THE PREACHER'S COMMENTARY

ON THE

BOOK OF PROVERBS.

THE

Preacher's Complete Homiletical

COMMENTARY

ON THE

OLD TESTAMENT

(ON AN ORIGINAL PLAN).

With Critical and Explanatory Notes, Indices, &c., &c

BY

VARIOUS AUTHORS.

New York
FUNK & WAGNALLS COMPANY
LONDON AND TORONTO
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A

HOMILETICAL COMMENTARY

ON THE BOOK OF

PROVERBS.

WITH COPIOUS ILLUSTRATIONS.

BY

THE REV. W. HARRIS.

AUTHOR OF "OUTLINES OF SERMONS ON THE MIRACLES AND PARABLES OF THE OLD TESTAMENT."

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HOMILETIC COMMENTARY

ON

PROVERBS.

INTRODUCTION AND PREFACE.

THE Hebrew word for proverb *(mashal)* means a comparison. Hence it includes more than we generally understand by the English word, viz., a pithy sentence expressing in a few words a well-known or obvious truth. When books were few it was most natural that observations on life and manners should be compressed into the smallest possible compass: hence proverbial teaching has been employed from the most remote antiquity. It is highly probable that all proverbial sayings were at first literally *comparisons*, as this would tend to fix them more indelibly upon the memory. But the word by degrees came to express that which we now understand it to signify.

Although a few more lengthy discourses are found in this book, it consists mainly of such short proverbial sentences, often illustrated and enforced by most striking metaphors. It has been almost universally received by both Jewish and Christian writers as the inspired production of Solomon. The most convincing proof of its canonicity is the fact that the New Testament contains many quotations from it. Compare Prov. iii. 11, 12, with Heb. xii. 5, 6; Prov. iii. 34, with Jas. iv. 6; Prov. x. 12, with 1 Pet. iv. 8; Prov. xi. 31 *(Sept.)*, with 1 Pet. iv. 18; Prov. xxii. 9 *(Sept.)*, with 2 Cor. ix. 7; Prov. xxv. 21, 22, with Rom. xii. 20; Prov. xxvi. 11, with 2 Pet. ii. 22; Prov. xxvii. 1, with Jas. iv. 13, 14. But, were these wanting, its superiority to every other book of a similar character would constitute a most weighty internal evidence of its Divine inspiration. Moses Stuart says of it: "All the heathen moralists and proverbialists joined together cannot furnish us with one such book as that of the Proverbs." And Wordsworth remarks: "The Proverbs of Solomon come from above, and they also look upward. They teach that all true wisdom is the gift of God, and is grounded on the fear of the Lord. They dwell with the strongest emphasis on the necessity of careful vigilance over the heart, which is manifest only to God, and on the duty of acting, in all the daily business and social intercourse of life, with habitual reference to the only unerring standard of human practice, His will and Word. In this respect the Book of Proverbs prepared the way for the preaching of the Gospel, and we recognise in it an anticipation of the apostolic precept: 'Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as unto the Lord.'" Dr. Guthrie considered that "the high character which Scotsmen earned in by-gone years was mainly due to their early acquaintance with the Book of Proverbs." (*Sunday Magazine*, Oct., 1868, p. 15.)

Although the greater part of the book was doubtless compiled by Solomon during his life, chapters xxv.—xxix. were not copied out until the days of Hezekiah, and the last two chapters are assigned in the book itself to other authors, of whom we know nothing. It seems startling at first sight that a man whose character we know from other parts of Holy Scripture to have been marred by so many serious defects, should be the author of an inspired book, but Dr. Arnot remarks on this point that "practical lessons on some subjects come better

through the heart of the weary, repentant king than through a man who had tasted fewer pleasures, and led a more even life. . . . . Not a line of Solomon's writings tends to palliate Solomon's sins. . . . . The glaring imperfections of the man's life have been used as a dark ground to set off the lustre of that pure righteousness which the Spirit has spoken by his lips." It is evident from the most cursory study of its contents that this book is rather ethical than doctrinal. The following Commentary has for its main object the setting forth the great moral lessons contained in it in a homiletic form. It does not pretend to be a critical Commentary, although the latest and best criticisms have been quoted where they seemed to throw any new light upon the text. But the book of Proverbs is not easy to treat homiletically. Prof. Lockler, the author of the expositions on the works of Solomon in Dr. Lange's Commentary, says,—"A theological and homiletical exposition of the book of Proverbs has difficulties to contend with which exist in an equal degree in but few books of the Old Testament, and in none in quite the same form. . . . . To treat the book homiletically and practically, in so far as regards only brief passages, is rendered more difficult by the obscurity of many single sentences; and in so far as it attempts to embrace large sections, by the unquestionable lack of fixed order and methodical structure."

The main DIVISIONS of the Book of Proverbs are:—I. A series of discourses on the excellency and advantages of wisdom, and the destructive character of sin (ch. i.—ix.) II. A collection of unconnected maxims on various subjects (ch. x.—xxii. 16). III. Short discourses on a variety of subjects (ch. xxii. 17; xxiv. 22), with a brief appendix of maxims (ch. xxiv. 23, 24). IV. The collection of Solomon's proverbs made in the time of Hezekiah (ch. xxv.—xxix.). V. A supplement containing the words of Agur (ch. xxx.) and of King Lemuel (ch. xxxi.). [*Annotated Paragraph Bible.*]

CHAPTER I.

Critical Notes.—1. Proverbs. See Introduction. **2. Instruction,** properly "chastisement," signifying moral training, admonition, then good habits, the practical side of wisdom. **3. Wisdom.** A different word from that in ver. 2. It means "prudence." **Justice** relates to a man's attitude in relation to God, and would be better translated "righteouness." **Judgment** includes our duties to our fellow-men and should be rendered "justice." **Equity** is "uprightness," "sincerity of purpose." **4. Subtlety,** "prudence." **Simple,** literally "the open," those easily persuaded. **5. Wise counsels,** or "capability to guide," literally "*helmsmanship.*" **7. Fools,** derived from a word meaning to be gross and dull of understanding. Gesenius understands it to signify "one who turns away," the "perverse." **10. Entice thee,** "lay thee open." Miller here reads "if sinners would make a door of thy simplicity, afford thou no entrance." **17.** Some interpret this verse as referring to the godly who escape the snares laid for them, others to the wicked, who, not so wise as the bird, plunge themselves into ruin by plotting against the good. Then the *blood* and *lives* of ver. 18 refer to the blood and life of the sinner. **20.** The word *wisdom* is in the plural form in the Hebrew. **27. Desolation,** or "tempest." **28.** To seek early denotes "earnestly." See ch. viii. 17, Hos. v. 15. The person now changes from the second to the third, "as though wisdom were increasing alienated" *(Miller).* **32.** The turning away of the simple, *i.e.*, their rejection of wisdom. **Prosperity,** "Security," "idle, easy rest."

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1—4.

The Author, his Method, and his Object.

I. Four things connected with Solomon would tend to commend his proverbs to the Hebrew nation. 1. *His remarkable antecedents.* The influence of any man in this world depends very much upon his antecedents. If they happen to be such as are held in esteem by society, they form at once letters of commendation for him, and often prove stepping-stones to great positions. The question, "*Whence* art thou?" is more often asked than "*What* art thou?" Perhaps

this was even more true of Hebrew society than it is of English. Solomon was the son of a king. The king whom he claimed as his father was the man whom God had honoured more than any other since the days of Moses. He was not only a king, but a prophet and a poet, who had no equal in the day in which he lived. He was more than this. His reputation as a warrior, more than anything else, endeared him to a people who looked upon him in this light as the best representative of their nation. The fact that Solomon was the "son of David," would ensure him the ear of the Jewish people throughout all their generations. 2. *His personal position.* He was not only the son of a king but a king himself —a king who had attained the highest pinnacle of royal greatness. 3. *His practical wisdom.* The instance of this narrated in 1 Kings iii. 16–28, proved to Israel that "the wisdom of God was in him to do judgment." Who so fit to utter proverbs concerning human life as a man who could thus so skilfully bring to light the hidden counsels of the heart? The Son of God Himself speaks of Solomon as a wise man (Matt. xii. 42). 4. *The variety of his experience.* Experience is always a good reason why men should speak their thoughts. Those are most fitted to counsel others who have travelled by the same path before them. Solomon's experience had been great and varied. He knew the real value of all that is held in estimation by men. See Eccles., chapters i. and ii. These considerations gave weight to his words in the day in which he lived and among his own people, and have done so in every succeeding age and in every nation in which his proverbs have been made known.

II. The form in which Solomon communicates his thoughts. A proverb is a large amount of wisdom wrapped up in the fewest possible words. It is like a corn-seed which, though a tiny thing in itself, encloses that which may expand and increase until it furnishes food for millions. Even a child may carry a large sum of money when it is in the form of golden coin, although his strength would be quite unequal to the task if the same amount were in baser metal. One diamond may constitute a small fortune, and may be easily carried and concealed upon the person, but its value in iron could only be lifted by the united strength of many. The proverb stands in the same relation to mental and moral wisdom as gold and diamonds do to copper or iron. It is so portable that it can be carried and retained by the weakest memory.

III. The main object of the utterer of these proverbs. "To give subtilty to the simple." The man who has to travel a dangerous path may be ignorant of the way to arrive at his destination in safety. His simplicity arises from his ignorance. Anyone who has gone the same way before, and has thus experimentally gained the knowledge which he lacks, can make him wise upon this subject. Solomon had trodden the greater part of the path of human life, those who had not done so were the *simple*, or ignorant, to whom he here desires to impart the knowledge which might save them from moral ruin. There were those in the days of Solomon, as there are now, who would take advantage of simplicity to destroy character. Solomon desires to preserve and strengthen character by showing how to avoid and resist sin.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Verse 1. The Bible is not given to teach us philosophy, but religion: not to show us the way to science, but the way to holiness and heaven. Notwithstanding, therefore, the extent and variety of Solomon's knowledge in botany, in natural history, and other departments of science, we have in preservation none whatever of his discoveries or his speculations on such subjects.—*Wardlaw.*

The Queen of Sheba came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear Solomon's wisdom. Did she come so

far upon uncertain reports, and shall not we receive with gladness his instructions, since he is come to us to be our teacher?—*Lawson.*

Verse 2. The general idea of wisdom is, that it consists in the choice of the best ends, and of the best means for their attainment. This definition admits of application both in a lower and higher department. In the first place it may be applied to the whole conduct of human life,—in all its daily intercourse and ordinary transactions, and amidst all its varying circumstances. . . . . To accommodate our conduct to these variations—to suit to all of them the application of the great general principles and precepts of the divine law, and "to guide our affairs with discretion" in them all, requires "*wisdom.*" And for enabling us to act our part rightly, creditably, and usefully, from day to day, there is in this book an immense fund of admirable counsel and salutary direction.

And then, secondly, the knowledge of wisdom may be taken in its higher application—to interests of a superior order, to spiritual duties, to the well-being of the better part, to all that regards true religion and the salvation of the soul. Wisdom, in this book, is generally understood in this its highest application, as might indeed be expected in a book of instructions from God. How important soever may be the successful and prudential regulation of our temporal affairs, yet in a divine communication to man, as an immortal creature, we cannot conceive it to be the only, or the principal subject.—*Wardlaw.*

Verse 3. "To perceive the words of understanding" is a phrase which may be interpreted as meaning the power of justly distinguishing between good and evil counsel—between that which is right in its principle and salutary in its operations, and that which is unsound and pernicious.—*Wardlaw.*

All through Ecclesiastes and throughout the present book, the more mental aspects of sin are always made prominent—piety is called wisdom. The saints are *the wise.* The impenitent man is *a fool.* Nothing could be more natural than that just here there should be the broad assertion that knowledge is piety. Nothing could be more seminal. A new heart comes from a new light. If a man sees, he believes, he loves, he hopes, he serves, he repents, he rejoices; and this as but new forms of the one blessed illumination.—*Miller.*

Verse 4. There are none that need to be politicians more than they that desire to serve God because they have to deal with most politic enemies . . . No gift is worse taken, though never so well bestowed, than this is, where there is no feeling of the want of it. The simple seeth not his defects, the young man thinketh that he seeth great abundance of ability in himself. —*Jermin.*

The teacher offers to save the young and inexperienced from the slower and more painful process of learning by experience.—*Plumptre.*

Over the gates of Plato's school it was written: "Let no one who is not a geometrician enter." But very different is the inscription over these doors of Solomon: "Let the ignorant, simple, foolish, young, enter."—*Cartwright.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 5, 6.

The Characteristics of a Wise Man.

I. He will hear. He shows that he values what he has already attained by giving heed to those who are able to add to his knowledge. Those who know the most are the most open to receive fresh knowledge. **II. The necessary**

consequence of this willingness to hear is a growth in knowledge. The wise man "will increase learning." There is an absolute promise in connection with spiritual wisdom. "Whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have" (Luke viii. 18). He who has wisdom to give heed shall have his wisdom increased by giving heed. To those who are willing to hear, that which was once dark and difficult becomes clear and plain. They "understand a proverb and the interpretation; the words of the wise and their dark sayings." This hearing implies more than a mere reception of sound. It includes a desire to translate precepts into deeds. Many who can understand the grammatical construction and literal meaning of the Divine oracles cannot apprehend their spiritual signification because they do not desire to submit to their guidance. This was the condition of many of the Scribes and Pharisees in the days of our Lord. They saw and yet were blind (Matt. xiii. 13; John ix. 39). "If any man will do his will, he shall *know* of the doctrine," etc. (John vii. 17). **III. This growth in knowledge gives a man a guide for his own life and enables him to guide others.** (For "wise counsels," see Critical Notes). Such a man will not sound all the mysteries of life or of God, but enough will be made plain to give him a compass by which to steer; and he will be able to lead others. A diligent pupil will by-and-by be fit for a teacher. How fully was the truth of these verses exemplified in the history of the Apostles. What dull pupils they were at first, and even until after their Master's resurrection. (Luke xxiv. 25.) But their willingness to be *disciples—learners*—fitted them at length to "go and teach all nations." (Matt. xxviii. 19.) Continuing in Christ's Word, they came to "know the truth," according to His promise. (John viii. 31.)

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Verse 5. True wisdom is never stationary, but always progressive; because it secures the ground behind it as a basis for further advances. "He who is not adding is wasting; he who is not increasing knowledge is losing from it," says Rabbi Hillel.—*Fausset.*

As long ago as the time of Melancthon it was recognised as a significant fact that wisdom claims as her hearers and pupils, not only the simple, the young, and the untaught, but those who are already advanced in the knowledge of the truth, the wise and experienced. It is indeed Divine wisdom in regard to which these assertions are made, and it is precisely as it is within the department of the New Testament with the duty of faith, and of growth in believing knowledge, which duty in no stage of the Christian life in this world ever loses its validity and its binding power. Compare Luke xvii. 5; Eph. iv. 15, 16; Col. i. 11; ii. 19; 2 Thess. i. 3; 2 Pet. iii. 18.—*Lange's Commentary.*

Verse 6. If the law be dark to any, the fault is not in the lawgiver, but in those that should better understand it. —*Trapp.*

The *sayings* of the wise are but *words* (two or three words), and it is their shortness that maketh them to be dark. Now, David says: "I will incline mine ear unto a parable"—there is his study to understand; "I will open my dark saying upon the harp"—there is the interpretation. It is not David, but He who came from David, that there is spoken of, and who, despising inanimate instruments, having made this world and the little world man, and by His Holy Spirit having compacted his soul and body, doth praise the Lord by an instrument of many voices, and to this instrument man doth sing the knowledge of His truth. Wherefore to understand the words of His wise prophets and penmen, we must go to Him.—*Jermin.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 7—9.

The Root of True Knowledge and the Means of its Attainment.

When the husbandman comes to examine a fruit-tree, he disregards everything in the way of leaf and branch; if he does not also find evidence of fruit in the appointed season, he considers that the end of planting is not attained. God, the great Husbandman, here declares that all human wisdom and intelligence avail nothing unless they have for their basis that fear of Him which enables a man to attain the end for which he was created. **I. The fear of the Lord springs** (1) *from a practical recognition of His existence.* God, to the vast majority of mankind, is but a name; they no more recognise the personality and moral character of the Divine Father than they recognise a personality and moral attributes in the wind or the sunlight. He has no influence upon their hearts; to them, practically, there is no God. There is no fear of God before their eyes, because there is no God. 2. *From an experimental knowledge of His kindness.* The mightiest being cannot be reverenced for his power; that may produce the "fear which hath torment," but not the "reverence and godly fear" which leads to willing obedience. When a king's character is such that his subjects taste of his kindness and feed upon his bounty, it begets a reverence which makes them fear to break his law. The "fear of the Lord" is synonymous with heart-religion, and must be born of a personal experience of Divine mercy. This fear says, "O taste and see that the Lord is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in Him" (Psa. xxxiv. 8). **II. The means by which this beginning of knowledge ought to be attained.** The rule in creatures below man is, that they instruct their offspring as soon as they are capable of instruction. The eagle teaches her young to fly: she "stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings." (Deut. xxxii. 11.) And this is what God expects every parent to do in a moral sense. A child ought to get his first ideas of God from his parent, and his father's and mother's love ought to be the stepping-stones by which he rises to apprehend the love of his Father in heaven. This exhortation takes for granted that the parents will be possessors of this true knowledge, and will impart it to their children. **III. The reason given to the young for receiving and retaining parental instruction.** The coronet on the brow of the noble proclaims his place in society—sets forth his high position. The necklace of pearls on the young and beautiful maiden proclaims the wealth of the wearer, and adds to her attractiveness. So the obedience of a good son to a true father proclaims him to belong to the noble in spirit—sets a crown upon his character. And a daughter's reverential love to a good mother is a true indication of moral wealth. That mother's words, treasured in the memory and translated into life, are so many precious pearls of soul-adornment, and are in the sight of God of great price.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Verse 7. This, "the fear of the Lord," comes as the motto of the book. The beginning of wisdom is found in the temper of reverence and awe. The fear of the finite in the presence of the Infinite—of the sinful in the presence of the Holy; self-abhorring, adoring, as in Job's confession (xliii. 5, 6), this for the Israelite was the starting point of all true wisdom. What the precept "Know thyself" was to the sage of Greece, that this law was for *him.* In the book of Job (xxviii. 28) it appears as an oracle accompanied by the noblest poetry. In Psa. cxi. 10, it comes as the choral close of a temple hymn. Here it is the watch-word of a true ethical education. This, and not love, is the *beginning* of "wisdom."

Through successive stages, and by the discipline of life, love blends with it and makes it perfect.—*Plumptre.*

Why is this the only way that God hath pointed out for the attaining to wisdom? 1. One reason may be the falseness of man's spirit. The heart is deceitful above all things, and so God will not entrust it with such estimable treasures of durable wisdom before a trial hath been upon it. "To him will I look, even to him that is of a pure and contrite spirit, and *trembleth* at my words." 2. Here is another argument, viz., *impossibility.* "The natural man perceiveth not the things of the spirit of God," &c. "The eye sees not the sun, unless it bear the image of the sun in it;" nor could it receive that impression if it were covered with dirt and filth. So the necessary foundation of true wisdom is unfeigned righteousness and pureness. The purging of a man's soul takes away the main impediments to true knowledge,—such as self-admiration, anger, envy, impatience, desire of victory rather than of truth, blindness proceeding out of a love of riches and honour, the smothering the active spark of reason by luxury and intemperance, &c.—*Henry Moore.*

Where God is, there is the fear of God; and where the fear of God is, there are all things which God requireth.—*Jermin.*

The fear of the Lord consists, once for all, in a complete devotion to God, —an unconditional subjection of one's own individuality to the beneficent will of God as revealed in the law (Deut. vi. 13; x. 20; xiii. 4; Psa. cxix. 63, &c.)

How, then, could they be regarded as fearing God, who should keep only a part of the Divine commands, or who should undertake to fulfil them only according to their moral principles, and did not seek also to make the embodying letter of their formal requirements the standard of life.—*Lange's Commentary.*

Verse 8. The relation of the teacher to the taught is essentially fatherly.—*Plumptre.*

In Scripture and that oriental speech framed to be its vehicle, narrow examples stand often for a universal class. "Honour thy father and mother," means—obey all superiors. "Thou shalt not steal," means—keep clear of every fraud. In those patriarchial countries, obedience to a father was the finest model of subordination . . . . Let the child take the first and obvious meaning; let the man look deeper. The earlier principles having been settled, the Proverbs have begun with a grand practical direction—that we are to listen to our teachers; that we are to begin at our firesides, and obey all the way up to God.—*Miller.*

Verse 9. The instruction and discipline of wisdom do at first seem difficult and hard, and are like fetters of iron restraining the corruption and rebellion of nature; but at length they are like chains of gold, worn like ornaments and no burden at all.—*Jermin.*

Nothing so beautifies as grace doth. Moses and Joseph were "fair to God," (Acts vii. 20) and favoured of all men. *Trapp.*

As Christ prays, "Hallowed be thy name," as his first petition, so Solomon puts first in his promises mere beauty, the mere prize of being right. The best thing in being pious is the mere comeliness of piety.—*Miller.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 10—19.

ENTICEMENT TO SIN AND EXHORTATION AGAINST YIELDING TO IT.

I. Youth will certainly be tempted. 1. *Because he is in an evil world.* In this world everything that possesses life is in danger of losing it. The tree is liable to have its root eaten by the worm, the smaller creatures in the animal world are beset with danger from those above them in size and strength, the

fish in the sea is ever in danger of the hook or the net, the bird of the fowler's snare, the forest king of the hunter's gun. Man, in respect to his mere bodily existence, is surrounded by influences antagonistic to the preservation of his animal life. And this danger often presents itself in the form of *enticement*. The crumbs lure the bird into the trap, the bait tempts the fish to bite the hook. A smooth sea and bright sunshine in the morning tempts the fisherman to the voyage upon the treacherous deep, which becomes his grave in the evening. Moral life is not excepted from this rule. Wherever the youth finds himself in the world he will be tempted, because he is everywhere surrounded by influences which war against his soul life. 2. *Because it is an ordination of God.* The Divine Ruler has ordained that men shall suffer temptation. There are things in this world which are the common lot of all men, from the highest to the lowest. Disease and death come alike to the proudest monarch and his meanest subject, to the man of highest intellect and to the most unlettered savage. And temptation is also an ordained heritage of man. Not even the "second Adam, the Lord from heaven," was exempted from this rule. 3. *Because it is necessary for the formation of moral character.* The seaman needs to come into conflict with the stormy winds and the rough waves of the ocean if he is to become a skilful mariner. The very effort which he puts forth to overcome them makes him more fit for his calling. So men must have temptation in order to test their powers of resistance; the struggle against sin, if successful, strengthens the moral character.

II. The elements which form the strength of the temptation. 1. *The secresy promised by the tempter.* "Let us *lay wait* for blood," let us *lurk privily* for the innocent, etc. No one commits a crime against his fellow man, without an underlying hope that he will not be found out; he even persuades himself that it is hidden from God. "They say, how doth God know, and is there knowledge in the Most High?" (Ps. lxxiii. 11). 2. *The hope of gain.* Advantage of some kind is supposed to be the fruit of every sin. That which the tempter uses here is an increase of wealth. "We shall find all precious substance," etc. This temptation is most common. A man is persuaded that by a very slight risk he can make a large fortune, that the deed will never come to light, and these two persuasions have been the ruin of hundreds. 3. *The number of the tempters.* Here several are represented as tempting one. "Come with us." Numbers always influence us even when no persuasion is used. Men are naturally inclined to do what the many do, to go with the multitude. There is an undefined feeling that safety is with the majority, or, at least, that the being involved with many others lessens personal responsibility. This element of temptation is very powerful in a world where "the many" go in at the gate which leadeth to destruction, and "few" walk in the way which leadeth unto life (Matt. vii. 13, 14).

III. The way of escape from the tempter. 1. *Calling to mind his filial relation.* "My son." It is a great help to a youth who is in danger of being drawn away from his steadfastness in the path of virtue to call his parents to mind. His father's instructions and example, his mother's love and prayers, the grief that his fall would bring upon them will, if reflected on, be a means of escape from the tempter's snare. The thought that he is a *son* ought to be sufficient to keep him from straying. 2. *A consideration of the certain end of sinners.* Those who promise themselves and others secresy shall be taken openly. The bird will not be decoyed into the net if he sees it spread, the trap must be laid in secret if it is to be successful. But sinners go on in sin although they are forewarned by God, by their own consciences, by the law of human society, and by the experience of others what the end will be. "Be sure your sin will find you out," is written, not only in the book of God, but within us and around us.

The young man is to bear in mind that they are *fools* who tell him there is gain to be had by sin. Those who seek to take life in order to enjoy the property of others, or in any way to wrong their fellows for their own fancied gain, shall themselves, like Haman, be hanged upon the gallows which they have made. Let the youth reflect up the sad histories of those who now fill our convict-prisons, and he will feel that it is indeed true that evil-doers "lay wait for their *own* blood."

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Verse 10. I. A supposition implied, that sinners will entice. Sin is of so virulent and malignant a nature, that it tainteth the whole air about it and filleth it with infection, and there is no safety to be found within its neighbourhood without the blessed antidotes of piety and carefulness. And the sinner will take as much pains to pervert his companions, as the Jews did to make proselytes, and with the same fatal design and consequence, viz., to make them twofold more the children of hell than themselves. For since the good have all other advantages, and vastly outweigh them in intrinsic worth, they will endeavour to come as near a level as they can by making up in number what they want in value. Besides, it silences in some measure the loud alarms of their own consciences, when many join with them in their vicious performances, and the approbation of others, by complying with their practices, lulleth them to sleep in a dull security. **II. A caution subjoined,** "Consent thou not." To which end—1. Consider the baseness and danger of consenting. We must sacrifice our reputation, render ourselves unfit for the company of men of worth, and exchange the glorious liberty of the children of God for that of vassals of iniquity. We must call in question the existence of God, and expose ourselves to that avenging hand which will lie heavy upon sinners to all eternity. 2. Take some plain and short directions to secure yourself against their enticements. Repel the first attempts upon your character. When that which is wrong is spoken or acted in your presence, do not suffer yourself to give it inward approbation. Withdraw from such society as soon as possible. Seek God's assistance.—*Nicolas Brady, D.D.*

This verse, in brief compass and transparent terms, reveals the foe and the fight. With a kindness and wisdom altogether paternal, it warns the youth of the *danger* that assails him, and suggests the method of defence.—*Arnot.*

Carry a severe rebuke in thy countenance, as God doth (Psa. lxxx. 16). To rebuke them is the ready way to be rid of them.—*Trapp.*

Verses 11—13. Two unreasonable and insatiable lusts they propose to gratify. 1. *Their cruelty.* They thirst for blood, and hate those that are innocent, and never gave them any provocation. Who could imagine that human nature should degenerate so far that it should ever be a pleasure to one man to destroy another? 2. *Their covetousness.* What, though we venture our necks, we shall fill our houses with spoil. See here (1) the idea they have of worldly wealth. They call that precious substance which is neither substance nor precious; it is a shadow and vanity, especially that which is gotten by robbery. It is the ruin of thousands, that they overvalue the wealth of this world. 2. The abundance which they promise themselves. Those who trade with sin promise themselves mighty bargains. But they only *dream that they eat*, the housefuls dwindle into scarcely a handful.—*Henry.*

Verse 11. The warning, as such, is true for all times and countries, but has here a special application. The temptation against which the teacher seeks to guard his disciple is that of

joining a band of highway robbers. At no period in its history has Palestine ever risen to the security of a well-ordered police system, and the wild licence of the marauder's life attracted, we may well believe, many who were brought up in towns (Judges xi. 3; 1 Sam. xxii. 2), and the bands of robbers who infested every part of the country in the period of the New Testament, and against whom every Roman governor had to wage incessant war, show how deeply rooted the evil was there. The history of many countries (our own, *e.g.*, in the popular *Traditions of Robin Hood and Henry V.*) presents like phenomena. The robber-life has attractions for the open-hearted and adventurous. No generation, perhaps no class, can afford to despise the warning against it. . . . . *Without cause* may mean *in vain*, and receive its interpretation from the mocking question of the tempter: "Doth Job serve God for nought?" The evil-doers deride their victims as being righteous gratis, or in vain.—*Plumptre.*

If sinners have their "come," should not saints much more? Should we not incite, entice, whet, and provoke one another, rouse and stir up each other, to love and good works? (2 Pet. i. 13; Heb. x. 24; Isa. ii. 3; Zech. viii. 21.)—*Trapp.*

Verse 12. The force of the verse noteth the allurement of wickedness from the cleanly despatch of it, so that nothing appeareth of the doing of it.—*Jermin.*

We will be as Sheol, as Hades, as the great underworld of the dead, all-devouring, merciless. The destruction of those we attack shall be as sudden as that of those who go down quickly into Sheol. (Numb. xvi. 30, 33.)--*Plumptre.*

Verse 13. Wickedness has always been a very bragging boaster. These sinners make a brag like that which the devil made to Christ: "All these things will I give thee." Covetousness is a strong chain to draw men on to wickedness.—*Jermin.*

Verse 14. The first form of temptation is addressed to the simple lust of greed. The second, with more subtle skill, appeals to something in itself nobler, however easily perverted. The main attraction of the robber-life is its wild communism, the sense of equal hazards and equal hopes. To have "one purse," setting laws of property at nought among themselves, seems almost a set-off against their attacks on the property of others.—*Plumptre.*

Verse 15. "God will not take the wicked by the hand." (Job viii. 20.) Why, then, should we?—*Trapp.*

The affairs of this life are the highways of the King of Heaven; thou mayest walk in the ways of them, but not with the wicked. It is an argument of a wicked man but to company with the wicked. We judge evil accompanyings to be next to evil deeds. —*Jermin.*

Verse 16. They may talk of walking, of walking in pleasures and delights, to get thee to walk with them. But, though, from what thou findest at first, thou little thinkest what will be the end, yet let me tell thee that it is to evil the journey tendeth; to that it will quickly come, for their feet *run* unto it. What shame is it that evil should be so pursued after!—*Jermin.*

Verse 17. These men are plotting with their eyes wide open. The verse teaches the great doctrine of deliberateness to ruin. Men go to hell when they expect it; at least, they go when it is a trap to them, of which they know the setting. They go open-eyed on into the gin.—*Miller.*

The great net of God's judgments is spread out, open to the eyes of all, and yet evil-doers, wilfully blind, still rush into it.—*Plumptre.*

Verse 18. These couriers of hell, who carry the despatches of the devil, cannot run faster to the hurt of others than they do to their own mischief; they cannot make more haste to shed the blood of others than they do to shed their own blood.—*Jermin.*

Verse 19. These "ways" are certainly some of the worst. The persons described are of the baser sort; the crimes enumerated are gross and rank. Yet when these apples of Sodom are traced to their sustaining root, it turns out to be *greed of gain.* The love of money can bear all these. When this greed is generated, like a thirst in the soul, it imperiously demands satisfaction wherever it can most readily be found. In some countries of the world it still retains the old-fashioned iniquity which Solomon has described. In our country, though the same passion domineer in a man's heart, it will not adopt the same method, because it has cunning enough to know that it will not succeed. Dishonesty is diluted, and coloured, and moulded, to suit the taste of the times. But the ancient and modern evil-doers are reckoned brethren in iniquity, despite the difference in the costume of their crimes . . . . This greed, when full-grown, is coarse and cruel. It has no bowels. It marches right to its mark, treading on everything that lies in the way. If necessary "it taketh away the life of the owners thereof." Covetousness is idolatry. The idol delights in blood. He demands and gets a hecatomb of human sacrifices.—*Arnot.*

Midas, the Phrygian king, asked a favour of the gods, and they agreed to grant him whatever he should desire. The monarch, overjoyed, resolved to make the favour inexhaustible. He prayed that whatever he touched might be turned to gold. The prayer was granted, and bitter were the consequences. What the king touched *did* turn to gold. He laid his hand upon the rock and it became a huge mass of priceless value; he clutched his oaken staff, and it became in his hand a bar of virgin gold. At first the monarch's joy was unbounded, and he returned to his palace the most favoured of mortals. Alas for the shortsightedness of man! He sat at table, and all he touched turned to gold—pure solid gold. The conviction rushed upon him that he must perish from his grasping wish—die in the midst of plenty; and remembering the ominous saying he had heard, "The gods themselves cannot take back their gifts," he howled to the sternly smiling Dionysius to restore him to the coarsest, vilest food, and deliver him from the curse of gold.—*Biblical Treasury.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH—Verses 20—23.

THE CRY OF WISDOM.

I. The wisdom of God is the voice of God. 1. *The wisdom of God in nature, in the heavens which declare His glory and in the firmament which sheweth His handiwork" is Divine speech which speaks loudly of eternal power and Godhead.* 2. *There is a voice of wisdom in the laws and economy of the old dispensation, although that voice gave sometimes but an indistinct sound concerning Divine mercy and judgment.* 3. *The wisdom of God as displayed in the plan of salvation by Christ is the loudest, the most persuasive and unmistakable voice of God.*

II. God's voice of Wisdom is an earnest voice. Wisdom *crieth.* The voice of the mother who thinks that her children are in danger rings upon the ear with no uncertain, theatrical sound. When the voice of Paul rang through the Philippian prison and fell upon the man who was about to destroy himself, it was a *loud* voice, because he was in earnest. God has to deal with his human children who are in danger, and therefore He speaks with earnestness when He says, "Do thyself no harm." The voice of God in the human conscience sometimes speaks as loudly as the trump of Sinai. He said by His prophets in the days of old, "Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways, for why will ye die, O house of Israel?" (Ezek. xxxiii. 11). The voice of Christ was an earnest voice. His death enforced the earnestness of the appeals which He uttered in His life. It proved the reality of His own and His Father's desire that "all should come to repentance." The voice of the Gospel ministry is an earnest

voice. Those who have been baptised by the Spirit of God, *beseech* men to be reconciled to God (2 Cor. v. 20).

III. God's voice of wisdom has been uttered where men could hear it. Wisdom uttereth her voice "in the streets," "in the chief places of concourse," "in the gates." The merchant brings his silks and diamonds to the crowded cities, because in them he is most likely to find purchasers. The vendors of goods seek the broad thoroughfares, because there they find streams of human beings to whom they offer their wares. God has observed this method in offering His Divine wisdom to the sons of men. The highest wisdom of God—the Gospel—was first proclaimed in the city of Jerusalem, at a time when there were gathered there men "out of every nation under heaven" (Acts ii. 5). The apostles of Christ preached in the chief cities of the civilised world, in Corinth, Athens, Antioch, Ephesus, and Rome. And now the voice of wisdom cries in the principal centres of the population of the world. The fishermen spread their nets where most fish congregate, and the fishers of men are attracted to the places where most human souls are gathered.

IV. God's voice of wisdom addresses all classes of sinners. 1. *The simple ones.* The unwary and those easily misled. Some men sin through ignorance or through the influence of others. As the unwalled garden is open to the foot of every dog that passes by, so the man who has no principle of his own to defend him is liable to have his soul entered and taken possession of by the first tempter who passes by. 2. *The scorner.* He is a sinner of a deeper dye. The child who is indifferent to his good father's love and the attractions of his happy home is a sinner, but the son who mocks his parents and holds up their words to ridicule is certainly a greater sinner. The simple man denotes a sinner who is passive in the hands of evil, but the scorner is active against good. He is placed before us in Holy Scripture as one who has reached the climax of human iniquity (Psa. i. 1). 3. *Fools are addressed.* The man who would rather use means to increase his disease than seek to cure it, may very properly be called a fool. The blind man who chooses to remain blind when he might be healed is certainly a fool. And certainly this is an appropriate name for those who love moral darkness rather than light. He who hates the knowledge which would save him and prefers death to life is the most unwise man upon the face of God's earth.

V. Although sinners may differ in degree, the same reproof and invitation are addressed to all. A rich man may be able to satisfy the wants of a hungry multitude, although all may not be equally hungry. If a physician possesses remedies which can heal men whose disease is deeply rooted, he will be able to cure those upon whom it has as yet a lighter hold. The voice of God to men offers but one way of satisfaction and soul-healing, viz., *repentance.* "Turn ye at my reproof." And the gift of his spirit which accompanies repentance (Acts ii. 38) is powerful to change the greatest sinner into a saint.

VI. The rejection of Wisdom's voice of invitation changes it to one of threatening. The refusal of the invitation to the Gospel feast shut out to retribution those who rejected it (Luke xiv. 16). The space given for repentance will not last for ever. A time is here foretold when God will not hear them who have refused to hear him. Their cry for help will be treated as they once treated the earnest cry of wisdom. "I will mock when your fear cometh."

VII. The blessed condition of those who accept Wisdom's invitation. The promises given under the Old Testament dispensation referred in a large degree to the present life. Dwelling safely here doubtless has its immediate reference to a home in Canaan, as in Isaiah i. 19. "If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land." Yet the underlying principle is that God will take charge of the real interests of those who yield themselves to Him—who fall in with His plans for their real eternal good.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Verse 20. What was in the views of godly men, in Solomon's days, an abstraction, became concrete when Christ was manifested on earth. The manifold character of this Divine wisdom (Isa. xi. 2, 3), and the multiplicity of the messengers of this wisdom of God in all ages of the Church accord with the plural form. (See "Critical Notes.")—*Fausset.*

The orientals used the plural form to denote the highest excellence. But *wisdoms* may be plural to denote wisdom in all forms, or all "*wisdoms*" in one; specially two forms of wisdom —wisdom in a worldly sense, and wisdom in the spiritual sense which the natural man does not discern. Wisdom in both these senses unites in piety. The pious man has spiritual wisdom of which the sinner knows nothing; and fleshly or natural wisdom to avoid hell and to secure heaven, to provide for death and get ready for an eternal world, to a degree altogether superior to a fleshly nature.—*Miller.*

After that Solomon hath brought in a godly father warning and instructing his sons, now he raiseth up, as it were, a matron or queen-mother provoking her children unto virtue.—*Muffet.*

The words of men may be wise; but when God speaks, Wisdom itself addresses us.—*Lawson.*

Perhaps some wide law of association connecting the purity and serenity of wisdom with the idea of womanhood, determines the character of the personification. Not in solitude, but in the haunts of men, through sages, lawgivers, and teachers, and yet more through life and its experiences, she preaches to mankind. Something of the same kind was present, we may believe, to Socrates when he said that the fields and the trees taught him nothing, but that he found the wisdom he was seeking in his converse with the men whom he met as he walked in the streets and *agora* of Athens. (Plato, "Phædrus," p. 230.)–*Plumptre.*

"In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and *cried*, saying, "Come unto me and drink." (John vii. 37.)—*Trapp.*

In the Scriptures, Wisdom cried unto men. "They testify of me," said Jesus. The prophets all spake of His coming. The sacrifice offered year by year, continually proclaimed aloud to each generation the guilt of men, and the way of mercy. The history of Israel, all the days of old, was itself Wisdom's perennial articulate cry of warning to the rebellious. The plains of Egypt and the Red Sea, Sinai and the Jordan, each had a voice, and all proclaimed in concert the righteousness and mercy that kissed each other in the counsels of God. And the things were not done in a corner. . . . But the wisdom of God is a manifold wisdom. While it centres bodily in Christ, it is reflected and re-echoed from every object and every event. There is a challenge in the prophets, "Oh earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the Lord!" The receptive earth has taken in that word, and obediently repeats it from age to age. . . . . He hath made all things for Himself. He serves Himself of criminals and their crimes. From many a ruined fortune, Wisdom cries, "Remember the Sabbath-day, to keep it holy." From many an outcast in his agonies, as when the eagles of the valley are picking out his eyes, Wisdom cries, "Honour thy father and mother, that thy days may be long." From many a gloomy scaffold Wisdom cries, "Thou shalt not kill."—*Arnot.*

Verse 21. Wisdom's walk through the streets. The Lord and His Spirit follow us everywhere with monition and reminder.—*Lange's Commentary.*

In verse 10 sin was represented as trying to get in. Here wisdom is represented as trying to reach out. Sin is harmless unless it can get into the conscience. Wisdom is utterly helpless unless it begins with the flesh. One strives to get in, the others yearns

to reach out. "The natural man discerneth not the things of the spirit." She must begin, therefore, without. The impenitent can only hear *natural* reasons. "The law is a schoolmaster." The terrors of death are applied by the Almighty to draw us nearer, within, and finally into the region that is spiritual. It is "out of doors," therefore, that Wisdom must lift up her voice.—*Miller.*

The voice of wisdom is heard everywhere. It sounds from the pulpit. From every creature it is heard (Job xii. 7, 8). The word is in our very hearts, and conscience echoes the voice in our souls. Let us go where we will we must hear it, unless we wilfully shut our ears.—*Lawson.*

In the Temple she crieth for holiness and reverence, in the gates she crieth for justice and equity, in the city she crieth for honesty and charity. Or else by accommodation we may thus take the words, the *head* is the chief place of concourse in man, where all the faculties do meet and all affairs are handled: the openings of the gate are the outward fences, the city is the *heart*, to all which wisdom strongly applieth her instructions. In the head she crieth for a right understanding, in the outward fences for watchfulness, in the heart for upright sincerity. —*Jermin.*

Verse 22. Men are always going to be wise, and, therefore, Wisdom plunges upon this very difficulty. You are going to repent; but when? And, as a still more imperative question, "How long first? You are, perhaps, a grey old man, and your resolutions have been for fifty years.—*Miller.*

Lovers of simplicity and haters of knowledge are joined together; for where there is a love of simplicity, there is a hatred of knowledge, where there is a love of vice there is a hatred of virtue.—*Jermin.*

Scorners *love* scorning. The habit grows by indulgence. It becomes a second nature.—*Arnot.*

These simplicians are much better than scorners, and far beyond those fools that hate knowledge. All sins are not alike sinful, and wicked men grow worse and worse.—*Trapp.*

Verse 23. The two things mentioned here are to be taken in connection with each other. The latter is the result of the former—the former in order to the latter. There can be no plea, therefore, for continued ignorance. The Word of God is in possession, and the Spirit of God is in promise.—*Wardlaw.*

When it is said: "Turn," &c., could any essay to turn be without some influence of the Spirit? But that, complied with, tends to pouring forth a copious effusion not to be withstood. —*J. Howe.*

When we turn at His reproof, He will pour out His Spirit; when He pours out His Spirit, we will turn at His reproof: blessed circle for the saints to reason in.—*Arnot.*

Little as we might have expected it, the teaching of the Book of Proverbs anticipates the prophecy of Joel (ii. 28) and the promise of our Lord (John xiv. 26; xv. 26.) Not the *Spirit* alone, with no articulate expression of truths received and felt: nor *words* alone, spoken or written, without the Spirit to give them life.—*Plumptre.*

He that reproves and then directs not how to do better, is he that snuffs a lamp, but pours not in oil to maintain it.—*Trapp.*

There are no words that can make known Wisdom's words but her own, and there is no one that can make known Wisdom's words but herself. She can, and here she saith: "*I will.*" And it is as she *will*, not as she *can*, and yet freely and fully too, whereof she saith: "I will *pour out.*"—*Jermin.*

I. The reproof God administers. God reproves (1) *by the Scriptures;* (2) *by ministers;* (3) *by conscience;* (4) *by Providence.* II. The submission He requires Turn (1) *with penitent hearts;* (2) *with believing minds;* (3) *with prompt obedience.* III. The encouragements He imparts. The Spirit is (1) *convincing;* (2) *quickening;* (3) *comforting;* (4) *sanctifying.* —*Sketches of Sermons.*

Verse 24. It is an honour to be invited to the feast of an earthly prince; how much more to be bidden unto the banquet of the King of kings! And as the desiring of any to dinner or supper is a sign of love and goodwill in him that offereth this courtesy, so it is a point of great ungentleness and sullenness for a man, without just cause, to refuse so kind a proffer; for, in so doing, he sheweth that he maketh none account at all of him, who not only hath borne toward him a loving affection, but made declaration thereof in some sort, and gone about to seal it by certain pledges of friendship; yea, that which is yet more, he causeth him to lose the cost which he hath bestowed about provisions and entertainment, and his messengers to lose their pains and their travail. Then, when those who are bidden to the kingdom of God (Luke xiv. 18) desire to be excused, how can this be but a great sin? but, when God shall not only call with His voice, but all day long stretch out His hand to a rebellious people, continuing His Word preached with all means pertaining thereunto; as the grace offered in this respect is doubled, so the sin of not profiting thereby is mightily increased.—*Muffet.*

God called for a famine on the land, and was not refused; God called for a drought upon the land, and was not refused; and, no doubt, should God call any other of His creatures, they would not refuse to come unto Him, seeing those things which are not, when they are called, do come to God. Only man refuseth. Surely hence it is that the prophets of God do so often speak unto insensible things, as: "Hear, O heavens: give ear, O earth." For it is not seldom that God calleth to men and is refused.—*Jermin.*

Verse 26. There is not in the Lord any such affection or disposition of mocking as in man; but when in the course of His providence He so worketh that He leaves the wicked to his misery, or maketh him a mocking stock to the world, He is said in the Scripture to scorn, or have them in derision (Ps. ii.), because He dealeth as a man which scorneth.—*Muffet.*

If God laugh, thou hast good cause to cry.—*Trapp.*

There is, as has been said, a Divine irony in the Nemesis of history. It is, however, significant that in the fuller revelation of the mind and will of the Father in the person of the Son, no such language meets us. Sadness, sternness, severity there may be, but from first to last no word of mere derision.—*Plumptre.*

Even I, not, "I also," *I,* who have warned you so often, so tenderly, so earnestly.—*Stuart.*

Verse 27. Cataline was wont to be afraid at any sudden noise, as being haunted with the furies of his own evil conscience. So was our Richard the Third after the murder of his two innocent nephews, and Charles the Ninth of France after the Parisian massacre. These tyrants became more terrible to themselves than ever they had been to others.—*Trapp.*

You cannot paint an angel upon light: so mercy could not be represented—mercy could not be, unless there were judgment without mercy, a ground of deep darkness lying beneath, to sustain and reveal it.—*Arnot.*

Here also the parallelism which we have traced before holds good. The "coming of the Son of Man" shall be as "the lightning" in its instantaneous flashing. And at that coming He will have to utter the same doom. "Many shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able."—*Plumptre.*

Verse 28. Does the sinner ever cry, and not get answered? Does he ever seek diligently, and God laugh at him? The passage is the profoundest Gospel. A man has two ways of seeking, before he becomes a Christian, and after he becomes a Christian. Before he becomes a Christian he seeks from *natural* motives, otherwise he would be already spiritual. We cannot say that natural seeking has no promise. We think it has. A man can only start outside the camp to get in. The man who

out of a deep sense of terror flies toward the wicket-gate under that schoolmaster the law, will reach it if he keep on, and that by promise. If he begs God to make him spiritual and to give him the true motives of the kingdom with even a proper common spirit though it be under the terrors of escape, he draws nearer all the time to being spiritual. The light will at last break. If he keeps on in that way he will emerge some day into the light of the blessed. The action of common grace will merge into that which is saving. But if his motives are too carnal; if his state is mere terror; if his moral part has been so abused that it has passed the boundary which our text suggests; if there be the mere terror of the lost, and the mere selfishness, such as wakes up at the judgment day, we could easily understand that oceans of such tears would drift a man only farther off. They are only a more insidious carnality. The sum of the doctrine is, that *natural* motives may become instruments of conversion if we seek God early, but if we sin away the day of grace, no terror, however selfishly and therefore passionately expressed, can become a saving prayer to bring us any nearer to the Redeemer. —*Miller.*

This was Saul's misery: "The Philistines are upon me, and God will not answer me." This was Moab's curse (Isa. xvi. 12). This was the case of David's enemies (Ps. xviii. 41). Even if God answer him at all, it is according to the idols of his heart (Ezek. xiv. 3, 4) with bitter answers, as in Judges x. 13, 14. Or, if better, it is but as He answered the Israelites for quails and afterwards for a king; better have been without. Giftless gifts God gives sometimes.—*Trapp.*

Verse 29. Those who do *not choose* the fear of the Lord are condemned no less than those who hate it. Not to choose is virtually to dislike, and ends in positive hatred. (Matt. xii. 30.) Men are free in choosing destruction, so that the blame rests wholly on themselves. "Ye judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life." (Acts xiii. 46.)—*Fausset.*

God will give them a reason of their punishment. No marvel if they who hate knowledge do not choose the fear of the Lord. For knowledge is the guide of election, and if the guide be bad the choice cannot be good. And to show the badness of the choice, there being many fears proposed to man's choice to which man's life is subject; to choose the fear of the Lord, freeth from all the rest; not to choose that, is to be a slave to all the rest.—*Jermin.*

Verse 30. There is not a word here of *disability*, it is all unwillingness. Point me to one passage in the Bible where sinners are represented as being condemned for not doing what they *could not* do. The blessed God is no such tantaliser. When, at any time, inability *is* spoken of, it is inability all of a moral nature, and resolves itself into *unwillingness.*—*Wardlaw.*

Can it be that *none* of God's counsel should be followed? Can it be that *all* his reproof should be despised? Yes; not to have a care of following all God's counsel is to follow none: not to have a mind that regardeth all His reproof, is to despise all. . . . As the wings of the living creature which Ezekiel saw, were joined together, so is the joining together of God's commandments, our desire of yielding a general obedience unto them, that must carry us up to heaven.—*Jermin.*

Verse 31. Their miserable end is the fruit—not of God's way, but of their own. *His* plan, *His* device for them, was a plan of salvation.—*Wardlaw.*

If a man plants and dresses a poisonous tree in his garden, it is just that he should be obliged to eat the fruit. If our vine is the vine of Sodom, and our clusters the clusters of bitterness, we must leave our complaint on ourselves, if we drink till we are drunken, and fall, and rise no more.—*Lawson.*

The sinner's sin is its own punishment (Isa. iii. 9—11. Hell is not an

arbitrary punishment, like human penalties, which have no necessary connection with the crimes, but a natural development of the seed and the bud (Isa. lix. 4; Gal. vi. 8). "Filled with their own devices"—*i. e.* filled even to loathing, which is the final result of the pleasures of sin. "They did eat, and were well filled; for He gave them their own desire; . . . . but while the meat was yet in their mouths, the wrath of God came upon them" (Psa. lxxviii. 29). Men's own desires fulfilled are made their sorest plagues (Psa. cvi. 11).—*Fausset.*

Bad will it be for them that shall eat of it; and yet due will it be to them to eat of it, because it is their own. . . . It is not said they shall *gather* the fruit of their ways, which were some expression of their misery, but they shall *eat* it, it shall enter into them, and be made, as it were, their very substance. This it is that *filleth up* the misery, and that the filling is of their own devices, that it is, that maketh it be pressed down.—*Jermin.*

Ver. 32. When Jeshurun waxed fat, he kicked (Deut. xxxii. 15). Thus the objection is met, that sinners often prosper now. Yes, replies wisdom; but that very prosperity proves their curse, and accelerates the judgment of God. It is they who are "settled on their lees" that say in their heart, The Lord will not do good, neither will he do evil (Zeph. i. 12)—*Fausset.*

Prosperity ever dangerous. 1. Because every foolish or vicious person is either ignorant or regardless of the proper ends and rules for which God designs the prosperity of those to whom He sends it. 2. Because prosperity, as the nature of man now stands, has a peculiar force and fitness to abate men's virtues and heighten their corruptions. 3. Because it directly indisposes them to the proper means of amendment and recovery.—*South.*

Because they are fools, they turn God's mercies to their own destruction; and because they prosper, they are confirmed in their folly.—*Baxter.*

When sinners are moved a little by wisdom, and *turn away*, it is deadly; it is worse than if they had never listened. *Prosperity* or *tranquillity* (see "Critical Notes"). The mere doing nothing of impenitent men is carrying them downward.—*Miller.*

Bernard calls prosperity a mercy that he had no mind to. What good is there in having a fine suit with the plague in it. A man may miscarry upon the soft sands as soon as upon the hard rocks.—*Trapp.*

Not outward prosperity, but the temper which it too often produces; the easy going indifference to higher truths is that which destroys.—*Plumptre.*

Verse 33. He shall enjoy genuine security. His mind will enjoy unmoved tranquillity amidst all the turmoils and all the vicissitudes of this life (Phil. iv. 6, 7). And he shall be quiet from the fear of ultimate evil. The season of the impenitent sinner's last alarm shall be to him the season of peace, and hope, and joy.—*Wardlaw.*

Be it so, that some fits of fear, like grudgings of an ague, in the midst of fiery temptations, begin sometimes to cause the faithful to quake a little, yet the grace of God's Spirit will drive them out in time, and put them all to flight in such manner at the end, that instead of timorousness, stoutness; of unquietness, peace; of bashfulness, boldness; of shrinking, triumph will arise. O, the valiant courage and unterrified heart of the Christian knight and spiritual champion, who is furnished with the whole armour of God (Eph. vi.), and fighteth under the banner of Divine wisdom, his renowned lady and mistress!—*Muffet.*

1. Temporally. 2. Mentally. 3. Spiritually. 4. Eternally. (Isa. xxvi. 3, xxxiii. 15, 16; Jer. xxiii. 6; Deut. xxxiii. 12, 28.—*Fausset.*

His ark is pitched within and without; tossed, it may be, but not drowned: shaken, but not shivered.—*Trapp.*

Eternal life, secure in the world to come, casts a bright beam of hope across, sufficient to quiet the anxieties

of a faint and fluttering heart in all the dangers of the journey through.—*Arnot.*

There is no *dwelling* but in heaven; hell is a *prison;* earth is a *pilgrimage.* In Heaven there be many mansions, wherein every room is the lodging of quietness, the walls whereof are safety, the gates security, and all fear of evil shut out for ever.—*Jermin.*

CHAPTER II.

CRITICAL NOTES.—**2. Incline.** To *sharpen* or prick the ear, like an animal. **5. God.** *Elohim.* One of five instances in the book in which God is thus designated, the appellation Jehovah occurring nearly ninety times. In explaining the all but universal use of *Jehovah* as the name of God in the Proverbs, while it never occurs in Ecclesiastes, Wordsworth says: "When Solomon wrote the book of Proverbs he was in a state of favour and grace with Jehovah, the Lord God of Israel; he was obedient to the law of Jehovah; and the special design of that book is to enforce obedience to that law." **7. Sound wisdom.** Miller translates this word "*something stable.*" It is used but twelve times in Scripture; in Job v. 12, it is translated "enterprise," but the rendering given here would well fit the context there; and so in every other case. **That walk uprightly,** literally "the walkers of innocence." **8.** (*Heb.*) *so as that* "He may keep," or *protect* the paths, etc., *i.e.* He manifests Himself as a shield that He may cause the upright to keep the paths of judgment (*Fausset*). **9 ver., Righteousness,** *etc.*, the same three words used in chap. i. 3 (see Notes). **Every** or "the whole" path. **10 ver. When.** Rather "if" or "because." This verse is antecedent to the consequence expressed in ver. 11. **Heart,** "the seat of desire, the starting point for all personal self-determination" (*Lange*). **12. Deliver,** "snatch," as a brand out of the fire. **Evil man,** rather "an evil way." **13.** "Level" paths. **16. Strange,** "unknown," "*wanton*" (see 1 Kings xi. 1—8). **17. Guide,** or "companion," "confidant," **her** lawful husband. **18. House,** in the East means "interests;" **a** man's whole blended well-being (Ex. i. 21).—*Miller.* (On Vers. 16—18 see Note at the beginning of Chap. vii.)

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1—5.

HUMAN UNDERSTANDING AND DIVINE KNOWLEDGE.

I. Divine knowledge is within the reach of the human understanding. When a physician has created an appetite in his patient, he sees that he is provided with food that will satisfy his hunger. As God has given the eye, so He has given light to meet its needs. God has created man with a *need,* and with *capabilities* of knowing Him, and has therefore placed such knowledge within his reach. "The Word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart, etc." (Rom. x. 8).

II The conditions of its attainment. 1. *Attention.* In all departments of knowledge we must begin by doing the easiest thing. The first thing we have to do is to listen to what the teacher has to say. Everybody can do that. This is the first thing to be done in order to attain a knowledge of God. We can listen to His message. We can "receive" His words, "incline our ear." "Faith cometh by hearing." 2. *Retention.* The simple attention of the soul is not the reclaiming power. The hearing will not bless us if we do not hold the truth in our memory. "And some seed fell by the wayside, and the fowls came and devoured them up" (Matt. xiii. 4). But the ploughed earth receives the seed, and holds it, and hides it, and by *retention* comes seed to the sower and bread to the eater. We must not only "receive" but "hide" the words of God. 3. *Reflection.* This prevents forgetfulness; this is indispensable to retention. The rules of grammar, or of arithmetic, must not only be received into the memory, but meditated upon. We must "apply" our minds to them in order to understand them. The soul which receives and holds Divine truth must apply itself to the understanding of it. 4. *Supplication.* If the learner has

not only the book, but the author of the book at hand, he can turn to him and ask him to unfold the meaning of the difficult passages, or to show him how to apply the rules. We have not only the Divine Word of God, but we have the Divine Spirit; not only the Book of Wisdom, but the Author of the Book, the source of wisdom. And He has promised to give wisdom for the asking. "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him (Jas. i. 5). There must be an asking in order to receive. "If thou criest after knowledge, etc." 5. *Perseverance.* Those who find a few diamonds upon the surface of the ground do not then bring their labours to a conclusion. They dig down beneath, and toil on for months and years if the mine yields. They do not cease while they think there is more to be gained. The Divine wisdom is a mine which yields a little on the surface, but we must not stop there: we must dig down deep, we must continue to hear, to remember, to meditate, to cry for enlightenment,—we must ask, and seek, and knock, and never cease to "search" for the hidden and exhaustless treasures of wisdom.

III. **The certainty of success if the conditions are fulfilled.** Then *shalt* thou understand, etc. The mariner puts out to sea, and fulfils all the conditions known to him for reaching the country to which he is bound, but he may find a grave midway between his starting-point and his goal. The husbandman sows the seed, and fulfils all the conditions upon which a good harvest depends. But his crop may fail notwithstanding: he may not reap the golden grain. But no such disappointment ever befals the earnest seeker after the knowledge of God.

ILLUSTRATION OF VERSE 4.

"There are frequent allusions to hid treasure in the Bible. Even in Job we read that the bitter in soul dig for death more earnestly than for hid treasure. There is not another comparison within the whole compass of human action so vivid as this. I have heard of diggers actually fainting when they have come even upon a single coin. They become positively frantic, dig all night with a desperate earnestness, and continue to work until utterly exhausted. There are, at this hour, hundreds of persons engaged in it all over the country. Not a few spend their last farthing upon these ruinous efforts. . . . It is not difficult to account for this hid treasure. The country has always been subject to revolutions, invasions, and calamities of different kinds. . . . . Warriors and conquerors from every part of the world sweep over the land, carrying everything away that falls into their hand. Then, again, this country has ever been subject to earthquakes, which bury everything beneath her ruined cities."—*Thomson's "Land and the Book."*

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Verses 1 and 2. The sinner is here told how he may become serious. In any conceivable path if thou wilt do that lowest conceivable thing—just listen; and, that thy listening may not be a mere passing flash, if thou wilt pause upon it, and attend. If a man just takes a chair and thinks for a moment of death and judgment and eternity, his heart begins to feel, and it will go on feeling to any length. It requires the Spirit, no doubt; but what is the Spirit but the Spirit of the God of Nature? He will come in the track of thought just as surely as a star is dragged after Him in the track of gravitation.—*Miller.*

The word of God is a vital seed, but it will not germinate unless it be hidden in a softened, receptive heart. It is here that Providence so often strikes in with effect as an instrument in the work of the Spirit. The place and use of providential visitations in the Divine administration of Christ's kingdom is to break up the way of the word through the incrustations of worldliness and vanity that encase a human heart, and keep the word lying hard and dry upon the surface.—*Arnot.*

Angels, who are so much our superiors, apply themselves to the learning of it: they are already supplied with the stores of truth, and yet they desire

to pry deeper into the mystery of it. Surely, then, the wisest of us ought to apply our whole hearts.—*Lawson.*

There are some who *do* hear, or rather, *seem* to hear. They profess to be all attention; but it is mere pretence—the mere result of politeness and courtesy to the speaker. This is worse than not hearing at all, inasmuch as it is the reality of neglect, with the guilt of hypocrisy added to it. —*Wardlaw.*

Verse 2. Lie low at God's feet and say,—"Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth." His saints "sit down at His feet, every one to receive His word."—*Trapp.*

Even as worldlings, when they hear of some good bargain, hearken very diligently; or as they who think that one speaketh of them put their ears near to him that speaketh.—*Muffet.*

Verse 3. Earthly wisdom is gained by study; heavenly wisdom by prayer. Study may form a biblical scholar; prayer puts the heart under a heavenly pupilage, and therefore forms the wise and spiritual Christian. But prayer must not stand in the stead of diligence. Let it rather give life and energy to it.—*Bridges.*

Knowledge is God's gift, and must be sought at His hand, since He is the "Father of Lights," and sells us "eyesalve" (Rev. iii. 17).—*Trapp.*

It is not any longer a Nicodemus inclined towards Jesus, he cannot tell how, and silently stealing into His presence under cloud of night; it is the jailer of Philippi springing in and crying with a loud voice: "What must I do to be saved?"—*Arnot.*

Verse 4. The same image occurs in John v. 39: "*Search* the Scriptures." Not merely scrape the surface and get a few superficial scraps of knowledge, but dig deep, and far, and wide. The "treasures" are "hidden" by God, not in order to keep them back from us, but to stimulate our faith and patient perseverance in seeking for them. *Fausset.*

Men never prayed that way and were not answered. Men seek money—(1) always; (2) as a matter of course; (3) against all discomfitures; (4) under all uncertainties.—*Miller.*

Will not the far-reaching plans, and heroic sacrifices, and long-enduring toil of Californian and Australian gold-diggers rise up and condemn us who have tasted and known the grace of God? Their zeal is the standard by which the Lord stimulates us now, and will measure us yet. Two things are required in our search—the right direction and the sufficient impulse. The Scriptures point out the right way, the avarice of mankind marks the quantum of forcefulness, wherewith the seeker must press on.—*Arnot.*

This intimates (1) a loss or want of something. Else men seek not for it. (2) A knowledge of this want or loss. Else men sit still. (3) Some goodness indeed, or, in our own opinion, of the thing sought. Men are, or should be, content to lose what is evil. (4) Some benefit to ourselves in it. Else few will seek it, though good in itself. (5) An earnest desire to find it. Else men have no heart to seek it. (6) A constant inquiry after it, wheresoever there is any hope to find it. Else we seek in vain. So in seeking wisdom—we must want it, and know that we want it, and see good in it, and that to ourselves, and seek it earnestly and constantly, if we would find it.—*Francis Taylor.*

Verse 5. That which impels men to the pursuit is also the prize which rewards them. If any distinction between God (Elohim, see "Critical Notes") and the Lord (Jehovah) can be pressed here, it is that in the former the glory, in the latter the personality of the Divine nature is prominent.—*Plumptre.*

He understandeth the fear of the Lord, whose understanding feareth the Lord. The knowledge of God is found in all His creatures, but he findeth the knowledge of God who, being lost in his sins, is found by God in the acknowledgment of them . . . And as fear

advanceth to the knowledge of God, so the knowledge of God bringeth us to the fear of Him.—*Jermin.*

This knowledge of God is the first lesson of heavenly wisdom. On the right apprehension of this lesson all the rest necessarily depends. Wrong views of God will vitiate every other department of your knowledge. Without right views of God you can have no right views of His law. Without right views of His law you can have no right views of sin, either in its guilt or in its amount. Without right views of sin you can have no right views of your own condition, and character, and prospects as sinners. Without right views of these you can have no right views of your need of a Saviour, or of the person, and righteousness, and atonement of that Saviour. Without right views of these you can have no right views of your obligations to Divine grace, etc. . . . The fear of the Lord, founded on the knowledge of Him, is something to the right understanding of which experience is indispensable. To a man who had never tasted anything sweet, you would attempt in vain to convey, by description, a right conception of the sensation of sweetness. And what is true of the sensations is true also of the emotions. To a creature that had never felt *fear* you would hardly convey, by description, an idea of its nature; and equally in vain would it be to make love intelligible to one that had never experienced that affection. It is thus to a depraved creature with regard to holy and spiritual affections. "The fear of the Lord"—a fear springing from love and proportioned to it—such a creature cannot *understand* but by being brought to experience it.—*Wardlaw.*

The knowledge of God regulates the fear and prevents it from sinking into terror, or degenerating into superstition, but guides it to express its power in checking and subduing every corrupt affection and animating the soul to every instance of obedience.—*Lawson.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 6—11.

God as a Giver and Man as a Receiver.

I. The fact stated—*that God gives.* The nature of the good is to give. God is the best of all beings, therefore He is the greatest giver. 1. The *kindness* of God is manifested in the character of His gifts. 2. The *resources* of God are revealed in the abundance of His gifts. The character and disposition of men are made known by *what* they give and by *how* they give. God's gifts are "good and perfect," and are given ungrudgingly (Jas. i. 5—17). But men's resources are not always equal to their desires to give. But God is rich, not only in mercy, but in power; He has given *up to Himself* in the gift of His Son, in whom dwell all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, and beyond whom the Father Himself cannot give.

II. Some of His gifts enumerated. 1. *Wisdom. Sound wisdom.* Real wisdom as opposed to that which is only a sham (see "Critical Notes"). The serpent—the devil—possesses *cunning*, but not real wisdom. Our first parents were led astray by believing a *lie*—the fruit of following the tempter's guidance was unsoundness of body and soul. The results of this "wisdom of the serpent" proved its falsity. God gives the true wisdom. He gives men the *truth.* A knowledge of the truth about themselves, about Him (ver. 6), brings stability of character—leads men into the right way of life (ver. 9)—and thus tends to peace and blessedness of soul. 2. He gives *protection* by giving true wisdom. "He is a *buckler*," etc. (ver. 7). When Abraham undertook to deliver Lot from the hands of his enemies, the skill with which he planned and carried out the attack (Gen. xiv. 14) showed his wisdom. After the victory God came to him and said, "Fear not, Abraham. I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward" (Gen. xv. 1). How had God just proved himself to be his shield? Not by sending a legion of

angels to deliver him, but by giving him the wisdom by which he had defended himself. This is how He is a buckler to His children. He preserveth the way of His saints" (ver. 8) by giving them wisdom and grace to "understand" and keep "every good path" (ver. 9).

III. Man as a receiver of God's gifts. 1. This wisdom and protection is only given to those who fulfil certain conditions. *Wisdom* is for the *righteous*, the *buckler* for them that *walk uprightly*, *preservation* for his *saints*. These terms must be regarded as relative, as we shall see presently; but the fact that God has "laid up" His "wisdom," implies that it must be sought. God had laid up a store of wisdom for Joseph's guidance when Pharaoh summoned him from the prison, even as Joseph afterwards stored up corn for the needy people; but in both instances the gifts had to be sought for (Gen. xli. 16). Daniel had wisdom laid up for him, but he had to ask for the wisdom kept in store for him (Dan. ii. 18). 2. *This best gift of God must be received into man's best place.* The knowledge which God gives must enter the *heart*, the affections—thus it will be *pleasant* to the soul (ver. 10). He who holds the rudder guides the vessel. There may be many important positions in a fortified city, but he who holds the highest place commands all the rest. Understanding the word *heart* here to mean the affections, the heart commands the man. The will, and even the conscience to an extent, are wheeled about by the affections. They are the rudder of the man; they are the key to the position in the town of Man-soul. 3. *Man, by thus receiving God's gifts, attains a relative perfection.* The "understanding" of every good way implies a walking in them. Those who receive God's wisdom "walk uprightly"—are "saints." The man who has long followed any profession may be said to be a perfect master of his business, of his handicraft. This does not imply that he can go no further—can attain to nothing higher. The Apostle Paul speaks of an absolute and a relative perfection. He had attained to the last but not to the first (Phil. iii. 12—15). To know what we ought to strive after and to choose the right way, is the relative perfection, which leads on to that which is absolute and entire.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Verse 6. One may, indeed, by natural knowledge, very readily learn that God is a benevolent being; but how He becomes to a sinner the God of love, this can be learned only from the mouth of God in the Holy Scriptures.—*Lange.*

Verses 1 to 5 teach plainly that a man may get "light," and that there are steps to it like money-getting; and yet hardly have the words left his lips before Solomon guards them: "*Jehovah gives wisdom*"—and guards them in a striking way, for he says: "For," that is, the fact that it is the gift of God is the reason it can be proceeded so hopefully after by man.—*Miller.*

Solomon knew this by experience. The "for" gives the reason why he who is anxious to have wisdom should learn to know and worship God.—*Fausset.*

Every beam of reason in men is communicated from the wisdom of God (1 John i. 9). The simplest of the mechanical arts cannot be acquired unless men are taught of God. How, then, can we be expected to understand the mystery of the Divine will without light from the Father of lights.—*Lawson.*

Verse 7. We are ill keepers of our own goodness and wisdom: God, therefore, is pleased to lay it up for us,—and that it may be safe, Himself is the buckler and safeguard of it. . . . . In this life, he that walketh, although he walk uprightly, and seeing evil, shuns it, yet may receive hurt behind, where backbiters too frequently make their assaults. Wherefore, as he walketh to God before him, so God walketh after him, and even there, where they can-

not help themselves, He will be a *buckler* to His servants. . . . . But learn also that the buckler shows that they who will live uprightly must strive and fight.—*Jermin.*

Heb., substance, reality (see "Critical Notes"): that which hath a true being in opposition to that which hath not. —*Trapp.*

He layeth up *that which is essential* for the righteous.—*A. Clarke.*

The righteousness of our conduct contributes to the enlightenment of our creed. The wholesome reaction of the moral on the intellectual is clearly intimated here, inasmuch as it is to the righteous that God imparteth wisdom.—*Chalmers.*

"He lays up" or "hides away." 1. That the wicked may not find it. 2. That the righteous may have to dig to get it (the verb is the same as that from which "hid treasures" is derived in Verse 4). 3. That it may be safe from the evil one.—*Miller.*

He walks uprightly who lives with the fear of God as his principle, and the Word of God as his rule, and the glory of God as his end.—*Wardlaw.*

The most dreadful enemies of those who walk uprightly are those who endeavour to turn aside the way of their paths; but against these enemies God defends, for He keepeth the paths of wisdom and righteousness.—*Lawson.*

Verse 8. Well may they walk uprightly that are so strongly supported. God's hand is ever under his; they cannot fall beneath it—*Trapp.*

"Paths of judgment" or "justice" are here, by the substitution of the abstract for the concrete expression, paths of the just, and therefore synonymous with "the way of His saints."—*Lange's Commentary.*

We have certain vicarious rights. One is, to come out all well at last. Another is, that all things shall work together for our good. Another is, that we shall grow up into Christ, increasing day by day. To realise each and all is required of God. The track this takes Him into for all is, as to each man, His path of judgment. Each such path He must walk in strictly. To do so, He must watch the saints.—*Miller.*

He is not the guardian of the broad way—the way of the world and of sin. *That* way Satan superintends, "the god of this world"—doing everything in his power, by all his various acts of enticement and intimidation, to keep his wretched subjects and victims from leaving it.—*Wardlaw.*

He preserveth the way of His saints both from being drawn out of that way, and from all evil while they walk in it. —*Jackson.*

If men will not keep their bounds, God will keep His. There is a right way for the saints to walk in. 1. Because else it were worse living in God's kingdom than in any other kingdom. For all kingdoms have rules of safety and of living. 2. God would be in a worse condition than the meanest master of a family. He would have no certain service.—*Francis Taylor.*

Verse 9. Not as standing in speculation, but as a rule of life. Knowledge is either apprehensive only, or effective also. This differs from that as much as the light of the sun, wherein is the influence of an enlivening power, from the light of torches.—*Trapp.*

Not only does it enlarge our *knowledge* of God, but it brings us to a full *understanding* of every practical obligation.—*Bridges.*

Good signifies, 1. That which is just and right. 2. That which is profitable. 3. That which is pleasing. 4. That which is full and complete (Gen. xv. 15) . . . . Men must grow from knowledge of some good duties to knowledge of others. They must go on till they know every good path.—*Francis Taylor.*

Verse 10. Another picture of the results of living unto the Lord. Not that only to which it leads a man, but that from which it saves him, must be brought into view. Here, as before, there is a gradation in the two clauses. It is one thing for wisdom to find entrance into the soul, another to be welcomed as a "pleasant guest."—*Plumptre.*

Spiritual joy mortifies sin. His mouth hankers not after homely provision that hath lately tasted of delicate sustenance. Pleasure there must be in the ways of God because therein men let out all their souls into God, the foundation of all good, hence they so infinitely distaste sin's tasteless fooleries.—*Trapp.*

It was to open thus thy heart for wisdom that Christ's heart was open upon the cross; it was to make an entrance for wisdom into thy heart that the spear entered into the heart of thy Saviour. And what though wisdom enter thy heart at a breach, a wound? It is this that must heal thee and make thee sound.—*Jermin.*

Here only has it any life or power. While it is only in the head it is dry, speculative, barren. . . . . Before it was the object of our search; now, having found it, it is our pleasure.—*Bridges.*

It is pleasure that can compete with pleasure. It is joy and peace in believing that can overcome the pleasures of sin. . . . . A human soul, by its very constitution, cannot be frightened into holiness. It is made for being won, and won it will be, by the drawing on this side or the drawing on that.—*Arnot.*

Verse 11. The man who has let knowledge come into his heart does but watch afterwards as he does in common walking: "discretion" or "reflection" will keep him straight.—*Miller.*

Men are subject to many dangers till they get wisdom. 1. Their reputation is in danger. 2. Their goods and estates are in danger. 3. Their body and life are in danger. 4. The soul is in danger of eternal misery. Therefore sin is called folly, and wicked men that go to hell are chronicled as fools all over this book.—*Francis Taylor.*

Though the heart of man by nature be a rebellious fort, so that wisdom at first must enter it by a kind of force, yet, being entered, it makes itself pleasant, and keeps and preserves the soul which kept her out.—*Jermin.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH—Verses 12—20.

THE CHARACTER OF THOSE FROM WHOM WISDOM PRESERVES.

I. The evil man. 1. *His speech is corrupt*, verse 12. The closed grave contains death and holds within it the seeds of pestilence, but while it remains unopened the corrupt influence remains enclosed in its narrow walls. But should it be opened, and its foulness allowed to fill the air, it begins to set in motion what will strike men down to its own level. The mouth of the wicked man while kept shut is a closed grave, his iniquity is shut up within himself, but when he speaks out the thoughts of his heart his mouth is as an open sepulchre, and he spreads around him moral disease and death. 2. *He is a man of progressive iniquity.* "He walks in the ways of darkness." When a stone is set in motion, the momentum given to it, if no other law comes into operation to prevent it, will carry it to the lowest level in the direction in which it travels. The progress of wickedness is downhill, and walking in the ways of darkness implies a destination which in Scripture is called "outer darkness." 3. *He delights in his downward progress.* Sorrow and joy are revealers of human hearts. The saint rejoices in whatsoever things are pure, lovely, and of good report, and in his increase of power to do the same. That which rejoices him reveals his heart. The sinner that "rejoices to do evil and delights in the forwardness of the wicked," brings to light the hidden things of darkness that are within him.

II. The wicked woman. 1. *She is, pre-eminently, a covenant-breaker.* The ribs of a vessel hold and keep together the whole structure, and enable it to keep its cargo safe. If the ribs give way, all goes to pieces, and the precious things

which have been stored up within the ship are lost in the ocean. Human society is belted together—kept from going to pieces—by covenants. They are the ribs which keep together the State. The marriage covenant holds the first place. The woman whose character is here depicted has broken the bonds of this most sacred covenant—to which God was a witness (the covenant of an institution of His own ordination)—and has taken to the "strange" way of the devil. Well may she be called a *strange* woman. That a woman should be guilty of such a crime—should choose such a course of life, so opposed to all that is pure and womanly—is indeed a mystery. 2. *She is a destroyer, not only of herself, but of others.* When the river has broken through its proper boundaries there is a *present* and *continual* destruction, of which the bursting of its banks was only the beginning. This woman in the past broke the moral boundaries of her life, and is now not content to go to ruin herself, but tries to take others with her. To this end are her false and flattering words, of which we shall hear more in chapter v. 3. *She carries her victims beyond hope of recovery.* There are no rules without exceptions. We know that there are those who have for a time been under the influence of such characters, and have returned to the paths of virtue and honour. But these are rare exceptions. In the main, it is, alas! true that "none that go unto her return again." A vessel founders at sea, and we say that the crew is lost, although one survivor may have been rescued. We speak of an army being destroyed if one escapes to tell the tale. Where one who has taken hold on her paths struggles back to life and purity, thousands go down with her to death, bodily, social, and spiritual.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Verse 12. To *snatch* (see "Critical Notes.") "The way of evil." The terms begin gently. It is only the gentle aspects that are dangerous at first. These are so fascinating that it requires us to be *snatched* to keep us out of the ways of darkness.—*Miller.*

Verse 13. Among the pests of men, none are such virulent pests of everything that is good as those that once made a profession of religion, but have *left the way of uprightness.* The stings of conscience which such persons experience, instead of reclaiming them, tend only to irritate their spirits, and inflame them into fierce enmity against religion.—*Lawson.*

Darkness, as thus set in contrast with uprightness, may be interpreted as descriptive both of the *nature* of the ways, and of their *tendency* and *end.* The man who walks in uprightness walks in light. His eye is "single." There is "none occasion of stumbling in him." He has but *one* principle; his "eyes look right on, his eyelids look straight before him." He is not always looking this way and that, for devious paths that may suit a present purpose, but presses on ever in the same course; and thus all is light, all plain, all safe. "The ways of darkness" are the ways of concealment, evasion, cunning, tortuous policy and deceit. He who walks in them is ever groping; hiding himself among the subtleties of "fleshly wisdom": and being ways of false principle and sin, they are ways of danger, and shame, and ruin.—*Wardlaw.*

There is a strictly causal and reciprocal relation between unrighteous deeds and moral darkness. The doing of evil produces darkness, and darkness produces the evil doing. Indulged lusts put out the eye-sight of the conscience; and under the darkened conscience the lusts revel unchecked.—*Arnot.*

The light stands in the way of their wicked ways as the angel did in Balaam's way to his sin.—*Trapp.*

Verse 14. Though it be wormwood which they drink (Lam. iii. 15), yet being drunk with it, they perceive not the bitterness thereof, but like drunken

men rejoice in their shame and misery. —*Jermin.*

Better is the sorrow of him that suffereth evil than the jollity of him that doeth evil, saith St. Augustine.—*Trapp.*

Here is a note of trial to discern our spiritual estate. Wicked men rejoice in sin; good men sorrow more for sin than for troubles. . . . Many triumph in their evil deeds because they have no good to boast of. And men are naturally proud and would boast of something.—*Francis Taylor.*

Verse 16. There is no viler object in nature than an adulteress. Though born and baptised in a Christian land, she is to be looked upon as a heathen woman and a stranger, and as self-made brutes are greater monsters than natural brute beasts, so baptised heathens are by far the worst of pagans.—*Lawson.*

This strange woman is an emblem of impenitence. The passage 16-19, means the seductiveness and yet the betraying wretchedness of impenitence. The woman who has left her husband has also left her God; and the *nulla vestigia retrorsum* witnessed in her dupes is the warning for the saint by which he keeps clear of her undoing. No man would err who would treat of adultery as having its lessons here. But no man would understand the passage who did not understand it further as a great picture of impenitence. The warnings are two: (1) the un-stopping-short character of sin; she who wrongs her husband will be seen universally wronging God; and (2) the unrecuperative history of the lost.—*Miller.*

Twice Solomon uses a similar expression, "the strange woman (even) the stranger," to impress more forcibly on the young man the fact *that her person belongs to another.* The literal and spiritual adulteress are both meant. The spiritual gives to the world her person and her heart, which belong by right to God. In this sense the foreign women who subsequently drew aside Solomon himself, were "strange women," not so much in respect to their local distance from Israel, as in respect to their being utterly *alien to the worship of God.* Lust and idolatry were the spiritual adultery into which they entrapped the once wise king. How striking that he should utter beforehand a warning which he himself afterwards disregarded.—*Fausset.*

We are not to forget that the accomplished seducer has herself perhaps been seduced. The fair and flattering words, the endless arts of allurement, are on both sides.—*Wardlaw.*

One who is as it were, a stranger to her own house and husband by faithlessness (Hitzig), and hence a type of anything that is false and seductive in doctrine or practice. . . . By God's goodness Solomon's words in this divinely inspired book were an antidote to the poison of his own vicious example.—*Wordsworth.*

Verse 17. False doctrine and false worship are in Scripture compared to harlotry and adultery. (Numb. xiv. 33; Judges ii. 17; viii. 33; Psa. cvi. 39; Rev. xvii. 1, 2; xviii. 3.—*Wordsworth.*

It is God that is the guide of her youth, whoever may be under Him; it is God's covenant that is made, whosoever may be the contractor in it. It is God who is first *forsaken*, then *forgotten;* forsaken in the beginning of wickedness, forgotten in the hardened practice of it. God hath appointed guides for youth—to stay the weakness of it, and to which, as unto God, youth ought to yield obedience. For elder years He hath appointed covenants as bonds and chains to hold them sure.—*Jermin.*

There is no trusting them that will fail God and their near friends. If they fail God, they will fail men for their advantage. If they fail friends —much more strangers. —*Francis Taylor.*

Verse 18. When you get into the company of the licentious, you are among the dead. They move about like men in outward appearance, but

the best attributes of humanity have disappeared—the best affections of nature have been drained away from their hearts.—*Arnot.*

Her house is not a building reared up, but inclined and bowed down, and she who dwelleth in it will, by her life, bring thee to the dead. . . . Death is here twice mentioned to show that it is a double death, a temporal death, and an eternal death, to which she bringeth men.—*Jermin.*

Verse 19. Who would cast himself into a deep pit in the hopes of coming out alive, when almost all that fell into it were dashed in pieces.—*Lawson.*

It is as hard to restore a lustful person to chastity as it is to restore a dead person to life.—*Chrysostom.*

A sin which, I am verily persuaded, if there be another that slays her thousands, may with truth be affirmed to slay its *ten* thousands.—*Wardlaw.*

Verse 20. Here follows the whole ground of the exhibition: "That," *for the very purpose* that "*thou* mayest walk in the way of good men." This is a grand, pregnant doctrine. This bad life was abandoned to its worst partly as a lesson.—*Miller.*

It is not enough to shun the evil way, unless men walk in the good way. —*Muffet.*

He that walks in the way of good men shall meet with good men, and that shall keep him from the company of evil men and women. The paths of the righteous are too narrow for such: he shall not be troubled with them.—*Jermin.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 21—22.

THE CONTRAST IN THE END FROM THE CONTRAST IN THE WAY.

If men walk in two directly opposite directions they cannot possibly arrive at the same goal. **I. The historic illustration of this truth.** The first inhabitants of Canaan were allowed to dwell in the land until they defiled it to so great an extent by their sins that they were "rooted out," to be replaced by the Hebrew people. These, in their turn, became "transgressors" of God's law, and consequently forfeited their inheritance. **II. The reasonableness of this dealing.** Uprightness leads to industry, and the land which is industriously cultivated fulfils the end for which God gave it to the children of men. Uprightness leads to the rightful dividing of the land or of its produce among all its inhabitants. It is God's will that none of his creatures should suffer bodily want: if all men were truly upright and godly, the poor and needy, if they did not cease out of the land (Deut. xv. 2) would have a much larger share of its good things than they at present enjoy. The Hebrew civil and social laws show us what God's intentions are in this matter. Therefore none ought to complain if they are deprived of a gift which they have mis-used. **III. The typical suggestion of the subject.** Dwelling in the land of Canaan was typical of the eternal dwelling in the heavenly country. Some of the first inhabitants of *that* country have been "rooted out" because of sin (2 Pet. ii. 4), others have dwelt safely there for ages, because they are, literally, *perfect.* This is the destined home of all just men made perfect (Heb. xii. 23; xi. 13-16. Matt. xxii. 32).

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Verse 21. The Israelite was, beyond the power of natural feeling, which makes home dear to every one, more closely bound to his ancestral soil by the whole form of the theocracy: torn from it he was in the inmost roots of his life itself, strained and broken.—*Elster.*

As surely a righteous man hath this right unto temporal things which a wicked man hath not, that God doth account him to be worthy of them . . . Wherefore it is observed, that in Scripture, although the wicked are said to possess the things of the earth, they are never said to inherit them; but

the godly are said to inherit the good things of the earth as receiving them from the love of their heavenly Father. —*Jermin.*

Ver. 22. The very earth casts out the wicked . . . . The whole has a typical meaning. This earth, many conjecture, is to be restored as heaven. In that event, the old Canaan types will be very perfect.—*Miller.*

Must not the righteous leave the earth too? Yes; but the earth is a very different thing to the righteous and to the wicked. To the latter it is all the heaven they ever have; to the righteous it is a place of preparation for heaven.—*Lawson.*

The event seemeth to be contrary to the promise here made, for the earth commonly is possessed by those who take evil ways, whilst in the mean season the godly are tossed up and down with many afflictions. But we must consider for our comfort, that the wicked wrongfully and unlawfully, as usurpers, possess the earth and the goods of this world; and again, that by many troubles, and by death in the end, they are put out of possession at last. As for the godly, they, by right, inherit the earth, so that, as Abraham was the heir to the land of promise even when he had not a foot of ground therein, in like manner all the godly are heirs of this world, according to the saying of the apostle, That all things are theirs (1 Cor. iii. 22); howsoever often here they possess little or nothing. In right they are heirs, and in part possessors, looking for a new heaven and a new earth, wherein the just shall dwell (2 Pet. iii. 13).—*Muffet.*

Suddenly, when they have feathered their nests and set up their rest, the wicked may die sinning. The saints shall not die till the best time—not till the time when, if they were rightly informed, they would desire to die.—*Trapp.*

CHAPTER III.

CRITICAL NOTES.—**1. Keep.** This word, says Miller, primarily means to look *hard at*, and generally to *keep watch over*, as over a vineyard. 2. **Length of days**, properly "extension of days." 3. **Good understanding**, or "good success," "good reputation." Some read "good *intelligence*," *i.e.*, thou shalt be esteemed before God and man as one of good understanding. 6. **Acknowledge**, "take notice of," "recognise" Him. **Direct**, "make level" or "smooth. 8. **Navel**, "body" or "muscles." **Marrow**, literally "refreshing," "moistening," in contrast to the condition described in Psa. xxxii. 3, 4. 11. **Despise not**, or "loathe not," "shrink not." The word, according to Miller, means "to melt." **Chastening**, "discipline," "correction." 12. The latter clause of this verse should be read, "and holds him dear, or does him a favour, as a father does his son." 13. **Gets**. "draws out." 18. **Lay hold**, "grasp," from a Hebrew root *strong*. **Retaineth**, "holds her fast." 20. **Depths**, &c., "were the floods divided" into rivers and streams for the blessing of man. **Dew**, or "gentle rain," or else the clouds signify the lower regions of the atmosphere where the dew is formed. 21. **Them**, *i.e.* "sound wisdom and discretion;" **Sound wisdom**, the same word as in chap. ii. 7 (see notes there). Miller translates here, as there, "*something stable.*" 25. **Desolation of the wicked.** This is interpreted in two ways. 1. The desolation in which the wicked strive to overwhelm the good; or, 2. The destruction which will sweep away the wicked, leaving the godly unharmed. "A positive decision is probably not possible" (Lange's Commentary). Stuart, and most modern commentators, adopt the latter view. 26. **Confidence.** "Jehovah shall be as loins to thee" (Miller). 27 **Withhold not, &c.**, literally "hold not good back from its master," *i.e.*, from him to whom it belongs. 31. **Envy thou not, &c.**, or "emulate not" (Vulg.) "*Do* not anxiously covet" (Stuart). 32. **Secret.** His "secret compact," "familiar intimacy." 34. "If," or "Seeing that He scorneth the scorners," &c. 35. **The promotion**, &c., literally "shame lifts up," *i.e.*, in order to sweep away and destroy them; so Lange translates. Miller reads, "fools are each piling shame." Stuart says on this verse, "Glory means here honour or an exalted station. Ziegler and Ewald render the next clause, 'Shame shall elevate fools,' spoken sarcastically. I prefer the meaning sanctioned by Ezek. xxi. 23; Is. lvii. 14, viz., to take off, to sweep away, as the dust which is elevated by the wind and is swept off, as may be seen in Isa. xvii. 13. Compare Isa. xxix. 5; Psa. xxxv. 5. At least, the image understood in this way is very vivid. It stands thus: '**Fools are elevated like the light dust, and then are *swept away* in the same manner.**'"

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1—4.

BLESSINGS FROM THE REMEMBRANCE OF GOD'S COMMANDMENTS.

I. The natural desire of a moral instructor. Every teacher desires that his pupil should remember his instructions, and unless that which has been given is remembered it is useless to carry him any further on. Memory holds a very important place in the formation of moral character. "Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the Gospel which I preached unto you; . . . by which also ye are saved, if ye *keep in memory* what I preached unto you" (1 Cor. xv. 1 and 2). Paul likewise exhorts his son Timothy by means of his memory (2 Tim. i. 6). See also Hebrews x. 32; 2 Pet. i. 15, iii. 1, etc. Solomon knew that his son could only profit by his counsel so long as he remembered it.

II. When the memory does not retain moral teaching, it is a moral rather than an intellectual fault. "Let thine *heart* keep my commandments." We find it difficult to forget where we love. If a child loves his father, he is not likely to forget his words. Christ reminded his disciples that they did not "remember" because their *hearts* were hardened (Mark viii. 17, 18).

III. When the heart keeps the Divine Word, mercy and truth will not forsake the character. Where God's precepts find a place of abode, there will likewise be found a merciful disposition towards men, and a truthful and sincere piety before God. If a tree has its roots in the waters, we know that its greenness will not fail: "its leaf shall not wither." The freshness and beauty of the foliage is the necessary outcome of its roots dwelling in the stream. The mercifulness and the truthfulness of a man's character will be in proportion to his affection for, and consequent retention of, the words of God.

IV. The blessings which will accompany a remembrance of the Divine teaching. 1. *Length of days.* We may infer from this that, as a rule, long life is to be desired. The longer distance a pure river runs through a country, the greater the amount of blessing which it diffuses on its way to the ocean. The longer a man of "mercy and truth" lives, the more he is enabled to bless his fellow-creatures. A long life gives a man time to attain great knowledge of God, and thus enables him to glorify Him upon the earth. A long life is also to be desired because the peculiar experience of earth belongs to the present life only. When that is ended we have reason to believe that we shall enter upon an entirely new experience; that which belonged to earth will have passed away with our earthly life. It has often been remarked that a godly manner of life is favourable to "length of days." Sin and anxious care tend to bring men to an early grave, while purity, and trust in a living and loving Father are promoters of bodily health. 2. *Divine and human favour.* The human ruler is favourable to those who make it their business to obey his commands. A wise and good father makes a difference in his treatment of those children who seek to please him and those who defy his authority. God is the Father, and consequently the rightful Ruler of men, and having made laws for the guidance of His children, it follows of necessity that those who seek to obey those laws must find favour with Him. He is in this sense a respecter of persons. He has respect to those who "have respect unto His commandments" (Psa. cxix. 6). Favour in the sight of man is also promised. The value of a man's favour depends upon a man's character. To find favour with some men would be to be known as an enemy of God (James iv. 4). It is written that Jesus increased "in favour with God and man" (Luke ii. 52). But we know that He found little favour with the rulers of the Jews. Therefore, these words must be taken to refer to the favour of those whose favour is worth having. 3. *Peace* (Verse 2). Where the conscience and passions are at war there can be nothing but unrest, but when the conscience is reinforced by the Divine precepts, she rules, and the soul, as a consequence, enjoys peace. Peace must flow from the possession of Divine favour, and also from the consciousness of the good-will of good men.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Verse 1. Here we advance another step. Not only is it necessary to renounce and shun evil (i. 10) and to listen to the voice of Wisdom and go in quest of her (i. 20; ii. 1-4), but it is also requisite to hold her fast under trial and tribulation (ver. 11), and to practise her rules by love to God and man (verses 9, 27, 30).—*Wordsworth.*

"My law." He who made us knows what is good for us. Submission to His will is the best condition for humanity. Our own will leads to sin and misery. The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul. . . . . Silently to forget God's law is a much more common thing amongst us than blasphemously to reject it.—*Arnot.*

Where love makes the impression, care locks it up. . . . . Philo saith, "Thou forgettest God's law, because thou forgettest thyself." For didst thou remember thine own condition, how very nothing thou art, thou couldst not forget His law whose excellency exceedeth all things; and therefore to fasten His law in our hearts, God saith no more than that it is *my law*, as if the strength of that reason were sufficient to strike them into us not to be forgotten.—*Jermin.*

We should be able to say to Wisdom as Cœnis did to her lady Antonia, "You need not, madame, bid me do your business, for I so remember your commands, as I need never be reminded of them."—*Trapp.*

The mental faculties have a close relation and a mutual dependence upon each other. There are, without doubt, original diversities in the power of memory. But memory depends greatly on *attention*, and attention depends not less upon the interest which the mind feels on the subject. He who feels no interest will not attend, and he who does not attend will not remember.—*Wardlaw.*

Verse 2. *Length of days* is the promise to the righteous—whether for earth or for heaven as their Father deems fittest for them. It itself, the promise, as regards this life, has no charm. . . . But *peace added* forms the sunshine of the toilsome way.—*Bridges.*

The original is "length of days and years of lives." They are lives which religion promiseth, one on earth, another in heaven: here such a long life as short days can make up, but there days shall be years: there shall be but one day, lengthened into eternity.—*Jermin.*

Where is the consistency of promising long life to wisdom! Where is the truth of such an assurance? But certain grammatical endings give us immediate signs of another interpretation. The verb "add" is masculine; the words "law" and "commandments" are feminine. On the contrary, all are masculines among the nouns of the next clause. Unless there should be reason to do violence by an ungrammatical exception, the nouns should be the subjects rather than the objects of the verb. We translate therefore, "For length of days, and years of life, and prosperity, shall make thee greater."—*Miller.*

Such declarations are certainly not to be interpreted as a promise of long life in this world in every instance, as the result of obedience to God's commands. There are promises to Israel of their days being prolonged in the land which are greatly mistaken when interpreted of the life of individuals; and as pledging in every case its prolongation to all the good. Such passages relate to the continued possession of the land of promise by the people, if they, in their successive generations, continued to serve God.—*Wardlaw.*

Simple duration of life in itself to Jewish mind, a great gift of God. "Years of *life*," *i.e.*, of a life truly such, a life worth living, not the lingering struggle with pain and sickness (compare the use of "life" in Psalm xxx. 5, xliii. 8.—*Plumptre.*

Verse 3. There was such a similitude of nature between the twins of love that at once they wept, and at

once they smiled; they fell sick together, and they recovered jointly. Such are these twins of grace. In policy, mercy without truth is a sweet shower dropping upon barren sands, quite spilt, and no blessing following it; truth without mercy is extreme right and extreme injury. Consider them toward God and heaven. A faith of mere protestation without good works, such is truth without mercy, and all the integrity of the heathen, all the goodness that Socrates could teach, such is mercy without truth.—*Bishop Hacket.*

The *neck* is, in Solomon's writings, the organ and symbol of *obedience.* To bind God's law about the neck is not only to *do* it, but to *rejoice* in doing it; to put it on and exult in it as the fairest ornament.—*Wordsworth.*

I. The matter to be recorded—mercy and truth. These two, meeting and kissing in the Mediator, constitute the revealed character of God Himself; and He desires to see, as it were, a miniature of His own likeness impressed upon His children. **II. The tablet for receiving it**—the human heart. The reference is obviously to the tables of stone. The tables were intended to be not a book only, but a type. An impress should be taken on our own hearts, that we may always have the will of God hidden within us. —*Arnot.*

Let these graces be, as with God, in combination. The want of one buries the commendation of the other. "Such a one is merciful to the poor, but there is no truth in him." "Such a one is very just in his dealings, but he is as hard as a flint." Nor must these virtues be in occasional and temporary exercise. "Let them not *forsake* thee."—*Bridges.*

Intimating—I. Their forsaking us is more than our forsaking them. Our forsaking them may come of our weakness, but their forsaking us comes of our wilfulness and hardness of heart in not entertaining them. II. It sets out the easiness of the loss of them through our corruption. III. It sets forth our great need of them. IV. It intimates our great care and pains needful for the retaining of them. They are easily lost, but hardly kept. A hawk must be well tamed before he is let fly, else he will return no more. These graces must be as carefully kept as providently gotten, like riches. And they must both be kept together, else mercy may lie to do good, and truth may reveal without cause what may do hurt. Therefore join both as God does (Ps. lxxxv. 10).—*Francis Taylor.*

Mercy and truth are dear sisters, blessed companions in God, sweet companions in man. Mercy loveth truth, truth loveth mercy, God loveth both; and if man love himself, he will do so likewise.—*Jermin.*

These words correspond to the two tables of the law. Benevolence is at the bottom of the command, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour," and what is right is that great glory which we are to love in God.—*Miller.*

Verse 4. In other words, "Thou shalt be favoured and truly prospered, God and man both bearing witness to thy well-directed efforts."—*Stuart.*

He that shows mercy to men shall find mercy with God. . . . and men love to be dealt truly and mercifully with themselves, even though they deal not so with others; especially they that get good by our merciful and just dealing will favour us.—*Francis Taylor.*

This favour of God and men, *i.e.*, not of all indiscriminately, but first and pre-eminently of the wise and devout, such as agree with God's judgment, is evidently in the view of the poet the highest and most precious of the multiform blessings of wisdom which he enumerates. What, however, is this favour of God and men but the being a true child of God, the belonging to the fellowship of God and His people, the co-citizenship in the kingdom of truth and blessedness? We stand here manifestly at the point at which the Old Testament doctrine of retributions predominantly earthly begin to be transformed into the supersensual or spiritual realistic doctrine

of the New Testament (Matt. v. 10—12; xix. 28—30).—*Lange's Commentary.*

This promise is all one with that of the Apostle Paul, when, speaking of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost, he saith, "that he which in these things serveth Christ, pleaseth God and is acceptable to men" (Rom. xiv. 18).

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH—VERSES 5 and 6.

EXHORTATION TO CONFIDENCE IN GOD.

Man is so constituted that, in some respects, he must have objects outside of himself to lean upon. As a child, he leans upon a wisdom and strength which is superior to his own, and few men are so self-sufficient as entirely to lay aside this habit in after life. In many things we must, whether we will or not, depend upon the guidance and help of others. Every man, in common with the lower creatures, must of necessity lean upon a power greater than his own. "The eyes of all wait upon Thee" (Psa. cxlv. 15). But this is a leaning which needs no exhortation: it springs from necessity. The exhortation of the text implies that in some things men have to choose whether they will lean upon God or not.

I. What is necessary in order to comply with the exhortation. 1. *A knowledge of God.* We cannot place entire trust in any person of whose character we have no knowledge; or, if we do so, we show our want of discretion. If a traveller across Central Africa were to give himself up to the guidance of the first native whom he met, he would probably find that his confidence had been misplaced. The youth who trusts in the first companion who offers his friendship is like a blind man placing his hand in that of any stranger who may offer him guidance. All lasting trust is based upon knowledge. "They that *know* Thy name will put their trust in Thee" (Psa. ix. 10). The confidence of a wise man is born of knowledge of character. God can be known. His only-begotten Son hath declared Him (Luke x. 22; John i. 18, xvii. 3). 2. *Love to God.* The character must be known, and, being known, must be loved, if there is to be a lasting confidence. We shall not lean with much weight where we do not love. The trust of a Christian will be in proportion to his love to his Lord. The more intimate the knowledge, the deeper will be the love; the deeper the love, the more entire the trust. Our Lord Jesus Christ knew His Father (John xvii. 25) as no creature could know Him, and His love being based upon this profound knowledge, His trust was entire and His obedience perfect, even in His darkest hours. "But that the world may know that I love the Father, and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do." "*Arise, let us go hence*" (John xiv. 31). We cannot do better than write after this copy.

II. The necessary effect of such a confidence. We shall acknowledge God in all our ways. This must mean—1. *A practical recognition of His presence.* We may be in the presence of a superior, and know that we are in his presence, without acknowledging it by showing him the respect that is due to him. If this is the case, we virtually ignore his existence. A child whose behaviour is not deferential to his parent practically ignores him. Acknowledging God in all our ways implies a reverent attitude of soul towards Him. 2. *A belief in God's care for the individual life.* God makes Himself known as the God of the individual man. The care of the individual is his self-imposed task. "I am the Lord God of *Abraham*, thy father, and the God of *Isaac*, . . . and behold I am with *thee*, and will keep *thee* in all places whither thou goest" (Gen. xxviii. 13, 15). 3. *The reference of all our affairs to His guidance, and a submission of our will to His.* This will be easy and natural in proportion to our knowledge, and love, and conviction that God will not think any of our concerns beneath His notice. Our submission will be in the ratio of our confidence—our confidence in the ratio of our knowledge.

III. The promise of direction guaranteed to compliance with the exhortation. 1. *Men have many ways in life.* Man's many ways spring from his many needs. He has a living to earn in the world. His hunger must be satisfied—his body must be clothed and fed. His social wants must be met—he must have companions, form relationships. His mind must have food as well as his body. The aspirations of his spirit form another way, and demand direction and enlightenment. But one way—the way of acknowledging God—is needful to make any and all the other ways profitable and pleasant. 2. *The certainty of right guidance from the foreknowledge and power of the guide.* An Alpine guide, who has traversed a road many times, knows from memory what is at the end of the journey. He sees the end while he is on the way. God's foreknowledge answers to our memory. He sees the end to which He is bringing us while we are on the way. And His power makes the accomplishment of his plans certain. He can speak of them as finished before the means are set in motion to bring them to pass. He said to Joshua: "Behold, I have given into thine hand Jericho" (Josh. vi. 2), before any steps had been taken to overthrow it. His guidance makes it certain that His designs will be accomplished, whatever becomes of our plans.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Verses 5 and 6. The heart, the seat of the affections, and also, in Hebrew psychology, the conscience, which is not a sure guide unless it is regulated by the Lord's will and word.—*Wordsworth.*

Once, indeed, man's understanding gave clear, unclouded light, as man's high prerogative—created in the image of God. But now—degraded by the fall, and darkened by the corruption of the heart—it must prove a false guide. Even in a renewed man—a prophet of God—it proved a mistaken counsellor 2 Sam. vii. 2, 5). Yet throw it not away; cultivate it; use it actively; but *lean* not to it.—*Bridges.*

"He shall Himself," *i.e.*, by His own Spirit. There is an emphatic pronoun. When we walk, it is not we that walk, but God.—*Miller.*

"Leaning to our own understanding" is, as far as it prevails, a kind of practical atheism. To form and prosecute our plans in this spirit of self-confidence, is to act as if there were *no* God—as if the fool's *thought*, or the fool's *wish*, were true.—*Wardlaw.*

I. The duty enjoined. 1. *Entire.* 2. *Exclusive* 3. *Uniform.* **II. The blessing promised—Direction.** *Necessary* on account of—1. Our fallibility. 2. The hazards of the way. 3. False guides. *Promised.* 1. By the pointings of Providence. 2. By the lessons of the Bible. 3. By the influences of the Holy Spirit.—*Outlines by Rev. G. Brooks.*

The fundamental principle of all religion, consisting in an entire self-commitment to the grace and truth of God, with the abandonment of every attempt to attain blessedness by one's own strength or wisdom.—*Lange's Commentary.*

The distant and unconfiding will come on occasion of State formalities to the sovereign; but the dear child will leap forward with everything. The Queen of England is the mother of a family. At one time her ministers of State come gravely into her presence to converse on the policy of nations; at another, her infant runs to her arms for protection, frightened at the buzzing of a fly. Will she love this last appeal because it is a little thing? We have had fathers of our flesh who delighted when we came to them with our minutest ailments. How much more should we bring all our ways to the Father of our spirits, and live by simple faith on Him.—*Arnot.*

We may be led for the exercise of our faith into a way of disappointment, or even of *mistake.* But no step well prayed over will ever bring ultimate regret.—*Bridges.*

Every enlightened believer trusts in a Divine power enlightening the understanding; he therefore follows the dictates of the understanding more religiously than any other man.—*M. Cheyne.*

The moralist, in preaching this trust in God, anticipates the teaching that man is justified by faith.—*Plumptre.*

See your confidence be not divided, part on God and part on man. Such a confidence may keep you from the lions (2 Kings xvii. 25) but it cannot keep you out of hell. A house built partly on firm ground, partly on sand, will fall. To trust in God is so to lean upon Him that if He fail thee thou sinkest.—*Francis Taylor.*

He shall direct, as He carefully chose out the Israelites' way in the wilderness; not the shortest, but the safest way.—*Trapp.*

1. That our reliance may be rational we should know what it is that God has promised, and what we may expect from Him; else we may be disappointed in our hopes. 2. Reliance must be accompanied with obedience, with a purpose, and endeavour to do the things that are pleasing to God. 3. Reliance must also be connected with particular supplications to Him to bless us. 4. It must be accompanied with diligence and prudence in our worldly affairs. 5. It excludes immoderate cares, vain desires, fretful discontent. 6. Although reliance be so advantageous to us, even for the present, that it ought to be considered rather as a privilege than a duty, yet it is a noble virtue and a disposition of mind most agreeable to God. It is the greatest honour we can pay to Him. By it we show our belief in His wisdom, power, equity, and goodness. —*Jortin.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 7—12.

THE WAY (1) TO HEALTH, (2) TO WEALTH, (3) TO ENDURANCE.

Three exhortations are here given, to each of which is attached a promise or reason to induce the young man to obey. **I. An exhortation to humility.** (Verses 7 and 8.) Its peculiar appropriateness and importance will be seen if we consider—1. *The person to whom the exhortation is addressed.* "My son" (ver. 1) Lack of experience has a great tendency to breed self-conceit. As a rule, those who have lived the longest and have most acquaintance with men and things are the least disposed to be "wise in their own eyes." Ignorance is the mother of self-conceit. These words are addressed to a young man, because his youth would render him very liable to this fault. 2. *That self-conceit does not end with oneself but is dangerous to others.* The man who insists upon the correctness of his knowledge of a dangerous way, and will not listen to the experience of those who are better acquainted with it, is sure to find some who believe in him and follow his guidance. Thus he may not only lose his own life but be the murderer of others. 3. *It shuts a man up to his ignorance.* The only way to become wise is to feel we are ignorant. As a lunatic must be shut up with others in a like condition while his madness is upon him, so a self-conceited man must be imprisoned with the fools of the universe while he remains in that condition. 4. *The Divine woes which are levelled against such an one.* All the woes pronounced by our Lord against the Scribes and Pharisees were against sins born of this sin. The charge against them was that they were wise in their own eyes. "For judgment am I come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind. And some of the Pharisees which were with him said, Are we blind also? Jesus said unto them, If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, *We see;* therefore your sin remaineth" (John ix. 41). "Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight" (Isa. v. 21). **II. The remedy against self-conceit.** "Fear *the Lord,*" etc. When those who are

wise in their own eyes begin to reverence those who are much wiser than they are, they will begin to depart from this evil which is the root of many evils. Esteem for those who deserve esteem will lessen their esteem for themselves. A knowledge of the character and wisdom of God will produce reverence. When a man renders to God the reverence which is due unto Him, and which is born of a right appreciation of what God is, the scales of self-conceit will fall from his own eyes. As the sun melts the hoar-frost from the windows and leaves a clear medium for the rays of the sun to enter the chamber, so the contact of God with the human soul will melt away the self-esteem which shut Him out. How entrenched was Saul of Tarsus in his own opinions before he met the Lord on the road to Damascus. How high an estimate he had of himself, but how great was the change which acquaintance with Christ wrought. When Job got an insight into God's greatness, he said, "I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (Job xlii. 6). Self-conceit cannot live where there are right views of God. **III. The promise here given to those who walk reverently before God.** Certain it is that such a mode of life leads to bodily health. Those who walk in the fear of the Lord live lives of purity, of temperance, of freedom from the consuming passions and corroding cares of the ungodly. Other things being equal, or anything like equal, godliness has the promise of the life that now is in this respect as in others. But if we understand the words in this narrow sense only, they seem to express only a small part, and the inferior part, of the blessing that comes to a man from the "fear of the Lord." The bones here, as in Psalm xxxii. 3, xxxv. 10, are put for the whole man. And as the Psalmist, in the first-mentioned psalm, expresses his sad condition of soul as well as body when he says, "My moisture is turned to the drought of summer," so the "marrow," or "moisture," of the bones here expresses a vigour of the entire man. Sin breaks the bones of a man's spirit; the consciousness of the Divine favour which will flow from a reverential walk with God makes them "to rejoice" (Ps. li. 8).

Verses 9 and 10 contain—**I. An exhortation to a right use of temporal riches.** 1. *Those who honour God with their gifts honour Him who has first honoured them with their stewardship.* The man who is entrusted with the property of others has an honour put upon him by the trust. Potiphar put a great honour upon Joseph when he committed all that he had into his hand, and Joseph felt that it was so. This of itself should be a motive to a strict integrity and to devotion to the interests of One who has thus honoured us with confidence. All temporal, material blessings are given to men as stewards of God's property (Luke xvi. 1—12), and in this light they ought to regard themselves. 2. *If men honour God with their substance, they turn what would otherwise be a snare into a blessing.* The tendency of wealth is doubtless to make men God-forgetting, self-confident, selfish (Mark x. 23; Luke xii. 16; Jas. v. 1). But those who use it for the advancement of God's kingdom—for the alleviation of human suffering—make a *friend* of this "mammon of unrighteousness" (Luke xvi. 9). 3. *God cannot be honoured with our substance unless we first give ourselves to Him.* The great desire of a true father in relation to his children is to secure their love. Having that, everything else that is theirs will be his. Without that, no offering, no service, can be acceptable. God must have the man before He will accept his wealth.

II. The promise annexed to this exhortation. This cannot be the *motive*, but it is the *consequence*. Any man who gave his wealth because he believed it was a good investment in this sense, would not be honouring God with it. We must *give*, as we are commanded to *lend*, hoping for nothing again (Luke vi. 35). And, although the material rewards which are appended to a certain line of conduct under the old dispensation do not invariably follow it in the new and more spiritual one, there is probably no Old Testament promise of earthly reward which is, and ever has been, fulfilled with so few exceptions.

Verses 11 and 12. **I. An exhortation to patient endurance of affliction.** 1. *From the constitution of our nature we can but dislike or loathe* (*despise*, see "Critical Notes") *affliction itself.* There has never been one of human kind who has welcomed affliction for its own sake; nay, more, there has never been one who has not shrunk from it, considered by itself. No man can do other than grieve for the death of his friend when he considers his own loss merely. No child of God can love pain or loss. The man who is under the knife of the surgeon must groan in the unnatural condition in which he is placed. Even Christ Himself, though He delighted to do the will of His Father (Psa. xl. 8), shrank from the bitter cup of suffering. If, then, pain—probably mental pain—was felt to be bitter by the Sinless Man, how much more will a sinful man find it hard to bear. 2. *The pain itself is that which renders us unable to see the connection between it and the benefit it is to work out.* While a man is suffering pain of body or mind, his feelings, more or less, overpower his reason. Although we know that it is to work good in the future, we fail often to realise the fact—feeling holds us down to the present.

II. Four considerations to help us in times of affliction. 1. *Its individuality.* "*My* son, despise not *thou*," which implies that God chastises men as individuals—that he distinguishes between them. There may be many sons and daughters in a human home; no two are exactly alike, therefore a wise discrimination must be exercised with regard to the chastisement or the discipline administered. So God discerns the needs of His children. No son or daughter need think that another cross would suit them better; they may be assured that the one they bear is the one that has been especially prepared for them, and is therefore peculiarly adapted for them. 2. *Its end.* It is educational. It is correction, not destruction. Even if it is rebuke, or punishment for a particular sin, it is designed to eradicate that sin, and thus add to the character; and we are assured, on the highest authority, that tribulation worketh patience, experience, and hope—all of which graces go to form a higher type of man (Rom. v. 2, 3). 3. *Its signification.* It means son-ship, adoption. It means that God has taken us in hand; that He is Himself presiding over our education; that He loves us and desires our spiritual growth. 4. *Its Author.* "The Lord." We accept that from one whom we know, which we would not from a stranger. If we can be sure that a man's motives are pure, we judge of his conduct accordingly. The consideration that affliction comes from the "righteous Father," the King who cannot wrong any of His subjects, ought to help us to take the rebuke with meekness,—to bear the pain, although we cannot now see the profit.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Verse 7. This warning against self-confidence is closely connected with the preceding verse. *The wise in his own eyes* is he that *leans to his own understanding*. How striking is this connection between the fear of the Lord and the fear of sin (ch. xiv. 27; xvi. 6. Gen. xxxix. 9-10; Neh. v. 15).—*Bridges.*

Get all the wisdom thou canst. That is the very burden of these Proverbs. But as thou gettest it if thou seemest wise, be sure that thou art weighed down with folly. Gabriel, who has never sinned, is foolish because he knows not the end from the beginning, and we are foolish from a further cause, that our wisdom has remains with it that are corrupt.—*Miller.*

The greatest hindrance to all true wisdom is the thought that we have already attained it.—*Plumptre.*

Fear God, and fear evil; fear God to go to Him, fear evil to depart from it. The wings of fear to carry thee to God are love and care, the wings of fear to carry thee from evil are shame and sorrow.—*Jermin.*

Verse 8. The constant, steadfast, self-diffident operation of the religious principle is beneficial alike to *body* and *soul*. It preserves the mind in tranquillity and peace (Isa. xxvi. 3), and this is in a high degree conducive to the health and vigour of the bodily frame.—*Wardlaw.*

Two sadnesses flow from not fearing Jehovah—worn muscles and dried bones (see "Critical Notes"). The two are perfectly distinct. One means "aching labour," the other, "horrible despondency." The fear of God delivers from both.—*Miller.*

All God's laws come from one source and conspire for one end. They favour righteousness and frown on sin. The law set in nature runs parallel as far as it goes to the law written in the word. Vice saps the health both of body and mind.—*Arnot.*

Verse 9. Works of piety and charity are evidently included.—*Wardlaw.*

Who art thou, that thou shouldest be able to honour Him, who is Himself of infinite honour? Who would not in this respect employ his substance in God's fear, seeing thereby thou dost honour Him, whom to serve is a high honour to the highest angels.—*Jermin.*

To devote a portion of our substance directly to the worship of God, and the good of men, is a duty plainly enjoined in the Scriptures. It is not a thing that a man may do, or may not do, as he pleases. There is this difference, however, between it and the common relative duties of life. For the neglect of it no infliction comes from a human hand. God will not have the dregs that are squeezed out by pressure poured into His treasury. He loveth a cheerful giver. He can work without our wealth, but He does not work without our willing service.—*Arnot.*

Verse 10. At first sight the motive may be regarded as a selfish one. But second thoughts give another view. *It is a trial of faith.* And it is a trial than which few are found more difficult. It is hard to persuade a man that giving away will make him rich. We look with more confidence to bank interest, or the still better interest of a vested loan, than to a return of profit from what is wholly given away.—*Wardlaw.*

Men take care how to use their money to the best advantage by sea, by buying land or cattle, or by usury, an easy trade; thy best trade will be to maintain God's worship.—*Jermin.*

This consecration of substance, as the seed-corn for the harvest, is as strange to the world as would be the casting of the seed in the earth to an untutored savage. Yet is the result secure in both cases: only with the difference, the temper of the earthly sower has no influence on the harvest; whereas the fruitfulness of the spiritual harvest mainly depends on the principles of the work. Most important is it that we *honour the Lord*—not ourselves.—*Bridges.*

Verse 11. Two things are forbidden here. 1. Do not make light of (despise) the Lord's chastening, as if thou couldst easily cast it off—in insensibility to it, not recognising the Lord's hand in it, and not humbling thyself under it. 2. Do not, on the contrary, through pusillanimity, be weary, and impatient, and despondent under the burden.—*Cartwright.*

Not to feel thy evils would be inhuman; not to bear them, unmanly.—*Seneca.*

Fainting and wearying may take place in two ways. The heart may be overwhelmed by sudden trials, giving an effect so stunning and overpowering that the spirit sinks into a temporary stupefaction, and, as the Apostle has it, "we faint." Or it may become wearied out and exhausted by the long continuance of the same trial, or by a rapid succession of different strokes of the rod.—*Wardlaw.*

Having stated the blessings of wisdom, it is logical to consider the apparent exceptions.—*Miller.*

For if God did despise thee, He would not chasten thee, if He was weary of thee, He would not correct thee.—*Jermin.*

Some think it a goodly thing to bear out a cross by head and shoulders, and wear it out as they may, never improving it. As a man that, coming out of a shower of rain, dries again, and all is as before.—*Trapp.*

Prosperity and adversity, in their wise mixture and proportion, form our present condition. Each is equally fruitful in honouring the Lord; in prosperity, by a wise consecration of our substance; in adversity, by a humble and cheerful submission. . . . It is correction, this is for your humbling; it is only correction, this is your consolation. It is the declared test of our legitimacy (Heb. xii. 7, 8). His discipline is that of the family, not of the school, much less of the prison.—*Bridges.*

Solomon here anticipates a covert objection, if all the favour in the sight of God and man, and the health which have been attributed to the fearers of the Lord (ver. 1-10) really be theirs, how is it that we see them so often sorely afflicted? The reason is, the Lord sends these afflictions, not for evil, but for good to His people.—*Fausset.*

Consider the afflictions we meet with in the character which the text assigns to them, viz., as *corrections.* What reasons have we for viewing them in this light? 1. They are *of God,* and God takes no pleasure in the misery of His creatures. By some other demonstrations than the dark demonstrations of sorrow, we know the benevolence of God; and as afflictions are from Him, we have reason to deem them a part of the discipline of His love. 2. The rule or order of human afflictions indicates their corrective intent. All do not come under this principle, but many do. It is manifest that many miseries of life are the results of sin, and if we could see further, it is extremely probable that we should attribute many human miseries to human sin which we now attribute to the naked sovereignty of God. 3. There is every reason to believe that a state of innocence would have kept the world from all suffering. Evils that extend so far, or are of such a nature that our reformation could not shun them, are instructive monitions that sin strikes deep, and requires for its cure the hand that rules the world. 4. Our afflictions have many alleviations. If they were intended as mere punishments they would have been made more destructive.—*Dr Spencer.*

The first distinct utterance of a truth which has been so full of comfort to many thousands, the summing up of all controversies, like those of Job's friends (Job v. 17) or our Lord's disciples (John ix. 2) as to the mystery of suffering. It was the lesson which the book of Job had proclaimed as the issue of so many perplexities. Here it enters into the education of every Jewish child taught to acknowledge a Father in heaven chastening him even as he had been chastened by an earthly father. The Apostle writing to the Hebrews can find no stronger comfort. —*Plumptre.*

Especially the well-beloved Son, who (ver. 12) was made "perfect through sufferings."—*Wordsworth.*

God's strokes are better than Satan's kiss and love; God smites for life, Satan caresses for death.—*Egard.*

The kingdom of God in this world is a kingdom of the cross; but all suffering tends evermore to the testing and confirmation of faith (1 Pet. i. 6-7).—*Lange.*

God's chastenings and corrections are no signs of anger, but of love; they are the pains which our healing and cure demand. Those who lie under the cross are often more acceptable to God than those who taste and experience His dainties. He finds pleasure in our crosses and sufferings for this reason, because these are His remembrance and renewal of the sufferings of His Son. His honour is also involved in such a perpetuation of the cross in His members (Eph. iii. 13; Col. i. 24, etc.), and it is this that causes Him this peculiar joy.—*Berleburg Bible.*

God loveth not thy correction but thee He loveth.—*Jermin.*

He that escapes affliction may well suspect his adoption.—*Trapp.*

The same stroke may fall on two men, and be in the one case judgment, in the other love. "In vain have I smitten your children, they received no correction (Jer. ii. 30). All were "smitten," but they only obtained paternal correction who, in the spirit of adoption, "received" it as such. You may prune branches lying withered on the ground, and also branches living in the vine. In the two cases, the operation and the instrument are precisely alike; but the operation on this branch has no result, and the operation on that branch produces fruitfulness, because of a difference in the place and condition of the branches operated upon.—*Arnot.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses **13 - 18.**

WISDOM AND HER GIFTS.

I. Wisdom is to be found. She does exist. Precious metals and choice stones are to be found. They have an existence, and they exist in regions which may be reached by the exercise of man's intelligence and labour. Those who find them have to dig for them, to seek for them, to give time, and strength, and wealth to the search. So Wisdom, although she is within reach of man must be diligently sought after, must be *drawn out* (see "Critical Notes") by painstaking diligence. 1. Wisdom is to be found in, and drawn out from *affliction.* The bee is said to suck honey from bitter herbs as well as from sweet flowers. The context to these words is closely connected with them, and declare him to be truly blessed who becomes by affliction a wiser and a better man. It is within the reach of intelligent faith in God thus to extract the honey of wisdom from the sorrow which to "the world worketh death" (2 Cor. vii. 10). 2. Wisdom is to be found by *study of the Divine Word.* All Scripture is given by inspiration of God—they are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus (2 Tim. iii. 15-16). The record which God has given of His Son is a revelation of His highest wisdom. A crucified Christ is a manifestation of the wisdom of God, and by the study of Him as revealed in Holy Scripture, we may "draw out understanding" of how a man may be "just with God" (Job ix. 2), and how a justified man may become a perfect man. 3. Wisdom is to be found in the *practice of Divine precepts.* "If any man will *do* His will, he shall know of the doctrine" (John vii. 17). He shall know the reality, the power, of the wisdom which cometh down from above by personal and blessed experience. Understanding in these matters is "drawn out" by doing. 4. Wisdom is found by *communion with God.* Those who talk much with men who are their superiors in goodness and intelligence, and live on friendly terms with them, must become wiser and better through the intercourse. The stronger soul will mould the weaker. The man who holds converse with the highest and best Intelligence, with the Fountain of Wisdom, must draw understanding out of this Living Spring. 5. Wisdom for special needs, the understanding how to act in emergencies, is drawn out from God by the *confession of our ignorance and the pleading of God's promises.* Solomon was himself an example of this. By special prayer, by obeying his own precept (verses 5-6), he obtained the gift of an understanding heart to judge the people (1 Kings iii. 5-12). **II. Wisdom is beyond comparison with anything outside herself.** She is better than wealth because she gives blessings which wealth cannot buy. 1. She gives real *heart-satisfaction.* Money will bring much ease and luxury to the bodily life, but mere material comfort cannot gladden the inner man or keep away old age and sickness. But Wisdom gives a joy which has its home in the heart, and which increases with the increase of years. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, because they are ways of holiness. Love, and joy, and peace, and all the graces which are the fruit of the Spirit of God are the very elements which in perfection constitute the blessedness of God Himself.

They are the fruits which His servants pluck from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God (Rev. ii. 7). To be holy is to be happy in the true, deep sense of the word. 2. She introduces to *better society*. Wealth will do much in this way. Gold is a passport to honour in the world generally, often to the Church in the world. But the holy character which is born of heavenly wisdom is the only possession which will open the doors of the "Church of the firstborn," which will admit to the society of God, His angels, and His redeemed ones. This is true honour. 3. Her gifts are *for eternity*. No matter how precious or how great the joy, the honour of earth passeth away (1 Cor. vii. 31). The gifts of Wisdom are for ever. The length of an eternity of days is in her hand.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Verse 13. Never will this solid happiness be known without singleness of judgment and purpose. This inestimable blessing must have the throne. The waverer and half-seeker fall short. Determined perseverance wins the prize (Phil. iii. 12—14).—*Bridges.*

If God loves a son, He corrects him; and then, "O the blessedness of the man!" It actually makes him wise. Let us not forget the doctrine that affliction—as, indeed, everything else—always benefits the Christian.—*Miller.*

The coherence between this verse and the one preceding it is not to be neglected. To persuade the more to patience under God's afflicting hand, he tells us, it is one way to get wisdom and happiness. What though thou suffer chastisement, and that be bitter to thee! if thou get wisdom by it, thou art happy.—*Francis Taylor.*

Saving wisdom is to be "found" and "gotten." It is not required that we create it. We could not plan, we could not execute, a way of righteous redemption for sinners. . . . This is God's doing, and it is all done. All things are now ready. . . . But we are required to seek the salvation which has been provided and brought near. . . . . Understanding is a thing to be gotten. It comes not in sparks from our own intellect in collision with other human minds. It is a light from heaven. Religion is not all and only an anxious, fearful seeking: it is a getting too, and a glad enjoying.—*Arnot.*

It was man who, by losing wisdom, became unhappy; and it is man who, by finding wisdom, or rather being found by the wisdom of God, is made happy again. It was man whose understanding was deceived by the subtle serpent; and it is man who, by getting understanding, deceiveth the serpent of his prey.—*Jermin.*

Verse 14. Here, as in ii. 4, we have traces of the new commerce, the ships going to Ophir for gold, the sight of the bright treasures stimulating men's minds to a new eagerness.—*Plumptre.*

Wisdom brings more profit than any worldly riches, because it brings better things than riches can. 1. It can quiet a man's mind, which no wealth can do. Rich men have many cares—many griefs; crowns are crowns of thorns: nothing but wisdom can poise the soul in all tempests. 2. It affords a ladder to climb to eternal things, like Jacob's ladder, that did reach from Bethel on earth, to Bethel (God's house) in Heaven.—*Francis Taylor.*

One grain of grace is far beyond all the gold of Ophir, and one hour's enjoyment of God to be much preferred before all the King of Spain's annual entradoes. "Let me be put to any pain, any loss, so I get my Jesus," said Ignatius. What is all the pomp and glory of the world but dung? (Phil. iii. 7, 8). "I esteem them no better" (surely) "that I may win Christ," said Paul, that great trader by land and sea. This gold we cannot buy too dear, whatever we pay for it. The wise merchant sells all to purchase it (Matt. xiii. 44, 46).—*Trapp.*

The gain of fine gold weigheth very heavy in man's account; but the gain of fine wisdom is better, for that weigheth heavy in the balance of God's esteem. Tertullian, comforting the Christian martyrs, writes: "If you have lost some joys of this life, it is but a merchandise—to lose something to gain greater."—*Jermin.*

Verse 16. As in the vision of Solomon at Gibeon, so here; Wisdom being chosen does not come alone, but brings with her the gifts which others who do not choose her choose in vain. The words are almost the echo of those in 1 Kings iii. 11-13.—*Plumptre.*

It is certainly not a uniform experience that a man lives long in proportion as he lives well. Such a rule would obviously not be suitable to the present dispensation. It is true that all wickedness acts as a shortener of life, and all goodness as its lengthener; but other elements enter, and complicate the result, and slightly veil the interior law. If the law were according to a simple calculation in arithmetic, "the holiest liver, the longest liver," and conversely, the moral government of God would be greatly impeded, if not altogether subverted. He will have men to choose goodness for His sake and its own, therefore a slight veil is cast over its present profitableness. Some power is allowed to the devil, to try them that are upon the earth.—*Arnot.*

If God give his people a crown, he will not deny them a crust. If they have the good things of a throne, they shall be sure of the good things of the footstool.—*Trapp.*

St. Augustine telleth us that length of days is eternity, for whatsoever hath an end is short: but riches and honour, which by men are esteemed good things, they are in the left hand. It is not forbidden thee to enjoy the good things of this life, but do not put that in the right hand which should be in the left; do not prefer temporal things before eternal. Let us use the left hand for a time, but desire the right hand for eternity.—*Jermin.*

The right hand in the Bible everywhere means one's highest instrumentality or agency (Rev. ii. 1). We understand the text to mean, therefore, that wisdom is able to use long life as a splendid agency.—*Miller.*

It is eternity that filleth the right hand of Wisdom. *Days* for the clarity, *length* for the eternity. As the glory is clear for the countenance, so is it long for the continuance. The gift of the left hand is short and temporal. **I. Riches and honour are God's gifts, therefore, in themselves, not evil.** Saith Augustine: "That they may not be thought evil, they are given to good men; that they may not be thought the best good, they are given to evil men. Chrysostom remarks that Christ doth not say: "Ye cannot *have* God and mammon," but, "Ye cannot *serve* God and mammon." **II. All are not so, but some; and therefore it is necessary for us to learn whether God gave us the riches and honour which we have.** They come from God if (1) *they are honestly gotten,* (2) *justly disposed,* (3) *patiently lost.* **III. Wealth and worship are, for the most part, companions; for both those gifts lie in one and the same hand.** Riches are the stairs whereby men climb up into the height of dignity, the fortification that defends it, the food it lives upon, the oil that keeps the lamp of honour from going out. **IV. Though riches and honour are God's gifts, yet they are but the gifts of His left hand.** Therefore it follows that every wise man will seek the blessings of the right. Let us strive for the latter without condition; for the other, if they fall in our way, let us stoop to take them up.—*Thomas Adams.*

Verse 17. **I. The ways of religion are ways of pleasantness.** 1. There is a pleasure in the duties relating immediately to God—in *love, faith, reliance, hope, prayer,* and *thanksgiving.* 2. There is a pleasure in those occupations in which a religious man will be frequently employed—*in studying the works of God and the Holy Scriptures:*

in meditating on the perfections of the Almighty, etc. 3. There is a pleasure in that behaviour towards others, and that manner of prosecuting our worldly affairs, which ever accompany a religious disposition—in *calm integrity, honest industry,* and *acts of beneficence.* 4. There is a pleasure in performing our duty to ourselves—in *temperance* and *control of the passions.* **II. The ways of sin are not ways of pleasantness.** 1. No man can be happy who acts against his conscience. 2. If men persuade themselves that there is no future life, the expectation of perishing utterly presents no agreeable prospect to the soul, which has a natural desire of immortality. 3. Every act contrary to reason and religion is, if not always, for the most part, hurtful, even in this life.—*Jortin.*

The excellency of the pleasure found in Wisdom's ways appears—**I. In that it is the pleasure of the mind. II. That it never satiates nor wearies. III. That it is in nobody's power, but only in his that has it.**—*South.*

I am confident that the true Christian hath more true pleasure in suffering for Christ, or in one act of mortification, or victory over one lust, than the highest earthly potentate hath in all the honour that is done him, or good things enjoyed by him all his days.—*Swinnock.*

I. Wisdom of itself is satisfactory, as it implies a revelation of truth, and a detection of error to us. We are all naturally endowed with a strong appetite to know, to see, to pursue truth; and with an abhorrency of being deceived and entangled in mistake.

II. In its consequences it is pleasant and peaceable. 1. It assures us we take the best course and proceed as we ought. He that knows his way and is satisfied it is the true one, goes on merrily and carelessly, not doubting he shall in good time arrive at his destined journey's end. Wisdom therefore frees us from the company of anxious doubt in our actions, and the consequence of bitter repentance; for no man can doubt of what he is sure, nor repent of what he knows good. 2. It begets in us a hope of success in our actions, and is usually attended therewith. What is more delicious than hope? What more satisfactory than success? And well-grounded hope confirms resolution and quickens activity, which mainly conduce to the prosperous issue of designs. 3. Wisdom prevents discouragement from the possibility of ill success, yea, and makes disappointment itself tolerable. For we have reason to hope that the All-wise Goodness reserves a better reward for us, and will some time recompense us, not only the good purposes we unhappily pursued, but also the unexpected disappointment we patiently endured. 4. Wisdom makes all the troubles of life easy and supportable, by rightly valuing the importance and moderating the influence of them. . . . If sin vex and discompose us, yet this trouble Wisdom, by representing the Divine Goodness and His tender mercies in our ever-blessed Redeemer, doth presently allay. And for all other adversities it abates their noxious power by showing us they are either merely imaginary or very short and temporary: that they admit of remedy, or at most do not exclude comfort. 5. Wisdom hath always a good conscience attending it, that purest delight and richest cordial of the soul; that brazen wall and impregnable fortress against both external assaults and internal commotions.—*Barrow.*

Some degree of comfort follows every good action, as heat accompanies fire, as beams and influences issue from the sun. This, saith one, is a fore-reward of well-doing. "*In* doing thereof (not only *for* doing) there is great reward" (Psa. xix. 11).—*Trapp.*

The paths of wisdom bring us to the peace of reconciliation with God; to the peace of society and friendship with the angels of God; to the peace of comfort and quietness in our own hearts.—*Jermin.*

They must be "ways of pleasantness" because "Thus saith the Lord." And if we feel them not to be so, we know them not.—*Bridges.*

Her ways are sometimes on hot coals and to burning stakes. If there is anything unpleasant in her way, it is to promote wisdom and so to promote more "pleasantness" another time. *All* her paths peace, or "prosperity." More thoroughly "all" of them than in the case of pleasantness. While the happiness of a Christian may flag in this world, his "prosperity" never stops a moment. His "way" is prosperous, *i.e.*, he gains by every inch.—*Miller.*

Both the way and the end to which the way leads is peace. There are many ways in the world pleasant but not safe; others safe but not pleasant.—*Fausset.*

Verse 18. Like that planted in Paradise and promised by Christ to all that overcome.—*Wordsworth.*

It is remarkable that this and other references in Proverbs xi. 30, xiii. 12, xv. 4, are the only allusions in any book of the Old Testament, after Genesis, to the "tree" itself, or to its spiritual significance. . . . The tree of life which Adam was not to taste lies open to his children. No cherubim with flaming swords bar the approach. Wisdom is the tree of life giving true immortality.—*Plumptre.*

Wisdom beareth not her fruit for everyone. She is a tree of life to them that *lay hold* of her, not to them that touch her with a light hand, that seek after her in a perfunctory manner, that think a little wisdom, a little godliness, to be sufficient for them.—*Jermin.*

The tree of life was the means ordained of God for the preservation of lasting life, and continual vigour and health, before man sinned. So true wisdom maintains man in the spiritual life of God's grace, and the communion of His Spirit.—*Diodati.*

One view of man's true dignity arises from the amount of his susceptibilities of enjoyment on the one hand, of suffering on the other. Think of what man was, of what he is, of what he is capable of becoming. His capabilities are such that nothing beneath God Himself can satisfy them. His soul can be filled from no created fountain. Wisdom provides for him a portion adequate to his most unbounded desires, to his most expanded capacities.—*Wardlaw.*

As the tree of life in Paradise, which was a sign of God's favour, or the tree which sweetened the waters of Marah, or the tree seen in the Revelation, or any living or good tree which bringeth forth fruit whereby men live.—*Muffet.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses **19, 20.**

ONE OF THE PROOFS OF GOD'S WISDOM.

I. God had a personal existence before the world. If we say that a man founded an institution—built a house—we imply that he existed before the institution or the house, and that he exists as a separate identity from that which he has built or founded.

II. The world did not come by chance—it is not an orphan; it had a Creator, a Father. The world is not eternal. The Lord founded it. He "laid the foundations of the earth" (Job.).

III. That the world which God has made bears the impress of Infinite Wisdom. Scientific investigation and discovery bear out the assertion of Solomon, that the Lord "by wisdom founded the earth." The discoveries of astronomers reveal to us more and more the "understanding" which "established the heavens." Solomon here selects one example of the wisdom of God, as displayed in relation to the earth, viz., the process by which it is watered—by which God "maketh it soft with showers, and thus blesseth the springing thereof" (Psa. lxv. 10), and so gives seed to the sower and bread to the eater. This "philosophy of rain," as it has been called, is one which illustrates creative wisdom in a remarkable manner. Dr. Ure says, "To understand the philosophy of the beautiful and often sublime phenomenon, so often witnessed since the

creation of the world, and essential to the very existence of plants and animals, a few facts derived from observation and a long train of experiments must be remembered. (1) Were the atmosphere everywhere at all times of a uniform temperature we should never have rain, or hail, or snow; the water absorbed by it in evaporation from the sea and the earth's surface would descend in an imperceptible vapour, or cease to be absorbed by the air when it was once fully saturated. (2) The absorbing power of the atmosphere, and consequently its capability to retain humidity, is proportionately greater and warmer than in cold air. (3) The air near the surface of the earth is warmer than it is in the region of the clouds. The higher we ascend from the earth, the colder do we find the atmosphere. Hence the perpetual snow on very high mountains in the hottest climate. Now, when from continued evaporation the air is highly saturated with vapour, though it be invisible and the sky cloudless,—if its temperature be suddenly reduced by cold currents descending from above, or rushing from a higher to a lower latitude, its capacity to retain moisture is diminished, clouds are formed, and the result is rain. Air condenses as it cools, and, like a sponge filled with water and compressed, pours out the water which it cannot hold. How singular, yet how simple, the philosophy of rain. Who but Omniscience could have devised such an admirable arrangement for watering the earth?" Solomon could not have known *how* the earth was watered, but he knew enough to awaken his admiration of Providential love and skill.

IV. The exhibition of God's wisdom in creation is intended to lead men to listen to his Word of Revelation. To this end the subject is introduced here by the preacher. When such a Being speaks, it must be worth men's while to listen and obey. The heavens and earth have a speech or language (Psa. xix. 1, 2). They counsel us to seek Him who hath measured the waters in the hollow of His hand, and meted out heaven with the span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure,"—Him "whose word shall stand for ever" (Isa. xl.).

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Verse 19. Hitherto Wisdom has been thought of in relation to men. Now the question comes: What is she in relation to God? and the answer is: That the creative act implies a Divine wisdom, through which the Divine will acts. We have, as it were, the first link of the chain which connects this wisdom with the Divine Word, the Logos of St. John's Gospel (John i. 3). —*Plumptre.*

The wisdom, so spiritual as to belong only to the pious, nevertheless has its reachings into all wisdom, as we saw in chap. i. 10, where it is called "wisdoms," as embracing all forms of it. Creative wisdom, therefore, is part of the broad array. But now, as a more important teaching, creative wisdom must include the spiritual. God could not found the heavens without that holy character that makes the system possible. Its enormous intricacies could not be kept up without the harmonising influences of holiness. Government, of course, is built upon it; justice, of course, is a part of it; and the whole world would be an unmeaning mass unless Jehovah, by wisdom, shaped it, viz., in those diviner forms in which He is the governor as well as the builder and original schemer of the universe. God *would* not have built the world without holiness, and therefore, in the very strictest sense, "by wisdom He founded" the heavens, because only that holy light, which is the light of love, could be the inspiring motive for building the habitations of His creatures. We are to understand this verse as meaning, therefore, first, that creative light merges into all light, as one grand omniscience; but, second, that creative light would be nothing without spiritual light; that God's love and justice were the very spring

and harmonious law whereon all are builded.—*Miller.*

The spirit of the recommendation seems to be that, as it is "the Lord which giveth wisdom," that which comes from such a source must be worthy the desire and the solicitation. Think of what Wisdom, as it exists in Deity, has done!—the wonders it hath wrought! This will recommend God's lessons.—*Wardlaw.*

The river and the fountain are both of one nature, and when pure water hath been looked on in the stream, it is a pleasant thing to behold it in the conduit head.—*Muffet.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 21—26.

GOD'S KEEPING, THE REWARD OF MAN'S KEEPING.

Here we have the *keeping* of the Divine commands resulting in a *being kept* by Divine power and love.

I. There is a possibility of losing what has been attained. The injunction here given is not, as in chap. ii. 10, to seek wisdom, but as in verse 18 of this chapter, to keep a hold upon what has been already gotten. The Scriptures abound in such exhortations. Barnabas exhorted the Church at Antioch to "cleave unto the Lord," and he and Paul, when in Pisidian Antioch, persuaded the disciples "to *continue* in the grace of God" (Acts xi. 23; xiii. 43). The word of Our Lord to the Church at Thyatira was "That which ye have hold fast till I come" (Rev. ii. 25). There is no safety but in continual watchfulness and in constant study of Divine precepts. "My son, let them not depart from thine eyes." A mariner may set out on his voyage with his vessel's head pointing in the right direction, but if he does not hourly keep consulting the compass, it will not avail him much that he started right. The Apostle speaks of men having "made shipwreck of faith and a good conscience" (1 Tim. i. 19). The world, the flesh, and the devil are cross currents and contrary winds which can only be met and overcome by constant, watchful reference to chart and compass.

II. The blessing which will result from "keeping wisdom," viz, Soul-life. As food and an observance of physical laws are the means by which the body is enabled to perform the functions which are natural to it, so a constant receiving of God's thoughts and an observance of God's laws will enable the soul—the spiritual man—to fulfil the end for which it was created—to glorify and enjoy God. Such a man has the assurance that he is under the special guardianship of God. All the subjects of this realm are under the protection of the monarch, but she has a special and personal care for her own children. So God is the "Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe" (1 Timothy iv. 10). This particular regard of God for those who have become His children, by falling in with His method of making them right with themselves and with Him, is guaranteed.—1. *In the ordinary events of life.* As the heirs of the monarch are always accompanied by those who count it an honour to serve them and, if needful, to protect them, so the heirs of salvation are ever attended by their body-guard, the angels who are "ministering spirits to the heirs of salvation" (Heb. i. 14). In the night not only do they encamp round about them that fear God (Psa. xxxiv. 7), but the Lord Himself is said to be their keeper (Psa. cxxi. 5). His peace "keeps (lit. *garrisons*) the heart" (Phil. iv. 7) and gives the sweet sleep promised in verse 24, even although outward circumstances may be apparently adverse (*see illustration*). This was the experience of David in the night of his adversity, even although he had brought it upon himself (Psa. iii. and iv). And the certain guidance which is promised in verse 6 insures an avoidance of all real danger (ver. 23). 2. *In times of special visitation* (ver. 25). There was a "desolation of the wicked" in the days of Noah, but he and his house were "shut in" the ark by God Himself (Gen. vii. 16). In the day when

the Lord "rained upon Sodom and Gomorrah He delivered just Lot." (2 Pet. ii. 6). When the "abomination of desolation stood in the holy place" at Jerusalem as foretold by our Lord (Matt. xxiv. 15), those who obeyed His command and fled to the mountains escaped the terrible fate of those who remained in the city. (This is recorded by Eusebius). This assurance of constant guardianship and guidance is "life" to the soul (Psa. xxx. 5). Fear of the future paralyses a man's energies, but confidence in an over-ruling personal God gives him strength for action.

ILLUSTRATION OF VERSE 24.

THE LAST HOURS OF THE NINTH EARL OF ARGYLE, EXECUTED BY JAMES II.

So effectually had religious faith and hope, co-operating with natural courage and equanimity, composed his spirits that, on the very day on which he was to die, he dined with appetite, conversed with gaiety at table, and, after his last meal, lay down, as he was wont, to take a short slumber, in order that his body and mind might be in full vigour when he should mount the scaffold. At this time one of the Lords of the Council, who had probably been bred a Presbyterian, and had been seduced by interest to join in oppressing the Church of which he had once been a member, came to the castle with a message from his brethren, and demanded admittance to the Earl. It was answered that the Earl was asleep. The Privy Councillor thought that this was a subterfuge, and insisted on entering. The door of the cell was softly opened, and there lay Argyle on the bed, sleeping, in his irons, the placid sleep of infancy. The conscience of the renegade smote him. He turned away, sick at heart, ran out of the castle, and took refuge in the dwelling of a lady of his family, who lived hard by. There he flung himself upon a couch, and gave himself up to an agony of remorse and shame. His kinswoman, alarmed by his looks and groans, thought that he had been taken with sudden illness, and begged him to drink a cup of sack. "No, no," he said, "that will do me no good." She prayed him to tell her what had disturbed him. "I have been," he said, "to Argyle's prison. I have seen him within an hour of eternity sleeping as sweetly as ever man did. But as for me——."—*Macaulay.*

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Verse 21. Simply attend to them. "Watch" like a sentinel, intently eyeing. Solomon enjoins the voluntary, and promises the involuntary. The voluntary we can do, save only for that grand helplessness, an aversion of the will itself. The involuntary we cannot do, save only mediately through obedient acts. Attention is within our power if God gives grace to the will. This is the drift of the promise: You do your part and God will do His.—*Miller.*

Eye these things as the steersman doth the load-star, as the archer doth the mark he shoots at, or as the passenger doth his way, which he finds hard to hit and dangerous to miss.—*Trapp.*

Verse 22.—Wisdom reveals the righteousness of God, whereby a believer lives before God. Without this the man is dead in sins (Heb. ii. 4, Eph. ii. 1).—*Fausset.*

There is no life in the soul till knowledge come into it. There was no living creature in the world till light was made. God clears the understanding before He rectifies the will and affections; He keeps the same method in the little world that He did in the great world.—*Francis Taylor.*

Verse 23. This promise has a direction embodied with it, "Thou shalt walk in thy way." We are required to keep the way of the Lord, and in the affairs of life to attend to our own concerns, shunning the character of busybodies by not meddling in the affairs of others.—*Lawson.*

Good success in the way may be crossed again; what is crowned with good success in the end can never be crossed.—*Francis Taylor.*

There shall be no cause to make thee stumble. For he that is blind or weak may stumble, though he be never so careful; and he may stumble that is

careless, though he be never so well able to walk safely. But wisdom shall take away thy blindness, thy weakness, thy carelessness.—*Jermin.*

Thou shalt ever go under a double guard, the peace of God within thee and the power of God about thee.—*Trapp.*

Verse 24.—Peter in prison, in chains, between two soldiers, on the eve of his probable execution, when there seemed but a "step between him and death." Yet in such a place, in such company, at such a moment, did he lie down so fearlessly and sleep so sweetly, that even the shining light failed to disturb him, and an angel's stroke was needed to awaken him.—*Bridges.*

Surely the way to sleep quietly in this world is to be asleep to the world; his sleep is sweetest, when he is asleep, who, when he is awake, doth sweetly sleep in a neglect of worldly crosses or contentments.—*Jermin.*

Verse 25. So safe will all thy ways be that to fear will be a sin.—*Plumptre.*

From the terms before used, respecting the final destruction of the wicked, it is most likely that to it the reference is in this verse.—*Wardlaw.*

"Be not afraid" is at once a precept and a promise to the godly. They shall have no cause to fear evil tidings, therefore it is their privilege that they are not to fear them (Psa. cxii. 7; xci. 5).—*Fausset.*

The Christian is threatened by the sinners in all their ills, whether for them or by them. Sin breeds the whole of them; and the wise man would magnify the grace by saying that they are all equally indifferent. "Let cares, like a wild deluge come."—*Miller.*

Let a David "walk through the vale of the shadow of death" he will not fear, no, though he should go back the same way; "for Thou art with me," saith he. He had God by the hand, and so long he feared no colours.—*Trapp.*

Verse 26. Beware of mistakes here. Do not say God is your confidence, if He be only your dread. An appalling amount of hypocrisy exists in Christendom, and passes current for devotion. He who is himself most worthy is often more disliked than any other being, and, as if this ingratitude were not enough, men double the sin by professing that they have confidence in Him. I have observed that sea-going ships do not trust to themselves in the windings of a river. Where they are hemmed in between rock and quicksand, grazing now the one and now the other, they take care to have a steam-tug, both to bear them forward and to guide them aright. They hang implicitly upon its power. They make no attempt at independent action. But as soon as they get clear of the narrows—as soon as they have attained a good offing and an open sea—they heave off and hoist their own sails. They never want a steamer till they come into narrow waters again. Such is the trust in God which the unreconciled experience. In distress they are fain to lean upon the Almighty. While they are in the narrows they would hang on the help of a Deliverer. . . . The line of their dependence seems ever tight by their constant leaning. But when they begin to creep out of these shoals of life they heave off and throw themselves upon their own resources. . . . This is not to have confidence in God.—*Arnot.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 27—29.

Doing Justice and Loving Mercy.

True wisdom in the heart will show itself in right dealing between man and man. He who holds back any good thing by which it is in his power to bless another man is a thief. The withholding is a crime for which God will visit. This is true in relation not only to debts of justice (Jas. v. 4) but to so-called

debts of mercy. When the Son of Man shall come in His glory, there will be some against whom He will bring the charge—"I was an hungred, and ye gave Me no meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave Me no drink; I was a stranger, and ye took Me not in; naked, and ye clothed Me not; sick and in prison, and ye visited Me not" (Matt. xxv. 42, 43). There are *five* reasons against the postponement of any act of justice or mercy until the morrow. 1. The person who is in need to-day may be beyond your reach to-morrow. Death may remove him from your reach, and he may go into eternity your creditor. Men and women have been saved from taking a step which would have been their ruin, by a kindly word or act which would have come too late on the morrow. 2. If your needy friend do live to be helped on the morrow, you may not live to give him help, and you will then enter the presence of God a debtor to your brother. To-morrow is God's property, to-day is man's. 3. If your brother is not beyond your reach to-morrow, his need has been increased by the delay. If a man's condition calls for medical aid to-day, and it is withholden, the disease will have a firmer hold to-morrow and will be harder to cure. What physician would say to a sick man in such a case, "Go, and come again?" Human need is a disease that is increased by delay in dealing with it. It is a weed that grows apace. What is only a seed to-day will be a sapling soon. If you delay the moral and intellectual training of the ignorant, the chains that bind them will be harder to break to-morrow than they are to-day. So that delay makes the demand greater, and the debt which might have been easily paid when it was due becomes hard to meet by withholding. 4 To do the good to-morrow which might be done to-day is not to be an imitator of God. The Divine Father makes His sun to shine to-day upon the evil and the good. He does not say, "To-morrow I will give thee," but "now is the accepted time." 5. The postponement of that which is due is "a devising of evil in the heart against thy neighbour" (ver. 29). Our Lord, in his parable of the good Samaritan, has answered for us the question, Who is my neighbour? (Luke x.). It is the man who is in need, and whose need we can relieve. It is not merely a negative, but a positive sin to withhold help to such a one—it is a violation of that rule of life which Christ Himself declares "is the law and the prophets" (Matt. vii. 12).

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Verse 27. The borrower is then to repay his debt to the lender; the finder to restore that which he hath taken up to the loser; he which hath received anything into his custody, is to bring it forth to him who reposed trust in him; the master is to pay the servant his wages. Finally, everyone is to practise that precept of the Apostle (Rom. xiii. 8).—*Muffet.*

This practical injunction may be applied: 1. To all lawful debts, for articles purchased or work performed. 2. To government taxes, which ought to be regarded as debts due to the community. 3. To debts of charity and benevolence. For such debts there are. They cannot indeed be claimed; they cannot be made good in law. But they are *due*—due on the principle of the "royal law" (Matt. vii. 12).—*Wardlaw.*

Here Solomon passes from general recommendations of wisdom to particular precepts of it. He reverts to instances of "mercy and truth" (ver. 3). He who is in need has a claim of ownership upon our property by the law of love, which is the law of God. Need makes the poor the owner, and God makes thee the dispenser of the goods which thou hast and which he needs: so such benefits are called "righteousness," *i.e.*, a righteous debt or obligation (2 Cor. ix. 9; Matt. vi. 1, "alms;" Greek, "righteousness"). The same principle applies in the case of spiritual knowledge which thou hast and thy neighbour has not.—*Fausset.*

With the luxuries of grace, the wise man mixes in its conditions. They are rugged like those of the Apostle (1 Cor. xiii). If we enjoy the good of the Gospel, we are to render again according to the benefits shown us.—*Miller.*

It is the hungry man's bread which we hoard up in our own barns. It is his meat on which we glut, and his drink which we guzzle: it is the naked man's apparel which we shut up in our presses, or which we exorbitantly ruffle and flaunt in: it is the needy person's gold and silver which we closely hide in our chests, or spend idly, or put out to useless use. We are, in thus holding, or thus spending, not only covetous, but wrongful, or havers of more than our own, against the will of the rightful owners.—*Barrow.*

1. They who have had much experience in the world may be of infinite use by giving *salutary advice.* 2. If we are afraid of being thought meddling, we can benefit others by a *good example.* 3. By *vindicating the characters* of those who have been unjustly defamed. 4. By not only giving alms, but *attention, care,* and *friendship* to the needy. 5. *By recommending* our brethren to God in *prayer.—Bishop Porteous.*

Verse 28. This conduct is too common. It may arise—1. From an avaricious reluctance to part with the money. The avaricious man is so loath to part with the object of his idolatry that even a day's delay pleases him. 2. From indolent listlessness. The man is not in a mood to be troubled. He is occupied about something else, or he is not disposed to be occupied at all. 3. From insolent superciliousness. This is often discovered towards inferiors, or towards persons against whom there exists a grudge. It is the vice of little minds—ungenerous, unjust, unmanly.—*Wardlaw.*

He gives twice to one in need who gives at once.—*Publius Syrus.*

Keep as few good intentions hovering about as possible. They are like ghosts haunting a dwelling. The way to lay them is to find bodies for them.—*Arnot.*

Verse 29. This evil may be practised in a great variety of ways. As, for instance—A man in business does what he can to obtain another's confidence; or, whether he acts from this view or not, he knows that he has that confidence, and he takes advantage of it to obtain large quantities of goods from him, when aware that his own affairs are precarious and his credit sinking. There are not wanting cases in which the most nefarious crimes have been perpetrated through the medium of unsuspecting confidence. The wife of a man's bosom, or the child of his paternal love, has been seduced by the unwitting confidence he has reposed in a seeming friend. It is the very sin by which "the devil beguiled Eve through his subtilty."... All therefore who act such a part are of "their father the devil."—*Wardlaw.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 30.

UNLAWFUL STRIFE FORBIDDEN.

I. Strife is unlawful when no good can come from striving. The purpose or end of the strife must be the test as to whether it is right or wrong. Mere assertion of our rights or material gain is not the highest good. If Abraham had pushed the quarrel between his herdsmen and those of Lot there can be no doubt that Abraham could have established a lawful claim to a choice of the land. But the good to be gained by striving was not worthy to be compared with the harm that would have been done, and therefore Abraham nobly forbore to insist on his rights.

II. Causeless strife is a self-infliction. A man can hardly be involved in lawful strife without mental agitation, how much more when he strives without cause. When the four winds of heaven seem to meet upon the sea, the waters

foam and toss in ceaseless agitation. The winds must cease to strive before the calm can come. A man involved in an unlawful quarrel is like such a troubled sea. Reason and passion, heaven and hell, contend within him for the mastery, and while the battle lasts he must be miserable.

III. Strife rarely ends with those who begin it. Man's relationship to his fellows renders it impossible for the result of his good or evil deeds to remain with himself alone. If the head of a family enters into a quarrel, the children will probably imbibe the spirit and suffer from the consequences. If kings and rulers involve a nation in unnecessary war, they bring needless suffering upon thousands of innocent people. This consideration alone ought to make men beware of entering into a quarrel.

IV. Causeless strife in the children of God gives a false representation of their Father's character. They are God's representatives upon earth, they are expected to fashion their lives upon the Divine model (Matt. v. 48). God is a God of peace (1 Thess. v. 23). His contention is only with sin, and its end is the establishment of peace upon earth by righteousness.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH—Verses 31—35.

THE OPPRESSOR NOT TO BE ENVIED.

The children of Wisdom are strongly tempted sometimes to do this. Like Asaph (Psalm lxxiii.), they see the prosperity of the wicked encompassed with pride, and clothed, as it were, with violence (verse 6), and they are tempted to say: "Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency."

Such a state of mind is—**I. Dangerous.** It is the first step to becoming like him. Envy of the oppressor may result in "choosing his ways." A conviction that there is anything belonging to the oppressor that can be envied may lead to becoming oppressors ourselves.

II. Unwise. 1. *Because the oppressor is held in universal abhorrence by men.* True it is that he possesses power, or he could not oppress, but sooner or later the power will be transferred to the hands of those whose rights he has trampled on, and the outburst of rejoicing at his overthrow is the revelation of the hidden hatred of which he has all along been the subject. 2. *Because he is an abomination to the Most High* (verse 32). As there is in the noblest of human kind an intense loathing of those who use their power to the injury of others, so this feeling exists more strongly in the mind of God in proportion as His goodness and benevolence exceeds that of the most perfect man. This is not only declared in revelation, but is manifested in the retributions of Providence. Since Pharaoh and his hosts were overthrown in the Red Sea, God has been slaying "mighty kings" who have followed in Pharaoh's footsteps, because "He is good, and His mercy endureth for ever" (Psa. cxxxvi). 3. *Because of the contrast in the character, and in the present and future reward of the oppressor and the child of Wisdom.* The oppressor is "froward." He will not submit to the voice of instruction or correction, but will be his own absolute lord and master. His actions, if not his words, say: "Who is the Lord, that I should obey His voice?" The righteous are submissive to the Divine will—they are the "lowly," who are willing to learn of Him who was meek and lowly in heart (Matt. xi. 29). Such opposite characters must necessarily meet with opposite dealing from a righteous Ruler. It is a righteous law that "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Gal. vi. 7). With the froward Thou wilt show Thyself froward—with the merciful Thou wilt show Thyself merciful—are the curse and the blessing which rest respectively upon, not only the froward and lowly man, but upon those to whom they belong—their *house*—those who are bound to them in

family relation. The scorn of the froward man reaps a harvest of scorn, but "grace" is the reward of lowliness and humility (verse 34). The contrast in the future inheritance is still greater. The present curse and blessing may not be always evident to onlookers, but the future glory and shame will be manifest to the universe (Matt. xxv. 31—36).

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Verse 32. The Lord will freely reveal to the righteous what He keeps from others—the truths and promises, the blessings and joys of His covenant of peace, secret to the soul that possesses them, intransferable, "passing all understanding," "unspeakable and full of glory."—*Wardlaw.*

There is no less a secret of godliness than there is of any other trade or profession. Many profess an art or a trade, but thrive not by it because they possess not the secret or mystery of it, and many profess godliness but are little the better for it, because they have not the true secret of it. He hath that with whom God is in secret in his heart, and he that is righteous in secret where no man sees him, he is the righteous man with whom the secret of the Lord is.—*Jernim.*

They shall be of His cabinet council who choose rather to lie in the dust than to rise by evil arts, by wicked principles.—*Trapp.*

Verse 33. Whatever cost be there, there can be no true cheer, for God's curse mars all; this will either rot the timber, and pull it down, or undermine the foundation, and blow it up. Possibly there may be in thy house a loving wife, loving children, many servants, stately rooms, costly furniture, dainty fare, great earthly delights; but, man, the curse of God is there. A spoonful of this, like copperas, will turn all thy wine into ink; thy sea of honey into gall and wormwood. How can thy sweetest dish be savoury, when the curse of God is thy sauce? Or thy finest raiment delight thee when in every suit there is the curse of God like a plague-sore? or how can thy most beautiful building content thee, when this curse of God on thee for thy wickedness turns it into a prison to keep thee, who art in the bond of iniquity, till the hour of death, the time of thine execution?—*Swinnock.*

The houses of the wicked are of two kinds, some dwell in their merits, others in their vices. The Pharisees of the world dwell in the lofty houses of their own meritorious holiness. But as St. Bernard saith, What more foolish than to dwell in a house yet hardly begun? The debauched people of the world dwell in the dirty houses of their wicked lives, and cannot be gotten out of them. But the curse of God is upon both. The righteous dwell in God's mercy which covereth them from the anger of His justice . . . . The rich glutton may keep out Lazarus, but he keeps in God's curse.—*Jermin.*

Here are the gods—could the philosopher say of his poor habitation, meaning his heathenish household gods—whatever else is wanting to me. How much more may the saint say so of his God.—*Trapp.*

Verse 35. They shall be promoted, indeed, but their exaltation shall be like that of Haman, who was exalted when he was hung upon a gallows fifty cubits high.—*Lawson.*

This last contrast carries us forward to the coming day when all shall "discern" in the full delight of eternity (Mal. iii. 18). The wise—the heirs of glory—are identified with the lowly (verse 34)—the heirs of grace. Self-knowledge—the principle of lowliness—is the very substance of wisdom. Their inheritance also is one—grace and glory (Psa. lxxxiv. 11). For what higher *glory* can there be than the *grace* which hath redeemed a worm of the earth and made him a king and priest unto God?—*Bridges.*

Humility is both a grace and a vessel to receive grace.—*Trapp.*

CHAPTER IV.

CRITICAL NOTES.—**2. Doctrine,** Literally something received, handed over; **the author so** describes it because he received it from his father. The Septuagint and the Vulgate translate by **donum,** "a gift." **3. Tender and only,** "dearly-beloved"—not that Solomon was Bathsheba's only son (1 Chron. iii. 5). **4. Get,** Heb. "acquire or buy"—spare no cost. The repetition of the verb makes the injunction more imperative. **Forget** is a word in Hebrew that takes the preposition *from.* In the idea of forgetting there is naturally involved that of turning aside or away from the object to be remembered. **6.** Miller translates the last clause: "Love her, and she shall stand sentry over thee." **7.** The first clause of this verse contains only four words, viz.: **Beginning,** or "principal thing;" **Wisdom; get wisdom** Its terseness has led to various translations. Hitzig and others read: "The highest thing is wisdom." Miller translates: "As the height of wisdom, get wisdom." Delitzsch—The beginning of wisdom is: "Get wisdom." **With,** not to be taken in the sense of "in connection with," but "by means of," or "at the price of." **8. Exalt** or "esteem." **9.** Last clause, or "she shall compass thee with a crown of glory." **10.** As is all other instances (see Notes on Chap. iii. 2), Miller translates the promise: "And they shall grow greater to thee through years of life" **14 Go not.** The Heb. is literally "to go straightforward;" also, "to pronounce happy." **15. Avoid,** "Let it go," reject it." **Turn from it,** *i.e.,* even if thou hast entered, turn back. **16.** Miller here reads: "For the mere reason that they sleep not, rest assured they do mischief; and that their sleep is stolen, rest assured they occasion stumbling:" and understands it to mean that the more sleepless the industrious impenitent, the faster he is carrying everything to eternal ruin. But all other commentators of importance read as in the English version. **18 Shining light,** Lit. "the light of dawn that grows and brightens even to the establishment of the day." **19. Darkness,** "thick darkness," the gloom of midnight. **22. Health,** or "healing." **23.** "Above all other watching, keep thy heart," some read: "Keep thy heart with all (kinds of) keeping." *Issues*—"currents," "outgoings." **24. Froward mouth,** Lit., "distortion," "crookedness." **26. Ponder,** "make level, or straight."

NOTE ON VERSE 20.—There is an aspect of sameness in these beginnings. But they *are* beginnings. One of the characteristics of Scripture is a division, like Childe Harold into cantos, or separate sonnets. They are most conspicuous in the prophet Isaiah; and, like grapes upon a bunch, each wrapped in its individual rind, but all clustered on a common stem. If we ventured a conjecture, it would be that this suited the Israelitish worship. The synagogue would take one of these cantos and use it for the day. They were of irregular length, but that would allow variety. They have some repetitions, but so have missals and breviaries, that allow of choice on different occasions. There was an aim to provide most of the points for recitation on each occasion. What for one reading would seem very same, for many readings would seem wonderfully diversified.—*Miller.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1—4.

THE RECIPROCAL DUTIES OF PARENTS AND CHILDREN.

I. Parental Duty. "He taught me." Solomon, and all children, have many claims upon their parents to receive from them instruction in the revelation of God. 1. *Parents are responsible for the existence of their children.* They are the instrumental cause of their child's being in the world, of his being in that state of probation upon which hang such "infinite possibilities." 2. *The child is so absolutely ignorant of the life into which he comes.* Unavoidable ignorance has always a claim upon knowledge, and the claim is assuredly increased in proportion as those who know and those who do not know are related to each other by a divinely constituted bond. "I am a stranger in the earth" is the claim which every child puts in as a reason why he should be instructed and taught in the way in which he should go. "Hide not God's commandments from me" is the appeal which the child's ignorance makes to those who have had some experience in the world. 3. *Children claim instruction because of their future relationship to others.* The neglect of a child's education is a sin against more than himself. He will come, in his turn, to influence others. Upon his character will depend, in a great degree, the characters and eternal destinies of many in generations yet to come. 4. *Children have a claim upon their parents because they belong to God.* If a proprietor of land hands over to the cultivator a piece of virgin soil, he does not relinquish his own claim thereby—he demands that

his property shall be restored to him increased in value by being brought under cultivation. The child is given to its parent by God in its undeveloped moral condition, but God retains his own inheritance in the gift. He looks for nurture, for cultivation; he demands from the parent such a fulfilment of parental duties as will ensure to Him that His gift shall grow of more and more worth in the moral universe. A day of reckoning on this matter will assuredly come. Solomon recognises the claim which children have upon their parents by recording his own parents' conduct in relation to himself and by giving us an example of his own method of instructing his children.

II. Filial Duty. "Hear, ye children." Parents have claims upon their children. 1. *From the simple fact of the relationship.* A good father claims the obedience of his son because he is that child's ordained guide and ruler. He is to his son God's viceregent so long as his commands are in accordance with God's law. 2. *From their larger experience.* They have trodden the path which the youth has yet to traverse, they have climbed the hill which rises yet before him, they have tested the worth of the things which will allure him. Their superior knowledge entitles them to say, "Hear the instruction of a father." 3. *From the self-denial which, as parents, they have exercised.* All that a good mother and father have done and suffered in order to advance the welfare of their children, their toil and forbearing love, constitutes a powerful claim to their children's grateful, reverential, attention and love. Solomon here gives an example of the honour in which every child should hold godly parents.

A Parent's most Precious Gift.

Good Doctrine. Ver. 2. 1. *Because without it there can be no good character.* There can be no right feelings towards God unless there has been right teaching about Him. True views of God can only come from true doctrine concerning Him. Without a right view of God there is no motive power to form character. A man must know God as He is before he can begin to follow Him. There must be a true mirror to give a correct reflection. 2. *Because if there is not the beginning of a good character, there will be an increasingly bad one.* When men have no right doctrine concerning God, in other words, when they do not know Him as He is, they invariably make a God after their own conceptions. They bring God down to their level. "Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself" (Psa. l. 21), has been the fatal mistake of men in all ages. If a man falls overboard from the deck of a vessel, he will not remain long at the level of his first fall. If he is not rescued he will sink to such a depth as will be out of all comparison with it. He will go lower and lower till his body finds the bottom of the ocean. Man's first fall from obedience to disobedience was a great fall, but he has not been content with this moral distance between himself and his Maker, he has tried to drag God down with him and thus has brutalised and demonised the divine that was still within him. In more than a material sense he has "changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like unto corruptible man" (Rom. i. 23). This changing of the truth of God into a lie will always take place where there is an absence of right conceptions of God, and the result must always be the moral deterioration which Paul gives as the result in Rom. i. 26—32. There is as much relation between "good" or "right" doctrine and good and holy character as there is between good bread and pure water and a healthy body. Good bread will make good muscle and sinew, bad bread will not nourish the human frame. Pure water is indispensable to health, stagnant water will breed a hundred diseases. And mistaken views about God must be fruitful of soul disease. Results prove this to be the case. National and individual history

prove the truth of it. "By their fruits ye shall know them" (Matt. vii. 20). As we can foretell what the quality of the harvest will be from the seed sown, so can we tell what has been the character of the seed from that which it brings forth.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Verse 2. The common cry is "Who will show us any good?" and every man will lend both ears to a good bargain. The doctrine here delivered is good every way, whether you look to the *author*, *matter*, or *effect* of it.—*Trapp.*

God's commandments are not like the commandments of any other, which are directed to the benefit of the commanders: but God's commandments do only bring good to him that is commanded . . . . What is there so absurd, as to despise His commands who doth command that He may have matter for rewarding: for God doth not want our obedience, but we do want His commanding. Therefore it is said, "As the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their master, and the eyes of a maiden to the hand of her mistress, so our eyes wait upon the Lord our God until he have mercy upon us, that is, until He command us something, and that, thou, O David, callest mercy.—*Jermin.*

Good. **I. In itself.** It is most majestic, as containing not trivial and common sentences, but high parables and extraordinary mysteries. It gives the highest direction in the greatest things. **II. It is good to us.** Good for profit and pleasure. Good for soul and body (1 Cor. xv. 2; Deut. xxviii. 1). Good for this life and the life to come (1 Tim. iv. 8). Good when it pleaseth us (Psa. cxix. 7). Good when it crosseth us (Isa. xxxix. 8).—*Francis Taylor.*

Verse 3. Noteworthy is the prominence given to the mother's share in the training of the child. Among the Israelites and the Egyptians alone of the nations of the old world, was the son's reverence for the mother placed side by side with that which he owed to his father.—*Plumptre.*

Verse 4. Training discipline, not foolish indulgence, is the truest evidence of affection to our tender and beloved ones (chap. xiii. 24; with 1 Kings i. 6). —*Bridges.*

"He taught me." The prayer of Solomon, at Gibeon, for wisdom, as the principal of God's gifts, was suggested to him by his father David, just before his death. (See 1 Chron. xxviii. 9, xxix. 19).—*Wordsworth.*

Here Solomon again commands the involuntary, because he has shown the steps to it. We cannot, of all other things in the world, *live* by a voluntary act, but we can "keep watch over the commandments." I mean, we can, as it is a voluntary act, if God makes us willing. But we cannot live as a voluntary thing except through some form of anterior obedience.—*Miller.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 5—13.

The One Thing Needful.

I. Human nature has many needs. 1. *There are the needs of the body, which begin upon our entrance into life, and never cease until the day of our death.* These are common to all men, and keep every man in an attitude of getting all through his life. It is the demand of these needs—the effort to get what will supply them—that is the motive-power which keeps the world of men in motion. 2. *Men's needs are multiplied in proportion to the greatness of their sphere and their intellectual activity.* The needs of a judge upon the bench are more than those of a crossing-sweeper. Both have some wants in common, but the intellectual and social position of the former has multiplied his needs far beyond

those of the latter. The needs of a master in a house of business, or of a mistress in a family, are more than those of their servants. They have more claims to meet—more responsible positions to fill. But the aim of each individual man, woman, or child is to supply their natural or acquired—their real or their supposed—wants, whether material, or intellectual, or spiritual.

II. There is one need above all other needs—one thing to be gotten before all other gettings—viz.: Wisdom, taking the word to mean godliness. The husbandman finds that the field that has been given him to till needs many things before it will yield him a golden harvest. But there is one thing, among others, that is indispensable, viz.: the sunlight. He will plough, and harrow, and sow in vain if this want is not supplied. So all a man's gettings will fail to bring him a harvest of soul-satisfaction if this primal element be wanting.

III. The blessings which will follow the getting of godliness. They have already been enumerated in chap. iii. 21—26. See homiletics on that paragraph. On verse 9 see homiletics on chap. i. 9.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Verse 5. We cannot do it directly, but there immediately follow the rules to be observed, "forget not," etc. It is astonishing how much is made of attention. It is the only voluntary thing, not muscular.—*Miller.*

For so much a man learns as he remembers. The promise also of salvation is limited to "keeping in memory what we have received" (1 Cor. xv. 2).

1. Because of the *excellency* of it. Things of high birth are excellent. This wisdom is from above (James iii. 17). Things rare are precious. True wisdom is not found in many. 2. Because of the *pleasure* of it (chap. iii. 17). No content in the world like that wisdom gives. 3. Because of the *profit* of it. Every trade will tell you that wisdom thrives, and folly beggars men. So in spiritual things. 4. Because of the *necessity* of it, which is the strongest argument. Without it die, nay be damned.—*Francis Taylor.*

Verse 6. Jerome wrote to a friend, "Beg now for me, who am grey-headed, of the Lord, that I may have Wisdom for my companion, of which it is written, "Love her and she shall keep thee."

Forsake her not, and thou will love her, for love is bred by continuing together; love her and thou will not forsake her, for love liketh not of parting. The manner of speech seemeth to intimate a union of marriage, and indeed Wisdom is a fit spouse for man's noble soul.—*Jermin.*

We turn an eye to Wisdom, and she turns an eye to us. We watch and she watches. In our ungodly state we cannot think of Wisdom that she does not turn and step back to us by common grace. And, if we think so long, and strive so earnestly as that she comes up to us and is full in sight, then each new fondness fascinates her and brings her close. Each wise thing that we do makes us wiser.—*Miller.*

It is worse with him that leaves good, than with him that never did it (2 Pet. ii. 21). One goes blindfold to hell and hath less pains there; another, seeing, hath more.—*Francis Taylor.*

Verse 7. Make religion thy business, other things do by the bye. As Cæsar, swimming through the waters to escape his enemies, carried his books in his hand above them, but lost his robe.—*Trapp.*

It can have no place if it has not the first place. If it be anything it will be everything.—*Bridges.*

The mistake of the principal thing is that which maketh the principal disorder in man's heart. . . . . But as that is light which showeth the light unto us, so that is the principal thing which showeth the principal thing unto us, even wisdom alone.—*Jermin.*

I. *What* we are to acquire. Both

divine and human learning, which differ as means do from the end. Were there no divine learning, human learning would lose great part of its value: limited to the present life, it must terminate on the confines of the grave. And had we no human learning, now that the days of inspiration have passed, we should not be able to attain that which is divine. II. *How* we are to acquire it. We must be taught by those who were in the world before us. Weeds and thistles only will be the spontaneous produce if the ground is *not* broken up and good seed sown. III. *Why* we are to acquire it. The pleasures of wisdom exceed all others —in kind, degree, and duration.—*Bishop Horne.*

The world's maxim, on the contrary, is—money is the principal thing; therefore get money; and with all thy getting, get more.—*Fausset.*

Amidst all thy other acquisitions acquire this, without which all others will be useless and even hurtful.—*Menochius.*

"With," rather "by means of" (see "Critical Notes"). We are to turn all our gettings into the channel of more grace. We are to use all our properties for growing wiser. We are to grind up all our corn into the bread of spiritual nourishment.—*Miller.*

Venture all for wisdom rather than miss it. 1. What we lose is transitory, what we get is durable. A fee-simple is better than a leaf. 2. What we lose is hollow and empty, what we get is full and substantial. A sound timber tree is better than one hollow within, though the latter make a bigger show. 3. What we lose is vain, what we get is profitable. A piece of gold is better than a counter. 4. What we lose is often matter of danger, what we get is matter of safety and security.—*Francis Taylor.*

Verse 8. On this recommendation of religion it is the more necessary to fix our attention because it is often refused to it by men of the world. Their notions of honour are apt to run in a very different channel. . . . A distinction must be made between fame and honour. The former is a loud and noisy applause; the latter a more silent and internal homage. Fame floats on the breath of the multitude; honour rests on the judgment of the thinking. Fame may give praise while it withholds esteem; true honour implies esteem mingled with respect. The one regards particular distinguished talents; the other looks up to the whole character. It follows, therefore, that in order to discern where man's true honour lies, we must look at the whole of what forms a man. A mind superior to fear, to selfish interest, and corruption; governed by this principle of uniform rectitude, the same in prosperity as in adversity, such is the mind which forms the distinction and eminence of men. And such a character is formed solely by the influence of true religion. II. The honour which man acquires by religion and virtue is independent and complete. It is independent of anything foreign or external. Wherever fortune is concerned it is the rank which commands our deference. Where some shining quality attracts admiration, it is only to a part of the character that we pay homage. But with goodness, it is the whole man whom we respect. III. This honour is divine and immortal. It is honour not only in the sight of man, but of God, whose judgment is the standard of truth and right. It enters with man into a future state; and continues to brighten through eternal ages.—*Blair.*

Not only "get," "keep," and "love" her, but also "exalt her." We are apt to think less of those things which we have, however precious, after the novelty has worn off. Beware of this feeling in religion. Religion richly repays in kind all that we can do to "embrace" her. She exalts them who exalt her (Psa. xxx. 1), and gives them fresh reason for exalting her (Psa. xxxvii. 34).—*Fausset.*

Verse 9. She is the diadem which bindeth up the shattered thoughts of man's understanding: she it is which

covereth and succoureth the broken cracks of man's invention: she it is which delivereth the authority of sovereignty to the head, and maketh the head to be the head, in bearing rule and commanding the inferior affections and lusts of the heart and other members.—*Jermin.*

Crowns were anciently given to many sorts of persons as tokens of general favour and esteem. 1. To wise men and learned; to those who excelled in the arts and sciences. Godly-wise men deserve them much better. 2. To men famous for justice and other moral virtues; to good law-makers and judges. Godly-wise men excel in theological virtues, which are far more excellent. 3. To conquerors. A wise man is a conqueror over his passions and affections, which make other men, and great ones too, very slaves. 4. To bridegrooms when they were married. A wise man is married to Wisdom, the fairest bride in the world. 5. To kings on their coronation day. So shall godly men be crowned when they die. They know how to rule their own souls here, and to direct others, and to get an eternal crown in Heaven. A beggar being once asked what he was, answered: "I am a king!" "Where is thy kingdom?" "It is in my soul. I can so rule my external and internal senses that all the faculties of my soul are subject to me." And who doubts that this kingdom is better than all the kingdoms of the world?—*Francis Taylor.*

Verse 11. He may boldly call to be heard who himself doth what he teacheth. Christ placeth doing before teaching (Matt. viii. 19), for good doing leading the way, though teaching doth not follow, yet good works can, as clear as the light, teach those that look upon us. Paul saith, "We have received grace and apostleship to the *obedience* of faith; one would have thought he should have said rather to the government and direction of faith, but he saith, *obedience*, because examples do direct and govern better than words. —*Jermin.*

The two branches which constitute the sum of parental tuition—*instruction* and *direction*—teaching truth and guiding to duty. The one part relates to *knowledge*, the other to *practice*. In all rightly conducted education, the two should never be disjoined. To teach duty without truth is to teach action without motive—virtue without its principle. To teach truth without duty is to teach motive without the practice to which it should lead. They are both partial, and, if kept asunder, both worthless. —*Wardlaw.*

Verse 12. Having a good mixture of zeal and knowledge; so that thy zeal doth quicken thy knowledge, and thy knowledge guide thy zeal.—*Trapp.*

The way of wisdom is indeed narrow, but in a narrow way there may be large steps; for though our feet may be straightened from going aside, yet they are not straightened from going on apace.—*Jermin.*

As "goest" refers to the ordinary course, so "runnest" refers to extraordinary undertakings, wherein the believer has to put forth more than common energy.—*Fausset.*

The word *straightened* seems to express the case of one in difficulty and perplexity — contradictory impulses and obstacles pressing and hindering him on every side, perpetually producing embarrassment and apprehension—hedging up the way, and hemming us in, and destroying the freedom and comfort of advancement. Such is the case of a man who walks according to a worldly and carnal policy. He is ever at a loss. As circumstances are ever shifting, he is ever shifting his principles and plans to suit them. But the "wisdom from above" inspires a simplicity and a unity of principle by which a vast amount of this painful and agitating perplexity is taken away.—*Wardlaw.*

Verse 13. Often a ship's crew at sea are obliged suddenly to betake themselves to their boats, and abandon the sinking ship. Such a case was

recently reported of an American whale-ship in the South Seas. The huge leviathan of the deep, wounded by the art of man, ran out the distance of a mile by way of getting a run-race, and thence came on with incredible velocity against the devoted ship. She began to fill . . . . the word was given. All hands went to work, and soon all the seaworthy boats were loaded to the gunwale with the prime necessaries of life. The deck was now nearly level with the water, and the boats shoved off for safety. After they had pulled a hundred yards away, two resolute men leaped from one of the boats into the sea, and made towards the ship. They disappear down a hatchway. In a minute they emerge again, bearing something in their hands. As they leap into the water the ship goes down; the men are separated from each other and their burden in the whirlpool that gathers over the sinking hull. They do not seem to consult their own safety. They remain in that dangerous eddy until they grasp again the object which they had carried over the ship's side. Holding it fast, they are seen at length bearing away to their comrades in the boat. What do these strong swimmers carry, for they seem to value it more than life? It is the compass! It had been left behind, and was remembered almost too late. Now they have taken fast hold of it, and will not let it go. Whatever they lose, they will at all hazards keep it, for "it is their life." When shall we see souls, shipwrecked on the sea of time, take and keep such hold of the truth as it is in Jesus?—*Arnot.*

Fasten and do not let slack. One rough grapple is not enough. Wisdom insidiously glides away if we give time to the arch deceiver. We are like a child trying to wake: he grasps the apple that one gives, but *slackens* as drowsiness creeps back.—*Miller.*

I. Because many thieves lie in the way to rob us of what wisdom teaches. 1. *The devil steals away the seed of the word* (Matt. xiii. 9). 2. *Wicked men also, by seducing us.* Sometimes by persecuting us to make us forsake the truth (Matt. xiii. 21). 3. *The world with its cares and profits seeks to take this treasure from us* (Matt. xiii. 22). The flesh presents many pleasures to us which drown our wits. **II. Because we may lose wisdom ourselves by negligence.**—*F. Taylor.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 14—19.

Contrasted Paths and Opposite Characters.

I. The just man's path. 1. It is a *pre-ordained* one. The path which the sun takes through the heavens, the path in which our earth encircles the sun, are the paths which God has pre-ordained for them. They are the only paths which they could take and preserve the harmony of the system to which they belong. They are the orbits which are exactly adapted to the fulfilment of the end for which God created them. So the path—the manner of life—of the godly man is the path in which God intended man to walk when He created him. He called him into being in order that he might "walk before Him and be perfect" (Gen. xvii. 1). "The highway of holiness" is the God-ordained path of man, the old way which was trodden by His creatures for ages before men had any existence. 2. It is a *blessing-dispensing* path. The sun, by keeping God's pre-ordained path, is a blessing to the world. Its rays possess a quickening power which developes the hidden life of the plant, and so clothes the earth with beauty and fruitfulness. Without its heat and light our globe would be a great Sahara—a vast wilderness of black barrenness. It likewise brings into operation a sense in man which would otherwise be dormant. The light of the body is the eye, but where would sight be without sun? Creatures who have lived for years in darkness appear to lose the power of sight, even if light shines upon their eye-balls. The constant contact of the eye with light

keeps alive the power of vision. So with the just man's path. Without the godly this world would be a moral wilderness. All the beauty of goodness there is in it comes from the life of the children of wisdom. "They that dwell under his shadow shall return; they shall revive as the corn and grow as the vine; the scent thereof shall be as the wine of Lebanon" (Hosea xiv. 7). And He keeps alive the inner eye of man—the conscience. It, too, needs external light to play upon it to keep it alive. And the holy walk of the godly does this for the ungodly, it prevents the conscience from being utterly stifled by sin. 3. It is a *progessive* path. It shines more and more. The light of dawn has glories all its own, but it is not strong enough to do the work of the noon-day rays, its heat is not able to penetrate beneath the surface of the earth and wake up the life of the seed-corn hidden there; its brightness touches the mountain-tops, but does not scatter the shadows in the valleys. But when the sun reaches its meridian "there is nothing hid from the heat thereof." So with the children of wisdom. When they first set out upon their journey their godliness is not so manifest to others, nor does it yield so much comfort to themselves as when they have trodden the path for years. But it must, from a necessity of nature, go on unto perfection. "Just men will be made perfect" (Heb. xii. 3). "They go from strength to strength" (Psa. lxxxiv. 7). They come "to the perfect day."

II. The wicked man's way. It is in every point the converse of that which has just been sketched. 1. *It is his own way* (chap. i. 31): *not God's way, not the way in which he was destined to walk.* It is an *old* way (Job. xxii. 15), but not the *oldest* way; it is a path cast up by the will of man and pre-Adamite sinners. 2 *It is a way of darkness, because it is a way of blindness.* Blindness puts a man in the dark, and, being in the dark, he has only the experience that springs from darkness. Wickedness puts out the eyes of the soul, and, like a blind Samson, it sits in darkness and the shadow of death. A state of blindness is a state of *ignorance.* A blind man cannot avoid objects that come in his way, and when he falls in consequence, he knows not the object that caused him to fall. So the wise man here describes the ungodly as one "who knows not at what he stumbles" (verse 19). He has no realisation of the real character of his tempters, no insight into the sinfulness of sin; the lack of a guiding principle turns his walk into a series of stumblings. It follows of necessity that such a path is one of *danger.* It is more dangerous to walk in the night than in the day. The footpad or the highwayman can hide himself from our view in the darkness, and come upon us unawares. We may fall over the precipice at night that we could easily avoid in the day. So is it in a course of sin. A man who shuts his eyes to the light within him, and rejects the light which is to "lighten every man" (John i. 9), will, unawares, be overtaken by retribution, and fall into depths of remorse upon which he little counts. 3. *Like the path of the just, it is a progressive path.* No man stands still in it. The darkness thickens as the blindness increases, and the blindness grows the longer men refuse to "come to the light" (John iii. 20). Men do not all at once come to the height or descend to the depth of iniquity described in verse 16, when, unless they have done some iniquitous act, they feel that they have lost a day. The merchant may feel he has lost a day when he has failed to make a good bargain; the scholar feels it when he has not added to his stock of knowledge; the heathen emperor reckoned a day lost when he had not benefited some one; but for a man not to sleep except he has done a mischief, surely expresses as "perfect a night" as it is possible for human nature to attain to. Surely he then proves himself to be a child of him whose business it is to "go about seeking whom he may devour" (2 Pet. v. 8). 4. *It is a path which is destructive to others.* As the good man, by walking in God's path, blesses his fellow-creatures as well as himself, so the wicked man, in his path of darkness, is a curse to others as well as himself. The force of evil example alone is pernicious to all who surround

him, but although he may begin in this negative way, he soon advances to positive acts of sin, until he lives upon the misery of others. It becomes his meat and drink to drag others to destruction with him, or, failing that, to do them as much injury as he can (verses 16 and 17).

III. **The means of escape from this path of darkness and ruin.** "Enter it not," and, to make sure of not entering it, give it a wide berth—"pass not by it, turn away" (verses 14, 15). When we see those whom we love in danger, we multiply words of warning, and are not careful to avoid repeating words which may have little or no difference in their meaning. So Solomon's anxiety shows itself here in the repetition of his exhortations. But there is some gradation observed in them. 1. *We are not to enter the paths, not even to set one foot upon the forbidden way.* Men may be tempted to venture a step or two just to take a glance, and intend to turn back as soon as they have done so, but it is enchanted ground, and it is more than likely if they are once upon the track they will go further than they at first intended. But if they do not *enter* it, they cannot *walk* in it. 2. *If you have already entered, do not persevere another moment, turn from it at once.* If the captain of a ship becomes all at once aware that he is steering his vessel upon the rocks, he puts about at once. The next best thing to not going wrong at all is to turn back—in Bible language, to repent, to put the face in the opposite direction, to turn the whole man back to the opposite goal. 3. *In order to escape the danger of entering at all, or of re-entrance after having once forsaken it, avoid its very neighbourhood, pass not by it, go not in the way of temptation.* If a youth has been induced to gamble, and has resolved to give up the habit, let him not go near the gambling house—let him give up all intercourse with gamblers; if he has been once under the fatal influence of strong drink, he must taste it no more—not even "*look upon* the wine when it is red" (ch. xxiii. 31). He must "flee youthful lusts," and the most certain method of doing this is to strike out another course—to "follow after righteousness (1 Tim. vi. 11, 12), to get well into the way of wisdom, to know from experience the blessedness of the path of the just." Men must have a "way" in life, there is no neutral ground; or if some men seem for a time to be living in the border-land, a time will come when they must declare for one side or the other.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Verse 14. We must all "enter" somewhere. We are all travelling. We all necessarily follow something. Don't take the path of the wicked for it. That is the doctrine.—*Miller.*

Sin is like a whirlpool. He who once ventures within the circle of its eddying waters in the self-sufficient assurance that he may go a certain length, and then turn at his pleasure and stem the current back, may feel the fancied strength of the sinews of his moral resolution but weakness in the moment of need, and may—nay, almost certainly will—be borne on further and further, till, all power of resistance failing, he is carried round and round with increasing celerity, and sucked into the central gulf of irrecoverable perdition.—*Wardlaw.*

Jortin, in his remarks upon Ecclesiastical History, relates the story of a colloquy between a Father of the second century and an evil spirit in a Christian, whom he sought to expel. Upon inquiring how he dared be so impudent as to enter a Christian, the evil spirit replied, "I went not to church after him, but he came to the playhouse after me, and, finding him upon my own ground, I sought to secure him for myself." Whatever becomes of the story, the moral of it deserves attention.—*Leifchild.*

We pray to be kept from temptation, and our practice ought not to contradict our prayers; otherwise, it is evident that we mock God by asking from Him what we do not wish to have.—*Lawson.*

Verse 15. This triple gradation of Solomon showeth, with a great emphasis, how necessary it is to flee from all appearance of sin. . . . Entireness (*friendship*) with wicked consorts is one of the strongest chains of hell, and binds me to a participation of both sin and punishment.—*Brooks.*

Come not near. 1. Because our corruption is so great that, if we come near it, we will both smell it with delight and smell of it. 2. Because wicked men stand upon the edge of their way to draw others into it, as thieves watch for their prey. 3. We may stumble into that way ourselves, if we be not pulled into it by others. He that walks on the brink of a river may fall in. There is but a narrow bridge between lawful and unlawful. And that which is lawful to-day may, by a circumstance, be made unlawful to-morrow.—*Francis Taylor.*

It would not be complaisance, but cowardice—it would be a sinful softness which allowed affinity in taste to imperil your faith or your virtue. It would be the same sort of courtesy which, in the equatorial forest, for the sake of its beautiful leaf, lets the liana, with its strangling arms, run up the plaintain or orange, and pays the forfeit in blasted boughs and total ruin. It would be the same sort of courtesy which, for fear of appearing rude or inhospitable, took into dock the infected vessel, or welcomed, not as a patient, but a guest, the plague-stricken stranger.—*Jas. Hamilton.*

Verses 16 and 17. The devil, their taskmaster, will not allow them time to sleep, which is very hard bondage. —*Trapp.*

The character of the wicked is here drawn in their father's image—first, sinners; then tempters. . . . Judas with his midnight torches (John xviii. 3); the early morning assembly of the Jewish rulers (Luke xxii. 66); the frenzied vow of the enemies of Paul (Acts xxiii. 12); and many a plot in after ages against the Church—all vividly pourtray this unwearied wickedness.—*Bridges.*

The fearful stage of debasement when the tendency to sin is like the craving for stimulants, as a condition without which there can be no repose. —*Plumptre.*

The trouble of others is the rest of the wicked.—*Jermin.*

Just as bread forms the flesh, and makes it grow, according as it is eaten, so wickedness is the food of the spirit. "My meat is," says Christ, "to do the will of Him that sent me, and to finish His work" (John iv. 34). "Thy words were found, and I did eat them" (Jer. xv. 16). So in chap. i. 31, "Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way"—the meaning being, that a man's way, spiritually considered, is all that forms him. He feeds upon it. If it is righteous, it nourishes him in life. If it is wicked, it nourishes him in death. He feeds on food of wickedness, and grows exactly in proportion as he sins. His very life is in its very self a deadly self-banqueting. —*Miller.*

They sin, not of frailty, but of malice; not by occasion, as it were, but by an insatiable desire of committing wickedness.—*Muffet.*

Verse 18. He sets forth betime in the morning and travels to meet the day.

The sun is an emblem, not of the just, but of the Justifier. Christ alone is the light of the world, Christians are the enlightened. The just are those whom the Sun of Righteousness shines upon. . . . When any portion of the earth's surface begins to experience a dawn diminishing its darkness, it is because that portion is gradually turning round towards the sun, the centre of light fixed in the heavens. When any part of the earth lies away from the sun, and in proportion to the measure of its aversion, it is dark and cold, in proportion as it turns to him again its atmosphere grows clearer, until in its gradual progress it comes in sight of the sun, and its day is perfect then. So is the path of the just. Day is not perfect here in the believer's heart. . . . but the machinery of the

everlasting covenant is meantime going softly and silently as the motion of the spheres; and they that are Christ's here, whatever clouds dim their present prospect, are wearing every moment farther from the night, and nearer to the day.—*Arnot.*

There is a day to be which shall be a day indeed, without cloud, without night, without morning, without evening. Unto this day leadeth the path of the righteous, and which going on, shineth more and more, until at last, when it seemeth to go out, it shall be received into that light which never goeth out.—*Jermin.*

Light is emblematical of *knowledge, holiness,* and joy. The three bear invariable proportion to each other—holiness springing from knowledge, and joy from both. . . . "The entrance of God's word gives light." But the entrance of this light into the mind is often, like the early dawn, feeble, glimmering, uncertain. . . . . But it does not abide so. . . . He who is enlightened from above is eager for more of the blessed light. He thirsts for knowledge, and is on the alert to obtain it. . . . With growth in knowledge there is growth in holiness. At the first dawn of spiritual light some faint desires are felt after God and sanctity. These progressively increase, and they show their influence in the increase of practical godliness. . . And joy is the natural attendant of spiritual illumination and inward sanctity. It, too, is progressive. Like the sun in every stage of his diurnal course, it may be overcast by occasional clouds. But as the sun appears the brighter on his emerging from the cloudy veil, so the trials of the just serve to give lustre to their virtues.—*Wardlaw.*

Verse 19. It is interesting to note the resemblance between these words and those of our Lord (John xi. 10; xii. 35).—*Plumptre.*

Strange enough! it is a confessed darkness. There is a sort of common light that tells a man that impenitence is darkness. And yet it does not teach him better. Like mere physical light at times, some chemical ray is absent. The darkness that remains is a darkness that may be felt. It constitutes our eternal chains (2 Pet. ii. 4); it binds a man on the car of ruin. And like a Christian, who, in his partial light, may fail to know what is blessing him, so the sinner in his absolute darkness, takes industry for virtue, and family love for a wholesome righteousness; and does not know the incidents of life that are stumbling blocks to eternal ruin.—*Miller.*

Sinners are in such darkness that they are insensible to the objects that are leading them to ruin, thus they stumble—1. At the great deceiver. 2. At one another. 3. At Divine Providence. 4. At their common employments. 5. At the nature and tendency of their religious performances. 6. At the preaching they hear. 7. At the blindness of their hearts.—*Emmons, from Lange's Commentary.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 20—27.

THE PATH OF SAFETY.

For Homiletics on Verses 20—22, *see chap.* II. 1—8, *etc.*

Verses 23—27. **I. A man's most precious and real possession.** "Thy heart." The heart here, and in other parts of Holy Scripture, is that part of a man for which the Bible exists, that in man to which the revelation of God appeals, that which places a great gulf between him and all other creatures in the world, that which links him to the angels of God, that which entails upon him responsibilities and endows him with capabilities which will last throughout all the ages to come. It is that spiritual nature which our Lord calls a man's "own soul" (Matt. xvi. 26), which Paul speaks of as the "inner man" (Ephes. iii. 16).

II. The need of "keeping," or "guarding" the heart. There are elements of evil as well as good in it. In any kingdom where there are bad subjects as well as good, there must be a watch kept over those out of whom submission to law is not to be got voluntarily. They must be guarded lest they get the upper hand and overpower and tyrannise over the peace-loving obedient citizens. In every human body there is some organ which is more prone to disease than others. While some are strong and vigorous, others are more or less delicate; therefore a man needs to exercise care over his body. So in the heart of the child of wisdom there is an evil element as well as a good one. "I see another law in my members," says Paul, "warring against the law of my mind" (Rom. vii. 23). Every godly man has a tendency to moral weakness, some opening in his spiritual armour, some weak part in his moral constitution. Therefore it behoves him to keep guard over, to watch vigilantly, the lawless, rebellious, or diseased elements within him, lest sin have dominion, if only for a time, where grace ought to rule.

III. The importance of keeping the heart. "Out of it are the issues of life." The physical heart of man is well defended by nature, because it is the spring of our bodily life. From it, as from a well, issues life-blood, which flows into every part of the body, and without which a man ceases to live. The strong ribs and the inner coverings of the heart which so well defend it show the necessity there is that it should be free to do its work without let or hindrance. "A sound heart is the life of the flesh," says Solomon (chap. xiv. 30). If the heart is healthy, the benefit is felt to the extremities of the body; if it is diseased, the whole physical frame suffers. Out of *it* are the issues of animal life. A man who has charge of a well of water is bound to keep it covered and secured against the entrance of anything that might poison or even defile it. Upon its safe keeping depends, perhaps, not only the health of himself and his household, but that of an entire district. It is a centre of health if pure, of disease if impure. So upon the condition of the inner man depends the character of the outward life. It is a well-spring of life in the sense that it determines the character of the life. The streams which issue from it are the actions of man, actions repeated are habits, and habits form character; and character influences other lives. What a man *is* blesses or curses those around him, and entails blessing or curse upon generations to come. A good man in a neighbourhood is like a well of living water, he diffuses and preserves moral health all around him.

IV. The way to keep the heart.—The vigilance of a sentinel is manifested by his notice of the distant motion of the grass under cover of which the enemy is creeping towards the citadel. He is ever on the look-out for the distant enemy. The watchful general notes the first symptoms of mutiny in the army, and treads out the spark before it becomes a flame. So the watchful heart-keeper takes notice of the first movement of rebels within. The thoughts take their rise in the soul under the eye of none but God and the keeper, and he must be on the alert at the first motion. And as when the sentinel sees the first movement of the enemy he never thinks of advancing to fight him alone, but communicates with one who has power to overthrow him, so when a man becomes aware of the first motion of evil in his heart, God must receive the information—He must be called upon to exercise His power to disperse or take prisoners the thoughts before they can become actions. Keeping of the heart includes a guarding of every inlet of temptation, a watchfulness over the senses, and any organ of the outward man which might lead us into temptation. Hence Solomon exhorts his son to guard his *eyes* and his *feet*. It has been asserted by some that there is nothing in the mind that has not first been in the senses; and though this is a disputed point, we are quite sure that there is much in the heart, both of good and evil, which entered by those gates. There

are thoughts there which have been kindled by what we have seen, as Achan's covetous desires were created by the sight of the goodly spoils of Jericho. The eye of David was the entrance-gate of the thought which ended in adultery and murder. And the feet may lead us in forbidden paths—into the way of temptation—into the society of those whose words, finding entrance by the ear, may sow seeds of impurity within.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Verse 20. Still he calls for attention. It fares with many of us as with little children, who, though saying their lessons, must needs look off to see the feather that flies by them.—*Trapp.*

The former verse having spoken of hearing God's Word, this speaketh of reading it. For the beginning of obedience is to be willing to know what is commanded, and it is a part of performance to have learned what is to be performed. . . . Let God's Word be in our heart, it will be in the midst of it. For the heart hath no outside, all is the midst there: the heart hath no outward show, all there is inward truth.—*Jermin.*

Verse 21. The terms of this verse may be compared, for illustration, with those of Deut. vi. 6, 8: "And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes." Amongst the Jews there was a sad propensity to take the letter injunction *literally* and *externally*. Hypocrites and formalists satisfied themselves with having little scraps of the law written on parchment, and worn as frontlets on the forehead. But this was a delusion. The laws of God are never rightly "before the eyes" unless they are "in the heart." The meaning of the former clause of the verse is, that the commandments of God should be kept *constantly in view* as the guides of the whole conduct. And this will be the case when they are kept "in the midst of the heart."—*Wardlaw.*

Verse 22. Some medicines are good for one part of the body, some for another. This is good for all the body, and all the soul.—*Cartwright.*

Verse 23. That thou mayest keep thy heart sincere, to use the similitude of a castle, for so the heart is,—1. Repair and fortify it diligently. Weak walls are soon broken down. Breaches give occasion for an enemy to enter. Thou wilt find something to mend every day in the understanding, or conscience, or memory, or will, or affections, if not in all of them. Victual this fort, else it cannot hold out against a siege. Feed it with good meditations from the creatures, and out of the Scriptures. Starved soldiers cannot defend a fort. 3. Set up a regiment in thy soul. No fort can be kept without government; soldiers, else, will rebel and betray the fort. Commit that charge to a well-informed conscience; submit all thoughts, and words, and deeds to it. 4. Get arms in it to keep out enemies; to wit, God's prohibitions and threats in His Word. This is the *sword of the Spirit* (Ephes. vi. 17).—*Francis Taylor.*

The man is as his heart is. The heart is the spring and fount of all natural and spiritual actions, it is the *primum mobile*, the great wheel that sets all other wheels agoing; it is the great monarch in the isle of man, therefore, keep it with all custody and caution, or else bid farewell to all true joy, peace, and comfort. When the heart stands right with Christ He will pardon much and pass by much . . . . Therefore we should keep our hearts as under lock and key, that they may be always at hand when the Lord shall call for them . . . . The word heart is here put comprehensively for the whole soul, with all its powers, noble faculties, and endowments, together

with their several operations, all which are to be watched over . . . . It is a duty incumbent upon every Christian to keep his own heart. Thou mayest make another thy park-keeper, thy housekeeper, thy shopkeeper, thy cash-keeper, but thou must be thy own heartkeeper. "With all diligence." Some understand this of all kind of watchfulness. 1. As men keep a prison. How vigilant are they in looking after their prisoners. 2. As they keep a besieged garrison, or castle, in time of war. A gracious heart is Christ's fort-royal. Against this fort Satan will employ his utmost art, therefore it must have a strong guard. 3. As the Levites kept the sanctuary of God and all the holy things committed to their charge (Ezek. xliv. 8—15). Our hearts are the temples of the Holy Ghost, and therefore we should keep a guard about them, that nothing may pass in or out that may be displeasing, grieving, or provoking to Him. 4. As a man keeps his life. The same word (*shamar*) is used in Job x. in reference to life. With what care, what diligence, do men labour to preserve their natural lives. 5. As men keep their treasures. There are few men who know how to value their hearts as they should. It is that pearl of price for which a man should lay down his all. 6. As spruce men and women do their fine clothes. They won't endure a spot upon them. Let not others be more careful to keep their outsides clean, than you are to keep your insides clean.—*Brooks.*

The fountains and wells of the East were watched over with special care. A stone was rolled to the mouth of the well, so that "a spring shut up, a fountain sealed," became the type of all that is most jealously guarded (Song Sol. iv. 22). So it is here. The heart is such a fountain—out of it flow "the issues of life." Shall we let the stream be tainted at the fountain head?—*Plumptre.*

Keep the heart. 1. Because it falls directly under the inspection of God. Man can judge only by what is external, but "I, the Lord, search the heart." 2. Because of the influence the heart has upon the life. He that is concerned about making the tree good will probably make the fruit so. 3. Care in keeping the heart is greatly to be regarded for itself. Is there nothing pleasant, nothing honourable in being masters at home—in being possessors of our own spirits? Is it nothing that the peace of the kingdom is broken, even though the constitution of it be not overthrown?—*Doddridge.*

A heart purified by the grace of God, and firmly rooted in truth as its ground, is the source and common fountain for the successful development of all the main activities and functions of human life, those belonging to the sphere of sense, as well as to the psychical and spiritual realms, and this must more and more manifest itself as such a centre of the personality, sending forth light and life.—*Lange's Commentary.*

Though to keep the heart be God's work, it is man's agency. Our efforts are his instrumentality.—*Bridges.*

All vital principles are lodged there, and only such as are good and holy will give you pleasure. The exercises of religion will be pleasing when they are natural, and flow easily out of their own fountain.—*John Howe.*

Although Solomon repeats himself he always advances upon the thought. There is always some characteristic novelty; and that novelty is the hinge of the purpose, and imbeds its meaning in the life of the passage. Here it is the function of the heart. It circulates life. Give it good blood, and it will throw off disease; give it bad blood, and it will produce disease. Give it health enough, and it will throw off incipient mortification; give it no health, and it will produce mortification. Solomon weaves this into experimental godliness. . . . Guard the great central guard-post, and no out-station will be cut off. If it be, for a time, the heart will win it again. —*Miller.*

Verse 24. While we speak, we should never forget that God is one of the listeners. . . . Take the principle

of Hagar's simple and sublime confession, accommodated in thought to the case in hand, "Thou, God, *hearest* me." If our words were all poured through that strainer, how much purer and fewer they would be.—*Arnot.*

It is true that vigilance over the heart is vigilance over the tongue, inasmuch as out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. . . . There is no surer index of the state of the "inner man." As is the conversation, so is the heart.—*Wardlaw.*

While a fire is confined to one man's house, even if it burns that house to its foundation, all other dwellings are unharmed; but when it lays hold of surrounding buildings, all the city is endangered. When an evil thought is confined to a man's own spirit, kept within the limits of thinking or desiring, though it may char his own soul with the blackness of perdition, the evil ends with himself. But when he allows his thought to become words, he kindles a fire outside himself which may go on burning even after he has forgotten it himself.

Verse 25. Let them be fixed upon right objects . . . Be well skilled in Moses' optics (Heb. xi. 27). Do as mariners do that have their eye on the star, their hand on the stern. A man may not look intently upon that he may not love.—*Trapp.*

Like one ploughing, who must not look back.—*Cartwright.*

Had Eve done so she would have looked at the command of God, not at the forbidden tree. Had Lot's wife looked straight before her instead of behind her, she would, like her husband, have been a monument of mercy. . . . . In asking the way to Zion, be sure that your *faces are thitherward* (Jer. i. 5). The pleasures of sin and the seductions of the world do not lie in the road. They belong to the bye-paths. They would not, therefore, meet the eye looking right on.—*Bridges.*

Verse 26. Lift not up one foot till you find firm footing for another, as those in Psa. xxxv. 6. The way of this world is like the vale of Siddim, slimy and slippery.—*Trapp.*

The habit of calm and serious thinking makes the difference between one man and another.—*Dr. Abercrombie.*

The feet of the soul are generally understood to be the affections. And surely we have need to ponder the path of them before we give way to them. St. Bernard maketh the two feet to be nature and custom, for, indeed, by them we are much carried, and great need we have to ponder the path of them, so that they do not lead us amiss.—*Jermin.*

The best time to ponder any path is not at the end, not even in the middle, but at the beginning of it.—*Arnot.*

Verse 27. It is as if the royal way was hemmed in by the sea, and a fall over either side were danger of drowning. Some are too greedy; others too ascetic. Some are too bold; others too diffident. Some neglect the one Mediator; others seek more mediators than one. Some flee the cross; others make one. Some tamper with Popery; others, from dread of it, hazard the loss of valuable truth.—*Cartwright.*

CHAPTER V.

CRITICAL NOTES.—**2. Discretion,** Lit. "reflection," "prudent consideration." **3. Drop as an honey-comb,** "distil honey." **Wormwood.** In Eastern countries this herb, **the** *absinthum* of Greek and Latin botanists, was regarded as a poison. It has a bitter and saline taste. **6.** This verse is rendered in two ways. The forms of the two verbs may be in the second person masculine, and so apply to the tempted youth, or in the third person feminine, and so be understood to refer to the harlot. Most modern commentators take the latter reading. Delitzsch translates: "She is far removed from entering the way of life: her steps wander without her observing it." Stuart: "That she may not ponder the path of life, her ways are become unsteady, while she regards it not." The rendering in *Lange's Commentary* is, "The path of life she never treadeth, her steps stray, she knoweth not whither." The authorised version is, however, supported by Rosenmuller and Michaelis. **9. Honour,** or "power," "bloom," or "freshness." **11. Mourn,** or "groan," "*at the last,*" lit. "at thine end." **14.** Readings here again vary. Miller translates: "I soon became like any wicked man." *Lange's Commentary:* "A little more, and I had fallen into utter destruction." The renderings of Stuart and Delitzsch are substantially the same as the authorised version. **16.** In order to make the idea in this verse agree with those preceding and following it, Stuart and other commentators insert a negative: "Let (not) thy fountains," &c. *Lange's Commentary* considers this needless, and retains the same idea by conceiving the sentence to be an interrogative indicated, not by its *form*, but by its *tone*: "Shall thy fountains?" &c. So also Hitzig. Holden, Noyes, Wordsworth, Miller, &c., read as in the authorised version. **19 Be ravished,** lit. "err," used in the next verse in a bad sense, and in chap. xx. 1, and Isa. xxviii. 7, of the staggering gait of the intoxicated. **It** seems to express a being transported with joy. **21. Pondereth,** or "**marketh out.**" **22. Shall be holden,** rather "**is holden.**" **23. Without,** "**for lack of.**"

ILLUSTRATION OF VERSE 19.

Here we have started up, and sent leaping over the plain, another of Solomon's favourites. What elegant creatures those gazelles are, and how gracefully they bound. We shall meet them all through Syria and Palestine, and the more you see of them the greater will be your admiration. Solomon is not alone in his partiality. Persian and Arab poets abound in reference to them. The fair ones of these fervid sons of song are often compared to the coy gazelle that comes by night and *pastures* upon their hearts. They are amiable, affectionate, and loving, by universal testimony, and accordingly no sweeter comparison can be found than that of Prov. v. 19.—Thomson's *Land and the Book.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1—20.

BITTER AND SWEET WATERS.

I. A wrong relation. The relationship here forbidden is wrong. **1.** ***Because it is a sin against the tempter.*** The tempter in Eden had his load of iniquity increased by the yielding of the tempted one to his persuasion. He increased his crime when he made another a partaker of his disobedience. Satan, doubtless, becomes worse each time that he persuades another to sin. The gambler's guilt and misery is increased in proportion to his success in bringing others to ruin. The young man in the text increases the guilt of the "strange woman" by yielding to her enticements. He burdens her with new guilt and intensifies her iniquity, and therefore helps to treasure up for her a greater remorse when her conscience shall awake and arise from the grave of sensuality. 2. ***Because it is a sin against a man's own body.*** That which is our own is generally valued by us, and there is nothing material which is ours in a more exclusive sense than our bodily frame. It is nearer to us than any other material possession, and to sin against *it* is to sin against that which stands in the nearest relation to our personal moral individuality. There are sins done in the body by the mind which are purely mental, from which the body does not suffer; but adultery forces the body into a relation which brings misery and disease upon it, and in due season consumes and destroys it like a devouring flame. "Every

sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body" (1 Cor. vi. 18). 3. *Because it is a sin against human nature in general, and national life in particular.* Human nature is like the human body, every man is linked to his fellow-men as the several members of the body are parts of one whole. This *solidarity*—this union of interests—is more obvious when considered in relation to a particular community or nation; and, as no member of the human body can be disfigured without bringing the whole frame into a state of imperfection and loss of dignity, so no man can degrade himself without bringing degradation upon the whole race. The fornicator is a plague-spot upon the body of humanity; and although other sinners bring disfigurement upon the body universal, there is none who defiles it as he does. God has written His mark upon the crust of the earth against this enormous sin (Gen. xix. 24, 25). 4. *Because it makes God, in a sense, to bear the iniquity with the transgressor.* The youth who spends the money his father gives him in furthering his own wicked purposes makes his father an unwilling partaker of his crimes, because the money was supplied by him. God made this complaint against sinners in the olden time. The good gifts of the earth which God bestowed upon the Hebrew people were used by them in their debasing idol-worship. God gave them the means of honouring Him, and they used His gifts in dishonouring His name. So God gives to every man power to glorify Him and to bless himself and the world by the formation of right relations. When the power thus given is used in an unlawful manner, God's own gift is used against Himself. The sinner turns the Divine gift against the Divine Giver; and while in God he lives, and moves, and has his being, he lives and moves but to sin against his Maker. Thus in Scripture language God "is made to serve" with the sinner, while He is "wearied with his iniquities" (Isa. xliii. 22—24).

II. The bitter waters which flow from this wrong relation. (Verse 4.) **1.** *The loss of honour.* (Verse 7.) To some men this is dearer than life. The captain would rather go to the bottom of the sea with his ship than live with a shadow upon his good name and reputation. The man who has lost his honour in the eyes of others has lost his honour in his own eyes, and the loss of self-honour or self-respect is a calamity that is very bitter to the soul. The man who will indulge in unlawful intercourse, will find that he not only loses the respect of others, but he will be unable to respect himself, and this loss is the greatest that a man can sustain on this side of hell. It is a draught which, although there might be pleasure in the *drawing*, will be very bitter in the *drinking*. 2. *The loss of manhood's vigour and opportunities.* He will "give his years to the cruel, his strength to the stranger." The loss of youthful strength and energy is the loss of years, the youth becomes old before he is a man. The vessel or the mansion that is charred by fire before it is completed presents a strange contrast. The newness and freshness of the walls or the timbers that have escaped make the destruction of the rest more lamentable. The building has been marred just upon the verge of completion, the ship has been spoiled when she was all but ready for the voyage. It is sad to see an old tree blasted by the lightning, but it is a greater misfortune when the tree is in its prime, when it is laden with fruit about to come to perfection. But these are faint shadows of the sad spectacle which is presented by a youth who has become prematurely old by unlawful indulgence before he has reached his prime. He is unfit to battle with the sea of life at the very time when he ought to be setting out on his voyage. He falls short of fulfilling the demands of God and man at the moment when he ought to be bringing forth abundant fruit. Surely such a consciousness must be as bitter waters to the spirit. 3. *The action of conscience and memory in a dying day.* "And thou mourn at the last," etc. (Verse 11.) The lamp that hangs from the stern of the vessel throws a light

upon the wake of the ship and reveals the path that she has travelled. Memory is such a lamp to the human soul. In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus we find memory throwing such a light upon the past, and enabling him to look back upon the path which had brought him to his present abode. Conscience sat in judgment upon it and united with memory to make his present cup a bitter one. The bitterness that is always mingled with the life of the profligate becomes doubly bitter at its end. Memory throws her light upon his past, and shows him the strength, and honour, and opportunities of life squandered in licentiousness, and conscience anticipates future retribution and makes him feel the truth of the word of warning, "Whoremongers and adulterers God will judge" (Heb. xiii. 4). The bitterness is increased by the reflection that the sin was committed in defiance of counsel to act differently. And thou say, "How have I hated instruction and my heart despised reproof" (verse 12). Those who sin against the light of nature *only*, find a recompense which is terrible, yet which an inspired Apostle declares to be "meet" (Rom. i. 27). The sins here mentioned are sins against nature, and nature asserts her right to punish her broken law and leave her mark upon the fornicator. But when revelation, and instruction, and good example are added to the light of nature, the cup contains ingredients of tenfold bitterness. "Whoso breaketh one edge, a serpent shall bite him" (Eccles. x. 8). How much sharper will be the sting if a double—a threefold—hedge is broken through.

III. Sweet waters flowing from a right relationship. The waters are sweet or living—1. *From a consciousness that a chaste wife belongs to him alone* (ver. 15). The profligate can lay no such claim for the woman of his choice; she is, by her own consent, common to all. The husbandman has a very different feeling concerning his own field, which he alone has a right to till, and the common land which is open to all comers. So the true husband has a feeling towards his wife to which the licentious man is an entire stranger. 2. *Because such a life is in harmony with the rights of society.* The brooks and rivers of the land cannot be pure if the springs are defiled. The social life of a nation can only be healthy while the purity of the marriage relation is maintained. God has written his doom whenever and wherever this sacred bond has been violated. The consciousness of being a blessing to the world swells the stream of satisfaction which arises from a faithful observance of this relationship. 3. *Because a true marriage is a man's completion.* The sinless man in Eden felt a want until Eve was given to him, even though God had created him in his own image. How much more does man now feel the need of a "helpmeet for him," such as he finds only in a faithful wife. 4. *The waters are further sweetened by the reflection that this relationship is used to symbolise that existing between Christ and His Church.* Christ is the Head of His Church for her good. The true husband feels that he is the head of the wife for the same end. The relationship becomes doubly blessed when looked at from this point of view.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Verses 1 and 2. When the Word of God enters the heart, it will banish all pollution from the tongue.—*Lawson.*

Perhaps painful experience (1 Kings xi. 1-8, Eccles. vii. 26) had given the wise man *wisdom* and *understanding*. Therefore let us attend to it with fear and trembling.—*Bridges.*

God allows us to call that knowledge ours which originally is His. 1. Because God give it us, and he that gives a man land allows him to call it his. 2. Because it is given for our good as well as other men's. We are not like the builders of Noah's ark, that could not be preserved in it.—*Francis Taylor.*

Verse 3. The "strange woman" occurs so often in this book, that it is not probable she is introduced simply to denounce licentiousness. Indeed, she so stands twin picture to wisdom, that we come to a firm belief that she is introduced as the picture of impenitence.—*Miller.*

To hear her one would suppose that she was possessed of the most generous and disinterested spirit. Her tongue is taught by him who betrayed Eve to paint the vilest sin with the most beautiful colours.—*Lawson.*

Verse 4. The wise counsel of the father puts those things together, in his words, which the folly of sinners putteth far asunder in their thoughts, the beginning and end of lustful wantonness. He that by foresight shall taste the bitter end will never lick the honeycomb. He that by a wise consideration shall feel the sharp edges of the issues of it, will never delight to smooth himself with the flat sides of the sword.—*Jermin.*

Verse 5. Possession of hell is taken by the wicked before they come into it; the devil giveth them that when he by wickedness possesseth their hearts. There is no more to be done than to set up their abode in it.—*Jermin.*

Verse 6. The words, if taken to refer to the woman, describe with a terrible vividness the state of heart and soul which prostitution brings upon its victims; the reckless blindness that will not think, tottering on the abyss, yet loud in its defiant mirth, ignoring the dreadful future.—*Plumptre.*

Verse 7. Let no one think what he will do when he is in danger, and how he will get from her, when once she hath got him to her, but hear *now* what ye are to do to keep out of danger.—*Jermin.*

Verse 8. The devil will tempt you enough without your own help. To tempt is his business. As you love your life and your own soul, give him no assistance in the work of destruction.—*Lawson.*

He that is farthest from fire is safest from the burning of it; he that is most remote from the way and course of the river is in less danger from the overflowing of it. It argues too much mind to be in the house, for anyone to come near the door of it. It is more safe not to be in danger of perishing, than being in danger not to perish. Chrysostom, speaking of Joseph, saith, "It doth not seem so wonderful to me, that the three children in the furnace overcame the fire, as that Joseph, being indeed in a more grievous furnace than that of Babylon, came forth untouched."—*Jermin.*

1. Because of thy proneness to evil. Straw will quickly take fire. Gunpowder is no more apt to take fire than our corrupt nature to be provoked to this sin. 2. Because flight is the best fight here. No struggle comparable to a safe retreat.—*F. Taylor.*

Verse 10. It is said that Demosthenes gave this answer to a harlot who desired to seduce him from the path of virtue, and demanded a hundred talents for her hire: "I will not buy repentance so dear."—*Jermin.*

One keenest torment of the damned will be to find that they are working hard in the very pit of the universe; submitting to the sentence (Matt. xxv. 28), "Take, therefore, the talent from him and give it to him that hath ten talents." The adulterer might make himself a bankrupt, and get himself sold for his transgression; but that is a trifle compared with the sweeping surrender that must be made of all by the finally impenitent.—*Miller.*

Verse 12. The climax goes on. Bitterer than slavery (ver. 9); poverty (ver. 10); disease (ver. 11) will be the bitterness of self-reproach, the remorse without hope, that worketh death.—*Plumptre.*

Though in respect of God's infinite mercy, it be never too late in this life, yet take heed how we stay too long.

It is true that the thief on the cross found mercy at the last hour; but it hath been well remarked, "It was not the last hour, but the first, of the thief's knowing God; as soon as he knew Christ he was converted. If, therefore, thou hast long known Christ, and has not repented, do not presume too rashly of mercy at last.—*Jermin.*

There are no infidels in eternity, and but few on a death-bed.—*Bridges.*

Verses 11, 12. *Dying regrets.* **I The subject of these regrets.** It is a man who has disregarded through life the means employed to preserve or reclaim him. What instructors has a man living in a country like this? *First,* Your connections in life. You may have been a member of a pious family, or had an instructor or a reprover in a brother, friend, or religious neighbour. *Second,* The Scriptures. *Third,* Ministers. *Fourth,* Conscience. *Fifth,* Irrational creatures. Can you hear the melody of the birds and not be ashamed of your sinful silence? Can you see the heavenly bodies perform unerringly their appointed course and not reflect on your own numberless departures from duty? *Sixth,* The dispensations of Providence. God has chastened you with sickness. You have stood by dying beds. **II. The period of these regrets.** It is a dying hour. It is "at the last, when thy flesh and thy body are consumed." Such a period is *unavoidable.* The last breath *will* expire, the last Sabbath *will* elapse, the last sermon *will* be heard. Such a period cannot be *far off.* "For what is our life? It is a vapour that appeareth for a little time and then vanisheth away." It is a flood. It is a flower. It is a tale that is told. It is a dream. Such a period *may be very near.* Such a period is sometimes *prematurely brought on by sin.* **III. The nature of these regrets.** This mourning is (1) *dreadful.* A dying hour has been called an honest hour. The world then recedes from view. The delusions of imagination give way. Criminal excuses vanish. Memory goes back and recalls the guilt of the former life, and conscience sets the most secret sins in the light of God's countenance. 2. *It is useless.* Not as to others, but as regards the individuals themselves. We are to describe things according to their natural and common course, and not according to occasional exceptions. And in this case exceptions are unusual. And we are borne out in this assertion (1) *By Scripture.* There we find *only one* called at this hour. 2. *By observation.* We have often attended persons on what seemed their dying bed; we have heard their prayers and their professions; we have seen their distress and their relief, and, had they died, we should have presumed on their salvation. But we have never known one of these, who, on recovery, lived so as to prove the reality of his conversion! We have often asked ministers concerning the same case, and they have been compelled to make the same awful declaration.—*Jay.*

Verse 14. In a spiritual sense this may be applied to those who "hold the truth in unrighteousness" (Rom. i. 18), and who, although they dwell in the midst of holy men in the Church of God, set their example at defiance by evil lives.—*Bede.*

Verse 15. Desire after forbidden enjoyments naturally springs from dissatisfaction with the blessings already in possession. Where contentment is not found at home it will be sought for, however vainly, abroad. Conjugal love is chief among the earthly gifts in mercy granted by God to His fallen creatures. . . . Whatsoever interrupts the strictest harmony in this delicate relationship, opens the door to temptation. Tender domestic affection is the best defence against the vagrant desires of unlawful passion.—*Bridges.*

Do not steal water from others. Although the strange woman saith, "Stolen waters are sweet," yet remember that the dead are there (ch. ix. 17, 18). The wife is called a vessel in 1 Pet. iii. 7. These words also have been expounded by ancient inter-

preters in a spiritual sense, which may well be present to the reader's mind; and they have been applied to the pure waters of Divine wisdom, a sense which is suggested by Jer. ii. 13.—*Wordsworth.*

If God had laid all common, certainly
Man would have been th' incloser: but since now
God hath impaled us, on the contrary,
Man breaks the fence, and every ground will plough.
O what were man, might he himself misplace!
Sure to be cross he would shift feet and face.

George Herbert.

Spiritual Self-helpfulness.—I. Man has independent spiritual resources. He has a "cistern," a "well" of his own. First: He has independent resources of thought. Every sane man can and does think for himself. Thoughts well up in every soul, voluntarily and involuntarily. Secondly: He has independent resources of experience. No two have exactly the same experience. Thirdly: He has independent powers of usefulness. Every man has a power to do a something which no other can—to touch some soul with an effectiveness which no other can. Wonderful is this well within—inexhaustible and ever active. **II. Man is bound to use these resources.** "Drink waters out of thine own cistern;" do not live on others. Self-drawing—First: Honours our own nature. Secondly: Increases our own resources. Self-helpfulness strengthens. The more you draw from this cistern the more comes. Thirdly: Contributes to the good of the universe. The man who gives only what he has borrowed from others adds nothing to the common stock. The subject—First: Indicates the kind of service one man can spiritually render another. To priest, rabbi, sectary, I would say—Man does not require your well; he has a cistern within. What he wants is the warm gospel of love to thaw his frozen nature, and to unseal the exhaustless fountain within, to remove all obstructions to its out-flow, and to make it as pure as the crystal. The subject—Secondly: Suggests an effective method to sap the foundation of all priestly assumptions. Let every man become self-helpful, and the influence of those who arrogate a lordship over the faith of others will soon die out. The subject—Thirdly: Presents a motive for thankfully adoring the Great Creator for the spiritual constitution He has given us. We have resources not, of course, independent of Him the primal fount of all life and power, but independent of all other creatures. We are not like the parched traveller in the Oriental desert, who, because he cannot discover water, dies of thirst. Spiritually, we can walk through sandy deserts bearing an exhaustless spring within.—*Dr. David Thomas.*

Verse 18. It is not only to feed and clothe her, and refrain from injuring her by word or deed. All this will not discharge a man's duty nor satisfy a woman's heart. All the allusions to this relation in Scripture imply an ardent, joyful love. To it, though it lie far beneath heaven, yet to it, as the highest earthly thing, is compared the union of Christ and His redeemed Church. Beware where you go for comfort in distress, and sympathy in happiness. The Lord Himself is the source of all consolation to a soul that seeks Him; yet nature is His, as well as redemption. He has constructed nether springs on earth and supplied them from His own high treasures; and to these He bids a broken or a joyful spirit go for sympathy. To "rejoice in the wife of thy youth"—this is not to put a creature in the place of God. He will take care of His own honour. He has hewn the cistern, and given it to you, and filled it, and when you draw out of it what He has put in, you get from Himself and give Him the glory.—*Arnot.*

Verse 19. In a spiritual sense, this imagery, derived from the limpid fountains and beautiful animals of the natural world, is regarded by the ancient expositors as descriptive of the delicious refreshment and perfect

loveliness of Divine truth, and the infinite blessings which it bestows on those faithful souls which are united to it in pure and unsullied love.—*Wordsworth.*

Verse 20. A rare instance in which a canto does not begin with "My son," but with "Why." The question is intended to be pressed. The commerce with "the strange woman" is so plainly mad that the rightly educated impenitent cannot possibly answer the wise man's question.—*Miller.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 21—23.

These verses contain three reasons why the way of sin should be avoided, and the way which God has appointed should be followed.

I. Because there is no place secret enough to commit sin. The sinner often comforts himself with the thought that what he has done, or is in the habit of doing, is not known—that the actors of the deed were the only persons privy to it. The text declares that there is no such thing as a secret place, because there is no place where the eyes of the Eternal do not penetrate. God is a witness of every crime committed in secret. He is not only a witness *after* the *deed,* but *of* the deed. Therefore there is no place secret enough to be a place of sin. The thought of the ever-present God should deter the sinnner. 1. *Because the Divine presence is a* pure *presence.* People who are in the habit of committing the sin against which the whole of this chapter is directed, would possibly shrink from being guilty of it in the presence of a pure man or woman. How much more should they be deterred by the fact that the eye of the pure and holy God is upon them. 2. *Because the presence of God is the presence of One* who has authority to punish. The presence of the chief magistrate of a nation would be sufficient to prevent the most hardened criminal from committing crime. A thief would not steal before the face of the man whom he knew could punish him. The presence of God is the presence of the highest authority in the universe, of One who is irresponsible to any other for His acts (Job. ix. 12), of One who hast power most terrible, of One who has always visited this sin with penalty. The presence of such an Authority ought surely to make the adulterer quake at the very thought of his sin.

II. Because, though the sinner may not be apprehended by human law, he shall be laid hold of and bound by his own deeds (verse 22). Many sinners of this kind go at large in the world, and are never reached by human law. No officer of justice will ever lay his hand upon them, and no material chains will ever bind them. But they are already taken and imprisoned by their own evil habits, which have bound them in chains of increasing thickness as the acts of sin have been repeated. This is a thraldom from which escape can come in only two ways. A man must either *cease to be,* or he must *repent,* before he can be free. Annihilation would set him free, because in ceasing to be he would cease to sin. But the repentance demanded by God is the only thing which will break his chains and permit him to retain his existence. We have no proof that there will ever be any way of escape by the first means, but we have abundant proof that the second is open to all men on this side of death.

III. Because the unrepentant adulterer will die as he has lived—a fool (ver. 23). A fool is a man without knowledge, one who acts from impulse rather than from reason. The sinner here pourtrayed is not a fool because he has not had instruction, but because he has not heeded it. Nature, History, Revelation and Conscience were his instructors, but he has disregarded them all. If he had listened to them he would have gained an experimental knowledge of the blessedness of godliness and purity, of which he must now go out of the world as ignorant as he entered it.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Verse 21. Practical atheism is the root of human depravity. The eye, even of a child, is a check upon a man, but the thought of an all-seeing God inspires no alarm.—*Bridges.*

The sin is not against man, nor dependent on man's detection only. The secret sin is open before the eyes of Jehovah. In the balance of His righteous judgment are weighed all human acts, this not excepted. There is a significant emphasis in the recurrence of the word used of the harlot herself in verse 6: "She ponders not, but God does."—*Plumptre.*

Because the ways of a sinful man are not before his own eyes, therefore are they before the eyes of God; because sinful man doth not ponder his goings, therefore the Lord pondereth them; because man doth not look on his ways with the eye of care, therefore the Lord looketh on them with the eye of wrath; because man doth not weigh his goings in the balance of due consideration, therefore God doth weigh them in the balance of severe justice. The opening of our eyes over our sins is the shutting of God's eye towards them; the shutting of our eyes upon them is the opening of God's eyes against them. For though we hide our ways from ourselves, we cannot hide them from God. We hide Him from ourselves; we do not hide ourselves from Him.—*Jermin.*

The meaning is, that directly in God's eyes are the ways of every man, as though there were no other creature in the universe; as though the wise man were saying, "Why, because the way seems smooth, and you seem helped in your folly, do you go on in your impenitency, and embrace the bosom of this wanton?" "For" the way of every man is directly in the sight of God. He takes the most emphatic interest in our schemes, whether we are doing well or ill. He helps us either in sinning or doing right, for "He levels all (one's) paths" (see Critical Notes). Not that we are to involve Him in the folly of any sin, but if a man desires to drink, He levels the way for Him. If he wishes liquor, He gives it; if he desires to steal, He gives the eye and the nerve. . . . The Divinity seems to help the struggling, whether saint or sinner, but the impenitent must not therefore imagine that it is righteous to go on.—*Miller.*

Verse 22. The licentious flatter themselves that in old age, when the passions are less fiery, they will easily extricate themselves from the dominion of their lusts, and repent and seek salvation. But Job xx. 11 declares that the old sinner's "bones are full of the sins of his youth, which shall lie down with him in the dust." Augustine, after experience, says: "While lust is being served the habit is formed, and whilst the habit is not being resisted necessity is formed."—*Fausset.*

Verse 23. Surely it is most just that he who lived without following instruction should die without having instruction; he that in his life would not do as he was instructed, deserveth that at death he should not be instructed what to do.—*Jermin.*

CHAPTER VI.

CRITICAL NOTES,—**1 With a stranger**, rather, "for" a stranger. **3. When thou art come**, rather, "for thou hast come." **Humble thyself**, literally "let thyself be trodden under foot." **Make sure**, "importune," "urge." **11. One that travelleth**, "a highwayman," "a footpad." **Armed man**, literally, "a man of the shield. **12. A naughty person**, "a worthless man." **13. Teacheth**, "motions." **14. Frowardness**, "perverseness." 16. Six, yea, seven. "A peculiar proverbial form, for which Arabic and Persian gnomic literature supply numerous illustrations. Elster probably gives the simplest and most correct explanation, deriving it "purely from the exigencies of parallelism." "The form of parallelism could not, on account of harmony, be sacrificed in any verse. But how should a parallel be found for a number? Since it was not any definite number that was the important thing, relief was found by taking one of the next adjacent numbers as the parallel to that which was chiefly in mind" (*Lange's Commentary*). **17. A proud look**, literally, "haughty eyes." **21. Continually**, "for evermore." **22.** *Lange's Commentary* translates into the imperative form, "let it lead thee," etc. **24. Evil woman**, literally "the woman of evil." **26.** Last clause means "an adulteress allures to that which may cost a man his life" (*Stuart*). **30. Despise.** Some translators render this word "scorn," others "disregard." Stuart, Wordsworth, and others adopt the former and understand the words to mean "men do not despise the thief, they do despise the adulterer." Noyes and others, adopting the latter rendering, take the sentence to mean "men punish even a thief, how much more an adulterer." **22.** Last clause, literally "Whoso will destroy **his life**, he does it." **34. Jealousy**, *i.e.*, of the injured husband.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1—5.

SELF-IMPOSED BONDAGE.

I. Man's highest glory may become the chief instrument of his trouble. The human tongue, or rather the power of speech, is a gift that stands pre-eminent among the good gifts of God to His creatures. It is man's most potent instrument of good or evil. The tongue of the statesman, when used wisely, may bring blessings on millions, but when it is made the tool of ambition it may entail misery upon generations. The tongue of a Christian, when used wisely, may be the means of bringing others into the way of life, but his unguarded words may be a stumbling-block in the way of many. The warning of the text reminds us that when the tongue is not kept in check by reason and consideration the glory becomes the means of ensnaring the whole man. The horse is a most useful servant to man, but the creature must be under proper control or he may be the means of inflicting the most serious injury upon his rider. If the rudder of a vessel is left to the guidance of the waves, the vessel is very likely to find herself upon the rocks. So with the tongue of man, it must be under the control of reason or it may bring its owner into danger and disgrace. When a man binds himself by solemn promises to a stranger of whose character he must be ignorant, he is very likely to involve himself and those dependent on him in much trouble, and perhaps in dishonour. A promise hastily made without due consideration of the consequences has often entailed upon a man years of suffering.

II. The same instrument which, thoughtlessly used, brings a man into a snare, may, when rightly guided, be the means of his deliverance. The promise made by Herod to Herodias (Matt. xiv. 7) was one which ought never to have been made. The king was ensnared by allowing his tongue to utter rash words, of which even *he* upon reflection repented. In his case, without doubt, it would have been a much less sin to have broken his promise than to keep it. But in the case before us, the advice given by Solomon to his pupil is, not to break his word, but to use the same instrument by which he bound himself, to obtain, if possible, a release. This he is to do—1. *By means purely moral.* There are other means which a man might try. He might use threatening; he

might employ falsehood; but these would be sinful. The only lawful means are those here implied, viz., words of persuasion and entreaty. 2. *Without delay.* He must endeavour to rectify his error at once; every day that passes over his head may be bringing nearer the day when he may be called upon to redeem his promise, and so he is to give "no sleep to his eyes nor slumber to his eyelids.

III. This advice is to be followed as a matter of duty. The man who has acted imprudently is bound to endeavour to deliver himself by lawful means. He is not to allow pride to hinder him (ver. 3). He is bound to try and prevent his life from being marred in the future—perhaps to its very close. For a man who is fettered by a promise which ought never to have been made, is like a creature born to enjoy freedom who has been taken captive by the hunter or the fowler. And as it is more than lawful for the roe or the bird (ver. 5) to try to regain its freedom, so is it the duty of man to use all right means to the same end.

ILLLUSTRATION OF VERSE 1.

The custom of striking hands at the conclusion of a bargain has maintained its ground among the customs of civilised nations down to the present time. To strike hands with another was the emblem of agreement among the Greeks under the walls of Troy, for Nestor complains, in a public assembly of the chiefs, that the Trojans had violated the engagements which they had sanctioned by libations of wine and by giving their right hands. (Iliad, Book II. i. 341, see also Book IV. i. 139). The Roman faith was plighted in the same way; for in Virgil, when Dido marked from her watch-towers the Trojan fleet setting forward with balanced sails, she exclaimed, "Is this the honour, the faith, *En dextra fidesque?*" Another striking instance is quoted by Calmet from Ockley's *History of the Saracens.* Telha, just before he died, asked one of Ali's men if he belonged to the Emperor of the Faithful, and being informed that he did, "Give me, then," said he, "your hand, that I may put mine into it, and by this action renew the oath of fidelity I have already made to him." (Calmet, vol. iii). See also Job xvii. 3; 2 Kings x. 15.—*Paxton's Illustrations of Scripture.*

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Verse 1. The two characters are carefully distinguished. 1. The companion, on whose behalf the young man pledges himself. 2. The stranger, probably the Phœnician money-lender, to whom he makes himself responsible. *Plumptre.*

God graciously directs our temporal affairs by His providence, and condescends, in His word, to give us instructions concerning them. If we regard not these, we need not be surprised though His providence convince us, by dear-bought experience, of our folly and sin.—*Lawson.*

The son has just been warned against the deadly wound of a stranger. He is now cautioned against a hurt from an imprudent friend. . . . . Our God, while he warns us against *suretyship*, has taken it upon Himself. He has given His word, His bond—yea, His blood—for sinners: a security that no powers of hell can shake.—*Bridges.*

Solomon, on different occasions, condemns the practice of suretyship. The condemnation is general. It does not follow, however, that what he says is to be taken as an unqualified prohibition, to which there are no circumstances that can constitute an exception. . . . . There are cases in which it is unavoidable; and there are cases in which the law requires it; and there are cases in which it is not only in consistency with law, but required by all the claims of prudence, justice, and charity. These, however, are rare. And it may be laid down as a maxim regarding the transactions of business, and all the mutual dealings of man with man, that *the less of it the better.* In such cases as the following, it is manifestly inadmissible, and

may even, in some instances, involve a large amount of moral turpitude. **I. It is wrong for a man to come under engagements that are beyond his actually existing means.** Such a course is one not merely of imprudence, but there is in it a *threefold injustice.* First, to the creditor for whom he becomes surety. Secondly, to his family, if he has one, to whom the requisition of payment must bring distress and ruin. Thirdly, to those who give him credit in his own transactions, with the risks of his own trade. **II. The same observations are applicable to the making of engagements with inconsideration and rashness.** The case here supposed is evidently that of suretyship *for* a friend *to* a *stranger.* And the rashness may be viewed either in relation to the *person* or to the *case.*—*Wardlaw.*

It may at first excite surprise that Solomon should have thought it needful to dwell so much as he does in the Proverbs on the evil of suretyship (xi. 15; xvii. 18; xx. 16; xxii. 26; xxvii. 13), and that in his lessons of moral prudence he should assign the first place to cautions against it. The reason is probably to be found in the peculiar circumstances under which the Proverbs were written, and the special design of the author in writing them; although, doubtless, Solomon had a general and universal purpose in composing them, and the Holy Spirit, who employed his instrumentality in the work, looked far beyond Solomon and his times, and extended his view to all ages and nations of the world. . . . . But the occasion which gave rise to the writing of the Proverbs was a personal and national one. Many strangers resorted to Jerusalem in the days of Solomon from all parts of the civilised world, for the purpose of commerce and trade. Borrowing and lending money was much in vogue; and many shrewd and crafty adventurers speculated on the credulity of rich capitalists. Solomon addresses his *son* Rehoboam (ver. 3). He was born before his father's accession to the throne, and Solomon reigned forty years. We hear nothing of him until his ripe maturity, and then we are told of an act of egregious folly. It was evident he was just the person to be the dupe of licentious spendthrifts and griping usurers. The courtly parasite who desired to find means for paying his own debts, or indulging his own vices, and the avaricious moneylender, would find a victim in the princely heir to the throne, whom they would flatter with eulogies on his generosity, and would puff up with proud notions of the exhaustless wealth to which he was the aspirant.—*Wordsworth.*

Verse 2. In the passage before us the warning is not so much against suretyship in general as merely against the imprudent assumption of such obligations, leaving out of account the moral unreliableness of the man involved; and the counsel is to the quickest possible release from every obligation of this kind that may have been hastily assumed. With the admonitions of our Lord in His Sermon on the Mount, to be ready at all times for the lending and giving away of one's property, even in cases where one cannot hope for the recovery of what has been given out (Luke vi. 30—36: comp. with 1 Cor. vi. 7), this demand is not in conflict. For Christ also plainly demands no such readiness to suffer loss on account of our neighbour, as would deprive us of personal liberty, and rob us of all means of further beneficence.—*Lange's Commentary.*

For bills and obligations do mancipate the most free and ingenuous spirit, and so put a man out of aim that he can neither serve God without distraction nor do good to others, nor set his own state in any good order, but lives and dies entangled and puzzled with cares and snares; and after a tedious and laborious life passed in a circle of fretting thoughts, he leaves at last, instead of better patrimony, a world of intricate troubles to his posterity, who are also taken "with the words of his mouth."—*Trapp.*

Verse 3. This appeal is not, obviously, to the bond-giver, who has seduced us to endorse him, and is as helpless as we to get anybody off; but the bond-holder; and the great remedy, therefore, for a securityship is to beg off in the most unspeakable abjectness, and to press and to urge the creditor to release our name. Now, I say, this is not *simpliciter*, the gist of the inspiration. But if we introduce the Gospel; if we see in this a great picture of our guilt; if we see in the bond-holder the Friend to whom we are to appeal; if we see in the bond-giver sin in all the seductive forms in which it has come down to us from the original transgressor; if the grip of the suretyship is the law, and the form of the law is the broken covenant; if the act of our "striking hands" is the way we have accepted the curse of Adam, and the way we have volunteered under this *stranger's* burdens, then the whole passage becomes complete, and we are ready for the appeal, "Go, humble thyself," &c. That is the very Gospel.—*Miller.*

St. Gregory, Bede, and other ancient expositors, apply these injunctions in a spiritual sense. "To be a surety for a friend is to take upon thee the charge of looking to another's soul," says St. Gregory, who also, reading the latter clause of this verse in the sense of "*urging*" and "*importuning*" (see Critical Notes), explains it thus: "Whosoever is set before others for an example of their living is admonished, not only to watch himself, but to rouse up his friend: for it sufficeth not that he doth watch well, if he do not rouse him also over whom he is set from the drowsiness of sin.

Verse. 4. Has this precept any connection with our spiritual interests? It has. It is a part of the eighth commandment, and though men regard it rather as a loss than as a sin to endanger their outward estate, it is both a sin and a temptation. Men who once seemed upright in their dealings have brought reproach upon religion by living and dying in other men's debt, and by having recourse to unjustifiable methods, suggested by distress, to relieve themselves. The effect of suretyship, even with the most upright men, has often proved hurtful to their souls, embittering their days, and unfitting them for the cheerful service of religion. We are the servants of Christ, and must not disqualify ourselves for His service by making ourselves needlessly the servants of men.—*Lawson.*

Verse 5. It is evident, however, that the language implies, If, with all your efforts, you are unsuccessful in obtaining your discharge you must stand to your engagement. Treachery would be a much greater loss in character.—*Wardlaw.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 6—11.

INDUSTRY AND INDOLENCE.

A contrast. **I. The industrious insect.** 1. *Nature is intended to be a moral teacher to man.* The most saintly natures of ancient and modern times have regarded God's works in this light, and God Himself has led the van in so often pointing man to animate and inanimate Nature for instruction and comfort. He first announced this truth when He said to Noah, "I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between Me and the earth" (Gen. ix. 13). This is the first record of the enlistment of Nature as a helper to the human soul, the first recorded instance of God's pointing out to man what He intended all natural objects to become to His spiritual nature. Here the son of Solomon is exhorted to gain instruction—to be stirred up to a sense of duty—from a study of one of God's inferior creatures. 2. *Nature becomes*

the instructor of those only who consider her ways. The existence, within a man's reach, of the most beautiful painting in the world will be of no advantage to him unless he studies it. It is only as he *considers* it that it will convey to him the thought of the painter. The works of God are within the reach of men, but they must be looked at and *considered* if they are to be to Him what God intended them to be. God placed the bow in the cloud and the tiny ant upon the ground to be subjects of meditation. The Psalmist *considered* the heavens before he was moved with a sense of his own littleness and God's majesty (Psalm viii.). Solomon's precept is, "Consider the ant." 3. *The lessons which are to be learned from the study of the ant.* Industry, improvement of opportunities, and individual action. The amount of work done by this insignificant insect ought to be enough to shame an indolent man into activity. Her care in embracing present opportunities is a loud rebuke to those who would put off until to-morrow what, perhaps, can only be done to-day. She says, by her diligent use of present hours, "I must work the works of Him that sent me while it is day; the night cometh, when no man can work" (John ix. 4). Especially her individual effort is held up as worthy of imitation (ver. 7). While some men wait for another to take the initiative, to clear the path for them, she puts forth her own individual effort without guide, overseer, or ruler Each man must do his own work in the world, each one has responsibilities of his own which will not admit of being discharged by proxy. He must find out his individual duty, and not try to shift the burden upon the shoulders of another, or wait for another to go before him in the way.

II. The indolent man. 1. *He does the right thing at the wrong time, or indulges to excess in a gift of God which is intended to be used in moderation.* Sleep is one of God's most precious gifts to man in his present condition. It is a necessity of human nature. The prophet Elijah had an angel of God to watch over him while he slept. God saw that it was the medicine he most needed in that hour of bodily fatigue and mental depression. But if he had been sleeping at the hour of evening sacrifice, when the nation had to choose between God and Baal on Mount Carmel, he would have been guilty of a great sin against himself, his nation, and his God. Israel was promised the land of rest after they had fought their way through the desert. Rest is the reward of labour and not to be substituted for it. And although intervals of rest are necessary and right, life is meant for work, and the motto of every man ought to be that of the famous coadjutor of the great William of Orange, St. Aldegonde, "Repos ailleurs" (rest elsewhere). The sin of the sluggard is the abuse of a great blessing, the doing a right thing at the wrong time. 2. *The consequence of such conduct.* This can be abundantly illustrated from human experience. If the farmer rests when, regardless of cold and storm, he ought to be ploughing or sowing, poverty will be coming upon him when his barns ought to be filled with plenty. The man who lets slip his spiritual opportunities through soul-indolence, will find himself in a state of soul-poverty at the end of life. When he ought to be reaping an abundant harvest of soul-satisfaction from a life whose energies have been used to bless himself and others, he will find himself in a state of soul-destitution. The rich man said to his soul, "Take thine ease," when he ought to have aroused it to prepare for the future which was coming up to meet him. But for the neglect of this God branded him as a "fool" (Luke xii. 20).

ILLUSTRATIONS OF VERSES 6—8.

When I began to employ workmen in this country, nothing annoyed me more than the necessity to hire also an *overseer*, or to fulfil this office myself. But I soon found this was universal, and strictly necessary. Without an overseer very little work would be done, and nothing as it should be. The workmen will not work at all unless kept to it and directed

in it by an overseer who is himself a perfect specimen of laziness. He does absolutely nothing but smoke his pipe, order this, scold that one, discuss the how and the why with the men themselves, or with idle passers-by. This overseeing often costs more than the work overseen. Now the ants manage far better. Every one attends to his own business and does it well. In another respect these provident creatures read a very necessary lesson to Orientals. In all warm climates there is a ruinous want of calculation and forecast. Having enough for the current day, men are reckless as to the future. . . . . Now the ant "provideth her meat in summer." All summer long, and especially in harvest, every denizen of their populous habitation is busy. As we ride or walk over the grassy plains, we notice paths leading to their subterranean granaries; at first broad, clean and smooth, like roads near a city, but constantly branching off into smaller and less distinct, until they disappear in the herbage of the plain. Along these converging paths hurry thousands of ants, thickening inward until it becomes an unbroken column of busy beings going in search of or returning with their food. I read lately, in a work of some pretension, that ants do not carry away wheat or barley This was by way of comment on Prov. vi 8. Tell it to these farmers, and they will laugh at you Ants are the greatest robbers in the land. Leave a bushel of wheat in the vicinity of one of their subterranean cities, and in a surprisingly short time the whole commonwealth will be summoned to plunder. A broad, black column stretches from the wheat to the hole, and, as if by magic, every grain seems to be accommodated with legs, and walks off in a hurry along the moving column.—*Thompson's Land and the Book.*

Solomon's lesson to the sluggard has been generally adduced as a strong confirmation of the ancient opinion, that ants have a magazine of provisions for winter; it can, however, only relate to the species of a warm climate, the habits of which are probably different from those of a cold one; so that his words, as commonly interpreted, may be perfectly correct and consistent with Nature, and yet be not at all applicable to the species that are indigenous to Europe. But Solomon does not affirm that the ant laid up in her cell stores of grain, but that she gathers her food when it is most plentiful, and thus shows her wisdom and prudence. The words thus interpreted will apply to the species among us, as well as to those that are not indigenous.—*Kirby and Spence's Entomology.*

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Verse 5. We may *infer* Rehoboam's character from such exhortations as these. And these and following precepts derive much interest from what we have reason to believe was his character. His position bore some resemblance to that of our own Charles II., at the voluptuous court of Versaillies, before his accession to the throne, and the character of the one was in some respects similar to that of the other. The unhappy example of his own father Solomon, in his old age, was more potent for evil than the precepts of the Proverbs were for good. At the age of forty-one Rehoboam was a feeble libertine. The warnings of the *Icôn Basiliké* fell flat on the ears of the royal author's own son, and Rehoboam derived little benefit from the book of Proverbs.—*Wordsworth.*

Verse 6 to 8. Our whole present life is the time for action; the future for retribution, which shall be ushered in by the judgment: the latter is the harvest (Matt. xxv. 3, 4).—*Fausset.*

How is man degenerated from the nobility of his creation, that an insect must be a pattern unto him. He that goes well without a guide is fit to be a guide, he that does well without an overseer is fit to be an overseer, he that orders himself well without a ruler is fit to be a ruler. Let the ant, therefore, be a guide unto the sluggard, and teach him to guide himself, who guides herself so carefully. Let the ant be his overseer, which he sees to overgo himself so much in pains and labour. Let the ant be his ruler, and by her example command him to work which rules herself so well in working.—*Jermin.*

First, as the ant in summer gathereth whereupon to live in winter, so every Christian in a time of quietness should gather out of God's word, that in trouble and adversity he may have wherewith to live spiritually. Secondly, we ought to labour by the example of the ant, that we get the fruit of good works, in the harvest of this present life, so sedulously and diligently, that in the time of winter and judgment

we perish not with hunger.—*St. Augustine.*

These precepts have a spiritual meaning and are to be applied to the soil of the heart and mind. As Bede says here, "The present life is compared to summer and harvest, because now, in the heat of trials, we must reap and lay up for the future, and the day of death and judgment is the winter for which we must prepare, and when there is no more any time for preparation."—*Wordsworth.*

Man, that was once the captain of God's school, is now, for his truantliness, turned down into the lowest form, as it were to learn his A B C again; yea, to be taught by these meanest creatures. . . . . Let no man here object that word of our Saviour, "Take no thought for the morrow." There is a care of *diligence*, and a care of *diffidence;* a care of the head and a care of the heart; the former is needful, the latter sinful.—*Trapp.*

Verse 9. Much more loudly would we call to the spiritual sluggard—thou that art sleeping away the opportunities of grace; not "striving to enter in at the strait gate" (Luke xiii. 24); taking thy salvation for granted; hoping that thou shalt "reap where thou has not sown, and gather where thou hast not strawed" (Matt. xxv. 26); improve, after this pattern, the summer and harvest season—the time of youth, the present, perhaps the only moment. *The ant hath no guide.* How many guides have you?—conscience, the Bible, ministers! *She has no overseer.* You are living before Him "whose eyes are as a flame of fire." *She has no ruler* calling her to account. "Every one of us must give account of himself to God."—*Bridges.*

Epaminondas, finding one of his sentinels asleep, thrust him through with his sword; and, being chidden for so great severity, replied, "I left him but as I found him." It must be our care that death serve us not in like sort, that we be not taken napping. . . . Our Saviour was up and at prayer "a great while before day" (Mark i. 45). The holy angels are styled "watchers" (Dan. iv. 10), and they are three times pronounced happy that *watch* (Luke xii. 37, 38, 43).—*Trapp.*

Verse 11. Two things are denoted in this imagery. 1. That idleness will *quickly* bring poverty. 2. That it will come as a *destroyer.*—*Stuart.*

I look upon indolence as a sort of suicide, for the man is effectually destroyed, though the appetite of the brute may survive.—*Lord Chesterfield.*

God will not support thee without work, but by work, that is His holy ordinance (Gen. iii. 19): Do thy part, and God will do His.—*Egard.*

A most dreadful simile! One who has waited for a fight knows how slowly the armed men seem to come up. They may be hours passing the intervening space. There is no sound of them. They are not on the roads, or on the air, either in sight or echo; and yet they are *coming on!* The intervening time is the sluggard's sleeping time; and it seems an age. But his want will come . . . . . All slothfulness is, no doubt, rebuked; but especially that which has all heaven for its garnered stores; all hell for its experience of want; all time for its season of neglect; and all eternity to break upon its sleep.—*Miller.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH—Verses 12—19.

A Student of Iniquity.

1. We have in these words a picture of a man so wicked that he makes it his study how to commit sin. The sin of many men, perhaps of most men, arises from thoughtlessness, weakness, or slothfulness (see verses 9, 10), but there are others who make sin their business, and apply themselves to it with as much

diligence as the merchant gives to his trade, or the man of letters to his pursuit of knowledge. "He deviseth mischief" (verse 14), "his heart deviseth wicked imaginations" (verse 18). Those who wish to compass any particular end must think upon the means by which they can accomplish it. Progression in iniquity is not always accomplished without thought, and wicked men have to plan much and think deeply sometimes before their malicious devices are ripe for execution. The thief has to study his profession before he can become an accomplished burglar. The sharper must spend much time in acquiring the skill by which he preys upon less experienced gamblers. The murderer must ponder deeply how he is to do his bloody deed without detection. It cost Haman a good deal of thinking before he could devise a scheme likely to injure Mordecai. The chief priests and scribes held many consultations before they could compass the death of Christ (Mark xi. 18, xiv. 1–55, etc.). The wicked man of the text is a student of ways and means. 2. He is constant in his studies. If a man professes to make any branch of knowledge his particular study and only applies himself to it by fits and starts, we know he is not much in earnest about it, but if he is constant in his application, he demonstrates by his perseverance that he intends, if possible, to excel. The wicked man here pictured by Solomon has made up his mind not to fail through lack of continuous application, "he deviseth mischief *continually*" (ver. 14). If one plan fails, he begins to form another; when one scheme has brought the desired end, he at once sets to work at a fresh one; as a natural consequence—3. *He makes progress*, "he walks with a froward mouth" (ver. 12), his feet become "swift in running to mischief" (ver. 18). The man who is always in the practice of any art can hardly stand still in it. He can hardly fail to become more and more of an adept. He sees where he might have done better yesterday and supplies the deficiency next time. And this is true of the work of wickedness as of any other work, "practice makes perfect." There are men, for instance, who from constant practice "lie like truth." The more the man studies how to injure his fellow-creatures, the more easily he can plan; the oftener he plans, the easier he finds it. 4. *In order to carry out his designs he invents an original language* (ver. 13). There is no member of the body which cannot become a medium to convey thought. The eye is very eloquent in this work, the hand, the lip, the finger, the whole body may do this to some extent, and are sometimes blessedly so employed when affliction has shut out our fellow-man from hearing the human voice, but this man of wickedness makes his whole body a medium for the conveyance of his evil plans and desires. He yields his "members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin" (Rom. vi. 13). The common every-day language of outspoken honest men will not do to convey his thoughts, because his thoughts are against the welfare of his fellow creatures. This compels him to use a language which is comprehended only by those who are like himself. The eye can be used in this way as a more safe and swift instrument than the tongue. A look may embody a thought that would need many words to express. The glance of one wicked man to another has often been the sentence of death to many. And so, in a less degree, perhaps, with the foot and the hand, as Matthew Henry says, "Those whom he makes use of as the tools of his wickedness understand the ill meaning of a wink of his eye, a stamp of his feet, the least motion of his fingers. He gives orders for evil-doing, and yet would not be thought to do so, but has ways of concealing what he does, so that he may not be suspected."

II. The end of such a man. (Verse 15.) 1. *His very success will bring his ruin.* The man who makes it the business of his life to lay plans against the comfort of his fellow-creatures may succeed for a time, but by-and-by he will find himself so famous, or infamous, that a reward may be offered for his person, and his very success in deceiving others in the past will possibly so throw him

off his guard as to make him an easy prey to those who now lay in wait to bring him to justice. But if he escapes the messenger of human retribution, he is sure of the Divine Nemesis. God's law and the universe are against him. In sowing discord in the world, he has sowed destruction for himself, and he must reap it. However cleverly he may have outwitted his fellow-men, he has not deceived God, and *His* law is that "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Ephes. vi. 7). 2. *The punishment will come when least expected.* "Suddenly shall he be broken" (verse 15). The thief makes it his study to find an entrance into his victim's house when he least expects him, and he finds himself one day repaid in his own coin. When he is enjoying his fancied security an officer of justice visits him, and suddenly he is summoned to answer for his crimes. This we find is generally the case with retribution; it not only comes certainly, but at a time when it is least looked for. 3. *His ruin will be complete.* "He shall be broken without remedy" (verse 15). The crime of murder is regarded by our code of law as one which deserves the extremest penalty which man can inflict upon man. The murderer, as a rule, is visited with a punishment which, so far as his earthly existence goes, cuts off all hope for the future. The man who is pictured to us in these verses is one who appears to have completed his character as a sinner. The number seven is often used in Scripture to denote perfection—completion; and this student of iniquity appears to have succeeded so well in his studies that there is no vice which is not found in one of the seven things which go to make up his character. His pride leads him to refuse God's yoke, and to carve out for himself a way without reference to the will of Him in whom he lives and moves. But his lying tongue betrays a sense of weakness. He fears that his plans, though so skilfully laid, may not succeed, and therefore he has recourse to deception to help him out with them. And so cruel is he that he shrinks from no misery that he may bring upon others in the furtherance of his own designs; neither the character nor the life of his victims is spared. He is "a false witness that speaketh lies and soweth discord," his "hands shed innocent blood." For so diseased a member of the body politic there seems nothing left but amputation. So complete a sinner must suffer a complete ruin, *Finally*, that such a character should be an abomination to the Lord (verse 16) is most natural, if we consider how entirely it is at variance with what God is Himself. Like seeks and loves like. The musical soul seeks and delights in those who love music. The courageous Jonathan delights in the courageous David. God is humble. He takes a right estimate of Himself and others. This is true humility. "Who is like unto the Lord our God, who dwelleth on high, who humbleth Himself to behold the things that are in heaven and in the earth?" (Psa. cxiii. 5, 5) How great a contrast is He in this respect to the man of "proud look." God is a "God of truth" (Psa. xxxi. 5), it is a blessed impossibilty with Him to lie (Titus i. 2). How can He do other than abominate a "lying tongue." He is the Saviour of men (1 Tim. iv. 10); this sinner seeks to destroy them. He is the Author of peace and the lover of concord; this man's aim has been to "sow discord" even "among brethren."

ILLUSTRATION OF VERSE 13.

It should be remembered that, in the East, when people are in the house they do not wear sandals, consequently their feet and toes are exposed. When guests wish to speak so as not to be observed by the host, they convey their meaning by the feet and toes. Does a person wish to leave the room in company with another? he lifts up one of his feet; and should the other refuse, he also lifts up a foot and suddenly puts it down again. When merchants wish to make a bargain with others without making known their terms, they sit on the ground, have a piece of cloth thrown over the lap, and then put a hand under, and thus speak with their fingers. When the Brahmins convey religious mysteries to their disciples, they teach with their fingers, having the hands concealed in the folds of their robe. —*Roberts, in Biblical Treasury.*

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Ver. 12. He who is nobody in deeds is often strong in words. He whose hands are idle has a tongue anything but idle; and he tries by words suited to men's humours to win that favour which he cannot by deeds.—*Cartwright.*

"Walketh" implies *progress* in *evil*, as the tendency of all sin is to grow more and more inveterate.—*Fausset.*

Every idle man is a "naughty" man; *is*, or, ere long, *will be*, for by doing nothing men learn to do evil. And "thou wicked and slothful servant," saith our Saviour (Matt. xxv. 26). He putteth no difference between the idle person and the wicked person. The devil will not long suffer such an one to be idle, but will soon set him to work. Idleness is the hour of temptation.—*Trapp.*

Ver. 13. He conveys his meanings, and carries on his schemes, and promotes his ends, in every sly, covert, unsuspected way.—*Wardlaw.*

Not speech only, but all other means by which man holds intercourse with man, are turned to instruments of fraud and falsehood. The wink which tells the accomplice that the victim is already snared, the gestures with foot and hand, half of deceit, half of mockery—these would betray him to anyone who was not blind.—*Plumptre.*

Verse 14. The wise man had showed before the outward rivulets, now he shows the inward fountain, a corrupt heart. This is added lest we should think that only outward signs and gestures are evil. If neither by outward signs nor gestures a wicked man dare express himself, yet his heart is evil.—*Francis Taylor.*

As the agriculturist applies himself wholly to the ploughing and sowing of his land, so the froward gives himself wholly to iniquity, seeking his harvest of gain, or of enjoyment of malignity, in traducing or lying, or in praising with words whilst all the time traducing by signs.—*Fausset.*

Where frowardness soweth the field, what can grow but contentions only? But these are first sown in the heart by mischievous devices, and there being come to a ripeness, then are they gathered, and are again sown in the outward actions of discord, one harvest serving to bring on another until they bring the seedsman to the harvest of destruction. The force of the verse is, that when wickedness is silent outwardly, it is devising mischief inwardly, that it may practice it the more abundantly.—*Jermin.*

Verse 15. *Therefore*, if a thing be so ruinous; if it be a fountain of sin; if it be sending forth corruption in such a manner as to increase the mass of it, and never diminish it; if it be putting forth causes of quarrel both with God and man, then that thing must be crushed. We would expect a sharp, clean end. If it be a root, it must be threaded to its very eye, and all the life of it must be traced and crushed quite out of it in the soil.—*Miller.*

The word "suddenly" shows the vanity of the sinner's hope that he shall have the time or the gift of repentance (Job xxi. 17, 18; Psa. lxiii. 19).—*Fausset.*

It were pity such a villain should go without his reward. The wise man, therefore, doth not leave him without his judgment denounced, and it is a grievous one. For he that spendeth time to devise mischief shall not have time at last to devise help for the preventing of his own sudden mischief. He that by plots maketh the breaches of strife, shall at length be broken suddenly into pieces, without hope of piecing himself together again . . . . Of Satan it is said that he fell like lightning from heaven, the fall whereof is most sudden, and so that it never riseth again. And so cometh the calamity of malicious, froward hearts: such is the breaking fall of their destruction.—*Jermin.*

Verse 16. This, curtly, is a restatement of the picture just passed; not exactly, but ripened a little, and advanced into a more mature expression.—*Miller.*

It is an evidence of the good-will God bears to mankind, that those sins are in a special manner provoking to Him which are prejudicial to the comfort of human life and society.—*Henry.*

The things which God hateth are the things which the devil maketh. He cannot be the author and hater of the same thing. And therefore it is not man, but the wicked things in man, which God abhorreth, and which, did not man love, God would still love man, although He hateth them.—*Jermin.*

Verse 17. A proud look or "lofty eyes" might seem to have little to do with a "worthless man" (see Critical Notes on verse 12), but a man is a man of emptiness solely because he is depending, in divers ways, upon himself. Humility is the very first lesson towards salvation. A man could not live a whole long life taking "a little more sleep" if he was not arrogantly depending upon something within himself. "Hands that shed innocent blood:" The movements of such a man are all deadly. The amiable may be fairly stung by such rude speech, but the wise man intends to imply that a deceived impenitence deceives and festers all about it. The worldly father that misguides his son sheds his blood. It is astonishing how much there is in the Bible of this cruel language (Psa. v. 9; Isa. i. 21, &c.).—*Miller.*

Verse 18. The heart underlies the seven vices which are an abomination to God, and in the midst, because it is the fountain from which evil flows in all directions.—*Starke.*

Verse 19. If the heavenly "dew descends upon the brethren that dwell together in unity" (Psa. cxxxiii.), a withering blast will fall on those who, mistaking prejudice for principle, "cause divisions" for their own selfish ends (Rom. xvi. 17, 18). If we cannot attain unity of opinion, "perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (1 Cor. i. 10), at least let us cultivate unity of Spirit (Phil. iii. 16).—*Bridges.*

Verses 12–19. As respects the arrangement in which the seven manifestations of treacherous dealing are enumerated in verses 16–19, it does not perfectly correspond with the order observed in verses 12–14. There the series is—mouth, eyes, feet, fingers, heart, devising evil counsels, stirring up strifes; here it is eyes, tongue, hands, heart, feet, speaking lies, instigating strife. With reference to the organs which are named as the instruments in the first five forms of treacherous wickedness, in the second enumeration an order is adopted involving a regular descent; the base disposition to stir up strife, or to let loose controversy in both cases ends the series . . . . . The six or seven vices, twice enumerated in different order and form of expression, are, at the same time, all of them manifestations of hatred against one's neighbour, or sins against the second table of the Decalogue; yet it is not so much a general unkindness as rather an unkindness consisting and displaying itself in falseness and malice that is emphasised as their common element. And only on account of the peculiarly mischievous and ruinous character of just these sins of hatred to one's neighbour, is he who is subject to them represented as an object of especially intense abhorrence on the part of a holy God, and as threatened with the strongest manifestations of His anger in penalties.—*Dr. Zöckler, in Lange's Commentary.*

Verses 16–19. There is one parallel well worthy of notice between the seven cursed things here and the seven blessed things in the fifth chapter of Matthew. In the Old Testament the things are set down in the sterner form of what the Lord hates, like the

"Thou shalt not" of the Decalogue. In the New Testament the form is in accordance with the gentleness of Christ. There we learn the good things that are blessed, and are left to gather thence the opposite evils that are cursed. But, making allowance for the difference in form, the first and the last of the seven are identical in the two lists. "The Lord hates a proud look" is precisely equivalent to "Blessed are the poor in spirit;" and "He that soweth discord among brethren" is the exact converse of the "peacemaker." This coincidence must be designed. When Jesus was teaching His disciples on the Mount He seems to have had in view the similar instructions that Solomon had formerly delivered, and, while the teaching is substantially new, there is as much of allusion to the ancient Scripture as to make it manifest that the Great Teacher kept His eye upon the prophets, and sanctioned all their testimony.—*Arnot.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 20—23.

***On verses* 20 *and* 21, *see Homiletics on chap. i.* 8, *and iv.* 1.**

THE LAW OF GOD'S WORD.

I. The Divine law as a lamp. 1. *It is like a lamp because it is portable.* A light that cannot be carried from place to place will be useless to a man who has to find his way home in the dark on an uneven road. Life is such a journey, and the commandment of the Lord can be carried in man's memory and heart: "Thy Word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against Thee" (Psa. cxix. 11). 2. *Its existence declares that men need light from a source outside themselves.* A man's eyes on a dark night are not sufficient to enable him to find the right road. If he depends simply upon them he will find that the "light within him is darkness" (Luke xi. 35). He must have external help. The existence of God's revelation in the world proves that man has not enough light within him to guide his feet into the way of peace. His own spiritual perception will not enable him to find his way through the night to eternal day. 3. *It is in constant requisition.* The position and relation of our globe to the sun makes it certain that night will constantly succeed the day. And while night continues to follow day the lamp will be needed to illumine the darkness. The Divine lamp will never be out of use while temptation, and doubt, and sin, and ignorance beset the path of man, as certainly as the revolution of the globe brings the night.

II. The commandment as a guide. "When thou goest, it shall lead thee" (verse 22). Where leading is promised ignorance is implied. The man who trusts to another to guide him acknowledges by the act that the guide knows more than he does. Scripture takes for granted that man is ignorant. Its existence implies that man needs information and direction concerning his life.

III. The commandment as a guard. "When thou sleepest, it shall keep thee." A keeper, or guard, implies danger in general, and in this instance in particular. There is a general danger in times of pestilence, and there is a special danger in some places and under some circumstances. There is a danger common to all vessels when sailing the ocean, but there are some parts which are especially dangerous. So is it with men in relation to sin. There is the general liability to fall into sin common to all men, but there are dangers which more especially beset youth and inexperience, and there is one sin above all others which is terrible in its effects and ruinous to the whole man. The text applies to a general keeping from the common danger and to a special keeping from this special danger (verse 24).

IV. The commandment is a keeper, a guide, and a lamp to those only who keep it. A man binds his sandal upon his foot and it keeps his foot, because it has itself been kept in its right place. There is a mutual keeping. There can be no keeping *by* the word unless there is a keeping *of* the word. A greater than Solomon has told us this truth. Our Lord, in His parable of the sower, reminds us of those wayside hearers who, not keeping the word, were not kept by it, and of those who, like the rocky and thorny ground, kept it only for a while and were only kept by it until the time of temptation scorched them, and their profession withered away (Matt. xiii. 1–7). And our Lord Himself used the commandment in the hour of His temptation to keep Him. To all the advances of the tempter he replied, "It is written."

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Verse 20. The first feature that arrests attention in this picture is, that effects are attributed to the law of a mother which only God's law can produce. The inference is obvious and sure. It is assumed that the law which a mother instils is the Word of God dwelling richly in her own heart, and that she acts as a channel to convey that Word to the heart of her children. To assume it as actually done is the most impressive method of enjoining it. Parents are, by the constitution of things, in an important sense mediators between God and their children for a time. . . . . Your children are, by grace, let into you, so as to drink in what you contain. The only safety is, that you be by grace let into Christ, so that what they get from you shall be, not what springs within you, but what flows into you from the Springhead of holiness. To the children it is the law of their mother, and therefore they receive it; but in substance it is the truth from Jesus, and to receive it is life.—*Arnot.*

We have already noticed (ch. i. 8) the fifth commandment as comprehending the first five; just as the tenth commandment comprehends the latter five. They ought to be painted so in churches. Handed down so, we verily believe, to Moses, each table must have carried five commandments. Honouring our father, in all the broad meaning of that term, is the first commandment "*in*," not "*with*" (as in Eng. version), "promise" (Eph. vi. 2). —*Miller.*

Verse 21. "Bind them continually" signifieth such a care of firm binding as when one, to be sure of binding strong, doth as it were always hold the strings in his hands, and is continually pulling them. And surely we had need so to bind continually God's commandments and law to our hearts and necks, for they are but loose knots which the best of us make, and they are ever and anon slipping back, unless our diligence be still pulling hard to keep them close. To bind that to our hearts which bindeth us to godliness, is to loose ourselves; to tie that about our necks which ties us to religion, is to free ourselves. A good father's commandment, a good mother's law, doth tie us in observance unto God's law; if, therefore, we shall bind the one upon our hearts continually, if we shall tie the other about our necks, this will give us the freedom of true sons, both with God and man. This hearty binding, and willing tying of ourselves, taketh away all burdensome feeling of any tie or binding from us. —*Jermin.*

Bind them upon thine heart "for ever," because through all eternity these commandments will be the very highest objects of affection. Holiness will be the greatest treasure of the blessed. And, second, "tie them about thy neck" for a still higher reason. Holiness is a bright ornament. It is precious on its own account. It is worthy, not on account of what it does, or of what it seems, but of what it is. That is, if we neither had joy

in it nor won profit by it, it would be glorious like a necklace upon the blind, intrinsically, and on its own account. —*Miller.*

Verse 22. No such guide to God as the Word, which, while a man holds to, he may safely say, "Lord, if I be deceived, Thou hast deceived me; if I be out of the way, Thy Word has misled me." If thou sleep with some good meditation in thy mind it shall keep thee from foolish and sinful dreams and fancies, and set thy heart in a holy frame when thou awakest. He that raketh up his fire at night shall find fire in the morning. "How precious are Thy thoughts unto me, O God" (Psa. cxxxix. 17). What follows? "When I awake, I am still with Thee" (verse 18).—*Trapp.*

I. The thing to be done. The Word of God is to talk with us. A man's character is obviously much influenced by his habitual talk. Sentiments received in conversation powerfully affect the mind. . . . . The idea of dealing with the Holy Scripture as a conversible companion is implied in the very name, "The Word of God," and in the statement that "God, who in sundry times, and in divers manners, *spoke* to the Fathers, by the prophets, has *spoken* to us by His son" (Heb. i. 1). 1. *The Word of God will talk to us instructively.* No part is addressed to mere speculation or curiosity. It has always in view the object of furnishing the mind with that which shall be useful in the highest sense, and for the longest duration. 2. *It will talk without flattery.* Our best friends seldom dare to tell us all that is thought of us. But the Word of God tells us what we actually are, and where our faults and danger lie. 3. *It will talk with us affectionately.* "Faithful are the wounds of a friend," yet they may be "wounds" after all, to minds too susceptible. But there is a depth of love even in the sternest rebukes of the Word of God. **II. The particular time when the Word of God may talk with us.** "When thou wakest." 1. *To forewarn us.* Every day is a little life, and who can say what the coming hour may bring forth. 2. *To fore-arm us.* There is not an hour in which some temptation may not present itself, or some principle be severely tried. A spiritual armour is therefore necessary, while a part of that armour, which is indispensable, is "the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God" (Eph. vi. 17). 3. *To pre-occupy us.* "How is it," said a friend to a learned physician, "that amidst much employment and continual exercise of mind you preserve such unruffled tranquillity?" "It is," said he, "because I give the first hour of every morning to the Holy Scriptures and to prayer." Much benefit may well be expected from a pre-occupation of the mind and heart, so entirely consonant to the whole tenor of man's relations to his Maker and perpetual benefactor.—*Bullar.*

Observe three benefits of keeping instruction, and in each the fit time and the act. A man walking, needs a guide; sleeping, needs a watchman; awaking, needs a friend to talk with him.—*Francis Taylor.*

Verse 23.—The reproofs of the law may alarm and terrify, but they are not to be less valued on that account. The threatenings of hell guard the way to heaven, and strongly urge us to keep the King's highway, the only way of safety.—*Lawson.*

The parallelism with Psalm cxix. 105, deserves special notice. The alliteration, "the law is light," like the vulgate, "lex, lux," reproduces a corresponding *paronomasia* in the Hebrew.—*Plumptre.*

He that hath the word of Christ richly dwelling in him, may lay his hand upon his heart and say, as dying Ecolampadius did: "Here is plenty of light." Under the law all was in riddles; Moses was veiled; and yet that saying was then verified. There was light enough to lead men to Christ "the end of the law" (Rom. x. 4). "Reproofs of instruction," or "corrections of instruction." A lesson set on with a whipping is best remembered.—*Trapp.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH—Verses 24—35.

A SPECIAL SIN AND ITS PENALTIES FROM WHICH HE WHO KEEPS GOD'S LAW WILL BE KEPT.

I. From the huntress of souls. The animals of tropical jungles are compelled at intervals to forsake their safe retreats and come down to the brink of the river to quench their thirst. This necessity of their life involves them in danger. The instinct of the lion tells him that the antelope will be compelled, by the cravings of his nature, to come to the place of water, and therefore he lays in wait there to make him an easy prey. And the hunter, being fully aware of the same fact, crouches by the river-side and takes both the lion and his prey. Thus the natural bodily instincts are used as means by which the lives of the creatures are destroyed. The danger of which the young man is here warned arises out of the existence of a God-given and, therefore, lawful desire. The huntress of souls—as she is well named in verse 25—takes advantage of this lawful propensity and uses it as a means of the destruction of her victim. She knows that the young man, from the strength of his lawful desires, is, comparatively, an easy prey to the seducer, hence it is to him that she points her weapons. These weapons are: 1. *Flattery.* Fair words cost nothing. A score of base coin can be purchased for a copper, and are worth exchanging for one golden piece. The dogs lick the hand of the vendor of their meat, but this not out of any affection for him. They do not use their tongue out of any affection for *him*, but for *what he has.* So the adulteress, and so indeed all flatterers. They give the base coin only in the hope of getting gold in return—fair words for real benefits. They will lick the back of the hand in order to get something out of the palm. 2. *Her beauty.* The beauty of a woman is a powerful weapon, and, if rightly used, may be a means of greatly blessing others. But, alas, how often has it been debased to the vilest purposes, how many times have strong men been cast down by it, how many sons of the mighty has it brought low, even to the dust! The keeping in the heart of the law of God's word will teach the young man to estimate flattering words and mere external beauty at their real worth.

II. From the inevitable marks left upon both constitution and character by unlawful intercourse (vers. 27, 28). A man's raiment cannot be kindled into a flame without its retaining the marks after the fire has been extinguished. The scar of the burn will remain even after the wound is healed. So those who yield to the solicitations of the "strange woman" will find that soul and body will suffer from the effects of the sin long after the action has been committed.

III. From the deserved contempt of all the pure-minded (vers. 30, 31). It is a sin compared with which a theft is a light crime in the eyes of God, and therefore in the eyes of the best men. A thief may make restitution for his crime, but this sin cannot be atoned for by an after act. Gold may be repaid fourfold, but dishonour brought upon a husband by a wife's infidelity is a blot which cannot be effaced. The loss of the poor man's ewe-lamb might be atoned for, but David could not have restored to Uriah an innocent wife. (See 2 Sam. xii. 1-6). Hence the much heavier punishment under the Mosaic law for adultery than for theft. (See Exod. xxii. 1-4; Lev. xx. 10).

IV. From the fury of a lawful jealousy (ver. 34). Where there is true love there is a jealousy for the honour and reputation of the object loved. The man who is not jealous for the honour of his country is not a patriot. The father who is not jealous for the reputation of his family is not worthy of the name. And so the husband who is not jealous of his own and his wife's honour is a stranger to real love. There is a right and lawful jealousy. God calls Himself "a jealous God" (Exod. xx. 5). There are rights which belong to

Him alone, and He is justly displeased if they are given to any other being. Paul tells the Corinthian Church that he was "jealous over them with a godly jealousy" (2 Cor. xi. 2). He was their Father in Christ, and he felt that his honour as well as theirs was staked upon their living holy lives. And the righteous jealousy of the injured husband spoken of in the text is to be dreaded, because *it is righteous*—because it has just grounds for its existence, and because God will see to it that the wrong is avenged.

ILLUSTRATION OF VERSE 25.

This probably refers to the care with which women in the East paint their eyelids, in a great measure in order to captivate the men, who, from the manner in which they are muffled up, can often see no more of their persons than their eyes—which may, indeed, be one reason why so much pains are taken to set them off.

ILLUSTRATION OF VERSE 28.

This image would hardly occur to us, who never go barefoot, and are never or rarely exposed to any liability of *treading* upon burning coals. If we desired to express the same sentiment by a similar image, we should say, "Can one *handle* hot coals and not be burned?" But in the East travelling parties kindle fires in the open air for cooking and for warmth, and a passenger might easily burn his naked foot by treading inadvertently upon the hot but not glowing place of one of these recently quitted fires.—*Kitto.*

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Verse 24. Bound and kept in the heart as a friend, that law will prevail to keep the youth "from the strange woman." Observing a great swelling wave rolling forward to devour him, this faithful teacher imparts to the young voyager on life's troubled sea a principle which will bear him buoyant over it. A slender vessel floats alone upon the ocean, contending with the storm. A huge wave approaches, towering high above her hull. All depends upon how the ship shall take it. If she go under it she will never rise again: if she is so trimmed that her bows rise with the first approaches, she springs lightly over it, and gets no harm. The threatening billow passes beneath her, and breaks with a growl behind her, but the ship is safe. The law and love of the Lord, taught by his mother in childhood, and maintaining its place yet as the friend of his bosom and the ruler of his conscience, will give the youth a spring upward proportionate to the magnitude of the temptation coming on.—*Arnot.*

That which is said of Jael is true of the strange woman. She brought forth soft words, but a hard nail; in her mouth was a gentle hammer, but in her hand a heavy one. Open force is more easily resisted, but that which is hid in the beginning with fair words in the end stingeth most cruelly.—*Jermin.*

"*Flattery.*" That constitutes the risk. If impenitence would tell the truth, or even if we would allow the truth, there would be no danger. But hers is an alien tongue in this,—that though we deliberately admit it is a cheat, we accept its flattery.—*Miller.*

Verse 26. A famine of bread followeth the gluttony of lust, and it is life itself that is destroyed by it. He that is thus brought to a morsel of bread on earth, shall be brought to a drop of water in hell, if repentance do not in time beg a gracious pardon for him. That man's life is precious, the devil himself affirmeth, who seeketh to make it vile; he saith, who laboureth to destroy it, that "Skin for skin, all that a man hath will he give for his life" (Job ii. 4). How unworthy

valuers are they therefore of their own lives who esteem them less than the devil does, and who make them a prey to the adulteress, who as a lion hunteth after them.—*Jermin.*

Nothing is so bewitching as womanly enchantment. Nothing *in esse*, when it is base, is so contemptible. Nothing sweeps a man with such a perfect storm of influence. Nothing leaves him so perfectly defrauded and unpaid.—*Miller.*

Verses 27 and 28. "*Fire*" is a favourite emblem for wickedness. "Wickedness burneth as the fire" (Isa. ix. 18, see also Isa. lxv. 5). The (1) *pain*, the (2) *waste*, the (3), *growth*, and (4) the *small beginnings* of sin are all instanced in the fire. "Bosom." Here is just where sin is taken. Sin is not only the inward but the outward enemy, not only the coals in our bosom but the coals (or fierce tempting occasions) in the midst of which we walk.—*Miller.*

Sin and punishment are linked together by a chain of adamant. "The fire of lust kindles the fire of hell," says Henry. He cannot afterwards plead the strength of the temptation. Why did he not avoid it? Who that knows how much tinder he carries about with him would wilfully light-up the sparks?—*Bridges.*

Perhaps such an one may think to tread upon coals, thereby to tread them out, but he will first tread the fire into his own feet: perhaps such an one may think to walk in the ways of lust, thereby to walk them out, but he will first walk out the strength of his body and means. The affections are the feet of man's soul, and if they walk upon this fire they will be inflamed suddenly.—*Jermin.*

Verse 29. Though the plea of a sleepy conscience be *not guilty*, the sentence of God is, *not innocent*. It was for this wickedness that God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah; it was for it He brought the deluge of waters upon the world, and as it is observed, for no other sin do we read, that God is said to have repented to have made man, but for this.—*Jermin.*

Verse 30. Compared with an adulterer, a thief is not treated with so much ignominy. The laws of modern society have reversed the maxims of Solomon; and, to the dishonour of Christian nations, an adulterer, who steals what is most precious to a man, and what is irretrievable, is treated by the law with more lenity than a thief, who robs him of what is comparatively of little value and may be easily replaced.—*Wordsworth.*

Adultery is worse than theft. It is before us in the commandments as the greater sin (Exod. xx. 14, 15). 1. It is a far greater theft. 2. The provocation to theft is greater. Want drives the one, wantonness draws the other. One may preserve his bodily life by his sin, the other destroys it. Hunger is a great provocation to evil (ch. xxx. 9). Necessity is a sore weapon.—*Francis Taylor.*

Verse 33. The three things here mentioned may be referred to three causes. The wound to the devil, the enemy of mankind, the dishonour to God, dishonoured by the adulterer, the reproach to sin, which is the true object of reproach. The devil woundeth out of malice, God dishonoureth in justice, sin reproacheth by nature; and where nature hath fastened the reproach or stain it is not any art that can take it out or wipe it away. He that giveth this good counsel was himself an example of what he writeth. As Jerome saith, Solomon, the sun of men, the treasure of God's delights, the peculiar house of wisdom, blurred with the thick ink of dishonour, lost the light of his soul, the glory of his house, the sweet perfume of his name, by the love of a woman.—*Jermin.*

What an indelible blot is the matter of Uriah upon David still.—*Trapp.*

Verse 34. Howbeit he may not kill the adulterer, but if no law will relieve a man, yet let him know that he shall do himself no disservice by making God his chancellor.—*Trapp.*

CHAPTER VII.

2. Apple of the eye, the "pupil," literally the "little man" of the eye, referring to the reflected image of a man seen in that organ. **3. Bind them** "refers to rings with large signets, upon which maxims were inscribed" *(Stuart)*. **4. Kinswoman**, rather, "an acquaintance, a familiar friend." **7 Simple**, "inexperienced." **8. Went**, "moved leisurely, sauntered." **9. In the black and dark night**, literally, "in the apple," or "pupil" of the night. **10.** Literally, "a woman, the attire of a harlot," with no connecting word between, as though the woman were nothing but such a dress. **Subtil**, "guarded." Wordsworth renders "her heart is like a walled fortress." **11. Stubborn**, rather "boisterous, ungovernable." **14.** The offerings here named are those of thanksgiving for blessings received. Of such offering, which, in accordance with the law (Lev. vii. 16), must be eaten by the second day, the guests partook, so that a rich feast is here offered to the young man under the garb of religious usage. **16. With carved works**, rather, "variegated coverlets of Egyptian linen." **20. The purse, etc.**, indicating long delay; **the day appointed**, rather, "the day of the full moon." **22. Straightway.** "The Hebrew implies that he had at first hesitated, until the fear of his to take the decisive step was overcome by evil appetite, and he now, with passionate promptness, formed the vile purpose and executed it at once, to cut off all further reflection. Here is evidently a stroke in the picture of the profoundest psychological truth" *(Lange's Commentary)*. The latter clause of the verse is literally, "and as fetters for the punishment of a fool." It has been variously rendered. Many expositors read, "As the obstinate fool is suddenly caught and held fast by a trap lying in a forbidden path, so has the deceitful power of the adulteress caught the young man." **23.** "The **liver** stands here as representative of the vitals in general as in Lam. ii. 11, as in some instances the heart, or again, the reins" (Psa. xvi. 7; lxxiii. 21, etc.). According to Delitzsch, the liver is here made prominent as the seat of sensual desire. "Since the ancient Greeks, Arabians, and Persians, in fact, connected this idea with the organ under consideration, this view may be received as probably correct" *(Lange's Commentary)*. **Knoweth not that it is for his life**, *i. e.* "that his life is at stake."

NOTE ON THE SIGNIFICATION OF THE "STRANGE WOMAN" OF THIS CHAPTER, AND OF MANY KINDRED PASSAGES IN THE BOOK.—Although most modern commentators attach no other meaning to this woman than that which would occur to the general reader, there are some who, as will be seen from the comments, agree with most of the early expositors in attaching to the representation an ideal meaning also. Wordsworth, referring to the original meaning of the word *mashal*, or proverb (see preface), says, "By a consideration of the proper meaning of this word *mashal*, used in the title of this book, and by reflecting on the use made of it in the Gospels, we are led to recognise in the Proverbs or Parables of Solomon not only moral apothegms for practical use in daily life, but to ponder deeply upon them as having also a typical character and inner spiritual significance concerning heavenly doctrines of supernatural truth, and as preparing the way for the evangelical teaching of the Divine Solomon, Jesus Christ, in parables on the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven." Following out this principle of interpretation, he continues, "As in Solomon's delineation of Wisdom we recognised Christ, so in the portraiture of the "strange woman," who is set in striking contrast to Wisdom in this book, we must learn to see something more than at first meets the eye. Doubtless we must hold fast the literal interpretation, and must strenuously contend for it; . . . . but in the gaudy and garish attire and alluring cozenage of the strange woman we may see a representation of the seductive arts with which the teachers of unsound doctrine, repugnant to the truth of Christ, endeavour to charm, captivate, and ensnare unwary souls, and to steal them away from Him. There is a harlotry of the intellect—there is an adultery of the soul, and this harlotry and adultery are not less dangerous and deadly than the grossest sins and foulest abominations. Indeed they are more perilous, because they present themselves in a more specious and attractive form." Hengstenberg, commenting on Eccles. vii. 26, says, "There are strong grounds for thinking that the woman of the Proverbs is the personification of heathenish folly, putting on the airs of wisdom and penetrating into the territory of the Israelites. . . . . The key to Prov. ii. 16, 17, is Jeremiah iii. 4—20. In Prov. v. the evil woman must needs be regarded as an ideal person, because of the opposition in which she is set to the *good* woman, Wisdom. If Wisdom in chap. vii. 4, 5, is an ideal person, her opponent must be also. . . . . In chap. ix. again, the evil woman is put in contrast with Wisdom; . . . . the explanation is, in fact, plainly given in verse 13. Last of all, in chap. xxii. 14, we read, "The mouth of the foreigner is a deep pit," etc. That the writer here treats of false doctrine is clear from the mention of the mouth. Nahum iii. 4, presents an analogous instance of such a personification. . . . . To the woman here, corresponds in Rev. ii. 20: "the woman Jezebel," a symbolical person. Miller, as will be seen in the suggestive comments on chap. ii. 16, looks upon this woman as an emblem of *impenitence*.

The following comment is by Professor Plumptre: "The strange woman," the "stranger," may mean simply the adulteress, as the "strange gods" the "strangers" (Deut. xxxii. 16; Jer. iii. 13), are those to whom Israel, forsaking her true husband, offered an adulterous worship. But in both cases there is implied also some idea of a foreign origin, as of one who by birth is

outside the covenant of Israel. In the second word used, this meaning is still stronger. It is the word used of the strange wives of Solomon (1 Kings xi. 1—8), and of those of the Jews who returned from Babylon (Ezra x.), of Ruth, as a Moabitess (Ruth ii. 10), of heathen invaders (Isa. ii. 6). Whatever form the sin here referred to had assumed before the monarchy (and the Book of Judges testifies to its frequency), the intercourse with Phœnicians and other nations under Solomon had a strong tendency to increase it. The king's example would naturally be followed, and it probably became a fashion to have foreign wives and concubines. At first it would seem this was accompanied by some show of proselytism. The women made a profession of conformity to the religion of their masters. But the old leaven breaks out. They sin and "forget the covenant of their God." The worship of other gods, a worship in itself sensual and ending in the foulest sin, leads the way to a life of harlotry. Other causes may have led to the same result. The stringent laws of the Mosaic code may have deterred the women of Israel from that sin, and led to a higher standard of purity than prevailed among other nations. Lidonian and Tyrian women came, like the Asiatic hetaeræ at Athens, at once with greater importunity and with new arts and fascinations to which the home-born were strangers.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH—Verses **1—4.**

THE SOURCE OF TRUE LIFE, ETC.

I. The true life of man depends upon his relation to the Word of God. "Keep my commandments, and live" (verse 2). The life which is given to man upon his entrance into this world is not life in its highest sense, but an existence in which he is to obtain life. "It is not all of life to live." Those who do not keep God's commandments are living existences, but in the moral signification of the word they are *dead*. It was said by the highest authority—by the Son of God Himself—that "it had been good for Judas Iscariot if he had not been born" (Matt. xxvi. 24). Existence is not a blessing, oftentimes a curse, unless a man is "born again," "not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John i. 13). Christ taught the same truth when He said, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God" (Luke iv. 4). Man is not flesh and blood only, he has not a mere animal existence, but moral capabilities and needs, which must be nourished by the thoughts of God. If this is not done, he has no life worth the name.

II. The relation that a man should have to the Word of God is like that which a rich man has to his banked money. "Lay up my commandments with thee." The best place for money which the merchant wishes to use constantly is a safe bank, from which he can draw out at any time of need. So the Word of God must be laid up in the mind ready for constant use. The Word of God must "dwell in us" (Col. iii. 16). It must be stored up to furnish us with encouragement and admonition in the unceasing warfare with temptation which we are called upon to wage. It must be at hand at the moment of need.

III. It is to be guarded with the same care as the eye is guarded by the eyelid. "As the apple of thine eye." The eye is carefully protected by nature because it is the organ of a most precious sense—of a sense of which we stand in the greatest need—without which we walk through the world in darkness. The revelation of God in the Holy Scriptures is the only light which enlightens us amid the darkness of ignorance and mystery by which we are surrounded. Without it all our future would be darkness indeed. Hence its preciousness, and hence the value we ought to set upon it.

IV. It is to hold to us a relation like that of a pure, and tender, and beloved sister. "Say unto Wisdom, Thou art my sister." The Word of God is the highest wisdom. The relationship of brother and sister, where it is what God intended it to be, is a very tender and pure relationship, involving willingness to undergo self-denial for the sake of her who is loved, to listen to her advice, to seek her welfare. In this light we must regard the wisdom of God as revealed in the word of God if existence is to become *life* to us. We must exercise self-denial for her sake. "I prevented the dawning of the morning, and cried: I hoped in Thy word" (Psa. cxix. 147).

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Verse 2. As God would have us keep His law as the apple of our eye, so He keeps His people (Deut. xxxii. 10), in answer to their prayer, as the apple of His eye (Zech. ii. 8). We guard the eye as our most precious and tender member from hurt, and prize it most dearly. As we guard the pupil of the eye from the least mote, which is sufficient to hurt it, so God's law is so tender and holy a thing that the least violation of it in thought, word, or deed, is sin; and we are so to keep the law as to avoid any violation of it. The law resembles the pupil of the eye also in its being spiritually the organ of light, without which we should be in utter darkness.—*Fausset.*

The instruction of the Word is the same to the soul which the eye is to the body. For as the body without the sight of the eyes runneth upon many things that hurt it, and falleth at every little stumbling-block, so the soul most fearfully runneth into sins if it want the light and direction of the Word.—*Muffet.*

Men are off and on in their promises: they are also slow and slack in their performances. But it is otherwise here: the very "entrance of Thy Word giveth light" (Psa. cxix. 130), and the very onset of obedience giveth life. It is but "*Hear*, and your soul shall live" (Isa. lv. 3). Sin is homogeneous, all of a kind, though not all of the same degree. As the least pebble is a stone as well as the hugest rock, and as the drop of a bucket is water as well as the main ocean, hence the least sins are in Scripture reproached by the names of the greatest. Malice is called manslaughter, lust, adultery, etc. Concupiscence is condemned by the law; even the first motions of sin, though they never come to consent (Rom. vii. 7). Inward bleeding may kill a man. The law of God is spiritual, though we be carnal. And as the sunshine shows us atoms and motes that till then we discerned not, so doth the law discover and censure smallest failings. It must therefore be kept curiously, even "as the apple of the eye," that cannot be touched, but will be distempered. Careful we must be, even in the punctilios of duty. Men will not lightly lose the least ends of gold.—*Trapp.*

In some bodies, as trees, etc., there is life without sense, which are things animated, but not so much with a soul as with a kind of animation; even as the wicked have some kind of knowledge from grace, but are not animated by it. Or rather the wicked do not live, indeed, for life consisteth in action, and how can he be said truly to live whose words are dead? But keep God's commandments, and live indeed, live cheerfully with the comfort of this life, which makes life to be life; live happily in the life of glory hereafter, which is the end for which this life is lent us.—*Jermin.*

Verse 4. Since, O youth, thou delightest in the intimacy of fair maidens, lo! here is by far the loveliest one, Wisdom.—*Cartwright.*

Wisdom has been represented as a wife, and here she is called a sister. As Didymus says (in *Catenâ*, p. 104), "Wisdom is called a mother, a sister, and a wife." She is a mother, because, through her, we are children of Christ; she is a wife, because, by union with her, we ourselves become parents of that which is good; she is our sister, because our love to her is chaste and holy, and because she, as well as ourselves, is the offspring of God. Such is the love of Christ, who is the true Wisdom, and who is all in all to the soul. Compare His own words, applied to every faithful and obedient soul: "The same is my brother, and my sister, and mother" (Mark iii. 35). "Do thou love the true faith with sisterly love, it shall keep thee from the impure love of the strange women of false doctrine" (Bede).—*Wordsworth.*

Holiness is positive. Sin is negative. The one is to love God, and also our neighbour. The other is not to love God or our neighbour. The one shows

itself in a positive delight in the abstract holiness; the other not in a positive delight in the opposite, viz., in an abstract sin, but a delight in women, a delight in money, a delight in praise, a delight in everything except moral purity, and therefore a delight in things which are innocent when in limits, and that are only guilty when the soul is let in upon them without curb of superior affection. If a man calls Wisdom his kinswoman, then he may love wine or love without moral danger.—*Miller.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 6—27.

A Picture Drawn from Life.

The woman depicted here has been before us twice before. (See on chap. ii. 16-19 and vi. 24). We will therefore confine ourselves in this chapter to the picture of her dupe. He fully justifies his right to the title here given to him, viz., "a young man void of understanding."

I. Because he did not wait for temptation to seek him, but went where he knew it would meet him Those who carry gunpowder upon their persons ought never to go into a blacksmith's forge, ought never even to approach the door lest some sparks fall upon them. How much more foolish is he who, knowing that there is a tendency to sin within him, seeks out the place where the spark will be fanned into a flame. This young man is found "near the corner" of the house of the temptress, "he went the way to her house."

II. He goes to ruin with his eyes wide open. The woman's character is plainly written upon her dress and upon her face. There is no pretence at disguise. She boasts of her infidelity to her husband. Yet he yields to her invitation; yet he believes her professions of attachment to himself. The most silly fish that swims will not bite if the steel hook gleams through the bait, but this simpleton takes the hook without any bait. The ox resists when he feels that he is being driven to death, but this fool goes deliberately to the house of death. He walks into the snare which he knows has been the death of myriads of his fellow creatures. The remedy for this folly is found in vers. 1—4.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Verses 6-27. From the earlier and copious warnings against adultery the one now before us is distinguished by the fact, that while chapter v. contrasted the blessings of conjugal fidelity and chaste marital love with unregulated sexual indulgence, and chapter vi. 20-35 particularly urged a contending against the inner roots and germs of the sin of unchastity, our passage dwells with special fulness upon the temptations from without to the transgression of the sixth commandment. It also sets forth the folly and the ruinous consequences of yielding to such temptations, by presenting an instructive living example . . . Aside from the fact that it is nocturnal rambling that delivers the thoughtless idle youth into the hands of temptation (verse 9), and aside from the other significant feature that after the first brief and feeble opposition, he throws himself suddenly and with the full energy of passion into his self-sought ruin (verse 22, comp. James i. 15), we have to notice here chiefly the important part played by the luxurious and savoury feast of the adulteress, as a co-operating factor in the allurement of the self-indulgent youth (verse 14 seq.). It is surely not a feature purely incidental, without deeper significance or design, that this meal is referred to as preceding the central or chief sin; for, that the tickling of the palate with stimulating meats and drinks prepares the way for lust is an old and universal

observation (comp. Exod. xxxii. 6, 1 Cor. x. 17, as also similar passages from the classical authors).—*Lange's Commentary.*

Apart from the external blandishments which are portrayed in this passage, there belongs to them a power of internal deception the most fallacious and insinuating—and this not merely because of their strength, and of their fitness to engross the whole man when once they take possession of him, and so to shut out all reflection and seriousness—those counteractives to evil passions; but because of their alliance with, and the affinity which they bear to, the kindly and benevolent and good feelings of our nature. As the poet says—himself a wild and wayward, and most dangerously seductive writer—the transition is a most natural one, from "loving much to loving wrong." Let all such affections be sedulously kept at bay, and the occasions of them shunned and fled from, rather than hazarded and tampered with. Let them never be wilfully encountered, or presumptuously braved and bid defiance to, lest the victory be theirs; and no sooner do they win the heart than they war against the soul.—*Chalmers.*

Verse 5. This woman not only represents the harlot and the adulteress literally, but is also a figure of whatever seduces the soul from God, whether in morals or religion, and whether in doctrine and practice, or in religious worship.—*Wordsworth.*

Strange, indeed, if she alienate us from the very God that made her, and stir the jealousy of the very Being that gives us our power to love her. (Hosea ii. 8).—*Miller.*

Verse 6. God is ever at His window, His casement is always open to see what thou dost.—*Jermin.*

Verse 8. Circumstances which give an occasion to sin are to be noticed and avoided. They who love danger fall into it. The youth (as verse 21 shows) did not go with the intention of defiling himself with the "strange woman," but to flatter his own vanity by seeing and talking with her, and hearing her flatteries. It is madness to play with Satan's edged tools.—*Faussett.*

The beginning of the sad end. The loitering evening walk, the unseasonable hour (Job xxiv. 15; Rom. xiii. 12, 13); the vacant mind. "The house was empty," and therefore ready for the reception of the tempter (Matt. xii. 44, 45), and soon altogether in his possession. How valuable are self-discipline, self-control, constant employment, active energy of pursuit, as preservatives under the Divine blessing from fearful danger.—*Bridges.*

Verses 7–9. The first character appears on the scene, young, "simple" in the bad sense of the word; *open* to all impressions of evil, empty-headed and empty-hearted; lounging near the place of ill-repute, not as yet deliberately purposing to sin, but placing himself in the way of it; wandering idly to see one of whose beauty he had heard, and this at a time when the pure in heart would seek their home. It is impossible not to see a certain symbolic meaning in this picture of the gathering gloom. Night is falling over the young man's life as the shadows deepen.—*Plumptre.*

Verse 9. He thought to obscure himself, but Solomon saw him; how much more God, before whom night will convert itself into noon, and silence prove a speaking evidence. Foolish men think to hide themselves from God, by hiding God from themselves.—*Trapp.*

Verse 10. A careless sinner shall not need to go far to *meet* with temptation. The first woman met with it almost as soon as she was made, and who meets not everywhere with the woman Temptation?—*Jermin.*

Verse 14. Though I indulge in amours, do not think I am averse to the worship of God; nay, I offer

liberally to Him: He is now therefore appeased, and will not mind venial offences.—*Cartwright.*

It is of course possible that the worship of Israel had so degenerated as to lose for the popular conscience all religious significance; but the hypothesis stated above (see note at the beginning of chapter), affords a simpler explanation. She who speaks is a foreigner who, under a show of conformity to the religion of Israel, still retains her old notions, and a feast-day is nothing to her but a time of self-indulgence, which she may invite another to share with her. If we assume, as probable, that these harlots of Jerusalem were mainly of Phœnician origin, the connection of their worship with their sin would be but the continuation of their original *cultus.*—*Plumptre.*

An awful portraiture of the mystery of iniquity. It is applicable also to corrupt churches, especially to the spiritual harlot described by St. John in the Apocalypse. She professes zeal for God's house and service, while she is offending Him by heretical doctrine, and insulting Him by the fascinations of idolatrous worship, with which she beguiles unwary souls to commit spiritual fornication with her. (See Rev. xvii. 1-5; xviii. 9). As Bede says, following in the steps of Basil and others: All the description which is here given is true, in a literal sense, of the meretricious allurements of an adulteress; but it is to be interpreted also spiritually. False doctrine tricks herself out with the embellishments of worldly rhetoric and spurious philosophy, and is ever lurking at the corners of the streets, to allure and deceive the simple, and to caress them with her embraces; and she makes religious professions. She has her couch adorned with heathen embroidery, and yet sprinkled with the odours of spiritual virtues; but Christ says of her in the Apocalypse, "I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds" (Rev. ii. 22).—*Wordsworth.*

The immoral devotionist. 1. The absurd conduct of those who indulge in immorality, and think to compound with God for so doing, by paying Him outward forms of worship. 2. All external observances vain and useless unless they are accompanied with purity of heart, and real goodness of life. True religion is an end, and all external observances are only means leading to that end. (See Micah. vi. 5). Agreeably to this St. Paul assures us that the end of the Christian revelation is to teach men to "live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world" (Titus ii. 12). And Christ assures us that no ceremonious method of atonement without practical goodness will entitle us to the rewards of Christianity (Matt. vii. 21). All duties enjoined by God can be enjoined by Him only for the good they do us. "Can a man be profitable unto God, as he that is wise is profitable to himself?" (Job. xxii. 2). And in which way can we possibly conceive how an immoral man can reap any benefit from the mere forms and ceremonies of religion. Is there any reason to think that God will accept this religious flattery instead of purity of life? No, rather it is an aggravation of his crimes. (See Isa. i. 11.)—*N. Ball.*

Verse 15. O how diligent is wickedness, thinking that thing never done soon enough which is too soon done at any time! O how diligent a helper is Satan of wickedness, administering all opportunities for it! And, therefore, as the harlot seeketh diligently, so she findeth readily. Which is the shame of religion in many that profess it, and who are so slow in the performance of religious duties, as if they were both servants and masters, and had the commandments of God at their own command, to do them at their pleasure; which is a great reason that they are so ill observed. But if they would use their own diligence, they should find God much more diligent to give a blessing to it.—*Jermin.*

Verse 16. Her coverings of tapestry could not cover her naughtiness, her

carved work could not embellish her own deformed work, her white Egyptian linen could not make white her black Egyptian soul.—*Jermin.*

Verse 17. This might have minded the young man that he was going to his grave, for the bodies of the dead were so perfumed. Such a meditation would much have rebated his edge—cooled his courage.—*Trapp.*

Verse 18. But what if death draw the curtains, and look in the while? If death do not, yet guilt will.—*Trapp.*

Verse 19. Instead of saying, "*My* husband," she contemptuously calls him "*the* goodman," as though he were unconnected with her.—*Fausset.*

Man may not be at home, but God is always at home, whose house is the world: man may be gone a far journey, but God's journey is at once to be everywhere; His farthest off, to be present always. . . . She talketh that the goodman was not at home, but the good woman was not at home rather; she saith that her husband was gone a far journey, but she herself was gone much farther from her duty. If she had been at home, to have heard her conscience the home reprover of wickedness, the goodman, though not at home, had not been so much wronged; if she had not gone far from her covenant, her husband, though gone far, had still been near and present in her heart.—*Jermin.*

Our hearts must be guarded against the admission of sin by stronger motives than the fear of detection and disgrace, for artful solicitors to evil will easily baffle such restraints as these. Joseph might have expected his master's favour by complying with the wishes of his mistress, but the motive that induced him to decline her company was irresistible,—"How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?"—*Lawson.*

Verse 22. He goeth to the slaughter when he thinketh he goeth to the pasture; or as those oxen brought forth by Jupiter's priests, with garlands unto the gates, but it was for a slain sacrifice (Acts xiv. 13).—*Trapp.*

The butcher's yard would show the meaning of this first similitude. In every sort of way the ox may be coaxed, or, in turn, may be desperately beaten, and apparently to no purpose. But though he may stand, ox-like, like a rock, yet the experienced herdman knows that he will suddenly start in. This is his nature. One inch may cost a hurricane of blows; but at a dash, as the butcher expects, he will suddenly rush in to his doom.—*Miller.*

Verse 25. Cut off the beginnings of desire. The first trickling of the crevasse is the manageable, and, therefore, more culpable, period of the difficulty.—*Miller.*

Verse 26. As Solomon himself subsequently was (Neh. xiii. 26). So Samson and David previously. It is better to learn by the awful example of others than by our own suffering. Experience keeps a dear school, but fools will learn in no other.—*Fausset.*

The house of the harlot had been compared before to the grave, to the world of the dead; now it is likened to a battle-field strewn with the corpses of armed men. The word speaks rather of the multitude than of the individual strength of those who have perished.—*Plumptre.*

In a figurative sense, some of the greatest teachers of Christendom have been seduced by the allurements of heresy, and have been cast down from their place in the firmament of the Church, like stars falling from heaven.—*Wordsworth.*

The valour of men hath oft been slaved by the wiles of a woman. Witness many of your greatest martialists, who conquered countries, and were vanquished of vices. The Persian kings commanded the whole world, and were commanded by their concubines.—*Trapp.*

The secret thought that one can saunter toward her house (verse 8), and

at any time turn back, is cruelly met by most discouraging examples. The whole passage is the more impressive, if we consider it as a warning against confidence in strength, and particularly grand, if we mark the second clause . . . All men are strong, and strong in the most substantial sense. All men, saved, are princes (Rev. i. 6); and they are offered the second place in God's kingdom (Isa. lxi. 7). All men are bone of Christ's bone; all men are born with a birthright to be kings and priests, if they choose to be, and brothers of Emmanuel.—*Miller.*

CHAPTER VIII.

CRITICAL NOTES.—**Places of the paths** "in the midst of the highways." "These ways are roads, solitary paths, not streets in the city, and the delineation proceeds in such an order as to exhibit Wisdom; first, in verse 2, as a preacher in the open country, in grove and field, on mountains and plains, and then in verse 3, to describe her public harangues in the cities, and in the tumult of the multitudes" *(Zöckler).* **3. At the entrance of its doors,** *i.e.*, "standing on the further side of the gateway" *(Zöckler)* "at the entrance of the avenues" *(Stuart).* **4.** The Hebrew words for men are different in the two clauses, "the first signifies men of high position, the second men of the common sort" (Psa. xlix. 2.) *(Fausset).* **5. Wisdom.** This is a different word from the one used in verse 1, and may be translated "subtilty," or "prudence," and though it is here used in a good sense, may, when the context requires it, be translated "artful cunning." **6. Excellent,** literally "princely," generally rendered "plain," "evident," "obvious." **7. Mouth,** lit. "palate." **Speak,** literally, "meditate;" the word originally meant "mutter," and grew to mean "meditate," because what a man meditates deeply he generally mutters about *(Miller).* **8. Froward,** literally, "distorted," or "crooked." **9.** "Right to the man of understanding, and plain to them that have attained knowledge" *(Zöckler).* "To the men of understanding they are all to the point" *(Delitzsch).* **11. Rubies,** "pearls." **12. Dwell with** or "inhabit." **Witty inventions.** "skilful plans" *(Stuart),* "sagacious counsels" *(Zöckler)* **14. Sound wisdom,** the same word as in chap. ii. 7 (see note there). Stuart reads here, "As for me, my might is understanding;" Delitzsch, "Mine is counsel and promotion." **17. Early,** *i.e.*, "earnestly" (see on ch. i. 28). **18. Durable.** Zöckler thinks this rather signifies "growing." **21 Inherit substance,** "abundance." **22. Jehovah possessed me.** The signification of this verb has been the subject of much discussion; ancient expositors, believing Wisdom here to be the eternal Son of God, deemed it necessary to reject the translation of the Septuagint, etc., who rendered it *created,* as the text then became an argument with Arians against the eternal co-existence of the Son. But most modern commentators, whatever view they take of the signification of "Wisdom," agree in rejecting the reading of the authorised version. The majority render it, "created;" Delitzsch reads, "brought me forth;" Wordsworth and Miller, "got possession of," or, "acquired." Wordsworth says, "The word occurs about eighty times in the Old Testament, and in only four places beside the present is it translated 'possess;' viz., Gen. xiv. 19-22; Psa. cxxxix. 13; Jer. xxxii. 15; Zech. xi, 5; in the last two it may well have the sense of getting, and in the former of creating." **23. Set up,** Stuart, Miller, and early expositors render "anointed;" Delitzsch and Zöckler prefer the authorised rendering. **26. Earth, etc.,** "the land and the plains, or the beginning of the dust of the earth." **27. Set a compass, etc.,** "marked out a circle," *i.e.*, "when He fixed the vault of heaven, which rests on the face of the ocean." **30. As one brought up,** "as director of His work," or, "as a builder at His side." **36. Sinneth against,** "misseth," so Stuart, Delitzsch, and Miller.

NOTE ON THE PERSONIFICATION OF WISDOM.—There has been great discussion among expositors as to who, or what, is to be understood by this personification. Many modern and all ancient expositors consider that it refers exclusively to the Divine Word, the Eternal Son of God, others understand it as relating entirely to an attribute of the Divine nature. There is a middle view, which is thus put by Dr. John Harris in his sermon on verses 30-36: "Others, again reply that it refers exclusively to neither—but partly to that wisdom which begins in the fear of the Lord, partly to the Divine attribute of wisdom, and partly to the Son of God, the second person in the Godhead." We cannot do better than give the views of a few eminent expositors and writers. Delitzsch thus comments on verse 22: "Wisdom takes now a new departure in establishing her right to be heard and to be obeyed and loved by men. As the Divine King in Psa. ii. opposes to His adversaries the self-testimony: 'I will speak concerning a decree! Jehovah said unto me, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten Thee;' so Wisdom

here unfolds her Divine patent of nobility; she originates with God before all creatures, and is the object of God's love and joy, as she also has the object of her love and joy on God's earth, and especially among the sons of men. (See his translation of the verb in this verse—Critical Notes). 1. Wisdom is not God, but is God's; she has personal existence in the Logos of the New Testament, but is not herself the Logos; she is the world idea, which, once projected, is objective to God, not as a dead form, but as a living spiritual image; she is the archetype of the world, which originating from God, stands before God, the world of the idea which forms the medium between the Godhead and the world of actual existence, the communicated spiritual power in the origination and the completion of the world as God designed it to be. This wisdom the poet here personifies; he does not speak of the personal Logos, but the further progress of the revelation points to her actual personification in the Logos. And since to her the poet attributes an existence preceding the creation of the world, he thereby declares her to be eternal, for to be before the world is to be before time. For if he places her at the head of the creatures, as the first of them, so therewith he does not seek to make her a creature of this world having its commencement in time; he connects her origination with the origination of the creature only on this account, because that *à priori* refers and tends to the latter; the power which was before heaven and earth were, and which operated at the creation of the earth and of the heavens, cannot certainly fall under the category of the creatures around and above us." Wordsworth, in accordance with the principle of interpretation set forth in the note at the beginning of chapter vii. says, "We should be taking a very low, unworthy, and inadequate view of the present and following magnificent and sublime chapters. . . . If we did not behold Him who is essential wisdom, the co-eternal Son of God, and recognise here a representation of His attributes and prerogative." The arguments in favour of this view are thus summed up by Fausset: "Wisdom is here personal Wisdom—the Son of God. For many personal predicates are attributed to Him: thus, *subsistence by or with God*, in verse 30; just as John i. 1 saith, 'The Word was with God,' which cannot be said of a mere attribute. Moreover, the mode of subsistence imparted is *generation*, verse 22, 24, 25 (see CRITICAL NOTES). In verse 22 God is said to have *possessed* or *acquired* wisdom, not by *creation* (Psa. civ. 24), nor by adoption, as Deut. xxxii, 6, Psa. lxxiv. 2, but by *generation*. The same verb is used by Eve of her firstborn (Gen. iv. 1). Moreover, other attributes are assigned to Wisdom, as if she were not an attribute but a person—'counsel,' 'strength,' etc. Also, she has the feelings of a person (verse 17): 'I love them that love me.' She does the acts of a person. She enables kings to rule, and invests them with authority (verses 15, 16). She takes part in creation, as one brought up, or *nursed*, in the bosom of the Father, as the only-begotten of His love (John i. 18). She cries aloud as a person (verses 1-4), and her 'lips' and 'mouth' are mentioned (verses 6, 7). She is the *delight* of the Father, and she in turn delights in men (verses 30, 31), answering to the rapturous delight into which the Father breaks forth concerning Messiah (Isa. xliii. 1; Matt. iii. 17, xvii. 5; Eph. i. 6). She builds a house, prepares a feast, and sends forth her maidens to invite the guests (ch. ix. 1-3). All which admirably applies to Messiah, who builds the Church, as His house, upon Himself the rock (Matt. xvi. 8, etc.), and invites all to the Gospel feast (Luke xiv. 16, etc.). He is Wisdom itself absolute, and as the Archetype, from Him wisdom imparted flows to others. As such, He invites us to learn wisdom from Him who is its source, 'counsel' and 'sound wisdom' (ver. 14), are in Him as attributes are in their subject, and as effects are in their cause. The parallel (ch. i. 20, 23,, 'I will pour out my spirit unto you' (see John vii. 38), confirms the personal view. The same truth is confirmed by the reproof (ch. i. 24), 'Because I have called,' etc., compared with Christ's own words (Matt. xi. 28, etc.) So Christ is called the Wisdom of God (Col. ii. 3). As Wisdom here saith 'I was set up,' or 'anointed from everlasting,' so the Father saith of Messiah, 'I have set' or 'anointed my king' etc. (Psa. ii. 6). As in verse 24, Wisdom is said to be "brought forth" or *begotten* by God before the world, and to have been *by Him in creating all things* (verses 27-30), so Messiah is called the 'Son of God,' and is said to have been *with God in the beginning*, and to have *made all things* (John i. 1-3) and to have been begotten before every creature (Col. i. 15-17); and His *goings forth* are said, in Mic. v. 2, *to have been from of old, from everlasting.*" The argument for the opposite view is thus stated by Dr. Wardlaw: "The objections to its meaning Christ, or the Word, are, to my mind, quite insuperable. For example: (1) The passage is not so applied in any part of the New Testament. I do not adduce this consideration as any *direct objection* to the interpretation in question. I mean no more than this, that from its not being so explained there, we are relieved from any *necessity* of so explaining it. Such necessity, then, being thus precluded, the direct objections may be allowed to have their full force. Observe, then (2), Wisdom here is a *female personage.* All along this is the case. Now, under such a view, the Scriptures nowhere else, in any of their figurative representations of 'the Christ,' ever thus describe or introduce Him. The application, on this account, appears to me exceedingly unnatural. (3) Wisdom does not appear intended as a *personal* designation, inasmuch as it is associated with various other terms, of synonymous, or, at least, of corresponding import (verse 1, chap. iii. 19, 20). Were it meant for a *personal* designation, like the *Logos* or *Word* in the beginning of John's Gospel, this would hardly have been admissible. (4) That the whole is a bold and striking *personification* of the attribute of Wisdom, as subsisting in the Deity, appears further from what

she is represented as saying in verse 12: 'I, Wisdom, dwell with prudence, and find out knowledge of witty inventions.' Here Wisdom is associated with prudence; and the import of the association is, that Wisdom directs to the best ends, and to the choice of the best means for their attainment; and *prudence*, or *discretion*, teaches to shun whatever might, in any way or degree, interfere with and impede, or mar their accomplishment. This is precisely what wisdom, as an attribute or quality, does. And it is worthy of remark, that this association of wisdom with prudence, is introduced by the Apostle as characterising the greatest of the Divine inventions and works—that of our redemption. Wisdom was associated with prudence in framing and perfecting that wonderful scheme (Ephes. i. 7, 8) (5). It is very true that there are many things here, especially in the latter part of the chapter—indeed through the whole—that are, in a very interesting and striking manner, applicable to the Divine Messiah. But this is no more than might have been anticipated, that things which are true of a *Divine attribute* should be susceptible of application to a *Divine person*." We quote, in conclusion, the remarks of Dr. Aiken, the American editor and translator of this portion of Lange's Commentary: "The error in our English exegetical and theological literature with respect to our passage has been, we think, the attempt to force upon it more of distinctness and precision in the revelation of the mysteries of the Divine Nature than is disclosed by a fair exegesis . . . If it be not unworthy of the Holy Spirit to employ a bold and graphic personification, many things in this chapter may be said of and by the personified Wisdom which these authors regard as triumphantly proving that we have here the pre-existent Christ, the Son of God. . . . We can, to say the least, go no farther than our author has done in discovering here the foreshadowings of the doctrine of the Logos. We are inclined to prefer the still more guarded statements, *e.g.*, of Dr. Pye Smith (*Scripture Testimony to the Messiah*), that this beautiful picture cannot be satisfactorily proved to be a designed description of the Saviour's person; or that of Dr. John Harris (Sermon on chap. viii. 30-36): "At all events, while, on the one hand, none can *demonstrate* that Christ is here directly intended, on the other, none can prove that He is not contemplated; and perhaps both will admit that, under certain conditions, language such as that in our text may be justifiably applied to Him. One of these conditions is, that the language be not employed *argumentatively*, or in *proof* of anything relating to Christ, but only for the purpose of illustration; and another is, that when so employed, it be only adduced to illustrate such views of the Son of God as are already established by such other parts of Scripture as are admitted by the parties addressed."

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1—3.

The Nature of Wisdom's Call.

Even if we reject the direct Messianic interpretation of this chapter, and understand Wisdom here to be only a poetical personification of an abstract attribute of God, it would be impossible, we think, for any minister of the New Testament to teach from it, and not find his way to Him who was "in the beginning with God" (John i. 2), to the Christ who is the "Wisdom of God" (1 Cor. i. 24), "in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. ii. 3). To say the least, the language is admirably adapted to set forth the Incarnate Son, the Saviour of the world. The introductory paragraph reveals *the intense desire of Wisdom to win disciples.*

I. From her taking the initiative. Wisdom addresses man first. When two persons have become estranged by the wrong-doing of one, he who is in the wrong will be slow to find his way back to the other to acknowledge his fault. Because he is in the wrong he may conclude, and in many cases would rightly conclude, that an advance on his side would be useless. But an advance from him who is in the right would be more likely to be successful; such a course of conduct on his part would carry with it a powerful magnetic force to draw the offender back, and would be a most convincing proof of the desire of him who had been rightly offended to effect a reconciliation. And if the offence had been committed, not once, but many times, the reluctance of the offender to face his offended friend would be increased in proportion to the number of times the act had been repeated, and if, notwithstanding these repeated offences, advances should continue to be made from the other side, the desire for reconciliation would be made more and more manifest. Wisdom is here represented

in this light, and God in Christ did take the initiative in "reconciling the world unto Himself" (1 Cor. v. 19). The Incarnate Wisdom *came* to men because men would not, and could not, by reason of their moral inability, come to Him first. In proportion to the distance men wander from God do they feel the impossibility of returning to Him unless they can receive from Him some encouragement to do so. This encouragement they have in the fact that "the Son of Man came to seek and save that which was lost (Matt. xviii. 11), that, "while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. v. 8).

II. From the variety of places where Wisdom's voice is heard (verses 2 and 3). If a man has goods to sell, he seeks those places where he will be most likely to find buyers; if he has thoughts which he wishes to make public, he goes where he will find the most hearers. The pilot has wisdom which he wants to sell to the less experienced ship-master, and he runs his cutter out into the highway of the channel. He is found at "the entrance of the gates" of the water-ways, at the mouths of the rivers; he places himself in the way of those who need his wisdom, and who will pay a good price for his skill. In proportion to a man's earnestness to obtain a market, or a hearing, will be his endeavour to seek out the places where he will most likely succeed. Wisdom is here represented as frequenting the most conspicuous places, the most crowded thoroughfares, to find buyers for that spiritual instruction which is to be had "without money and without price" (Isa. lv. 1). Christ was found imparting the treasures of His wisdom wherever men would listen to His words. He "went up into a mountain and taught" (Matt. v. 1). He was found in the streets of the cities, in the temple, at the publican's feast (Luke v. 27), in a boat on the shore of the lake. When multitudes were gathered at Jerusalem at the feasts, He was among them (John vii. 14 and 37). At other times "He went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the Gospel of the kingdom" (Matt. ix. 35). And thus He revealed His intense desire to give unto men those words which He declares to be "spirit and life" (John vi. 63).

III. From the earnest tone of her call. "Doth not Wisdom *cry*." When the voice of Christ was heard upon earth it was in no indifferent tone He addressed His hearers. He was "moved with compassion" towards the multitudes who followed Him (Matt. xiv. 14). On the "great day of the feast He stood and *cried*, saying, If any man thirst, let Him come unto Me and drink" (John vii. 37). With what earnestness must He have uttered His lament over Jerusalem: "If thou hadst known, even thou, in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace" (Luke xix. 42). A man's tone is more or less earnest to us in proportion as he gives proof that he is willing to follow up words by deeds. Judged in this light, how earnest must the call of Christ to men sound when they consider that He was willing to face Gethsemane and Calvary to give effect to His words. On this subject see also Homiletics on chap. i. 20, 21.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Verse 1. She crieth by the written word, by ministers, and by the dealings of Providence. Instead of the clandestine whisper of the adulteress in the dark, Wisdom "puts forth her voice" openly in the day, and in a style suitable to every capacity, so that all are left without excuse if they reject her, preferring darkness to light.—*Bausset.*

The eternal Son of God gathers, plants, builds His Church by a voice, *i.e.*, His word. All true teachers of the Word are crying voices through which Christ calls. Out of Christ's school is no true wisdom. So long as Christ's wisdom is still speaking outside thee it avails thee nothing; but when thou allowest it to dwell in thee it is thy light and life.—*Egard.*

We cannot promulgate as doctrine, but we think the last day will show that wisdom plied every art; that what was "all things working together for good" in behalf of the believer, was something analagous in tendency in the instance of the sinner; that if the sinner thought his lot defeated repentance, he was mistaken; or that, could he have fared otherwise, his chances would have been improved: all this was largely error; moreover, that he will be held accountable at last for quite the opposite, and punished for a life singularly favoured and frequently adapted as the very best to lead him to salvation.—*Miller.*

In her ministers, who are criers by office, and must be earnest (Isa. lviii. 1). See an instance in holy Bradford. "I beseech you," saith he, "I pray you, I desire you, I crave at your hands with all my very heart, I ask of you with hand, pen, tongue, and mind, in Christ, through Christ, for Christ, for His name, blood, mercy, power, and truth's sake, my most entirely beloved that you admit no doubting of God's final mercies towards you." Here was a lusty crier indeed.—*Trapp.*

This form of interrogation, which expects as its answer an assenting and emphatic "yes, truly," points to the fact clearly brought to view in all that has preceded, that Wisdom bears an unceasing witness in her own behalf in the life of men.—*Zöckler.*

Verse 2. "Standeth" implies assiduous perseverance. Instead of taking her stand in dark places, in a corner, like the harlot (chap. vii. 9), she "standeth" in the top of high places. —*Fausset.*

Wisdom is representing as haunting all human paths. Folly lives upon them, too. Wisdom does not claim them as her own; Folly does. Wisdom has but one path. And she haunts every other to turn men out of such diverse journeyings into the one great track of holiness and truth.—*Miller.*

Verse 3. Thereby intending (1) to reach the whole concourse of the lost, and (2) to make human life at these great rallying places of men, speak its own lessons, and utter the loudest warnings against the soul's impenitence.—*Miller.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH—Verses 4—9.

God's Speech meeting Man's Need.

I. Divine Wisdom has spoken because God's silence would be human death. When a man is lying in prison awaiting the execution of the extreme penalty of the law, after he has petitioned the monarch for a reprieve, the silence of the monarch is a permission that the sentence is to be carried out. His silence is a death-knell to the criminal who has asked for pardon. It is an anticipation of the steel of the executioner, of the rope of the hangman. He longs for the word that would bring pardon. There is *death* in the *silence.* In the history of men's lives there are many other instances when the silence of those whom they desire to speak embitters their life. There are many who keep silence whose speech would fall upon the heart of those who long for it, as the dew and gentle rain falls upon the parched earth. A word or a letter would be like a new lease of life, but the silence brings a sorrow which is akin to death, which perchance is the death of all that makes life to be desired. A parent who has no word from his absent son goes down in sorrow to the grave. Jacob was thus going down mourning when the words of Joseph reached him. Then "his spirit revived" (Gen. xlv. 27), and the aged, sorrowful patriarch renewed his youth. The life of man—all that is worth calling life—depends upon God's breaking the silence between earth and heaven. His silence is that which is most dreaded by those

who have heard his voice. Hence their prayer is, "Be not *silent* unto me; lest, if Thou be silent unto me, I become *like them that go down into the pit* (Psa. xxviii. 1). If man had been left without any communication from God, he must have remained spiritually dead throughout his term of probation. For he is by nature what is called in Scripture, "carnally-minded," which "is death" (Rom. viii. 5.). Every man, if left to himself, forms habits of thinking and of acting that cause him "to be tied and bound with the chain of his sins." And if God had not spoken he must have remained in this condition, which is spiritual death. Therefore, God has broken this silence with an "Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead" (Ephes. v. 14). The nations were walking in the darkness and the shadow of death when the "light shined" upon them (Luke i. 79), in the person of Him who is the Word and the Wisdom of God, who, Himself, declared "*The words that I speak unto* you, they are spirit, and they are *life*;" "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly (John vi. 63, x. 10).

II. Human nature needs the voice of Divine Wisdom because the soul cannot rest upon uncertainties (verses 6–8). If a man is in the dark upon any subject, he is in a condition of unrest; there is a desire within him to rise from the state of probability to one of certainty. If a boy works a sum and does not know how to prove that it is right, he does not feel that satisfaction at having completed his task that he would do if he could demonstrate that the answer was correct. After all his labour he has only arrived at a may-be. So the result of all efforts of man's unaided reasonings concerning himself and his destiny was but a sum unproved. There was no certainty after ages of laborious conjecture. There might be a future life and immortality, but it could not be positively affirmed. Although the sum *might be right* there was a possibility that it was wrong. The world by wisdom arrived at no certain conclusions in relation to the Divine character and the chief end of man, and uttered but an uncertain sound on the life beyond the grave. "How can man be just with God?" "If a man die shall he live again?" were never fully and triumphantly answered until the Incarnate Word stood by His own empty gravė and said, "I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God" (John xx. 17). He brought "rest" to the weary and heavy laden (Matt. xi. 28), because His words were truth, and plainness, and certainty (see verses 6–8); before they had been only error, or obscurity, or conjecture.

III. The wisdom of God is appreciated by those who have realised its adaptation to human needs. (Ver. 9.) There is a twofold knowledge, or "understanding," of Divine truth, as there is of much else with which we are acquainted. There is an acquaintance with the general facts of Divine revelation—a theoretical understanding of its suitableness to the needs of men, and there is a knowledge which arises from an experience of its adaptation to our personal need—a practical understanding which springs from having received a personal benefit. The chemist knows that a certain drug possesses qualities adapted to cure a particular malady, but if he comes to experience its efficacy in the cure of the disease in his own body, he has a knowledge which far surpasses the merely theoretical. It is then "plain" to him from an experimental understanding. The wisdom of God in the abstract, or in the personal Logos, is allowed by many to be adapted to the spiritual needs of the human race. They see the philosophy of the plan of salvation in the general, but its wonderful adaptation and "rightness" is only fully revealed when they have "found" the "knowledge" by an experimental reception of Christ into their own hearts. To him that thus "understands" all is "plain."

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Verse 4. Christ offers Himself as a Saviour to all the human race. I. **The most awakening truth in all the Bible.** It is commonly thought that preaching the holy law is the most awakening truth in the Bible, and, indeed, I believe this is the most ordinary means which God makes use of. And yet to me there is something far more awakening in the sight of a Divine Saviour freely offering Himself to every one of the human race. . . . Does it not show that all men are lost—that a dreadful hell is before them? Would the Saviour call so loud and so long if there was no hell? **II. The most comforting truth in the Bible.** If there were no other text in the whole Bible to encourage sinners to come freely to Christ, this one alone might persuade them. Christ speaks to the human race. Instead of writing down every name He puts all together in one word, which includes every man, woman, and child. **III. The most condemning truth in all the Bible.** If Christ be freely offered to all men, then it is plain that those who live and die without accepting Christ shall meet with the doom of those who refuse the Son of God.—*McCheyne.*

They are called to repentance, they are called to the remission of their sins; they may and must repent, and they, by repentance, are sure of pardon for all their sins. The good angels have not sinned, the bad angels cannot repent; it is *man* that hath done the one, it is *man* that must do the other. —*Jermin.*

"O men." Some render it, "O ye eminent men" (see Critical Notes), whether for greatness of birth, wealth, or learning. But "the world by wisdom knows not God" (1 Cor. i. 21); and "not many wise men, not many mighty, not many noble, are called" (verse 26). And yet they shall not want for calling, if that would do it. But all to little purpose, for most part. They that lay their heads upon down pillows cannot so easily hear noises. "The sons of men," *i.e.*, to the meaner sort of people. These, usually, like little fishes, bite more than bigger. "The poor are gospelised," saith our Saviour. Smyrna was the poorest, but the best of the seven churches.—*Trapp.*

Several ways whereby God addresses Himself to man. How different the method which God uses towards the *rational* from that which He uses toward the *material* world. In the world of matter God has not only fixed and prescribed certain laws according to which the course of nature shall proceed, but He is Himself the sole and immediate executor of those laws. . . . It is to Himself that He has set those laws, and it is by Himself that they are executed. But He does not deal so with the world of *spirits.* He does not here execute the laws of *love,* as He does there the laws of *motion.* He contents Himself to prescribe laws, to make rational applications, to *speak* to spirits. He speaks to them because they are *rational,* and can understand what He says, and He does *but* speak to them because they are *free.* And this He does in several ways. 1. *By the natural and necessary order and connection of things.* God, as being the Author of nature, is also the author of that connection that results from it between some actions and that good and evil that follows upon them, and which must therefore not be considered as mere natural consequences, but as a kind of rewards and punishments annexed to them by the Supreme Lawgiver, God having declared by them, as by a natural sanction, that 'tis His will and pleasure that those actions which are attended with good consequences should be done, and that those which are attended with evil consequences should be avoided. Not that the law has its obligation from the *sanction,* but these natural sanctions are *signs* and *declarations* of the will of God. 2. *By sensible pleasure and pain.* A thing which everybody feels, but which few reflect upon, yet there is a voice of God in it. For

does not God, by the frequent and daily return of these impressions, continually put us in mind of the nature and capacity of our souls, that we are thinking beings, and beings capable of happiness and misery, which because we actually feel in several degrees, and in several kinds, we may justly think ourselves capable of in more, though how far, and in what variety, it be past our comprehension exactly to define. 3. *By that inward joy which attends the good, and by that inward trouble and uneasiness which attends the bad state of the soul.* This is a matter of universal experience. It is God that raiseth this pleasure or this pain in us, and that thus differently rewards or punishes the souls of men, and thus, out of His infinite love, is pleased to do the office of a private monitor to every particular man, by smiling upon him when he does well, and by frowning upon him when he does ill, that so he may have a mark to *discern*, and an encouragement to *do* his duty.—*John Norris.*

Verse 5. A man may be acutely shrewd and yet be a fool, and that in the very highest sense. Nor is this a mere mystic sense. He must be a fool actually, and of the very plainest kind, who gives the whole labour of a life, for example, to increase his eternal agonies.—*Miller.*

The *heart* is frequently used simply for the mind or seat of intellect as well as for the affections; so that "an understanding heart" might mean nothing different from an *intelligent mind.* At the same time, since the state of the heart affects to such a degree the exercise of the judgment, "an understanding heart" may signify a heart freed from the influence of those corrupt affections and passions by which the understanding is perverted, and its vision marred and destroyed.—*Wardlaw.*

Verse 6. The discoveries of Wisdom relate to things of the highest possible *excellence;* such as the existence, character, works, and ways of God; the soul; eternity; the way of salvation—the means of eternal life. And they are, on all subjects, "*right.*" They could not, indeed, be excellent themselves, how excellent soever in dignity and importance the subjects to which they related, unless they were "right." But all her instructions are so. They are *true* in what regards *doctrine*, and "holy, just, and good" in what regards *conduct* or *duty.* There is truth without any mixture of error, and rectitude without any alloy of evil.—*Wardlaw.*

Right for each man's purposes and occasions. The Scriptures are so penned that every man may think they speak of him and his affairs. In all God's commands there is so much rectitude and good reason, could we but see it, that if God did not command them, yet it were our best way to practise them.—*Trapp.*

The teaching is not *trifling*, though addressed to *triflers.* "Right things"—things which are calculated to correct your false notions, and set straight your crooked ways.—*Adam Clarke.*

Verse 9. If aught in God's Word does not seem to us right, it is because we, so far, have not found true knowledge. "To those who have bloodshot eyes, white seems red (Lyra). He who would have the sealed book opened to him must ask it of the Lamb who opens the book (Rev. v. 4–9.—*Fausset.*

The first part of this verse wears very much the aspect of a *truism.* But it is not said, "They are plain to him that understandeth *them*;" but simply to him that "*understandeth.*" It seems to signify, who has the understanding necessary to the apprehension of Divine truth—spiritual discernment. "He who is spiritual *discerneth all things.*" "They are all plain" to him who *thus* understandeth. It may further be observed, how very much depends, in the prosecution of any science, for correct and easy apprehension of its progressive development to the mind, on the clear comprehension of its *elementary principles.* The very clearest and plainest demonstrations, in

any department of philosophy, will fail to be followed and to carry conviction—will leave the mind only in wonder and bewildering confusion, unless there is a full and correct acquaintance with principles or elements, or a willingness to apply the mind to its attainment. So in Divine science. There are, in regard to the discoveries of the Divine Word, certain primary principles, which all who are taught of God know, and which they hold as principles of explanation for all that that Word reveals. They who *are* thus "taught of God," perceive with increasing fulness the truth, the rectitude, the unalloyed excellence of all the dictates of Divine wisdom. All is "plain"—all "right." The darkness that brooded over the mind is dissipated. They "have an unction from the Holy One, and know all things" (1 John ii. 20).—*Wardlaw.*

When a man gets the knowledge of himself, then he sees all the *threatenings* of God to be *right.* When he obtains the knowledge of God in Christ, then he finds that all the *promises* of God are *right*—yea and amen.—*Adam Clarke.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH—*Verses* **10, 11.**

WISDOM BETTER THAN WEALTH.

I. Wisdom is to be preferred to wealth because it belongs to a higher sphere. The wisdom by which men succeed in finding gold and silver reveals the superiority of mind over matter. The apparatus of the miner or digger reveals that his thought, by which he is enabled to find the precious metal, is more than the metal itself. The precious stones which the merchant gains by trading are inferior to the wisdom he puts in operation to gain them, even though it is a wisdom which is only devoted to gaining money. The mental power which he puts forth shows that he is possessed of intelligence, which, belonging to the region of mind, belongs to a higher sphere than material wealth. When the wisdom is that spoken of in the text, the wisdom which springs from the very Fountain of goodness, it is not only preferable because it is the offspring of mind, but because it belongs to the higher region of spiritual purity.

II. Wisdom is to be preferred to wealth, because it had an existence before wealth. The world, with all its precious stones, and rich mines of gold and silver, is but of yesterday compared with wisdom. The mental and spiritual wealth of God was before matter; upon that wisdom—as we learn in this chapter—depended the existence of the material (vers. 22–32; chap iii. 19, 20). Mental wealth is eternal, material wealth belongs only to time. Gold had a beginning, because the earth had a birthday, but wisdom is as old as God.

III. Wisdom is to be preferred to wealth, because it is an absolute necessity to man's well-being, which gold is not. The first man, in his state of sinlessness, had no need of what men now call wealth, but wisdom—spiritual wisdom—was absolutely necessary to his continuation in a state of blessedness. Men need worldly, intellectual wisdom, even to make money. Many who inherit wealth lose it because they lack wisdom to use it rightly. But they can be blest without wealth, but not without the wisdom which leads to holiness. Wealth may bring pleasure with it, but to do so it must be united to true wisdom. Many who roll in riches have no pleasure in them; sometimes their very wealth adds to their unhappiness. Mental wealth enables men to extract some enjoyment from material wealth, but the riches of goodness makes gold and silver a means of increasing men's happiness.

IV. Wisdom is to be preferred to wealth, because the latter may be destructive to character, and the former is its constructive power. Many men have been morally destroyed by their riches. But true wisdom is that by which a holy character is formed, the sustenance of the spiritual life. Riches may ruin; the wisdom which God gives to those who seek it at His hand can but bless.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Verse 10. Thou canst not make as thy chief aim the acquisition of silver and that of true wisdom at one and the same time, for those aims mutually conflict, and each claims the whole man (Matt. vi. 24). To accept the one involves the rejection of the other as the chief portion. He who lives for money is void of wisdom (Luke xii. 16, 20), and is called in Scripture a "fool."—*Fausset.*

Had it been said, Receive silver, who would not have held out his hand to receive it? Had it been said, Receive gold, who would not have been forward and glad with both his hands to have taken it? But it is instruction and not silver, wherein, lest a worldly heart be afraid that the taking of silver were forbidden him, the next words show the meaning, that it is but instruction *rather* than silver, as it is knowledge *rather* than gold. . . . He that seeketh gold and silver diggeth up much earth, but finds little of them, but he that receiveth instruction and knowledge, which are, indeed, of a golden nature, even in a little shall get and find much. Wherefore Clemens Alexandrinus saith, "It is in the soul that riches are, and they alone are riches whereof the soul alone is the treasure."—*Jermin.*

The first warning uttered by this wisdom from above is the repetition of a former word. The repetition is not vain. Another stroke so soon on the same place indicates that he who strikes feels a peculiar hardness there. The love of money is a root of evil against which the Bible mercifully deals many a blow. There lies one of our deepest sores. Thanks be to God for touching it with "line upon line" of His healing Word. . . . A ship bearing a hundred emigrants has been driven from her course and wrecked on a desert island, far from the tracks of men. The passengers get safe ashore with all their stores. There is no way of escape, but there are means of subsistence. An ocean unvisited by ordinary voyagers circles round their prison, but they have seed, with a rich soil to receive, and a genial climate to ripen it. Ere any plan has been laid, or any operation begun, an exploring party returns to head quarters reporting the discovery of a gold mine. Thither instantly the whole company resort to dig. They acquire and accumulate heaps of gold. The people are quickly becoming rich. But the spring is past, and not a field has been cleared, not a grain of seed has been committed to the ground. The summer comes, and their wealth increases, but the store of food is small. In harvest they begin to discover that their stores of gold are worthless. A cart-load of it cannot satisfy a hungry child. When famine stares them in the face a suspicion shoots across their fainting hearts that their gold has cheated them. They loathe the bright betrayer. They rush to the woods, fell the trees, till the ground, and sow the seed. Alas! it is too late! Winter has come, and their seed rots in the soil. They die of want in the midst of their treasures. This earth is a little isle—eternity the ocean round it. On this shore we have been cast, like shipwrecked sailors. There is a living seed; there is an auspicious spring time; the sower may eat and live. But gold mines attract us; we spend our spring there—our summer there: winter overtakes us toiling there, with heaps of hoarded dust, but destitute of the bread of life. —*Arnot.*

Verse 11. First, because everything else without it is a curse, and with it is just what is needed; second, because it is necessary to all beings, and even to God himself, as the spring of action; third, because it is glory and wealth in its very nature.—*Miller.*

Surely he that thinketh himself adorned with precious stones, showeth himself to be of less price than the stones are. To whom Clemens well applieth that saying of Apelles, who, when one of his scholars had painted Helena set out with much

gold, said unto him, "Alas, poor young man, when thou could'st not draw her fair thou hast made her rich," for so, when many have neglected the jewel of the soul they seek to prank out the body with jewels.—*Jermin.*

The wisdom of goodness, or virtue. 1. *Is absolutely and without any limitation good, absolutely and without any limitation useful and desirable.* It alone can never be misapplied, can never be criminal. This we cannot pronounce of any other good. Riches may be a snare, honours a burden, even the endowments of the mind may be a snare to us. 2. *It is far more unchangeable than the value of all other goods and endowments.* The value of riches is regulated by our wants and the wants of the society in which we live. The value of honour changes according to the opinions, the usages, the political institutions of mankind. The value of sensual pleasure depends much on our constitution, age, and health. Even the value of mental endowments is subject to vicissitudes. The value of true wisdom alone is invariably the same. 3. *It is much more independent of station than any other good.* Riches would cease to be riches if all men lived in abundance. Honour would lose much of its value if it gave us no precedence over others. A great proportion of the value of sensual and mental pleasures would be reduced to nothing if every man possessed them, and each in the same degree. But no man loses anything if another be virtuous likewise, but if all were virtuous all would infinitely profit thereby. 4. *It has a pre-eminent value, by the effects it produces in us.* It renders us: (1) much better, (2) more useful, (3) more happy. 5. It alone fits us for a better life. It passes for as much in heaven as it does upon earth, and much more. It alone assimilates us with God. What we call riches, power, and knowledge, are poverty, weakness, and darkness, with Him.—*Zollikofer.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH—Verses 12, 18.

Wisdom and Prudence.

I. Wisdom and prudence are here represented as dwelling together to express unity of action. Elster remarks upon this passage: "Prudence denotes here right knowledge in special cases, in contrast with the more comprehensive idea of intelligence in general; the practical realisation of the higher principle of knowledge found in wisdom." Prudence is as necessary to wisdom, as the hand is to the will. Prudence asks what is the best time, the best place, and the best manner in which to carry out what wisdom has designed. It has therefore been defined as "wisdom applied to practice." Wisdom decrees that a certain word is to be spoken. Prudence decides upon the best time, place, and manner in which to say it. Prudence must always dwell with wisdom, if the designs of a wise man are to be brought to a successful issue. In all God's plans both are always in operation. Consider their manifestation in the plan of redemption. The wisdom of God is manifested in the conception of plan. His prudence was shown in the choice of the *time*, *place*, and *manner* of the manifestation. 1. The *time* was "the fulness of time" (Gal. iv. 4), when all the streams of human wisdom and greatness which had been flowing through the world for ages, had converged into one head and were seen to be powerless to accomplish the regeneration of the world. Then "God sent forth His Son." 2. The *place* of the manifestation. When the wisdom of a commander has decided that a battle must be fought, his prudence is called in to decide where it must take place, where all lawful advantage will be upon his side. Our world was chosen by Divine prudence as the scene of the battle between the powers of Good and Evil because, seeing that here the human race had been

most shamefully defeated by the devil, it was most fitting that here the Prince of Darkness should be defeated by One in human form—that the victory should be won where the defeat had been sustained. 3. *The manner in which, or the means by which, man's redemption was accomplished.* The life of the Incarnate Son of God was adapted to influence the hearts of men. His death for their sins was calculated, as probably no other event could have been, to beget within them a love which is powerful enough to make them new creatures. The fact that millions of men and women have been thus born to a new life through the cross of Christ is a revelation of its adaptation to human needs, and a manifestation that Divine wisdom dwelt with Divine prudence in the plan of redemption; that in this, as in all His other workings, there was an exhibition of "sagacious counsels" (see Critical Notes).

II. Divine wisdom and prudence act in union for the promotion of moral ends (verse 13). There is a wisdom and prudence which do not act in concert for this purpose, but for the very opposite. There is a manifestation of prudence choosing the best time, place, and method in which to work out an evil design. The plan of the tempter to ruin our first parents was a great display of united wisdom and prudence. The *time*, the *place*, the *means* chosen were all calculated to effect the purpose. But the wisdom and prudence of God unite to put down sin, to banish its evil influence from the universe. As we see the combination of wisdom and prudence in the Father's plan of redemption, so we see them combined in every act and word of the Son of God while He was manifest in the flesh. The means He used to silence His enemies, to instruct His disciples, to enlighten the ignorant multitude, were all revelations of His Divine wisdom and prudence.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Verse 12. That is, this spiritual light, which the very first proverb (ch. i. 2, 3) says is holiness; takes possession of any *intellect; dwells in it;* nay, *makes a dwelling in it;* for holiness can dwell in nothing else; and that intellect, though it may be the very mind of God, is stirred up by nothing else to *do* all that is grand in its total history (verse 22–30). Satan, with such splendid intellect, what is he but the universe's insanest fool? He toils for worse wages than anybody in the whole creation. But could wisdom get a lodging in that peerless intellect, what different results! She gets a lodging in our earthly faculties, and turns us about from sowing to our death, to a splendid harvest of eternal favour.—*Miller.*

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

In the first address of Wisdom (ch. i. 22–33), her words were stern and terrible. The first step in the Divine education is to proclaim "the terrors of the Lord," but here she neither promises nor threatens, but, as if lost in contemplation, speaks of her own excellence "Prudence." The subtilty of the serpent, in itself neutral, but capable of being turned to good as well as evil. Wisdom, high and lofty, occupied with things heavenly and eternal, does not exclude, yea, rather,

"dwells with" the practical tact and insight needed for the common life of men.—*Plumptre.*

Wisdom here beginneth to draw her own picture, and with her own pencil . . . . The force of the verse is, that Wisdom is there where there is a fitness of worth to entertain her.—*Jermin.*

I draw all into practice, and teach men to prove by their own experience, what is "that good, and holy, and acceptable will of God" (Rom. xii. 2). *Trapp.*

All arts among men are the rays of Divine wisdom falling upon them. Whatsoever wisdom there is in the world, it is but a shadow of the wisdom of God.—*Charnock.*

Prudence is defined, *wisdom applied to practice;* so, wherever true wisdom is, it will lead to action. . . . The farther wisdom proceeds in man the more practical knowledge it gains, and, finding out the nature and properties of things, and the general course of Providence, it can contrive by new combinations to produce new results. —*Adam Clarke.*

Verse 13. To fear retribution is not to hate sin. In most cases it is to love it with the whole heart. It is a solemn suggestion that even the *religion* of dark, unrenewed men is in its essence a love of their own sins. Instead of hating sin themselves, their grand regret is, that God hates it. If they could be convinced that the Judge would regard it as lightly as the culprit, the fear would collapse like steam under cold water, and all the religious machinery which it drove would stand still.—*Arnot.*

The godly avoid evil and do good—not merely from habit, education, the hope of reward, or the fear of punishment, but from hatred of evil and love of goodness.—*Cartwright.*

The affection of hatred as having sin for its object is spoken of in Scripture as no inconsiderable part of true religion. It is spoken of as that by which true religion may be known and distinguished.—*Jon. Edwards.*

Wisdom having shown where she dwelleth, she showeth likewise where she dwelleth not. . . . He that saith, "The fear of the Lord is to hate evil," is Himself the Lord that hateth evil. And, doubtless, every one should hate that which He hateth, whom all must love. Now, in an evil way, there be some ringleaders, and such are "pride, arrogancy, and the froward mouth," for these draw many other after them. . . . And as for the Eternal Wisdom, how much He hateth them, His little regard of Himself showeth plainly and fully. For it was His hatred of Satan's pride, reigning in wickedness, as well as His love to man captivated by it, that made Him to become man; yea, a worm, and no man, and by His humility to destroy pride, which He so greatly hated.—*Jermin.*

It is not only Divine *holiness*, observe, that "hates evil," it is Divine *wisdom.* This conveys to us the important lesson that the will of God, along with his abhorrence of all that is opposed it, is founded in the *best of reasons.* All that is evil is contrary to His own necessary perfection, and, consequently, to "the eternal fitness of things."—*Wardlaw.*

As it is impossible to hate evil without loving good; and as hatred to evil will lead a man to abandon the evil way, and love to goodness will lead him to do what is right in the sight of God, under the influence of that spirit which has given the hatred to evil, and the love of goodness; this implies the sum and substance of true religion, which is here termed the fear of the Lord.—*Adam Clarke.*

God's people partake of the Divine nature, and so have God-like sympathies and antipathies (Rev. ii. 6). They not only leave sin, but loathe it, and are at deadly feud with it. They purge themselves—by this clean fear of God (Psa. xix. 7)—from all pollutions, not of flesh only, worldly lusts, and gross evils, but of spirit also, that lie more up in the heart of the country, as pride, arrogancy, etc.—*Trapp.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 14—16.

THE SOURCE OF TRUE POWER.

I. Moral wisdom is the strength of kings. "I have strength; by me kings rule." There is a kind of strength in all wisdom. The serpent's strength is in his subtlety. The strength of the kingdom of darkness consists in a kind of wisdom of which our Lord speaks, when He says, "The children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light" (Luke xvi. 8). Many kingdoms have been founded and governed upon the basis of merely human sagacity. But in all such government there are elements of weakness. The foundation of all lasting, true government is to be found only in moral wisdom, in other words, in holiness. That king or ruler will in the long-run have the firmest hold upon his subjects who is himself ruled by Divine wisdom. His strength will be found in the fact, that he rules himself before he attempts to rule others. His personal character will be his chief strength. Christ Himself is strong to rule, because He is pre-eminently the "Holy One."

II. Without moral wisdom there can be no righteous government. "By me princes decree justice." A man's laws will be the outcome of his character. He will not make righteous laws unless he has himself submitted to moral rule. We are assured that all God's decrees in relation to all His creatures are righteous, because we know Him to be altogether righteous. He has been declared by Him who knows Him best to be the "righteous Father" (John xvii. 25), therefore we know that only righteous laws can be decreed by Him. And it is only in proportion as rulers are influenced by Him, and partake of His character, that they rule in righteousness.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Verse 14. Wisdom's life is a thing of system. It has an assured result. It is the card-building of the spirit. One card supports another. It builds out with a declared dependence to the very end.—*Miller.*

The Son of God is a counsellor, as Isaiah calleth Him; for He is both of the privy council of His Father, and the adviser of His Church. Moreover, He hath strength in Him, being the arm of God to conquer sin, with hell and Satan, and is able to do whatsoever He will. Substance (sound wisdom, see Critical Notes), or the being of things, is likewise His, for He causeth all creatures to be and subsist. —*Muffet.*

Direction how to act in all circumstances and on all occasions must come from wisdom: the foolish man can give no counsel, cannot show another how he is to act in the various changes and chances of life. The wise man alone can give this counsel, and he can give it only as continually receiving instruction from God: for this Divine Wisdom can say, substance, reality, essence, (see Critical Notes on Sound Wisdom), all belong to me: I am the fountain whence all are derived. Man may be wise, and good, and prudent, and ingenious; but these he derives from me, and they are *dependently* in him. But in me all these are independently and essentially inherent.—*Adam Clarke.*

Many things are done, but not having *counsel* for the foundation of them, are weak and rotten and fall again to nothing. Many have *understanding* what is to be done, and how to do it, but have not *strength* to effect it: again many have *strength* of effecting, but have not *understanding* how to go about it. But the eternal wisdom hath all. It is no strength which by His strength is not supported, no understanding which by His understanding is not enlightened, no counsel

which by His counsel is not guided.—*Jermin.*

"Knowledge is power," and knowledge in union with wisdom—the ability to use knowledge aright—multiplies the power. In proportion as there is "understanding" and "wisdom," is there "strength"—moral and spiritual strength—strength to act and to suffer, to *do* and to *bear*.—*Wardlaw.*

Verses 15, 16. The chief monarchs of the world come unto their sceptres by the power and permission of the Son of God. Lawgivers and counsellors, by His direction and inspiration, give advice and invent politic laws. Inferior rulers keep their places, countenance, and authority by His assistance, whereunto they also rise by His secret disposing of matters. Finally, judges and justices who use to keep courts and sit on benches, do by Him, from Him, and for Him, pronounce sentence, handle matters of state, execute laws, and finally determine all cases.—*Muffet.*

Here is a divine prophecy concerning Him who said, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth" (Matt. xxiii. 18), and who has "on His head many crowns" (Rev. xix. 12), and "on His vesture and on His thigh a name written, King of Kings, and Lord of Lords" (Rev. xix. 16), and of whom it is written, "that by Him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, and He is before all things, and by Him all things consist" (Col. i. 16, 17).—*Wordsworth.*

Kings are kings only as they are wise, that is, wise in the sense of holiness. It does not mean holiness as altogether distinct from virtue, but holiness as that moral right which belongs to all ranks of moral intelligences. The virtue that belongs to God, and the virtue that belongs to Gabriel, and the virtue that remains in man, and the virtue that is wrecked in hell, are not all different qualities of moral right, but are all identically the same. One moral quality inheres in all. Government being a moral work, the man that governs must have a moral heart. And, as there are no two sorts of virtue, he truly exercises his kingship just in proportion as he is holy, *i.e.*, in the language of this inspired book, just in proportion as he is spiritually wise.—*Miller.*

Every kingdom is a province of the universal empire of the "King of Kings." Men may mix their own pride, folly, and self-will with this appointment. But God's providential counter-working preserves the substantial blessing.—*Bridges.*

This language may be considered as implying (1) that human government, in all its branches, is the appointment of Divine wisdom. 2. That all who sustain positions of authority and power should act habitually under the influence of Divine wisdom. 3. That no authority can be rightly exercised, and no judicial process successfully carried out, without the direction of Wisdom. 4. That Divine wisdom exercises control over all human agents in the administration of public affairs. —*Wardlaw.*

"By me kings reign," not as if men did behold that book, and accordingly frame their laws, but because it worketh in them when the laws which they make are righteous.—*Hooker.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 17—21.

The Reward of Earnest Seekers.

I. The mutual love which exists between Wisdom and her children. There is always a mutual love between a true teacher and a diligent, receptive pupil, and the love on each side has a reflex influence on both master and pupil, and renders it more pleasant to teach, and more easy to learn. When a child loves his parent, and the parent is teaching the child, love oils the wheels of the

intellectual powers, and furnishes a motive power to conquer the lesson. And when the parent feels that he is loved by his child and pupil, the love is a present reward. There is such a love between Christ and His disciples. Peter appealed to Christ's consciousness of being loved by him when he said, "Lord, Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I love Thee" (John xxi. 17). And Christ loves His pupils. "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." "As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you" (John xv. 9, 13). This mutual love imparts patience on the one side and perseverance on the other. It was Christ's "first love to us" that gave Him patience to "endure the cross and despise the shame" (Heb. xii. 2). And it is the responsive love of the disciple that enables Him to endure unto the end. It is the love that is born of the consciousness of being loved that stirs up to the *diligent seeking* of the latter clause of the verse, which expresses—

II. A certain success to the seekers of wisdom. In Holy Scripture earnest seeking and finding are complements of each other. The one does not exist without the other. Seeking ensures finding. Finding implies seeking. "If any man lack *wisdom*, let him ask of God, who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not" (Jas. i. 5). God's promise is absolute. It can only fail on one of three suppositions. 1. That when God made the promise He had no intention of keeping it, or—2. That unforseen circumstances have since arisen which render Him unable to fulfil His word, or—3. That the conditions have not been fulfilled on the part of the seeker. We know that God's holiness and omnipotence render the first two impossible, and therefore, whenever there is no finding, we are certain that there has been no real, earnest seeking. For the promise is limited by the condition, "they that seek me early, or earnestly." If a traveller has a long journey to perform and many difficulties to overcome in the way, he shows his determination to arrive safely at his destination by setting out at early dawn. Those who are anxious to make a name, or a fortune, show their anxiety by rising early and sitting up late. There are degress of earnestness in seekers after Divine wisdom as in all other seekers. But those whose seeking is the most earnest will receive the most abundant reward. The Syro-Phœnician woman who besought Christ to heal her daughter was a type of earnest seekers. She redoubled her efforts as the apparent difficulties increased. She ***asked***, she *sought*, she ***knocked***. And she received not only what she sought, but a commendation from the Lord for her earnest seeking (Matt. xv. 28).

III. What those find who find God. The reward promised to those who seek God is God Himself. In finding Him they find (1.) *The lasting riches of righteousness* (vers. 18, 19). This a wealth which will *last*. However great the satisfaction, however many the blessings which may flow from the riches of earth, "passing away" is written upon all. Yea, long before the end of life the riches may "make themselves wings" (chap. xxiii. 5). Among many other qualities that make moral wealth incomparably superior to material wealth, not the least is its *durability*. (See on vers. 11, 12; also chap. iii. 15, 16). 2. *Guidance*, ver. 20. (See on chap. iii. 6, etc.) 3. *Reality in opposition to shadow*, ver. 21. The hungry man who dreams that he is feasting experiences a kind of pleasure. But the feast is only in vision. There is no power in it to appease his hunger, or nourish his frame. But, if on awaking, he finds a table really spread with food, he then has the substance of that of which in his dream he had only the shadow. Worldly men walk, the Psalmist tells us, in a "vain show," *i.e.*, in an "image," an "unreality" (Psa. xxxix. 6). "They walk," says Spurgeon on this verse, "as if the mocking images were substantial, like travellers in a mirage, soon to be filled with disappointment and despair." There are many who dream that they are being satisfied while they are morally asleep. But by and by they awake and find that they have been feeding on visions of the night, that they have been spending their money for "that which was not

bread, and their labour for that which satisfieth not" (Isa. lv. 2). To all who are conscious of this soul-hunger, eternal wisdom here offers substantial heart satisfaction, "a well of water springing up into everlasting life."

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Verse 17. The philosopher could say, that if moral virtue could be seen with mortal eyes, she would stir up wonderful loves of herself in the hearts of the beholders. How much more, then, would "the wisdom of God in a mystery!" (1 Cor. ii. 7,) that essential wisdom of God especially, the Lord Jesus, who is "altogether lovely," "the desire of all nations." "My love was crucified," said Ignatius, who "loved not His life unto the death" (Rev. xii. 11). Neither was there any love lost, or can be, for "I love them that love me." Men do not always reciprocate, or return love for love. David lost his love upon Absalom; Paul upon the Corinthians; but here is no such danger.—*Trapp.*

The characters whom Christ loves. *Christ loves those who love Him.* (1) *Because He has done and suffered so much for their salvation.* We naturally prize any object in proportion to the labour and expense which it cost us to obtain it. How highly, then, must Christ prize, how ineffably must He love His people. For this, among other reasons, His love for them must be greater in degree, and of a different kind from that which He entertains for the angels of light. (2) *Because they are united to Him by strong and indissoluble ties.* The expressions used to describe this union are the strongest that language can afford. The people of Christ are not only His brethren, His sisters, His bride, but His members, His body, and He consequently loves them as we love our members, as our souls love our bodies. (3) *Because they possess His spirit, and bear His image.* Similarity of character tends to produce affection, and hence every being in the universe loves his own image when he discovers it. Especially does Christ love His own image in His creatures, because it essentially consists in holiness, which is of all things most pleasing to His Father and Himself. (4) *Because they rejoice in and return His affection.* It is the natural tendency of love to produce and increase love. Even those whom we have long loved become incomparably more dear when they begin to prize our love and to return it. If Christ so loved His people before they existed, and even while they were His enemies, as to lay down His life for their redemption, how inexpressibly dear must they be to Him after they become His friends.—*Payson.*

Seeking wisdom early implies (1) that it engages our first concern and endeavour, while matters of an inferior consideration are postponed. 2. The constant use of the proper means to obtain it. If we see one continually practising any art, we judge that it is his intention to be master of it. 3. The using them with spirit and vigour. The superficial and spiritless performance of duty is as faulty as the total omission.—*Abernethy.*

All fancy that they love God. But those who either do not seek God at all, or seek Him coldly, whilst they eagerly seek the vanities of the world, make it plain that they are led by the love of the world more than by the love of God.—*Fausset.*

It is His love to us that makes us to love Him; and, doubtless, He that loves us so as to make us to love Him, cannot but love us when we do love Him.—*Jermin.*

Seek early, as the Israelites went early in the morning to seek for manna (Exod. xvi. 21), and as students rise early in the morning and sit close to it to get knowledge. To seek the Lord early is to seek the Lord (1) *firstly;* (2) *opportunely.* There is a season wherein God may be found (Isa. lv. 6), and if you let this season

slip, you may seek and miss Him. (3) *Affectionately, earnestly* (Isa. xxvi. 9). That prayer that sets the whole man a-work will work wonders in Heaven, in the heart, and in the earth. Earnest prayer, like Saul's sword and Jonathan's bow, never returns empty.—*Brooks.*

Verse 18. Spiritual riches are durable. 1. Because they are gotten without wronging any man. Temporal riches are often gotten by fraud and violence, and, therefore, are not lasting. The parties wronged use all means to recover their own, and God punishes unjust persons. Spiritual riches no man can challenge from us. 2. They are everlasting riches, and therefore durable. That must needs last long which lasts ever. These are true, not transitory riches, which often change their masters. They will swim out of the sea of this world with us, out of the shipwreck of death. Neither fire nor sword can take them from us.—*Francis Taylor.*

In the matters of rank and riches, the two strong cords by which the ambitious are led, the two reciprocally supporting rails on which the train of ambition ever runs,—even in these matters, that seem the peculiar province of an earthly crown, the Prince of Peace comes forth with loud challenge and conspicuous rivalry. Titles of honour! their real glory depends on the height and purity of the fountain whence they flow. They have often been the gift of profligate princes, and the rewards of successful crime. At the best the fountain is low and muddy: the streams, if looked at in the light of day, are tinged and sluggish. Thus saith the Lord, "Honour is with me." He who saith it is the King of Glory. To be adopted into the family of God,—to be the son or daughter of the Lord Almighty,—this is honour. High born! We are all low-born until we are *born* again, and then we are the children of a King.—*Arnot.*

Verse 20. Christ guides infallibly by—1. *His word.* It is all truth. 2. *His spirit.* Men mistake and think they are guided by God's spirit when they are guided by their own, or by a worse spirit. But certainly whom Christ's spirit guides He guides aright. 3. *His example.* All other men have their failings, and must be followed no further than they follow Christ. He is the original copy; others are but blurred abstracts.—*Francis Taylor.*

"I lead in the way of righteousness," which is to say, I got not my wealth by right and wrong, by wrench and wiles. My riches are not the riches of unrighteousness, the "mammon of iniquity" (Luke xvi. 9); but are honestly come by, and are therefore like to be "durable" (ver. 18). St. Jerome somewhere saith, that most rich men are either themselves bad men or are heirs of those that have been bad. It is reported of Nevessan, the lawyer, that he should say, "He that will not venture his body shall never be valiant; he that will not venture his soul never rich." But Wisdom's walk lies not any such way. God forbid, saith she, that I, or any of mine, should take of Satan, "from a thread even to a shoelatchet, lest he should say, I have made you rich" (Gen. xiv. 23).—*Trapp.*

Verse 21. The great "I AM" (Exod. iii. 14) is the only substantial reality to satisfy the disciples of Wisdom.—*Fausset.*

The followers of Christ shall be no losers by Him. They shall not inherit the wind, nor possess for their portion those unsubstantial things, of which it is said, *they are not* (chap. xxiii. 5), because they are not the true riches. It is not for want of riches to bestow, nor for want of love to His people, that He does not bestow upon every one of them crowns of gold and mines of precious metals.—*Lawson.*

Here is no yawning vacuum, but a grand object to give interest to life, to fill up every vacancy in the heart—perfect happiness. All that we could add from the world would only make us poorer, by diminishing that enjoyment

of God for the loss of which there is no compensation. There is one point —only one—in the universe where we can look up and cry with the saintly Martyn, "With Thee there is no disappointment."—*Bridges.*

"I will fill their treasures." This is a great promise. It is made in a kingly style. There is no limit. It will take much to fill these treasures, for the capacity of the human spirit is very large. God moulded man after His own image, and when the creature is empty, nothing short of His Maker will fill him again. Although a man should gain the whole world, his appetite would not be perceptibly diminished. The void would be as great and the craving as keen as ever. Handfuls are gotten on the ground, but a soulful is not to be had except in Christ. "In Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily, and ye are complete (*i.e.*, full) in Him."—*Arnot.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH—Verses 22—31.

The Personal Wisdom of God.

I. The antiquity of the Personal Wisdom of God. Wisdom in the abstract must have existed before the creation of the world, because the world bears marks of wisdom. There must have been in Solomon the wisdom to design the temple before it took the form of beauty which made it so famous. There is skill hidden in the artist's mind before it is manifested upon his canvas—the very existence of the picture proves the pre-existent skill. The world is a temple of large proportions, the beauty of which man can but copy afar off, and its existence proves the pre-existence of wisdom resident in a pre-existent person. As the world bears evident marks of great antiquity it proclaims an All-wise Cause which must necessarily be older still. There is no person known to the human race who claimed to have an existence before the world except Jesus Christ. He claimed—and it is claimed for Him by those who bore witness to Him—to have been before the world was, and to have been conscious of His divinity before the foundation of the world. He claims to have been possessor of "a glory with the Father before the world was" (John xvii. 5), a glory which included intellectual and moral wisdom. And the claim of His apostle concerning the pre-existence of the "Word of God" is most unmistakable (John i. 3). The existence of other and inferior "sons of God" before the creation of this world is implied in Scripture (Job. xxxviii. 7), but we have no direct revelation concerning them. We feel that we could not apply to them, or to any creature, the words of the text, "The Lord possessed me in the beginning of His way," etc. But, in the light of New Testament revelation, if we give them a personal application, we must apply them to the Son of God, the Eternal Word, and to Him alone. The words point to an existence *distinct from* God. "I was by Him," and "I was with Him." And yet the intimate relationship and fellowship described does not express *inferiority,* but finds its fulfilment only in Him who not only "was in the beginning with God," but who "was God." (On this subject see note).

II. The Personal Wisdom of God the delight of the Eternal Father. "I was daily His delight" (verse 30). (1) Likeness in character is a foundation of delight. A man who is godly delights to see his own godly character reflected in his son. The recognition of moral likeness in the uncreated Son gave delight to the Eternal Father. Nothing gives God so much joy as *goodness.* Hence His joy in His only-begotten Son. (2) Equality of nature is a source of delight to the good and true. Fellowship with an equal gives joy. Christ, when on earth, ever claimed this equality with the Father. He claimed an *eternity*

of being. "Before Abraham was, I am" (Exod. iii. 14; John viii. 58). *Omniscience* is claimed for Him, and He gave evidence that He possessed it. "He knew what was in man" (John ii. 25). "And Jesus knowing their thoughts," etc. (Matt. ix. 4). *Divine energy.* "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work" (John v. 17). *Independent existence.* "As the Father hath life in Himself, so hath He given to the Son to have life in Himself" (John v. 26). *Holiness.* "Which of you convinceth me of sin?" (John viii. 46). *Almighty power.* "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth" (Matt. xxviii. 18). In the eternal ages, before the creation of the world, the Father looked upon this "brightness of His glory and express image of His person" (Heb. i. 3), and this Divine Equal gave joy to the uncreated God (Isa. xlii. 1).

III. **The delight of the Personal Wisdom of God in the creation of the home of man.** "Rejoicing in the habitable parts of the earth" (verse 31). The artist has joy in the thought of his completed work while it is in progress. He joys in that which *is not* as yet in outward form, but which *is*, in its completeness, within his mind. The architect, who sees day by day the building being reared which he knows will be the wonder of coming ages and the means of yielding comfort to thousands, rejoices in the thought of the blessing that is to come out of his work. He experiences an emotion with which a stranger cannot intermeddle (Prov. xiv. 10). And so Eternal Wisdom is here represented as regarding the future home of man. He saw its adaptibility to the wants of the creatures who were to inhabit it—its inexhaustible resources for the supply of all man's physical and many of his intellectual wants, and the thought of the millions to whose happiness the earth's riches and beauties would minister throughout the ages gave Him joy. The best natures among human-kind delight when they are able to produce what will increase the happiness of their fellow-creatures. The poet rejoices when he feels that his thoughts will cheer the hearts of other men. The inventor is glad when he has made a discovery which he knows will be a boon to his race. And so the Eternal Wisdom of God looked with joy upon the earth which He had called into being for the habitation of the race whom He was about to create. The joy that would be theirs gave Him joy when He looked upon creation with their eyes.

IV. **The special delight of the Personal Wisdom in man himself.** "My delights were with the sons of men." 1. *His delight in man would arise from the fact that he was a creature different from all pre-existing creatures.* Man is a link between mind and matter. He is a compound of the animal and the angel, of the dust of the earth and the breath of God. The material creation was called into being before man. The angelic and spiritual creatures existed before man. Man was, as it were, the clasp which united the two, and his unique character, we may well believe, made him a special object of interest to his Creator. New combinations give joy to those who, by combining forces, or material, or thoughts for the first time, bring about a new thing in the earth. They create a power or an idea which would not have existed if these elements had remained separate. Man, as he came originally from the hand of God, was such a perfectly balanced compound of mind and matter, of body and spirit, that his Creator had joy in the contemplation of His work, and declared it to be "very good" (Gen. i. 31). If we apply the words of the text to the second person of the Godhead, we know, from Scripture testimony, that He was the Creator of man, for "without Him was not anything made that was made." He is as rich in invention as He is in goodness. 2. *The delight of Christ would be especially with men, because in His own nature God and man would meet in an eternal combination.* The commander who can pluck victory out of the jaws of defeat, by the combination of certain forces not yet brought upon the field with others which have been already defeated, is allowed to give evidence of the highest military skill. The statesman who, anticipating the defeat of

one measure, reserved another method of tactics in the background which he knew would ensure an ultimate success, and who used the very means by which he had been defeated as a lever to establish a better law and a more lasting benefit, would be considered to display ability of the first degree, and to be a benefactor of his race. And the contemplation of such a victory beforehand must be an occupation of the deepest interest to the mind which originates the plan and carries it into action. Christ is, beyond all comparison, the leader of men. He saw beforehand that human nature would be defeated in its first conflict with evil. He knew that Satan would enter in and spoil this new principality of God. But He had already made preparation for this defeat, and He purposed, by means of the very human nature which would be thus defeated. in combination with His own divinity, to spoil the spoiler and lead captivity captive. By the eternal union of His own nature with the human He purposed to place man on a firmer standing ground, and gain for him the power of an endless life. Christ becoming the head of the race has defeated sin in the human nature that was itself defeated, and the grace which He has thus imparted to man has lifted him to a higher level than that in which he was created. And if the first edition of man, which was "of the earth, earthy" (1 Cor. xv. 47), gave joy to his Creator, how much more must He have rejoiced in the prospect of that second edition which was to be made after His own likeness, and to be the reward of "the travail of His soul" (Isa. liii. 11), although even then He knew at what a cost the work would be accomplished. (1 Pet. i. 20.)

NOTE ON THE RELATION OF THE SON OF GOD TO THE FATHER. (Verses 22-30 John i. 1). On this subject Dr. John Brown says, "That the Son is essentially and eternally related to the Father, in some real sense, as Father and Son; but that while *distinct* in person (for 'the Word was with God'), He is neither *posterior* to Him in time (for 'in the beginning was the Word'), nor *inferior* to Him in nature (for 'the Word was God'), nor *separate* from Him in being (for 'the same was in the beginning with God'), but *One Godhead* with the Father;" this would seem to come as near to the full testimony of Scripture on this mysterious subject as can be reached by our finite understanding, without darkening counsel with words without knowledge.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Verse 22. "The beginning of His way" evidently means the commencement of creation, when Jehovah set out in His course of creative and consequently of providential manifestation of His eternal perfections. *When* this was we cannot tell. We may know the age of our own world, at least according to its present constitution. But *when* the universe was brought into being, and whether by one omnipotent *fiat*, or at successive and widely varying periods, it is beyond our power to ascertain. One thing we know for a certainly revealed fact, that there were angelic creatures in existence previous to the reduction of our globe to order and to the creation of man upon it. These holy intelligences contemplated the six days work of Divine wisdom and power in this part of the universe with benevolent transport. "The morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy." How many other creatures, and of what descriptions—how many other worlds, and how peopled, might have existed before man and his earthly residence we are unable to affirm. When men, indeed, begin to talk of its being absurd to suppose the universe so recent as to have been only coeval with our own globe, or our own system, they forget themselves. They do not speak considerately nor philosophically. There is no lapse of ages or any point of measurement in eternity . . . . Beginning is as inconsistent with the idea of eternity as termination is. Go as far back as imagination, or as numbers heaped on numbers, can carry you, there still remains the previous

eternity, during which our speculative and presumptuous minds may wonder that Divine power had not been put forth.—*Wardlaw.*

Verse 23. It was in the last times, that the Eternal Wisdom was set forth unto us, but it was *from everlasting*, that He was set up to be a king over us. It was in the fulness of time that He offered Himself for us, but it was from the beginning that He was anointed to be priest unto us. It was upon the earth that His gracious lips taught us, but it was before the earth was that He was ordained to be a prophet for us. It is in Him that all are chosen who come unto eternity, and He Himself was chosen from eternity. From everlasting he was set up our King, to set us up an everlasting kingdom. From the beginning was He anointed our priest, to anoint us in a priesthood that shall never end. Before the earth was, He was ordained our prophet, to order our feet in that way which shall bring us from earth to heaven; He was chosen that we might be the chosen people of God.—*Jermin.*

Verse 24. The order of creation corresponds to that which we find in Genesis I. Still more striking is the resemblance with the thoughts and language of the book of Job, chap. xxii., xxvi., xxxviii. A world of waters, "great deeps" lying in darkness—this was the picture of the remotest time of which man could form any conception, and yet the coexistence of the uncreated wisdom with the eternal Jehovah was before that.—*Plumptre.*

At the period referred to here, creation was not yet actually framed and executed, it was only framed and planned; the whole being at once, in all its magnificence and in all its minuteness, before the eye of the Omniscient mind, in its almost *infinite* complexity, extent, and variety, yet without the slightest approach to confusion! All there, in one vast and complicated, yet simple idea!—*Wardlaw.*

Verse 27. God's "setting a compass upon the face of the deep" seems to refer to His circumscribing the earth when in its fluid state, assigning to it its spherical form, and fixing the laws by which that form should be constantly maintained. I think it probable that this refers to the earth in the state in which it is described previous to the beginning of the six days' work, by which it was reduced to order, and fitted for and stocked with inhabitants. How was the fluid element held together in the spherical form? The answer is, God "set a compass upon the face of the deep, saying, This be thy just circumference, O world!" By the power of gravitation, affecting every particle, drawing it to the common centre, the equilibrium was maintained, the globular form effected and kept; which may here be meant by the poetical conception of sweeping a circle from the centre, and defining the spherical limits of the world of waters.—*Wardlaw.*

Verse 29. Though great be the noise of the roaring of the sea, great the inconstancy of the tumbling waves, great the looseness of the flowing waters; yet the voice of God's decree is easily heard by them, constant is their obedience unto God's commandment, firmly do they keep the bounds of His law. But in the noise of our disorders, little is God's Word heard by us, in the lightness of our hearts, much is the will of God slighted, in the looseness of our lives every way doth a careless regard of God's law spread itself, which could not but drown us in a sea of God's wrath, did not He who was when the bounds of the sea were decreed, purchase by the red sea of His blood a gracious pardon for us. . . . Fitly is God said to appoint the foundations of the earth only; for that alone founded the whole earth, no more was needful for it. But how little doth God's appointment prevail with man, a little piece of earth. How often are God's purposes in the means of salvation disappointed by him. To lay firm the

foundations of grace in man's heart, the Eternal Wisdom, who was when the foundations of the earth were appointed, came down from Heaven, and here was pleased to work out His life thereby to accomplish the work of our redemption. And shall not this, then, make us to work out our salvation with fear and trembling?—*Jermin.*

Verse 30. To Wisdom the work was no laborious task. She "sported," as it were, in the exuberance of her strength and might.—*Plumptre.*

Verse 31. What was it that here attracted His interest? Man had been created in the image of God—free to stand or fall. This freedom was the perfection of his nature. His fall was permitted as the mysterious means of his higher elevation. His ruin was overruled for his greater security. This *habitable earth* was to be the grand theatre of the work that should fill the whole creation with wonder and joy. Here the serpent's head was to be visibly bruised, the kingdom of Satan to be destroyed, "precious spoil to be divided with the strong" (Isa. liii. 12). Here was the Church to be framed, as the manifestation of His glory, the mirror of His Divine perfections (Ephes. iii. 10, 21). Considering the infinite cost at which He was to accomplish this work, the wonder is that He should have *endured* it; a greater wonder that, ere one atom of the creation was formed—ere the first blossom had been put forth in Paradise, he should have *rejoiced* in it.—*Bridges.*

Of all earthly creatures, Christ delights most in men. 1. Because man is the chief of God's creatures upon earth, made after God's image, and for whom all the rest were made. 2. Because He took on Him the nature of men, and not of angels (Heb. ii. 16). 3. He conversed most familiarly with men when He was incarnate. Men only had reason and wisdom to delight in Christ's company, and to give Him occasion to delight in theirs. 4. Because He gave His life for them, that they might live with Him for ever. It seems, then, that He took great delight in them, and means to do so for ever.—*Francis Taylor.*

Did our Saviour, before His incarnation, rejoice in the habitable parts of the earth, and delight in visiting and blessing the sons of men? Then we may be certain that He still does so; for He is, yesterday, to-day, and for ever, the same. Still, He prefers earth to heaven; still, His chief delights are with the sons of men; and while, as man, He intercedes for them in Heaven, He still, as God, visits our world, to meet with and bless His people. . . . . And how great will be our Saviour's happiness, after the final consummation of all things! . . . If He loved, and rejoiced, and delighted in them before they knew and loved Him, how will He love and rejoice in them, when He sees them surrounding His throne, perfectly resembling Himself in body and soul, loving Him with unutterable love, contemplating Him with ineffable delight, and praising Him as their deliverer from sin, and death, and hell, as the author of all their everlasting glory and felicity.—*Payson.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH—Verses 32—36.

EXHORTATION FOUNDED ON HUMAN OBLIGATIONS TO DIVINE WISDOM.

I. Because Christ, the Eternal Wisdom, has manifested His sympathy with man, we are under obligations to come into sympathy with Him. A man who has manifested his sympathy with, and delight in, another's welfare by most substantial acts of benevolence and self-denial, has taken the most reasonable method of awakening an answering sympathy in the breast of him whom he has thus regarded. And the obligation on the part of the recipient is

increased in proportion to the amount of self-sacrifice undergone on his behalf. If such a benefactor desires and asks for the friendship of him whom he has befriended, it would seem impossible that such an appeal could be made in vain. The eternal wisdom of God has gone to the utmost of even His infinite capacity of self-denial to show His delight in, and regard for the human race. This, coupled with His eternal existence and His almighty power, is here made the basis of an exhortation to men to listen to His words, "Now, therefore, hearken unto me, O ye children!"

II. Those who are thus drawn into sympathy with Eternal Wisdom come under conditions of life. Here is a repetition of an oft-repeated truth of revelation, that life and God's favour are inseparable—identical (ver. 35). We can see shadows of this truth in the intercourse of men with their fellow-creatures. If a poor outcast child, surrounded by influences of evil to which he must yield if left to fight them single-handed, is lifted out of his degradation into a godly home, the favour of the friend who thus raises him changes his miserable existence into something worth calling life in comparison. The child who, by wilfulness, has forfeited the favour of a good parent, feels his entire existence clouded, but forgiveness through reconciliation brings light and life back to his spirit. The favour, therefore, of a fellow-creature is sometimes, by comparison, life. How much more is it so when we come into sympathy with Christ by hearkening to His voice and taking His yoke, and are by Him lifted out of a life of bondage to sin into the glorious liberty of the sons of God.

III. Those who refuse thus to come into sympathy with Eternal Wisdom are self-destroyers, because they are God-haters. He who refuses to drink of the Fountain of Life, must, of necessity, be left to soul-death. There is nothing that gives more sorrow to a human being than to know that the evil from which he is suffering is self-inflicted. If a man loses his sight through a wound which he receives from another, although he feels his blindness to be a terrible calamity, it lacks the element of bitterness which would be added to it if it had been brought about by his own wilfulness. The man who loses a limb in lawful battle looks upon his loss as an honour, because it was inevitable. But his feeling would be very different if he knew that he had been crippled for life by his own folly. It will be the main ingredient in the bitter cup of those who disregard the invitations of Divine Wisdom that they are moral suicides. The consciousness of this is a perpetual hell to the human spirit. And the mere neglect is sufficient to give the death-blow. It is not necessary to be in positive opposition to God and goodness. Not to listen is to refuse. Not to wait on God is to sin against Him—is to despise the provisions of His mercy.

ILLUSTRATION OF VERSE 34.

Hovering about the avenues of a royal residence, there are in Eastern as well as in other countries, always to be seen groups of people, some of whom are attracted by the impulse of curiosity, others by the hope of obtaining some mark of royal favour. The assiduity and perseverance requisite for succeeding in their suit, and waiting the propitious moment of presenting themselves in the presence of their sovereign, is not, as may be easily supposed, at all times consistent with personal ease and convenience, and, accordingly, here and there may be observed individuals seated upon a stone, or reclining upon the grass, in anxious expectation for the appearance of the sovereign on his way to daily exercise. To sit at the gates of a king is a custom of great antiquity.—*Paxton's Illustrations of Scripture.*

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Verse 32. O sweet courtesy! as if it were but a small matter that the Eternal Wisdom should become our Master, and teach us as His scholars; or that, being our Lord, He should teach us as His servants; or that, being God, He should teach us as men; yet greater is His love, and, as a Father,

He teacheth us as His children. And well may He call us His children, for it is He that teacheth us who, by adoption, hath made us to be His children, which by hearkening unto Him we show ourselves to be.—*Jermin.*

Verse 34. Uriah watched at David's gate as a token of service (2 Sam. xi. 9). Lazarus watched at Dives' gate as a token of dependence (Luke xvi. 20). Courtiers at royal entrances for smiles of favour. Let the sinner do all these things.—*Miller.*

Not watching awhile, and then going away if they be not let in presently, but waiting patiently till they be let in. Not only taking occasion of learning offered, but waiting to find occasions, as petitioners wait on great men till their causes be ended.—*Francis Taylor.*

Wisdom here appears as a sovereign, separate and secluded, in the style of Oriental monarchs, so that only those know anything of her who diligently keep watch at her doors. Wisdom, who is universal in her call and invitation (verses 1-3), yet, in the course of communication, in order to test the fidelity of her admirers, veils herself at times in a mysterious darkness, and reveals herself only to those who never intermit their search (Matt. vii. 7).—*Von Gerlach, in Lange's Commentary.*

There ought to be an expectation raised in us that the vital savour diffused in and by the Word may reach us; and many are ruined for not expecting it—not waiting at the posts of Wisdom's door.—*John Howe.*

Verse 35. 1. *Natural life* is found by it, not in regard of the beginning of it, but in regard of the comfort and continuance. 2. *Spiritual life*, or the life of grace. Wisdom is the life of the soul, and what were the world worth if there were no light? 3. *Eternal life*, or the life of glory. This is indeed the life that Christ, the wisdom of God, died to purchase for us, and lived among us to show us the way to it.—*Francis Taylor.*

Verse 36. Doing without is a stupid misery; but hating wisdom is an insane marvel.—*Miller.*

Not to love and earnestly seek Wisdom is to *sin against her.* To disregard her is to *hate* her, and is virtually, though unconsciously, to love death: for it is loving things, which as being opposed to wisdom, bring with them death.—*Fausset.*

What meaneth this *all*, where one would think there could be none? Can there be an all to hate Him who loveth all that is? But if it were not so, why do so many resist His holy will, despise His heavenly laws, rebel against His sacred pleasure? Are not these effects of hatred? Besides, so doth He challenge the *all* of our affection, as not to hate all things for His sake, is to hate Him. Now they that hate Him, what can they love? Surely it must needs be *death*, because in all things else He is. But that is the fruit of sin, and they that love the tree must needs love the fruit also. But to whom do we speak these things, or why do we speak them? Where shall we find open ears, or seeing eyes, when now almost men care not whom they look after, so that they do not look after themselves?—*Jermin.*

A child or an idiot may kindle a fire which all the city cannot quench. In spite of their utmost efforts, it might destroy both the homes of the poor and the palaces of majesty. So a sinner, though he cannot do the least good, can do the greatest evil. The Almighty only can save him, but he can destroy himself.—*Arnot.*

Sin a self-injury. There are three facts implied in these words: Firstly, *That man is capable of sinning.* This capability distinguishes man from the brute, and belongs to all moral beings. . . . It is our glory that we *can* sin; it is our disgrace and ruin that we do. Secondly, *That sin is something directed against God.* All the laws of man's being—physical, organic, intellectual, and moral—are God's laws, and violation of them is rebellion against heaven. Thirdly, *That sin against God is a wrong done to our nature.* This is

true of all sin, physical as well as spiritual. We cannot violate the laws of physical health, without losing at the same time something of the life, elasticity, and vigour of the mind. That sin injures the soul admits of no debate: it is a patent fact written on every page of history, and proclaimed by the deep consciousness of humanity. From this unquestionable fact we may fairly deduce three general truths. I. *That God's laws are essentially connected with the constitution of man.* From this fact two things follow. (1.) That all sin is unnatural. (2.) That an evasion of the penalties of sin is beyond the power of the creature. II. *That God's laws are the expression of benevolence.* We wrong our souls by not keeping God's laws. Obedience to them is happiness. The voice of all Divine prohibitions is, "Do thyself no harm," the voice of all Divine injunctions is, "Rejoice evermore." We infer from this *fact*—III. *That God's laws should be studiously obeyed.* (1.) Right requires it. All God's laws are righteously binding upon the subject, and disobedience is a crime. (2.) Expediency requires it. A life of sin is a life of folly, for it must ever be a life of misery.—*Dr. David Thomas.*

Verses 30–36. I. From the beginning the welfare of man engaged the complacent regard of God our Saviour. He derived delight from the *material* creation because it was to be subservient to man. II. We may therefore expect that all His communications and intercourse with us would be made to harmonise with our welfare also. We are warranted in expecting that all His communications with us will harmonise with the wants of our nature—that the means will be adapted to the end. Accordingly verses 35 and 36 imply that so perfect is the adaptation between the provisions of mercy and the necessity of man, that he who rejects them wrongs his own soul, that who receives them receives life. III. May we not infer that, even of this habitable part, He would rejoice in some spots more than in others, especially in such as are set apart for the diffusion of His truth and the promotion of His designs.—*Dr. J. Harris.*

CHAPTER IX.

CRITICAL NOTES.—**1. Wisdom,** in the plural, as in chap. i. 20, to express excellence and dignity. **2. he hath mingled her wine.** Some commentators understand the mingling to be with water, others with spices; both were customary among ancient orientals. **7. Latter clause.** Most commentators translate, "he that rebuketh the wicked, it is his dishonour," or, "it is a dishonour to him," *i.e.*, to the wicked man. **10. The Holy,** generally understood to stand in apposition to Jehovah. **13. A foolish woman,** rather, "the woman of folly," an exact opposition of the personified wisdom of the former part of the chapter. **Clamorous,** "violently excited" *(Zöckler).* **15. Who go right on their ways.** "Who are going straightforward in their paths" *(Stuart).*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1—12.

WISDOM'S FEAST.

I. The house to which Divine Wisdom invites her guests is one which has cost time and labour in the preparation. "Wisdom hath *builded* her house." The building of anything implies the expenditure of time and labour. When the eagle builds her nest and prepares a house for her yet unborn young she spends much time in her work and bestows much labour upon it. In the building of a house for human habitation, whether it be a palace or a cottage,

time and care, and thought and labour must be given to the building. And so it is in mental building; when thoughts are to be gathered together and fashioned into a book, the gathering and the building involves the expenditure of mental labour, and of many hours and days, and sometimes years, before the work is completed. And God has not departed from this rule in the works which He has wrought for the benefit of His creatures. The house which He has built for the habitation of man was not brought into its present form all at once. God did not create the heavens and the earth in one day or in a short period of time. We read that "in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is" (Exod. xx, ii), and the record of the rocks confirms the testimony of revelation that the preparation of the earth for man was a work of time. In creation Divine Wisdom "builded her house." And what is true of creation is true also of redemption. The incarnation of the Son of God took place in the days of Tiberius Cæsar, but the process of building the plan of redemption had been going on for ages. In the Mosaic dispensation it was seen in outline. Its sacrifices were shadows of the house which God intended hereafter to build in the human nature of the man Christ Jesus. The temple of Herod was forty-six years in building (John ii. 20), but the temple of God was in course of preparation for more than forty-six generations before it was brought to completion in "the Word made flesh" (See Hebrews, chap. ix.).

II. That which has been long in preparation is strong and enduring in character. It hath "seven pillars." The snow-flake is not long in being formed, and it is not long in duration. The bubble upon the stream is built in an instant, and passes away as quickly. But the coral island has taken many years, and cost a million lives, to build it, and now it stands a rock in the midst of the ocean, and has become the home of man. All that is strong and lasting in the world has taken time in its formation. So is it in the refuge where that is found which will satisfy the soul of man. It was long ere it was completed, but it is a lasting edifice, built upon a sure foundation (Heb. vi. 18, 19).

III. The house which Wisdom has builded contains that which will satisfy human need. The soul-blessings which God offers to men are often compared to a feast (Isa. xxv. 6; Matt xxii. 4). Here Wisdom is spoken of as having "killed her beasts, mingled her wine, furnished her table." 1. *It is plain that the human spirit needs a feast from the fact that God has spread the board.* When the Lord Jesus furnished a table in the wilderness for the multitude it was to supply a manifest need. It was to meet Israel's need that God fed them with manna in the wilderness. Man's spiritual nature must starve without the feast which God's wisdom has prepared. The existence of the feast proves the existence of the need. 2. *This feast is of the best quality.* The man who prepares a feast for his guests prepares of his best. The feast prepared by a poor man will be the best at his command; the banquet of a king will be such as befits his rank and resources. The banquet to which Divine Wisdom invites her guests is furnished with the most costly provisions that even God has to give. Christ, who declares Himself to be meat and drink to the spirit of man (John vi. 51, 54, 56) is the best gift that God had to bestow upon man—the best food that Heaven could furnish. 3. *Wisdom's feast is one in which there is variety.* There is *flesh*, *wine*, and *bread* (verses 2 and 5). The feasts of the rich and great consist of many different dishes, and the variety adds to the enjoyment of the guests. God has provided many different kinds of food to satisfy our bodily appetite. Although they are all adapted to the same end, viz., to the nourishment of the body, the difference in their composition and flavour adds much to man's enjoyment. The human spirit, like the human body, craves a variety in its food, and God has satisfied that craving. The revelation of God in Christ (in other words, the Gospel) reveals a great variety of spiritual truths upon which the spiritual nature of man can feed. There are

things "new and old" in the Gospel treasury (Matt. xiii. 52). And new revelations of life and immortality will be brought to light throughout the coming ages, and the feeling of those who partake of the royal banquet will be like that of the ruler of the feast at Cana: "Thou hast kept the good wine until now" (John ii. 10).

IV. Those who invite to Wisdom's feast must be pure in character. The sending forth of "maidens" seems to convey this idea. Maidenhood is a type of purity. The character of the inviter must be in keeping with the nature of the invitation. If a man gives an invitation to the Gospel-feast, he will find that those whom he invites will look at the invitation through the glass of his character, and unless it is one through which the invitation can be favourably viewed, there will be little hope of his words proving effectual. Character and doctrine are inseparable. God intends the first to be a recommendation of the last. The invitation to "Come," from the lips of the Lord Jesus, was mighty in its power, because the purity of His teaching was equalled by the purity of His life. The great power of the invitation to Wisdom's feast in the mouths of the first Christian teachers sprang from the character of those who gave the invitation (see 2 Cor. i. 2).

V. The means by which the guests are brought in They are *invited.* There can be no compulsion in bringing men to the feast of Wisdom. No man can be compelled to partake of a feast. Persuasion can be used, and men can be induced to eat of it from a sense of need, but force is useless. A man may be placed at the board and kept there against his will, but the eating must ever be his own act. And so it is with the spiritual blessings which God has prepared for men. All the force that can be exercised is the force of persuasion. The first servants who went forth to invite men to the Gospel-feast were fully convinced that the weapon which they were to use was that of *persuasion.* "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we *pray you* in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God" (2 Cor. v. 20). "Knowing the terrors of the Lord we *persuade men*" (2 Cor. v. 11).

VI. The publicity and general nature of the invitation. "She crieth upon the highest places of the city." On this head see Homiletics on chaps. i. 20, 21; viii. 2, 3.

VII. The different characters with whom Wisdom's servants meet in giving her invitation. They meet with the wise and just man (ver. 9), and with the wicked, who are again classified as the *simple* (ver. 4), and the *scorners* (ver. 7). There is often a great difference in things of the same class and kind. All the fruit upon a tree may be bad, but all may not be equally bad. So among sinners are men of different degrees of sinfulness There are the *simple*—those who are merely heedless of Divine teachings through a culpable ignorance and thoughtlessness, there are men so bad that they *scorn* all God's invitations and set at nought His threatenings. This character is held up in Scripture as having reached the climax of iniquity. (See Homiletics on chap. i. 22). The just man (ver. 9), is here synonymous with the wise man. He only is a wise man who has a worthy end which he sets himself to attain, and who uses the best means to attain that end. Hence the good or just man is the only truly wise man. He lays hold of all the means within his reach to increase his godliness, to get power to enable him to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk with God, and thus shows himself to be a member of the kingdom of the good which is the kingdom of the wise. He must be a *just* man, one who is upright in all his relations in life, one who will not knowingly leave undone his duty to his fellow-men. A man who is right in his relations towards God will not fail in his relations towards men. Simeon was a *devout* man, therefore he was a *just* man (Luke ii. 25), so was Cornelius (Acts x. 2, 22). But these wise men are not all equally wise, and none are so wise that they

cannot increase in wisdom, and therefore Wisdom sends forth her invitations to all, to the wise and just men as well as to the simple and the scorner.

VIII. The opposite effects of the invitation upon opposite characters. The scorner *hates* it—the wise man *loves* it (ver. 8). When the sun shines upon a diseased eye it produces a sense of discomfort, but the same light falling upon a healthy eye gives a sensation of pleasure. The opposite feelings are the results of opposite conditions. The different receptions which are given to God's invitations arise from the different spiritual conditions of the men who hear them. The man who "loves darkness rather than light because his deeds are evil" is pained when he receives Wisdom's invitation, because the very invitation condemns him. It is a rebuke to him (verses 7 and 8) for continuing to reject the feast for husks, for preferring to spend "money upon that which is not bread and his labour upon that which satisfieth not." Hence he who thus reproveth a scorner gets to himself shame, and he that rebuketh a wicked man getteth himself a blot (verse 7). The preacher of the Gospel endures the shame of the cross when he delivers his message to such an one, but it meets with quite an opposite reception from the wise and just. A wise man because he is wise desires more wisdom. Those who know most about a good thing are those who desire to know more, and this desire prevents them from being offended with those who offer to give them more knowledge. Even if Wisdom's invitation takes the form of a *rebuke* (ver. 8), the wise man, considering that the end of the rebuke is to do him good, loves the ambassador of Wisdom who administers it. When a sick man receives severe treatment from a physician, he accepts it patiently because he bears in mind the end in view, viz., his restoration to health. And this is the light in which all wise men regard Divine reproof, whether it comes directly from Himself in the form of providential dispensations, or through the medium of the lips of one of His servants. The message which is a "savour of death" to the scorner, is a "savour of life" to them.

IX. If the invitation is effectual, there will be a forsaking and a fearing. "Forsake the foolish and live" (verse 6). "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (verse 10). A forsaking of the wrong path must go before the entrance into the right one, and a fear that we may go wrong will help to keep us in the right way. A wholesome dread of God's displeasure will lead a man to repentance, which is but another name for a change in life's end, and aims, and purposes. A conviction that he has been going in the wrong direction will cause him to lend a willing ear to those who invite him to set out on the right path; and the acceptance of the invitation is the beginning of a life of true wisdom, because it is the beginning of the only safe and satisfying course of life.

X. Whatever reception is given to the invitations of Divine Wisdom, God is above all human approbation. If thou be wise, thou shalt be wise for thyself; but if thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it" (verse 12). The sun will go on shining, whatever men think or say about it. All the approbation of all the world will not add to the glory of the light that rules the day, and if men were to find fault with the manner in which it dispensed its light and heat, it would still hold on its way "rejoicing, as a strong man to run a race." The children of Wisdom, who accept the Divine invitation, and fall in with God's way of saving them, do not make God their debtor in any way. He would still be the moral Sun of the universe, if all mankind were to turn a deaf ear to His invitations, and all the praise of all the good in Heaven and earth cannot add one ray to the moral glory of His being. The scorn of the scorner cannot harm the God whose revelation he scorns, any more than a man could injure the wind that blows upon him by beating it. If men disapprove of God's way of governing the world, or of His conditions of salvation, it cannot harm the Divine

Being in any way. He is above all the approval or disapproval—all the rejection or acceptance of any finite creature. Eliphaz, the Temanite, spoke truly when he said, "Can a man be profitable to God, as he that is wise may be profitable unto himself? Is it any pleasure to the Almighty that thou art righteous? Or is it gain to Him that thou makest thy ways perfect?" (Job xxii. 2, 3). It therefore follows, as a matter of course, that the Divine plan of redemption has been devised solely out of regard to His creatures; that love is the only motive that prompts Him to multiply invitations and warnings; and that the sufferings which are entailed upon men by their rejection of His provisions spring from nothing selfish or arbitrary in the Divine character.

XI. The acceptance of the Divine invitation is an obedience to the lawful instinct of self-love. Self-love is often confounded with selfishness, but they are widely different. The principle of self-love is recognised as lawful and right throughout the Bible. God commands a man to love his neighbour *as* he loves himself, thereby laying down the principle that self-love is necessary and right. Our Saviour appeals to this Divinely-implanted instinct when He urges men to save their souls, because of the infinite *profit* which they will thereby gain (Mark viii. 36). And the fact that God has made self-love the standard whereby we are to measure our love to others, and that it is urged upon men as a motive by the Divine Son, at once places a great gulf between it and selfishness. Obedience to self-love leads men to obey Wisdom's invitation and thus to become truly wise themselves. Self-love leads men to desire to make the best of their existence, and no man can do this unless he accepts the call to the feast which Wisdom has prepared. The Hebrew nation thought they could get profit to themselves apart from acceptance of the Divine proposals. They persuaded themselves that they could do without God's way of life, and that the feast which He had prepared could be neglected with impunity. But they found when too late that they had done themselves an eternal wrong by "making light" of the call of the king's servants. (See Matt. xxii. 14). But "Wisdom is justified of her children," and although our Lord likens the men of that generation to children who neither dance to the sound of joyful music nor mourn to strains of lamentation (Luke vii. 31-35), there have always been some who have so regarded their real interest as to be willing guests of the Divine Inviter. Obeying His call they come into possession of a righteous character, the only attainment of real profit which can be gotten out of existence. It is the only end worth living for. The end of a true soldier's existence is not the *keeping of his bodily life.* That with him is quite a secondary consideration. Neither is it his *happiness.* These things are nothing to him in comparison with the attainment of a character for bravery and fidelity to his trust. And so with every man in God's universe. Not ease and comfort, not fame or high position, but *character* is that only which will make existence really profitable, which will make it a gain to live. Happiness will, of necessity, follow godliness, but it is not the thing to be aimed at. The attainment of the highest earthly fame, or the amassing of vast riches, will not necessarily make a man a good companion for *himself,* and if he is not this, he has failed to draw true profit out of his existence. He may be a wise man according to men's judgment, but if he has failed to consult his own true self-interest, he is a fool. A position in heaven would be nothing to such a man if he could obtain it. The blessedness of the heavenly world springs from the holy character of those who inhabit it, and this can be obtained only by listening to Wisdom's voice, and so gaining that "fear of the Lord which is the beginning of wisdom and the knowledge of the holy, which is understanding" (ver. 10). "If thou be wise, thou shalt be wise for thyself" (ver. 12); in other words—thou thyself shall reap the first and principal benefit.

XII. The consequence of the rejection of Wisdom's invitation must be borne

by him who rejects it. "If thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it." If a man refuses to use the power which he possesses to walk, he will, in the course of time, lose the power of using his limbs. The man who will not listen to the promptings of self-love will stifle its voice. But though he may destroy self-love, he cannot destroy himself. That belongs to God alone. Man can make his existence into a terrible burden, can change that which God intended to be a blessing into a curse, and in this sense he can destroy himself—can "lose his soul;" but he must live still, and bear the consequences of his choice. We can burn up the most costly articles and reduce them to black ashes, but no power of man can annihilate a single particle of the ashes. They exist still in some form or other. So men, by scorning God's invitations, can blacken and spoil the existence which God has given them, but they cannot annihilate themselves. They must live and bear the self-imposed burden.

ILLUSTRATION OF VERSE 3.

This may derive some illustration from a custom which Hasselquist noticed in Egypt, and which may seem to be ancient in that country. That it has been scarcely noticed by other travellers may arise from the fact that, although they may have seen the maidens on their way, they had not the means of knowing on what errand they were bound. He says that he saw a great number of women, who went about inviting people to a banquet in a singular, and, without doubt, in a very ancient manner. They were about ten or twelve, covered with black veils, as is customary in that country. They were preceded by four eunuchs; after them, and on the side, were Moors, with their usual walking staves. As they were walking, they all joined in making a noise, which, he was told, signified their joy, but which he could not find resembled a joyful or pleasing sound.—*Kitto.*

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Verse 1. "*House*" among the Hebrews was an image of all well-being (Exod. i. 21). It means shelter. It means nurture. It means repose. It means the centre of all provision. It means the home of all convivial feasts. If Wisdom has built such a shelter for the lost, it means she has furnished for them every possible necessity. An Eastern house depended upon columns that were around a court. Samson put his hand upon such interior supports. If Wisdom "*has hewed out her seven pillars,*" it means that the provision she has made for the saints is absolutely secure. The very number "*seven*" betokens a perfect, because a sacred support; and we have but to ask upon what the Gospel rests in its eternal promises and in the righteousness of its Great Head, to settle the question as to these sacred pillars.—*Miller.*

The Holy Spirit—having described in the foregoing chapter the office and work of Christ, as Creator, in the world of nature—now proceeds to describe His office and work in the world of grace. Solomon, the son of David, and the builder of the holy house at Jerusalem, here describes the operation of His own Divine Antitype, the Essential Wisdom, in building His house. The Son of God, having existed from eternity with the Father, in the fulness of time became Incarnate, building for Himself a human body, and also building for Himself a mystical body—the Church universal. . . . Wisdom's seven pillars represent the perfection and universality of Christ's work in both respects.—*Wordsworth.*

Pillars, and polished pillars. Anything is good enough to build a mud wall; but the church's pillars are of marble, and those not rough but hewn; her safety is accompanied with beauty. —*Trapp.*

If Wisdom dwell anywhere, herself must build the house; if she set up the pillars, herself must hew them. Nothing can be meet to entertain her which is not her own work. Nothing can be fit for God's residence, which is

not made fit by God's influence.—*Jermin.*

In the preceding chapter, Wisdom represented herself as manifest in all the works of God in the natural world; all being constructed according to the counsels of an infinite understanding. *Here,* she represents herself as the great *potentate,* who was to rule all that she had constructed; and having an immense *family* to provide for, had made an abundant provision, and calls all to partake of it.—*Adam Clarke.*

Verse 2. "She hath mingled her wine," viz., with spices and other exhilarating ingredients, as was the custom in the East (Cant. viii. 2). Not *with water* which is the emblem of degeneracy. The wine mingled with aromatic spices is the exhilarating joy and comforts of the gospel (Isa. lv. 1, Matt. xxvi. 29).—*Fausset.*

Does Christ give us His own flesh and blood, to nourish and refresh our souls? what grace, what comfort, what privilege will He withhold? He is most willing to communicate this provision to us.—*Lawson.*

God's favour and grace is always ready to be found when it is faithfully sought. Our faith can never make Him tardy in desiring that at the present which He cannot give till hereafter, or in being beforehand to demand that which His ability is behindhand to perform. The messengers say not in the Gospel, Be there at such a time, and in the meanwhile things shall be prepared, or, Go with me now, and dinner will be ready anon; but Come, for all things are now ready.—*Dod.*

Christ provideth for His the best of the best; "fat things full of marrow, wines on the lees" (Isa. xxv. 6); His own flesh, which is meat indeed; His own blood, which is drink indeed; besides that continual feast of a good conscience, whereat the holy angels, saith Luther, are as cooks and butlers, and the blessed Trinity joyful guests. Mr. Latimer says that the assurance of salvation is the sweatmeats of this stately feast.—*Trapp.*

Without asking what the flesh and wine specially mean, they are figures of the manifold enjoyment which makes at once *strong* and *happy.*—*Delitzsch.*

Verse 3. "*Her maidens.*" Sermons and providential strokes, the whole heraldry of the doctrine of salvation. —*Miller.*

Wisdom being personified as a feminine word, fitly has maidens as her ministers here. May there not also be an intimation (as Gregory and Bede suggest) of the natural *feebleness* of the Apostles and other ministers of the Gospel who have their treasure in earthen vessels (2 Cor. iv. 7), and also of the tender *love* which the preachers of the Gospel must feel for the souls of those to whom they are sent? . . . The great Apostle of the Gentiles speaks of himself spiritually as a *nurse* and a *mother.*—*Wordsworth.*

She, together with her maids, crieth; she puts not off all the business to them, but hath a hand in it herself. "We are workers together with God," saith Paul.—*Trapp.*

Verse 4. Ignorance is not a cause that should stay men from hearing the Word of God, but rather incite them to it. Their necessity doth require it, for who hath more need of eye-salve than they whose eyes are sore? And who have more need of guides than they who have lost their sight and are become blind? And especially when the way is difficult and full of danger. —*Dod.*

Verse 5. Not for the first time, in John vi., or on the night of the Last Supper, had bread and wine been made the symbols of fellowship with eternal life and truth.—*Plumptre.*

Indeed, to *come* is to *eat;* to come to Wisdom by attention is to eat of her instructions by receiving it into the soul.—*Jermin.*

The invitation is *free.* So it is throughout the Bible. The blessings of salvation are the gift of God. They are offered to sinners with the freeness of Divine munificence. Not only *may* they be had without a price, but if they are to be had at all it *must* be

without a price. This is one of their special peculiarities. In treating with our fellow-men in the communication of good, we make distinctions. From some, who can afford it, we take an equivalent; from others, who cannot, we take none. We *sell* to the rich, we *give* to the poor. In the present case there is no distinction. All are poor. All are alike poor; and he who presumes to bring what he imagines a price, of whatever kind, forfeits the blessings, and is "sent empty away." The invitation, too, is *universal;* for all men, in regard to divine and spiritual things, are naturally inconsiderate and foolish, negligent and improvident of their best and highest interests. And it is *earnest, repeated, importunate.* Is not this wonderful? Ought not the earnestness and the importunity to be all on the other side? Should not we find men entreating God to bestow the blessings, not God entreating men to accept them? *Wonderful?* "No," we may answer in the terms of the negro woman to the missionary when he put the question, "Is not this wonderful?" "No, Massa, it be *just like him.*" It is in the true style of infinite benevolence. But is it not wonderful that sinners should refuse the invitation? It is not in one view, and it is in another. It is *not,* when we consider their depravity and alienation from God. It *is,* when we think of their natural desire for happiness, and the manifest impossibility of the object of their desire being ever found, otherwise than by their acceptance of them.—*Wardlaw.*

Verse 7. The reproof given is duty discharged, and the retort in return is a fresh call to repentance for sin past, and a caution against sin to come.—*Flavel.*

Here caution is given how we tender reprehension to arrogant and scornful natures, whose manner it is to esteem it for contumely, and accordingly to return it.—*Lord Bacon.*

The three verses, 7-9, in their general preceptive form, seem somewhat to interrupt the continuity of the invitation which Wisdom utters. The order of thought is, however, this: "I speak to you, the simple, the open ones, for you have yet ears to hear; but from the scorner or evil-doer of such, I turn away." The rules which govern human teachers, leading them to choose willing or fit disciples, are the laws also of the Divine Educator. So taken, the words are parallel to Matt. vii. 2, and find an illustration in the difference between our Lord's teaching to His disciples and to them that were without.—*Plumptre.*

The passage is telling the consequences to the poor hardened man (see Critical Notes). Man is not like a thermometer, raised or sunken by every breath, but he is the subject of a change which makes a difference in moral influences. Without that change, instruction hardens him. With that change, it moves him and makes him better. Without the change the thermometer is always sinking; with the change it is rising all the time. This teaching is had in all forms in the New Testament. John says, "I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you" (1 John ii. 12); his plain implication being, that it would be useless to write except for the grace of forgiveness. We hear of a "savour of death unto death" (2 Cor. ii. 16); and Christ tells (John xv. 24) that "if He had not come among them, and done the works that none other man did, they had not had sin."—*Miller.*

Verse 8. By which I do not understand that we are forbidden to preach to the impenitent, but that we are to contemplate two facts: first, that unless they are changed our preaching will make them worse, and, therefore, second, that though our preaching is a chosen instrument of the change itself, yet, if they are *scorners—i.e.,* if they are what our Saviour calls "swine" (Matt. vii. 6), and He means by that, specially incorrigible—we are not to scatter our pearls to them. We are not to intrude religion upon scoffers.

We are to withhold the good seed to some extent (yet with infinite compassion for all,) for what may more reasonably be hoped to be the good and honest ground (Mark iv. 8).—*Miller.*

We must distinguish between the ignorant and the wilful scorner. Paul "did it ignorantly, in unbelief" (1 Tim. i. 13). His countrymen deliberately refused the blessing, and shut themselves out from the free offers of salvation.—*Bridges.*

Verse 9. *Instruction may be given with advantage to the wise.* 1. No truly wise man will account it impossible to make accessions to his wisdom. Such a man is not wise in his own conceit (Rom. xii. 16). His entrance into this course is of too recent a date, and the efforts which he has made to gain wisdom too defective, to permit him to think his wisdom incapable of augmentation (John viii. 2). And (2) every wise man, whatever be the nature of his wisdom, will wish it to be increased as much as possible (Prov. xviii. 15). Hence (3), whatever instruction is given to him which is adapted to his character and circumstances, that is, which shows wherein he is defective, either in the end which he is pursuing, or in the manner of his pursuit, no matter by whom the instruction is given, he will account himself happy in having it, and will be the better for it.—*Sketches of Sermons.*

Verse 10. Men cannot begin to be wise except in holiness; unless it begins to be the fact that God is teaching a man, you cannot teach him.—*Miller.*

The heart that is touched with the loadstone of Divine love trembles still with godly fear.—*Leighton.*

The "knowledge of the holy" is the knowledge of all that is involved in *hallowing God's name;* knowing experimentally all that tends to our sanctifying the Lord in our hearts and in life.—*Fausset.*

Some of the true wisdom is a nucleus, round which more will gather. A little island once formed in the bed of a great river, tends continually to increase. Everything adds to its bulk. The floods of winter deposit soil on it. The sun of summer covers it with herbage and consolidates its surface. Such is wisdom from above once settled in a soul. It makes all things work together for good to its possessor.—*Arnot.*

Verse 12. As we are not aware that the mass of the impenitent actually scoff at religion, we must look at this word, so often selected by Solomon, as meaning that practical scorn, by which men, who profess to respect the Gospel, show it the practical contempt of their worldliness.—*Miller.*

The principle involved in the parable of the talents (Matt. xxv.) is embodied in the first intimation. The talents are in the first instance not won by the servant, but given by the master. So wisdom is specifically the gift of God (James i. 5). Those servants who use the talents well, are permitted to retain for their own use both the original capital and all the profit that has sprung from it: whereas he who made no profit is not allowed to retain the capital. Thus the Giver acts in regard to the wisdom which it is his own to bestow. The wisdom, with all the benefit it brings, is your own. Every instance of wise acting is an accummulation made sure for your own benefit. It cannot be lost. It is like water to the earth. The drop of water that trembled on the green leaf, and glittered in the morning sun, seems to be lost when it glitters in the air unseen; but it is all in safe keeping. It is held in trust by the faithful atmosphere, and will distil as dew upon the ground again, when and where it is needed most. Thus will every exercise of wisdom, though fools think it is thrown away, return into your own bosom, when the day of need comes round. Equally sure is the law that the evil which you do survives and comes back upon yourself. The profane word, the impure thought, the unjust transaction, they are gone like the

wind that whistled past, and you seem to have nothing more to do with them. Nay, but they have more to do with you. Nothing is lost out of God's world, physical or moral. When a piece of paper is consumed in the fire and vanishes in smoke, it seems to have returned to nothing. If it bore the only evidence of your guilt, you would be glad to see the last corner disappear before the officers of justice came in. All the world cannot restore that paper and read the dreaded lines again. The criminal breathes freely now no human tribunal can bring home his crime. But as the material of the paper remains undiminished in the mundane system, so the guilt which it recorded abides, held in solution, as it were, by the moral atmosphere which encircles the judgment-seat of God. Uniting with all of kindred essence that has been generated in your soul, it will be precipitated by a law, and when it falls, it will not miss the mark. Thou alone shalt bear it Those who have not found refuge in the Sin-bearer must bear their own sin. Sins, like water, are not annihilated, although they go out of our sight. They fall with all their weight either on the sin-doer or on the Almighty Substitute. Alas for the man who is "alone" when the reckoning comes.—*Arnot.*

A man's self is not that which he is for a short time and space, but that which he is for continuance, indeed for an endless continuance. And therefore that which we are in this life is not ourselves, but that which we shall be, that is ourselves. So that whosoever is wise for that time is wise for himself, and for that time we shall be wise if we be made so by the instruction of Eternal Wisdom.—*Jermin.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 13—18.

The Feast of Folly.

That which strikes one upon reading this description is the analogy and the contrast which it presents to the feast of Wisdom. **I. Its analogies.** 1. *Both appeal to elements in the nature of man.* Man is a compound, a complex being. He possesses a moral nature, a conscience, which can be satisfied only with moral truth and goodness, to which Wisdom appeals with her wine and bread of God's revelation, and whose cravings they alone are able to appease. And he has sinful inclinations and passions which hanker after forbidden things, to which Folly appeals when she sets forth the attractions of her "stolen waters" and her "bread eaten in secret" (verse 17). God's wisdom and love are shown in appealing to the first, and Satan's cunning and malice are manifested in the adaptation of his appeal to the second. 2. *Both invite the same kind of character*, viz., the "*simple*," the inexperienced, those who have not tasted the sweets of godly living, yet "know not" from experience that the "dead" are in the house of Folly, that "her guests are in the depths of hell (verse 18). Two potters may be desirous of possessing the same lump of clay in order to fashion it each one after his own desire. It is now a shapeless mass, but they know its yielding and pliable nature renders it capable of assuming any form, of taking any impress, which they may please to impart to it. The inexperienced in the experimental knowledge of good and evil are very much like potter's clay; and here Wisdom and Folly, God and the devil, holiness and sin, stand side by side bidding for the clay, the one desiring to fashion out of it a "vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the Master's use" (2 Tim. ii. 21), and the other anxious to make it a "vessel of wrath fitted to destruction" (Rom. ix. 22). 3. *Both invite to the feasts through those who possess powers of persuasion.* Though in the first Wisdom herself does not go forth, but sends her maidens,

and in the second the woman herself goes out into the streets, yet they both belong to the sex which is, by common consent, allowed to be most skilled in the art of persuasion. History is full of instances of their power to influence for good and evil. There have been many Lady Macbeths, both in public and private life, and many "handmaids of the Lord" whose influence has been as mighty on the side of good. Both Wisdom and Folly possess ambassadors whose persuasive powers are mighty. 4. *They utter their invitations in the same places.* Wisdom "crieth upon the high places of the city" (ver. 3). Folly "sitteth at the door of her house, on a seat in the high places of the city" (ver. 14). They both give invitations where they are most likely to obtain guests. In the places where many congregate are found the greatest variety of characters and those who have the most varied wants, and as in such places those who have wares of any kind to sell are sure of finding some to purchase, so the ambassadors of Divine wisdom and the emissaries of evil are certain, where the multitudes are gathered together, to find some to listen to their respective voices. 5. *Both use the same words of invitation, and offer the same inducements.* A feast is promised in both cases, *i.e.*, both inviters promise satisfaction—enjoyment—to their guests. If a man coins bad money he must make it look as near as possible like the gold or he would not get anyone to accept it. It is only afterwards that his dupe finds that it lacks the ring of real gold. So the tempter to evil must make the advantages he professes to dispense look as much like real good as he possibly can. The false friend will often-times adopt the phraseology of the true, and will never be wanting in arguments to win his victim. The incarnate wisdom of God reminded His disciples that they might, in this respect and in others, learn something from the "children of this world," who, in some matters, "are in their generation wiser than the children of light" (Luke xvi. 8). 6. *Both make the invitation wide and free.* "Whoso" is the word used by both. The kingdom of darkness, as well as the kingdom of light, is willing to gather of "every kind" (Matt. xiii. 47). The only condition is "Enter in and partake of the banquet prepared."

II. The Contrasts. 1. *In the character of the inviters.* In the one case they are "maidens," emblematical (as we saw in considering the first feast) of purity; in the other she who invites is evidently a bold and wanton woman, identical with the one described in chapters v. and vii. (compare v. 6, vii. 11, 12, with verses 13, 14). Each one who invites is an embodiment of the principles ruling in the house to which she invites; each one sets forth in her own deportment what will be the result of accepting the respective invitations. So that, although the words used may be similar, the simple might be warned from the difference in aspect and demeanour of those who use them. 2. *In the place to which the simple are invited.* "In the former case," says Zöckler, "it is to a splendid palace with its columns, to a holy temple of God; in the latter to a common house, a harlot's abode, built over an entrance to the abyss of hell." The first invitation is to the abode of a righteous king, where law, and order, and peace reign; the second is to an abode of lawlessness and self-seeking, and consequently of incessant strife and misery. Those who dwell in the first are ever magnifying the favour by which they were permitted to enter; the inhabitants of the latter are eternally cursing those by whose persuasions their feet were turned into the path which leads to death. 3. *Wisdom invites to what is her own; Folly invites to that which belongs to another.* Wisdom hath killed *her* beasts and mingled *her* wine; she cries, "Come, eat of *my* bread" (verses 2, 5). Folly saith to her victim, "Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant" (verse 17). The first is therefore a lawful meal: its dainties may be enjoyed with a full sense that there is no wrong done to oneself, or to any other creature in the universe, by participating in it. It may be eaten publicly; there is no reason for concealment—no sense of shame. But

the guests of Folly are all wronging themselves, and wronging God, and wronging their fellow-men by sitting down at her table. And they feel that it is so even when the waters taste the sweetest, and the bread the most pleasant. Hence their banquet is a secret one, "for it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret" (Ephes. v. 12). Hence they "love darkness rather than light;" they "hate the light, lest their deeds should be reproved" (John iii. 20, 21). 4. *The contrast in the results.* There are poisonous fruits which are pleasant to the taste, but which lead to sickness and death. And there are bitter herbs which are not palatable, but which bring healing to the frame. Some of Wisdom's dishes are seasoned with reproof and rebuke (verse 8), but the outcome of listening to her call is an increase of wisdom and a lengthening of days and years (verses 9-11). The feast of Folly is sweetened with "flattery" (chap. ii. 16, vii. 21). The lips of the tempter "drop as an honey-comb" (chap. v. 2), but there is a deadly poison in the dish. Eating of her food brings a man down into a devil; the bread and wine of Wisdom nourishes and strengthens him until he becomes "equal unto the angels of God" (Luke xx. 26).

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Verses 1–18. The prototypical relation of the contents of this chapter to our Lord's parables founded on banquets (Matt. xxii. 1–14, Luke xiv. 16–24) is evident, and therefore its special importance to the doctrines of the call of salvation.—*Lange's Commentary.*

Verse 13. "Clamorous," that is, so bustling as to allow no time for repentance (see 5, 6), like Cardinal Mazarin, of whom it was said that the devil would never let him rest. The sinner is so hurried along in the changes of life, as apparently to unsettle any attempted reformation. "Knows nothing;" an expression grandly doctrinal. The impenitent is blankly dark. Eccles. vi. 5 represents the perishing as like an untimely birth. "He hath not seen the sun, nor known anything." "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; neither can he know them because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. ii. 14). "Where can Wisdom be found?" says the inspired man (Job xxviii. 14–22). "The depth saith, It is not in me; and the sea saith, It is not with me." The woman of folly is blankly ignorant; for the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and if she has not the beginning, then mental light, if she have any, must be but as "darkness" (Matt. vi. 23).—*Miller.*

A foolish woman is clamorous, and hath many words, but they are words only, for she knoweth nothing; the folly of sin is clamorous, and maketh many promises of pleasure and contentment, but they are promises only, and she performeth nothing.—*Jermin.*

Verse 15. Her chief aim is to secure the godly, or those inclined to become so; for she is secure as to others, and therefore takes no great trouble in their case.—*Fausset.*

Even the highway of God, though a path of safety, is beset with temptation. Satan is so angry with none as with those *who are going right on.*—*Bridges.*

Verse 16. Wisdom sets up her school to instruct the ignorant: Folly sets up her school next door to defeat the designs of Wisdom. Thus the saying of the satirist appears to be verified:—

"Wherever God erects a house of prayer,
The devil surely builds a chapel there;
And it is found, upon examination,
The latter has the larger congregation."—*Defoe.*
Adam Clark.

Folly does not invite the scorners,

because she is secure of them, but only the "simple," *i.e.*, those who are such in the judgment of the Holy Spirit. Scripture expresses not what she says in outward words, but what is the reality. Whosoever turns in to her is a simpleton. *Cartwright* takes it that she calls the pious "simple." Verse 15 favours this.—*Fausset.*

Verse 17. Folly shows her skill in seduction by holding out, in promise, the secret enjoyment of forbidden sweets. Alas! since the entrance of sin into the world, there has been among mankind a sadly strong and perverse propensity to aught that is forbidden, to taste what is laid under an interdict. The very interdiction draws towards it the wistful desires, and looks, and longings of the perverse and rebellious heart.—*Wardlaw.*

The power of sin lies in its pleasure. If stolen waters were not sweet, none would steal the waters. This is part of the mystery in which our being is involved by the fall. It is one of the most fearful features of the case. Our appetite is diseased . . . . Oh, for the new tastes of a new nature! "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness." When a soul has tasted and seen that the Lord is gracious, the foolish woman beckons you toward her stolen waters, and praises their sweetness in vain. The new appetite drives out the old.—*Arnot.*

Many eat that on earth that they digest in hell.—*Trapp.*

Indirect ways best please flesh and blood. "Sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence" (Rom. vii. 8). We take this from our first parents, a greedy desire to eat of the forbidden fruit. All the other trees in the garden, although the fruit were as good, would not satisfy them . . . . Such is the corruption of our nature, that we like best what God likes worst.—*Francis Taylor.*

Verse 18. Of course "he knows not." If the sinner only knew that he were already dead, he might wake up with a bound to the work of his salvation.—*Miller.*

All sinful joys are damned up with a *but.* They have a worm that crops them, nay, gnaws asunder their very root, though they shoot up more hastily and spread more spaciously than Jonah's gourd . . . . When all the prophecies of ill success have been held as Cassandra's riddles, when all the contrary minds of afflictions, all the threatened storms of God's wrath could not dishearten the sinner's voyage to these Netherlands, here is a *but* that shipwrecks all; the very mouth of a bottomless pit, not shallower than hell itself. . . . . As man hath his *sic*, so God hath His *sed.*—*T. Adams.*

CHAPTER X.

We here enter upon the second main division of the Book of Proverbs, which is composed of a number of distinct propositions or maxims, having but little connection with each other and answering to the modern signification of the word proverb. Wordsworth here remarks that "the Proverbs of the present chapter are exemplifications in detail of the principles, practices, and results of the two ways of life displayed in the foregoing chapters which constitute the prologue."

CRITICAL NOTES.—1. Heaviness, "grief." 3. The soul of the righteous, literally, "the spirit of the righteous." But He casteth away, etc. Zöckler and Delitzsch here read, "but the craving of the wicked He disappointeth." Miller thus translates the whole verse: "Jehovah will not starve the righteous appetite, but the craving of the wicked He will thrust away."

4. Dealeth, rather, "worketh. **6.** Zöckler and most commentators translate the second clause of this verse, "the mouth of the wicked hideth or covereth violence or iniquity." Stuart reads, "the mouth of the wicked concealeth injury." Miller adheres nearly to the authorised version, and understands it to mean that "wrong shuts up all chance of feast and comfort." It will be observed, that this latter reading renders the clause antithetical to the former part of the verse, which is not the case with the other renderings. **9. Be known,** *i.e.*, "be made known," or, discovered. **11.** For second clause, see on verse 6. **14. Lay up,** literally, "conceal," *i.e.*, "husband the knowledge and understanding which they possess for the right time and place, do not squander it in unreasonable talk or babbling" *(Zöckler).* **Near destruction,** rather, *is a* near destruction, *i.e.*, "is a quickly destroying agency" *(Lange's Commentary).* **16. Labour,** *i.e.*, "the gain," "the reward of labour." **Fruit,** "gain," antithetical to the subject of the first clause. **17.** Not, **He is in the way,** but "He *is* the way." **Erreth,** causeth others to err. **18. Not with lying lips,** but "is of lying lips." "The meaning of this second clause does not stand in the relation of an antithesis to the preceding, but in that of a climax, adding a worse case to one not so bad. If one conceals his hatred within himself, he becomes a malignant flatterer; but if he gives expression to it in slander, abuse, and base detraction, then, as a genuine fool, he brings upon himself the greatest injury" *(Zöckler).* **22.** Delitzsch and Zöckler read the second clause, "and labour addeth nothing thereto," *i.e.*, "God's blessing is in itself all in all, and makes rich without any effort." Stuart and Miller translate as the authorised version, and the former understands it to signify that "sorrow shall not necessarily increase by riches when it is Jehovah Himself who bestows them." 23. Second clause, "to a man of understanding wisdom is an enjoyment" *(Zöckler).* **25.** "*When* the whirlwind passeth, the wicked is no more." **29.** "Jehovah's way is a fortress to the upright, but *it is destruction* to the workers of iniquity. **31. Cut out,** "rooted out."

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 1.

PARENTAL GRIEF AND GLADNESS.

The generalisation of the first nine chapters here descends into particular applications. The chemist dilates upon the power and excellence of certain elements, and then illustrates what he has affirmed by showing their action in particular cases. Solomon has dwelt long upon the general blessings which will flow from listening to the counsels of Divine Wisdom, and he now shows some particular instances of it. He begins with its effect in the family. Consider—

I. How the author here speaks from personal experience. 1. *In his relation to his father.* Men in positions of far less importance than that which David held are solicitous that their sons should possess such a character and such mental qualifications as will enable them to fulfil the duties which they will bequeath to them at their own departure from the world. The owner of a large estate, if he has a right sense of his own responsibilities, desires that his heir should be one who will exercise his stewardship wisely and generously. The head of a mercantile firm hopes that the son who is to succeed to his position will be prudent and far-seeing, and possess an aptitude for business. If a monarch is what he ought to be, and feels how very great is his power for good or evil, it will be a matter of the deepest anxiety to him that the son who is one day to sit upon the throne should be one who will discharge his weighty duties wisely and well. David was such a monarch, and we can well imagine how great was his solicitude that his well-beloved son Solomon should possess such gifts and graces as would enable him worthily to fulfil the high position he would one day be called to occupy. And, from what we know of Solomon's youth and early manhood, we have every reason to believe that he was such a son as gladdened his father's heart. In the wonderful seventy-second Psalm—which, although it has its entire fulfilment only in the "greater than Solomon," refers, doubtless, in the first instance, to the great king—we have a glimpse of David's desires and hopes concerning him. He begins with a prayer for him: "Give the king Thy judgments, O God, and Thy righteousness unto the king's son" (verse 1). And then he gives utterance to the hopes which he cherished concerning his prosperous and beneficent reign—hopes which, alas! would have

been sadly dimmed could he have foreseen the cloud that overshadowed Solomon's later days, but which were founded in the evidences which he gave of youthful piety and devotion. Solomon knew that he had been the gladness of his father's heart, because he had been a "wise son," and therefore he spoke from experience when he uttered the first clause of this proverb. But he spoke no less from experience when he gave utterance to the opposite truth. Solomon was a father as well as a son, and he speaks (2) *in his relation to his son.* Rehoboam's youth and manhood—for he was a man long before his father's death—were not, we may fairly conclude, of such a character as to give his father much joy, but was such as to awaken the gravest fears concerning his conduct when he should become absolute master of the kingdom. We well know how these fears were justified by his conduct on his accession to the throne. The great crime of David's life had been committed before Solomon's birth, and had, therefore, had no bad influence upon him, but the sins of his own old age were a sad example to set before his son, and could not have been without their evil influence. From what we read of Rehoboam, we can but conclude that he had been a "foolish" son, and that Solomon's heart was heavy with sadness concerning him when he penned these words. These thoughts suggest a lesson which parents should deeply ponder, viz., *that whether parents shall have gladness or grief in their children depends not so much upon the excellence of their words as upon the godliness of their lives.* Solomon uttered thousands of moral precepts, but had he uttered as many more, they would not have had much effect upon Rehoboam. What his son needed more than wise sayings was the power of a godly life. This must ever accompany moral teaching: nay, it must go before it, for a child can receive impressions from a holy example before it is old enough to appreciate abstract teaching. A parent's wise *sayings* will never do a child any good unless there are correspondent *doings.* A good example is the best education. Consider—

II. **How very much our joy and sorrow in this world depend upon our relationships.** In proportion as the wise are related to the foolish or to the wise, will be their grief or their gladness. Distant relationships are not very effective in this way, but near relationships are powerful in proportion to their nearness. And the relation of parent to child is in some respects nearer than any other—nearer, perhaps, even than that of husband and wife. Our children are a part of ourselves, and what they are makes or mars our lives. How much does that little pronoun "my" carry with it! To hear that *any* young man has disgraced his manhood and thrown away his opportunities is an occasion of sadness to us. This is increased if he is the son of anyone we have known and loved. But if good parents have to reflect that "my" son has become a reprobate, how bitter is their sorrow. But when the folly is not so great as this there may still be much "heaviness" in a parent's heart. "Wise" and "foolish" are relative terms. A good father's joy is proportionate to his son's goodness, for we understand wisdom and folly here to stand for the wisdom of godliness and the folly of sin, and a very little amount of wickedness will make a good mother's heart heavy. *Let children then learn from this text to reflect how much power to give joy or sorrow rests with them, and to act accordingly;* and *let parents, considering how entirely their future happiness or misery will depend upon the character of their children, begin to train them, both by example and precept, from their tenderest years.* (On this subject see also Homiletics on chap. iv. 1–4.)

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

The future may be imperative. We prefer this view. "*Let* a wise son make a glad father." If a man has a good son, let it be his one all-sufficient gratification. . . . Men toil for their children, and give themselves pain in their behalf to an extent absolutely heroic, considering how they abnegate self, but to an extent altogether disproportioned, as between their temporal and eternal warfare. This is one way we destroy our children. If their temporal inheritance is threatened, we are all on thorns; but if they are doing well or ill in piety, we give it but little notice. The verb, therefore, as an imperative, means most. "*Let* a foolish son be the grief of his mother," that is, an unconverted son. He may be all smiles and amiableness, and the father's business may be doing well, but if he is a fool, spiritually, it should be his mother's grief. And then follow the reasons—(For) "treasures of wickedness profit nothing," etc.—*Miller.*

Perhaps this first sentence may have been placed in the front to point to the value of a godly education in its personal, social, national influence, connected both with time and eternity. —*Bridges.*

The father is specially said to be gladdened by a wise son as he is of a more severe nature, and not so likely to form a partial estimate, and therefore not so easily gladdened as the mother; so that it is the stronger praise of the wise son to say that not only the mother, but also the father, is gladdened by him. On the other hand, the mother is apt, through fondness, to ignore the errors of her son, and even to encourage them by indulgent connivance. The wise man admonishes her that she is laying up "heaviness" in store for herself.—*Fausset.*

After the previous general description of Wisdom, Solomon begins with what is uppermost in his own mind, What would be the character of his successor? What would become of his throne, his wealth, his people, after himself? See his melancholy forebodings in Proverbs xvii. 2-21, 25; xix. 13; Eccles. ii. 18, etc. Solomon has one son, and he is Rehoboam. This thought lies underneath many of the sayings in the Proverbs.—*Wordsworth.*

Every son should be an Abner, that is, his father's light, and every daughter an Abigail, her father's joy. Eve promised herself much in her Cain, and David did the like in his Absalom. But they were both deceived. Samuel succeeds Eli in his cross, though not in his sin. Virtue is not, as lands, inheritable. Let parents labour to mend by education what they have marred by propagation.—*Trapp.*

Do you hear this, young man? It is in your power to make your father glad, and God expects you to do it Here is an object for your ambition, here is an investment that will ensure an immediate return. Come now, make your choice. Whether you will try to please these fools who banter you here, or to gladden your father's heart that is yearning for you there? . . . These companions that come between you and him—what have they done for you, and what would they do for you to-morrow, if you were in distress? They have never lost a night's rest by watching at your sick bed, and never will. But your father what has he done, and yet will do? The command of God is that you gladden your father and not grieve him. Your conscience countersigns that command now. Obey.—*Arnot.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 2.

THE COMPARATIVE VALUE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS AND RICHES.

I. Wealth when lawfully gotten is profitless for many very important things. Death is mentioned in the text, it has no power over that in any form.

1. *Wealth will not deliver from the daily dying, which is the lot of all men.* It has been said that as soon as we are born we begin to die, and we know that it is certain that as soon as men have attained their prime, their outward man perisheth day by day (2 Cor. iv. 16). The richest man cannot purchase exemption from this law with all his wealth. 2. *Neither can wealth prevent the death which we call premature.* Men of vast fortunes are often brought down to an early grave; the seeds of disease within them hasten the operation of the law of death which has passed upon the whole human race. A galloping consumption cannot be held in check even with *golden* reins. 3. *Treasures of wealth will not insure a man against sudden death.* The morning finds the rich man looking over his vast acres, or counting up his dividends, and saying, "I have much good laid up for many years;" and before the sun sets another has entered into possession of all his riches 4. *Lawfully-gotten wealth will not only not deliver from premature death, but may sometimes bring it on.* Wealth is very apt to produce very mistaken views in a man's mind. When he has amassed a large portion of this world's goods, and is in a condition of moral bankruptcy, he is very prone to imagine that he is secure in the enjoyment of all that he has acquired, and that nothing can come between his riches and himself. Then God may read him a lesson by saying, "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee" (Luke xii. 20). Had the man in the parable been a poor man he would not have died so soon; his wealth not only could not deliver him from death, but it hastened his end. And many men walking in his footsteps have been brought to their graves in a similar manner and for a similar reason even when the wealth has been honestly gained. We have no reason to think that the rich fool amassed his riches dishonestly; his sin consisted, not in his *having* riches, but in his *trusting* in them.

II. If treasure gotten by honest toil is profitless to deliver from death and other evils, how much less will the "treasures of wickedness," i.e., ill-gotten wealth, be profitable to work such a deliverance. The means used to obtain it were opposed to the law of righteousness, which does rule in the universe notwithstanding all the apparent exceptions, and it is as foolish for a man to expect to derive real profit from it as it would be for a man to expect to construct a pyramid which would stand upon its apex. The latter would not be more contrary to natural law than the former is to spiritual law. And treasures of wickedness are not simply *profitless*, they bring the man who has them under the curse of the Righteous Ruler of the world. They not only bring no *profit* but they bring great *loss*. No man can make an unlawful bargain or commit any other dishonest act to gain money without bringing a blight upon his spiritual nature, without entailing upon himself moral death. And if the acquirement of "the treasures of wickedness" must subject a man to this greatest calamity, how impossible it is that they can be profitable to deliver from any lesser evil.

III. Righteousness, on the other hand—1. *Has often delivered from bodily death.* All the extraordinary deliverances from death recorded in the Bible took place in connection with righteousness, thereby showing us that righteousness is stronger than death. Enoch did not see death because he was a righteous man. Noah and his family were exempted from the premature death which overtook the rest of the world for the same reason. All the resurrections from the dead were wrought either through the instrumentality of righteous men or by the immediate action of the righteous Son of God. 2. *Does deliver always from the curse of bodily death.* Death is the penalty of sin; it is therefore a curse. We read that "The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law" (1 Cor. xv. 56). But "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us" (Gal. iii. 13). We are justified by His righteousness if we appropriate it by faith (Rom. iii. 21–26), and thus obtain

the "victory" over death "through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. xv. 57). Here a *relative* righteousness delivers from the *condemnation* of death. But this is the foundation of a *personal* and *actual* righteousness of character which delivers from *spiritual death now*, and will one day deliver the *body* from the grave. "If Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the spirit of Him that raised up Christ from the dead dwell in you, He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by His spirit that dwelleth in you" (Rom. viii. 10, 11). Here Paul argues from the greater spiritual deliverance to the lesser bodily one, and shows how, in all senses, "righteousness delivers from death."

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

The proverb means the treasures of an unsaved man. . . . The highest opulence of the dead sinner is of no possible profit: but the righteousness of the saved sinner, even without any opulence at all, is a fortune; for, like the "charm of the lamp," it makes for him everlasting blessedness.—*Miller.*

A man may seem to *profit* by them, and to come up wonderfully for a time. But what was the profit of Naboth's vineyard to Ahab, when in his ivory palace he was withering under the curse of God? (1 Kings xxi. 4-24 with xxii. 39). What was the profit of the thirty pieces of silver to Judas? Instead of *delivering from death*, their intolerable sting plunged him into death eternal (Matt. xxvii. 5).—*Bridges.*

Righteousness delivereth from death, to wit, in the time of vengeance; for uprightness is that mark of election and life which the Lord, spying in any when He plagueth the wicked for their transgressions, spareth them, and preserveth them from destruction. Thus, although the righteousness of the just person deserveth nothing at God's hands, neither is any cause of man's preservation or salvation, yet it serveth as a sovereign treacle to preserve the evil-doer from that deadly plague, which is sent from the Lord to destroy the disobedient, and as a letter of passport to safe-conduct the faithful person in perilous times, and to protect him from all dangers.—*Muffet.*

Observe—**I. The excellency of these comforts in themselves.** They are *treasures*—that is, heaps of outward good things. The word includeth a *multitude*, for one or two will not make a treasure; and a *multitude of precious things*, for a heap of sand, or coals, or dust, is not a treasure: but of silver or gold, or some excellent earthly things. It is here in the plural, treasures, noting the greatest confluence of worldly comforts. **II. The impiety of the owners.** They are treasures of wickedness. The purchaser got them by sinful practices. They were brought into his house slily at some back door. He was both the receiver and the thief. Treasures of wickedness, because gotten by wicked ways, and employed to wicked ends. There is an English proverb which too many Englishmen have made good, "That which is got over the devil's back is usually spent under the devil's belly. When sin is the parent that begets riches it many times hath this recompense, that they are wholly at its service and command. **III. The vanity of those treasures:** they profit nothing. They are unable to cheer the mind, to cure the diseases of the body, much less to heal the wounds of the soul, or to bribe the flames of hell. Alas! they are so far from profiting, that they are infinitely prejudicial. Such powder-masters are blown up with their own ware. These loads sink the bearer into the unquenchable lake. Aristotle tells us of the sea-mew, or sea-eagle, that she will often seize on her prey, though it be more than she can bear, and falleth down headlong with it into the deep, and so perisheth. This fowl is a fit emblem of the un-

righteous person, for he graspeth those heavy possessions which press him down into the pit of perdition. "They that will be rich (that resolve on it, whether God will or no, and by any means, whether right or wrong), fall into temptations, and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition" (1 Tim. vi. 9). Men that scrape an estate together unjustly are frequently said in the Word of God to get it in haste, because such will not stay God's time, nor wait in His way till He send them wealth, but must have it presently, and care not though it be unrighteously. Fair and softly goes far. None thrive so well as those that stay God's leisure, and expect wealth in His way. . . . . 1. *Be righteous in thy works or actions.* Deal with men as one that in all hath to do with God. If thou art a Christian, thou art a law to thyself; thou hast not only a law without thee (the Word of God), but a law within thee, and so darest not transgress. Thy double hedge may well prevent thy wandering. . . . . Be righteous in buying. . . . . Take heed lest thou layest out thy money to purchase endless misery. Some have bought places to bury their bodies in, but more have bought those commodities which have swallowed up their souls. Injustice in buying is a canker which will eat up and waste the most durable wares. In buying, do not work either upon the ignorance or the poverty of the seller. Be righteous in selling. Be careful, while thou sellest thy wares to men, that thou dost not sell thy soul to Satan. Be righteous in the *substance* of what thou sellest, and that in regard of its quality and quantity. God can see the rottenness of thy stuffs, and heart too, under thy false glosses, and for all thy false lights. Be righteous in regard to the quantity. They wrong themselves most who wrong others of their right. The jealous God is very punctual in this particular (Lev. xix. 35, 36). 2. *Be righteous in thy words and expressions, as well as in thy works.* The Christian's tongue should be his heart's interpreter, and reveal its mind and meaning; and the Christian's hand should justify his tongue, by turning his words into deeds. The burgess of the new Jerusalem is known by this livery: "He walketh uprightly, worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart; he sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not" (Psa. xv. 2, 4). His speech is the natural and genuine offspring of his heart; there is a great resemblance between the child and the parent. There is a symmetry between his hand and his tongue; he is slow to promise, not hasty to enter into bonds, but being once engaged, he will be sure to perform.—*Swinnock.*

Wickedness is in itself a treasure laid up against the day of wrath; and as that profiteth nothing, so neither do the treasures of wickedness. For as he that setteth himself to any employment, perhaps may lose one way and get another, but if, in the general upshot and confusion, he finds his estate to be bettered, then is his employment said to be profitable; so in the treasures of wickedness, there may be gain of wealth, honour, pleasure, and loss of credit, quiet, comfort, but in the conclusion the loss will be most grievous, and therefore profitable they cannot be.—*Jermin.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH—Verses 3, 4.

Divine and Human Providence.

I. A general rule. God supplies all the needs of His children (verse 3). We take the word soul here to mean what it often does in the Old Testament, viz., the *bodily life*, and, therefore, understand the promise to be similar to that in Psalm xxxiii. 19, etc. God's special providential care is over the righteous.

This we should have expected if this and like promises did not exist. The animal creation, as a rule, care and provide for their own offspring. There are men and women who have fallen so low as not to care for the well-being of those dependent on them, but wherever there is any virtue left in human beings it will certainly manifest itself in making some efforts to secure from want those who are nearly related to them and dependent upon them. God has laid it as a charge upon His creatures to care for the bodily wants of their children, and He has implanted within men and women an instinct which is generally strong enough to lead them to do it. It is an apostolic sentence—"If any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel" (1 Tim. v. 8). God has taught us that the righteous are bound to Him by a closer tie than we are bound to each other by flesh and blood relationships. "For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven," said Christ, "the same is my brother, and sister, and mother" (Matt. xii. 50). He was more nearly related to His disciples than to those of His brethren who did not believe on Him. They were Christ's "own" (John xiii. 1) in a sense in which other men were not, and He provided for their necessities because they held this special relation to Him. God has a general care for all that He has made. He cares for the life of the tiniest wild flower, and feeds it with light and moisture according to its need. "He giveth to the beast his food, and to the young ravens which cry" (Psalm cxlvii. 9). He maketh His sun to shine and His rain to fall upon the fields of the unjust, and is kind to the unthankful and the evil (Luke vi. 35). Then it follows from necessity that He, the *Righteous Father*, will not suffer the souls of the "righteous" to famish. When ordinary means will not meet their need, He will employ special means to do so. There are many instances upon record in the history of God's Church in which, the supply not being obtainable within the ordinary working of His providence, He has gone into the region of the supernatural for sustenance for His children.

II. Special exceptions to this rule If we understand these words as referring to the bodily life, we must admit that there have been exceptions to it. Some of God's children have suffered from want, some have starved to death in dungeons *because* they have been righteous. But these special exceptions have been for special ends. Solomon's father, when he was hunted by Saul, was doubtless often in want of food, but this severe discipline fitted him for the position he was afterwards to occupy as the King of Israel. Paul tells us that he was often "in hunger and thirst, in fastings, in cold and nakedness" (2 Cor. xi. 27), but he likewise tells us that he "gloried in tribulation," because it "worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope," etc. (Rom. v. 3, 4). Whenever there are partial or entire exceptions to this rule, we may rest assured that those who are the subjects of the exceptions have their material loss more than made up to them.

III. Special relationship to God will not secure exemption from want unless the necessary conditions are fulfilled. "He," whether saint or sinner, "becometh poor that dealeth with a slack hand" (ver. 4). If a godly man is not diligent in business, he will come to want as certainly as an ungodly one. God's children are not exempt from the working of the natural and providential laws of the world in which they live. If they transgress any physical law, they must pay the penalty. The disregard of any such law is a "tempting of the Lord their God" (Matt. iv. 5-7). And what is true of physical laws is true of providential laws. If a husbandman is ever so prayerful and trustful, he will not have a crop in harvest unless he works hard in the days of ploughing and sowing. And the most spiritually-minded tradesman will not earn a living unless he gives due attention to his business. "God's promises were never made to ferry our laziness" (*Beecher*). It is sheer presumption to expect God

to give us our daily bread if we neglect to do all within our power to earn it. Even in Paradise nature would not yield her treasure without diligence on the part of man. Adam was to "till the ground," to "dress and keep" the Garden of Eden (Gen. ii. 5-15). And this dependence of success upon diligence is—1. Good for the man himself. He has bodily and mental powers which cannot be developed without constant exercise. 2. Good for others. A man who does not bring all his powers into play defrauds society of the benefit it might receive from his latent abilities.

IV. When the conditions of growing rich are fulfilled by unrighteous men, the wealth attained by diligence shall be taken away by justice. Riches and poverty are comparative terms; it is certainly not true that every diligent man makes a fortune; probably Solomon means no more than that diligence always brings some amount of reward. However that may be, we must put the declaration "The hand of the diligent maketh rich" side by side with that in the preceding verse, "He casteth away the substance of the wicked." The professional thief exercises a diligence which is not surpassed by many honest men, if by any. He deals with no slack hand, and he generally succeeds in getting rich for a time. But if he is *diligent*, the detective officer is *vigilant*, and the substance he has gathered will one day be scattered by the hand of justice. And there are many unprofessional thieves in the world who gain their riches by means quite as unlawful as their professional brethren, although they sail under other colours. Substance thus obtained is as surely marked by God for scattering as that of the housebreaker or highwayman, although He sometimes delays long the apprehension of the culprit. Against all such the sentence has gone forth, "Yea, they shall not be planted; yea, they shall not be sown; yea, their stock shall not take root in the earth: and He shall also blow upon them and they shall wither, and the whirlwind shall take them away as stubble" (Isa. xl. 24). There are three reasons why wealth, which has been gathered by unrighteous diligence, should be scattered. 1. *Such unrighteous dealing is a sin against God.* It is a defiance of the eighth and tenth commandments, for all men who get rich unlawfully must both covet and steal. When God's "thou shalt not" is thus disregarded, we may be certain that He will vindicate His right to give laws to His creatures. 2. *It is a sin against man.* Such a man's diligence must have caused much misery to many of his fellow-creatures. Men cannot satisfy lawless desires without bringing unhappiness on others. 3. *Wealth unlawfully gained is sure to be made an instrument of oppression.* Wealth always gives some amount of power, and he who has trampled on the rights of others to get riches will be sure to use them for their oppression when he has obtained them. Verse 4 may be applied spiritually. If material good cannot be obtained without diligence, most assuredly spiritual blessings cannot (2 Pet. i. 5, 10, etc.). It is as necessary for the spiritual powers to be kept in constant exercise, if they are to be healthy and strong, as it is for the body or the mind. The needs of others as well as our own demand diligence in spiritual things. And whatever exceptions there may be in the rule in relation to material good, this higher wealth will always be in proportion to the diligent use of means.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Verse 3. Should the wicked be permitted to hold their substance all their days, Death, that terrible messenger, shall at last drag them from it; nor shall their glory descend after them to the grave, but that wickedness by which they acquired it shall lie down with them in the dust and torture their souls in hell.—*Lawson.*

The substance of the wicked is "of

the earth, earthy." It pertains not to the soul, and partakes not of its imperishable vitality. O the miserable but sadly common mistake of the rich man in the parable, when he addressed his *soul* in terms of congratulation, as if, in the abundance of worldly good, it had got what would give it real and permanent satisfaction (Luke xii. 16–21). "*Casting it away*" is an act indicative of regarding it as *worthless*. The substance of this world is that on which the hearts of the sons of men are set. But "God will cast it away." He will not only bereave them of it—and that, it may be, suddenly—but what is there in all this substance that can avail as purchase money for the soul and for heaven? Had a man "the world" to offer, God would "cast it away." He would say, "Thy money perish with thee!" "Riches profit not in the day of wrath." The famished soul must then die, and die for ever.—*Wardlaw.*

As the end of the former verse must chiefly be understood of spiritual death, because temporarily the righteous die as well as the wicked, so, with St. Jerome, I understand this of a spiritual famine. Now, as the course that is needful to preserve the body is so to nourish it that it may neither be glutted with fulness nor pined with emptiness, but in such sort to feed it that it may still have appetite for food, the same is the care which Almighty God taketh of the soul's health; for He so feedeth the righteous that He will not suffer them to famish, and yet He doth not so fill them as that they do not hunger and thirst after righteousness. The time of fulness is heaven, where, as there will be no danger of sickness to the soul, so no lack of plenty.—*Jermin.*

It might be objected, If I strain not my conscience I may starve for it. Fear not that, saith the wise man. Faith fears not famine. Necessaries thou shalt be sure of (Psalm xxxvii. 25, 26; xxxiv. 15); superfluities thou art not to stand upon (1 Tim. vi. 8).—*Trapp.*

Verse 4. "The diligent" (Hebrew, *charutzim*, from *charatz*, to *cut short*, or *settle*); those who are *decisive* in all things, who economise their time and means—prompt in movement.—*Fausset.*

Riches were first bestowed upon the world as they are still continued in it, by the blessing of God upon the industry of men, in the use of their understanding and strength.—*Bishop Butler.*

The Lord's visits of favour were never given to loiterers. Moses and the shepherds of Bethlehem were keeping their flocks (Exod. iii. 1, 2; Luke ii. 8, 9). Gideon was at the threshing-floor (Judg. vi. 11). "Our idle days," as Bishop Hall observes, "are Satan's busy days." Active employment gives us a ready answer to his present temptation. "I am doing a great work, and I cannot come down" (Neh. vi. 3).—*Bridges.*

Not only will God provide for the wise, but wisdom itself is a provision. "The hand of the diligent makes riches," even if it earn little; the meaning being that active work is itself a treasure; or, passing into the realm of piety, which is the one intended, he is a poor man who is a sluggard in his soul's work, and a rich man who is awake and active. Our treasure is within. "My meat is," said our Great Exemplar, "to do the will of Him that sent me." And on our dying bed our money will be of small account, but our work will be the splendid fortune that will follow the believer (Rev. xiv. 13).—*Miller.*

The advantages of virtuous industry. 1. The industrous man performs and accomplishes many things which are profitable to himself and others in numberless respects. Let his station be never so humble, yet that which he does in it has influence more or less upon all other stations. If he completely fulfil his duty, every other can more completely fulfil his. Let the faculties, the endowments of a man be never so confined, yet by continued uninterrupted application he can perform much, often far more than he

who with eminent powers of intellect is slothful or indolent. 2. He executes them with far more ease and dexterity than if he were not industrious. He has no need of any long previous contest with himself, of long previous consideration how he shall begin the work, or whether he shall begin it at all. But he attacks the business with alacrity and spirit and pursues it with good-will. 3. He unfolds, exercises, perfects his mental powers. And this he does alike in every vocation; because it is not of so much consequence to what we apply our intellectual faculties, as how we employ them. Whether we apply them to the government of a nation or to the learning and exercise of some useful trade makes no material difference. But to learn to think methodically and justly, to act as rational beings, with consideration and fixed principles, to do what we have to do deliberately, carefully, punctiliously, conscientiously, that is the main concern. Virtuous diligence is a continual exercise of the understanding, of reason, of reflection, of self-command. 4. The industrious man lives in the entire true intimate consciousness of himself. He rejoices in his life, his faculties, his endowments, his time. He can give an account of the use and application of them and can therefore look back upon the past with satisfaction and into the future without disquietude. 5. He experiences neither languor nor irksomeness. He who really loves work can never be wanting in means and opportunities for it. To him every occupation is agreeable, even though it procure him no visible profit. 6. He alone knows the pleasures of rest for he alone really wants it, he alone has deserved it, he alone can enjoy it without reproach. 7. The industrious man alone fulfils the design for which he is placed on earth, and can boldly give an account to God, to his fellow-creatures, and to himself how he has spent his life.—*Zollikofer.*

This rule applies alike to the business of life and the concerns of the soul. Diligence is necessary to the laying-up of treasures, either within or beyond the reach of rust. . . . . A world bringing forth fruit spontaneously might have suited a sinless race, but it would be unsuitable for mankind as they now are. If all men had plenty without labour, the world would not be fit for living in. In every country and under every kind of government, the unemployed are the most dangerous classes. Thus the necessity of labour has become a blessing to man. . . . . It would be a libel upon the Divine economy to imagine that the tender plant of grace would thrive in a sluggard's garden. The work is difficult. The times are bad. He who would gain in godliness must put his soul into the business. But he who puts his soul into the business will grow rich. Labour laid out here is not lost. Those who strive lawfully will win a kingdom. When all counts are closed, he who is rich in faith is the richest man.—*Arnot.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 5.

The Use and the Neglect of Opportunities.

I. Man has opportunities given to him which it is a mark of wisdom to embrace. 1. *He has the literal and temporal summer.* When the harvest is ripe the reaper must take down his sickle and toil at the ingathering of the grain if he would have bread to eat in the days of winter. The fisherman must spread his net in the season when the fish are abundant and watch his opportunity to catch the passing shoal. The merchant must take advantage of the flood-tide of commercial prosperity to make money so that he may not be brought to bankruptcy in times of depression. These things cannot be done at *any* time, but the *opportune* time must be laid hold of and improved. 2. ***He has a mental***

summer. Youth is the season usually given to man to develop his mental faculties and lay up stores of knowledge for use in after life. Those who embrace this season and industriously improve it, that "gather" in this "summer," are "wise sons," and reap an abundant reward in the time of manhood and old age. 3. *He has an opportunity given to lay the foundation of a godly character.* The season of youth is most favourable for this work. The youthful mind is more susceptible of moral impressions than those of a man who has grown to manhood without yielding to their influence. The young tree can be easily trained to grow in the desired direction, but it is impossible to bend the trunk when it has acquired any degree of strength. So it is comparatively easy to form habits of godly thought and action when we are young, although by the power of God's grace it is not impossible at any time. He who subjects his will to the Great Teacher in his early days will enjoy an abundant blessing in old age from this "gathering in summer."

II. He who neglects thus to improve his opportunities is—1. *Likened to a man who sleeps through the season of harvest.* He sets one blessing of God in opposition to the other. Toil and rest are both Divine ordinances, and both are good and blessed in their season. Sleep is felt to be an incalculable boon at the end of each day of toil. The rest of the Sabbath is a priceless gift of God, and is needed to renew both body and mind after the six days' labour. Longer seasons of rest are good and needful at certain periods of life, and it is a sin against God not to use the ordinary opportunities of rest which are given to all, or ought to be, or to refuse to make use of extraordinary opportunities when they are given to us by the providence of God. But this is quite a different thing from making life a time of indolence—from neglecting to do work either belonging to the body, mind, or spirit; which, if done at all, can only be done in the given opportunity, or cannot be done so well at any other time. 2. *Such a sleeping in harvest brings shame*—(1) *To the man himself.* He is accused by his own conscience. Conscience will recognise the authority of God's institutions, and the lazy man will be brought to feel that he is out of harmony with the Divine ordinations which govern the world. A time will come in his experience when he will feel the want of the material good, or of the knowledge, or of the favour of God, which he would have possessed if he had used his opportunities, and his poverty in one or all of these respects will make him ashamed when he compares himself with those who "gathered in summer." (2) *It brings shame upon others.* No man can suffer alone for his own sin. Those related to him suffer also in proportion to the nearness of their relationship and to the affection which they bear to him. The son who fritters away the season of youthful opportunity disgraces his parents. By-and-by he becomes a father, and his children partake of his shame. The whole subject reminds us that bare admission into the Divine family is not the end, but the beginning of a Divine life. There must be a "gathering" ever going on. "And *beside this*" (see verses 1-4), "giving all diligence, add to your faith, virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, charity" (2 Peter i. 5-7).

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Look at the *large harvest of opportunity in labouring for God.* The great and diversified machinery of religious societies, needing direction and energy; the mass of fellow sinners around us, claiming our sympathy and helpfulness. "While we have time, let us do good" (Gal. vi. 10). How high is the privilege of gathering with Christ *in such a harvest!* (Matt. xii. 30). How great the *shame* of doing nothing, where there is so much to be

done! What a *harvest* also is the present "accepted time" (2 Cor. vi. 2). Mark the abundance of the means of grace, the living verdure of the gospel. Can I bear the thought of that desponding cry of eternal remorse—"The *harvest* is past, the *summer* is ended, and I am not saved?" (Jer. viii. 20). —*Bridges.*

The opportunity is in all matters carefully to be observed. He gathereth in summer who, redeeming the time, maketh his best advantage of the season; for the summer is that fit season wherein the fruits are got into the barn for the whole year following. He that thus in due season provideth for his body or soul, is worthily called a son of understanding, or a wise man; for he hath not only prudently foreseen what is best to be done, but wisely took the occasioned offered unto his best advantage. On the contrary side, he sleepeth in harvest who fondly letteth slip the most convenient means or opportunity of doing or receiving good. Such a one is a son of confusion, that is to say, one that shall be ashamed or confounded, by reason of the want or misery whereunto he shall fall through his own folly. —*Muffett.*

The use of the word "son" in both clauses implies that the work of the vine-dresser and the plough had been done by the father. All that the son is called to do is to enter into the labours of others, and reap where they have sown.—*Plumptre.*

As the former verse commendeth labour and pains and therein diligence, so this commendeth the diligence of watchfulness, in taking opportunity and not omitting it. For there may be much labouring, but there will be little benefit, unless there be a gathering in summer. The taking of pains may show a mind to gather, but the unseasonableness of the pains will not show the wisdom of the mind.—*Jermin.*

I. God affords opportunities for good. In this view we may regard the *whole period of life.* 1. You are blessed with a season of gospel grace while many are sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death, upon you *hath the light shined.* 2. You have a season of civil and religious liberty. What advantage do we possess above many of our ancestors who suffered for conscience sake! They laboured, and we have entered into their labours. 3. Who has not experienced a day of trouble? 4. Where is the person who does not know what we mean by a season of conviction? **II. I would enforce upon you the necessity of diligence to improve your reaping season.** 1. Consider how much you have to accomplish. The salvation of the soul is a great—an arduous concern. Religion is a race, and you must run; it is a warfare, and you must fight. The blessings of the gospel are free, but they are to be sought, and gained. 2. Consider the worth of the blessings which demand your attention. . . . Is it not desirable to be redeemed from the curse of the law; to be justified freely from every charge brought against us at the bar of God; to be delivered from the tyranny and rage of vicious appetites and passions? Great is the happiness of the good here; but who can describe the exalted glory and joy that await them hereafter? 3. Remember that your labour will not be in vain in the Lord. The husbandman has many uncertainties to contend with, but *probability* stimulates *him;* how much more should actual *certainty* encourage *you.* 4. Remember that your season for action is limited and short. Harvest does not last long. Your time is *uncertain* as well as short. 5. Reflect upon the consequences of negligence Is a man blamed for sleeping in harvest? Does every one reproach him as a fool? You act a part more absurd and fatal, who *neglect this great salvation.* Having made no provision for eternity, your ruin is unavoidable. It will also be insupportable.—*Jay.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 6, 7, *and* 11.

THE WAY TO PRESENT BLESSEDNESS AND FUTURE FAME.

We connect the first and last of these verses, because the latter clause in both is the same. **I. Opposite characters revealed by a great contrast in speech** (verse 11). When a righteous man opens his mouth, it is as if the cover was removed from a pure, clear well of water. He has no evil intentions to conceal: his words are an index to his heart. By them men may read his thoughts with the same ease as they can see what is at the bottom of a clear spring of water. There is medicinal virtue in them—they *heal* as well as *refresh* the spirits of men. What a well of life have the words of Christ been for centuries to millions of the human race. But a wicked man cannot let all the thoughts of his heart be laid open to the light of day. His "mouth conceals injury" (see Critical Notes). He has plans which are not devised for the good of his fellow-creatures, and he must use his words not to reveal, but to hide what is in his mind. And if he lets his tongue loose, and permits his thoughts to flow out into words, they do not bless his hearers, but are like a poisonous stream, carrying moral death wherever they flow.

II. Character yields a present blessing or a present curse. "Blessings *are* upon the head of the righteous," etc. A man's present comfort within himself, and the inheritance of good-will he now receives from his fellow-men, as well as the favour of God, are all dependent upon what he is in his character. The kingdom of heaven is *now* inherited by him. All the beatitudes uttered by our Lord speak of a present blessedness. "Blessed *are* the poor in spirit," etc. The opposite truth is not expressed, but it is implied. Curses, not blessings, are the present inheritance of the man whose "mouth is covered by violence."

III. Character determines the nature of our future fame (verse 7). 1. *The memory of the righteous is blessed, because what they did upon the earth is the means of bringing blessings upon others after they are gone.* Many a son has received kindness for the sake of the righteousness of his father. God blesses the children for the father's sake. "I will make him prince all the days of his life *for David my servant's sake*, whom I chose, because he kept my commandments and my statutes" (1 Kings xi. 34). "Fear not," said God to Isaac, for I am with thee, and will bless thee, and multiply thy seed for *my servant Abraham's sake* (Gen. xxvi. 24). Cyrus was raised up to deliver Israel *for Jacob's sake* (Isa. xlv. 4). Men can but bless the memory of those whose past godliness is the means of bringing blessings upon them in the present. 2. *The just man's memory is blessed because he leaves behind him reproductions of his own character.* All life will reproduce itself. After a tree has decayed and gone to dust, others will be in full life and vigour that were seedlings of the old tree. Intellectual life is reproductive. The man of mighty genius leaves disciples to carry out his ideas after he is gone. Good men are the parents of good children, or make other men good by their words and lives. "They that dwell under his shadow shall return," and "*they* shall grow as the vine" (Hosea xiv. 7). The good must be held in blessed remembrance so long as there are those upon earth who are the reproductions of their character. 3. *The memory of some is blessed because they did deeds which never can be reproduced by others—which have left a fragrance behind them which can never be repeated.* The one act of Abraham, when he prepared to offer up Isaac at God's command, can never be repeated; but is the one which, above all his other acts of faith, causes him to be held in everlasting remembrance. And so it has been with many of the leaders of the Church in all ages. They have performed acts of godly heroism which we cannot imitate, but of which we reap the reward, and for which we bless their memory. Especially is this true of Him who is pre-eminently the

Holy One and the Just, whose glorious "name is blessed for ever" (Psa. lxxii. 19), because "He endured the cross and despised the shame." But the converse of all this is the lot of the wicked. We can but remember them when we are brought face to face with the evil they have left behind them; but we turn from the remembrance as we turn from some offensive putrid object, while the memory of the just is as a sweet savour. Contrast the feelings with which Christendom now regards the emperors of Rome and the fishermen of Galilee.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Verse 6. Not one, but many blessings are on the head of the righteous: the blessing of peace, the blessing of plenty, the blessing of health, and the blessing of grace, shall be upon them. The precious ointment of the Lord's favour or blessing shall so be poured upon their heads as that it shall not here stay, but run down to the rest of the members of their bodies, and enter into their very hearts.—*Muffet.*

"*Blessings:*" not simply good things, but good things bestowed by another; not simply good things bestowed by another, but divinely bestowed as sacred *benedictions.* "*Blessings*" are for the righteous exclusively; that is, for no one else. "*For the head;*" not the mouth, not the hand; because often without either's agency. "*On his head;*" because unconsciously, and sometimes even when asleep.—*Miller.*

Verse 7. The memory of the just is blessed (1) because of his winning friendship; (2) because of his unfeigned piety; (3) because of his steadfast patience; (4) because of his noble, public-spirited activity.—*Ziegler, from Lange's Commentary.*

And what signifies an empty name? It brings honour to God, and prolongs the influence of his good example who has left it. His good works not only follow him, but live behind him. As Jeroboam made Israel to sin after he was dead, so the good man helps to make others holy whilst he is lying in the grave. Should it so happen that his character is mistaken in the world, or should his name die out among men, it shall yet be had in everlasting remembrance before God; for never shall those names be erased from the Lamb's book of life, which were written in it from the foundation of the world. —*Lawson.*

Not what he remembers, but what is remembered of him. He blesses after he is dead. So does the wicked, but, like most other growths in nature, by his decay. "*Name;*" that which is known of a man. The "name of God" is that which may be known of God. "The memory of the righteous," viz., of the Church of God, is that which propagates her, and causes her to hand down her strength. Our walk about Zion, our telling her towers, our marking her bulwarks, is for this grand aim, among the rest, that we may tell to the generation following (Psa. xlviii. 12, 13).—*Miller.*

I. The memory of the just is blessed, self-evidently so, for the mind blesses it and reverts to it with complacency, mingled with solemnity,—returns to it with delight from the sight of the living evil in the world, sometimes even prefers this silent society to the living good. They show in a most evident and pleasing manner the gracious connection which God has constantly maintained with a sinful world. His uninterrupted connection with it by justice and sovereign power has been manifest in mighty evidence: but His saints have been the peculiar illustration of His grace, His mercy, acting on this world. II. It is so, when we consider them as practical illustrations, verifying examples of the exellence of genuine religion; that it is a noble thing in human nature, and makes, and alone makes, that nature noble;—that, whatever scoffers may

say, or the vain world pretend to disbelieve, here is what has made such men as nothing else, under heaven, could or can. III. Their memory is blessed while we regard them as diminishing to our view the repulsiveness and horror of death. Our Lord's dying was the fact that threw out the mightiest agency to this effect. But, in their measure, His faithful disciples have done the same. When we contemplate them as having prepared for it with a calm resolution—as having approached it—multitudes with a calm resignation and fortitude, and very many with an animated exultation;—as having passed it, and emerged in brightness beyond its gloom—they seem to shine back through the gloom, and make the shade less thick. IV. It is blessed, also, as combined with the whole progress of God upon the earth, —with its living agency throughout every stage. He has never, and nowhere, had a visible cause in the world, without putting *men* in trust with it. . . . . Think of what men have been employed and empowered to do in the propagation of truth, in the incessant warfare against evil, in the exemplification of all the virtues by which he could be honoured.—*John Foster.*

Verse 11. A Church is but a body of righteous men. What would the world do without the Church? The influences of a Church, and that a land is ruined without a Church, and that one generation hands on the worship of God to another, all are illustrations on a grand scale of how *the mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life.* A good man will constantly be doing good to others. But "wrong covers the mouth of the wicked," so that he can give no blessing; so keeps him from any possible usefulness, that he cannot utter good, or make his mouth, as the righteous can, "a fountain of life" to all about him.—*Miller.*

In a hot summer's day I was sailing with a friend in a tiny boat on a miniature lake, enclosed like a cup within a circle of steep, bare Scottish hills. On the shoulders of the brown, sun-burnt mountain, and full in sight, was a well, with a crystal stream trickling over its lip, and making its way down towards the lake. Around the well's mouth, and along the course of the rivulet, a belt of green stood out in strong contrast with the iron surface of the rock all around. "What do you make of that?" said my friend, who had both an open eye to read the book of Nature and a heart all aglow with its lessons of love. We soon agreed as to what should be made of it. It did not need us to make it into anything. There it was, a legend clearly printed by the finger of God on the side of these silent hills, teaching the passer-by how needful a good man is, and how useful he may be in a desert world. . . . . The Lord looks down, and men look up, expecting to see a fringe of living green around the lip of a Christian's life-course.—*Arnot.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 8.

THE DOER AND THE TALKER.

I. A definition of a wise man. He is one that "will receive commandments." The reception of commandments implies a commander, and a willingness to obey his laws. The wise man is willing to obey good laws even at the expense of some self-sacrifice, because he has a strong conviction of the benefits that will arise from submission. The laws which govern a well-ordered State will not be irksome to a right-minded citizen. He feels that submission to them will bring only comfort to him. The yoke will bring ease, and he proves that he is a wise man by accepting it. The commandments here are the commandments of Jehovah. He only is a truly wise man who is willing to submit his will to the Divine will to take upon himself the yoke of Him whose "yoke is

easy" (Matt. xi. 30), who is the Lawgiver who "makes free indeed" (John viii. 36). He obeys His commandments from the full conviction of the benefits and blessings which flow from keeping them. He knows that the obedience must come before the comfort, that Incarnate Wisdom has placed the commandment first, and then the reward "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you" (John xv. 14). He can say, from past experience concerning the Divine commands, "In keeping of them there is great reward" (Psa. xix. 11), and the blessedness that he has tasted he knows to be but the earnest of what is to be in the future, and therefore he is willing to sacrifice present advantage and worldly ease to obedience to them. He is like the trader who has received a sample of a rich cargo from a distant land, and who is so convinced of the value of the whole from that which has come to hand, that he is willing to undergo any present privation in order to become its possessor. The Son of God likened such an one to "a wise man, which built his house upon a rock," for it is evident that to "receive" commandments is here equivalent to "doing" them (Matt. vii. 24).

II. A distinguishing mark of a fool. He is a *prater*. He is one who is willing to talk, but not to act; willing to give out words, but not to receive instruction; and therefore he is one who can give out nothing by speech that is worth giving. Unless the earth receives good seed into its bosom, it cannot give out "seed to the sower and bread to the eater. Unless a man receives into his heart the good seed of the kingdom, he can never bring forth moral fruit" (Matt. xiii. 23), and he can never do more than *prate* about spiritual truths. There are many words but no meat. There is only one Being in the universe who can be a giver without first being a receiver, and that is God. Outside of Him, all must receive of His fulness if they would be anything more than mere *talkers* on eternal realities. All such men are fools. "Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this world? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?" (1 Cor. i. 20.)

III. The end of such a mere talker. He shall fall. 1. *In the estimation of those whom he pretends to instruct.* No men are so prone to assume the office of instructors as men who are ignorant, but such men cannot long hold a place in the estimation of others. 2. *He shall fall into deeper folly.* Those who refuse to receive that Divine commandment which will make them truly wise, must sink lower and lower in sinful folly. The longer he refuses the offered wisdom, and refuses to put his neck under the yoke of God's commandments, the heavier will grow the chains of sinful habit, and the more firmly will they be riveted. 3. *He shall fall into righteous retribution.* This will be proportionate to the opportunities he has had of receiving wisdom. "And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shall be brought down to hell" (Matt. xi. 23).

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

A fool is in nothing sooner and better recognised than in his conversation.—*Geier.*

It is striking how often Solomon dwells upon sins of the tongue; no member is so hard to control; none more surely indicates the man.—*Fausset.*

The heart is the seat of true wisdom, and a teachable spirit is the best proof of its influence. For who that knows himself would not be thankful for further light. No sooner, therefore, do the commandments come down from heaven, than the well-instructed Christian *receives them*, like his father Abraham (Heb. xi. 8, Gen. xxii. 1–3), with undisputing simplicity; welcomes the voice of his heavenly teacher (1 Sam. iii. 10, Acts x. 33, Psa. xxvii.

8, cxliii. 10), and when he knows that "it is the Lord, girds himself" with all the ardour of the disciple to be found at his feet (John xxi. 2–7). But look at the professor of religion destitute of this *heart-seated wisdom*. We find him a man of creeds and doctrines, not of prayer; asking curious questions rather than listening to plain truths; wanting to know events rather than duties; occupied with other men's business to the neglect of his own (Luke xiii. 23, 24; 1 Tim. v. 13).—*Bridges.*

It is one of the marks of true wisdom, and none of the least, that it is not self-sufficient and self-willed. This is the evident import of the former part of this verse. We might consider the disposition in reference both to *God* and to *men*—to the Supreme Ruler and Lord of the conscience,—and to existing human authorities. The "wise in heart will receive" *God's* "commandments." *This*, true wisdom will do *implicitly*. It will never presume on dictating to God, or on altering and amending His prescriptions; but, proceeding on the self-evident principle that the dictates of Divine Wisdom must in all cases be perfect, will bow in instant acquiescence. With regard also to *earthly superiors*, a humble submission to legitimate authority, both in the family and in the State, is the province of wisdom. There is a self-conceit that spurns at all such authority. It talks as if it would legislate for all nations. It would *give* commandments rather than *receive* them. It likes not being dictated to. It plumes itself on its skill in finding fault. There is no rule prescribed at which it does not carp, no proposal in which it does not see something not to its mind, no order in which it does not find something to which it cannot submit. This is folly, for, were this temper of mind prevalent, there would be an end to all subordination and control. The prating fool, or the *fool of lips*, may be understood in two ways. First, the self-conceited are generally superficial. There is much talk and little substance: words without sense: plenty of tongue, but a lack of wit. Light matter floats on the surface, and appears to all; what is solid and precious lies at the bottom. The foam is on the face of the waters; the pearl is below. Or, secondly, the reference may be to the bluster of insubordination; the loud protestations and boasting of his independence on the part of a man who resists authority, and determines to be "a law to himself."—*Wardlaw.*

The word "*commandments*" (E. V.), might often be translated "*laws*." One set of passages would just change words with another. The word translated "*commandments*" means primarily "*something fixed*." It answers to the New Testament "*law*" (Rom. viii. 3), and is adapted to the reasonings of the apostles. "*He of the wise heart*" means the truly wise. *He of the fool heart* might seem good for the rest of the sentence. But a deep philosophy reminds the inspired man that men are not such fools as to believe in sin, as the pardoned Christian does in holiness. They know a great deal more than they either act or utter. A vast deal of the worldliness of men is a mere lip service, like that to the Almighty. And, knowing that the lost man is aware of his perdition, and has been told his folly, the proverb does not account him a fool in his deep sense, so much as superficially, and in the mad actings of his folly. In his *heart* he knows he is deceived. In his *lips* he is constantly deceiving himself. In his acts he keeps up a fictitious life.—*Miller.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH—Verses 9—10.

OPPOSITE CHARACTERS.

I. He who walketh uprightly. 1. *Is a restorer of an ancient path.* The way of uprightness is much older than the human race, and was originally the only way known in the universe to intelligent and moral creatures. Uprightness

is as old as God. Crooked walking is of the creature and but of yesterday compared with uprightness. He who walks uprightly is a restorer of the breach made in heaven, and re-establishes the old paths (Jer. vi. 16) of righteousness upon earth. The way of uprightness was the way in which man walked in Eden. In Eden also man lost this way by entering the by-path of transgression and thus ceased to walk with God. The man that walks uprightly is a restorer of man's ancient dignity as a walker with God. He shall "be called a repairer of the breach, a restorer of paths to dwell in" (Isa. lviii. 12). A man who reopened up some ancient and important highway to a great city would be regarded by the citizens as a benefactor; how much more ought he to be held in esteem whose life reveals this ancient highway of holiness, who by his uprightness becomes himself a way to others. 2. *He obeys an ancient command.* "When Abram was ninety years old and nine, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me and be thou *perfect*"—upright (Gen. xvii. 1). Often the great want of a partially-civilised country is a straight and level road, by which commerce can easily find its way to the central city, and a royal edict is sometimes issued that such a road should be made. The great want of the world in the day when this command was given to Abram was an example of uprightness in a human life. The need of the world in this direction is still great, and the ancient command given to the patriarch is still in force. 3. *His walking is not limited to the present life.* He walks in the same way after death as before it. "He shall enter into peace: they shall rest in their beds, each one walking in his uprightness" (Isa. lvii. 2). Heaven has no better way of walking than the way of uprightness, and death will not make any change in the moral characteristics of the godly man, except to intensify and strengthen them. The death of the seed-corn will not be the means of giving birth to a different *kind* of seed, but only of making an *increase* of the same kind. Death is needful, not to change one thing for another, but to make much out of little. Death will bring heaven to the godly and upright, but it can give nothing to an upright man better than his uprightness, but this it can do, it can render him more entirely and completely upright Hence the path of the upright is a path which death cannot end—a path which, begun to be trodden in time, will be continued in throughout eternity. The happiness of the human creatures who make up a family, or a larger community, will depend very much upon the uprightness of each member. Heaven's blessedness springs from the perfectly upright character of each citizen of that perfect city. 4. *His upright walk is sure, or safe, because it is preservative of character.* Uprightness is to character what salt is to food. He who walks uprightly can never become *less* godly and righteous, but must of necessity become more and more so; hence the Psalmist's prayer, "Let integrity and uprightness *preserve* me" (Psalm xxv. 21).

II. Two phases of character are placed in contrast to that of the upright man. 1. *That of the man whose evil nature does not lie entirely upon the surface.* "He that perverteth his ways" and yet endeavours to cloak his perversion, to hide his wrong-doing. The "winking of the eye" mentioned in verse 10 indicates an effort after concealment. Those who "pervert" their ways pervert nature in order to attain their ends. The eye is intended by God to be a revelation of the soul, and where integrity and sincerity dwells, it is so. But he who walks crookedly or perversely makes an unnatural use of his eye, and by means of it endeavours to work ill to his neighbour. But all his efforts at concealment will at some time or other be ineffectual; the very means he uses to conceal his evil plans may be the means of awakening suspicion. And if he succeeds in blinding the eyes of his fellow men, "the Lord will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts" (1 Cor. iv. 5). The day of judgment will reveal the guilty secrets of

many who have never yet—nor ever will be until that day—fully "*known.*" 2. *That of him whose perversity is manifest to all.* The "prating fool" cannot conceal what he is. Upon him and upon his destiny, see Homiletics and Suggestive Comments on verse 8.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Verse 9. An *upright walk* is Christian, not sinless, perfection (Job. i. 8); "walking before God," not before men (Gen. xvii. 1). Impurity, indeed, defiles the holiest exercise. But if the will be rightly bent, the integrity will be maintained. "Show me an easier path," is Nature's cry. "Show me," cries the child of God, "a *sure* path."—*Bridges.*

To walk uprightly, or to walk in integrity, means to act according to one complete scheme: not as the fool does (verse 8), behaving one way and believing another. It means to aim for "something stable" (chap. ii. 7); and hence, of course, not to lay our plans so that we ourselves know they must ultimately fail. He walks surely or *securely, i.e.*, must certainly succeed. —*Miller.*

The dissembler walks in crooked paths. Like Judas, who put on a cloak of charity to hide his covetousness (John xii. 6), he conceals the selfish principles which regulate his behaviour under the appearances of piety, prudence, and other good qualities. But he cannot hold the mantle so tight about him as to conceal from the wise observer his inward baseness. It will occasionally be shuffled aside, it will at length drop off, and he shall be known for what he is, abhorred by all men, and punished with other hypocrites.—*Lawson.*

Walking uprightly stands opposed to all duplicity, all tortuous policy, all the crooked arts of *manœuvering*, for the purpose of promoting reputation, interest, comfort, or any other end whatsoever. He who walketh thus, *walketh surely.* He walks with a comfortable *feeling of security*, a calm, unagitated serenity of mind. This springs from confidence in that God whose will he makes his only rule. In the path of implicit obedience he feels that he can *trust.* And further, the way in which he walks is the *surest* for the attainment of his ends. Proverbs are generally founded in observation and experience, and express their ascertained results. Hence, even though not inspired, they have generally truth in them. It has become proverbial that "honesty is the best policy." The meaning is, that acts of deceit very frequently frustrate the object of him by whom they are employed, and land him in evils greater than the one he meant, by the use of them, to shun.—*Wardlaw.*

First—the heart of the upright man hath God's own eye to behold it, and His Spirit to testify the faithfulness of it, and so receiveth comfort from Him, as Job did, when in the confidence of his cause and conscience he saith, "O that some would hear me, behold my desire is that the Almighty would answer me" (Job xxxi. 35). *Secondly*, the course of their actions is such as will endure light, and the more they are examined the better they will prove, and therefore they need not fear any might or malice, or cunning adversaries that shall seek their disgrace. And upon the assurance of this the prophet professeth his undaunted courage and magnanimity, with challenge also to his calumniant enemy, whosoever he were, "I have set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed. He is near that justifieth me," etc. (Isa. l. 7, 8.) *Thirdly*, their bodies and state are in God's custody, and He hath undertaken the defence and preservation of them, whereas the wicked are out of God's protection and perpetually go into peril. *Fourthly*, their souls are prepared for death and for judgment, and therefore more desire

to be dissolved than are afraid to hear of the nearness of their dissolution.—*Dod.*

I. An upright walker is sure of easily finding his way: it requires no laborious dealing to find out what is *just.* II. He treads upon firm ground; upon solid, safe, and well-tried principles. . . . . The practice built on such foundations must be very secure. III. He walks steadily. A good conscience steers by fixed stars, and aims at fixed marks. An upright man is always the same man, and goes the same way; the external state of things does not alter the moral reason of things with him, or change the law of God.—*Sydney Smith.*

I. The way of uprightness is the *surest for despatch,* and the shortest cut towards the execution or attainment of any good purpose, securing a man from irksome expectations and tedious delays. II. It is *fair and pleasant.* He that walketh in it hath good weather and a clear sky about him; a hopeful confidence and a cheerful satisfaction do ever wait upon him. Being conscious to himself of an honest meaning, and a due course in prosecuting it, he feeleth no check or struggling of mind: no regret or sting of heart. III. He is secure of his *honour and credit.* He hath no fear of being detected, or care to smother his intents. IV. *He hath perfect security as to the final result of his affairs,* that he shall not be quite baffled in his expectations and desires. He shall prosper in the true notion of prosperity, explained by that Divine saying, "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright, for the end of that man is peace."—*Barrow.*

Verse 10. The connection of the clauses is—to speak feignedly and to speak rashly are both alike dangerous: to do the former hurts others, to do the latter hurts oneself. When we avoid *cunning* and *feigned speaking,* we are not to run into the opposite extremes of *prating folly.*—*Fausset.*

The one shuts his eye to conceal his subtlety, the other opens his mouth to declare his folly. The one winketh, but sayeth nothing; the other says too much, but thinketh not what he says. The one giveth sorrow to the deceived in his malicious bounty; the other taketh a fall from the superfluous bounty of his own words.—*Jermin.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 12.

Love and Hatred.

The lawfulness or unlawfulness of hatred and strife depends upon the subject or occasion of such feeling. God hates sin, and we know that this hatred is the fruit of one of His highest attributes. The divine and Incarnate Son of God foretold that He had not "come to send peace on earth, but a sword" (Matt. x. 34), and therefore even He was an occasion of strife because He was a hater of sin. There is then a holy as well as a wicked hatred, a lawful as well as an unlawful strife. But the hatred of the text being placed in contrast with love is evidently the malicious hatred of a wicked man.

I. The hatred of the wicked is—1. *Insatiable.* It has been said that those who hate have first injured. This is doubtless true, but there must have been some amount of hatred to prompt the injury. But after the injury has been inflicted, the hatred is not diminished, but is generally increased. Herodias prevailed upon Herod to put John the Baptist into prison, but this did not lessen her malice. It was such a devouring flame as could be quenched by nothing but his blood. The pain which conscience inflicts upon him who has injured another is put to the account of the injured person, and goes to increase the bitterness of the anger against him. 2. *It is generally impartial.* Wicked men generally begin by hating good men, but they come in time to a habit of hating bad men too. The blind man will be as likely to strike his friend as his

foe. Hatred is blind, and those who begin by hating those whom they consider their enemies, generally end by hating their so-called friends.

II. The effect of hatred. It stirs up strife. This implies that the materials for strife are already in existence. There are no signs of mud upon the surface of a peaceful lake, but it only requires some disturbing element to be thrown in to show that it is lying at the bottom. The spirit of the most sanctified man has some evil tendencies within it, which may be stirred up by undeserved hatred. Only One who ever wore our human nature had within Him no germ of strife which might be stirred up by hatred. Only One could say that temptation found "nothing" in Him (John xiv. 13). The elements which may be stirred up to strife have a lodging place in the most sanctified human spirit, and when strife is thus stirred up by hatred the whole soul or the whole society is influenced for evil. When the lake is stirred up from the bottom all the waters are more or less troubled, and when the elements of contention are at work even in a good man or in a Christian community the whole man or the entire community is ruffled and disturbed. In contrast with this hatred, which is not only sin in itself but, by stirring up strife, is the occasion of sin in others, is placed the love which "covereth" or does away with sin.

I. Love covers sin by forgiving it. Malicious hatred, even when it is directed against sin, will but incite to more sin. But forgiveness of the sin may lead to its being forsaken, and the mere fact of being forgiven may give the sinner an impulse after a better life in the future, and thus enable him to efface the remembrance of the past. If a man is deeply in debt to another, and that other gives him a discharge of his debt, the very fact of his being legally free may give him such new energy to work as may enable him to pay that which he owed. And a sense of being forgiven a moral debt will sometimes have this effect upon the soul. God's covering up of sin by forgiveness is the beginning of a new life to those who are willing to accept His pardon (Psa. xxxii. 1, 1 John i. 7).

II. Love covers sin by forgetting it. It is in the nature of love not only to forgive an injury, but to forget that the injury has ever been done. And a consciousness that our sin is covered by being forgotten is very healing to the spirit. For a soul that has lived a sinful life is like a man that has passed through a campaign and received many wounds. He requires skilful treatment and gentle nursing; and when the wounds have been bound up, and have, perhaps, begun to heal, care must be taken that no rough hand re-opens them, and causes them to bleed afresh. A word spoken which shows that the sinful past is still remembered by those who have professed to forgive, may re-open old wounds with a fatal effect. Love covers sin as God declares that He covers it. His promise is not only "I will forgive their iniquity," but, "I will *remember their sin no more*" (Jer. xxxi. 34).

III. Love covers sin by making active efforts to recover the sinner. Love will not be content with forgiving when forgiveness is sought, but it will go out of its way to recover the erring. The godly man will walk in the footsteps of Him who came to *seek* that which was lost. God did not wait until man returned to Him before He held out hope of forgiveness. As soon as Satan's hatred had led man into sin, He held out hope of return to holiness by the promise of Him who "should bruise the serpent's head" (Gen. iii. 15). And in the fulness of time, by the gift of His Son, He showed the depth of His love and His desire to cover the "sin of the world." And as in many human homes there are those who owe their present moral standing, the recovery of all that makes existence worth having, to the love that followed and sought them when they were outcasts, so those who people the heavenly home—that multitude which God alone can number—are the fruit of that Divine love which not only covered a multitude of sins by forgiving and forgetting the sin, but sought out the sinner in order to forgive him.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

"Love covereth all ins," saith Solomon, covers them partly from the eyes of God, in praying for the offenders; partly from the eyes of the world, in throwing a cloak over our brother's nakedness; especially from its own eyes, by winking at many wrongs offered it.—*T. Adams.*

Hatred disturbs the existing quiet by railings; stirs up dormant quarrels on mere suspicions and trifles, and by unfavourable constructions put upon everything, even upon acts of kindness. As hatred by quarrels exposes the faults of others, so "love covers" them, except in so far as brotherly correction requires their exposure. Love condones, yea, takes no notice of a friend's errors. The disagreements which hatred stirs up, love allays; and the offences which are usually the causes of quarrel, it sees as though it saw them not, and excuses them (1 Cor. xiii. 4–7). It gives to men the forgiveness which it daily craves from God.—*Fausset.*

To abuse the precept in 1 Peter iv. 8 (where this text is quoted) into a warrant for silencing all faithful reproofs of sin in others, would be to ascribe to charity the office of a procuress.—*Cartwright.*

First, it makes us to cover and pardon the wrongs that others do us. *Secondly*, a loving carriage maketh others pardon the wrongs that we do them. *Thirdly*, it maketh God to pardon the offences which we commit against Him.—*Jermin.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 13, 14.

Laying Up to Give Out.

I. The practice of the morally wise man. He "lays up knowledge" (verse 14). The present position of a man in social life is often the result of a "laying up" in the past. The man who has made it the business of his past life to lay up money is now a rich man. His present wealth arises from his past storing. An artificer or professional man who laid up knowledge in his youthful days is able to command a good position in his mature life. But there are differences between those who lay up riches, or mere intellectual wisdom, and him who stores moral wisdom—the only real and lasting wealth. 1. *The man spoken of in the text lays up that which is truly his own now, and will be throughout eternity.* The riches of godly wisdom are not transferable either before or at the time of death. Material wealth may go at any time in our life, and must be left behind when we leave the world. And while we call it ours it is but lent us by God. He takes a wider range, and lays up for a life beyond time, and what he lays up now will make him what he will be in the ages beyond death. He is determined to be crowned rich towards God in the day when he shall be summoned to appear and give an account of his stewardship. Most men are layers up of riches and knowledge in a greater or less degree. The truly wise man banks for moral character, and intends to be considered rich in the city of God.

II. It is because spiritual knowledge is laid up that "wisdom is found in the lips" (verse 13). The possession of wealth or of intellectual knowledge is no guarantee that wisdom will be found with it. A rich man may not know how to use his riches to the best advantage. He might know how to gather it, but may not know how to spend it for his own good. A man may gather much intellectual knowledge without being able to make it profitable, or a source of enjoyment either to himself or others. A man may be able to gather timber and stones together and yet not know how to build a house out of them after he has gathered them. A housewife may collect a store of wool and stuffs, but

not be skilful enough to fashion the materials into garments for herself and her household. So knowledge, in its general sense, is not necessarily accompanied by wisdom; but *spiritual* knowledge and *spiritual* wisdom are never separated. The one is always joined to the other. Where there is a laying up of the knowledge of God, there wisdom will be found. No man can truly know God and not have wisdom enough to reduce his knowledge to practice in the building up of a godly character. Where knowledge is in the heart there will be wisdom in the lips and life.

III. This knowledge and wisdom will be used for the benefit of others. It will be found in the lips. The man who is "instructed unto the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old" (Matt. xiii. 52). He has a store, from which he draws according to the need of those whom his words can benefit. His instructions are like the viands of the thrifty housewife, stored up in abundance against the time of need, and suited, both as to quantity and quality, to the wants of the needy soul (verse 21).

IV. The influence and the fate of him who refuses to lay up knowledge. His mouth is a near destruction (see rendering in Critical Notes). The man who refuses to lay up the knowledge of some calling or profession is both a fool and a knave, because by such neglect he makes himself dependent when he might be independent, and because he eats the bread earned by industrious men. How much more foolish is he who will not lay up that by which he may acquire a character which would make him an equal with the angels of God. But his neglect injures others beside himself. He wrongs his fellow-men by withholding his influence from the side of that which is righteous, and consequently defrauds the world of that which it is the duty of every man to give it. But he does not stop here. (1) He adds the positive evil influence of sinful words. The Bible speaks often of the evil influence of sinful speech. It likens it to the poison of venomous reptiles (see Psalm lviii. 4; cxl. 3; Jas. iii. 8). But these creatures can only destroy the body, whereas the fool's mouth is often a destruction to both body and soul. (On this subject see homiletical remarks on chapter i. 12). (2) But he is a curse to his own existence as well as to that of others. That which is a destruction to them makes a rod for his own back (verse 13). Such a man's mouth utters falsehood and slander by which he creates enemies *without*. That which he speaks brings guilt upon his conscience, which becomes an instrument of chastisement *within*. And a guilty conscience creates imaginary enemies as well as keeps us in remembrance of real ones. An old writer says, "The guilty conscience conceives every thistle to be a tree, every tree a man, every man a devil,—afraid of every man that it sees, nay, many times of those that it sees not. Not much unlike to one that was very deep in debt and had many creditors, who, as he walked London streets in the evening, a tenter-hook caught his cloak. 'At whose suit?' said he, conceiving some sergeant had arrested him. Thus the ill-conscienced man counts every creature he meets with a bailiff sent from God to punish him." Such a conscience is indeed a "rod for the fool's back" (chap. xxvi. 3).

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Verse 13. Through the lips of the Christian other men get wisdom. If we will think of it, men get it in no other way. "Faith cometh by hearing" (Rom. x. 17). The Church hands itself down by the blessing of heaven, from lip to lip. But then from the same lips comes a *rod*. The good man, not listened to, becomes a scourge. Christ Himself becomes an instrument of death.—*Miller*.

Solomon and his son admirably

illustrate this contrast. Such wisdom was found in his lips, the fruit of an understanding heart, that "all the world came to hear of it" (1 Kings iv. 31). Rehoboam was as *void*, as his father was *full*, of understanding. His folly prepared a rod for his back (1 Kings xii. 13–24). Learn then to seek for wisdom at the lips of the wise. The want of this wisdom, or rather the want of a heart to seek it, will surely bring us under *the rod*. In many a chastisement we shall feel its smart; for the loose education of our children (chap. xxix. 15); for carnal indulgence (2 Sam. xii. 9–11). And how different is this *rod* from our Father's loving chastisement. That, the seal of our adoption (chap. iii. 11, 12); this, the mark of disgrace. Will not the children of God cry, "Turn away the reproach that I fear, for Thy judgments are good" (Psa. cxix. 39).—*Bridges.*

The wise man carries the ornament of his wisdom in his *lips;* the fool shall bear the disgrace of his folly on his back.—*Fausset.*

He who trembleth not in hearing shall be broken to pieces in feeling.—*Bradford.*

The dwelling of wisdom is in the heart, but there it is *hid;* in the lips it is *found*. There it sitteth, like an ancient Israelite, at the gates of the city, marking what goes out, and weighs it before it passeth, that nothing issue forth which may disparage the honour or wrong the estate of the city. There shall *folly find it*, as smart and heavy in the reproof of it as a rod is to the back, and which is fit for him whose tongue is void of understanding. For it is reason that his back should bear, whose tongue will not forbear.—*Jermin.*

Verse 14. To "lay up" knowledge very obviously implies that value is set upon it. Men never think of seeking and accumulating what they regard as worthless; and in proportion as an object is prized will be the degree of eagerness with which it is pursued, and of jealous vigilance, with which it is "laid up" and guarded. Thus the *miser*. With what an eye of restlessness and eager covetousness does he look after the acquisition of his heart's desires! with what delight does he hug himself upon his success!—with what avidity does he add the increase to his treasures, carefully secreting them from all access but his own! With a care incomparably more dignified and useful how does the man of science mark and record every fact and observation, whether of his own discovery and suggestion or of those of others! How he exults in every new acquisition to *his* stores! He lays all up in his mind, or, fearful of a treacherous memory, in surer modes of record and preservation. Hints that lead to nothing at the time may lead to much afterwards. Some one in another generation may carry out into practical application, or into the formation of valuable theories, the facts and conjectures that are now, in apparent isolation, "laid up" for such possible future use. The true philosopher, to use a colloquial phrase, "has all his eyes about him." He allows nothing to escape notice, and nothing, if he can help it, to pass into oblivion. But, alas! in this respect, as in others, "the children of this world are, in their generation, wiser than the children of light."—*Wardlaw.*

Who would not heedfully foresee where his arrow shall hit, before he shoot it out of his bow; lest it should destroy any person or other creature through negligence? Who would not be very circumspect and wary in discharging a piece, lest he should do mischief by it? And yet, by these, a man may affright, and not hurt; and hurt, and not kill; and kill, and not die himself; but what arrow, what shot, what artillery, what murdering piece is to be compared to the mouth of a man that is not guided by a wise and watchful forethought? Great woe it worketh unto other men, but it surely bringeth death unto himself; every word that breaketh another man's skin doth certainly break the caul of his own heart; and he that doth aim at another to give him a

wound, cannot miss himself to violate his own life.—*Dod.*

The part of wisdom is to treasure up experience, and hold it ready for use in the time and the place of need. Everything may be turned to account. In the process of accumulating this species of wealth, the wonders of the philosopher's stone may be more than realised. Even losses can be converted into gains. Every mistake or disappointment is a new lesson. Every fault you commit, and every glow of shame which suffuses your face because of it, may be changed into a most valuable piece of wisdom. Let nothing trickle out, and flow away useless. After one has bought wit at a heavy price, it is a double misfortune to throw it away. As a general rule, the dearer it is the more useful it will be.—*Arnot.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses **15, 16.**

A False and a True Estimate of Life.

I. A false estimate of life in its relation to riches. It is a mistake to look on wealth as a "strong city" in which we can be secure from the evils of life. A commander, who knows that there is behind him a fortress into which he can retire in case of need, may be brought to ruin by forming an over-estimate of its security. He may underrate the ability of the enemy to follow him thither. Strongholds have been undermined, and those who had trusted in their strength have been destroyed by that very confidence; or pestilence has broken out on account of the number who have taken refuge in the fortress, and so that which they deemed their strength has been their weakness. These events have proved that the estimate taken of their safety was a wrong one—that even the refuge itself might be a cause of destruction. So with a "rich man's wealth." If he looks upon it as a resource under all emergencies—if he thinks it can purchase him immunity from all ills—he is a terrible self-deceiver. Wealth cannot drive back disease; nothing can keep death from storming his stronghold; and sometimes a single day brings together such an army of adverse circumstances that the strong city goes down before it, and is never rebuilt, or the very refuge itself is the cause of moral ruin. Therefore "Let not the rich man glory in his riches" (Jer. ix. 23).

II. A false estimate of life in relation to poverty. It is a mistake also to look on poverty as a "destruction." If the rich man errs on the side of excessive confidence, the poor man errs on that of fearfulness. He should remember —1. *That the blessedness of life here does not consist in what a man has, but in what he is.* Wealth may be a curse to existence, and so may poverty, but a good conscience, a godly character, is a continual feast. And it is quite *as* easy, perhaps more so, to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God in poverty as in wealth. "A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth" (Luke xii. 15). This is the declaration of Him who created man, and who, therefore, knows his needs. The poor are the objects of His special regard. "Hath not God chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which He hath promised to them that love Him? (Jas. ii. 5). 2. *He should keep in mind the day of levelling and compensation.* "Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things, but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented" (Luke xvi. 25).

III. A right estimate of that which constitutes life, viz., righteous labour. (verse 16.) The first clause of this verse suggests (1) that there can be no true life without righteousness; (2) that righteousness must show that it exists by honest labour; (3) that the honest labour of a righteous man, whether of hand

or brain, shall bless his existence. From the second clause we learn (1) *that godless men likewise labour for a harvest.* There are as hard workers among the godless as among the good. They toil for earthly gain all the more earnestly because they have no other to possess: that which belongs to the present life is their all. (2.) *That there is no blessing in the gain of the ungodly.* The gain of a sinner only tends to confirm him in his ungodliness—it "tendeth to sin." If a tree is bad at the root the larger it grows the more bad fruit it will bear. The richer a bad man grows the worse he becomes, the greater are his facilities for sinning himself, and the more evil is his influence upon others. Sin being at the root of his actions, sin will be in the fruit. The whole subject teaches us not to make poverty and riches the standard by which to measure a man's blessedness or misfortune. Beecher says, "We say a man is 'made.'" What do we mean? That he has got the control of his lower instincts, so that they are only fuel to his higher feelings, giving force to his nature? That his affections are like vines, sending out on all sides blossoms and clustering fruits? That his tastes are so cultivated that all beautiful things speak to him, and bring him their delights? That his understanding is opened, so that he walks through every hall of knowledge and gathers its treasures? That his moral feelings are so developed and quickened that he holds sweet communion with Heaven? O, no, none of these things. He is cold and dead in heart, and mind, and soul. Only his passions are alive; but—he is worth five hundred thousand dollars! . . . . . And we say a man is "ruined." Are his wife and children dead? O, no. Has he lost his reputation through crime? No. Is his reason gone? O, no; it is as sound as ever. Is he struck through with disease? No. He has lost his property, and he is ruined. The *man* ruined! When shall we learn that "a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth?"

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Verse 15. It is not *a* strong city, but *his* strong city. You see how justly the worldling is called an idolater, for he makes not God his confidence, but trusts to a thing of nought; for his riches, if they are a city, are not a strong city, but a city broken down, and without walls. How hard is it for rich men to obtain an entrance into that city that hath foundations, when it is a miracle for a man that hath riches not to trust in them.—*Muffet.*

The rich man stands independent, changes and adversities cannot so easily overthrow him; he is also raised above many hazards and temptations: on the contrary, the poor man is overthrown by little misfortunes, and his despairing endeavours to save himself, when they fail, ruin him completely, and perhaps make him at the same time a moral outlaw. It is quite an experienced fact which this proverb expresses, but one from which the double doctrine is easily derived: (1) That it is not only advised, but commanded, that man make the firm establishing of his external life-position the aim of his endeavour. (2) That one ought to treat with forbearance the humble man; and if he always sinks deeper and deeper, one ought not to judge him with unmerciful harshness, and in proud self-exaltation.—*Delitzsch.*

As soldiers look upon a strong city as a good place which they may retire to for safety in times of flight, so worldly men, in their distress and danger, esteem their wealth the only means of relief and succour: or, as a marching army expects supply, if need be, from a well-manned and well-victualled city, so men in their fainting fits, and under dreadful crosses, expect to be revived by their earthly cordials. —*Swinnock.*

The word destruction is capable of

two meanings. First, there are temptations peculiar to poverty as well as to riches. Agur was aware of these when he prayed, "Give me not poverty, lest I steal and take the name of my God in vain" (chap. xxx. 7–9). He who gives way to such influences of poverty ensures "destruction" as much as he who is "full and denies God, and says, Who is the Lord?" Secondly, as we found the preceding clause to refer to the state of mind—the *confidence of safety* inspired by his wealth in the bosom of the rich, it seems fair and natural to understand the latter clause on a similar principle. "The destruction of the poor" will then mean, that which, *in their own eyes*, is their destruction; that which engenders their fears and apprehensions—their constant dread of destruction. They are ever apt to contrast their circumstances with those of their wealthy neighbours, and to deplore their poverty, and fret at it as that which keeps them down, depriving them of all good, and exposing them to all evil. And, without doubt, it is the source of many and heavy sufferings, both in the way of privation and endurance. But the poor may indulge their fears, and make themselves unhappy without cause. Their forebodings may be more than groundless. If by their poverty they are exposed to some evils, they are exempted by it from others. . . Let the poor seek the peace, and comfort, and safety which are imparted by the Gospel; and thus, possessing the "true riches," they will not need to "fear what man can do unto them." The worst of all destructions will be far from them.—*Wardlaw.*

The "wealth of the rich," even in this world, is their great capital. The "destruction of the poor" is the helplessness, and friendlessness, and creditlessness, and lack of instruments incident to "poverty." In the spiritual world the distinction is entire. The rich get richer, and the poor get poorer, and both by inviolable laws. All works for good for one, and all for evil for the other. The last Proverb explained it. Wisdom, by its very nature, grows, and so does folly. All other interests vibrate: sometimes worse, and sometimes better. But Wisdom, like the God that chose it, has no "shadow of turning." If it begins in the soul it grows for ever. If it does not begin it grows more distant. There is never rest. Wealth in the spiritual world, by the very covenant, must continually heap up; and poverty, by the very necessities of justice, must increase its helplessness. —*Miller.*

Naturally the author is here thinking of wealth well earned by practical wisdom, and this is at the same time a means in the further effort of Wisdom; and, again, of a deserved poverty, which, while the consequence of foolish conduct, always causes one to sink deeper in folly and moral need. Compare the verse following.—*Lange's Commentary.*

Surely this should humble us, that riches,—that should be our rises to raise us up to God, or glasses to see the love of God in—our corrupt nature useth them as clouds, as clogs, etc., yea, sets them up in God's place, and saith to the fine gold, "Thou art my confidence" (Job xxxi. 24). *The destruction of the poor is their poverty.* They are devoured by the richer cannibals (Psa. xiv. 4), as the lesser fish are by the greater. Men go over the hedge where it is lowest. "Poor" and "afflicted" are joined together (Zeph. iii. 12). So are "to want" and "to be abased" (Phil. iv. 12).—*Trapp.*

Here he is describing what is, rather than prescribing what ought to be. The verse acknowledges and proclaims a prominent feature in the condition of the world. It is not a command from the law of God, but a fact from the history of men. In all ages and in all lands money has been a mighty power, and its relative importance increases with the advance of civilisation. Money is one of the principal instruments by which the affairs of the world are turned, and the man who holds that instrument in his grasp can make himself felt in his age and neighbourhood. It does not reach the Divine

purpose, but it controls human action. It is constrained to become God's servant, but it makes itself the master of man.—*Arnot.*

The rich man often goes about his Sion, or rather his Jericho, and views the walls thereof; he marketh the bulwarks, and telleth the towers of it. He looks upon his wealth, he marks his bags, he tells his moneys, and therein is his confidence; thereby he thinketh to outstand any siege or assault, and, placing his security on it, dareth to oppose his strength to any right or reason; whereas God with a blast of ram's horns is quickly able to throw down all his might and his greatness.—*Jermin.*

Verse 16. The labour of the righteous tendeth to life or "serves as life." 1. Because it is a good thing in itself. 2. Because it procures good, each stroke earning its pay. 3. Because it increases, and that on for ever, making us holier and happier, and making others holier and happier through the endless ages. It "*serves*" pre-eminently "*as life*," therefore, literally, "*is for life.*" But the fruit, or "*gains of the wicked*" (and we must not fail to note the crescendo in the second clause, "The *labour* of a righteous man"–"the *gains* of a wicked man"; the righteous still toiling, the wicked having made his harvest,) serve to sin or "*as a sin-offering.*" That is, they are all demanded by justice, and are all consumed for the expiation of his sins. Pious acts are a life. Wicked gains go to swell what our great creditor seizes.—*Miller.*

Labour, not idleness, is the stamp of a servant of God; thus cheered by the glowing confidence, that it tendeth to life (John vi. 27). "Occupy till I come"—"Do all to the glory of God" (Luke xix. 13; 1 Cor. x. 31)—this is the standard. Thus the duties even of our daily calling tend to life. God works in us, by us, with us, through us. We work *in* and *through* Him. Our *labour*, therefore, is His work—wrought in dependence on Him; not *for* life, but *to* life (Rom. viii. 13; 1 Cor. xv. 10; Phil. ii. 12, 13)—*Bridges.*

The words are fitly chosen: "labour" in honest industry is the righteous man's ordinary way of living. "Revenue" (fruit) not gained by honest labour is frequently the wicked man's livelihood.—*Fausset.*

It is not directly said, as the previous clause might lead us to expect, that the "fruit" of the wicked tendeth to "death," but to "sin." This, by the wise man, is considered as the same thing. It "tendeth to sin," and, consequently, to *death.* Thus it is said, "When lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death" (Jas. i. 15.). Between the two there is an intimate and inseparable connection.—*Wardlaw.*

The righteous are laborious, as knowing that to be the end of their life. For themselves they labour, to lead their lives with comfort here, to get the life of glory hereafter. For others they labour, to supply the wants of their disconsolate life on earth, and to help them forward to the blessed life of heaven. Wherefore St. Bernard saith well, "When we read that Adam in the beginning was set in a place of pleasure to work in it, what man of sound understanding can think that his children should be set in a place of affliction for to play in it."—*Jermin.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 18.

The Influence of Example.

We take here the rendering of all recent commentators as given in the Critical Notes, and understand the verse to set forth the truth that "no man liveth to himself." His character is reproduced in others.

I. A good man is a way, because he is the means to an end. The way to the

city is the road by which we reach it. The life of a holy man is a way to spiritual and eternal life, because it is the means by which men come home to God. If there were no good men in the world, there would be no means by which sinners could be brought from death unto life. Christ is pre-eminently "*the way*," because His life is the great means by which men learn to know and to return to God. "No man cometh unto the Father but by Me" (John xiv. 6). The longer a path is trodden the more distinctly it proclaims itself as a way. So a good man becomes a more evident way the longer he lives. A good life is so distinct in its teachings that both sage and savage are compelled to admit its influence, and the longer it exerts its power for good the more pronounced it becomes. The Son of God has for ages been the way to life, and the longer He continues to be so the more distinctly is He seen to be the means to this end.

II. The conditions to be fulfilled in order to become a way of life. 1. *The man must keep instruction.* It is not enough to *receive* it. The Word of God must not only be *heard*, but must be *remembered.* The commandments of God must not only be *received*, but must be *kept.* "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them" (John xiii. 17). 2. *He must submit to discipline even when it takes the form of reproof.* This is implied in the last clause of the verse, "He that refuseth reproof causeth to err." The man who has attained a position in any profession, and has thereby become qualified to lead others, has done so because he has submitted to discipline even when it has been in the unpalatable form of reproof. Such a man can well exhort others to submit to that by which he has become fit to be their guide. Even the Son of God "*learned obedience* by the things which He suffered" (Heb. v. 8).

III. An ungodly man injures others as well as himself. He not only wanders from the path himself, but he "causeth (others) to err." We often hear it said of a godless man—of one "who refuseth reproof"—that "he is nobody's enemy but his own." This cannot be. It has been truly said that "nothing leaves us wholly as it found us. Every man we meet, every book we read, every picture or landscape we see, every word or tone we hear, mingles with our being and modifies it." This being so, every man makes every man with whom he comes in contact better or worse, and as every good man draws others into the path of life, so every man who refuses to submit to Divine discipline drags others with him in the broad road that leads to destruction.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

St. Basil, answering the question, "With what mind anyone ought to receive the instructions of reproof administered unto him," giveth this answer, "With the same mind that befitteth him who, being sick of some disease and troubled for the preserving of life, receiveth a medicine, namely, with the greatest desire of recovering his health." For there is a way of life though a man be not *sick* but *dead* unto sin. And the hand that putteth into this way is instruction, and that which must keep us in the way is the keeping of instruction: for he that refuseth reproof erreth, erreth in refusing, erreth more by refusing.—*Jermin.*

This is the idea of other verses (11-13): that a man going to heaven blazes a path for others. He *is* a way Others travel upon him in his prayers and in his example.—*Miller.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 18.

THREE DEGREES OF MORAL FOOLISHNESS

I. A liar. 1. *A liar is a fool because he fights for a weak cause.* When a case can only be made out by lying it is manifestly a bad one. A man who will strive to uphold such a cause reveals his folly. 2. *Because he makes use of a weak weapon.* Among tribes ignorant of the methods of civilised warfare we find weapons which are little better than slim rods, and, although their points are sharp and poisoned, yet they proclaim their weakness when they come into collision with an experienced swordsman. Lying is such a weapon, and its use reveals the utter folly of him who wields it. It can no more stand against truth than the wooden spear of a savage can turn aside the thrust of a Damascus blade. 3. *Because by lying he degrades his moral character.* The serpent lost his upright position by being linked with lying, instead of going erect, God passed upon him the sentence—"Upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life" (Gen. iii. 14). The liar finds that this is his doom. He can no longer hold up his head like an honest man among his fellow-men, he must henceforth crawl and wind his way through the world, and eat the dust of ignominy and scorn. Men turn from a liar as they do from a serpent. It is assuredly the height of folly for a man thus to throw away that which alone makes him worthy to be called a man.

II. A liar who conceals hatred by lying. This man displays a higher degree of iniquity and folly. There are those who lie simply to serve their own purposes and have no dislike to the person whom they deceive. There is often much lying where there is no special malice. But when lying is used to conceal hatred—which is murder (1. John iii. 15)—there is a double folly because there is a double sin. The lying of the "father of lies" is simply a blind to conceal his intense hatred of the human race, and this makes him the greater sinner.

III. A liar who utters slander. When malice finds vent in lying slander we have an exhibition of greater iniquity and therefore of greater folly. It is bad to be a liar, it is worse to conceal hatred by lying, but it is worse to let the hatred of the heart break forth into false accusations of the innocent. The tree that is most richly laden with the ripest fruit is the one upon which the birds will congregate. We never find them passing by such booty to peck at green fruit. The pirates lay in wait for vessels with a rich cargo, empty vessels pass by unmolested and secure from attack. So it is always the best men who attract slanderers, men of little or no moral worth are not considered foemen worthy of their steel. God declared Job to be the best man in all the earth, "perfect and upright, one who feared Him, and eschewed evil" (Job i. 8). And it was because he stood thus pre-eminent that the tongue of the great slanderer was used against him; being from the begining a liar and a murderer of character he gave one of the most complete exhibitions of his real nature when he pointed his lying hatred agains the best man of his day. The Holy One of God did not escape the tongue of the slanderer. He was a "man gluttonous, and a wine-bibber" (Matt. xi. 19), "one that perverteth the people" (Luke xxiii. 14). When "He bore our griefs and carried our sorrows" He was esteemed "smitten of God and afflicted" (Isiah liii. 4). All lying and malice, whether concealed or manifested, becomes the most palpable folly when looked at in the light of the "coming of the Lord, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness and make manifest the counsels of the hearts" (1 Cor. iv. 5).

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

If we desire the credit of wisdom let us use better means to obtain it than artificial disgracings of our brethren, for that cometh not from above; it is no gift of God; it is sensual, carnal, and devilish. Do not hearken to the reports of such wicked persons as seek to defame others and detract from their good name; they are but foolish and base pedlars that utter such infectious wares, and therefore they cannot be wise chapmen that traffic with them and receive them at their hands. Here is consolation for them that are molested and vexed unjustly for the Gospel's sake by clamourous and false accusers; let them consider what account God maketh of their malicious adversaries; He calls them fools and derideth their practices, and, therefore, in the end it shall be seen that when they have spat all their venom they have but shot a fool's bolt and procured shame and sorrow to themselves.—*Dod.*

The folly of slander. 1. *If this practice be proved extremly sinful it will thence be demonstrated no less foolish.* And it is indeed plainly the blackest and most hellish sin that can be; that which giveth the grand fiend his name, and most expresseth his nature. He is the *slanderer*, *Satan*, the spiteful adversary, the old *serpent* or *dragon* spitting forth the venom of calumnious accusation, the *accuser of the brethren, the father of lies*, the grand defamer of God to man, of man to God, of one man to another. And highly wicked that practice must be whereby we grow namesakes to him. 2. *The slanderer is plainly a fool because he makes wrong judgments and valuations of things*, and accordingly driveth on silly bargains for himself, in result whereof he proveth a great loser. He means by his calumnious stories either to vent some passion boiling within him, or to compass some design which he affecteth, or to please some humour that he is possessed with; but is any of these things worth purchasing at so dear a rate? Can there be any valuable exchange for our honesty? Can anything in the world be so considerable that for its sake we should defile our souls? 3. *Because he uses improper means and preposterous methods of effecting his purposes.* As there is no design worth the carrying on by ways of falsehood and iniquity, so there is scarce any (no good and lawful one at least) which may not more surely, more safely, more cleverly be achieved by means of truth and justice . . . He that is observed to practise falsehood will be declined by some, opposed by others, disliked by all. 4. *The slanderer is a fool, as bringing many great inconveniences and troubles upon himself.* (1.) By no means can a man inflame so fierce anger, impress so stiff hatred, raise so deadly enmity against himself, and consequently so endanger his safety, ease, and welfare as by this practice. Men will rather pardon a robber of their goods than of their good name. (2.) And he is not only odious to the person immediately concerned, but generally to all men who observe his practice; every man presently will be sensible how easily it may be his own case to be thus abused. (3.) He also derogateth wholly from his own credit, for he that dareth thus to injure his neighbour, who can trust him in anything that he speaks? (4.) This practice is perpetually haunted with most troublesome companions, inward regret, and self-condemnation. (5.) The consequence of this practice is commonly shameful disgrace, with an obligation to retract and to render satisfaction; for seldom doth calumny pass long without being detected and confuted. (6.) The slanderer doth banish himself from heaven and happiness. For, if none that "maketh a lie" (Rev. xxii. 15) shall enter the heavenly city, assuredly the capital liar, the *slanderer*, shall be far excluded from felicity. All these things being considered, we may, I

think, reasonably conclude it most evidently true that "he who uttereth slander is a fool."—*Barrow.*

Better. *He who hideth hatred is of lying lips.* The alternative is offered with a delicate touch of irony. He who cherishes hatred must choose between being a knave or a fool—a knave if he hides, a fool if he utters it.—*Plumptre.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 19-21.

Speech and Silence.

I. The wisdom of not always using the tongue when we might. "He that refraineth his lips is wise." The reputation of a good man may be much injured by even speaking the truth at certain times and to certain persons. The silence of a man who can speak wisely and eloquently is a revelation of self-control, and often adds more to the dignity of his character than words can. The Son of God "opened not His mouth" before His false accusers, and thus revealed His power of self-control—His moral majesty. That He could be silent in such circumstances is a manifestation of the deep ocean of conscious innocence within Him, and is an unparalleled exposition of His own precept, "In patience possess ye your souls." 1. *Silence is wisdom when we feel that speech would be useless to convince.*—when we feel that a foregone conclusion has been arrived at which no argument or appeal could shake. This has been the case in the history of the confessors and martyrs of the Church in all ages, and was pre-eminently so when the Lord Jesus Christ stood to be tried before men who had determined to murder Him. 2. *Silence is sometimes more convincing than speech.* Men are often more impressed by acts than by words, by a spirit of forbearance than by a passionate vindication of our rights. 3. *Silence does not necessarily imply acquiescence.* The Eternal Himself is sometimes silent from displeasure. "These things hast thou done and I kept silence" (Psalm lv. 21).

II. The blessing of using the tongue when we ought. "The tongue of the just is as choice silver." The lips of the righteous feed many because they supply a need. Man needs a medium by which to express the value of his labour or his merchandise, and silver supplies this want. And he likewise needs a medium by which to express his thoughts, and speech is this medium. But unless it is the speech of a *just* man it will be a curse and not a blessing. It must convey *good thinking* if it is to be as choice silver to a needy man. The prisoner who stands at the bar charged with a crime of which he is innocent feels that the tongue of the man who pleads his cause is more precious to him than much silver. To the man who is seeking after God, the tongue of one who can tell him "words whereby he shall be saved" is as choice silver (Acts xi. 14). The words of Peter were so esteemed by Cornelius. The heart of the Ethiopian eunuch was more rejoiced by the preaching of Philip the Evangelist than it would have been by the possession of all the treasure of his mistress (Acts viii. 26-39). The words of Him who was "the Just One" (Acts iii. 14) are and ever will be "a strength to the needy in his distress" (Isa. xxv. 4); more precious to those who are conscious of their soul-poverty "than thousands of gold and silver" (Psalm cxix. 72); and it is in proportion as men are like Him in character and disposition that their speech will bless the world.

III. The sin of using the tongue too much. The shell and the kernel of the fruit were intended by God to grow together; the latter cannot grow to perfection without the former, yet the shell only exists for the kernel. The soul and body are ordained to grow together; the body only exists for the soul, yet the soul

can only manifest itself through the medium of the body. But the body without the soul is worthless. Man's thought and word were intended by God to act together; thoughts are useless without speech in which to clothe them; words without thoughts have no reason for existence, they are shells without kernels, bodies without souls, and their use is a sin against God's ordained method. Where there is a "multitude of words" there is not much thought, and therefore there is sin.—**1.** *Against a man's self*, because "every idle word that men shall speak they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment (Matt. xii. 36). **2.** *Against society*, because the man utters sounds which contain nothing to benefit. God has ordained thought to feed the soul as He has ordained bread to feed the body. Where there are words men have a right to expect thoughts upon which to feed, as they have a right to look for the kernel within the shell. When they get the first without the last they are robbed of what is their due.

IV. The origin of idle and worthless talking. "The heart of the wicked is little worth." "Fools die for want of wisdom." Where there is no moral wisdom there can be no real worth; no thoughts can be generated in the heart that is not under the influence of Divine teaching that will supply the needs of needy men. As is the fountain so must be the stream. "The tree is known by its fruit. O, generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh" (Matt. xii. 33-34).

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Verse 19. A man of inordinate talk runs inordinate risk. He must be a God that can talk all the time and never trespass. And, therefore, as blunders "come home to roost," he is a *prosperous* man who reduces the volume of his speech.—*Miller.*

The fool talks for ever upon nothing, not because he is full, but because he is empty; not for instruction, but for the pure love of talking. . . . . The sphere of social intercourse that stimulates the conversational powers at the same time teaches the wholesome discipline of the tongue—that beautiful accomplishment of silence which, however, alike with its opposite grace, derives its chief loveliness as the fruit of christian humility and kindness. The *wisdom* is especially valuable under provocation (1 Sam. x. 27. 2 Kings xviii. 36). And even in the unbending of innocent recreation the discipline of godly sobriety is of great moment. The sins of this "little member" are not trifles.—*Bridges.*

"Refraineth" as with a bridle, for we must by force bridle our tongue as an untameable member (Jas. iii. 2-8). *Xenocrates*, in "Valerius Maximus," says, "I have been sometimes sorry that I spoke; I never have been sorry that I was silent.—*Fausset.*

If thou be master-gunner spend not all
That thou canst speak at once, but husband it,
And give men turns of speech; do not forestall
By lavishness thine one and others' wit,
As if thou mad'st thy will. A civil guest
Will no more talk all than eat all the feast.
George Herbert.

I. The general vice here referred to is not evil speaking from malice, nor lying or bearing false witness from indirect selfish designs, but it is talkativeness: a disposition to be talking, abstracted from the consideration of what is to be said, with very little or no regard to, or thought of doing, either good or harm. . . . . Those who are addicted to this folly cannot confine themselves to trifles and indifferent subjects: they cannot go on for ever talking of nothing, and, as common matters will not afford a sufficient fund for perpetual continued discourse, when subjects of this kind are exhausted, they will go on to scandal, divulging of secrets, or they will invent something to engage attention: not that they have any concern about being believed otherwise than a means of being heard. . . . . The tongue used in such a licentious man-

ner is like a sword in the hand of a madman: it is employed at random, it can scarce possibly do any good, and, for the most part, does a world of mischief. **II. The due government of the tongue.** The due and proper use of any natural faculty or power is to be judged of by the end and design for which it was given us. The chief purpose for which the faculty of speech was given to man is plainly that we might communicate our thoughts to each other in order to carry on the affairs of the world; for business, and for our improvement in knowledge and learning. But the good Author of our nature designed us not only necessaries, but likewise enjoyment and satisfaction. There are secondary uses of our faculties: they administer to delight as well as to necessity, and the secondary use of speech is to please and be entertaining to each other in conversation. This is in every respect allowable and right: it unites men closer in alliance and friendship, and is in several respects serviceable to virtue. Such conversation, though it has no *particular* good tendency, yet hath a *general* good one; it is social and friendly, and tends to promote humanity, good nature, and civility. . . . . The government of the tongue, considered as a subject of itself, relates chiefly to conversation, and the danger is, lest persons entertain themselves or others at the expense of their wisdom or their virtue. The cautions for avoiding these dangers fall under the following particulars: 1. *Silence.* The wise man observes that "there is a time to speak, and a time to keep silence." One meets with people in the world who seem never to have made the last of these observations. But the occasions of silence are obvious, namely, when a man has nothing to say, or nothing but what is better unsaid: better either in regard to particular persons he is present with, or from its being an interruption to conversation itself, or to conversation of a more agreeable kind, or better, lastly, with regard to himself. 2. *Talking upon indifferent subjects.* Be sure that the subject is *indifferent*, that it be in no way offensive to virtue, religion, or good manners; that it be in no way vexatious to others, and that too much time be not spent in this way. 3. *In discourse upon the affairs and characters of others.* Consider, first, that though it is equally of bad consequence to society that men should have either good or ill characters which they do not deserve, yet when you say some good of a man which he does not deserve, there is no wrong done him in particular; whereas, when you say evil of a man which he does not deserve, here is a direct formal injury done to him. Secondly, a good man will, upon every occasion, and often without any, say all the good he can of everybody, but, so far as he is a good man, will never be disposed to speak evil of any, unless there be some other reason for it besides barely that it is the truth.—*Bishop Butler.*

Verse 20. If, as regards this world's wealth, the Lord's poor must say, "Silver and gold have I none," at least they may scatter *choice silver* with a widely extended blessing. "As poor, yet making many rich" (Acts iii. 6; 2 Cor. vi. 10).—*Bridges.*

A wicked man hath his worst side inward. Though sinful persons make never so great a show on the outside, yet there is nothing within them worth anything. To that purpose tend the words of the Apostle collected out of the Psalms: "The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise to be but vain." If the point had stood upon man's opinion there might easily have been an error in it; but he bringeth the testimony of God, upon sure and infallible knowledge, to confirm it. . . . Therefore, do not too much magnify and admire them, nor too far depend on them. For better things are not certainly to be expected from them than are in them.—*Dod.*

The antithesis runs through every word of both clauses. The tongue, the instrument of the mind, is contrasted with the mind itself; the just

with the wicked; the choice silver with the worthless "little." In each case there is implied an *à fortiori* argument. If the tongue is precious, how much more the mind! If the heart is worthless, how much more the speech!—*Plumptre.*

As pure and choice silver giveth a clear and sweet sound, so the tongue of the wise soundeth sweetly and pleasantly in the ears of men. It is also as choice silver, because therewith he is ready to buy the hearts of men to virtue and goodness. But the heart of a fool being of little worth, hence it is that he buys it not. . . . Now if the tongue of the just be as choice silver, his heart must needs be of fine gold. And if the heart of the wicked be little worth, his tongue must needs be worth nothing at all. Well therefore it were, if that the wicked would get the just man's tongue to be his heart; or else get the tongue of the just to infuse some of his metal into his heart; for that is able to put worth into it, and from thence to derive worth into his tongue also. The proverbial sense is, that the excellent words of wisdom work not upon a foolish heart, that having not worth to value the worth of it.—*Jermin.*

I. By a just man is meant — 1. *A renewed man*, for naturally our lips are polluted. "I am a man of unclean lips," etc. (Isa. vi. 5). Sin of the tongue is most frequent, and that not without difficulty avoided. The corruption of men by nature is described (Rom. iii. 13). This is man's true character, as he is in his natural estate. The pure lip is the fruit of God's converting grace (Zeph. iii. 9). 2. *A man furnished with knowledge of the things which concern his duty;* for every renewed man is an enlightened man (Prov. xv. 2). Unless a man understand his duty, how shall he speak of it? 3. *This renewed man is a mortified man;* for otherwise he will only stickle for opinions, and be one of the disputers of this world, but will not warm men's hearts and excite them to practise. That must be first upon the heart which will afterwards be upon the tongue; and unless the heart be cleansed the tongue will not be cleansed. If the heart be upon the world, the tongue will be upon the world (1 John iv. 5). 4. *This renewed man must be biassed with a love of God and Christ and heaven before he can edify others.* To restrain the tongue from evil is not enough, we must do good. To heart-warning discourse, faith is necessary. **II. His discourse is as choice silver.** 1. *For purity.* Choice silver is that which is refined from all dross, and there is much evil bewrayed by the tongue, such as lying, railing, ribaldry (Eph. iv. 29), cursing, idle discourse, etc. 2. *For external profit.* Money is very profitable for worldly uses, the discourse of a good man is very profitable to others. **III. By a wicked man is meant one that is not regenerate or renewed by the Holy Spirit.** They are of several sorts. 1. *Some have great natural abilities*, as Ahithophel (2 Samuel xvi. 23), yet his heart was nothing worth. 2. *Some have plausible shows of piety*, but that will not help the matter (Matt. xxiii. 27, 28). 3. *Partial obedience availeth not* (2 Chron. xxv. 2). Amaziah was right in the matter, and he did many things right, but his heart was nothing worth. 1. *What is in the heart of such a man?* See Gen. vi. 5. This is the mint that is always at work; sin worketh in the heart all day, and playeth in the fancy all night; there is no truce in this warfare. 2. *What cometh out of such a heart?* See Mark vii. 21, 22. 3. *In what sense is it little worth?* (1.) As to acceptation with God. (2.) As to the benefit and profiting of others. Observe—1. *That the heart of the wicked is spoken of in the softest terms.* Elsewhere it is said to be deceitful above all things and desperately wicked (Jer. xvii. 9). And this teaches us that it is not enough to do harm by our speech, but it must benefit others. 2. *Till we make conscience of our thoughts, we cannot well order our words.* 3. *Familiar converse with those whose hearts are nothing worth, will tend to our hurt.* 4. *Be sure that you get*

another heart. For though it be not in our power to make ourselves a new heart, it is our duty to get it.—*Manton.*

Verse 21. A great housekeeper he is, hath his doors ever open, and, though himself be poor, yet he "maketh many rich" (2 Cor. vi. 10). He well knows that to this end God put "honey and milk under his tongue" (Cant. iii. 2), that he might look to this spiritual lip-feeding. To this end hath he communicated to him those "rivers of water" (John vii. 38) that they may flow from him to quench that world of wickedness, that, being set on fire of hell would set on fire the whole course of nature (Jas. iii. 6). They are "*empty* vines that bear fruit to themselves" (Hosea x. 1).—*Trapp.*

This bread of life which the disciples distribute is not like common bread The more you give of it to the needy the more remains for your own use. It is the bread which Jesus blesses in the wilderness—the bread from heaven, which Jesus is; and when from His hand, and at His bidding, you have fed three thousand on five loaves, you will have more bread remaining in your baskets than the stock you began with. . . . Fools, so far from being helpful to other, have nothing for themselves. They have taken no oil in their vessels, and the flame of their lamp dies out.—*Arnot.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 22.

The Source of True Riches.

This proverb cannot be understood to assert that a man needs nothing but God's blessing to make him a wealthy man in the ordinary sense of the word, because we know there are many cases in which men would never have been rich if they had not toiled hard to obtain riches. Industry has been joined to the blessing of the Lord, and so they have become rich. God's favour does not generally make a man rich except he works; it is presumptuous sin to expect God to make us rich without honest toil. But the lesson to be learnt is evidently this—that diligence cannot command riches, that God must be taken into account in all our efforts to make money, that the "race is not" *always* "to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding" (Eccles. ix. 11), even when the runners and the warriors are men after God's own heart. Placing the words beside our experience, we learn—

I. That when a good man gains riches through hard toil, it is by reason of the Divine blessing on his labour. There are among us many possessors of vast wealth who have risen early and sat up late, and eaten the bread of carefulness, but have acknowledged that, after all, it was the blessing of the Lord that had made them rich. They can point to others equally diligent, and, in some respects, superior to themselves, who have fallen in the race and have died comparatively poor. Such examples are admonitions not to trust to one's own wisdom or effort to the exclusion of the will of God. Jacob worked hard for his riches for twenty years; "in the day the drought consumed him, and the frost by night—and the sleep departed from his eyes." But he declares that his wealth was a gift from the God of his fathers—"I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth which thou hast showed unto thy servant, for with my staff I have passed over this Jordan, and now I am become two bands (Gen. xxxi. 40; xxxii. 10). A good man cannot use unlawful means of getting rich, therefore he may enjoy the amount of success which follows his efforts as a token of Divine favour.

II. That when men inherit, or become possessed of wealth for which they have not laboured, it is by the blessing of the Lord. The riches of Solomon were

bestowed upon him without so much as the expression of a desire on his part, and were a token of the Divine approval. "Because . . . . thou hast asked for thyself understanding to discern judgment . . . . I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked, both riches and honour" (1 Kings iii. 11-13). Looked upon as God's gift, wealth will be rightly used, and will be the blessing that it was intended to be.

III. That there is a moral truth contained here which has nothing to do with material riches or poverty. Solomon has, over and over again, directed his hearers to riches which are far more precious than silver or gold (see chap. iii. 14-15; viii. 11-19; also Homiletics and Comments of those verses). The blessing of the Lord is *itself* wealth. 1. *Because it enriches us with Divine knowledge* (1 Cor. i. 5). Solomon's knowledge was a higher kind of wealth than all his gold and precious stones, how much more a knowledge of Him whom to know is "life eternal" (John xvii. 3). 2. *Because by means of it men obtain a Divine character* (2 Pet. i. 2-4). This wealth men can claim as theirs in other worlds beside the one upon which they now live; this is their perpetual untransferable property.

IV. That when sorrow comes to men who have been enriched by God, it springs from some other source than the riches. The text does not apply in any sense to ill-gotten gain; that is dealt with elsewhere (chap. i. 19; xv. 27). It refers only to that which a man may lawfully call his own. 1. *But this may be the occasion of sorrow.* Solomon's great wealth was the occasion of sorrow, insomuch as he used it for sinful purposes, but this sorrow was added by himself and not by God. The misuse of riches, or of any other gift of God, will be followed by a penalty which will bring sorrow; but this is man's work, and not God's. 2. *Or sorrow may spring from another, and an independent source.* Sorrow in one form or another is the lot of fallen man. The incarnate Son of God was a "Man of sorrows." God-given and sanctified sorrow is often a token of greater Divine favour than temporal prosperity (chap. iii. 12). But there is no necessary connection between wealth and sorrow.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Verse 22. The sluggard looks for prosperity without diligence; the practical atheist from diligence alone; the sound-hearted Christian from the *blessing of God* in the exercise of diligence. This wise combination keeps him in an active habit; humble, and dependent upon God (John vi. 27). For, "except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it" (Psa. cxxvii. 1). . . . . He addeth at least no sorrow but what turns to a blessing. Accumulation of riches may be the accumulation of sorrows. Lot's covetous choice was fraught with bitterness. . . . . Gehazi was laden with his bags, but the plague of leprosy was upon him.—*Bridges.*

There is no sorrow added to them which is not a blessing, and, being a blessing, it cannot well be said to be sorrow. Now thus the verse may be understood as well of temporal as of spiritual riches; for it is the blessing of God, with which sorrow cannot stand. . . . . It is God's blessing alone which, being true riches, doth truly make rich. Other things esteemed in the world may be added together in great heaps of plenty; but, having sorrow added with them, they cannot be that weal of man which truly makes wealth. It is the blessing of God which, taking away sorrow, giveth true riches unto man. And, therefore, when Job wisheth "that he were as in the months past"—the months of his plenty and prosperity—it is with this addition, "as in the days when God preserved me." He desireth God's blessing with the things of this world, or else he careth not for them. For

that it is, as St. Gregory speaketh, which so bestoweth the help of earthly glory, as that thereby it exalteth much more in heavenly happiness.—*Jermin.*

Those three vultures shall be driven away that constantly feed on the wealthy worldling's heart—care in getting, fear in keeping, grief in losing the things of this life. God giveth to His, wealth without woe, store without sore, gold without guilt, one little drop whereof troubleth the whole sea of outward comforts.—*Trapp.*

The truth here is twofold. The cord, as it lies, seems single, but when you begin to handle it, you find it divides easily into two. It means that God's blessing gives material wealth, and also that they are rich who have that blessing, although they get nothing more. . . . . It is a common practice to constitute firms for trade, and exhibit their titles to the public with a single name "and company." . . . . Reverently take the All-seeing into your commercial company and counsels. If you cast Him out, there is no saying, there is no imagining, whom you may take in. . . . . One peculiar excellence of the riches made in a company from whose councils God is not excluded, is, that the wealth will not hurt its possessors, whether it abide with them or fly away. A human soul is so made that it cannot safely have riches next it. If they come into direct contact with it, they will clasp it too closely; if they remain, they wither the soul's life away; if they are violently wrenched off, they tear the soul's life asunder. Whether, therefore, you keep or lose them, if you clasp them to your soul with nothing spiritual between, they will become its destroyer.—*Arnot.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 23.

A Touchstone of Character.

The painter uses the dark background of his picture to set off the bright foreground. Sunlight never looks so beautiful as when seen shining upon a black thunder-cloud; it is the power of contrast. Solomon in his character-painting is constantly making use of this power. He is ever setting the dark and the light side by side—making the foolish or wicked man a dark background upon which to portray the moral features of the truly wise. The fool looks more foolish, and the good man more wise, by the contrast.

I. That which is an object of mirth is a touchstone of character. The fool makes sport out of mischief, out of that which does harm to his fellow-creatures, and consequently involves them in misery. If we saw a man making merriment over the burning of his neighbour's house, we should conclude that he was either a maniac or utterly without a heart. A man who realised the meaning of such a calamity, and had any sympathy within him, could but be grieved at the sight. But men find occasions of mirth in matters that are of far more serious moment. The wise man tell us in chap. xiv. 9, that "fools make a mock at *sin*"—that great "mischief of the universe." The saint is made sad by that in which the sinner finds an occasion of mirth. "Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people" (Jer. ix. 1). "Verily, verily, I say unto you, that ye shall weep and lament; but the world shall rejoice" (John xvi. 20). But the fool not only makes sport *at* mischief, it is his sport to *do* mischief; the one leads to the other. The fool who thinks sin is a laughing matter will not hesitate to commit sin himself, or to do his brother the irreparable mischief of leading him in the path of sin and death.

II. Men cease to make light of sin in proportion as they have "understanding." The text implies that a man who has any right comprehension of the end of

life, the value of the soul, the reality of Divine and eternal things, will not, *cannot*, make a sport of mischief in any shape or degree, especially of the mischief of moral wrong. A baby might laugh at a blazing house, although its own mother might be enwrapped in the flames, but this would only be an evidence of his want of understanding. Nothing proclaims a man to be a fool so plainly as his mockery of sin. A man of wisdom has too just a sense of its terrible and ruinous consequence to feel anything but sad when he thinks of it. He knows what mischief it has worked, and is working in the universe, and his understanding of these things makes that which is the sport of the fool the subject of his most solemn thought.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

The difference between the lost and the saved is, that to one it is but trifling to live; to the other it is the gravest "*wisdom*."—*Miller.*

That man has arrived at an advanced stage of folly who takes as much pleasure in it as if it were an agreeable amusement. This, however, is to be expected in its natural course. Sinners at first feel much uneasiness from the operation of fear and shame, but they are hardened by the deceitfulness of sin, till at length they not only cast off all restraints, but become impudent in sin, and think it a manly action to cast away the cords of God, and to pour insult and abuse on their fellow-men. But it were safer far to sport with fire than with sin, which kindles a fire that will burn to the lowest hell. It may now be a sport to do mischief, but in the lake of fire and brimstone it will be no sport to have done it.—*Lawson.*

When a man diveth under water he feeleth no weight of the water, though there be many tons of it over his head; whereas half a tubful of the same water, taken out of the river and set upon the same man's head, would be very burdensome unto him, and make him soon grow weary of it. In like manner, so long as a man is over head and ears in sin, he is not sensible of the weight of sin: it is not troublesome unto him; but when he beginneth once to come out of that state of sin wherein he lay and lived before, then beginneth sin to hang heavy upon him, and he to feel the heavy weight of it. So, so long as sin is in the will, the proper seat of sin, a man feeleth no weight of it, but, like a fool, it is a sport and pastime unto him to do evil. And it is therefore a good sign that sin is removed out of his seat—out of his chair of state—when it becomes ponderous and burdensome to us, as the elements do when they are out of their natural place. — *Spencer's Things New and Old.*

The fool is then merriest when he hath the devil for his playfellow. He danceth well in his bolts, and is passing well afraid for his woful bondage.—*Trapp.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 24.

The Inheritance of Fear and Desire.

These words treat of things desired and of things not desired coming to be possessed.

I. Ungodly men have fears concerning the future. These fears proceed from a consciousness of past sin and present guilt, and prove the existence within man of a moral standard of action. In the natural world, we know that certain effects invariably follow certain causes. Sunlight and genial rain produce fertility and beauty, the hurricane and the flood leave behind them desolation. There are certain particles whose action, if diffused abroad in the air, breed disease and death; there are others whose effects are most refreshing and healthful to the bodily frame. Coming into the region of human action and

moral responsibility, there are certain actions of men which clothe the spirit with gladness, making the soul as a field which the Lord God hath blest, and there are acts which leave behind them a sting which brings utter desolation. There are deeds done by moral agents which are followed by the disapprobation of conscience in proportion as conscience is educated by moral light, and there are those which are well-springs of joy in the human heart. It is to conscience that we must refer the fears of the wicked in relation to the future.

II. The certainty that the fears of the wicked will be realised. 1. *From the inequality of rewards and punishments in the present.* There are men whose characters seem to be almost perfect who have not the reward at present which their integrity and uprightness deserve. There are many men who sit, as it were, like Lazarus, at a rich man's gate in poverty, who are much better men than the rich man himself. The difference in the character of the man who passed the sentence of death upon Paul, and Paul himself calls for a more manifest impartiality on the part of the Divine Ruler in the eternity to come. We feel certain that elsewhere a just sentence has been passed upon Paul and Nero. The inequality in the present dealings of God with the righteous and the wicked demands that in the future the "fear of the wicked shall come upon him." 2. *From the admonition of conscience.* Although the mariner's compass is sometimes unsteady, its direction is always towards the north. And the human conscience, however it may occasionally waver, points to a future judgment. It is not an *occasional* occurrence but so *universal* as to be a prophecy of a fact. 3. *From the necessity that God should fulfil His own appointment.* Revelation declares that, "He hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom He hath ordained" (Acts xvii. 31). The Righteous Judge of all the earth must keep His own appointment, therefore every wicked man must have what he does not desire, viz., a fair and impartial trial.

III. Good men have had desires which have not been granted. The gratification of such desires would have been an injury to themselves and others. Moses desired to see God in the sense in which the Incarnate Son tells us He had seen Him. But if this desire had been granted Moses must have died, the Hebrew nation would have lost the only man who could lead them, and he would have missed the completion of the glory of his life (Exod. xxxiii. 20). Peter desired that His Master should not suffer at the hands of the chief priests and scribes (Matt. xvi. 21). But what a calamity this would have been for Peter himself and the human race.

IV. But that which a righteous man desires above all other things shall be granted. 1. *For himself in the present life, he desires a holy character.* This he regards as the "one thing needful" above all other personal possessions. And God desires this for him, therefore this desire shall be granted on the fulfilment of the pre-ordained conditions (1 Thess. iv. 3). 2. *For the world he desires that God's kingdom may "come," that right may in the end triumph over wrong.* Now this desire also must be granted, because Christ has taught His disciples to pray for its accomplishment, and because He Himself at the right hand of God is "henceforth expecting, till His enemies be made His footstool" (Heb. x. 13). 3. *He desires for himself in the future a complete redemption of both soul and body from the curse of sin* (2 Cor. v. 1-4). But this desire is implanted within him by that God who can fulfil his desire, and who has already given an earnest of its fulfilment. This alone is a guarantee that it shall be granted. "Now He that hath wrought us for the self-same thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the spirit" (2 Cor. v. 5). He has also the direct promise of Him who is "the Resurrection and the Life," the assurance of His inspired apostle that this desire of the righteous shall be granted (John v. 28-29; 1 Cor. xv. 49-54).

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

But *if our desires be granted*, and even exceeded (Gen. xlviii. 2; 1 Kings iii. 13; Ephes. iii. 20), faith and patience will be tried in the very *grant*. Growth in grace is given by deep and humbling views of our corruption. Longings for holiness are fulfilled by painful affliction; prayers are answered by crosses. Our Father's dispensations are not what they seem to be, but what He is pleased to make them.—*Bridges.*

The best way to have our wills satisfied is to be godly. For to such there is a promise made. Wherein yet these rules are to be observed: *First*, that our will be agreeable to God's will, the desire must be holy, and seasoned with the Spirit; and not carnal and corrupted by the flesh. *Secondly*, that sometimes lawful desires are not performed in the same kind, but exchanged for better, and that which doth more good is bestowed instead of them. Moses desired to enter into the land of Canaan; he was denied that, but he entered sooner into the heavenly and blessed rest of everlasting life. *Thirdly*, that we tarry the Lord's leisure, and depend on His hand, to minister, in fittest time, all those good things which our souls desire, and so we shall not fail to receive them when He seeth that they will be most expedient for us.—*Dod.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 25.

THE WHIRLWIND AND THE SURE FOUNDATION.

I. The resemblance of a wicked man to a whirlwind. 1. *They are both destructive forces.* A whirlwind passes over a district and everything that resists its advance is either overthrown, broken, or made to bend to its fury. Every wicked man in his sphere is a destroyer of human happiness and of moral life, but the image is especially applicable to tyrants who have been destroyers of the lives of thousands of their fellow-creatures, and have ruined the happiness of thousands more in their unscrupulous onward march to the attainment of their own selfish ends. Isaiah describes such a one when he says, "Is this the man that made the earth to tremble, that did shake kingdoms; that made the world as a wilderness, and destroyed the cities thereof?" (chap. xiv. 16, 17.) 2. *They often burst forth with sudden fury, and seem beyond the control of ordinary laws and methods of operation.* A whirlwind often descends upon a peaceful valley without any warning, and its fury is the more terrible by reason of its suddenness, and because of the impossibility of foretelling its course and where it will fall in its most destructive power. So a wicked man is a lawless man, he is not guided by principle but by passion and impulse, none of his fellow-creatures can foretell what will be his next act of violence, or who will be the next victims of his selfish ambition. It is this lawless, uncontrollable destructiveness which makes both the moral and the physical whirlwind the terror of the human race, and leads men instinctively to avoid them if possible. 3. *The triumph of both is short.* How soon nature rights herself after the passage of a whirlwind. She covers the broken rocks with verdure, the trees put forth fresh branches clothed with fresh leaves, others grow up in the places of those which were uprooted, grass and corn spring again, and all looks lovely as before the visitation. The whirlwind "passeth," and so does the wicked man. It is soon written of him that he is "no more," and men who have trembled at his name take heart, and nations and peoples whom he seemed to have annihilated spring into existence again, and the world rights itself. How many such instances stand recorded in history from the days of Nebuchadnezzar to those of Napoleon. How many times has the experience of the Psalmist been repeated: "I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself

like a green bay tree, yet he passed away, and lo, he was not: yea, I sought him, but he could not be found" (Psalm xxxvii. 35, 36). How often has the world had occasion to repeat the song, "How hath the oppressor ceased! . . . . The Lord hath broken the staff of the wicked, and the sceptre of the rulers. He who smote the people in wrath with a continual stroke, he that ruled the nations in anger, is persecuted, and none hindereth. The whole earth is at rest, and is quiet: they break forth into singing. Yea, the fir trees rejoice at thee, and the cedars of Lebanon, saying, Since thou art laid down, no feller is come up against us" (Isa. xiv. 4–8).

II. In what respects a righteous man is "an everlasting foundation." 1. *His character is something to build upon.* Nothing can be built upon a whirlwind, but a substantial structure can be raised upon a good foundation. Men may build hope upon the word and character of a righteous man. A promise given by him is a solid ground of confidence upon which the heart of his brother-man may rest securely. Thus righteousness is a constructive force in the world—a foundation without which society cannot exist. Especially is this true of the ideal man, Christ Jesus. Because He is the Righteous One (Isa. xi. 4) His promises are as anchors of the soul to the children of men. In resting upon His word His disciples build upon a "sure foundation" (1 Cor. iii. 11). Upon His character rests all their hopes for their own blessedness in the future, and for the restoration of a fallen world. Every man is a *foundation* if "righteousness" is the chief element of his character. 2. *Because for his sake the world stands.* The owner of a house may let it stand if there is a good foundation of solid rock, although the superstructure may be comparatively worthless. Our Lord tells us concerning the tribulations which he foretold, that "except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved; but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened" (Matt. xxiv. 22). This teaches us that the righteousness of the godly is the power which averts the destruction of the wicked, and keeps the world in existence. In this sense, therefore, the righteous are a foundation. 3. *The righteous are an "everlasting" foundation, because righteousness is the basis of confidence in eternity as it is in time.* The blessedness of the life to come is founded upon righteousness. The Kingdom of God in both worlds is "established in righteousness" (Isa. liv. 14). The immutable character of the heavenly world is founded upon the righteousness first of its righteous King, and then upon that of His righteous servants.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

The righteous may be poor, and, in his sinful state, anything but a stately building to the Lord, but in his meanest infancy he is a "*foundation.*" Very little appears above the surface. But he is a basis of all that is to be built, and that basis is to be "*eternal.*"—*Miller.*

The proverb reminds us of the close of the Sermon on the Mount, and finds the final confirmation of its truth in this, that the death of the godless is a penal thrusting of them away, but the death of the righteous a lifting them up to their home. The righteous also often enough perish in times of war and of pestilence; but the proverb, as it is interpreted, verifies itself, even although not so as the poet, viewing it from his narrow Old Testament standpoint, understood it; for the righteous, let him die when and how he may, is preserved, while the godless perishes. —*Delitzsch.*

The continuance of the wicked is but while they dig the pit of their own destruction.—*Jermin.*

The Lord will lay "a sure foundation," and "he that believeth shall not make haste" (Isa. xxviii. 16). These two promises lie together in the Scripture. When your heart's hope is fixed on that precious corner-stone, you need not be thrown into a flutter by the fiercest onset of the world and its god. —*Arnot.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 26.

The Vexatiousness of a Sluggish Servant.

I. He is as smoke to the eyes. Smoke in the eyes prevents the accomplishment of a man's purposes, or at least it hinders and annoys him in their execution. The eye is the light of the body; if vision is in any way obstructed or impaired, delay and vexation must ensue. So the employer of a sluggish servant must be the victim of perplexity and annoyance. He sends him on an errand, or entrusts him with a work which it is important should be done within a certain time. But he lingers over it until the time is long past, and perhaps an opportunity is lost which can never be recalled. Much often depends upon the performance of duties *up to time*. The want of punctuality sometimes is as disastrous as not doing the thing at all. How many plans have been frustrated, how many sufferings have in various ways been entailed upon men, by delay in the performance of duty. A master who has to depend upon a sluggard is like a man in the midst of the smoke of a burning house; he is uncertain as to his present whereabouts, and ignorant of what mishap may befal him next.

II. He is as vinegar to the teeth. He is most irritating to the temper. As vinegar sours everything with which it comes in contact, so a sluggard sours the temper of those with whom he has to do, and makes them sometimes not only irritable with him who is the offender, but with the innocent also.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Does, then, the sluggard disappoint and provoke his earthly master? See that we be not such sluggards to our Heavenly Master. Laodicean professors are especially hateful in his sight (Rev. iii. 16). The slothful minister carries in a tremendous account to *Him that sent him*. No more pitiable object is found than the man who has time to spare, who has no object of commanding interest, and is going on to the end as if he had spent his whole life in children's play, and had lived to no useful purpose. . . . Why "standeth he idle in the market-place?" It cannot be—"No man hath hired him." His master's call sounds in his ears—"Go ye into the vineyard." And at his peril he disobeys it (Matt. xx. 7-30). —*Bridges*.

Sluggishness is a cutting, vexing thing. If we are Christ's, we should crucify this self-pleasing affection of the flesh. . . . It is a sin to waste another man's time, as much as to waste his property. "Whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." No doubt it is the natural disposition of some people to be slovenly and unexact. But what is your religion worth if it do not correct such a propensity? . . . If any man be in Christ he is a new creature. If the new life is strong in the heart, it will send its warm pulses down to the extremest member. . . . He who is a Christian in little things is not a little Christian; he is the greatest Christian, and the most useful. The baptism of these little outlying things shows that he is full of grace, for these are grace's overflowings; and they are ever the overflowings of the full well that refresh the desert. The great centre must be fully occupied before the stream can reach that outer edge.—*Arnot*.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 27.

Long Life.

This verse must be looked at—

I. Generally. The fear of the Lord prolongs life because, other things being equal, godliness tends to bodily health. A good man governs his life by some

kind of law, his passions and inclinations do not play the lord over his conscience and will. This has a beneficial influence upon his bodily health. He has contentment with his present lot, trust in his God amid all the anxieties of life, and hope for the future. Such a state of mind tends to soundness of bodily health, whereas the manner of life of a godless man is opposed to health and consequently to long life. If a complicated machine is permitted to work with some of its parts improperly adjusted and fretting against each other at every turn of the wheel, the friction will soon wear away the parts, and ere long they will cease to act. A soul without godliness is a complicated mechanism which has never been rightly adjusted. There is no ruling principle, no guiding hand, one passion wars against another, the man bears the burden of life alone, he is at times a prey to the fears spoken of in verse 24, and the rule of all these devils in the soul has a tendency to wear out the body before its time. This is a truth universally admitted. But the words must also be regarded—

II. Relatively. That is, with a due regard to other circumstances. The length of a good man's life does not always depend upon himself, but upon the age in which he lives—upon the people by whom he is surrounded. The godliness of Abel shortened his life very materially. If his works had not been righteous, his brother would not have murdered him. The first Christian martyr met with an early and a violent death because he was a "man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost" (Acts vi. 5); and the fear of the Lord has shortened the days of millions since then. The ranks of the "noble army of martyrs" have been filled up by volunteers of every age and many nations since Stephen fell asleep, testifying to the fact that, so far as life in this world is concerned, other things must be taken into consideration.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

There is no such wholesome air—there is no such kindly physic—there is no such sovereign cordial—as the fear of the Lord. That makes the *days* of the godly as long as the *years* of the wicked.—*Jermin.*

The righteous' days are *great* and *noble*, and the wicked's days are *mean* and *small*. And this is the meaning of the Proverb, "Made little," literally, "shortened" (E.V.). We thought at first that this was decisive against our sense, and against our rendering of all the verses expounded in chap. iii. (verses 2–16). Our thought of this was increased by Job xiv. 1, and by all the expositions. But when we turned to Psalm cii. 23, our own sense was wonderfully confirmed. That verse reads, "He weakened my strength in the way; He shortened my days:" where "*shortened*" must have a sense coincident with continued living. And what that sense is, such passages as these: "Is my hand shortened?" (Isa. l. 2), "The soul of the people was (lit.) *shortened*," "The days of his youth hast Thou shortened" (Num. xxi. 4; Psa. lxxxix. 45), and nearly all the other instances strikingly confirm. The meaning is, Wisdom makes our days grander and grander, and Impenitence makes them weaker, and always of less account.—*Miller.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 28.

Hopes Realised and Disappointed.

I. The righteous man's present possession—"Hope." We saw in treating verse 24 that the righteous man possesses God-begotten desires, and that he has good ground for believing that these desires will be granted, therefore he *expects* their fulfilment, and desire and expectation constitute his hope. Hope is a

fortune in itself. It gives a present gladness, and therefore a present power. It is in itself a tower of strength. Nothing upholds us so surely in present difficulties as the hope of a brighter future. If in the hour of darkness a man can say to his soul, "Why art thou cast down, and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God" (Psalm xlii. 5), he holds in possession a sheet-anchor which will prevent him from making shipwreck upon the rocks of despair and infidelity. The hope of the righteous is a present salvation. "We are saved by hope" (Rom. viii. 24). It is "an anchor of the soul" (Heb. vi. 19).

II. The righteous man's future inheritance—gladness. If the hope of an expected good gives gladness, how much more its realisation! A man is glad when the title deeds of an estate are handed over to him even if he cannot at once enter upon its possession, how much more glad is he when he enters into the full enjoyment of his inheritance. The righteous man's hope is a more certain guarantee of his future inheritance of gladness than the most indisputable deed ever written upon parchment. It is as we saw before (see on verse 24) an earnest of its own fulfilment. The hope begotten in the heart of a child, by the inspiration of his father's character and genius, that he may one day be like his parent, is a hope that the father himself will not disappoint. Love for his child and a regard for his own honour will impel him to do all that lies within his reach to satisfy the desire—to fulfil the expectation—of his child. If, in addition, he was able to promise the child that his hope should be realised, nothing could acquit him of his obligation to perform his promise except inability. The Eternal Father has by His spirit and by His promise begotten such a hope within His children and "begotten them" unto the hope (1 Pet. i. 3). This is "the hope" of the righteous, and the character and the omnipotence of Him who gave it birth is a sure pledge that it shall be "gladness." Closely connected with it are the hopes of the coming of God's kingdom, and of the "adoption of the body" (Rom. viii. 23), noticed in considering "the desire of the righteous."

III. The doom of the expectation of the ungodly man. If the wicked man has fears concerning the future (see on verse 24), he has also vague hopes concerning it, although his desires and expectations are chiefly in relation to the present world. As to his desires of a state of happiness after death, they are not strong enough to lead him to comply with the conditions of entering upon it. Any expectation of this nature can be based upon nothing outside himself, and it must therefore perish. His expectation of the results of his own earth-born and devilish schemes will also perish. He may apparently bring them to a successful issue, but the end will show that it is not so. If he succeeds in gaining wealth or power, he will not get what he expected out of them. Any expectation which he forms as to the overthrow of the good will meet with the same doom. Pharaoh expected to be able to retain the Hebrews in bondage, but his expectation was broken to shivers upon the shield of Eternal Omnipotence. The chief priests and scribes expected to stamp out the name and the influence of the Nazarene by crucifying Him, but the result contradicted their expectations. In these instances may be seen a reflection of the doom of every expectation which is out of harmony with righteousness.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Christian! make sure the ground of your hope (2 Pet. i. 10). Then set out its gladness as becomes an heir of glory. Let not a drooping spirit tell the world the scantiness of your hope. But show that you can live upon its gladness until you enter into its perfect and everlasting fruition. Doubtfulness leaves believers and infidels nearly upon the same level.—*Bridges.*

The proverb means literally—"The hope of the righteous (itself) turns to joy." Faith is the begining of felicity. . . . The expectation or "*assurance*" of the impenitent man, even if he finds it well placed, "*perishes*" as of its very nature. "The world passes away and the desire thereof." The lost may have had all he wished, but his very wishes perish at the last day (1 John ii. 17).—*Miller.*

All the hopes of the wicked shall not bring him to heaven; all the fears of the righteous shall not bring him to hell.—*Bunyan.*

It would be better for "hope" and "expectation" to change places. Even the expectant waiting of the righteous is joyful at the time, and ends in joy; the eager hope of the wicked comes to nought (comp. Job viii. 13).—*Plumptre.*

The wicked cannot choose but fear, and, therefore, Eliphaz says of a wicked man, the sound of fear is in his ears (Job xv. 21). And in Isaiah (xx. 17) they are compared to the troubled sea, which cannot rest. And because where fear is, it is some ease to think, if not to hope, that the evil feared may not fall upon them; this ease is taken away, for the fear *shall come.* Come it shall, as it were of itself without sending for, because it is most due unto them. An instance of this is given in those who lived at the time of the building of the Tower of Babel, and who saying "Let us build it lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth," it followeth soon after, "and the Lord scatttered them upon the face of all the earth." On the other side, the righteous having tasted of goodness cannot choose but desire it; and because where desire is, it is some trouble to think, if not to doubt, that the good desired may not be accomplished, this trouble is taken away, for *He* shall give who can give whatsoever Himself will, whatsoever they can desire.—*Jermin.*

Attachment to futurity has a remarkable influence on the operation of the human mind. The present, whatever it be, seldom engages our attention so much as what is to come. The present is apt to be considered an evanescent scene, just about to pass away; and in the midst of wishes and desires, of hopes and fears, which all respect futurity, we may be said to dwell. As on these the life of man is so much suspended, it becomes a material part of wisdom and duty to attend to any regulations by which they may be properly conducted. The anticipations of the *righteous,* conducted by prudence, and regulated by piety, mislead him not from his duty, and afford him satisfaction in the end. While the expectation of the *wicked,* arising from fantastic imaginary prospects, delude him for a while and terminate in misery. Let us consider, what we may, and what we may not, reasonably expect from the world. **I. We must not expect the uninterrupted continuance of any measure of health, prosperity, or comfort, which we now enjoy. II. We are not to expect, from our intercourse with others, all that satisfaction which we fondly wish.** . . . . Such is the power which the sophistry of self-love exercises over us, that almost everyone may be assured that he measures himself by a deceitful scale; that he places the point of his own merit at a higher degree than others will admit that it reaches. . . . Were expectations more moderate, they would be more favourably received. If you look for a friend in whose temper there is not to be found the least inequality, who upon no occasion is to be hurt or offended by any frailties you discover, whose feelings are to harmonise in every trifle with yours, whose countenance is always to reflect the image of your own, you look for a pleasing phantom, which is never, or at most, very rarely, to be found; and if disappointment sour your mind, you have your own folly to blame. You ought to have considered that you live in a region of human infirmity, where everyone has imperfections and failings. **III. We are not to expect constant gratitude from those whom we have obliged and**

served. I am far from saying that gratitude is a rare virtue, but our expectations of proper returns must be kept within moderate bounds. We must not imagine that gratitude is to produce unlimited compliance with every desire we indulge, or that those whom we have obliged will altogether desert their own interest for the sake of their benefactors. I shall next show what a good man may reasonably expect from human life. I. *Whatever course the affairs of the world may take, he may justly hope to enjoy peace of mind.* This to the sceptic and the profligate will be held as a very inconsiderable object of hope. But, assuredly, the peace of an approving conscience is one of the chief ingredients of human happiness; provided always that this self-approbation be tempered with due humility and regulated by Christian faith. II. *He has ground to expect that any external condition into which he may pass shall, by means of virtue and wisdom, be rendered if not perfectly agreeable, yet tolerably easy to him.* The inequality of real happiness is not to be measured by the inequality of outward estate. A wise and good man is never left without resources by which to make his state tolerable. Seldom or never do all good things forsake a man at once. What is very severe of any kind, seldom lasts long. Time and continuance reconcile us to many things that were at first insuportable. III. *We have ground to expect that, if we persevere in studying to do our duty towards God and man, we shall meet with the esteem and love of those around us.* The world, as I have before observed, is seldom disposed to give a favourable reception to claims based on superior talents and merits. But, with respect to moral qualifications, the world is more ready to do justice to character. Unaffected piety commands respect. Candour never fails to attract esteem and trust. Kindness conciliates love and creates warm friendships. I have considered only what the righteous man has to hope for in the ordinary course of the world. But—IV. *He has before him a much higher object of hope, even the hope which is laid up for him in heaven; the assured expectation of a better life in a higher and better world* Put the case of a servant of God being overwhelmed with all the disappointments which the world can bring upon him, here is an *expectation* which will always be *gladness.—Blair.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 29.

God's Way Destruction and Salvation.

I. In common with all His intellectual and moral creatures, God has a way, or plan of action. A skilful artificer has a *way* by which he brings forth a certain result in a work of skill. His way is the out-come of his previous thought and purpose; he does not go about his work in uncertainty as to what he is going to do, or how he is going to do it. The architect proceeds to erect his building in accordance with a certain plan, in a certain *way* before determined on. The public instructor has *ways* of teaching which are the out-come of previous thought; he would otherwise work at random. Those who are leaders of others must think and teach within the limits of certain rules, in pursuance of some definite end, otherwise there could be no result from their teaching. God, the skilful Artificer and wise Architect of the material universe, the Great Instructor of men, is no exception to this rule. 1. He works in *nature* according to a definite and pre-ordained rule or law. All that we see around us reveals Divine forethought and intention, proclaims that the Creator works for a definite end, that He walks in a pre-arranged way. He has a way, or method, of producing day and night, summer and winter, of developing the seed-corn into the full ear, of watering the earth

by clouds, and so fitting it for the habitation of man. 2. He has a way in *Providence*, and though here it is far more difficult than even in nature to trace His working or unravel His purposes, we know that He works in accordance with a definite plan for the accomplishment of a certain purpose, and that there is nothing of chance in the mysteries of life. A child may look on while his father is putting together the works of a watch, he cannot judge of the adaptation of certain processes and actions, but he knows that his father has made many watches before, and he judges from what *has been*, of what *is*, and what *shall be*. And so with God's way of providence, we cannot trace the why of His operations, we cannot see the issue of His actions while He is at work. The workings are too complicated for us to trace the adaptation of the means to the end. But from past results we conclude what will be the issue of His present dealings, from what *has been* we know what *shall be*, viz., that all will be seen to be part of a great plan or way of action, and that the verdict of the universe at last will be, "just and true are Thy ways, Thou king of saints" (Rev. xv. 3). Clouds and darkness have been around God's working in the past, but righteousness and justice have come out of the darkness, and so we know it ever shall be. 3. God has a *way* of grace. Here His way is a way of forgiveness through a Divine Atoner, and of sanctification through a Divine Spirit, meeting human need if that human need is felt and confessed. The need of a man who has broken God's law must be felt and acknowledged before the way of forgiveness and restoration is brought into operation. This is the law by which men are loosed from the bonds of sin, "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them" (2 Cor. v. 19). This is Jehovah's "way of salvation."

II. The opposite effects of the Divine way upon opposite characters. "The way of the Lord is *strength* to the upright, but *destruction* to the workers of iniquity" (see Critical Notes). All men who are not numbered with the "upright," whose moral nature has not been lifted up by contact with the Divine, are "workers of iniquity." Dr. David Thomas says of iniquity, "The word is negative—the want of equity. Men will be damned not merely for doing wrong, but for not doing the right" (see "The Practical Philosopher," p. 132). We take the words therefore to signify the two great classes into which Christ divides the world, "He that believeth and he that believeth not" (John iii. 18), and consider the different effect upon these two opposite characters of—1. *Jehovah's way of nature.* To the upright there comes strength from the contemplation of God as revealed in His material works. He feels that God is a necessity to account for what he sees around him. All created things speak to him of the wisdom, the power, and the goodness of their Maker and Upholder, and his faith is strengthened by this manifestation of "the way of the Lord." He obeys the injunction of the prophet, "*Lift up your eyes on high and behold, who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number; He calleth them all by names, by the greatness of His might, for that He is strong in power, not one faileth.*" And thence he draws the prophet's argument, "*That the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary,*" that "*He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might He increaseth strength,*" and in thus "*waiting upon the Lord*" he "*renews his strength,*" he "*runs and is not weary, he walks and does not faint*" (Isa. xl. 26-31). But how different is the effect of the works of nature, when the God of nature is not acknowledged. They harden men in materialism, God's own laws are used to bow Him out of His own universe, and their working becomes so many forces of destruction because they drive men further from their only hope and help. As Paul tells us, such men "*hold* (back) *the truth in* (or, by) *unrighteousness, because that which may be known of God is manifest in* (or to) *them; for God hath showed it to them. For the invisible things of Him from*

the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His Eternal Power and Godhead. But, "*professing themselves wise, they became fools, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator*" (see Rom. i. 18-32). This is destruction to any man. 2. *Of Jehovah's way of providence.* Faith in a personal God, in a Divine Saviour, makes this "way" also "strength to the upright." If a seaman has faith in his captain, this gives him strength for his duty even in the roughest weather. He feels that he is not altogether left to the mercy of the blind elements, but that there is a strong and wise will guiding the ship. So confidence in an All-wise Father, in a King who "can do no wrong," is the stronghold of the upright amidst all the apparent contradictions and mysteries of life. He knows who is at the wheel of all human affairs, that

> "When He folds the cloud about Him,
> Firm within it stands His throne;"

and the knowledge that "God is Light, and in Him is no darkness at all," makes what would otherwise overwhelm him in doubt, and consequently in weakness, a source of strength, a power of life. But where God is not known, this confidence is absent, and nothing but chance, or an arbitrary Judge, sits upon the throne of the Universe. The terrible perplexities of life are like the rings of the wheels in Ezekiel's vision, "so high that they are dreadful," and, as such a man does not discern above them the "man upon the throne" (Ezek. i. 18-20), they are to him only mighty and resistless engines of destruction. 3. *Of Jehovah's way of grace.* The upright man has gained his strength to be upright from the way of Divine forgiveness. Even a child feels stronger when assured of his father's restored favour, and the forgiveness of God sets a man upon his feet and gives him that "joy of the Lord" which is "strength" (Neh. viii. 10). Unforgiven sin breaks the bones of the soul. "When I kept silence, my bones waxed old," but "I said I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin." "Make me to hear joy and gladness: that the bones which Thou hast broken may rejoice. Hide Thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities" (Psa. xxxii. 3–5, li. 8, 9). And he gains strength to continue in the way of uprightness by communion with an unseen Saviour, by the indwelling power of the Holy Ghost. Christ is "the power of an endless life" to all who believe in Him (Heb. vii. 16). This is the "*way*" or *law* of the kingdom of grace. "To as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name" (John i. 12). But to those who reject this way of grace, this "righteousness of God" (Rom. iii. 22), this "way of salvation," becomes a power of destruction; that which was ordained to be a "savour of life" becomes a "savour of death." Christ crucified is a stumbling-block and foolishness to such (1 Cor. i. 23). "Whosoever shall fall upon this stone shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder" (Matt. xxi. 44). The way of Jehovah is in no instance the *cause* of the destruction of the wicked but it must be the *occasion.* The words and works of Christ were the *occasion* but not the *cause* of the great national sin of the Jewish nation. "If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloak for their sin. If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father" (John xv. 22–24). The knife in the hand of the surgeon is an instrument to save life, but the patient may use it to kill himself if he be so minded. A candle may be used to give light and comfort to all in the house —this is its use with regard to honest men—but the same light may be the means of the discovery and punishment of a thief. The light and heat of the sun, falling upon a bed of flowers fills the air with fragrance and the spirit of

man with delight, but if it fall upon a noisome stagnant pool, or a dead body, it will hasten decomposition and spread the seeds of disease and death. It is not the nature of sunlight to destroy, but the objects upon which it falls turns the blessing into a curse. So with "the grace of God which bringeth salvation" (Titus ii. 11). "Is it not true," says Maclaren, "that every man that rejects Christ does in verity *reject* Him, and not merely *neglect* Him; that there is always an effort, that there is a struggle, feeble, perhaps, but real, which ends in the turning away? It is not that you stand there, and simply let him go past. That were bad enough; but it is more than that. It is that you turn your back upon Him! It is not that His hand is laid on yours, and yours remains dead and cold, and does not open to clasp it; but it is that His hand being laid on yours, you clench yours the tighter, and *will not* have it. And so every man (I believe) that ever rejects Christ does these things thereby—wounds his own conscience, hardens his own heart, makes himself a worse man, just because he has had a glimpse, and has willingly, almost consciously, "loved darkness rather than light." The message of love can never come into a human soul, and pass away from it unreceived, without leaving that spirit worse, with all its lowest characteristics strengthened, and all its best ones depressed, by the fact of rejection . . . . . If there were no judgment at all, the natural result of the simple rejection of the Gospel is that, bit by bit, all the lingering remains of nobleness that hover about the man, like scent about a broken vase, shall pass away; and that, step by step, through the simple process of saying, "I will not have Christ to rule over me," the whole being shall degenerate, until manhood becomes devilhood, and the soul is lost by its own want of faith" (See Sermons, Vol. I. p. 7). And so it is all with man, and in no degree with God, that "His way," which He intends to be the fortress, the strength of every human soul, becomes a destruction to "the workers of iniquity."

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

This promise implies help for our work, and not rest from our labour. We shall have *strength* for the conflict. But "there is no discharge from the war." There is supply for real, not for imaginary, wants; for present, not for future, need. The healthful energy of the man of God is also supposed. He is alive in the way; his heart is set in it. This makes it practicable. What before was drudgery is now meat and drink. Indeed, the more godly we are, the more godly we shall be. The habit of grace increases by exercise. One step helps on the next. Thus was the way of the Lord strength to the upright Nicodemus. His first step was feebleness and fear. Walking onwards, he waxed stronger; standing up in the ungodly council, and ultimately the bold confessor of his Saviour when his self-confident disciples slunk back (John iii. 2, vii. 50, xix. 39). . . .

Thus "the righteous shall hold on their way, going from strength to strength," strengthened in the Lord, and walking up and down in His name (Job xvii. 9; Psa. lxxxiv. 5-7; Zech. x. 12). . . . No such resources support the workers of iniquity. Captives instead of soldiers, they know no conflicts; they realise no need of strength.—*Bridges.*

The way of the earth doth weary them that walk in it, and doth take away their strength: but *the way of the Lord is strength to the upright*, so that the more they go *in* it, the more able are they to go *on* in it. Or else because he that walketh uprightly walketh in the ways of God's most gracious providence over him, and that must needs be a strength unto him. A strong staff, that is, to support him, a strong bulwark to defend him, a strong arm to fight for him.

The angel, therefore, might well say to Gideon, "Thou mighty man of valour" when he had first said, "The Lord is with thee." But as the way of the Lord is to the upright the way of His gracious providence over them, so He hath another way for the *workers of iniquity*, and that is the way of judgment.—*Jermin.*

Sin is man's destruction. 1. Sin brings many evils upon man, from which, if he were virtuous, he would be totally free, such as a decayed body, a wounded conscience, a discontented heart, vexation in the present, fear for the future. 2. Sin puts man out of condition to render tolerable those evils which he cannot avoid. He feels the burden of them in all their pressure because he is destitute of the supports of reliance and hope. He cannot perceive in his afflictions the hand of a father, but is forced to confess them the punishment of an offended sovereign. 3. Sin prevents man from the full enjoyment of the good which outweighs the evil in the world. The Christian finds pleasure in the works of creation, the methods of providence, in beneficence, in friendship, in domestic happiness. Sin deprives us of a taste for these pleasures by enervating the mind, by selfishness, by pride. 4. Sin incapacitates us for the state of pure and perfect happiness in the world to come.—*Zollikofer.*

Sometimes, by the way of the Lord, the observing of God's law, sometimes the course of God's providence is meant in Scripture, as here in this place. It is said to strengthen the upright, not only for that it fortifieth their hearts, but because it preserveth them by sundry means from destruction. The manner of the Lord's dealing with the wicked is quite contrary; for the Lord plagueth them and crosseth them for their iniquities, and in their evil doing, even throughout the whole course of their life, which is unfortunate and full of many miseries.—*Muffet.*

The "*way*" Jehovah personally walks in (as, for example, His way of justice) "*is a fortress.*" To Gabriel, for instance, it is the arch that shelters him for ever; to the poor saint it is a sworn certainty of defence; but to the wicked it is an eternal vengeance. The way of mercy—that is, in the cross of Christ—is life unto life to the saint, and death unto death to the rebellious sinner. Elihu pictures this in the outward creation (Job xxxvi. 31): "For by them" (that is, by the same elements of Nature) "judgeth He the people; He giveth meat in abundance." The same showers fertilise the earth, or tear to pieces with a deluge.—*Miller.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 30.

The Earth the Possession of the Righteous.

I. From their relation to God it is theirs now. The estate of an English nobleman is the portion of all his family to a certain extent. They all live upon it, and partake of its productions. But the eldest son has a special inheritance in it—it is the perpetual possession of the heir of the house, and it is therefore his in a sense in which it is not the property of his brothers and sisters. "The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof" (Psa. xxiv. 1), and it is therefore the property of His children—of those who are His sons and heirs (Rom. viii. 17). All men enjoy to some extent the blessings of the earth, but it *belongs* only to them whom Paul addresses when he says, "All things are yours, whether . . . . the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come" (1 Cor. iii. 21, 22).

II. From their relation to God it shall be theirs in the future. The regenerated earth is to be the eternal abode of the righteous. The glorified body of the redeemed man will have enough of his present body to enable us to identify each other. Although we have not now the "body that shall be" (1 Cor. xv. 37), there will be such a relationship between the present

and the future as shall make them the same individual man. So, although the earth is to be "a new earth" (2 Pet. iii. 13), there will be that about it which will enable the regenerated man to recognise his old home. And if in the new earth there is to dwell "righteousness," it is because it is to be the abode of righteous beings. On this subject see also Homiletics on Chap. II. 21, 22.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Verse 30. Love of home is an impulse and emotion natural to man; but to no people was fatherland so greatly delighted in, to none was exile and banishment from fatherland so dreadful a thought, as it was to the people of Israel. Expatriation is the worst of all evils with which the prophets threatened individuals and the people; and the history of Israel in their exile, which was a punishment of their national apostasy, confirms this proverb, and explains its form. . . . . In general, the proverb means that the righteous fearlessly maintains the position he takes; while, on the contrary, all they who have no hold on God lose also their outward position. But often enough this saying is fulfilled in this, that they, in order that they may escape disgrace, become wanderers and fugitives, and are compelled to conceal themselves among strangers.—*Delitzsch.*

The desire of the righteous is not to stay upon earth, neither is that the reward which God hath appointed for them. They know a better place to go unto, and where better things than the earth can afford are provided for them. Hugo de Sancto Victore saith, therefore, making three sorts of men, "He is very delicate whose own country is delicious unto him; he is valiant to whom every country is his own; he is perfect to whom the world is a banishment. The first hath fastened his love upon the world, the second hath scattered his love in the world, the last hath extinguished his love from the world." And this is the *righteous man* of whom it is here said that he shall never be removed, because he shall never be taken hence with an unwilling and reluctant mind. He having never set his affection upon the world, can never be *removed* from it. When he goeth hence, he goeth cheerfully and gladly; it is not a *remove* of him, but a pleasant passage to him.—*Jermin.*

Moved, not removed, but *shaken:* shall not be seriously disturbed.—*Miller.*

See also comments on chap. ii. 21, 22.

(For Homiletics on Verse 31, see on Verses 13, 14, 20, 21.)

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

The figure here is of a *sprout* or *seedling* which has the capacity to grow for ever. "*Wisdom*" is such a tree. It grows from the mouth of the good man, and will grow for ever; that is, the good man will incessantly spread abroad wisdom. God, who is invisible, spreads abroad wisdom only through the creature. But the ungodly tongue, literally "*the tongue of upturnings*," overturning everything, and being in this world the great instrument for leading others astray, will be put in a condition to be foiled of such an influence: as the inspired sentence expresses it, will be "*cut out.*"—*Miller.*

As a tree full of life and sap brings forth its fruit, so in Isaiah, lvii. 19, the cognate word is translated "the fruit of the lips." The froward tongue is like a tree that brings forth evil and not good fruit. It "shall be cut down." What is meant is, that the abuse of God's gift of speech will lead ultimately to its forfeiture. There shall, at last, be the silence of shame and confusion.—*Plumptre.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 32.

ACCEPTABLE WORDS.

I. The righteous man knows what words are acceptable to God from a study of Divine laws. The courtier knows how to approach his king—in what words to address him—because he has made himself acquainted with the laws of the court. The righteous man is well acquainted with the laws of the kingdom of God, and, being so, he knows how to draw near to the Divine King—he sets his words in order before Him as the wood is laid in order upon the altar for the sacrifice. God has not left man in ignorance of what kind of words are acceptable to Him (Hosea xiv. 2; Mal. iii. 16; Matt. vi. 9; Ephes. v. 19, 20, etc).

II. He knows what words are acceptable to men from a study of their character. Man's character is a prophecy of the kind of words that will be acceptable. The righteous man makes it his business, and regards it as his duty to frame his speech—so far as is consistent with righteousness—in such a manner that those to whom he speaks will be won to listen to his words.

III. He speaks what are acceptable words from the habit of his heart. It is natural for a good tree to bear good fruit, and it is the nature of a righteous man to speak words of humility and faith to his God and of kindness to his fellow-men. As the tree is, so is the fruit. As the man's heart is, so, with rare exceptions, are his words. (See on verse 20).

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Verse 32. The plain sense is, that the righteous speak those things whereby they have the favour both of God and man, and whereby they are in friendship and peace both with heaven and earth. But the mouth of the wicked careth not to offend either God or man, and seeketh not for love anywhere, being wholly pleased in perverseness. But many know what is *acceptable* to God and man, but their lips do not know it. So the liar knoweth truth to be *acceptable* to God and man, but their lips *do not know it:* the profane person knoweth prayer to be acceptable, but his lips do not know it: the ill governor knoweth the reproof of vice to be acceptable, but his lips do not know it: the brawler knoweth mildness of speech to be acceptable, but his lips do not know it. Yea, the lips also of many speak that which is acceptable, but their lips do not know it; their speaking of it being in such a manner as maketh that which is acceptable not to be acceptable. But the righteous man speaketh that which pleaseth God and pleaseth man, and he speaks it in a pleasing manner. Or else as *Clemens Alexandrinus* readeth, the lips of the righteous know high things in speaking the high praises of the highest God, and in opening the truth of high things unto men.—*Jermin.*

How, what, when, to whom to speak, is a matter of great wisdom. Yet this consideration of *acceptableness* must involve no sacrifice of principle. Let it be a considerate accommodation of *mode* to the diversities of tastes; a forbearance with lesser prejudices and constitutional infirmities; avoiding not all offences (which faithfulness to our Divine Master forbids), but all *needless* offences, all uncalled-for occasions of design and irritation. "The meekness of wisdom" should be clearly manifested in Christian faithfulness (Jas. iii. 13.) Thus Gideon melted the frowardness of the men of Ephraim (Judg. viii. 2, 3). Abigail restrained David's hands from blood (1 Sam. xxv. 23, 33). Daniel stood fearless before the mighty monarch of Babylon (Dan. iv. 27). Their lips knew what was acceptable, and their God honoured them.—*Bridges.*

HOMILY ON THE ENTIRE CHAPTER. The pious and ungodly compared in respect—1. To their earthly good; 2 To their worth in the eyes of men; 3. To

their outward demeanour in intercourse with others; 4. To their disposition of heart as this appears in their mien, their words, their acts; 5. To their diverse fruits, that which they produce in their moral influence upon others; 6. To their different fates as awarded to them at last in the retribution of eternity.—*Lange's Commentary.*

CHAPTER XI.

CRITICAL NOTES —**1. Just weight,** literally, "a stone of completeness, **a full stone.**" Stone was a very ancient material for weight; not rusting, it was not changeable. **2.** Literally, "there hath come pride, there will come shame." Stuart reads, "Does pride come, then shame will come." **3. Guide,** "lead" "as a shepherd his sheep, and therefore in the path of safety and peace" *(Stuart).* **Perverseness.** "slipperiness," "falseness." **Destroy.** An intensive word in the Hebrew, "to lay hold of them with violent force" *(Stuart).* **5. Direct,** "make smooth or even." **6. Naughtiness,** "cravings," "desires," "covetousness." **7. His** and **men** are not in the original, and the verse is variously rendered. Stuart reads, "When the wicked die, all the hopes perish; and when they are afflicted, their expectation of recovery or alleviation will be frustrated." Zöckler—"With the death of the wicked hope cometh to nought, and the unjust expectation has perished." Miller—"By the death of a wicked man hope is lost, and the expectation of sorrowing ones is lost already." **9.** Zöckler here reads, "The hypocrite with his mouth destroyeth his neighbour, but by the knowledge of the righteous shall they (the neighbours) be delivered." **12. Void of wisdom,** literally, "of heart." Zöckler inverts the phrase, "He that speaks contemptuously of his neighbour lacketh wisdom." **13.** "He who goeth about as a slanderer." **14. Counsel,** literally, "pilotage," "steermanship." **15. Suretyship,** literally "striking hands." See Notes and Illustration on chap. vi. 1. Stuart translates this verse, "An evil man showeth himself as evil when he giveth pledge to a stranger," *i.e.*, by hastily pledging himself and then not redeeming his pledge. **16.** Last clause "as strong men retain," or "grasp at riches." **17.** Or "He who doeth good to himself is a merciful man, but he who troubleth his own flesh is cruel." So Stuart and Miller, Zöckler and Delitzsch read as the authorised version. **18** "The wicked gaineth a deceptive result, but he that soweth righteousness a sure reward" (Zöckler). **21.** The Hebrew here is simply "**hand to hand, the wicked,**" etc. Zöckler and Delitzsch understand it as a formula of strong asseveration derived from the custom of becoming surety by clasping hands, and hence equivalent to "assuredly," "verily," "I pledge it." Stuart says "Different meanings have been assigned. 1. Hand against hand, *i.e.*, the injurious man. 2. From one hand to another, *i.e.*, from one generation to another. 3. Joining hands in way of assurance—"verily." All these are little better than guesses. The phrase is evidently proverbial and is doubtless abridged. The most simple interpretation is that of Michael, "Hand joined to hand will not protect the guilty. Let the evil man struggle with all his might he will not escape." **23. Wrath,** *i.e.* God's wrath (Zöckler). **25. Liberal soul,** "the soul of blessing," *i.e.*, "the soul that blesses others." **27. Procureth,** rather "seeketh" **Favour,** *i.e.*, God's favour. So it is generally understood. But Delitzsch reads "He who striveth after good, seeketh that which is pleasing, *i.e.*, that which pleaseth or doeth good to others. **28. Branch,** rather, "a green leaf." 30. Or, "the wise man winneth" or "taketh" souls 31. Miller transposes this verse and reads, "Behold the righteous on earth shall be recompensed," etc. **On earth** may be placed either with "**the righteous,**" **or** with "**recompensed.**"

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 1.

JUST WEIGHT.

This judgment on a false weight is a two-fold revelation.

I. It reveals the existence of a true standard. We only know what is false by knowing what is true. If a mason looks at a stone and declares that it is uneven, he declares at the same time that there is such a thing as an even stone, or that there is a possibility of making a stone perfectly level and square. He reveals his knowledge of what is even by passing judgment upon what is

uneven. When a judge declares that a man has not fulfilled the requirements of the law, he thereby proclaims the existence of a law which ought to have been, and might have been obeyed. As Paul tells us, "Sin is not imputed where there is no law" (Rom. v. 13). And if a weight is condemned as false, the condemnation implies that there is a certain standard of weight which ought to have been reached. God, who here tells men that He abominates a false balance, declares by His condemnation of it that there is such a thing as a true weight: that there is that which He recognises as *justice* between man and man. And much that men call "a full stone," a "fair day's wages," is not so regarded by God. It is not dealing truly with a man to give him the smallest possible amount for the work he does—to take advantage of his poverty or ignorance to beat him down to the lowest sum for which his need will induce him to give his labour, and thereby condemn him to all the evils of insufficient means. "Behold!" says Carlyle, "supply and demand is not the one law of Nature; cash payment is not the sole nexus of man with man,—how far from it! Deep, far deeper than supply and demand are laws, obligations sacred as man's life itself!" This is the law of the Divine kingdom: "All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them" (Matt. vii. 12). Less than this is a "false balance," this is the "full stone," which is God's "*delight.*"

II. It reveals the character of God. If a man declares that certain actions are displeasing to him, the declaration reveals his character; if the actions that he hates are wicked in themselves and hurtful to men, his hatred of them proclaims his own righteousness and benevolence. That God is a hater of false weights and measures in every sense and of every kind proclaims Him to be a God of mercy and truth, a Ruler who will Himself "not pervert judgment," who "will not lay upon man more than right," but who will "give everyone according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings" (Job xxxiv. 12, 13; Jer. xxxii. 19). And the text likewise proclaims God's notice of what men sometimes call little things. The farthing kept back from the child, and the ounce taken from the pound, are as much marked by Him as the short wages given to the man, the unjust sentence passed upon the prisoner. Dr. Guthrie says "God sees the water in the milk, and the sand in the sugar." There are no great and small transactions in a moral sense, one action contains the sin as much as another.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

In this emphatic reproduction of the old rule of Deut. xxv. 13, 14, we may find, perhaps, a trace, as in chap. vi. 1, of the growing commerce of the Israelites, and the danger of dishonesty incidental to it. While the words have a wider range and include all unequal and unrighteous judgments, there can be no doubt that the literal meaning is the prominent one. The stress laid on the same sin in chaps. xvi. 11, xx. 10, bears witness to the desire of the teacher to educate the youth of Israel to a high standard of integrity, just as the protest of Hosea against it (ch. xii. 7) shows the zeal of the prophet in rebuking what was becoming more and more a besetting sin.—*Plumptre.*

Hither may be referred corruptions in courts, and partialities in Church businesses. See that tremendous "charge" to do nothing by partiality or by "tilting the balance" (1 Tim v. 21). Those that have the "balances of deceit in their hand" (Hosea xii. 7) are called Canaanites, so the Hebrew hath it, that is, mere natural men (Ezek. xvi. 3), that have no goodness in them, no, not common honesty; they do not as they would be done by, which very heathens condemned.—*Trapp.*

Surely he that weighs in a false

balance is himself weighed by God in a balance of justice, and for the gain he gets he getteth to himself from the Lord His just abomination ; not only His dislike or condemnation of it, but the *abomination* because it is a theft cloaked with the colour of justice, even the exact justice of weighing. But a just balance is such a delight unto God as that He delighteth, as it were, to be a seller in that shop, and that He maketh others to delight to come and buy at it. Surely such a "perfect stone" (see Hebrew) is a perfect jewel, and a precious stone in the sight of God. But in a spiritual sense there is no such false balance as when man weigheth heavier than God, earth heavier than heaven, the pleasures of sin heavier than the crown of glory, a momentary contentment heavier than eternal blessedness. And justly are such false balances an abomination to the Lord. But that is a just weight whereby the light vanity of worldly things is rightly perceived, the levity of earthly greatness is truly discerned, the weightiness of God's promises is duly considered, the heaviness of God's threatenings is carefully apprehended. Such a weight is God's delight, doth overbalance all whatsoever the world delighteth in.—*Jermin.*

That which is hurtful to our brother is hateful to God, and therefore can never be helpful to us. If He judge it unrighteous we shall find it unprofitable : if it be damnable in His sight, and therefore His soul doth hate it, it will at last be in our sense, and our souls shall rue it. Here is consolation to them that do constantly and conscionably addict themselves to the practice of equity. None hath truly learned this but such as have been apprentices to heaven, whom the Lord hath informed in the mysteries of that trade.—*Dod.*

Weight and balance are judicial institutions of the Lord, and every weight is His work. But marriage compacts, also political confederacies, civil compacts, judgments, penalties, etc., are ordinances of Divine wisdom and justice, and are effectively superintended by God.—*Melancthon.*

This is repeated with varied language three times (xvi. 11 ; xx. 10, 23). The tendency of all commentators is to treat it as descriptive of *men.* It seems conspicuously to be asserted of the Almighty. Sentences like chap. x. 29 make the doctrine a very timely one, that God is in His very essence just ; that He takes no liberties of an arbitrary nature ; that He is the administrator, not at all of fate, for this is blind and unreasoning, but of eternal rectitude ; that we need give ourselves no care of our government, for that He has no temptation to do us wrong, because "false balances" are an abomination to Jehovah." "*Delight*" is rather a strong version. It only means that the Almighty has the eternal *desire* to be absolutely just. Omniscience, *omnipotence*, and this *desire* must make an immaculate administration. God will not, by a false balance, become an abomination to Himself.—*Miller.*

Commerce is a providential appointment for our social intercourse and mutual helpfulness. It is grounded with men upon human faith, as with God upon Divine faith. Balance, weights, money are its necessary materials. Impositions, double dealings, the hard bargain struck with self-complacent shrewdness (chap. xx. 14) —this is the false balance forbidden alike of the law and of the Gospel (Matt. vii. 12 ; Phil. iv. 8).—*Bridges.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 2.

Pride and Humility.

I. Pride comes to the human spirit. "When pride *cometh.*" There are certain weeds that come at certain seasons of the year without being sent for or desired. They tarry not for the will of man, but appear in the most well-

kept garden and in the most carefully tilled field. The only will that the proprietor has in the matter is whether they shall be allowed to stay. If they stay, they will assuredly spread and increase in strength. Self-sown plants are the first to spring up in the ground, and will be the last to disappear. Nothing will kill them but uprooting and consuming the entire plant by fire. So pride will spring up in the human heart. The seeds are there, and the soul is congenial to their germination and growth. According to the highest authority upon the subject, pride is its natural outgrowth. "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts . . . . pride" etc. (Mark. vii. 21, 22). The question for every man to settle when pride comes up in the blade, is whether it shall be allowed to go on to the full ear—whether the feeling shall be allowed to remain until it is manifested in action, or whether the fire of the Holy Ghost shall be called in to consume the very root. "Pride," says Adams, "is like the heart, the first thing that lives and the last thing that dies in us."

II. When pride is permitted to remain, shame will follow. 1. *Because it tends to ingratitude.* If a man permits a wrong estimate of himself to grow up and strengthen within him, growing daily in a sense of his own importance and his own deserts, he will soon be ungrateful to men for their acts of goodwill, and to God for the position in which He has placed him in the world. Ingratitude is a high road to shame before God and before men, because it prevents men from taking advantage of present opportunities. 2. *Because it keeps men ignorant.* There is a shame arising from ignorance, when men have had no opportunities of acquiring knowledge. Even when it is not their own fault, men feel ashamed of their ignorance. But pride leads men to refuse instruction when it is offered to them, and thus it leads to wilful ignorance, which, being *wilful*, is doubly *shameful*. 3. *Because it makes men useless.* If a man has received many gifts from the Divine hand and yet lacks that spiritual-mindedness and humility which is the salt to season them and make them acceptable to the hearts and consciences of mankind, he will be to them like a fountain of beautiful and polished marble without any water, and will only vex the thirsty traveller by reflecting the rays of light from the basin which he hoped to find filled with water. He is a cloud without water, lovely to the eye, but not refreshing to the thirsty land. And men will turn from and despise *gifts* without *graces*, especially the grace ef humility.

III. Lowly men are wise men, and are in the way of becoming wiser. 1. *This we know from the Divine promise.* "I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit" (Isa. lvii. 15.) From the nature of things, those who are alike in character will seek to dwell together. The good and the bad each go "to their own company" in this world, and must do so in every world. There is no pride in the Divine character: "He humbleth Himself to behold the things that are in heaven and in the earth" (Psa. cxiii. 6). Because He can rightly estimate everything and every person, pride cannot dwell with Him. Therefore He dwells with those who are like Himself, and the man with whom God dwells, and who is "taught of the Lord" (Isa. liv. 13), must be ever increasing in wisdom. 2. *This we know from experience.* The wisest men in the world, the men who are most able to teach others, are those who have been willing first to stoop to learn: those who have been willing to own their ignorance and need, and so have been willing to sit at the feet of those who knew more than they did. Wise men are always lowly in estimating their present acquirements, whether of intellect or character, and this keeps them in the way of ever becoming wiser.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Trite as the words now are, the appearance in many languages of the same maxim points to the delight with which men have in all ages welcomed this statement of a fact of general experience, in which they saw also a proof of a Divine government. A Rabbinic paraphrase of the latter clause is worth quoting: "Lowly souls become full of wisdom as the low place becomes full of water."—*Plumptre.*

Where pride is in the saddle, shame is on the crupper. He is a "proud fool" saith our English proverb. But "God gives grace to the humble" (Jas. iv. 6); that is, as some sense it, good repute and report among men. Who am I? saith Moses; and yet who fitter than he to go to Pharaoh? He refused to be called Pharaoh's daughter's son; he was afterwards called to be Pharaoh's god. (Exod. vii. 1.)—*Trapp.*

When Nebuchadnezzar was bragging of his Babel which he had built for his glory, he was banished from all habitation, not having so much as a cottage, and like a beast made to lie among the beasts of the field, with ignominy. When Haman thought to ride on horseback and to be waited on like a king, he was driven to lackey on foot, and to wait attendance like a page, and purposing to hang Mordecai on high to honour himself, he prepared a high gallows to be hanged on himself. When Herod thought himself good enough to take on him the state and honour of a god, the Lord declared him to be bad enough to be devoured of contemptible vermin. . . . Whereas the humble are always in the way of preferment, either to come to honour in a great place, or for honour to come to them in a mean place.—*Dod.*

It is the prayer of David, *Let not the foot of pride come against me, or unto me:* for pride and shame ride in one chariot, they come both together; he that entertaineth the one, must entertain the other. And howbeit pride set open her bravery, and shame awhile be masked, yet shame at length shall open itself, and pride shall not be seen. For how can shame choose but be joined with pride, which, says St. Ambrose, knows not how to stand, and when it is fallen, is ignorant how to rise. On the other side, although lowliness goes on foot, yet wisdom is her companion, which not only preserveth the lowly from shame, but highly advanceth them in the esteem of God and man. And indeed what greater wisdom is there than humility, which, says St. Ambrose again, by desiring nothing, obtaineth all that is despised by it.—*Jermin.*

The folly and wickedness of pride—1. *Of station.* "Man will not long abide in honour, seeing he may be compared to the beast that perisheth" (Psa. xlix. 12). In the sight of God, the greatest and proudest of men are but dust and ashes. 2. *Of birth.* Even an ancient heathen could see its absurdity and say, "As to family and ancestors, and what we have not done ourselves, can scarcely be called ours." We certainly had no hand in producing these distinctions. 3. *Of riches.* They cannot give dignity of character, superiority of intellect, vigour of body, peace of conscience, or any one of those advantages which form the chief blessings of life. 4. *Of talent or learning.* A disease, an accident, may overset the mind, and turn all our light into utter darkness, and even should our abilities and learning continue with us till the end of our days here below, they must then vanish and be extinguished. It was the consciousness of their uncertain and transient endurance, as well as of their imperfection, that made the wise Agur say, "Surely I am more brutish than any man, and have not the understanding of a man;" and which drew from Solomon the confession, "In much wisdom there is much grief; and he that increaseth knowledge, increaseth sorrow" (Eccles. i. 18). 4. *Of beauty.* "All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field." 5. *Of spiritual pride.* Of all description of

guilt this appears to be the most odious to God and unbecoming to man, and as such is denounced throughout the Scriptures. Everlasting shame is made the portion of every one "that exalteth himself."—*Warner.*

Gabriel is the prince he is solely from the Spirit. It is because God gave him the Spirit that he remained in grace; and it was because God took the Spirit that Satan fell into apostasy. *Pride*, therefore, is a mad vanity. If "false balances" are an abomination to God, He would not be apt to let "pride" flourish. And yet pride does flourish in worldly things. The "shame" here must mean that spiritual contempt which looks to the whole eternity. It is only (1) out of contempt for him that God lets a man be proud; and it is only (2) contempt and shame that can follow upon the proud thought. Pride itself is an evidence of God's contempt. And being "humble" not only (1) invites "Wisdom," and makes her feel at home; not only (2) flows from Wisdom because she is at home, but (3) actually "*is* Wisdom." It would not do to say, Has humility entered? There also enters Wisdom; for humility *is* wisdom, and could not exist unless Wisdom had entered already.—*Miller.*

Perhaps the reference in the words before us may especially be to the influence of pride in our intercourse with men. In this view of them they are verified in different ways. For example—the manifestation of pride,—of supercilious loftiness and self-sufficiency—strongly tempts others to spy out defects, and to bring down the haughty man from his imaginary elevation. Everyone takes a pleasure in plucking at him, and leaving the laurel-wreath which he has twined for his own brow as bare of leaves as possible; and thus to cover him with "shame." Another way in which it tends to "shame" is, that it leads him who is the subject of it to undertake, in the plenitude of his confident self-sufficiency, to fill stations for which he is incompetent; by which means he, ere long, exposes himself to the derision or the pity of his fellows. He shortly finds himself in the position of those described in our Lord's parable, who "choose for themselves the highest seats," but in the end, abashed and crest-fallen, "begin with shame to take the lowest rooms." That parable (Luke xiv. 7-11) is a graphic commentary on the words before us.—*Wardlaw.*

Pride was the principle of the fall (Gen. iii. 5), and, therefore, the native principle of fallen man (Mark vii. 22). When pride had stripped us of our honour, then—not till then—*cometh shame* (Gen. iii. 7, with ii. 25). This is the wise discipline of our God to scourge the one by the other. . . . . What a splendour of wisdom shone in the lowly child "sitting at the doctors' feet, astonishing them at His understanding and His answers" (Luke ii. 47). And will not this Spirit be to us the path of Wisdom? For the Divine Teacher "reveals to the babes what He hides from the wise and prudent.—*Bridges.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 8.

The Infallible Guide.

I. **The upright man is in danger.** To say that a man needs a guide is to say that he is exposed to some kind of danger—that the path which he has to tread is one in which it is possible to sustain loss of some kind. A man does not need a guide when he is walking in a road where he knows every step of the way, where his path lies straight before him, beset with no danger. An upright man has much to lose. He can lose much in losing *one* thing, he can, indeed, lose *all* in one thing, his all for time and eternity, viz., his *moral character.* It

his uprightness of character sustains any loss, if any stain is permitted to fall upon *that*, it will only regain its erectness and purity at the cost of much pain and time. What was gained with difficulty at first will be harder to *re*gain. It is up-hill work to redeem a lost character, and if it is not redeemed, existence is cast away and the man is said to be *lost*. *And the very fact that a man is godly places him in danger*. The thief is never found measuring the height of the wall or testing the security of the locks of the house where poverty reigns. He does not haunt such a dwelling, and reckon up the opposition he would be likely to meet with *there*. Such a house has no attraction for him, and is safe from all danger so far as he is concerned, because there is no silver or gold there. But the house filled with plate and jewels is the one around which he paces with stealthy steps, and whose means of defence and unguarded doors or windows he takes note of. Such a house draws him towards it as the magnet draws the needle. So the godless man has little or no attraction for the enemy of souls. The very poverty of his moral nature renders him an unattractive object to the great thief of character. But an upright man he considers a foeman worthy of his steel, and the rich graces that dwell within the heart of such a one have a magnetic power for him who was "a murderer from the beginning" (John viii. 44), and for all his emissaries and agents, whether they be devils or men.

II. The infallible guide for the godly or upright man: Integrity. What is integrity? Dr. Bushnell says: "As an integer is a whole, in distinction from a fraction, which is only a part, so a man of integrity is a man whose aim in the right is a whole aim, in distinction from one whose aim is divided, partial, or unstable. It does not mean that he has never been a sinner, or that he is not one now, but simply that the intent of his soul is to do and be wholly right with God and man. Old Simeon was such a man. It is said of him that he was *just*, that is, he was single in his purpose in relation to man, and that he was *devout*, which expresses the *wholeness* of his aim in relation to God. Paul was such a man. "What shall I do, Lord?"—"This one thing I do" was the key note of his life. (Acts xxii. 10, Phil. iii. 13.) 1. *This guide is one whose voice is not easily mistaken*. If a man sets his own interest before him as the guide of his life, he is very likely to be mistaken as to what his own interest really is even so far as regards the present life. We are so short-sighted as to be unable to foretell what may be the issue of any act of life in relation to our own personal and present well-being looked at from a material point of view. If we are more unselfish and adopt the famous principle of "the good of the greatest number," we involve ourselves in a still greater perplexity. This problem is one which can be solved by God alone. But every man whose conscience is not wholly depraved can determine as to the right and wrong of his actions, and thus possesses a clue to guide him step by step through every intricate path of life. Darkness of soul and circumstances may at times surround him, but here is a pole-star which will shine through the gloom. "In the darkest hour through which a human soul can pass," says Robertson, of Brighton, speaking of the doubts and perplexities to which the most sincere men are often the most liable, "whatever else is doubtful this is certain, that it is better to be generous than selfish, better to be chaste than licentious, better to be true than false, better to be brave than a coward. Blessed beyond all earthly blessedness is the man who, in the tempestuous darkness of the soul, has dared to hold fast to these venerable landmarks. Thrice blessed is he, who, when all is drear and cheerless within and without, has obstinately clung to moral good. Thrice blessed because his night shall pass into bright, clear day." Thus "the integrity of the upright shall guide them." This virtue is a guide as recognisable as sunlight. The eye of every man, in every nation, recognises the sun as the light which is the guide of his life; and integrity, honesty, and *complete dealing*

between man and man is recognisable by every man whose conscience is not wholly blinded by long-continued persistence in wickedness (see Luke xii. 57). 2. *It shall guide a man to happiness.* We have seen that happiness or self-interest cannot be the guide of life, either in relation to the one man or to the many. The happiness of one man, in this narrow and low sense of the word, may mean misery to another; but right-doing is the high road to the happiness of the individual, and the promoter of the happiness of all to whom he is related. Though happiness is not the aim of the upright man, yea, *because* it is *not* the aim of his life, he will be guided into it. The man who does right simply because it is right, and without hope of reward, will have a reward. Integrity must lead to the happiness of the upright man. The approbation of conscience is a large element of blessed happiness, and the certainty that right-doing can wrong none of his fellow-creatures, but may add much to their well-being, is another element in the reward. There is also happiness in the possession of a single aim, an undivided purpose in life. The concentration of all a man's powers to one point increases his power to accomplish the task to which he has set himself. He is like a man steering for the harbour, with his eye upon the compass and his hand upon the wheel; he is conscious of a power to carry out his purpose, and the certainty of success is in itself a reward. 3. *It must guide a man to heaven.* All the upright who are in heaven have been guided there by integrity—by first of all "rendering unto God the things that are God's"—loyal obedience to His conditions of salvation, and then, as a necessary result, rendering unto their fellow-men that which is their due.

ILLUSTRATION OF THE SECOND CLAUSE OF VERSE 3.

"The perverseness of transgressors shall destroy them." *A Grecian legend.*—An old diver was wont to boast of his skill to bring up treasures from the sea. To test his power the people threw many a golden coin and silver cup into deep water, all of which he brought to the surface with triumph. But one day a disguised fiend threw a tinsel crown into a whirlpool, and challenged the confident diver to bring it up, promising him, if he succeeded, the power to wear it, and to transmit it to his children. Down he sprung after the bauble, but the nereids of the sea, hearing the clangour of the crown when it fell upon their grottos, closed around him as he was grasping his prize and held him fast till he perished. The most daring may dare once too often; folly, though long successful, will plunge its victim into ruin at last.—*Biblical Treasury.*

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

All obliquity and trick in the intercourse of men is a libel on Providence. Every recourse to falsehood is a direct distrust of God. Truth is both the shortest and the surest road in every difficulty. How much labour is lost by adopting tortuous paths. A great part of life's labour consists in following a crooked course, and then trying to make it appear a straight one. The crooked line is far more difficult at the first, and the defence of it afterwards doubles the labour.—*Arnot.*

"I will walk in mine integrity," was David's staff, and in doing anything there is no such guide to do it well as the integrity of the heart. Knowledge is requisite, and is a good director: counsel may be needful, and is a good conductor; but the master pilot is the sincerity of the heart. If that be wanting the others will not be following, if that be present the others will not be wanting.—*Jermin.*

Everyone that is truly godly hath a faithful guide and an upright counsellor in his own breast. A sound heart is the stern of the soul, and a good conscience is the pilot to govern it.—*Dod.*

A man, to be led, must have a way; and, to have a way, he must have an end at which he is aiming. The end

of the "upright" man is righteousness itself. If the great joy of heaven is uprightness, and the price of wisdom is above rubies, of course "integrity" is the best guide in the world, because of course righteousness is the best guide to righteousness; and, poor or rich, the righteous man is always advancing in his treasure. Righteousness is also the best guide to happiness, for no good thing shall be withholden from them that walk uprightly. Sin, on the other hand, by increasing itself, is itself its own seducer.—*Miller.*

Sincerity is one eminent branch of the good man's character. Nathaniel was a man without guile. We accordingly find that, though prejudiced against Jesus of Nazareth, his sincerity appeared in the means which he employed to arrive at a knowledge of the truth, and he was led by it in the right way. Christ's enemies were men of perverse spirits. They crucified Him with a view to maintain their honour and preserve their nation; but by their perverse conduct both were destroyed.—*Lawson.*

Every man who comes into a state of *right intent*, will forthwith also be a Christian. Whoever is willing to be carried just where it will carry him, cost him what it may, in that man the spirit of all sin is broken, and his mind is in a state to lay hold of Christ and to be laid hold of by Him. . . . "For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect towards Him" (2 Chron. xvi. 9). God is on the look-out always for an honest man—him to help, and with him, and for him, to be strong. And if there be one, God will not miss him; for His desiring, all-searching eyes are running the world through always to find him.—*Bushnell.*

I. The guidance of integrity is the *safest* under which we can be placed. Perfect immunity from danger is not to be expected in this life. But let us inquire who the persons are that, in all the different lines of life, have gone through the world with most success, and we shall find that the men of probity and honour form by far the most considerable part of the list; that men of plain understanding, acting upon fair and direct views, have much oftener prospered than men of the deepest policy, who were devoid of principle. II. It is unquestionably the most *honourable.* Other qualities may add splendour to character; but if this essential requisite be wanting, all its lustre fades. He who rests upon an internal principle of virtue and honour, will act with a dignity and boldness of which they are incapable who are wholly guided by interest. He is above those timid, suspicious, and cautious restraints which fetter and embarrass their conduct. III. This plan of conduct is the most *comfortable.* Amidst the various and perplexing events of life, it is of singular advantage to be kept free from doubt as to the part most proper to be chosen. The man of principle is a stranger to those inward troubles which beset men who consult nothing but worldly interest. His time is not lost, nor his temper fretted, by long and anxious consultations. One light always shines upon him from above. One path always opens clear and distinct upon his view. He is also delivered from all inward upbraidings, from all alarms founded on the dread of discovery and disgrace. The man of virtue has *committed his way to the Lord.* He co-operates with the Divine purpose. The power which sways the universe is engaged on his side. By natural consequence, he has ground to expect that any seeming disappointments which he may now incur shall be over-ruled in the end to some salutary result. IV. He has always in view the prospect of *immortal rewards.* That surely is the wisest direction of conduct, which is most amply recompensed at last.—*Blair.*

For Homiletics of verse 4 see chapter x. 2. The thought of the first clauses of verses 5 and 6 is the same as that treated in verse 3.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE LATTER CLAUSES OF VERSES 5 and 6.

MADE OR MARRED BY DESIRES.

The word translated "naughtiness" should be rendered "**lust**" or "**desires.**" (See Critical Notes).

I. Sin is compliance with desires that do not harmonise with moral righteousness. A traveller on a lonely and dangerous road may have two guides offered to him by the opposite promptings of his own mind. He may have a strong desire to explore a path which looks most pleasant and attractive but which he knows does not lead to his destination, and is beset with many perils although its aspect is inviting. On the other hand, his good sense tells him it is unwise to run the risk of injury by thus turning aside from the road that he knows leads to the goal which he desires to reach, although the path may be rough and toilsome. If he yields to his first desire and pursues the dangerous path until it is too late to retrace his steps, he may lose his life by a false step over a precipice and so be destroyed by his own desires. All men are under the dominion of desires, and if their desires after God and righteousness have the rule they will be guided by them into the ways of deliverance and safety, as we saw in considering verse 3. But if they yield themselves up to the guidance of desires which run counter to the law of God and right, as they are made known both by conscience and revelation, they sink lower and lower in the scale of moral being and become slaves when they might have been free men. "Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin." "Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness" (John viii. 34; Rom. vi. 16).

II. The sinner is the forger of his own fetters. If a man labours in his field, his garden, or his vineyard, in harmony with the known laws which God has ordained to be observed, he may reasonably expect a good crop—an abundant harvest. But if he sets at nought these laws—if he yields to desires of self-indulgence—or in any other way acts contrary to the conditions which are indispensable to success—he has no one to blame but himself if he finds himself a beggar when he might have had plenty. The law of God's moral universe is written in revelation, upon conscience, in the history of men, that "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap," that "The wages of sin is death" (Gal. vi. 7; Rom. vi. 23). If men are "taken," are first enslaved by sin and then suffer the penalty of sinning, they have themselves digged the pit of their own destruction—have forged the chains by which they are bound.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Verse 4. How badly led those are who are not righteous, appears in this: that while *righteousness* does everything for a man in journeying to his end, *wealth* does nothing for him. "Wealth," which seems to be the great guide of the human family, not only cannot *deliver*, but cannot *profit* in the crisis of fate. While "*righteousness*," all covered with stains, lets no day go to waste; lets no mile be utterly lost; lets no fear ever be realised; still grapples a man's hand; and still guides a man's tread, till he steps at last into the regions of safety. —*Miller.*

It were no bad comparison to liken mere rich men to camels and mules; for they often pursue their devious way, over hills and mountains, laden with India purple, with gems, aromas, and generous wines upon their backs, attended, too, by a long line of servants as a safeguard on their way.

Soon, however, they come to their evening halting-place, and forthwith their precious burdens are taken from their backs; and they, now wearied, and stripped of their lading and their retinue of slaves, show nothing but livid marks of stripes. So, also, those who glitter in gold and purple raiment, when the evening of life comes rushing on them, have nought to show but marks and wounds of sin impressed upon them by the evil use of riches.—*St. Augustine.*

Riches will not even obtain "a drop of water to cool the tormented tongue" (Luke xvi. 19-24). In vain will "the rich men of the earth" seek a shelter from the wrath of the Lamb" (Rev. vi. 15-17).—*Bridges.*

While the words are true in their highest sense of the great *dies iræ* of the future, they speak, in the first instance, as do the like words in Zeph. i. 15-18, of *any* "day of the Lord," any time of judgment, when men or nations receive the chastisement of their sins.—*Plumptre.*

"Wherefore should I die, being so rich?" said that wretched Cardinal, Henry Beaufort, Bishop of Winchester, in Henry VI.'s time. "Fie," quoth he, "will not death be lured? Will money do nothing?"—*Trapp.*

If righteousness delivereth not from the day, yet it delivereth from the wrath of the day: if it deliver not from death, yet it delivereth from the death of the wicked.—*Jermin.*

Ver. 5. "The righteousness of the man of integrity" is perfect only in heaven, and how it "*directs*" or "*levels*" his way appears best by the perfect facility of walking in that bright abode. It will be no trouble there to travel forward. While more work will be done in heaven than here, yet there it is done so easily that it is called a "Rest." The paths of this world are not only difficult, but deadly. "*The wicked*" will not only struggle, but "*fall*" in them; and the roughnesses at which he stumbles are not ever in the paths themselves, but really his "*own wickedness.*"—*Miller.*

Greedy desire (see Critical Notes) will strongly tempt men to sin, and so they will be ensnared.—*Stuart.*

The first part of this text may be taken—I. As declaring *a fact.* A real Christian takes, for direction in his way, the rule of righteousness. The question that he continually puts to himself is—"What ought I to do?" This is the character of a believer in the abstract; and though none may lay claim to perfection, yet none can be justly called believers, unless their lives in the main answer to this description. II. As propounding a *promise.* It is nowhere promised that the righteous shall not come into trouble, but the strait road goes *through* them. The other statement of the text may also be regarded—I. As an *assertion* proved by experience. The drunkard ruins his health and shortens his life by excesses. The spendthrift brings himself to beggary. The contentious man brings himself to mischief. They often dig a pit for others and fall into it themselves. III. As a *threat.* It does not always happen that men are visited for their sins in this life. Still it may be said to every ungodly man, "Be sure your sin will find you out."—*B. W. Dibdin.*

Ver. 6. Godliness hath many troubles, and as many helps against trouble. As Moses' hand, it turns the serpent into a rod; and as the tree that Moses cast into the waters of Marah, it sweeteneth the bitter waters of affliction. Well may it be called the divine nature, for as God doth bring light out of darkness, so doth grace.—*Trapp.*

There need no blocks to be laid in the way of the wicked, no enemies need to thrust him down, for his own *wickedness* being his way, by *that* he shall fall. . . . Wickedness is fastened, by the devil, like a cord about the wicked; by that he pulls them after him: by that he makes them fall, first into shame and misery here, and into hell when they are gone hence.—*Jermin.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 7.

THE DEATH OF THE WICKED.

I. An inevitable event in relation to a wicked man. "When a wicked man dieth." He must die. "It is appointed unto men,"—to the good and to the bad—"once to die." (Heb. ix. 27). 1. This inevitable event is most undesired by the wicked man. The certainty of any coming event will make it to be dreaded in proportion as it is felt that its advent must be followed by unpleasant consequences. The man who knows that nothing can save him from becoming a bankrupt at no distant period feels the certainty of the fact to be a most unwelcome thought. The man who knows that on a certain day of reckoning he will be unable to meet his liabilities, and that the day will as surely arrive as the planets will hold on their way in the heavens, can only look forward to the future with the most gloomy apprehensions. That coming day is ever hanging over his present, and imparting a sting to every hour in which he allows his thoughts to dwell upon it. The certainty of death is a most painful subject of contemplation for a wicked man. Conscience tells him that he has no resources wherewith to meet the demands of that day—he knows that he is unfit to face that most ruthless of all creditors, and the knowledge that nothing can turn aside his footsteps is often a bitter drop in the cup of his present apparent prosperity and security. 2. The wicked man takes refuge from the thought of the *certainty* of the *event* in the *uncertainty* of the *time* when it will take place. He indulges in "hopes," and "expectations," concerning the present life, because of the indefiniteness of its length. Although he knows that death must come one day, he hopes that it may be many years hence. The rich fool in our Lord's parable knew that he must die some day—he admitted that certainty. But he made the uncertainty of the time an excuse for taking present ease. He refused to take into account the possibility that the summons had gone forth: "This night thy soul shall be required of thee." 3. The certainty of the death of the wicked is a most painful subject of thought to good men. They look at the present condition of the ungodly, and, knowing the indispensable and intimate connection between present character and future happiness or misery, the certainty of the death of the wicked man is often a more saddening thought to them than to the man himself. The contemplation of such an event must give pain to a soul in harmony with God and goodness. 4. Yet, looked at with regard to his relation with others, the certainty of the death of the wicked is most desirable. If one portion of the body has become so diseased that the whole body is likely to suffer from it, a severance between the diseased part and the sound body must take place, however painful the operation may be. The loss of the part is indispensable to the salvation of the rest. There have been, and there are, men who are so morally diseased that their removal from the world is to be desired for the sake of others. It must be regarded as a blessing for the world that the death of the wicked is certain. The death of one wicked man is sometimes the means of bringing peace to many to whom his existence was a curse. There are men who do the best thing for the world when they leave it—their exit from it is the greatest benefit they have ever conferred upon it.

II. The wicked man is in his worst condition when he has most need of being in his best. It is at *death* that his expectation and hope perish. The time when we approach a crisis in our history is a time when we need to be most furnished with all the resources that will be demanded to meet it. It was more necessary that David should be filled with faith and courage when he went forth to meet Goliath than when he was keeping his sheep in his father's fields. When a youthful candidate for academical honour comes to the day of his examination,

he needs to concentrate all his past days of study into one focus. If on that day all his mental powers are not at their very best, he is likely to be overwhelmed with disappointment instead of to be crowned with honour. It is sad indeed to be dragged down by fear and despair at the moment when we need all the inspiration of confidence and hope to bear us up. The day of death is the great crisis to which all human life is tending—it is the day when a man needs every possible support to enable him to meet the solemn fact with which he stands face to face. Hope of a blessed immortality should then bear us up. We ought to be able to say, "I know in whom I have believed;" "I am now ready to be offered and the time of my departure is at hand" (2 Tim. iv. 6). But this is the hour when a wicked man's hope takes wing and flies away. He is at his worst when he needs to be at his best.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Men derive almost the whole of their happiness from hope. The wicked man laughs at the righteous because he lives by hope; but the wicked man himself does the same with this difference, that whilst the hopes of the one are coeval with eternity, those of the other are bounded by time. The present situation of the wicked man never yields him the pleasure which he wishes and expects . . . . if his hope is deferred, his heart is sick; if it is accomplished, he is still unsatisfied; but he comforts himself with some other hope, like a child who sees a rainbow on the top of a neighbouring hill, and runs to take hold of it, but sees it as far removed from him as before. Thus the life of a wicked man is spent in vain wishes, and toils, and hopes, till death kills at once his body, his hope, and his happiness.—*Lawson.*

It is sad to be drawn into ruin by "desire" (see last verse); because it breeds only "hope," and that is sure to perish. "The world passes away, and the desire of it" (1 John ii. 17).—*Miller.*

There have been some who have questioned whether the doctrine of a future state was understood under the former dispensation. They have regarded that economy as to such an extent carnal, worldly, and temporary, as to have excluded from it all reference to that subject. I might show, from many passages, the falsity of such a sentiment. In this verse we have *one* of them. Nothing can be clearer than that, were there not such a future state, the expectation and hope of righteous and wicked alike must perish together, and that the very distinction so evidently made here between the one and the other proceeds upon the assumption of a state beyond the present.—*Wardlaw.*

He died, perhaps, in strong hopes of heaven, as those seem to have done that came rapping and bouncing at heaven's gates, with "Lord, Lord, open to us," but were sent away with a "Depart, I know you not" (Matt. vii. 22). His most strong hope shall come to nothing. He made a bridge of his own shadow and thought to go over it, but is fallen into the brook. He thought he had taken hold of God; but it is but with him as with a child that catcheth at the shadow on the wall, which he thinks he holds fast. But he only *thinks* so.—*Trapp.*

He never had good by any hope, which hath not the fruition of his hope at death. Though a man should never obtain his desire in any earthly thing during his life, yet, if he enjoy salvation after this life, he hath failed of nothing. Though a man should miss of nothing that his heart could wish for, while breath is in his body, yet if he be damned, when the soul goeth out of his body, he hath never gained anything.—*Dod.*

Hope and expectation are long-lived things; though weak, and sick, and

blind, yet they hold out. They live with the longest liver, and seldom die in any, until they die themselves in whom they are. But the hope of the wicked doth not only die, but *perish*, that is, is lost in some unlooked-for, unthought-of manner.—*Jermin.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 8.

The Wicked Coming in the Stead of the Righteous.

I. This proverb must be fulfilled from the nature of the case. If a vessel is being steered straight for the rocks nothing can prevent her from being dashed upon them except a change of course. Nothing else can avert the catastrophe, unless a supernatural power removes the rock out of the way. This last cannot be; the first alternative rests with the will of the commander. If another vessel is going in an opposite direction she must as necessarily escape the doom to which the other is hastening. There is nothing of fate about their different destinies, they are the outcome of a choice of opposite courses. So with the opposite ends of the righteous and the wicked. Deliverance for the first, an inheritance of trouble for the latter, are the result of no arbitrary fate but the outcome of their pursuing opposite courses. Unless God will remove His everlasting laws out of the universe it must be so, and to expect Him to do that is to expect Him to change His nature, which would be a much more dire calamity than the trouble which comes upon the wicked from his course of wilful opposition to righteousness. For in this life it is always open to a man to turn round, to change his course, and so to escape the shipwreck of his existence upon the rocks of perdition. "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon" (Isa. lv. 7). God will not remove His righteous laws out of the sinner's way, but He holds out every inducement and encouragement to the transgressor to come into harmony with them.

II. The proverb has received abundant illustrations in the history of our race. Pharaoh designed to drive the Israelitish nation into the Red Sea and so to destroy them. God delivered them, and their oppressors "came in their stead." Daniel's persecutors planned to take his life, "the righteous man was delivered out of trouble," and his wicked slanderers met with the death to which they had hoped to bring him. Instances might be multiplied in which this truth has been illustrated both in Scripture history and in more modern times.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

It is a "righteous thing" with God (2 Thess. i. 6, 7), though to men it seems an incredible paradox, and a news far more wonderful than acceptable, that there should be such a transmutation of conditions on both sides, to contraries.—*Trapp.*

Though the afflictions of good men seem sharp and grievous, yet they are not perpetual. Before ever God bring His into troubles, He appointeth how they shall be preserved in them, and pass through them, and get out of them. He doth as well see their arrival, as their launching forth, and the end of the boisterous storms which they must endure as well as the beginning and entrance thereof.—*Dod.*

In this world trouble is a common place, as the world is, both to the righteous and the wicked, and it beseems them both. The one has his proper and due place, the other has his place of honour. For, as St. Basil saith, He that saith that tribulation doth not beseem a righteous man,

saith nothing else but that an adversary doth not beseem a valiant champion. Sometimes God Himself doth put the righteous into trouble, and then as the place belongeth to them, so St. Chrysostom tells us, God doth it not to bring the trouble upon us, but rather by the trouble to bring us to Himself. Sometimes the injustice or malice of men doth thrust them into it, and then, God delivering them, puts the wicked in their place. For this world is full of misplacings, the wicked being seated where the godly should be, the godly seated where the wicked should be. God Almighty is pleased sometimes to put things in order, and, showing mercy to the righteous, doth give the wicked their due place.—*Jermin.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 9.

The Just Man Delivered from the Mouth of the Hypocrite.

I. We have here—1. *A character most difficult to maintain.* The actor cannot always be playing his part, he must have times when his own individuality asserts itself—when he appears the man he really is. The man most in love with the dramatic art finds a few hours' practice at a time enough for him, and feels it a relief to throw off his stage character and be himself again. He cannot, if he would, be ever trying to live in an experience that does not belong to him—be ever assuming an individuality which is not his own property. It would be an intolerable burden to be always endeavouring to sustain a part. A hypocrite has set himself a hard task. He has undertaken to pretend to be living a life which he knows does not belong to him, and which he never can possess unless his whole nature is regenerated. Now to keep up the deportment and to use the language that belong to a true nature must be as difficult as for a professional actor always to be playing the part of a king. The hypocrite must sometimes feel that his life is a sort of treadmill, and must sometimes be overcome by his real self in spite of all efforts to prevent nature from asserting her rights. No hypocrite can be always in his stage dress. The character is difficult to sustain. 2. *A character most injurious to mankind and most miserable for the man who owns it.* The actor plays his part by assuming the character of another man, but he does this without necessarily injuring himself or any of his fellow-creatures. But it is not so with the hypocrite. If a bad man assumes the garb of a good man he tends to lessen the estimation of real goodness in the minds of men. The existence of false coin makes us suspicious of genuine gold. The hypocrite must be conscious that he is a *living lie,* and so a living curse to his fellow-creatures, and this consciousness can but make him miserable. 3. *A character in danger of becoming irreclaimable.* A man who tries to pass for a scholar when he is utterly ignorant is the most difficult person to change into a scholar. The man who desires to be always first among his fellows is the least likely to become a qualified leader of men. We have it on the best authority that whatever such a man may desire, that "whosoever will be chief shall be a servant" (Matt. xx. 27). He is only fit for a low position who is ever straining every nerve after a high one. The hypocrite is ever desiring to pass for what he is not—he is ever desiring to fill a place for which he is utterly unfit. He is less likely than the most openly vicious man ever to become in reality that which he is ever seeming to be. This was the judgment of the Son of God concerning the hypocrites of His day: "Verily I say unto you that the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you" (Matt. xxi. 31). 4. *A character most hateful to God and to man.* A hypocrite must be disliked by those whose character he endeavours to personify. The good must hate hypocrisy because, as we said before, it lessens the power of

goodness in the world by making men suspect the really good. A hypocrite is hated by other hypocrites. If a man wants to utter false coin himself, he prefers to enjoy a monopoly of the business. The more of it there is in circulation the less likely people are to be deceived by it. A hypocrite is hateful to God. No sin is so denounced under both the old and new dispensations as the sin of hypocrisy. "Incense is an *abomination unto Me;* the new moons and Sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, *I cannot away with it.* . . . . Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth" (Isaiah i. 13, 14). The God of Israel reserves these burning words for His own people, who were drawing near to Him with their lips, while their hearts were far from Him. The most terrible denunciations of the Son of God were uttered against those who were guilty of this sin. "Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites," is repeated again and again in one discourse (Matt. xxiii).

II. The chief instrument used by the hypocrite. "The mouth." The power of speech is a most precious gift of God, and is intended by Him to be an instrument of blessing to the human race. It is this most precious instrument of good that the hypocrite is here represented as turning into an all-devouring weapon of destruction. He is like a man who gives potent poison for healing medicine. He may have disguised its deadly nature under an unknown and high-sounding name, but this will not lessen its deadly effects. The hypocrite is the man who above all others is skilful in making words the means of concealing thoughts—who speaks so plausibly that men believe they are drinking a healthful draught when they are imbibing a deadly poison. The tongue of the hypocrite destroys his neighbour because he makes him believe that he has his welfare at heart when he is really plotting his destruction. He makes him believe that some utterly worthless commercial speculation is sound and profitable, and so involves him in material destruction. Or he persuades him that a certain course of dishonest conduct is without moral danger, and so brings him into spiritual destruction. His neighbour's destruction is certain in proportion to the strength of his confidence in the words of the hypocrite.

III. The means of deliverance from the hypocrite's mouth. "Through knowledge shall the just be delivered." The just man possesses a knowledge of God, and thus has a correct standard of character by which to judge men. If a man walks in the light of the sun he will be able to avoid pitfalls and open graves. A just man has an acquaintance with the character and the laws of God. He "walks in the light" (1 John i. 7). And this gives him an insight into character—this furnishes him with a test to "try the spirits whether they are of God" (1 John iv. 1). The more men come into contact with reality the more quick will they be to detect unreality. The more men know God the more correct will be the estimate they form of their fellow-men. The Spirit of wisdom is a Spirit of "enlightenment" on this point as on all others (Eph. i. 18). The law of the Lord "makes wise the simple" or the unwary (Psalm xix. 7). That scripture which is the "inspiration of God" "furnishes the man of God" with a means of escape from the snare of the hypocrite's mouth (2 Tim. iii. 16). The knowledge which is derived from its study is a foil for the attacks of the most subtle seducer.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Haman, under the pretence of loyalty, would have *destroyed* a whole nation (Esther iii. 8, 13). Ziba, under the same false cover, would have *destroyed his neighbour* (2 Sam. xvi. 1, 4). The lying prophet, from mere wilfulness, ruined his brother (1 Kings xiii).

Then look at the hypocrite in the church—"a ravening wolf in sheep's clothing," devouring the flock (Matt.

vii. 15); "making merchandise with feigned words" (2 Pet. ii. 1, 3); an "apostle of Satan," so diligent is he in his master's work of destruction (2 Cor. xi. 3, 13). "These false Christs," we are warned, "deceive many," if it *were possible the very elect* (Matt. xxiv. 24). . . . . Learn the value of solid knowledge. Feeling, excitement, imagination, expose us to an unsteady profession. (Such as Eph. iv. 14.) *Knowledge* supplies principle and steadfastness. "Add to your faith *knowledge*" (2 Pet. i. 5).—*Bridges.*

Hypocrites are awful stumbling blocks. Full many has the detection of their true character hardened in sin and worldliness, and established in infidelity. Full many have they thus destroyed.—*Wardlaw.*

When God converts a soul, He gives it light. That light makes it invulnerable. All things afterward help it. "Virtue may be assailed, but never hurt." Satan is one of the blessings of a Christian.—*Miller.*

It was an ordinary prayer of King Antigonus, "Deliver me from the hands of my friends." When asked why he did not rather pray for preservation from his enemies, he answered, "That he guarded against his enemies, but could not guard against false friends."—*Lawson.*

How to detect a hypocrite. To make a man a good man all parts of goodness must concur, but any one way of wickedness is suffioient to denominate a bad man.—*Tillotson.*

A hypocrite is hated of the world for seeming to be a Christian, and hated of God for not being one.—*Mason.*

The meaning of the verse as a whole is, "By the protective power of that knowledge that serves righteousness, they are delivered who were endangered by the artifices of that shrewdness which is the instrument of wickedness."—*Elster.*

The just man is too wise to be flattered, and too knowing to be plucked away with the error of the wicked (1 Pet. iii. 17, 18).—*Trapp.*

Beware of carrying deadly weapons. An untrue man is a moral murderer, his mouth the lethal weapon, and his neighbour the victim.—*Arnot.*

"Neither man nor angels can discern
Hypocrisy, the only evil that walks
Invisible, except to God alone,
By His permissive will, thro' heaven and earth:
And oft though Wisdom wake, suspicion sleeps
At Wisdom's gate, and to simplicity
Resigns her charge, while goodness
Thinks no ill
Where no ill seems."

Paradise Lost. Book iii.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSES 10 *and* 11.

THE REWARD OF THE RIGHTEOUS CITIZEN OR RULER. THE FATE OF THE UNRIGHTEOUS ONE.

I. The words imply that it does not always go with the righteous. "*When* it goeth well," etc. A good man's plans and efforts for the good of his fellow-citizens or fellow-countrymen are not always successful. They may need more resources to make them effectual than he has at his command. The men whom he desires to benefit may not themselves be willing to exercise the self-denial for their own welfare that he is willing to undergo for them. They would be willing to reap the harvest of joy, but they do not like to sow the seed of suffering. It often happens that a righteous man is in the midst of a generation who cannot appreciate his moral worth and his intellectual wisdom. It has been said that the intellectual struggles of one age are the intuitions of the next, and men that are now regarded as grand and noble were perhaps looked upon as of little worth in the generation in which they lived. Or a man may not live long enough to complete his plans for the public benefit—the best things are often slow in coming to maturity, and many a righteous man has been called away before he

has perfected his designs of blessing for his race. Although the good and faithful servant will always have the "Well-done" of his master, his plans and purposes are often seemingly frustrated by the shortness of his life, the scantiness of his resources, or the misconception of his fellows. History abounds with illustrations of this truth.

II. That there must come a time when it will go well with the righteous. It is an ordination of God's providence that the righteous man should pass through both experiences. The soldier needs defeat as well as victory to develope all his latent talent, to make manifest all the heroism that is within him. The mariner must pass through storms as well as fair weather if he is to learn the true art of navigation. And so the righteous man must have the experience of apparent failure and defeat to develop faith, and patience, and courage, which would otherwise remain hidden or dwarfed. But when this has been accomplished, a "set time to favour him will come." "He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall *doubtless* come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him" (Psalm cxxvi. 6). The worth of his character and his work will be recognised freely and generously by many, and must be acknowledged, although it may be with reluctance, even by his opponents. Joseph passed many years in servitude and imprisonment, but by and by his worth was freely acknowledged. "Can we find such a one as this is, a man in whom the Spirit of God is? (Gen. xli. 38.) Both king and people decided that it ought to go well with him, and it did go well with him now that his ability and character were known.

III. The blessing and consequent joy that comes to others when the time has come for it to "go well with the righteous." By the blessing of the righteous the city is exalted—"the city" as a consequence "rejoiceth." Even the bad in a kingdom have cause for joy when the righteous have the pre-eminence in a community, whatever be their condition they would be much worse off under the rule of unrighteousness. The lost in hell and those who are being lost on earth are in a better condition from having the Righteous God upon the throne of the universe. The greatest criminals in our prisons find it better to have a just and righteous gaoler than an unrighteous one. So the whole city has reason to rejoice in the pre-eminence—in the success of the righteous. Such men exalt a city—1. *By forming a basis for commercial enterprise.* The rule of the unrighteous in a city will, in time, prevent commercial prosperity by destroying public confidence. 2. *By promoting the just rights of all.* That community is blessed where each citizen enjoys freedom to live his life and do his best for himself and others without trampling on the rights of his fellows. Tyranny on the one hand provokes rebellion on the other, and misery to both parties is the issue. The head is intended to think and plan for the rest of the body, the limbs are intended to carry out the designs of the head; if either the one or the other fails to perform its work, suffering comes to the whole frame. So in the body politic. Righteous men strive for the union of all classes for the good of all, and this unity exalts a city—gives peace at home, and is the surest defence against foes without. Righteousness is a stronger wall than any material defence. This is the safeguard of the ideal city of Isaiah's prophecy. "I will make thine officers peace, and thine exactors righteousness. Violence shall no more be heard in thy land, wasting nor destruction within thy borders; but thou shalt call thy walls Salvation, and thy gates Praise" (Isa. lx. 18). 3. *By averting Divine judgments.* Sodom would have been spared if there had been *ten* righteous within the city. Unrighteousness in a nation must bring national calamity, but a minority of good men delays the visitation. "Except the Lord of Hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah" (Isa. i. 9). "For the elect's sake, those days shall be shortened" (Matt xxiv. 22).

IV. That as the character and services of the righteous man shall meet with public and grateful recognition, so the man who by his wicked influence has brought misery upon his fellow-creatures shall meet with public execration. Just as the righteous man often seems defeated by untoward circumstances, and all his unselfish and patriotic plans seem nipped in the bud for a time, yet success comes to him in the end, or, if not so, yet at his death his real worth is seen and acknowledged; so a wicked and selfish man may seem to carry all before him for a time, and may even succeed in blinding men to his real character, yet the time comes when his worthlessness and self-seeking meet with their terrible yet just reward. There is a tendency generally in human nature to condone a man's sins after he is dead, but instances are not few in the history of the world when this humane tendency has been stifled by the exceeding curse that some men have been to the world.

ILLUSTRATIONS OF VERSES 10 *and* 11.

A more vivid illustration of what has been said here concerning a righteous man cannot be found than in the life and labours of William the Silent, Prince of Holland. This noble man gave his all to the liberation of the Netherlands from Spanish tyranny. For many years he bore the whole weight of a struggle which Motley designates "as unequal as men have ever undertaken." "To exclude the Inquisition," he continues, "to maintain the ancient liberties of his country, was the task which he appointed to himself when a youth of three and twenty. He accomplished the task, through danger, amid toils, and with sacrifices such as few men have ever been able to lay upon their country's altar; for the disinterestedness of the man was as prominent as his fortitude. A prince of high rank and with royal revenues, he stripped himself of station, wealth, almost at times of the common necessaries of life, and became, in his country's cause, nearly a beggar as well as an outlaw." At times it seemed as if the cause to which he had thus devoted himself was lost, and even this disinterested man did not escape the envy and suspicion of those whom he was trying to serve. But he lived to see his work accomplished, and when he fell at last by the hand of an assassin, he was "entombed," to quote again from his biographer, "amid the tears of a whole nation." "The people were grateful and affectionate, for they trusted the character of their 'Father William,' and not all the clouds which calumny could collect ever dimmed to their eyes the radiance of that lofty mind to which they were accustomed, in their darkest calamities, to look for light As long as he lived, he was the guiding star of a whole brave nation, and when he died, the little children cried in the streets."—*Motley's Rise of the Dutch Republic.*

Illustrations of the latter clause of verse 10 abound in history. "Memorable in the prison experiences of Herod Agrippa was the arrival of news that the tyrant of Capreæ was dead. Immediately on the death of Tiberius, Marsyas, Agrippa's faithful bondslave, hastened to his master's dungeon, and communicated the joyful intelligence, saying, in the Hebrew language, "The lion is dead." The centurion on guard heard the rejoicing, inquired as to the cause, ordered the royal prisoner's chains to be struck off, and invited him to supper. But more memorable was the exultation, widely felt and cruelly expressed, at Agrippa's own death—that loathsome death, so strange in its surroundings, of which a tale is told in the Acts of the Apostles The inhabitants of Sebaste and Cæsarea, as we learn from Josephus, and particularly Herod's own soldiers, indulged in the most brutal rejoicings at his death,—heaping his memory with reproaches. . . . . In his account of the death of the Emperor Maximin. Gibbon says, "It is easier to conceive than to describe the universal joy of the Roman world on the fall of the tyrant." The death of Richelieu is said to have been felt by France like the relief from a nightmare; from the king to the lowest rhymster, all joined in the burden of the couplets that proclaimed it—*Il est parti, il a plié bagage, ce cardinal.*—*Jacox.*

Judge Jeffreys. A disposition to triumph over the fallen has never been one of the besetting sins of Englishmen; but the hatred of which Jeffreys was the object was without a parallel in our history, and partook but too largely of the savageness of his own nature. The people, where he was concerned, were as cruel as himself, and exulted in his misery as he had been accustomed to exult in the misery of convicts listening to the sentence of death, and of families clad in mourning. The rabble congregated before his deserted mansion in Duke Street, and read on the door, with shouts of laughter, the bills which announced the sale of his property. Even delicate women, who had tears for highwaymen and housebreakers, breathed nothing but vengeance against him. The lampoons which were hawked about the town were distinguished by an atrocity rare even in those days. Hanging would be too mild a death for him: a grave under the gibbet would be too respectable a resting place: he ought to be whipt to death at the cart's tail: he ought to be tortured like an Indian: he

ought to be devoured alive. . . . . Disease, assisted by strong drink and by misery. did its work fast. He dwindled in a few weeks from a portly and even corpulent man to a skeleton, and died in the forty-first year of his age. He had been Chief Justice of the King's Bench at thirty-five, and Lord Chancellor at thirty-seven. In the whole history of the English bar there is no other instance of so rapid an elevation or so terrible a fall.—*Macaulay.*

Foulon, a French Official in the time of the great Revolution. This is that same Foulon named *âme damnée* (Familiar demon) *du* Parlement; a man grown gray in treachery, in griping, projecting, intriguing and iniquity: who once, when it was objected, to some finance-scheme of his, "What will the people do?" made answer, in the fire of discussion, "The people may eat grass:" hasty words, which fly abroad irrevocable, and will send back tidings. . . . . We are but at the 22nd of the month, hardly above a week since the Bastile fell, when it suddenly appears that old Foulon is alive; nay, that he is here, in early morning, in the streets of Paris: the extortioner, the plotter, who would make the people eat grass, and was a liar from the beginning! It is even so. The deceptive "sumptuous funeral" (of some domestic that died); the hiding-place at Vitry towards Fontainebleau, have not availed that wretched old man. Some living domestic or dependent, for none loves old Foulon, has betrayed him to the village. Merciless boors of Vitry unearth him, pounce upon him, like hell-hounds. Westward, old Infamy! to Paris, to be judged at the Hotel-de-Ville! His old head, which seventy-four years have bleached, is bare; they have tied an emblematic bundle of grass upon his back; a garland of nettles and thistles is round his neck: in this manner, led with ropes, goaded on with curses and menaces, must he, with his old limbs, sprawl forward; the pitiablest, most unpitied of all old men. Sooty Saint-Antoine, and every street, musters its crowds as he passes; the Hall of the Hôtel-de-Ville, the Place de Grève itself, will scarcely hold his escort and him. Foulon must not only be judged righteously, but judged there where he stands without delay. Appoint seven judges, ye Municipals, or seventy and seven; name them yourselves, or we will name them, but judge him. Electoral rhetoric, eloquence of Mayor Bailiy, is wasted for hours, explaining the beauty of the law's delay. Delay, and still delay! . . . the morning has worn itself into noon, and he is still unjudged. . . . "Friends," said a person, stepping forward, "what is the use of judging this man? Has he not been judged these thirty years?" With wild yells Sansculottism clutches him in its hundred hands: he is whirled across the Place de Grève to the *Lanterne* (lamp-iron), which there is at the corner of the *Rue de la Vannerie*, pleading bitterly for life—to the deaf winds. Only with the third rope—for two ropes broke, and the quavering voice still pleaded—can he be so much as got hanged. His body is dragged through the streets; his head goes aloft upon a pike, the mouth filled with grass: amid sounds as of Tophet, from a grass-eating people. *Carlyle's French Revolution.*

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Two things, as herein is showed, do move the righteous unto joy. The one is, the honouring and good success of the just. When it is well with them that do well, the well-disposed multitude cannot but be inwardly glad, and outwardly testify this inward joy by signs and tokens of mirth. The other thing that moveth the well-disposed to rejoice, and even to sing (or shout) is the destruction of the wicked. There is great cause why the people of God should rejoice at the vengeance that is executed on the ungodly; for they persecute the Church, or infect many with their evil counsel and example, or draw God's punishments on the places wherein they live. Thus did the ancient Israelities rejoice in old time, when the enemies of God were overthrown; and thus did we of late sing and triumph when the proud Popish Spaniards were drowned and confounded. . . . A kingdom is overthrown by the flattery, heresy, foolish counsel, and conspiracy of mischievous and ungodly persons. Thus a tongue can even build and overthrow a city. —*Muffet.*

The world, in despite of the native enmity of the heart, bears its testimony to consistent godliness (ch. xvi. 7; Mark vi. 20). . . The people of God unite in the shouting occasioned by the overthrow of the wicked; not from any selfish feeling of revenge; much less from unfeeling hardness towards their fellow-sinners. But when a hindrance to the good cause is removed (ch. xxviii. 28; Eccles. ix. 18); when the justice of God against sin (2 Sam. xviii. 14-28), and his faithful preservation of His Church (Exod. xv. 21;

Judges v. 31) are displayed, ought not every feeling to be absorbed in a supreme interest in His glory? Ought they not to shout? (Psa. lii. 6, 7, lviii. 10; Rev. xviii. 20). The "Alleluia" of heaven is an exulting testimony to the righteous judgments of the Lord our God, hastening forward His glorious kingdom (Rev. xix. 1, 2).—*Bridges.*

By the good of the righteous; not "in the good" or "when it goeth well." "*By the perishing of the wicked,*" not when the wicked perish. A city is very far from exulting in the good of the righteous, or in the destruction of the wicked. But "by," or "by means of," as the unacknowledged cause there comes the exulting and shouting. That is, a city is blest by the prosperity of righteous men. "*Good.*" This word cannot be properly translated. It means both *good* and *goodness.* If we say "good," the "*good* of the righteous" will mean their *welfare.* If we say "goodness" it will mean their piety. The word in the Hebrew means both. The text to be complete must confine itself to neither. The city is not only blessed by the good that characterises the righteous, but by the good that happens to them. How glorious this becomes when "the righteous" means the Church! The wilderness and the solitary place have been glad for her. It is true of all the universe. As the history of heaven and hell, the "good of the righteous," and "the perishing of the wicked" will breed universal benefit. It was such texts as these that moved the Papists to realise the good by actually slaughtering the wicked out of the land. . . . . Piety is in proportion to usefulness. If a Christian does not bless his city, it is a mark against him. "*Bless*" means to *invoke good.* "The mouth of the wicked" pulls down a neighbourhood by every form of teaching. The righteous builds it, and especially by prayer.—*Miller.*

"The mouth of the wicked." Whether he be a seedsman of sedition or a seducer of the people, a Sheba or a Shebna, a carnal gospeller or a godless politician, whose drift is to formalise and enervate the power of the truth, till at length they leave us a heartless and sapless religion. "One of these sinners may destroy much good" (Eccles. ix. 18). —*Trapp.*

Good men have not only God's hand to give them good things, but godly men's hearts to be joyful for them. When Mordecai was advanced, the city of Shushan rejoiced and was glad. When the Lord showed His great mercy on Zacharias and Elizabeth in giving them a son, their kinsfolk and neighbours came and rejoiced with them. . . . . It is well known that righteous men will make their brothers commoners with them in their prosperity; when they are advanced, others shall not be disgraced thereby: when they are enriched, others shall not be impoverished thereby: when they are made mighty, others shall not be weakened thereby; And so it is said concerning Mordecai, that when the royal apparel was on his back, and the crown of gold on his head, that unto the Jews was come light, and joy, and gladness, and honour (Esth. viii. 16) . . . . Here is instruction to them that be desirous to gain the hearts of honest men . . . . Many men desire to be popular, but few to be righteous. . . . . Good liking is not gotten by pomp and power, and favour is not gained by wealth and riches, and love is not commanded by authority and dignity. These may be allured with goodness, but never compelled by violence.—*Dod.*

Such is the nature of righteousness, that though it cannot make all to love it, yet it maketh all to love the welfare of the righteous. Origen therefore saith, that the few righteous which were in Jerusalem were not carried into captivity for their own offences, but that the captive people might rejoice in their welfare. For, saith he, had the wicked only been carried away, and the righteous remained, the wicked had never had the comfort of returning. On the other side, such is the nature of wickedness, that though many embrace it themselves, yet they are pleased to see it destroyed in others.—*Jermin.*

The exultant shout of relief at a man's death might almost wake the dead man. It is hideous to think of a choral symphony of voices, jubilant at a dead march, making the welkin ring with huzzas at death's last feat, and welcoming it to the echo. For those tumultuous pæans have a vengeful curse in every note. They mean malediction; and they say what they mean. The bad man dead and gone is such a good riddance. The multitude account it for themselves, not for him, such a happy release. The greatest of the greater prophets of the Old Testament indites the "triumphant insultation," of his country and his countrymen against the dead and gone king of Babylon, when that oppressor ceased. . . . (Isa. xiv. 4). When Alexander Jannæus, desirous of a reconcilement with his people, asked them what he should do to make them quite content;—"Die!" was the response. It was the only way. The death of Ethwald, in Joanna Baillie's tragedy, points the moral to the same bitter tale. Here are the closing lines of the drama:—

"Through all the vexed land
Let every heart bound at the joyful tidings,
Thus from his frowning height the tyrant falls
Like a dark mountain, whose interior fires,
Raging in ceaseless tumult, have devoured
Its own foundations. Sunk in sudden ruin
To the tremendous gulf, in the vast void
No friendly rock rears its opposing head
To stay the dreadful crash. . . . The joyful hinds
Point to the traveller the hollow vale
Where once it stood." *Jacox.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSES 12, 13.

CONTEMPT AND TALE-BEARING.

I. He who lacks moral worth will be indifferent to the worth of others. He will despise the character that he does not possess. In the minds of some men who have no learning there is a disposition to undervalue the attainments of others. They do not value it because they do not possess it. In order to esteem it rightly they must come to the possession of it. Some men pretend to despise wealth and call gold sordid dust, but most, if not all people of this kind have very little of what they despise in their own possession. Some translate here "a heartless man despiseth his neighbour." A man without moral wisdom is a man without a kind heart, and he despises his neighbour because he lacks the heart which is probably possessed by the man whom he despises. A man must have something good in himself to enable him to see what is worthy of honour in his brother. There must be light in the eye if we are to appreciate the light of the sun. A man must have something of a musical nature to be able to appreciate the musical gifts of another. A man shows that he is void of wisdom if he despises the meanest of his fellow creatures.

II. A special form in which contempt for others is often manifested. "A tale-bearer revealeth secrets." If a man holds his neighbour in contempt, he is not careful of that neighbour's reputation. Being himself without moral worth he has nothing to lose, and therefore esteems lightly what is most valued by his brother man. Men who by their own folly are always poor are ever anxious to bring others down to their own level, and so men without reputation are very often disposed to rob others of their good name. This they attempt to do by revealing what they ought to conceal. There are times when we ought faithfully to keep within our own bosoms what we know about another, even although what we know is in the highest degree honourable to him. In the plan which Christ had marked out for Himself there were times when He desired that even His deeds of benevolence should not be made known To some whom He healed He charged "that they should not make it known" (Matt. xii. 16). If it is good sometimes to conceal what is only honourable and praiseworthy, how much more should a man be careful not to reveal any real or seeming

inconsistency in a good man—anything which may in any way lower him in the estimation of others—any painful secret which might be mis-construed to his dishonour or lessen his influence for good in the world.

III. "The contrast exhibited in the conduct of a man of moral worth." He, "being a man of understanding," knows the value of every human soul. He may *pity* his degraded fellow-man, but never *despises* them. He sets too high an estimate upon his neighbour to hold in contempt even those who are far beneath him in moral excellence, how much less will it be possible for him to despise those who are his equals or superiors. Around the imperfections of all he throws the robe of that charity which even "thinketh no evil" (1 Cor. xiii. 5), much less *speaks* a word that could be interpreted to his neighbour's disadvantage. He holds the good name of others as a sacred trust. He guards it as a man of a "faithful spirit" would guard any precious possession belonging to another.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Ver. 12. "*A heartless man.*" All such are titles of the unsaved man. The same negative state, *i.e.*, a want of the Spirit, and hence a want of benevolence, not only keeps men from blessing their city (ver. 11), but makes them contemptuous. Others' interests do not weigh a feather. See a fine description of this in 1 Cor. xiii., where men are supposed even to "behave unseemly" from this high theologic fact. They do not care for their neighbours, and, therefore, do not care to behave well. If a neighbour is disgraced, they are too contemptuous to care for its effect. They are reckless in their talk of his disgrace, while a "man of understanding" is silent.—*Miller.*

No human creature is to be despised, for he is our neighbour. He is our own flesh, our brother, sprung from our common father Adam. Honour all men. Men were made in the image of God; and though that image is now lost, it is still a sufficient evidence of the sinfulness of despising, as well as of murdering, our neighbour, that in the image of God man was made, and that we cannot say whether the persons whom we are tempted to despise are not in that happy number of the chosen of God for whose sakes the Son of God hath dignified our nature by assuming it, and whom He will again beautify with that glorious image which was effaced by the fall. Do you allege that your neighbour is worthy of contempt, on account of his poverty or meanness, or some remarkable weakness, by which he is rendered ridiculous? I ask you whether he is a fool. You say, No. Then confess that your contempt ought to rest upon yourself; for Solomon says you are one, and want of wisdom is far worse than the want of riches, or beauty, or polite accomplishments.—*Lawson.*

Not remembering that he is his neighbour, cut out of the same cloth, the shears only going between, and as capable of heaven as himself, though never so poor, mean, deformed, or otherwise despicable. The man of understanding refraineth his tongue even if he be slighted or reviled. He knows it is to no purpose to wash off dirt with dirt.—*Trapp.*

Ver. 13. The difference is a sharply drawn one, the distinction a distinctly defined one, between fidelity and unfaithfulness, between the treacherous and the loyal. There is a Danish proverb, quoted in the Archbishop of Dublin's book, which warns us well against relying too much on other men's silence, since there is no rarer gift than the capacity of keeping a secret: "Tell nothing to thy friend which thy enemy may not know." One should be careful not to entrust another unnecessarily with a secret which it may be a hard matter to keep; nor should one's desire for aid or sympathy be indulged by dragging other people into one's misfortunes. "There is as much responsibility in imparting

your own secrets, as in keeping those of your neighbour," says Helps.—*Jacox.*

This expression comes from trading. He who gads about to indulge in gossiping, will gratify his taste by scandals that he did not intend to divulge. "Secrets" or "secret counsels," that formal divan, where purest privacy is the thing that has been expected. It is these slight lusts, as we call them, that divulge character. The man that is born again will be of a "faithful spirit," and will scorn to gratify scandal at a neighbour's expense.—*Miller.*

A note to know a talker by, is that he is a walker from place to place (see Critical Notes), hearing and spying what he can, that he may have whereof to prattle to this body and that body. This carrying of tales the Lord forbiddeth in his law, where he saith, "Thou shalt not go up and down as a tale-bearer among thy people" (Lev. xix. 16).—*Muffet.*

Here we see that a well-governed spirit will govern the tongue. An unrestrained tongue is an evidence of levity, or of some worse quality in the heart. And if the spirit be faithful, the tongue will be cautious and friendly. The communication between the spirit and the tongue is so easy, that the one will certainly discover the quality of the other, for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.—*Lawson.*

There are various ways of acting the "tale-bearer." There is that of *open blabbing.* And this, as it is the simplest, is, in truth, the least dangerous. The character becomes immediately known; and all who have secrets which they *really wish kept* will take care to withhold them from him. There is next that of *confidential communication.* The secret-holder affects to look this way and that, to ascertain that no one is within hearing; and then with many whispered *doubts* whether he is doing right, and whispered *no doubts* that he is perfectly safe with the dear friend to whom he speaks, imparts it in a breath that enters only his solitary ear, as a thing received in the profoundest secrecy, and not, on any account whatever, to go further—thus setting the example of broken confidence as the encouragement and inducement to keep it. There is that also of *sly insinuation.* The person who has the secret neither openly blabs it nor confidentially whispers it, but throws out hints of his having it—allusions more or less remote as to its nature—by which curiosity is awakened, inquiry stimulated, and the thing ultimately brought to light; while he who threw out the leading notices plumes himself on having escaped the imputation of a tale-bearer. Now these and whatever others there may be, *are all bad;* and the greater the amount of pretension and hypocrisy, so much the worse.—*Wardlaw.*

Reticence is commended from another point of view. The man who comes to us with tales about others will reveal our secrets also. Faithfulness is shown, not only in doing what a man has been commissioned to do, but in doing it quietly and without garrulity.—*Plumptre.*

He is a rare friend that can both give counsel and keep counsel.—*Trapp.*

The Holy Ghost, here and elsewhere, compareth busybodies and such as delight to deal in other men's matters, to petty chapmen and pedlars, which carry wares about, selling in one place and buying in another. A slanderous tongue trafficketh altogether by exchange, it will deliver nothing to you, but upon condition to receive somewhat from you. It will never bear an empty pack, but desireth, where aught is uttered and taken out, there to take somewhat to put in, that it may have choice for other places.—*Dod.*

We must regard every matter as an entrusted secret, which we believe the person concerned would wish to be considered such. Nay, further still, we must consider all circumstances as secrets entrusted, which would bring scandal upon another if told, and which it is not our certain duty to discuss, and that in our own persons and to his face.—*Leigh Hunt.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 14.

HELMSMANSHIP.

I. The many (the people) are dependent upon the few for guidance. The word counsel is literally "pilotage," "helmsmanship." The many passengers in the vessel are dependent upon the few who guide it. The dependence of the many upon the few for guidance runs through every phase of human life. The dependence of the children upon their natural head is but prophetic of all the periods of after life, which very much consists in the dependence of the many upon the few. The child's life at home and at school is a preparation for the rough handling of circumstance in this matter in the time of manhood. Although the man's ability to guide his own life is far greater than that of the child, yet his need of counsel and guidance has increased with his years and responsibilities. This need of guidance springs from men's unequal gifts. The physical, mental, and moral inequalities of men create and supply the demand for leaders—for counsellors for the many. This inequality is an ordination of the Divine Ruler of the universe—God is the Author of the inequalities. In nature we see that the strong gives shelter to the weak. The mighty oak protects the tiny plant at its roots. Counsellors are the giant trees which give shelter by giving guidance to those who are in some respects inferior to them. Men may be born *free*, but they are nowhere born *equal* in mental and physical qualities. Hence some must *counsel*, others must *be counselled*. Guidance is felt to be a necessity, and men make a virtue of the necessity. The passengers on board a vessel submit to the direction of the pilot because they feel that their safety depends upon submission, and so do the members of a nation—the citizens of a city. They know from experience that the way out of a difficulty is not found by those who follow, but by those who lead—that if they would enjoy the advantages of civil peace and safety, they must submit to guidance and direction.

II. That "no counsel" in a nation will end in there being no nation to counsel. "Where there is no counsel the people fall." The passengers in a ship who have no one to steer the vessel will soon cease to have need of a helmsman. So the nation which has no head—no government—will cease to be a nation. Its national existence will be ruined by the anarchy that must follow.

III. Many men to give counsel are as a rule better than one. When the sea is heavy and breakers are ahead, one man at the wheel of a vessel would not be able to hold her on her course, many hands at once must be at work—the united strength of the many is indispensable. "In the multitude" there is "safety." So it is generally in the case of the ship of the State. As a rule, there is more wisdom and ability in the union of many men than in one—there is likewise less danger of despotic rule. But there have been many exceptions to this rule. Joseph knew how to provide for the safety of Egypt when all the rest of Pharaoh's counsellors were at their wits' end. Before the battle of Plassy—which laid the foundation of British rule in India—Clive called a council of war to decide whether or not the battle should be fought. The majority pronounced against fighting. But it is now generally allowed that if the advice of that council had been followed the British would have never been in possession of India. Clive decided to act in opposition to the opinion of the majority, and the day was won for England. *(See Macaulay's Essay on Lord Clive.)* Sometimes in the multitude of counsellors there has been national ruin. "All the council" of the Jews sought to put Jesus to death (Matt. xxvi. 59), and so brought about the destruction of their nation. But these are exceptions to a rule.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

The case supposed, appears to be that of a self-willed, self-sufficient, headstrong ruler who glories in his power; who determines to wield the rod of that power in his own way, and who plays the hasty, jealous, resolute, sensitive and vindictive tyrant; who disdains to call in counsel, or who does it only for the pleasure of showing his superiority to it by setting it at nought. I conceive the phrase, "Where no counsel is," to be intended to convey not a little of the character of him by whom it is declined or disregarded. We have an example of such a character in Solomon's own successor *Rehoboam*. And yet, at the same time, in his case we are taught the necessity of understanding all such maxims as admitting of exceptions. Rehoboam *did* take counsel; and his counsellors were not few. Had they been *fewer*, there would in that instance been *more safety*. Had he stopped with the "*old men* who had stood before Solomon his father," all would have been well. . . . How much better would it have been for Ahab, had he taken for his sole counsellor Micaiah the son of Imlah than it was when he preferred the four hundred prophets of Baal! The maxim, therefore, is *general*. It affirms the danger of solitary self-sufficiency, and the safety of deliberate and, in proportion to the complexity and difficulty of each case, and the nature and amount of its consequences, of extensive and diversified consultation.—*Wardlaw*.

It is a penalty inflicted by God on a sinful state to give it princes void of counsel (Isa. iii. 4; chap. xv. 22).—*Fausset*.

Care seems to be taken after a proverb lauding silence, always to put in a eulogy of speech. (See chap. x. 20, 21.) Secrets are not to be hid until the whole community is one covered over wickedness. The same faithfulness that conceals a secret, intrudes counsel, and grasps control, and saves the people by that leadership that the pious alone are intended to achieve. The word *counsel* or "helmsmanship" is from a root meaning a *cord;* hence the tacking of the helm; and, now, that princely guidance, which piety in the world (though the world does not think so) does actually bestow. "*Safety*"—or "*salvation.*" The inspired sentence-maker is always managing what the music men would call a *crescendo*, for the second clause. The first clause speaks of the people as *falling*, the second as not only "*not falling*," but, though fallen, as actually raised.—*Miller*.

Tyranny is better than anarchy. And yet "Woe also to thee, O land, whose king is a child"; that is, wilful and uncounsellable. . . . One special thing the primitive Christians prayed for the emperor was, that God would send him a faithful council.—*Trapp*.

It is not said that in the multitude of counsellors there is safety, but in the *largeness* or *muchness* of a counsellor, that is, such a counsellor as is furnished with a variety of counsels, and can look many ways for direction. For such a one is instead of many, nay, often far better; because he can sooner resolve what is best, than many will or can. And therefore, though it be good to have many, and when they agree perhaps to follow them, yet it may be better to have one of many counsels, on whom to rely.—*Jermin*.

Probably one is more struck, on reflection and in reading, with the exceptions to the rule, than with confirmatory examples of it, that in the multitude of counsellors there is safety. . . . . A modern historian finds in the unlicensed discretion reposed by the Roman Senate in the general, the most efficient aid to the extent of Rome's early conquests, and he points by way of contrast, to the modern republics of Italy, as denying themselves scope for larger conquests by their extreme jealousy of their commanders. Anarchy in Antwerp is the heading of one of Mr. Morley's graphic pages, and a lively picture it offers us of the confusion that ensued when the

hydra heads of the multitudinous government were laid together. In Drake's expedition of 1595, there were too many in command; and after losing time in debate which Sir Francis, if alone, would have spent in action, they were obliged to give up the attempt on the Canaries, with some loss. The otherwise unaccountable action of De Witt in 1671 is explained at once when the anarchical constitution of the Dutch republic is remembered—its want of a central authority, and the fact that, to raise money or troops, the consent of a number of petty councils was necessary, in the multitude of whose counsellors was anything but safety. "In the multitude of counsellors there may be safety," says Alison, "it is in general safety to the counsellors, not to the counselled." The quality of the counsel, and the ability of the counsellors, are elements of main import in the maxim of the king.—*Jacox.*

For Homiletics on verse 15, see on chap. vi. 1—4.

ILLUSTRATION OF VERSE 15.

The melancholy instances of ruin, in consequence of becoming surety for others, are exceedingly numerous in the East. Against this they have many proverbs and fearful examples; but nothing seems to impart wisdom. Nearly all the Government monopolies, both among native and European rulers, are let to the highest bidders, and as the whole of the money cannot be advanced till a part of the produce be sold, sureties have to be accountable for the amount. But as men generally enter into these speculations in order to better a reduced fortune, an extravagant price is often paid, and ruin is the consequence both to the principal and his surety. This practice of suretyship, however, is also common in the most trifling affairs of life. "Sign your name," is a request preferred by every one who is desirous of obtaining additional security to a petty agreement. In every legal court or magistrate's office may be seen, now and then, a trio entering, thus to become responsible for the engagements of the other. The cause of all this is probably the bad faith which prevails amongst the heathen.—*Roberts.*

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

The traffic of ancient times was small, in comparison with the vast system of exchange which now compasses the whole world like network; but the same vices that we lament marred it, and the same righteousness that we desiderate would have healed its ailments. Neither the law of gravitation nor the law of righteousness has changed since the times of Solomon; both are as powerful as they then were, and as pervasive. . . . In those primitive times, it seems, as in our own, some men desired to get faster forward in the world than their circumstances legitimately permitted. They will throw for a fortune at another's risk. . . . The warning does not of course discourage considerate kindness in bearing a deserving man over temporary pressure. . . . The Bible permits and requires more of kindness to our brother than we have ever done him yet; but it does not allow us to do a certain substantial evil, for the sake of a distant, shadowy good.—*Arnot.*

The heart and mind of every one is a stranger to every one except to God alone. He therefore that is a surety for another, is surety for a *stranger.*—*Jermin.*

. . . be not surety, if thou be a father,
Love is a personal debt. I cannot give
My children's right, nor ought he to take it: rather
Both friends should die, than hinder them to live.
Fathers first enter bonds to nature's ends;
And are her sureties, ere they are a friend's.
—*Herbert.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE **16.**

A GRACIOUS WOMAN.

I. What is a gracious woman? 1. She is one who stands in right relations to God. Everything depends upon right relationship. Upon the right relationship of the earth to the great centre of the solar system depends all that makes the earth of worth to us—all its glorious fruitfulness and beauty. If there was not this adjustment of relationship between the earth and the sun, our planet would not only be an unfit abode for man, but would be a positive blot upon God's universe. This is true also of men's relations to each other, and is specially so in respect to our relationship to God. Nothing but a right relationship to Him can develope those moral beauties which alone make a true woman. She is accepted or "justified" by God's most gracious favour on God's own conditions. She lives in the eternal sunlight of His gracious influence, and is held to the most Blessed Being in the universe, by the sweet persuasiveness which flows from His blessed character. The thoughts of the Eternal God are the food of her spirit, and from this relationship to Him comes all the grace of her character. Is there any other relationship which can make such a woman? There is none, not only so, the absence of it may end in making even a woman a blot, a positive evil, in the moral universe. There can be no true graciousness where there is no union with Him whose most attractive attribute is His graciousness, who makes Himself known, as "the Lord God, merciful and gracious." (Exod. xxxiv. 6). A gracious woman must be in right relationship with a gracious God. 2. In consequence of this, a gracious woman is right in her human relationships. Being right in the greater matter, she must be in that which is less. The earth, because she preserves her right relation to the sun, is right in her relationship to the other planets, that is, her path in the heavens is just that which is best for the whole planetary system—that which enables them also to keep their orbits, and prevents one of them from exercising a baleful influence over another. A woman whose spirit is under the influence of a gracious God will be a gracious daughter, a gracious wife, a gracious mother, a gracious friend and neighbour—that is, all her doings and sayings will be irradiated and warmed by that holiness and love which is the essence of the character of God Himself. In the summing up of the Divine law, Christ makes the right human relation depend upon a right Divine relation. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself." (Luke x. 27), and He repeats this foundation principle in His last discourse with His disciples before His death, "*By this* shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." (John xiii. 35).

II. A woman with such a character wins honour. The strong men to whom she is compared (see critical notes) are warriors who take the spoil by strength of hand, such men as Othniel, the son of Kenaz, who took Kirjath-sepher by reason of his strength and military skill. For the strong men must *gain* their spoil before they can *retain* it. So with a gracious woman. She must *win* honour before she can *retain* it, and this she most certainly will do. She will be honoured by God because she is fulfilling His purpose in sending her into the world—because she is bringing glory to Him by showing to the world what He meant a woman to be. And as a necessity she will be honoured. Those in nearest relation to her will honour her. "Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also and he praiseth her." But she is honoured in a wider sphere by a larger circle—"her own works praise her in the gates." (chap. xxxi. 28, 31).

III. What she has won she will retain. Strong men, when they have won their prize, hold it fast. It is more difficult to obtain wealth than to retain it.

Having done the first by reason of their strength, it is comparatively easy to do the second by the same means. So with a gracious woman. Honour is the guerdon of her gracious character, this she has won without any striving. Her *character* is that for which she has striven, and this it is which is the strength by which she retains *her* riches, viz., her *honour*.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Albeit the woman is the weaker vessel, yet when she is gracious, that is to say, graced, not so much with beauty, as with wisdom and virtue, she keepeth honour, that is, maintaineth her credit and preserveth her chastity. It were a hard thing to rob or spoil a strong man of his goods; but to take away the chastity of an honest matron, be she never so weak, it is impossible, who will rather die a thousand deaths than to be stained with the least speck of dishonesty.—*Muffet.*

A woman is powerful by her grace as the mighty are by their strength. In grace there lies as great force as in the imposing nature of the mighty; nay, the power of the strength of the latter gains only more property, while the woman gains honour and esteem, which are of more worth.—*Rueetschi, from Lange's Commentary.*

Thus Deborah "retained honour" as a mother in Israel, the counsellor and stay of a sinking people. (Judges iv. 4; v. 7.) Esther "retained" her influence over her heathen husband for the good of her nation (Esth. ix. 12, 13, 25). And still the gracious woman retaineth honour long after she has mingled with the dust. Sarah, the obedient wife (1 Pet. iii. 5, 6); Hannah, the consecrating mother (1 Sam. i. 28); Lois, Eunice, and "the elect lady" (2 Tim. i. 5; iii. 15; 2 John 1—4), in the family sphere; Phœbe and her companions in the annals of the Church (Rom. xvi. 2—6; Phil. iv. 3); the rich contributor to the temple (Mark xii. 42–44); the self-denying lover of her Lord (Mark xiv. 3—9); Mary in contemplative retirement (Luke x. 39); Dorcas in active usefulness (Acts ix. 36):—Are not these "good names" still had in *honourable* remembrance? (Psalm cxii. 6).—*Bridges.*

It is true of both sexes, which Solomon here affirms of women only, that *gracious* persons, they who are in the grace and favour of God, and are strengthened by His gracious assistance, shall from the generality of men gain an inward esteem and, for the most part, an outward respect. There are many instances in which virtue has been rather contemned and ridiculed, —and I will mention none other than the most signal of all, God Incarnate— but goodness has an inseparable splendour which can never suffer a total eclipse, and when it is most reviled and persecuted, it then shines brightest out of the cloud. So that all who are not wilfully blind, who will but make use of their eyes to see, must acknowledge the force of its rays. But why does Solomon here instance the woman rather than the man? Either this, that as vice is more odious and more detested, so on the other hand, virtue is more attractive, and looks more lovely in women than it usually does in men. Or it is, because men have more advantages of aspiring to honour in all public stations than women have, and the only way for a woman to gain honour, is an exemplary holiness. Or it is, because women are made of a temper more soft and frail, are more endangered by snares and temptations, and more inclinable to extremes of good and bad than men, and generally speaking, goodness is a tender thing, more hazardous and brittle in the former than in the latter, and consequently a firm and steady virtue is more to be valued in the weaker sex than in the stronger; so that a *gracious woman* is most worthy to receive and to *retain honour*. Or it is, because women in all ages, have given so many heroic examples of sanctity, that there is that peculiar to the sex which naturally renders them more pliable to the Divine grace than men.—*Bp. Ken.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 17.

MERCY AND CRUELTY.

I. A blessed human character—"A merciful man." The blessedness of any human existence depends upon the amount of mercifulness found in it. It will be blessed in itself, and a blessing to others in proportion as this Divine characteristic is found in the spirit. God, as a God of power, would be a wonderful and awe-inspiring Being, but He would not be the "the blessed God" (1 Tim. i. 11) if this were His only attribute. So far as men are concerned, He would only be a Person who added to the mysteries and miseries of human life. There is plenty of power in the world, but power is not the one thing needful for fallen and sorrowful humanity. A complex and mighty machine may, and does, excite our wonder and even our admiration, but it has no sympathy. God would be no more to us if He were not "The Lord God, merciful and gracious." He could otherwise add nothing of blessedness to our existence—yea, His very existence would be a calamity for sinful men. So, no man is a real blessing to his fellow-creatures if he is not merciful. He may be a great genius, he may be a great intellectual power, he may be possessed of great influence from one source or another; but none of these things alone, or all of them put together, will add anything to the sum of human happiness if he is not *merciful*. He is simply a hard machine, and will never make any wilderness heart rejoice or any moral waste blossom as the rose. But mercy is a moral force, which works as subtilly and as certainly upon human hearts to bless them as do the mysterious influences of the spring-time upon the barren earth. The absence of mercifulness makes hell the barren world that it is, and fills heaven with moral light and joy. On earth, mercifulness is felt to be most needful. The scum of humanity are not insensible to its blessed influence, and there is no man, however exalted above his fellow-men, who does not sometimes stand in need of its exercise.

II. The region which is first blest by the exercise of mercy. The merciful man's "own soul." There are things which by the constitution of the material universe cannot be separated. Where there is flame, there is certain to be heat; where the sun's rays come, there must be light. So mercifulness of disposition must bless a man's own soul. The exercise of kindliness is in harmony with the law of self-love. A man is but obeying this law when he exercises mercy. "Thou shalt love thy neighbour *as* thyself," implies that a man is to love himself. Loving his neighbour is the surest way—the only way—of truly doing good to himself. God has ordained that all exercise of loving kindness shall have a reward *in* the doing and *for* the doing. "He that watereth others shall be watered himself" (ver. 25). 1. His own spirit will be filled with a sense of blessedness. 2. His character will be daily growing more and more like God. 3. He will have mercy extended to him when he stands in need of it. "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy." "For with what measure you mete, it shall be measured unto you again" (Matt. v. 7, vii. 2). And so it is that mercy—

> "Is twice bless'd;
> It blesseth him that gives, and him that takes."

We have now to consider the opposite character:—

III. A curse to human kind. "A cruel man." He is an inflicter of pain upon others from a malicious disposition. Pain is the common lot of men. In the present constitution of things in this world it is a necessity, and will remain so while sin remains in human nature. Sometimes pain has to be inflicted upon human beings from the purest motives, and by the most benevolent of beings. The kindest physician in the world is obliged constantly to inflict severe physical

pain. The moral teacher—the loving parent or master—must often be the means of inflicting mental pain. But in these cases the motive is not *ill*-will, but *good*-will. The pain is contrary to the disposition of the person who inflicts it. He would not give the pain if the end could be obtained without it. He intends by present pain to give future pleasure. But a cruel man inflicts pain from *choice*, for the purpose of making men miserable. His cruelty is the outcome of his malicious nature. Hence he is a curse to his race. To the unavoidable and necessary pain of the world he adds that which is worse than needless. He would often inflict more than he does, if he had the power. Did not experience teach the contrary, we should not believe it possible that there could be such monsters in the garb of men. They are, indeed, of "their father the devil" (John viii. 44), who finds his only delight in the misery of others.

IV. That, in the end, the cruel man will inflict the most pain upon himself. 1. He will "trouble his own flesh," or his whole being in the present. He will be tormented by his conscience which now and again will rise from its deathlike slumber and avenge the miseries of those upon whose rights he has trampled—whose lives he has taken, or worse, whose souls he has ruined. While he is still pursuing his course of cruelty he will have the sting of the serpent remorse poisoning the life-blood of his spirit—a prophecy of future retribution possibly in this world, certainly in the next. 2. He is laying up trouble for himself in the future. *Men may* return his cruelty with compound interest,—(see comments and illustrations on verse 10), whether *they* do or not *God certainly will.* The Divine decree has gone forth, "He shall have judgment without mercy, that hath showed no mercy. (James ii. 13). His experience will be that of the cruel tyrant of Bezek. "As I have done so God hath requited me," (Judges i. 6, 7), or that of Shakespere's Richard iii.

O coward conscience, how thou dost afflict me!
The lights burn blue.—It is now dead midnight.
Cold fearful drops stand on my trembling flesh.
What; do I fear myself? there's none else by:
Richard loves Richard; that is, I am I.
Is there a murderer here? No;—yes, I am:
Then fly,—What, from myself? Great reason, why?
Lest I revenge. What? myself on myself?
I love myself. Wherefore? for any good
That I myself have done unto myself?
O no; alas, I rather hate myself,
For hateful deeds committed by myself.
* * * * *
My conscience hath a thousand several tongues,
And every tongue brings in a several tale,
And every tale convicts me for a villain
* * * * *
All several sins, all used in each degree,
Throng to the bar, crying all,—Guilty! guilty!
I shall despair.—There is no creature loves me:—
And, if I die, no soul will pity me:—
Nay, wherefore should they, since that I myself
Find in myself no pity to myself.

ILLUSTRATIONS OF THE LATTER CLAUSE OF THE VERSE.

Buchanan, the Scotch historian, relates that John Cameron, Bishop of Glasgow, was so given to extortion and oppression, especially upon his tenants and vassals, that he would scarcely afford them bread to eat, or clothes to wear. But one Christmas eve, as he lay in his bed in his house at Lockwood, he heard a voice summoning him to appear before the tribunal of Christ, and give an account of his actions. Being terrified with this notice, and the pangs of a guilty conscience, he called up his servants, and commanded them to stay in the room with him. He himself took a book in his hand, and began to read; but the voice, being heard a second time, struck all the servants with horror. The same voice repeating the summons a third

time, and with a louder and more dreadful accent, the bishop, after a most lamentable and frightful groan, was found dead in his bed.

The Last Days of Nero. Nero had landed in Italy about the end of February, and now, at the beginning of June, his cause had already become hopeless. Galba, though stedfast in his resolution, had not yet set his troops in motion; nevertheless, Nero was no longer safe in the city. . . . . Terrified by dreams, stung by ridicule or desertion, when his last hope of succour was announced to have deceived him, the wretched tyrant started from his couch at supper, upset the tables, and dashed his choicest vessels to the ground; then, taking poison from Locusta, and placing it in a golden casket, he crossed from the palace to the Servilian gardens, and sent his trustiest freedman to secure a galley at Ostia. He conjured some tribunes and centurions, with a handful of guards, to join his flight, but all refused; and one, blunter than the rest, exclaimed, tauntingly, "*Is it, then, so hard to die?*" At last, at midnight, finding that even the sentinels had left their posts, he sent, or rushed himself, to assemble his attendants. Every door was closed; he knocked, but no answer came. Returning to his chamber, he found the slaves fled, the furniture pillaged, the case of poison removed. Not a guard, not a gladiator, was at hand, to pierce his throat. *I have neither friend nor foe*, he exclaimed. He would have thrown himself into the Tiber but his courage failed him. He must have time, he said, and repose to collect his spirits for suicide, and his freedman Phaon at last offered him his villa in the suburbs, four miles from the city. In undress and barefooted, throwing a rough cloak over his shoulders and a kerchief across his face, he glided through the doors, mounted a horse and, attended by Sporus and three others, passed the city gates with the dawn of a summer morning. The Nomentane road led him beneath the wall of the prætorians, whom he might hear uttering curses against him and pledging vows to Galbo; and the early travellers from the country asked him as they met, *What news of Nero?* or remarked to one another, *These men are pursuing the tyrant.* Thunder and lightning, and a shock of earthquake, added terror to the moment. Nero's horse started at a dead body on the roadside, the kerchief fell from his face, and a prætorian passing by recognised and saluted him. At the fourth milestone the party quitted the highway, alighted from their horses, and scrambled on foot through a canebrake, laying their own cloaks to tread on, to the rear of the promised villa. Phaon now desired Nero to crouch in a sand-pit hard by, while he contrived to open the drain of the bath-room, and so admit him unperceived; but he vowed that he would not go *alive*, as he said, *underground*, and remained trembling beneath the wall. At last a hole was made through which he crept on all fours into a narrow chamber of the house, and there threw himself on a pallet. The coarse bread that was offered him he could not eat, but swallowed a little tepid water. . . . . Suddenly was heard the tramp of horsemen, sent to seize the culprit alive. Then at last he placed a weapon to his breast, and the slave Epaphroditus drove it home. . . . Nero perished at the age of thirty years and six months.—*Merivale.*

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

There are two descriptions of mercy. There is mercy to *sufferers*, and mercy to *offenders*. Mercy to sufferers is the disposition to *relieve;* mercy to offenders is the disposition to *forgive*. The two are infinitely united in God. Under His government all sufferers are offenders. It is only *as* offenders that they are sufferers; and when He pardons the offence, He cancels the sentence to suffering. And in every good man the two are united. They should, indeed, be regarded as one principle, operating in different departments. Now "the merciful man" whether considered in the one light or the other,—in exercising forgiveness or in relieving distress—effectually consults his own interests. He does so, even for present enjoyment. The divine sentiment of the Saviour—"It is more blessed to give than to receive," has its full application here. Jesus Himself, above all that ever lived on earth, experienced its truth. He "delighted in mercy." He came from above on an errand of mercy. The "merciful man" participates in the blessedness of the Son of God. . . . . He, moreover, procures favour with his fellow-men;—he "makes himself friends of the mammon of unrighteousness;" he causes society to feel an interest in him—to regard and treat him as its friend and benefactor. This is eminently gratifying and pleasing;—to know that in the hearts of our fellow-men our names are associated with affection and blessing, and that when we "fail," there will be some ready to receive us into "everlasting habitations," who had been

made friends by our kindness during their sojourn in the wilderness. But above all, the mercy of the merciful is associated with the favour and blessing of God. , . . But the cruel stirs up resentment, instead of conciliating favour; so that on every hand, in every face, he sees an enemy, from whom he dreads the fulfilment of the Saviour's maxim,—"With what measure ye mete it shall be measured to you again." How can he be happy? There is unhappiness in his very passions. The opposite of the character of God, they cannot but be associated with misery.—*Wardlaw.*

We are to preserve, as much as in us lies, these two parts of our nature, our souls and our bodies. . . . . He that may truly be called a kind man, is kind to his own soul, in comforting his own heart, and in granting thereunto the delight which may be received by sleep, by food, and the use of all things necessary and pleasant. Wherefore the counsel which the son of Sirach giveth is good and worthy to be followed: "Love thy soul, and comfort thine heart, and put heaviness far away from thee." (Ecclus. xxx. 21, etc.) On the contrary side the cruel person, either for niggardliness, or travail, or sorrow, pincheth, consumeth, or pineth his body. He ceaseth not to labour, nor saith, For whom do I travail and deprive my soul of good things.—*Muffet.*

The merciful man will ever find a merciful God. (Psa. xli. 1. Matt. v. 7). The widow of Sarepta and the woman of Shunem, each for their kiudness to the Lord's prophets received a prophet's reward. (2 Kings iv. 16. viii. 1, 6). The alms of Cornelius brought *good to his own soul.* (Acts x. 2, 4). Even now "God is not unrighteous to forget our work and labour of love." (Heb. vi. 10. Matt. x. 42). At the great day He will honour it before the assembled universe. (Matt. xxv. 34). . . . . Cain found his brother's murder an intolerable "*trouble to his flesh.*" (Gen. iv. 13, 14). The doom of Ahab and Jezebel was the curse of their own cruelty. (1 Kings xxii. 38. 2 Kings ix. 36, 37). The treasures of selfishness will eat as a canker in *our own flesh.* (Jas. v. 1, 3).—*Bridges.*

Why did not the wise man say, "he that is cruel troubleth his own soul?" He knew that a cruel man cares nothing for his soul. If you would obtain a hearing from the merciless man, say nothing about his soul. He values it less than his dog. But if you could convince him that his want of mercy will be hurtful to his flesh, he would think a little about his ways. And it is evident from Scripture, that his flesh, no less than his soul, is under a fearful curse.—*Lawson.*

His chief business is with and for himself: how to set all to rights within, how to keep a continual sabbath of soul, a constant composedness. He will not purchase earth with his loss of heaven. And inasmuch as the body is the soul's servant, and should therefore be fit for the soul's business—it ought not to be pinched or pined with penury or overmuch abstinence, as those impostors (Col. ii. 23), and our Popish merit-mongers, that starve their genius, and are cruel to their own flesh. They shall one day hear, "Who required these things at your hand?"—*Trapp.*

In every act that mercy prompts there are two parties who obtain a benefit,—the person in need, who is the object of compassion, and the person not in need, who pities his suffering brother. Both get good, but the giver gets the larger share. . . . The good Samaritan who bathed the wounds and provided for the wants of a plundered Jew, obtained a greater profit on the transaction than the sufferer who was saved by his benevolence. It is like God to constitute His world so. Even Christ himself, in the act of showing mercy, has His reward. . . . And a man cannot hurt his neighbour without hurting himself. The rebound is heavier than the blow. . . Such is the fence which the Creator has set up to keep man off his fellows. This dividing line is useful now to keep off the ravages of sin; but when perfect love has come, that divider, no longer needed, will be no longer seen. It is

like one of those black jagged ridges of rock that at low water stretch across the sand from the edge of the cultivated ground to the margin of the sea, an impassable, an unapproachable barrier: when the tide rises, all is level, and it is nowhere seen. This law of God, rising as a rampart between man and man, is confined to this narrow six thousand year strip of time. In the perfect state it will act no more, for want of material to act upon.—*Arnot.*

It is to his own soul that a merciful man doeth good. For it hath been well said, there is nothing so much a man's own as that which is given to the poor. That which men do, they do as to a poor soul, of as noble birth, and by nature of as great excellency as their own soul is, and so they do it, as it were, to their own. That which God doth, He doth to a sinful soul, degenerate from the birth which He gave it, and turned to be a rebel against Him. So that God is more ready to be good to His enemies, than we are to be good to ourselves.—*Jermin.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH—Verses 18—20.

Sowing and Reaping.

I. The life-work of the wicked contains within itself the germs of a three-fold bane, A deception, a death, and an abomination 1. A *deception.* The wicked man expects from his life-work that which it cannot possibly yield. It is against the moral constitution of the universe that a life of wickedness, or an evil undertaking in that life should yield satisfaction or any degree of real comfort to the worker. If a man sowed darnel in his field and expected to get a crop of wheat, he would be "working a deceitful work," that is, he would be a victim of self-deception. Nature cannot go out of her way to gratify his desires, to prevent his disappointment. The ungodly man lives a life of ungodliness—he "pursues evil," (ver. 19), he perversely chooses his own course, in other words, he "is of a froward heart," (ver. 20), and he promises himself some kind of advantage. But it cannot be, he is doomed to disappointment. However much *he lies* to work his work, the *issue of his work* will not lie. The earth will not lie concerning what kind of seed is placed in her furrows. If wheat is hidden there she will not disappoint the husbandman by returning him tares—if tares are sown she will render back of what has been entrusted to her care. She will speak the truth about the sowing by giving according to that which she has received. The sinner wants to make God a liar. "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die," is the Divine sentence. "Ye shall not surely die," is the assurance of the great deceiver. But the end will ever be what it was when man first suffered himself to entertain a doubt upon the matter. The man who builds himself a house upon the side of a volcano may promise himself, or may be promised by others, safety and peace, but unless he can quench the internal fires, that promise cannot be kept. The elements of destruction are ever at work under his very feet, the day will come when the devouring flame will burst forth and consume the work and the worker together. 2. *Death.* There are three kinds of death which are all the fruit of sin and which are developed out of one another as the blade, the corn in the ear, and the full corn are successive developments of one seed. There is that present paralysis of all the spiritual capabilities of the man which the Bible calls *carnal mindedness.* (Rom. viii. 6). Into this condition Adam came at once as soon as he worked his wicked work, and every son of his who lives a life of opposition to the Divine will is even now "dead" in this sense. The death of the body is but the outcome of this spiritual death, and although it is the portion of those who have been made spiritually alive, its character is

changed from a curse into a blessing. But the consummation of both these "deaths," is that irrecoverable paralysis of spirit, and that correspondent condition of body known as the "second death." This is what the man "pursues" who "pursues evil." 3. *An abomination.* A musical soul hates discord, a honest man hates dishonesty, the pure-minded turn with loathing from all impurity. Although God loves His creatures, He holds in abomination all that is unholy; a persistent frowardness—a constant refusal to fall in with the Divine plan of separating sin from the human soul will—it is here and elsewhere declared—result in the very creature whom He has made becoming an offence to his Divine Creator.

II. The life-work of the righteous will meet the certain reward of a Divine character and Divine delight. 1. *A Divine character.* He is now a partaker of spiritual life. A man's present healthy life is in itself a reward for any self-denial he may practise in observing the laws of health. There is a joy in living which a diseased man knows nothing of. So there is a present joy in being in a state of spiritual health, in the exercise of all the graces which are the fruit of the spirit, (Gal. v. 22), to which a man who is morally diseased and dead is an entire stranger. The spiritual life which is the harvest of "sowing righteousness" or uprightness, is a present reward. But the present spiritual life and health is a prophecy and an earnest of a completed and perfected life in the city of God. Righteousness is the very life of God, and in proportion as His children attain perfection of character they attain a more perfect life. (See Homiletics on chap. vii. 1, 4). 2. *Divine delight.* God is the Author and Fountain of all the righteousness in the universe, and He can but take pleasure in the work of His own hands. He delights in men of uprightness because He sees in them a reproduction of His own character. His "soul *delighted,*" (Isa. xlii. 1), in the work and character of His elected servant, His only-begotten Son, because He was, pre-eminently "the Righteous." (1 Isa. ii. 1). He delights also in His created sons in proportion as their character comes up to that perfect standard.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Ver. 18. 1. *Opposite characters.* The radical idea of the word righteousness seems to be that of equality, as the equilibrium of a pair of scales, etc. Hence, applied to moral or religious matters, it means a correspondence between our obligations on the one hand, and our performance on the other. But as the rightful claims of God and man are embodied in the Divine law, righteousness is considered as obedience and conformity to that law (Deut. vi. 25). And as this rule rather declares what it enjoins to be fit and proper, than makes it so, righteousness, in relation to the arrangement and constitution of things, is order, fitness, reality, truth. The radical meaning of the word here employed to denote the wicked man appears to be that of inequality, unfairness. Hence *wicked*, that is, *unequal*, balances (Mic. vi. 11). Agreeably to this idea, the word, when used in a moral sense, means a want of correspondence between duty and performance—nonconformity to the law of God. As righteousness is order, etc., so that which is the essence of wickedness, is disorder, incongruity, deception, a lie, an unsound principle. 2. *Opposite practices.* As is the tree, so is the fruit. Righteousness renders to God and to man their due. The unrighteous man robs God (Mal. iii. 8, 9) of time and talents which should have been devoted to His service. His work is—Deceitful (often) in its intention. Deception is the very object proposed. Deceitful (always) in its nature. Weighed in the balances, it is found wanting. 3. *Opposite results.* The deceiver himself often becomes the

dupe of his own delusions. By abuse the moral sense becomes blunted, etc., then follows what is described Isa. xliv. 18, 20; 2 Tim. iii. 13. Deceitful in its results—generally in this world. A tradesman who makes a point of telling profitable lies, is detected and disbelieved even when he speaks the truth, and, being deserted, comes to ruin.—Certainly in the world to come. Every man loves happiness; but sin will leave the sinner to weeping and wailing, etc. On the contrary, the righteous has a sure reward. His reward is—1. Certain. The perfections and word of God assure this. 2. Suitable; a reward of truth, a reward in kind, an increase of correct and pious feeling (Matt. v. 6, 8). Hence, 3. Satisfying (Psalm xvii. 15). 4. Abiding (Psa. xix. 9).—*Adapted from Sketches of Sermons.*

Although the ungodly person labour much, yet he doth a work which neither shall continue, nor bring any fruit unto him. The hypocrite giveth alms oftentimes to be seen by men, but he shall never be rewarded for his liberality by the Lord. The transgressor of God's law buildeth himself upon the show of an outward profession: such a house will fall. The vain teacher delivereth the straw and the stubble of error and vanity for true doctrine and sound divinity. This work cannot abide; the day will reveal it, and the fire will consume it.—*Muffet.*

None would be so rich and happy as the servants of Satan, were his promises all performed; but the misery is, that he will promise kingdoms, though he cannot, like Chaldean robbers, have a single sheep without the Divine permission; and what is worst of all, those that trust his promises are paid with fire and brimstone. The devil was a liar from the beginning, yet so infatuated are men, that they will trust him more than a God that cannot lie. The devil places pleasure and profit before them; God, by the threatenings of His word, sets an everlasting hell before them. But they will venture through it, in order to enjoy the vanities with which the great tempter allures them.—*Lawson.*

By necessity of his condition, every man's life, and every moment of it, is a sowing. The machine is continually moving over the field and shaking; it cannot, even for a moment, be made to stand still, so as not to sow. It is not an open question at all whether I shall sow or not to-day; the only question to be decided is, Shall I sow good seed or bad?—*Arnot.*

If righteousness be our main end, God will make it our best friend; nor will He, as the world has done, reward us with ciphers instead of gold.—*Bridges.*

Nothing is durable that a wicked man does except his crimes.—*A Clarke.*

Our wage is better than ordinary, the whole crop that we sow is given us for our labour, and therefore let us not be too hasty to reap it before it be ready. Good farmers indeed pay the ploughman sooner than the corn is ripe, but cheaper than the corn is worth: Whereas God bestoweth freely upon his labourers all that they have sown, it is their own, and therefore let them tarry till harvest, and they shall find their hire will far surmount their travail.—*Dod.*

Let us inquire why this gracious course of consecrating a man's self to God in the practice of godliness is called a *sowing* of righteousness. It is because of the likeness which is betwixt the practice of godliness, and the sowing of the seed—(1) *in some things which do go before the sowing.* Two things, then, have to be looked after, viz., *the preparation of the ground and the choice of seed.* In the sowing of righteousness the like to these two are of great behoof. The preparation of the heart and the choice of particulars belonging to a Christian course. (2) *In some things which do accompany the sowing, viz.. the time of sowing and the plenty of sowing.* When the season comes, the husbandman falls to his work, though, perhaps, it be not so seasonable as he could desire. So in spiritual business—the seed time for righteousness is this life: the opportunity must be taken when it comes. If I meet with many encum-

brances, shall I cease sowing and tarry for a calmer season? God forbid. Through with it I must, in season, and out of season. If I look for a better time, upon a sudden, there will be no time at all. Then the seedsman casts not in one seed alone, but a handful at once, one handful after another. To sow righteousness is to be rich in good works, to do good once and again, to join with faith virtue; with virtue knowledge, etc. Some do now and then drop out a good work. some little devotion to God, some petty office of mercy to men, but it is to no purpose in the world; no plenty in sowing, no fulness in reaping. (3) *In things which follow after sowing.* Great is the care that the seed put into the ground may thrive and prosper; the fields be hedged, the cattle be shut out, etc. It is ever and anon looked to, to see how it be going on. So it is in vain to have entered upon a good course if it be not continued. (Phil. iv. 1; Thess. iv. 1; 2 Pet. iii. 18; Heb. vi. 1). Thus we see that to sow righteousness is—1. The submitting a man's self to have his heart broken up by the power of God's word. 2. A diligent inquiry into the best way of pleasing God. 3. A pressing forward amid many encumbrances. 4. A striving to be fruitful in good works. 5. A watching with continued diligence.—*Hieron.*

Ver. 19. The course of rivers is to return to the sea, from whence they issue, and so righteousness, coming from the ocean of life, thither tendeth again, and evil, coming from the black sea of darkness, bendeth thither also. The difference which the passengers find is this: that in the waters of righteousness all the tempests and rough waves are in the river, but going on with it to the sea, there is nothing but calmness, security, and pleasantness, in which they bathe themselves for evermore. In the waters of wickedness the passengers find the river to be easy often, and smoothly to carry them along, but following the course of it, when they come to the sea, there are nothing but horrid storms, raging winds, and gaping gulfs of death, wherein they are for ever swallowed up.—*Jermin.*

Our principal pay will be in *life*, whereof we have part in hand by grace in our souls in this world, and the rest is behind until the pay day in the world to come. So that a sinner cannot discern the happiness of a Christian, nor conceive how God dealeth with him. For the comfort of a heart is a thing unknown to him, and the glorious life is hid with Christ in God, and shall not fully be seen before we appear with Him in glory.—*Dod.*

If righteousness is a seed, and is sown, and has a certain crop, then, in this way, "righteousness is unto life," but he that pursues evil does so to his death; that is, he grows in spiritual corruption, and that eternally. He grows in spiritual corruption, not because creatures are self-subsistent, and advance by laws implanted in themselves; but because sin is the punishment of sin, and advance by laws implanted in the Almighty. Eternal justice declares that sin must be given up to an advance in sin.—*Miller.*

It is frequently possible for men to screen themselves from the penalty of human laws, but no man can be ungrateful or unjust without suffering for his crime; hence I conclude that these laws must have proceeded from a more excellent legislator than man.—*Socrates.*

Ver. 20. Uprightness is a noble quality, for the Lord greatly delights in it. He boasted, if we may speak so, to the devil of Job's invincible integrity. Christ speaks of an upright Nathaniel as a wonder in the world. How wonderful is the grace of God, that takes such kind notice of grace so imperfect as that which may be found on earth.—*Lawson.*

"An abomination to Jehovah," as taught in this book, is a thing so radically full of mischief that it must be forced out of the way some day, by the very necessities of the universe.—*Miller.*

Not only those that pursue and practise wickedness, but they also that harbour it in their hearts, are hated of God. (Luke xvi. 15). A man may die of inward bleeding; a man may be damned for contemplative wickedness. The antithesis requires that he should say, such as are upright *in heart*. But He chooseth rather to say, *in their way*, not only because a good heart ever makes a good life, but to meet with such as brag of the goodness of their hearts when their lives are altogether loose and licentious. Whereas holiness in the heart, as the candle in the lantern, well appears in the body.—*Trapp.*

A pearl upon a dunghill is worth stooping for, and a gracious man or woman is worth looking after. Sure it is that God looks on them as His jewels, as a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, His delight, His dear children, and what not. It much concerns us then, to set a true value upon them, make a true estimate of them, and (as much as lieth in us) to be mindful of them, comfortable to them, and willing on all occasions to do them good.—*Spencer's Things New and Old.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 21.

DELIVERANCE FROM A CONFEDERATED OPPOSITION.

I. The wicked will certainly confederate against the good. They will join "hand in hand." 1. *On account of their nearness to each other.* If two nations who are near neighbours feel that the advance of one in possessions, in power, in wealth, will be the correspondent retrogression of the other, there will be a confederation of each nation. Their nearness to each other will necessitate a *defensive* confederation—most likely an *offensive* one, for each will feel that its existence depends upon a union of its members. The wicked and the good in the entire universe make but two hostile camps, although they are not separated into distinct nationalities or divided by geographical boundaries in this world. Some of each side are found in every nation, in every city, in every hamlet, often in the same house, and while this is the case there will be confederation on both sides. We have here to do only with that of the wicked. Hatred of the good is often the only bond of union between wicked men, they feel that, if the good are to be held back from possessing the earth, they must unite to oppose their work. Hatred of Christ united Herod and Pilate (Luke xxiii. 12). 2. *This confederation of the wicked is against both persons and principles.* The good fight only against the *principles* of the godless—they love their *persons*, the wicked hate both the *persons* and *principles* of the good. 3. *The wicked will confederate because of the tremendous issues depending upon the conflict.* If the principles that govern the good should triumph in the world, they instinctively feel that there will be no place left for their persons and principles. 4. *Confederation implies choice, confidence in numbers, thought, and a covenant to stand by each other.* Those who join hand to hand show that they choose each other's society—choice is a revelation of character—those who join hands with the wicked reveal that they are wicked also. It implies confidence in numbers. Numbers have a wonderful influence in begetting confidence. They inspire men with hope of success. It seems impossible that so many can be defeated. The fact that the wicked are in the majority in this world is often a strong point with them. This was the hope of Pharaoh (Exod. xiv. 6, 7) and of Sennacherib (Isa. xxxvi). The first Napoleon made it his boast that "Providence fought always on the side of great battalions." It likewise implies thought. They do not go to their work without taking counsel together as to the best means of accomplishing their ends. This "multitude of counsellors"

(ver. 14) is one of the advantages of confederation. It likewise implies covenant. There is something even in a wicked man that makes him slow to break an agreement—to violate a solemn promise. Even the wicked Herod would keep his oath to the daughter of Herodias, although the thought of the crime which he must commit to do so startled him for a moment (Matt. xiv. 9). All these things together make up the strength of the confederation of the wicked; but, notwithstanding,—

II. They will be defeated. "The seed of the righteous will be delivered." The end of all their planning and plotting was the destruction of the good, but it will not be. Another confederation has been formed which has in it a stronger Person than any in the confederation of the wicked. *God* is in it. God has chosen the good for His confederates because they have chosen Him (Isa. xli. 8, 9). Although the wicked have many on their side there are more in numbers on the other side (2 Kings vi. 16). Those unseen defenders of the good cause must be taken into account. God has thoughts and plans which embrace and overrule all the plans and schemes of the wicked. He has likewise made a covenant, and He cannot "alter the thing that has gone out of His lips" (Psalm xxxix. 34). Therefore the righteous may meet their foes with this challenge: "*Associate yourselves, O ye people, and ye shall be broken in pieces; gird yourselves, and ye shall be broken in pieces. Take counsel together, and it shall come to naught; speak the word, and it shall not stand; for the Lord is with us*" (Isa. viii. 9, 10).

III. The members of the wicked confederation will be punished. Men think that individuals will be lost in the crowd. They think there is safety in being one of many. But it is not so. God will deal with men as individuals. He will "render to *every man* according to His work" (Psalm lxii. 12). This is the word of the Lord to those who dare "to take counsel together against the Lord and against His anointed (Psalm ii. 2)—"*Judgment also will I lay to the line and righteousness to the plummet; and the hail shall sweep away the refuges of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding-place. And your covenant with death shall be disannulled, and your agreement with hell shall not stand; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, then ye shall be trodden down by it*" (Isaiah xxviii. 18). And this is His word to "the seed of the righteous,"—"*Behold they shall surely gather together, but not by me: whosoever shall gather together against thee shall fall for thy sake. Behold, I have created the smith that bloweth the coals in the fire, and that bringeth forth an instrument for his work; and I have created the waster to destroy. No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper, and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn*" (Isaiah liv. 15, 17).

ILLUSTRATION.

A very solemn method of taking an oath in the East is by joining hands, uttering at the same time a curse upon the false swearer. To this the wise man probably alludes. This form of swearing is still observed in Egypt and the vicinity; for when Mr. Bruce was at Shekh Hunner, he entreated the protection of the governor in prosecuting his journey, when the great people who were assembled came, and after joining hands, repeated a kind of prayer about two minutes long, by which they declared themselves and their children accursed, if ever they lifted up their hands against him in the tent, or the field, or the desert, or in case that he or his should fly to them for refuge, if they did not protect them at the risk of their lives. Or, sometimes, when two persons make a contract they bring the palms of their right hands into contact, and raise them to their lips and forehead At other times they rub the forefingers of their right hands together, repeating the words "right, right," or "together, together."—*Paxton's Illustration*.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

What many wicked cannot do, in saving one wicked man from wrath, that shall one godly man do for many. For not only *himself*, but his *seed* shall be delivered.—*Jermin.*

The best way for any man to do his children good, is to be godly himself.—*Dod.*

The "*seed of the righteous*" is not simply the children of righteous people, because it includes the parents themselves; not simply the parents, because it includes the children; not both parents and children, because many children perish; but the *seed* of the righteous in the sense (1) that righteousness runs in lines;—there is a generation of them that seek Him (Psa. xxiv. 6)—and (2) that the righteous, as far as they are righteous in the parental relation, will have godly children (Gen. xviii. 19; Titus i. 6). Righteousness itself (by its fidelities) has its offspring in Christian families. This is the favourite method of the Church's growth.—*Miller.*

Let sinners beware of the danger and the inevitable result of fighting against God! "He is wise in heart, and mighty in strength; who hath hardened himself against Him and prospered?" What fearful odds—the creature against the Creator! the sinner against his rightful Judge! the arm of flesh against the hand of Omnipotence. Though the wicked could league all creation with them in conspiracy and rebellion, how powerless the combination! "He that sitteth in the heavens should laugh; the Lord should have them in derision. He should speak unto them in His wrath, and vex them in His sore displeasure." Companions in sin shall be companions in banishment and suffering. "Forsake the foolish, then, and live." Choose another fellowship. Give your hand to God's people, giving your heart to God Himself.—*Wardlaw.*

When we hear of the wicked, we are apt to think that men of abandoned lives can alone be meant. Hence, when we read the text we have a picture brought before us of some overbearing tyranny, or some perfidious conspiracy. Such specimens of evil are doubtless intended; still, after all, much more is included in its meaning, much which we see before our eyes. Is not the world itself evil? Is it an accident, is it an occasion, is it but an excess, or a crisis, or a complication of circumstances, which constitutes its sinfulness? or, rather, is it not one of our three great spiritual enemies at all times, and under all circumstances? (See Jas. iv. 4; Ephes. ii. 2; Rom. xii. 2; 1 John ii. 15). Let us be sure, then, that that confederacy of evil which Scripture calls the world—that conspiracy against God of which Satan is the secret instigator—is something wider, and more subtle, and more ordinary than mere cruelty, or craft, or profligacy: it is that very world in which we are. It is not a certain body or party of men—it is human society itself.—*J. H. Newman.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 22.

PRECIOUS THINGS POSSESSED BY UNWORTHY OWNERS.

I. There is an analogy between gold and beauty. 1. *They are both gifts from God.* Whether a man possesses gold by inheritance or as the result of labour it is a gift from God. In the first instance no praise or blame is due to him for being a rich man, he can no more help it than he can help being in existence. And it is no less a gift from God when it has been earned by toil (see Homiletics on chap. x. 22). Beauty is also a gift from God, those who possess it deserve no honour for being beautiful, those who lack it are not to be despised on that account. 2. *Both have a certain value.* Gold may add much to a man him-

self, it increases his opportunities of spiritual and intellectual growth. It enables him to add much to the joy and comfort of others, to give them opportunities of growth also; a rich man can, if he pleases, serve his generation most effectually by a right use of wealth, and thereby increase a thousandfold his own happiness as well as that of others. Beauty is precious also. A woman who possesses physical beauty possesses an influence which she can use, if she pleases, as a lever to raise the moral tone of those who come under her influence. A beautiful woman may use her beauty so as to earn for herself a good reward, and gladden the hearts of her fellow-creatures. 3. *Both may make their possessors worthy of praise or blame.* Although neither praise nor blame can be attached to the *possession* of them, much may be to their *use*. He who uses gold as we have just indicated will receive the "well done," which is the highest praise that man can receive (Matt. xxv. 21). But if, like a sponge, he sucks up all the blessings that his gold can give into his own life, and leaves others unsuccoured and unblest, he will deserve, and he will receive, the sentence passed upon the rich by the Apostle James (chap. v. 1). So with the use or the abuse of beauty. For the right use of this gift of God, praise will be accorded to its possessor, for its abuse she will be called to render an account.

II. Gold and beauty, each in a wrong relation. An ornament of gold is a fitting and becoming adornment of the human person. But the same thing in a swine's snout is utterly out of place; the conjunction of the two strikes us as entirely incongruous. But it is not more so than to find a fair face united to an unlovely soul—to a soul which lacks the purity and modesty without which a woman is the most repulsive of God's creatures. For the word translated discretion evidently means *womanliness—virtue*, and when we see a beautiful face and find that it belongs to one with a foul spirit, we seem to see heaven and hell united in one person. The analogy goes further; the swine uses his snout to grovel in the mire in search of that which will satisfy his animal and swinish nature, he could put a jewel of gold to no other use. And the woman of the proverb does the same with her beauty. She debases this jewel of God's own workmanship to the vile use of satisfying her own grovelling and lawless desires, and thus renders the resemblance most striking.

ILLUSTRATION.

Nearly all the females of the East wear a jewel of gold in their nostrils, or in the septum of their nose; and some of them are exceedingly beautiful, and of great value. The Oriental lady looks with as much pleasure upon the jewel which adorns her nose as any of her sex in England do upon that which deck their ears.—*Roberts.*

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

We cannot, if we are ourselves right-minded,—if we have even good sense, apart from piety—admire such beauty. It hardly deserves the name. True loveliness consists not in the mere exquisite symmetry of features. It cannot exist without *expression*. To constitute true beauty, the countenance must be the index of the mind and heart—of what is intellectual and what is amiable.—*Wardlaw.*

The most direct proverb, in the sense of "*mashal*," or *similitude*, which has yet reached us.—*Plumptre.*

Beauty is an earthly jewel, and is a comely ornament, where God and nature have bestowed it. But if there be no discretion to consider whence it cometh, and by whom it is preserved; if there be no understanding to perceive what the nature of it is, to what at last it cometh, and how soon it fadeth, it is then but as a jewel of gold in a swine's snout.—*Jermin.*

God makes no more reckoning of sinful people without understanding, than of brute beasts without reason. Though they have human nature, and

carry the shape and form of men and women, with best show, yet if there be nothing but flesh and blood and sinfulness, no beauty nor bravery, make the best of them, is more acceptable to Him than is the basest of all the other creatures. It is a very homely comparison wherewith the Holy Ghost disgraceth the wicked in this book, and yet so true, that He toucheth it again in the New Testament (2 Pet. ii. 22).—*Dod.*

It is small praise, saith one, to have a good face and an evil nature. No one means, saith another, hath so enriched hell as beautiful faces. Art thou fair? saith an author; be not like an Egyptian temple, or a painted sepulchre. Art thou foul? let thy soul be like a rich pearl in a rude shell.—*Trapp.*

Beauty in the possession of an unthinking woman is more dangerous than a drawn sword in the hands of an idiot.

Beauty, unaccompanied by virtue, is as a flower without perfume.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 23.

We cannot understand the first clause of this verse to mean that *all* a righteous man's desires are good. 1. *History contradicts it.* Solomon must have known it was not true of his own father. David was a righteous man, but some of his desires were not only not good, but inhuman and devilish. Of all the good men of whom we read, whether in inspired or uninspired history, there is hardly one of whom some act is not recorded which reveals that their desires were sometimes sinful. 2. *Present experience contradicts it.* If those who are now looked upon as the salt of the earth were appealed to upon this matter they would emphatically deny that their desires were at all times and altogether good. But this we may affirm. I. *That the main desire of a righteous man is that he may be good, and that to all his fellow-creatures "good may be the final goal of ill."* II. *That there will be a period in his history when his desires will be "only" good.* In nature all things tend towards a perfection —a completion. If no untoward circumstance prevent, a tree or a flower will go on growing until it has attained to the perfectness to which it has been ordained. The Christian is destined to attain to perfectness of moral beauty. And when this completion is arrived at his desires will be *only* good. See 1 John iii. 1, 2, etc. (For full treatment of the verse see Homiletics on chap. x. verses 24 and 28.)

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Here we are to contrast a wish and an *assurance* (expectation) like that class of passages already alluded to where the last clause is intensive. The mere *wish* of the righteous is an intrinsic good; either *first*, because *all* actings of his heart, whether wise or unwise, will exercise him (Psalm lxxxiv. 7), and will speed him to his celestial state; or *secondly*, because the wish of a righteous man, *quoad* a righteous man, will be a righteous wish, and, therefore, will be good in itself, and will be sure to be gratified. The wish of a righteous man, like the spongelets of a tree, is that which goes searching for God's gifts, and is sure in the end to attain them. Therefore, emphasising "*only*" the wish of a righteous man will be made altogether to work for his good, however disappointed, and however kept low and troubled in the difficulties of the present life. But "*an assurance* of the wicked;" that is, a thing so grasped and reached as to be no longer a "*wish*," but a certainty; wealth, when it is made his, or honour, when it is actually grasped, will not only be lost; will not only be followed by

"*wrath*" in the sense of actually bringing it; but "*is wrath*" in the sense of being sent as punishment, and in the further sense that the sinner knew it all the time; and that his assurance, though it seemed to be a certainty of joy, was, lower down, a certainty of punishment; we mean by that an assurance (which he would confess if he were asked) that all his properties could end only in increasing retribution.—*Miller.*

"Desire is the wing of the soul, whereby it moveth, and is carried to the thing which it loveth as the eagle to the carcase, to feed itself upon it, and be satisfied with it" (Bishop Reynolds). The desire of the righteous must be good because it is God's own work (Psalm x. 17; Rom. viii. 26, 27). It must be *only good*, because it centres in Himself (Psalm lxxiii. 25; Isa. xxvi. 8, 9). . . . . The corrupt mixture of worldliness, selfishness, and pride is against our better will (Rom. vii. 15). In despite of this mighty assault—"Lord, all my desire is before thee; thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee" (Psalm xxxviii. 9; John xxi. 17).—*Bridges.*

Evil motions haunt his mind otherwhiles, but there they inhabit not. . . As the ferryman plies the oar, and eyes the shore homeward, where he would be, yet there comes a gust of wind that carries him back again, so it is oft with a Christian. But every man is with God so good as he desires to be. They are written in the book of life that do what they can, though they cannot do as they would.—*Trapp.*

Verse 23 and chap. x. 24. I. *What, or who is the righteous man?* 1. He is one whom God makes righteous by bestowing righteousness upon him—by counting the righteousness of His Son for his (Rom. v. 19). A man must be righteous by imputation before he can be made good, for the Spirit which makes our persons good—which sanctifies our nature—is the fruit of the righteousness which is by Jesus Christ. 2. God makes a man righteous by bestowing upon him a principle of righteousness. Men must have eyes before they can see, tongues before they can speak, and legs before they go: even so a man must be made habitually good and righteous before he can work righteousness. 3. The man is practically righteous. Fruits show outwardly what the heart is principled with. Mark how the apostle words it: "Being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness" (Rom. vi. 22). The works flow from the heart of a righteous man—of a man that before he had any good work had a twofold righteousness imparted to him—one to make him righteous before God, the other to principle him to be righteous before the world. II. *What a righteous man desires.* A righteous man is sometimes taken for his best part, or as he is a second creation, as in 2 Cor. v. 17; Col. iii. 10, etc. In which places the sinful flesh, the old man, the outward man—all of which are corrupt according to the deceitful lusts—are excluded, and so pared off from the man, that he is righteous. As Paul in Rom. vii. 15–17 severs himself in twain,—himself as he is spiritual from himself as he is carnal—so the righteous man here must be taken for the I that would do the good, the I that hates the evil. There is a spring that yieldeth water good and clear, but the channels through which this water comes to us are muddy and foul: now, of the channels the water receives a disadvantage, and so come to us savouring of what came not with them from the fountain of grace—the Holy Ghost—but from the channels through which they must pass. The desires of a righteous man, then, are comprised under, (1) those they would have accomplished here, and (2) those which they know cannot be enjoyed until after death. And the first are comprised under communion with God in spirit and the liberty of enjoyment of His ordinances. And the second are comprehended under the desire of that presence of the Lord which is personal,

and their desire to be in that country where their Lord personally is. These last have a long neck: for they look over the brazen wall of this, quite into another world. They breed a divorce betwixt the soul and all inordinate love of the world; their strength is such, that they are ready to dissolve that sweet knot of union betwixt body and soul and to grapple with the King of Terrors. These desires do deal with death, as Jacob's love to Rachel did with the seven long years which he was to serve for her. III. *What is meant by granting the righteous man's desires.* It is to accomplish them. There is nothing that God likes of ours better than he likes our true desires. For, indeed, true desires are the smoke of our incense, the flower of our graces, the vital part of the new man. Right desires jump with God's mind; they are the life of prayer; they are a man's kindness to God; (chap. xix. 22) and they which will take him up from the ground, and carry him after God to do His will, be the work never so hard. Is it any marvel, then, that God has promised they shall be granted?—*Bunyan.*

The desire of all, as it is desire, is only *of good;* but as desire is accomplished, so it is the desire of the righteous only that is good, and their desire accomplished is *good only.* It is simply good, there is no mixture of evil added to it, yea, it is not only all good, but all the good that desire can wish.—*Jermin.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 24—26.

THE LIBERAL AND THE NIGGARDLY MAN.

We have here a twofold contrast under two similitudes—

I. A man who withholds what he ought to give out. "He withholdeth more that is meet—he withholdeth corn" when he ought to sell it. 1. *He is a sinner against the law of necessity which runs through all human things.* The earth will only yield of her good things by first having good things cast into her bosom. The farmer who is sparing of labour and of money in the tillage of his fields will never be a rich man. The same principle is at work in the mart and on the exchange. There must of necessity be a wise scattering of wealth before there is any increase. 2. *He is a sinner against the Divine ordination and commandment.* When God organised the Hebrew commonwealth he ordained that the "poor should not cease out of the land" (Deut. xv. ii), and that they should be helped by the rich. The same principle was proclaimed by Christ, when he said "Freely ye have received, freely give" (Matt. x. 8), God has given to you that you may give to others. This is the fast that Jehovah has chosen, "*Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thine house? When thou seest the naked that thou cover him, and that thou hide not thyself from thy own flesh*" (Isa. lviii. 7). 3. *He is, as a necessity, a sinner against his fellow creatures.* He sins against their need. In times of scarcity those who have abundance and will not *give* of their abundance are guilty, how much more those who have the material to feed the people and will not even *sell* it, but withhold it to raise the price. Such men are robbers and murderers. They murder by refusing the means of life. 4. *He is a sinner against himself.* He will not be so rich as he would have been if he had used what he had in accordance with the laws of nature and morality. A man who does not put his money out to a lawful use cannot make more by it. More than this, he is a stranger to that blessedness of which Christ spake when He said "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts xx. 35). But this is not all, he is under a Divine and human curse. God's ban is upon him. If a tree is constantly receiving from the

fatness of the earth and the heavens and yet brings forth no fruit for the service of man, it is marked for the woodman's axe. The message of God to such cumberers of the ground is, *Go to, now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you. Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and your silver is cankered, and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire* (Jas. v. 1-3). "The people shall curse him." How can they do otherwise? They feel that he has robbed them of their rights when he will not even sell what they are willing to buy.

II. The man who gives out liberally of that which he possesses. He yields first of all to the necessity of things. He scatters his wealth wisely in order to increase it. But this is his lowest motive and his smallest blessing. So far as mere trading goes this scattering to increase is a mere matter of necessity. He knows he must cast a bushel of corn into the ground if he would have it increase—that he must spend a thousand pounds before he can gain ten thousand. In this way he shows that he has faith in the ordinary law of multiplication. But he goes further than this. "He selleth corn" at a fair price, when, by withholding it, he might exact more. This is a sample of all his dealings with his fellow-men. He does not take advantage of their necessities to enrich himself (see Homiletics on verse 1). He goes beyond this—he not only *sells* at a fair price, but he is a *giver*. He scatters in the way of giving out of his abundance, "looking for nothing again" (Luke vi. 35). But he is a great gainer. 1. *He will very likely get richer in material wealth by giving.* This is not positively affirmed in the text "there is that scattereth and yet increaseth." But he will certainly never be the poorer, for he makes God his creditor. "He that hath pity on the poor lendeth to the Lord" (chap. xix. 17). 2. *He will certainly be richer in more precious wealth.* "He will be watered himself." He will have a double blessing. Men will call down blessings on his head. Those who partake of his wealth will give him in return love, honour, and respect. God will add to his personal character that which will increase tenfold the blessedness of his existence. He will, according to the apostolic promise, "*make all grace to abound toward him, that he, having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work.*" He will "*increase the fruits of righteousness*" (2 Cor. ix. 6–11), and water his soul with His own Divine influence. "*If thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noon-day: and the Lord shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones; and thou shalt be like a watered garden, whose waters fail not*" (Isa. lviii. 11).

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Vers. 24, 25. Is not this just one of the appropriate ways of putting faith to the test on God's part, and showing its reality on ours? Is it not precisely the defectiveness of this faith that makes us timid, cautious, parsimonious in giving? ever fearing that we may stint ourselves and feel the want of what we expend on suffering humanity and on the cause of God? Is it not thus by unbelief that we are tempted to sow sparingly? And ought it to be, that the husbandman trust more to the laws of nature than the Christian does to the covenant of his God.—*Wardlaw.*

The Jews in Haggai's time had no prosperity till they made the house of the Lord their chief object (Hag. i. 6, 9-11; ii. 15-19). So far is the true wealth of the withholder from being increased by withholding what is meet to be given for the glory of God and the good of man, that he is at last deprived even of that which he had (Matt. xiii. 12).—*Fausset.*

Men may scatter in improvidence and sin, and it tendeth to poverty (chap. xxi. 17). But the man of God, "dispersing abroad" the seed of godliness (Ps. cxii. 9), consecrating his substance and influence to the Lord, "as he has opportunity, doing good unto all men" (Gal. vi. 10), shall receive a plentiful increase.—*Bridges.*

The liberal man will ever be rich; for God's providence is his estate, God's wisdom and power are his defence, God's love and favour are his reward, and God's word is his security. *Barrow.*

The liberal soul is made fat in the healthful vigour of practical godliness. The minister is refreshed by his own message of salvation to his people. The Sunday-school teacher learns many valuable lessons in the work of instruction. The Christian visitor's own soul glows in carrying the precious name of Jesus to a fellow-sinner. Every holy temper, every spiritual gift, every active grace is increased by exercise. *Bridges.*

Give, and thou shalt receive. John Howard, when he grew sad about his piety, put on his hat and went about among the poor. He came back a gainer. He diverted his mind from his own interests, and yet promoted them in a higher assurance. Religion being benevolence, as well as a love of holiness, doing good to others is a philosophic way of ripening it in ourselves. Verse 24 has its Poor Richard phrase as well as a higher one. Being "penny wise and pound foolish" is understood even in our shops. But the grand sense is evangelical. "*Inserviendo allius consumor*" may be true of poor impenitents, but a candle is no emblem for a Christian. He is a glorious sun who, by some strange alchemy, brightens by shining. *Watereth* refers to the ground, or to animals. "Giving plenty to drink" is the meaning of the word as applied to men.—*Miller.*

Wherefore doth the Lord make your cup run over, but that other men's lips might taste the liquor? The showers that fall upon the highest mountains should glide into the lowest valleys.—*Secker.*

Man is God's image, but a poor man is
Christ's stamp to boot; both images regard.
God reckons for him, counts the favour His:
Write, so much given to God; thou shalt be heard.
Let thy alms go before, and keep heaven's gate
Open for thee, or both may come too late.

The last clause of ver. 25 is literally *he that raineth shall himself become a river.* The water that falls in refreshing and fertilising irrigation is not lost, but becomes a fair stream. So the bounty of the liberal man, which rains down blessings, will flow on for ever in a beautiful river.—*Wordsworth.*

The well-being of all is concerned in the right working of each. One necessarily affects for good or evil all the rest in proportion to the closeness of its relations and the weight of its influence. You draw another to keep him from error: that other's weight which you have taken on keeps you steadier in your path. You water one who is ready to wither away; and although the precious stream seems to sink into the earth, it rises to heaven and hovers over you, and falls again upon yourself in refreshing dew. It comes to this, if we be not watering we are withering.—*Arnot.*

Poor men are not excluded from the grace and blessing of being merciful, though they attain not to the state and ability of being wealthy. Mercy is not placed with money in the purse, but dwelleth with loving-kindness in the heart. He that can mourn with such as do mourn, he that can pray for them that be in distress, has a "soul of blessing."—*Dod.*

St. Gregory applieth the words particularly unto ministers, and saith, He that by preaching doth outwardly bless, receiveth the fatness of inward increase. And to this sense the Chaldee reads it, saying, "He that teacheth shall himself also learn." And then the former part of the verse may be taken thus, the soul that bestoweth abroad the blessings of a wise instruction shall profit much in his wisdom, according to a common saying among

the Jews, "I have profited more by my scholars than by all things else."—*Jermin.*

Bounty is the most compendious way to plenty; neither is getting, but giving, the best thrift. The five loaves in the Gospel, by a strange kind of arithmetic, were multiplied by a division and augmented by subtraction. So will it be in this case. St. Augustine, descanting upon Psa. lxxvi. 5, says, "Why is this?" "They found nothing in their own hands, because they feared to lay up anything in Christ's hands." "The poor man's hand is Christ's treasury," saith another Father.—*Trapp.*

Verse 26. He that withholdeth corn holdeth, as it were, the gracious hand of God, yea, pulleth it back by his covetousness, when God in bounty hath stretched it forth unto a land. . . . . Now, what is said of a countryman concerning his corn, let the citizen also mark concerning his wares, "Let not profit overcome honesty, but let honesty overcome profit." And what is said to the citizen let the minister also observe, and bind not up by a damnable silence that good word which may profit many.—*Jermin.*

The point of antithesis apparently fails only to give stronger security to the blessing. The *curse* comes directly from the *people;* the *blessing* from *above.—Bridges.*

The prevailing maxim of the world, ever since the first murderer gave utterance to the tendencies of human nature, after its fall, in the question, "Am I my brother's keeper?" has been, "*Every man for himself.*" The identity of human nature in all ages is stamped upon the book of Proverbs. What presented itself to view in Solomon's days is no rarity still. . . . There can hardly be a more affecting exemplification than this of the power of an avaricious disposition in hardening the heart.—*Wardlaw.*

Such a man, like a corrupt, imposthumated member, would draw all the nourishment to himself, and cares not, though the other parts of the body perish. This oak, which will suffer no small trees to thrive near it, will in time fall with the breath of so many curses.—*Swinnock.*

Modern political economy may have taught us that even here the selfishness of the individual does, in the long run, by limiting consumption, and maintaining a reserve, promote the general good, but it is no less true that men hate the selfishness and pour blessings upon him who sells at a moderate profit. Our own laws against forestalling and regrating schemes for a maximum price of bread, as in the famine of the French Revolution, histories like that of M. Maulins, legends like that of Bishop Hatto and the rats, are tokens of the universality of the feeling.—*Plumptre.*

Literally, "breaketh it," like Joseph to his brethren and the people in Egypt. In a spiritual sense this verse may be applied specially to pastors and to churches. He that withholdeth corn—he that keepeth back from others the bread of life, which is the Word of God, the Holy Scriptures—the food of the soul, he shall be accursed; but blessings are upon him that fully and freely dispenses it.—*Wordsworth.*

To be an object of aversion among his neighbours is a heavy infliction upon a human being. No man can despise it. . . . . This, in the last resort, is the protection of the poor and the punishment of the oppressor. The mightiest man desires the blessing of the people, and dreads their curse. Wealth would be a weapon too powerful for the liberty of men, if he who wields it were not confined within narrow limits by the weakness of humanity, common to him with the meanest of the people.—*Arnot.*

Here is consolation to them that bring an upright heart to selling, though they cannot be large in giving: therein they do a service to God and perform a work of love to their neighbour.—*Dod.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 27.

DILIGENT SEEKERS.

I. An object worthy of search—"Good." There is. 1. Material, temporal good. The human race need no exhortation to stimulate them to go in quest of this good. The child begins his search after this good as soon as he is conscious of need and finds himself in possession of power to seek it. And until old age these good things are sought without any admonition from God to lead a man to seek them. 2. But there is a higher good—the good which ministers to the spiritual nature and forms a holy character—the good of which Christ speaks when He says, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness." (Matt. vi. 23). Men need to be exhorted to seek this good, and the Bible puts before them every kind of motive to stimulate men to the search—motives drawn from the happiness of a future heaven and a future hell, and from the present heaven or hell which will result from the search or from the neglect of this true good. Men are, as a rule, too much occupied with seeking the lower and the transitory good to seek that which is spiritual and eternal—that Supreme Personal Good—God Himself. God is the Good that the soul needs because He unites in Himself all that can minister to our better nature. The soul needs truth—and God is truth. The soul needs something above itself to worship, to love, to obey. There is nothing can supply this need but the living God.

II. How this good is to be sought. "Diligently." The diligence will be in proportion to the desire. The word here translated diligently is the same as that translated "early" in chap. viii. 16. (See Homiletics on that passage).

III. The reward of diligent seekers after real good. "Favour." 1. Of God. He loves to see men value that upon which He sets value, viz., their own spiritual and eternal gain. 2. Of good men *always*. Of bad men *often*. For the diligent seeking of this highest good does not make a man selfish—on the contrary, the more earnest he is in the search, the more will he lay himself out to serve his fellow-men. In this the contrast is marked between the diligent search after material and spiritual good. The sentiment of the verse is the same as that in chap. iii. 4 (see Homiletics on that verse).

IV. A most unworthy object of search. "Mischief." Understanding this of evil in general which is most mischievous in its working and in its results, we remark—1. That it requires no great diligence to work moral mischief towards a man's self. To abstain from seeking good is to seek and to find mischief. To "neglect salvation" (Heb. ii. 3) is enough to ruin. 2. That the man who plots to work mischief to another often sets the seekers after good an example of diligence. How much of planning—what an expenditure of thought and activity is often put forth to ruin another! 3. That the man who seeks mischief is certain to find it. It will not wait even to be found—it will "come" to meet him. But there may and will be some amount of disappointment. If he seeks his own ruin he will certainly succeed, but if he seeks to do another a mischief, he may miscarry, but the intention will be fulfilled in himself. Whether he succeeds in harming another man or not, it is a law of moral gravitation that "His mischief shall return upon *his own head* and his violent dealing shall come down *upon his own pate*" (Psalm vii. 16).

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

There is no negative existence. Man is born for action. All of us are living with a stupendous measure of vital activity for *good* or for *mischief*. Man was never intended—least of all the Christian — to be idle. Our Divine Master "went about doing good." He is a counterfeit who does not live after this pattern. Usefulness is everything. We must not rest in life received, nor must we wait to have it brought to us. We must seek it.—*Bridges.*

From the last proverbs it has appeared that going after our own selfish gain, is really going after evil. Joy is innocent in itself; and yet, gone after absorbingly, it is an evil end. "Whosoever shall seek to save his life, shall lose it" (Luke xvii. 33) Solomon, therefore utters a most philosophic truth when he says "He that diligently seeketh good," etc., that is, who forgets himself, and is *early* (for that is the original sense) after what is intrinsically right and holy, that man is really the person who is seeking or *hunting up* favour; that is, if he could really gain it by hunting it up directly, and for his selfish good, he could not gain it more directly than by forgetting it, and striving for what is pure. (See Matt. vi. 33). Then follows the antithesis. He that seeks mischief, etc., as one is conscious that he does when he turns his heart selfishly even after innocent joys. He goes after that which may in itself be innocent, like money, or like the support of life; in a way that to his own conscience makes it confessedly evil, shall have it "come to him" at the end of his course, infallibly as evil.—*Miller.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 28.

TRUST IN RICHES AND TRUST IN GOD.

I. The trust in riches springs, 1. *From the fact that gold, and what it can do for us, is within reach of the senses.* Unless the bodily senses are counterbalanced by the moral—the spiritual—sense, they have a tendency to shut us in upon the seen—to shut out the unseen. This is why men make to themselves gods that they can see and carry about with them. The rich man can look upon his gold and upon all that it has purchased for him, his mansion, his lands, his sumptuous table, his obsequious servants. All these things are daily before his eyes, and if his spiritual sight is not keen, they are very likely to become his confidence. 2. *From the fact that gold can do very much for men.* It can afford him opportunities of the best education. Gold can place the son of a tradesman side by side with that of the nobleman in this respect. It can surround him with all the refining influences of life. It will open to him positions of power and influence, its magic power will surround him with friends. When a man feels that he owes all these good things to gold, he is very prone to trust in it. 3. *From the fact that gold is so universal in its influence in the present world.* There is no place upon the globe, where there are human beings, where gold, or what gold can purchase, will not do something for a man. No monarch has such a wide dominion or so many subjects as this King *Gold.*

II. But he that trusts in riches will find them fail him. 1. *Because he is more than the object of his trust.* Man is more than gold because it was made for him and not man for gold. God made it to be his servant, but when a man makes it the object of his supreme hope and confidence, he inverts the Divine order and becomes its slave. And man needs something more than himself to be the object of his trust. 2. *Because there are comforts for existence that gold cannot buy.* Faith in a living God, a good conscience, hope for the

future, present peace and rest of soul cannot be purchased for all the gold of the Indies. Nebuchadnezzar could make an image of gold, but all his riches could not purchase the faith and godly courage of the three Hebrew youths. The rich man in hell needed comfort that all his earthly wealth could not have purchased. 3. *Because the only Being who can supply man's deepest needs cannot be bribed.* Pardon of sin cannot be "gotten for gold neither shall silver be weighed for the price thereof." A holy character "cannot be valued with the gold of Ophir, with the precious onyx or the sapphire. The gold and the crystal cannot equal it: and the exchange of it shall not be for jewels of fine gold." (Job xxviii. 16, 17). The Holy Ghost—that "gift of God," cannot be "purchased with money." (Acts viii. 20). A golden key will not open the gate of heaven. Therefore "*Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God.* (1 Tim. vi. 17).

III. The righteous man shall not fall, but flourish as a branch, because as a branch in a tree he is in connection with life. Gold is a dead thing, but the God of the good man is a Living Person, a Being who can understand and supply all his soul's need—a Being who is not only King of the present and the seen, but of the future and of the unseen. "*I am the vine, ye are the branches.*" "*Because I live, ye shall live also*" (John xiv. 19, xv. 5). He shall not only *live*, but *flourish*—"his leaf shall not wither"—"he shall bring forth fruit in his season" (Psa. i. 3). The cause of the *branch* being laden with fruitfulness and beauty is because of its connection with the *root*. *Trust* is the link between the creature and the Creator, which makes the one a partaker of the fulness of the other. "*Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is. For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit*" (Jer. xvii. 7, 8).

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

I have read of one that, upon his dying bed, called for his bags, and laid a bag of gold to his heart, and then cried out, "Take it away, it will not do, it will not do!" There are things that earthly riches cannot do. They can never satisfy Divine justice, nor pacify Divine wrath, nor quiet a guilty conscience. And till these things are done, the man is undone.—*Brooks.*

As sheep that go in fat pastures come sooner to the slaughter-house than those which are kept upon the bare common: so, likewise, rich men, who are pampered with the wealth of this world, sooner forsake God, and therefore are sooner forsaken of God than others.—*Cawdray.*

He that trusts in riches may trust in that which may not disappoint him. That is, it may remain great, and may follow him to the grave. But while his riches are piling up, he himself is withering away. It is not the rich, but they that *trust in riches* (Mark x. 24). The truly important thing is the man himself; and while the unregenerate *falls*, or decays, the righteous, even without money, prospers. He grows from within. That is *he* grows, and not his money.—*Miller.*

Be not proud of riches, but afraid of them, lest they be as silver bars to cross the way to heaven. We must answer for our riches, but our riches cannot answer for us.—*Mason.*

Riches were never true to any that trusted in them. The rich churl that trusted and boasted that he had "much goods laid up in store" for many years, when, like a jay, he was pruning himself in his boughs, came tumbling down with the arrow in his side.—*Trapp.*

Riches are of a falling nature, now

they fall to a man, now they fall from him, now they fall to this man, now to that, now to another. There is no holdfast of them, and less holdfast by them. He, therefore, that trusteth in them shall fall, fall into their hands and power, who seek his hurt and mischief, because not trusting in God, he receiveth no succour from Him.—*Jermin.*

Good men have the Lord Jesus Christ for their root, and God the Father to dress and keep them, therefore the drought of adversity shall not hurt them, nor the dews of wholesome prosperity fail them. They shall have safety for their bodies, graces for their souls, competency for their state, and all good furtherances for their everlasting glory.—*Dod.*

Money, thou bane of bliss, and source of woe,
Whence com'st thou, that thou art so fresh and fine?
I know thy parentage is base and low:
Man found thee poor and dirty in a mine.

Surely thou didst so little little contribute
To this great kingdom, which thou now hast got,
That he was fain, when thou wert destitute,
To dig thee out of thy dark cave and grot.

Then forcing thee, by fire he made thee bright;
Nay, thou hast got the face of man: for we
Have with our stamp and seal transferred our right:
Thou art the man, and man but dross to thee.

Man calleth thee his wealth, who made thee rich,
And while he digs out thee, falls in the ditch.

Herbert.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 29.

Foolish Home Rulers.

"There are many ways of troubling one's own house." Many sparks fly from one anvil, but one is sufficient to set a house on fire. Some home-destroyers emit many sparks, but one evil habit or temper is enough to consume all the peace of home-life. A man may trouble his house by—1. *Selfishness.* When a dry sponge is placed in a vessel of water, it will soak up every drop of water that it can hold, and very probably will leave the vessel empty. So the selfish head of a household will absorb all the comforts of the household—take to himself all the luxuries and enjoyments which ought to be distributed among all its members. 2. *Hasty temper.* A human father and husband that will complain at every trifle and blaze into a passion when nothing has been done or said worthy of notice, will be a great troubler of his house. He will not be heeded when there is real occasion for his displeasure. The perpetual rattle of a daily siege so dulls the ear of the soldier that he does not notice the roar of the cannon on the day of special battle. So the members of a household who are always being subjected to the rattle of an ungovernable tongue make no account of reproof when there is really an occasion for it. 3. *A perpetual assertion of authority.* There can be no joyful obedience in a family where its head is always insisting upon the fact that he is their master. Such a constant proclamation of right to rule makes that a bondage which would otherwise be a glad service. 4. *Prodigality or niggardliness.* He who wastes that which belongs to his children is a robber, and so is he who from avaricious motives deprives them of those home comforts with which he is able to furnish them. These are but samples of the many ways in which a man may trouble his house—ways which are not altogether unknown in some homes whose head is a professor of godliness. Such a man is a far-reaching curse. The members of such a home scatter themselves abroad in the world carrying with them none of the blessed influences that they ought to have received from their home-life, and are very likely in their turn to become the troublers of *their* houses. The gold receives its form and polish, its image and superscription at the mint. Home

is the mint where the value of the character for its entire future is often impressed upon it. The child generally bears the image and superscription of his parent.

II. Such a troubler is a fool. 1. *He can reap no possible advantage by it.* To "inherit the wind" is to inherit cold cheer. A wintry wind is poor comfort for a man with little raiment on a cold night. Wind is an unsatisfying substitute for food to a hungry man. But a man in such a condition is an apt illustration of a man in the winter of life who has forfeited that love and honour which would have been the reward of a different course of conduct. 2. *He shall go down in social position.* The man who has ruled his household well must win the respect and confidence of those outside of it. It is an inevitable consequence that he will go up in the estimation of his associates while one of the opposite character will go down and so "be servant to the wise of heart."

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

He that troubles his own house in any form of impenitence; he that takes the trouble to live without the gospel; he that chases wealth when he admits that it will breed him vengeance; he that goes through the self-denials of the world to accumulate worldly benefits which he knows are mischiefs to his soul, is absolutely "fool" enough to be the "servant" in all these trials, and that through eternal ages, of wiser and better creatures.—*Miller.*

He shall leave at last but the wind of his breath to deplore his folly and to beg help for his misery. St. Gregory taketh the latter part of the verse that a fool serveth the wise in heart even by ruling over him and oppressing him, for he advanceth him to a better state and condition of goodness.—*Jermin.*

He that would not undo himself, let him not undo his family and domestic affairs. It nearly concerneth a householder to know that his house is laden with his whole estate, that his people sail together with him in the same vessel, for his use.—*Dod.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 30.

The Winner of Souls.

I. Souls can be won to God and goodness. 1. *There is in every man a natural light to which to appeal.* If a sick man has something in his constitution upon which the physician can fix as a basis of operation, there is hope of recovery. But where the constitution is utterly and entirely bad, the very effort of the physician is a proof of his lack of wisdom. Man is morally diseased, but he is not so depraved as to make his being won to God a hopeless attempt. There is in him a moral base of operation, he has a conscience which is more or less enlightened. Men are, acccording to the highest authority, "a law unto themselves," "that which may be known of God is manifest in (or to) them." (See Rom. i. 19, 20, ii. 14.) They would not be "without excuse," as the Apostle there declares that they are, if they had no moral consciousness. 2. *The very existence of the Bible proves that man is not hopelessly lost.* Wise men do not waste words and efforts where they know they would be thrown away. They do not set on foot plans to help those for whom they know there is no hope. A wise physician will not harass his patient and waste his own energies when he knows there is no possibility of cure. It is kinder to let him die in peace. God is too wise and too kind to send man a revelation which he knows would be useless to him. He would not tantalise him with hopes which could not be realised. 3. *The history of Christ confirms this view.* He claimed

to come to this earth for the special purpose of seeking and saving men. He was pre-eminently a winner of souls. There can be but one explanation of the Incarnation. 4. *The moral difference in men is another proof.* For every effect there is a cause. That there is an immense difference in the character of men is admitted by all; and the difference is that some have been won from sin to God.

II. Souls can only be won. There are two kinds of power in the universe —force and persuasion. The mother who desires her child to take a certain place may attain her end in two ways—she may take the child in her arms and carry it where she desires, or she may use moral suasion and induce the child to fall in with her wishes by the exercise of its own free will. The thing may be done either by strength of muscle or by the strength of love. Souls cannot be dealt with in the first way. The soul can only be won *to* God by the same kind of power as it was won *from* God, viz., by that of persuasion. If the tempter had tried force he would have failed with our first parents. He knew human nature too well to attempt the use of such means. Force is of no avail to bring about a *friendship*, and the winning of a soul is bringing about a *friendship* between man and God. Therefore the Apostle "beseeches" and "prays" men to be reconciled to God (2 Cor. v. 20). To be won to God is to be won to *service.* Two kinds of service may be rendered to a human parent or ruler. There is a service of the *body only* which is prompted by fear, and there is the service of the *whole man* which is the fruit of love. God must have the latter or none (Isa. i. 11, etc.,) hence the soul must be "drawn," "constrained," by the power of moral force. (See Hosea xxi. 4; John xii. 32; 2 Cor. v. 11, 14).

III. Souls are won by fruit. Human nature will not be influenced by words without actions. The actions which make up a holy life are here called *fruit.* When two men are at variance and hatred is deeply rooted, he who would be a peace-maker must *be* something as well as *say* something. Words alone will not kill enmity—there must be correspondent deeds. This constituted our Lord Jesus Christ the great Reconciler—that He brought forth the fruits of holiness and self-sacrifice, and so gave weight to His words of persuasion. So many souls have been won by him because so much fruit was brought forth by him. And all who would win souls must in their measure do likewise. In this sense they must obey His injunction and be made partakers of His promise: "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men" (Matt. iv. 19).

IV. The fruit that wins souls will be a "tree of life" both to the winner and to those who are won. The vine-dresser has joy in rearing his fruit, and the eater has joy in partaking of its sweetness. When he who seeks to win souls brings one to taste the sweets of godliness for himself, there is joy for both. The righteous man is a "tree of righteousness," hence he is himself a "tree of life." Others partake of his fruit and live unto holiness, and become fruit-bearing trees in their turn. And in this sense "he that reapeth and he who soweth rejoice together," and the precious harvest is a "tree of life"—an undying source of soul-satisfaction to both.

V. He who thus wins souls is a wise man. He saves men from a present and real misery. The end of all practical wisdom is to elevate the human race —to lift men out of misery and degradation—to solve the problems of every day social life. The man who wins a soul to God is a truly scientific man—he has reduced his moral science to practice in his own life, and then has brought it to bear upon the lives of others. He is a wise general who can turn the guns of the enemy against the foe. He who wins a soul can teach a man how to turn the forces that have been against him into powers and influences that shall work for him. He is a wise financier who can devise means by which a man can free himself from debt. The winner of souls can show his fellow-man how to be freed from moral debt. He is a wise physician who, by healing one man of a deadly pestilence, prevents the spread of disease. The man who turns

another from the error of his ways, not only "saves a soul from death," but hides a multitudes of sins (Jas. v. 20) by, in some measure, lessening the increase of sin in the universe.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

I. Christians are a blessing to the world. 1. *There is the influence of personal character, showing what religion is, viz., a living principle in the hearts of the faithful, which must spread its radiance.* It may be said of a good man, as it was said of Christ, "He could not be hid" (Mark vii. 24). 2. *There is the force of the great principles they advocate—Freedom, Education, etc.* They raise, in this way, the standard of public opinion. 3. *There are their habits of active beneficence.* **II. To win souls the highest wisdom is requisite.** 1. *Consider the preciousness of the object—souls.* Made in the image of God, and designed to reflect His glory. Of infinite value in the esteem of Him who came to redeem them. 2. *How greatly they are endangered by sin, held captive by Satan, in bondage by the world, entrenched in long habits of evil.* The soul, in its present depraved state, is not inclined to seek God, nor anxious to obtain deliverance. 3. *The difficulty is increased by the shortness of the time and the limitation of the means at our command.* The preacher has only the Sabbath; Satan and the the world have all the week wherein to exert their influence. It is more or less so with all who endeavour to win souls.—*S. Thodey.*

He may begin as a "leaf" or "branch" (verse 28), but he ends as a "tree." The tree of life made the partaker of it immortal. "The fruit of the righteous" is immortal life to many a poor sinner. The latter clause may read either: "The wise is a winner of souls," or "The winner of souls is wise." It doubtless should be read in both. The grand "tree of life" on earth is the man converted already. The man converted already will be a "tree of life." Both doctrines are true, and, therefore, in so terse a passage, I see no resource but to understand the Hebrew as pregnant of both. It is of the very essence of wisdom to be benevolent, and it is the very height of benevolence to catch the souls of the impenitent. Moreover, no soul is caught but by the wise.—*Miller.*

What is dwelt on is the power of wisdom, as we say, to win the *hearts* of men. He that is wise draws men to himself, just as the fruit of the righteous is to all around him a tree of life, bearing new fruits of healing evermore. It is to be noted, also, that the phrase here rendered "winneth souls," is the same as that which is elsewhere translated by "taketh the life" (1 Kings xix. 4; Psa. xxxi. 13). The wise man is the true conqueror.—*Plumptre.*

To win souls is one special fruit of the tree of life. This is a noble fruit indeed, since our soul is more worth than a world, as He hath told us who only went to the price of it (Matt. xvi. 26).—*Trapp.*

In this verse we have set forth to us the excellency of a righteous man. I. *He is more useful than others.* He is not a barren tree, but a fruitful bough, as Joseph was. And he doth not bring forth fruit unto himself. As the tree of life would give life to them that would eat thereof, so those that will hearken to the counsel of the righteous shall partake with him of eternal life. II. *He is more skilful than others.* He wins souls—1. By Scripture demonstration. Thou canst never throw down the devil's strongholds except by God's own weapons. 2. By earnest supplications. As the prophet did pray life into the dead child, so thou shouldst strive in prayer for dead souls. 3. By kind obligation. Labour by kindness and courtesy to gain upon all thou dost converse with, that thou mayst get within him, that thou mayst be in a capacity to do

good to his soul. 4. By faithful reprehension. 'Tis quite contrary to Christian love to let sin lie upon thy brother (Lev. xix. 17). Show your love to souls by the faithful rebuking of sin, not as a token of your displeasure, but as an ordinance of God. 5. By convincing conversation. Live before all thou dost converse with in the convincing power of a holy life. 6. By careful observation of all those advantages that God puts into your hand. Take advantage of his affliction. Make use of thy near relation or of his dependence upon thee, or of thy interest in him. It may be he is concerned in thy goodwill to him, or hath some affection for thee. Make use of it for God.—*Alleine.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 31.

THE RECOMPENSE OF THE RIGHTEOUS AND THE WICKED.

I. The righteous man will receive a present chastisement for his sins—1. *Because of his near relation to God.* "You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities" (Amos iii. 2). Is this a strange principle of action? Is it not one which is, or ought to be, acted upon among men? If the son of a king commits a crime, is it not felt that his high position and his special privileges make him more deserving of punishment? Our Lord recognised this truth when He said, "To whom men have committed much of him they will ask the more" (Luke xii. 48). Those who stand in a special relation to God are expected to show it by a holy life, and when they fall into sin greater dishonour is brought upon the name of God than by many sins of the ungodly. Hence the necessity for their chastisement. 2. *Because he will not be punished in the next world.* The whole tenor of Bible teaching recognises this truth, and Paul asserts it: "We are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world" (1 Cor. xi. 32). 3. *To overthrow that doctrine of devils—"Let us sin that grace may abound"* (Rom. vi. 1, 15). Many false doctrines have gone abroad in the so-called church, but surely none is so manifestly from the devil as this which proclaims that the more a child of God sins the more God is glorified! Will the man whose wound has been closed and whose bleeding has been stanched by the surgeon, tear off the bandage and reopen the wound in order to afford the physician another opportunity of displaying his skill? May he not, by such an act, be guilty of suicide? May he not so incur the anger of his doctor as to make him refuse to re-dress the wound? If any man thinks that the abounding mercy of God is a licence for sin, let him read the history of David, and ask himself if it does not prove that he is wofully mistaken. David himself most certainly was, if he presumed upon his high standing with the God whose "gentleness had made him great" (Psa. xviii. 35) when he sinned the great sin which was the curse of all his after life. The God whom men fancy will be thus indulgent is not the God of the Bible—the God of Sinai—the God who visited the sin even of His servant Moses. "Let us sin that grace may abound" came from the forger of the oldest lie in human history. Mount Hor, Mount Nebo, and Mount Zion, each of which was the scene of a penalty inflicted on a distinguished saint of God for a particular and specified sin, bear witness to the truth that the "righteous will be recompensed on the earth." And of these instances that of Moses is, perhaps, the most striking. Here is the chastisement of the greatest man in the Old Testament dispensation—the specially elected leader and lawgiver of the chosen people. And though he had been and still was—yea, *because* he was the most honoured of Old Testament saints, he was shut out of the land

to which he had been journeying for forty years for assuming a Divine prerogative—"die in the mount whither thou goest up, and be gathered to thy people, as Aaron thy brother died at Mount Hor, and was gathered to his people: because ye trespassed against me among the children of Israel at the waters of Meribah-Kadesh, in the wilderness of Zin; because ye sanctified me not in the midst of the children of Israel" (Deut. xxxii. 50, 51). Such a sentence testifies that God is a consuming fire to sin, in the righteous as well as in the wicked.

II. If God's friends are chastised, His enemies must be.—For they not only *sin* but make light of sin, either denying the fact or blaming their circumstances, their temperament, or their tempters, laying the blame anywhere except upon themselves, and this increases their guilt. If those who acknowledge and confess their sin must yet be chastised for it, how much more those who refuse to do either! The sin of the righteous is the exception of his life, but the entire life of the ungodly man is a course of opposition to the law of God. If, therefore, the isolated instances are visited, how much more such an accumulation of moral debt! The very justice of God demands that if He punish the saint He shall also punish the sinner. This is New Testament teaching as well as Old. "For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God; and if it first begin at us, what shall be the end of them that obey not the Gospel of God?" (1 Pet. iv. 17).

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

But where is the righteous person thus scourged, judged, and recompensed? On the earth, even in this life, and in the world. The earth is not that seat which the Lord hath properly appointed for judgment or vengeance, neither is this life the day of the great assize; yet rather than sin shall be unpunished, yea, even in the elect, the Lord will keep a petty sessions in this life, and make the earth a house of correction.—*Muffet.*

The righteous are under the *discipline* though not under the *curse*, of the rod. —*Bridges.*

The best must look for stripes, if they will take liberty to sin against God. True it is that the Lord taketh not advantage of infirmities, He passeth by them, He smiteth not His children for them: but when they grow too bold, He will nurture and awe them with correction. In this sense He may be said to be no respecter of persons, that as He will not endure the sinfulness of the wicked, though they be never so great, so He will not allow of the sins of the godly, though they be never so good. First, *God herein respecteth His own glory*, who will have His people to know that He doth look for service at their hands. And the wicked see by this that He is neither remiss towards all nor partial towards any. Second, *He respecteth the good.* How wanton, how froward, how stubborn would children be, into what perils would they cast themselves should they be altogether exempted from the rod. They could never feel comfort of their parents' favour unless they sometimes found the smart of their displeasure . . . And the tribulation and afflictions of good men do not bring them behind the wicked, but show that the plagues and punishments of the wicked are yet behind.—*Dod.*

The righteous Lord shall pay His debts even to the righteous. Sin makes God a debtor.—*Jermin.*

CHAPTER XII.

CRITICAL NOTES.—1. Instruction, "discipline" or "disciplinary instruction." **2. Obtaineth,** literally "draws out." **4. Virtuous,** literally "strenuous," "capable" (used in Ruth iii. 11). **5. Thoughts,** or "purposes." **Right,** "judgment," "justice." **7.** Wordsworth here reads, "When the wicked turn themselves," etc., *i.e.*, on any reverse of their fortunes, however slight, they perish. **9.** This verse is read in two ways. Zockler reads, "Better is the lowly that serveth himself than he that boasteth and lacketh bread." Wordsworth agrees with this view. Delitzsch and Stuart render as the authorised version (see comments on the verse). **10. Regardeth,** literally "knoweth." Delitzsch reads, "knoweth how his cattle feed." "Cruel is singular, denoting that each one of his mercies are cruel" (Fausset). **11. Vain persons,** or "vanity," "emptiness." **12. Net.** Delitzsch, Zockler, and Miller translate this word "spoil" or "prey." The Hebrew word means also a "fortress." Maurer, therefore, translates it "defence," and understands it to mean that the evil combine for mutual protection. This agrees with Zockler's rendering of the second clause, "the root of the righteous is made sure." **16. Presently,** literally "in that very day," *i.e.* "at once." **Covereth shame,** or "hides his offence." **17. Speaketh,** literally "breathes." **18. Speaketh,** literally "babbles." **Health,** "healing." **19. A moment,** literally "while I wink." **20.** Delitzsch reads, "cause joy." **26. Is more excellent than his neighbour,** rather "guides his neighbour." Delitzsch reads, "looketh after his pastures." The Hebrew word signifies "abundance" (see Miller's remarks in the comments on the verses). **27.** The word translated **roast** does not occur in this sense elsewhere. In the Chaldee of Dan. iii. 27, it is used in this sense. It may be read "catcheth not his prey." The second clause should be, "a precious treasure is diligence," or "a diligent man." **28. No death,** literally "no-death," *i.e.*, "immortality."

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 1.

THE LOVE OF KNOWLEDGE AND THE PROOF OF IT.

True knowledge is to be loved—

I. For what it can do for him who loves it. 1. *It refines a man.* Gold when it is in its natural condition is valuable because it is gold, but when it has been purged from its impurities by the refining process it is more to be valued and is more beautiful. So a man may be sterling gold without much knowledge, but when the dross of ignorance is removed, he is worth more and is more attractive. If this be true of knowledge in the general, it is pre-eminently true of the knowledge which comes from above. If any knowledge exercises a refining influence upon the human mind, much more does the highest knowledge —the knowledge of God. 2. *It will open up sources of enjoyment that would otherwise be hidden.* The blind are deprived of many enjoyments by lack of sight. There is an abundance of beauty all around them, but their want of vision makes it useless to them. Intellectual ignorance is intellectual blindness; the ignorant man is a stranger to a thousand pleasures which are enjoyed by a well-informed man. Especially ignorance of Divine things shuts a man out from the highest, the only lasting unalloyed source of joy. 3. *It makes a man less dependent on the outward and visible.* A man who has stored up knowledge will be good company for himself. He can find refreshment by meditating on what he has within him, and need not be ever seeking it in external things. The contemplation of Divine and eternal truths especially, will ever be "within him a well of water" (John iv. 14).

II. For what it will do for others. If a man makes money only to dig a grave and bury it, he sins against himself and all whom he might bless by its use. So there are men who seem to have no other end in getting knowledge than to bury it. Such a man is an intellectual miser, and a sinner against human kind. There ought to be a love of giving, as well as a love of getting. For a man who possesses any kind of knowledge can bless others by its use. And this being true of all useful knowledge, how much more true is it of the

knowledge which makes "wise unto salvation?" Christ insists that no Christian make himself a grave in which to bury this knowledge, but a medium to communicate it (Matt. v. 16). And the influence of knowledge which has been acquired is not limited to the short life of a man upon the earth. How much are we indebted to the knowledge gained by earnest seekers in every department of knowledge long before we were born. One earnest seeker may gain a knowledge that will be a light to men as long as the world lasts. Especially those who have been earnest seekers after Divine truth leave a legacy of blessing behind them, the influence of which will outlive the world. For all these reasons men ought to love knowledge.

III. The proof of loving knowledge. He will seek instruction. This is the only way to knowledge. If a man loves the object of his pursuit, he will show his love by the use of means. 1. Seeking instruction is a confession of ignorance, and to be convinced that we are ignorant is the first step to becoming wise. Self-conceit is the fatal barrier to a man's gaining knowledge. 2. It involves self-denying labour. Little that is worth having can be obtained without labour. The gold-digger has to labour long and painfully before he finds the precious nuggets. If men would drink of a springing well of pure water they must dig deep down for it. The student must plod over dry details if he wishes to taste the sweets of learning. 3. It generally involves correction by the instructor. If a man sets out to dig for gold or to dig for water, he will most likely make mistakes while he is a novice. If he is really in earnest about his work he will receive "reproof," although it will not be altogether palatable. So with the scholar, he must suffer the reproof of the master. Doubtless the main reference here is to that knowledge which regenerates the character; and certainly the man who loves this highest knowledge will confess his ignorance, will not shrink from labouring to attain it, will accept that "reproof" which is an indispensable element in Divine instruction. If the man of God is to be "thoroughly furnished" or "perfected," he must accept "reproof" and "correction," as well as instruction (2 Tim. iii. 16, 17).

IV. The character of the man who does not love reproof. He is "brutish." The great difference between a man and a brute is that the one can grow intellectually and morally and the other cannot. Many animals possess great sagacity, and to a certain extent that can be developed. They sometimes, too, possess admirable qualities, but they are not capable of *soul-enlargement*. But man is, and in order to attain it he must submit to the instruction and reproof of those who are wiser than himself. He must stoop before he can rise. If he will not do this, he will never attain to the high destiny for which he was created—ever to be rising higher and higher in the scale of being. His lower nature will rule his spirit, and he will be little better than the beast. He must submit to the correction and instruction of His God if he would not be classed with "the horse and the mule, which have no understanding" (Psa. xxxii. 8, 9). The man who will not take reproof will certainly have to submit to it, and this not only from those who are wiser than himself, but from his companions in ignorance, A terrible reproof will be administered by Divine Wisdom to those who refuse reproof (chap. i. 24-31). And he will not escape upbraidings from those who are involved in the same sentence. Ungodly men are the first to upbraid their companions in ungodliness when they are all involved in the same penalty.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Here is shewed that adversity is the best university, saith an interpreter. Corrections of instructions are the way of life. Men commonly beat and bruise their links before they light them, to make them burn the brighter. God first

humbles whom He means to illuminate; as Gideon took thorns of the wilderness and briars and with them he taught the men of Succoth (Judges viii. 16). M. Ascham was a good schoolmaster to Queen Elizabeth, but affliction was a better, as one well observeth. He that hateth reproof, whether it be by the rebukes of men, or the rod of God, is fallen below the stirrup of reason, he is a brute in man's shape; nothing is more irrational than irreligion.—*Trapp.*

The most we can attain to in this life is, not to know, but only to have a love of knowledge; we know in part, and a partial knowledge is not to know indeed. If we can love knowledge entirely, that is the entireness of knowledge in this life. Now as knowledge cometh from instruction, so the love of knowledge from the love of instruction. He that is servant to the one, will soon be a master to the other. A loving obedience in receiving doth even command love to keep what is received. . . . . There is the reproof of an *enemy* and there is the reproof of a *friend*, the one seeketh reproach, the other amendment, but neither is to be hated, for howsoever reproof be used it is a profitable thing.—*Jermin.*

Reproof is not pleasant to nature. We may learn its value from its results, but it will never be sweet to our taste. At the best it is a bitter morsel. The difference between a wise man and a fool is not that one likes it and the other loathes it; both dislike it, but the fool casts away the precious because it is unpalatable, and the wise man accepts the unpalatable because it is precious.—*Arnot.*

The grand secret of life is to hear lessons, and not to teach them.—*Haliburton.*

It is the property of all true knowledge, especially spiritual, to enlarge the soul by filling it; to enlarge it without swelling it; to make it more capable, and more earnest to know, the more it knows.—*Bishop Sprat.*

Ignorance is the curse of God,
Knowledge the wing with which we fly to heaven.
Shakespeare.

This is a great text. We may expect great texts where there is a look of commonplace. The thought raises itself two stories at least in the respect of doctrine. He that, instead of fretting at that mysterious Providence of God that we call *evil*, enters into its deep experiences, and learns to value it as precious to his soul—that man loves light, or gospel "knowledge." That is the first story. But, now, he who takes a much wider view, and looks at all the gains from evil to the universe—how impossible would be high forms of knowledge, how utterly unconceived by anyone not Infinite, without the foil of either observed or experienced misery—that man acquiesces in all the evils that are seen in the creation, *loving discipline because he loves knowledge*, and acquiescing even in hell itself, because he suspects its absolute necessity in the providential system. Mourning over our griefs, which seems to be the work often of a refined and delicate nature, is here asserted to be "*brutish.*" He is but a Hottentot in the ways of the Almighty who does not see that the crushing of his hopes has been one of the tenderest methods of his redemption.—*Miller.*

He, and he only, that loves the means, loves the end. The means of knowledge are "instruction" in what is right, and "reproof" for what is wrong. He who is an enemy to either of these means is an enemy to the end. *A. Fuller.*

Is there any man so like a beast as not to love knowledge? Solomon tells us, that those who hate reproof are brutish. Let us, therefore, examine ourselves by this mark . . . . He is surely not a rational creature who has swallowed poison, and will rather suffer it to take its course than admit the necessary relief of medicine, lest he should be obliged to confess his folly in exposing himself to the need of it.—*Lawson.*

It was when Asaph recovered from that strange temptation, under the power of which he seemed to forget the eternity of man's being, and to confine his estimate to the present life,

that he exclaimed, "So foolish was I, and ignorant; I was as *a beast* before Thee" (Psa. lxxiii. 22). And the same comparison is repeatedly used respecting the ungodly. They sink themselves even below the level of the brutes, for *they* fulfil the ends of *their* being, under the impulse of their respective instincts and appetites; but the man who forgets his immortality and his God, does *not* fulfil the end of *his*. There may also be comprehended in the expression, the absence of what every rational creature ought to have—*spiritual discernment and taste;* the destitution of all right sentiment and feeling in reference to God and Divine things. This is the character of him whom Paul denominates the "natural" or animal "man," who receiveth not the things of the spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him.—*Wardlaw.*

The subject of Verse 2 has been treated in previous chapters. See Homiletics on chap. iii. 4; xi. 21, etc.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Ver. 2. Or "hath what he will of God." Thus it is written of Luther, that by his prayers he could prevail with God at his pleasure. When gifts were offered him, he refused them with this brave speech, "I solemnly protested to God that I would not be put off with these low things." And on a time praying for the recovery of a godly useful man, among other passages, he let fall this transcendent rapture of a daring faith, "Let my will he done," and then falls off sweetly; "My will, Lord, because Thy will." Blessed is he that hath what he will and wills nothing but what he should. If an evil thought haunt his heart, it is the device of the man, he is not the man of such devices.—*Trapp.*

A man can no way be so happy as by being in God's favour. If any other thing were better than this, it would here be named; for His purpose is to promise and perform the best. Good men do set their wits to work to find the way whereby they may best please Him, and He doth set His wisdom to work to frame a recompense that may best pleasure them. It is precious—1. In regard of the rareness of it, it is a flower which groweth only in God's own garden. It is a privilege and freedom peculiar to the children of God. 2. In regard to the continuance of it, it is not worn out by time, it vanisheth not away, it is never taken from them upon whom it is bestowed. 3. In regard to those good effects wherewith it is always accompanied—defence from enemies, safety from danger, gladness of heart, the love and favour of God it doth minister to everyone that partakes of it.—*Dod.*

Were the goodness of the godly such as it should be, it would from God's goodness even deserve praise, not stand in need of remitting favour, it would carry favour with it, it would not be put by seeking to obtain it. But in the best, so little it is, that he must even fetch it out from the Lord with many prayers, earnest suit, and at last it is the great mercy of God that he doth obtain it. But yet, such is the mercy of God toward the good, that however He dealeth with the good man he still obtaineth favour from Him. St. Augustine saith, "Thou receivedst benefit both from His coming and His going; He cometh to the increase of thy comfort, He goeth to the increase of thy care. He goeth away sometimes lest continual presence shonld make Him despised, and that absence should make Him more desired.—*Jermin.*"

A man of wicked devices may be artful enough to disguise his selfish plans under the mask of religion and benevolence, like the old Pharisees; but the eyes of the Judge of the world are like a flame of fire, they pierce into the secrets of every soul, and there is

no dark design harboured which shall not be completely disclosed in the day of Christ.—*Lawson.*

Let blind reason condemn God. (see on ver. 1.) He who has gospel light will see Him as one out of whom he can draw favour. A man not only pure himself, but doing good to others, looks upon God as a fountain of blessing.—*Miller.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 3.

A Right Desire and the Means of its Attainment.

I. There has always been a desire in men for establishment—for fixedness. 1. *It is a good and God-given aspiration, and manifests itself in many ways.* Men rightly desire to have a settled home—a spot on earth to which they may attach themselves and from which they cannot be driven. This is a desire especially strong in the western and northern nations, and has been a powerful element in their development. Men desire a permanent and certain income, and the desire to obtain it is a great motive power to induce them to acquire knowledge of mechanical arts and professions. Men desire to earn a fixed reputation, and the desire acts as a moral power in the world. 2. *It is a desire very old in its manifestation.* Very early in the history of our race we have an instance of man's desire for fixedness of position on the earth, and for a permanent reputation. It was this that prompted the men of Shinar to say one to another, "Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the earth" (Gen. xi. 4). They desired to have a centre of unity in the world—a spot where they could settle down together and establish a name that would outlive them. The building of Babel is a parable of what has been going on ever since, and will go on until the end of time. The building is not of bricks and mortar, but the desire is the same.

II. Men can only have this desire satisfied in one way. The men who purposed to build the tower of Babel used wrong means to fulfil a lawful desire. It was right to aspire towards reaching the fixedness of heaven, but that cannot be done with *bricks* were they never so many or so well burnt. They did "make a name," but not the name they desired. And so it is with men now. They want to gain for themselves a permanent resting place and a lasting name, and they think to attain their desire by linking themselves with something belonging only to earth, they desire to reach the heavenly with the earthly. And if they could use all the clay upon the globe to make their bricks they would find their tower fall far short of reaching heaven. All life without God is a life of wickedness, and such a life cannot be an *establishment* because it is contrary to Divine law. But this desire towards the immutable is intended by God to lead man to turn his face towards "those things which cannot be shaken" (Heb. xii. 27), that righteous character which fits a man for the "house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" (2 Cor. v. 1), which can be obtained by union with Him who is immutable—"The same yesterday, to-day, and for ever" (Heb. xiii. 8). Men may build upon a foundation which shall not be removed, they may send their roots deep down into an eternal abiding place by falling in with the conditions laid down by Christ Himself in Matt. v. 24, 25.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Established may have reference not to the stability of his *fortunes*, but to that of his *mind*—to tranquil self-possession and firmness. Even if, in the providence of God, his substance should fail, he himself remains un-

shaken and entire in all his best blessings, and in all his hopes.—*Wardlaw.*

A man, being wicked, how shall he expect anything, except that he shall be disturbed? While the saint, though "*shaken*" in leaf and bough, and storm-tossed, and, perhaps, broken in his branches, yet "*shall not be shaken*" in his "*root.*"—*Miller.*

Ahab strove to establish himself in despite of the threatened curse of God. He increased his family, trained them with care under the tutelage of his choicest nobility. And surely one, at least, out of seventy, might remain to inherit his throne. But this was the vain "striving" of the worm "with his Maker." One hour swept them all away (1 Kings xxi. 21, with 2 Kings x. 1-7). The device of Caiaphas, also, to *establish his nation by wickedness*, was the means of its overthrow (John xi. 49, 50, with Matt. xxi. 43, 44).—*Bridges.*

A man shall not be established by wickedness, for he lays his foundation upon firework, and brimstone is scattered upon his housetop: if the fire of God from heaven but flash upon it, it will all be aflame immediately. He walks all day upon a mine of gunpowder; and hath God with His armies ready to run upon the thickest bosses of his buckler, and to hurl him to hell. How can this man be sure of anything? Cain built cities, but could not rest in them; Ahab begat seventy sons, but not one successor to the kingdom. Sin hath no settledness. But the righteous, though shaken with winds, are rooted as trees; like a ship at anchor, they wag up and down, yet remove not.—*Trapp.*

We shall lose our labour in seeking any sinful helps. We shall but make quicksand our foundation, and mud our stonework, and stubble and reeds our strongest timber. It is time for us to pull down our own ruinous building, lest it fall upon our heads. For though it be so slight, and as weak as a cobweb, to be a cover over us, yet it is very heavy, and as weighty as a mountain to press us under it.—*Dod.*

Many are established in wickedness, and cannot be removed from it, but none shall ever be established by it.—*Jermin.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 4.

A Husband's Crown.

I. A woman possessed of a quality which time will not destroy or impair. Virtue is not a mere negative good—it is not simply an absence of evil. A virtuous person is one who has *overcome* evil—one who is prevented from being a worker of evil by being a worker of good. Virtue is a thing of growth—human nature has to struggle to acquire moral excellence—to attain that strength of goodness which we call virtue. It has its seat in the regenerated heart. The river that is always flowing with pure, living water, is not fed from a cistern, but from a living spring which is in communication with the parent of waters. So virtue is not a native of this fallen world—it is of celestial birth—it is derived from the source of all goodness and consequently partakes of the indestructibility of all eternal things. There is no annihilation of virtue. Stabbing cannot kill it. Burning cannot destroy it. It will break the bonds of calumny and rise from the dead. Virtue adorns either sex, but it is especially attractive in a woman. It is *her* crown, and because she is so crowned, she crowns her husband.

II. Man needs such a woman to complete, or crown his life. Even the first man in his sinless condition, with all the peculiar joys springing from his sinless nature, felt his existence incomplete until God gave him the woman as the filling up—the crown and finish of his life. But this woman was crowned herself with innocence and purity or she could not have crowned her husband. If man in

his sinless condition needed a wife to complete his life, how much more does he need now a virtuous woman to be a helpmeet for him. 1. *He needs her because he needs help from virtue outside himself.* The most perfect of imperfect men must lean upon some human support, and they will consciously or unconsciously do so. A man who has a virtuous wife has ever about him an atmosphere which is strengthening to his own virtue. She will help him to preserve his integrity more effectually than any other person because she is so constantly about his path. She will give him that moral sympathy which is so helpful to men struggling to keep a good conscience in an evil world, which is like oil to the wheels of life, and makes what would otherwise be very difficult easy and pleasant. 2. *He needs an intellectual companion.* He must have a rational and intelligent spirit in his home if his life is to be what God intended it to be —one with whom he can converse and to whom he can impart his thoughts on things human and divine. He cannot be *crowned*, in the full sense of the word, unless he has such a wife, and the word virtue may embrace intellectual vigour as well as moral excellence. (See Comments on the verse). When a man has such a wife as we have described his life is completed or crowned. The word among the Hebrews was also symbolic of joy and gladness (Cant. vi. 11), and such a woman is of necessity a joy to her husband.

III. The man who would be thus crowned must be wise in his choice of a wife. The most precious things are not generally to be obtained without some amount of seeking. Pebbles can be gathered upon any shore, but diamonds are only to be had for patient seeking. Pinchbeck ornaments are to be had for a trifle, but a golden diadem costs much money. There are plenty of women who may be won without much seeking, but a wife who is virtuous in the sense of the text is not to be met with every day or in every place. To find such an one he must ask counsel of Him who provided the first man with the woman who supplied his need in this respect. Though we have no record that Adam asked God for a helpmeet for him, yet we do not know that he did not. This we do know, that God's best gifts, as a rule, are only had for asking. And when we reflect upon the terrible blight that an ungodly, unsympathetic, incapable wife is to a man, causing him such shame as is "rottenness to his bones," we can fully see the need of seeking Divine guidance in forming a relationship which has so much to do with "making" or "marring" a man.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Here we have a king and a crown, a *holy woman* the *crown;* a *happy man,* the *king.* I. *Inasmuch as a woman of grace is here called her husband's crown we learn that a good wife is the husband's best outward blessing, the worthiest mercy that a man may have in this world.* It follows: 1. That as he who would be introduced into the crown of any kingdom or monarchy must match himself into the king's race, so, he that would be sure to have a crown for his wife must take the same course, he must marry into the house of heaven, with some one to whom the King of Kings is a father, and who is by grace of the lineage and offspring of the Lord of Hosts. 2. The wife being the husband's crown must be much respected by her husband. Crowns are no contemptible things. The Apostle Peter is exact in commanding this (1Pet. iii. 7). She is called the "glory of h e man" (1 Cor. xi. 7) and his companion (Mal. ii. 14) his second-self (Ephes. v. 28, 29). If in these regards God hath made a woman an honour to a man, the Lord looks that man should give honour to a woman. 3. A wife being a crown, requireth maintenance as much as her husband's estate will afford. The crown must be maintained, it is for the honour and safety of the king, and for the content of the sub-

jects that it have meet support. II. *If the wife be the crown, the husband is the king.* Therefore: 1. She must acknowledge him and obey him in all matrimonial loyalty and love. The proverb is, there is no service to compare with that of a king, but, certainly there is no king's service to this. Kings can give the greatest about them, but *rewards* when they have done their best; but the husband gives the wife *himself* for her obedience. 2. It is her duty to grace him. To be a woman, and to be a wife, is not enough to be a crown, a man may have both these and yet she that he hath may be a shame unto him. There go more than *two* words to this bargain; to be a woman, a wife, and *gracious*, and she that is so cannot fail of her glory.—*John Wing* (1620).

Man, though made for the throne of the world, was found unfit for the final investiture until he got woman as a help. . . . When the relations of the sexes move in fittings of truth and love, the working of the complicated machinery of life is a wonder to an observing man and a glory to the Creator God. . . . We need not be surprised by the announcement of the horrid contrast. It is according to law; the best things abused become the worst. Woman is the very element of home. When that element is tainted, corruption spreads over all its breadth and sinks into its core.—*Arnot.*

The word implies the virtue of earnestness, or strength of character, rather than of simple chastity.—*Plumptre.*

The weakness of women is never a reproach unto them, but when it appeareth in not resisting sin. And therefore the original is *a woman of strength*, such a woman as is by God's grace strong enough to withstand sin: a *manlike* woman, the Syriac hath it, in spiritual courage. But contrariwise she, who is not ashamed of her sinful weakness in yielding unto sin maketh him ashamed for whom she was created, and as rottenness in his bones destroyeth his strength, making him weak through grief, as she is through folly, for such grief enters deeply, and it is the bones that it wasteth, when she is naught who was made of man's bone.—*Jermin.*

Let man learn to be grateful to woman for this undoubted achievement of her sex, that it is she—she far more than he, and she, too often, in despite of him—who has kept Christendom from lapsing back into barbarism, kept mercy and truth from being utterly overborne by those two greedy monsters, money and war. Let him be grateful for this, that almost every great soul that has led forward, or lifted up the race, has been furnished for each noble deed, and inspired with each patriotic and holy aspiration, by the retiring fortitude of some Spartan—some Christian mother. Moses, the deliverer of his people, drawn out of the Nile by the king's daughter, some one has hinted, is only a symbol of the way that woman's better instincts outwit the tyrannical diplomacy of the man. Let him cheerfully remember, that though the sinewy sex achieves enterprises on public theatres, it is the nerve and sensibility of the other that arm the mind and inflame the soul in secret. Everywhere a man executes the performance, but woman trains the man.—*Anon.*

The figure in the second clause is strong. We may consider it as conveying *two* ideas! 1. The "bones" are the *strength* of the frame. Upon them the whole is built. There is, therefore, in the idea of *caries*, or rottenness in them, that of the *wasting* of the vigour of body and mind, and the bringing of the man prematurely to his grave; and that, too, by means which cost him, ere this result is effected, exquisite suffering. 2. The "bones" are *unseen.* The poor man is pierced with inward and secret agony, which he cannot disclose; pines in unseen distress—distress of which the cause is hidden, while the *effects* are sadly and rapidly visible.—*Wardlaw.*

"Capable;" sometimes "virtuous," literally *strong.* "It is well observed by Michaelis (Supp. No. 17), that in

the early stages of society, when the government and laws had little influence, fortitude was the first and most necessary virtue; and might therefore naturally give its name to the other virtues. Hence *virtus* in Latin, and αρετη in Greek, which, according to their etymology, denote mainly strength and fortitude, came, at length, to signify virtue in general (Holder)." "*Crown*," that is (1) *ornament*, and (2) *source of power*. A virtuous woman is both to her husband. A spendthrift, drunken, or adulterous wife is so entrenched in our being, that our very bone, that is, our dearest interests (Psalm xxxv. 10; Jno. xix. 36), are rotten, when these qualities begin their influence. A man, linked with such disorders, cannot complain of his inevitable reproof (ver. 1). Does he link himself with evil, he must partake of the storms that buffet it. Women, however, in all this book, seem to be types of qualities;—of Grace (xi. 16); of Wisdom (xiv. 1); of Folly (ix. 13). The "virtuous woman" has not stood before us in all her true light, till she stands as Wisdom; nor "One that causes shame," till we make her Impenitency. "The virtuous or capable woman" is our "*crown*," for, with faith, all things are ours; and her great rival is our shame, for, with unbelief, there is "rottenness" in our very "bones." This disposition always to see a figure must not be set down as fanciful, till the Woman of Grace, of Folly, and of Wisdom, and other still more artificial cases (Rev xii. 1), have been thoroughly considered.—*Miller.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPHS—Verses 5—8.

THOUGHTS AND WORDS AND THEIR RESULT.

I. The thoughts of the righteous or godly man are right. 1. *Because he has the best material out of which to build his thoughts.* The kind of building which is reared will depend mainly upon the quarry from which the stones are hewn. The man of God gets the material of his thoughts from the revealed word of God. He obeys the Divine command.—"This book of the law shall not depart out thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate thereon day and night" (Josh. i. 8). 2. *Because his thinking is under the rule of law.* He does not allow his mind to dwell upon every suggestion that comes into it, he forbids certain things to enter there, or if they enter in an unguarded moment, he will not give them a dwelling place. He does not give unqualified assent to the boast that "thought is free." The righteous man does not aspire to be a "*free*-thinker," if he did he could not be a *good* thinker. He rules his thoughts accordiag to the legislation of Christ (Matt. v. 28; xv. 18), and endeavours to bring *every thought* into obedience to Him (2 Cor. x. 5).

II. The speech of the righteous. A man's words are never worse than his thoughts. In a good man they are the outcome of his thoughts. As the child is the undeveloped man, and the seed the undeveloped tree, so thought is the seed of speech. If the child's constitution is good and the seed is good, the man and the tree will be healthy and vigorous. If the thought is healthy and wise the speech will be so likewise, for "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh" (Matt. xii. 34).

III. The thoughts of the wicked. They are such as spring spontaneously from the human heart, which is, according to the estimate of One who knows, "deceitful above all things" (Jer. xvii. 9). In such a heart counsels or thoughts of deceit must be generated. His own life-work will be a deceit (chap. xi. 18), and he will deceive others. The verse evidently refers to thoughts which purpose harm to other people. When a man's thoughts are not in subjection to the law of God, they have a tendency to go from bad to worse. The ungodly man, either directly or indirectly, injures others as well as himself.

IV. The words of the wicked. The ungodly are here represented, as in chap. xi. 21, as combining to injure the godly (see Homiletics on that verse). Their words are the outcome of their evil and malicious thoughts. Most ungodly men try to lessen the influence of the good by depreciating their character when they do not dare to attack their property and their lives. This lying in wait for blood may cover all schemes to bring about the downfall of the good. The two characters now stand before us. Let us look at what is in store for each. I. For the righteous. 1. *Deliverance from the machinations of the wicked.* This is effected by means of the godly man's own words. He is able to refute what his enemies bring against him. This proverb cannot of course be taken to assert that the righteous are always delivered from death at the hands of their persecutors. They are delivered as Christ was delivered from the counsels of deceit, and from the bloody plans of the Scribes and Pharisees. The words here used exactly describe their character, and the deliverance of the righteous is such a deliverance as our Lord wrought for Himself by the words of truth and wisdom with which He silenced them. Take the instance of the tribute-money as recorded by Matthew (chap. xxii. 15). "Then went the Pharisees and took counsel how they might entangle Him in His talk. And they sent out unto Him their disciples with the Herodians, saying, Master, we know that Thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth, neither carest Thou for any man; for thou regardest not the person of men. Tell us, therefore, What thinkest Thou? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Cæsar, or not? But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites? Show me the tribute money. And they brought Him a penny. And He saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription? They say unto Him, Cæsar's. Then saith He unto them, Render therefore unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's, and unto God the things which are God's. When they had heard these words, they marvelled, and left him, and went their way." Two other instances of Christ's delivering Himself by His "mouth" are given in the same chapter. And many of His followers have in like manner defeated the plans of their enemies. 2. *The establishment of his family.* His thoughts and words bless his own house—they are the means of reproducing other characters whose thoughts and words are like his own. This of itself is a good reason why his house should stand. Each member of it thus becomes a centre of influence for good, and in this way the world is preserved from moral corruption and ruin. And it is a law of God's kingdom that the godliness of the head of a family or race should bring a blessing upon his posterity. God defended the people of Jerusalem in the days of Hezekiah for "His servant David's sake" (Isa. xxxvii. 35). He blessed Isaac for "my servant Abraham's sake" (Gen. xxvi. 24). And the same law is at work in New Testament times, "The promise is unto you and to your children" (Acts ii. 39). 3. *General commendation.* The wise and the righteous are synonymous in the book of Proverbs, the wisdom of the 8th verse is, doubtless, *moral* wisdom. Paul calls his Corinthian converts, whom he had begotten by his holy thoughts and wise words, his "letters of commendation" (2 Cor. iii. 1-3). Every godly man has some such commendatory epistles in the living souls whom his life and words have blessed. Men can but acknowledge that he is a blsssing to his fellow-creatures while he lives, and after he has left the world he is praised by, and because of, those whom he turned to righteousness" (Dan. xii. 3). But for the wicked there must be—1. *Overthrow.* They entered the lists against a power much stronger than their own, and must therefore come to ruin. The stubble of the field can contend for a time against the fire, but the latter grows stronger the longer it burns, and the stubble is less and less able to resist its power, until presently there is nothing left but a few ashes which are soon scattered by the winds, and the place that once

knew them knows them no more, "*For behold the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven, and all the proud and all that do wickedly shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of Hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch*" (Mal. iv. 1). 4. *General contempt.* The wicked or "perverse of heart" will not be able to respect himself, how then can he expect others to hold him in honour? And in the day of his overthrow the contempt or indifference with which both he and his fate will be regarded will not come from those whom he has striven to injure, but from those who are like himself. Those who have already met with their overthrow will be those who will meet him with the taunt, "*Art thou also become weak as we? Art thou become like unto us?*" (Isa. xiv. 10). And those whose time of judgment is yet in the future will not stoop to pity or succour him.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Verse 5. That thoughts are free, is his lesson, by whom we are made slaves unto sin. For if the thoughts be corrupted, the affections will soon be polluted, and then the actions are easily perverted. If the flies of Egypt get into our eyes, the frogs of Egypt will soon get into our chambers, the chambers of our hearts, and then the caterpillars of Egypt will soon destroy our fruits, the actions of our lives. The counsels of the wicked are deceit —they deceive God of His honour, their neighbour of his right, themselves of their salvation.—*Jermin.*

The stress lies upon the words, "thoughts" or "purposes," and "counsels." Habits of good and evil reach beyond the region of outward act to that of impulse and volition.—*Plumptre.*

To the righteous are ascribed simple and clear thoughts, to the godless, prudently thought through schemes and measures, but on that very account not simple, because of their tendency. *Delitzsch.*

If good thoughts *look* into a wicked heart, they *stay* not there, as those that like not their lodging; the flashes of lightnings may be discerned into the darkest prisons. The light that shines into a holy heart is constant, like that of the sun, which keeps due times, and varies not the course for any of these sublunary occasions.—*Trapp.*

At the first creation man was made to excel brute beasts more by the reason and gifts of the soul than by the fashion and shape of the body, so at the second, a Christian is made to excel sinful men more by the holiness and working of the soul than by those of the body.—*Dod.*

The mere *thoughts*—the unpremeditated *resolves* of a righteous man—are *right*; the *deliberate counsels*, the very *deliberations* of the wicked, are *deceit.* —*Burgon.*

Many indeed are the deviations of the righteous. But there is an overcoming law within that, in despite of all opposition, fixes *his thoughts* with delight on God and His law (Psa. cxxxix. 17, 18; Rom. vii. 15, 23), and gives to them a single bias for His service. Widely different are the thoughts of the wicked, ripening into *counsels* fraught with *deceit.* Such were those of Joseph's brethren to deceive their father; of Jeroboam, under a feigned consideration of the people; of Daniel's enemies, under pretence of honouring the king; of Herod, under the profession of worshipping the infant Saviour.—*Bridges.*

This verse has been rendered, "*The policy of the just is honesty; the wisdom of the wicked is cunning.*" The righteous man deals in rectitude, and from his actions you know his thoughts. It is not so with "the wicked." He thinks one way and acts another. His words and deeds are not the fair index of his thoughts.—*Wardlaw.*

"*The plans of the righteous are a judgment.*" This word, which is very

common in the Bible, means a judicial decision. The "judgment" of the wicked is a verdict of the Almighty consigning them to hell. The "judgment" of the righteous, by what Christ has wrought out, is a verdict of eternal reward . . . . The "plans of the righteous," however disastrous they may seem, "are a judgment." And, as the "judgment" of the righteous is in his favour, his plans, however bad, are shaped in him for his good. Whatsoever storms they may lead to, they are from a most prosperous verdict, and have been allowed to supervene, for his highest, and well-graduated good. Mark now the climax (as in ch. xiv. 11). It says, the *plans* of the righteous, leaving us to suppose they might be very wretched. But it says "the *helmsmanship* (counsels, see on chap. xi. 14) of the wicked," leaving us to suppose they are very shrewd. The keenest calculations of the wicked, where a cool eye is at the *helm*, and where instead of marrying a foolish wife (ver. 4), he has built grandly for the world; still, as a *judgment*, I mean by that, as the whole verdict in his case, his very *helmsmanships* are a deceit. (1) His own wisdom cheats him in ordering his life; and (2) God Himself, as a part of His award, takes care that he be deceived as to his total well-being.—*Miller.*

Verse 6. The law of parallelism leaves it open to us to refer the pronoun at the end of the verse to the righteous themselves, or to those, the unwary and innocent, for whom the words of the wicked lie in wait.—*Plumptre.*

The fiercer ebullitions of humanity may, indeed, be softened down and restrained. But the principle remains the same. The fiery elements only lie in slumbering cover, and often break out, wasting the very face of society.—*Bridges.*

The words. Speech is the great instrument of man. Talking is his trade. Wall Street and Lombard Street make their fortunes by the tongue. The "words of the wicked" are, therefore, their highest activities, and our proverb declares that these high acts are "a lying in wait for blood." We would not deny that this may include the blood of others; but in the light of the last verse the grand victim is themselves (chap. i. 18). Each order on change is for a man's last discomfiture.—*Miller.*

Though nature hath denied man the weapons of his teeth, yet wickedness giveth to some such *words* as are more bloody than the teeth of the most bloody beasts. The false witness will frame his tale so cunningly as if he intended nothing but a clearing of the truth, whereas he seeketh nothing but the shedding of blood. The corrupt judge will couch his words so closely, as if he meant nothing but to have justice executed, whereas they are nothing but ambushments to surprise innocent blood. But there are words which issue from the mouth of the upright, as making a sally out of some adjoining fort, whereby the prey is rescued, the pillagers are defeated, the innocent is delivered, the upright as victorious is crowned with the diadem of his judgment as in Job it is called (ch. xxix. 14); and which St. Gregory saith is rightly called a diadem, because by the glory of an excellent work it leadeth to the crown of a glorious reward. Now such were the words of Job's mouth, who brake the jaws of the wicked and plucked the spoil out of his teeth, being eyes to the blind, feet to the lame, and a father to the poor.—*Jermin.*

The prayers of God's people ascend up to God's presence for His help, and those mouths prevail mightily that seek for redress of wrong at His hands. Herod thought it would be too late for all the friends which Peter had to minister help to him when he had clapped him in prison. But he remembered not how swift the godly be to prayer and how soon a prayer can come to God.—*Dod.*

Ver. 7. The *persons* of the wicked are *overthrown and are not*, the *house* of the righteous (the very roof that sheltered him) shall *stand.*—*Burgon.*

He that is strong may be overthrown and may rise again, he that riseth not to what he was may rise in part to something, he that riseth not at all, may lie where he has fallen; but in the overthrow of the wicked all hope is gone of anything, for they themselves are *nothing*. They *were not* in goodness, they *are not* by their wickedness. They are not to be recovered from their overthrow, because they are not changed to repentance by their overthrow. On the other side, not only the righteous shall stand, their family, their posterity shall stand, for God shall stand by them, and then no fear of falling can be unto them.—*Jermin.*

When a change of the estate of the ungodly is made from prosperity unto adversity, their utter destruction is commonly wrought, for their house being built upon the sand, the tempests and the winds arise and quite overthrow it. The whole manner of the overthrow is described in Job xviii. 15. —*Muffet.*

The righteous shall "have a place in the Lord's house," immovable here (Isa. lvi. 4, 5), and in eternity (Rev. iii. 12).—*Bridges.*

Solomon had a signal exemplification of this in the case of *Saul* and his father *David*. Possibly this instance might be in his eye at the time.—*Wardlaw.*

Eventually there must be *overthrow*, even if it be no overthrow but death. When the wicked do fall, there is positively *nothing of them left*. While in the deepest disasters of the righteous, nothing is not *left*. "*His house*," and by that is meant every possible real interest (1 Sam. ii. 35) shall stand for ever.—*Miller.*

Ver. 8. Sometimes, and very often, the wicked shall commend him, commonly the righteous, and always the Lord Himself, but most of all at the last day, before all men and angels. They that are not void of uprightness shall not be destitute of praise and honour. Though some be blind that they cannot discern their understanding and graces, yet others have their eyesight and behold them. Though some be dumb and will not speak of their virtues, yet others have their lips open to commend them.—*Dod.*

And all wisdom consists in this, that a man rightly know and worship God. Apollonius, Archimedes, and Aristotle were wise in their generations, and so accounted, but by whom? Not by St. Paul, he hath another opinion of them (Rom. i. 22). Not by our Saviour (Matt. xi. 25).—*Trapp.*

According—"in exact proportion;" such is the meaning of the Hebrew. A man is more applauded for good sense than perhaps anything else. *Wisdom* —"shrewdness;" that attribute that leads to success. Therefore it sometimes means success (2 Kings xviii. 7). Successful shrewdness is a very positive sort. Such is the shrewdness of the righteous man (ver. 7). *Perverse heart* —"crooked sense," literally *heart*; though heart contains more of sense (νους) than we ascribe to it. If a man whose mind works crookedly every time becomes an object of contempt, why ought not the wicked to become so, whose very helmsmanships are a deceit? (ver. 5).—*Miller.*

How thrilling will be the *commendation of wisdom* before the assembled universe! (Luke xii. 42–44). Who will not then acknowledge the *wise* choice of an earthly cross with a heavenly crown?—*Bridges.*

This is capable of two interpretations. It may refer to commendation by *men*, or to commendation by *God*. In the one case it may mean mere *secular discretions*, in the other it must mean *religious principle*, according to the invariable testimony that "the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom." This is not the wisdom that secures the eulogy of men; but it will ever secure that of the Infinitely Wise, the Infinitely Good. And, indeed, the two things may be united. A man who fears God will always be *a faithful* counsellor, and if at the same time he have sound discretion in regard to the affairs of life, this will form the perfection of character, and there will be commendation both from *men* and *God*. . . . In

the pride of your hearts, you may affect to hold very cheap the contempt of men; though even that is often more pretension than reality, disappointment rankling at the heart, while scorn is curling the lip. But what must it be to be "lightly esteemed" at last, to be "despised" by that God who has in his hands the destinies of the universe!—*Wardlaw.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 9.

Whichever rendering we adopt of this verse the subject is the same—that of one man's allowing his vanity, his love for appearances, to rob him of all real comfort, and that of his wiser brother's preference of comfort to outside show.

I. The wise man who is despised. Men who have the moral courage to live in a simple style, and to labour with their own hands, will certainly be regarded with contempt by some, but by whom? By those whose good opinion and honour is not worth having. Children are taken with what is showy on the surface—they have little regard for what lies underneath. They will be more delighted with a soap-bubble than with a diamond. But *men* look on things with different eyes. So it is only men and women of childish minds who estimate a man by his clothes, his house, or his establishment, and it is only such who will despise the first man mentioned in the text. If we take the common rendering of the verse, then this man is more useful to society than the other; for, instead of spending all his money on himself, he keeps a servant, and so gives another a means of living. For as it is implied that he does not lack bread himself, so he will not let those in his employ want the necessaries of life. Other things being equal, the man who, by a judicious use of his means, gives employment to others, is a greater benefactor to his race than he who spends his money in selfish luxury. At any rate, this man is a wiser man than the other, for he has the good sense to prefer the greater to the less. It is only obeying a natural instinct to satisfy the bodily wants, and to supply ourselves with all the substantial comforts of life before we spend money on things which do not, after all, add in the least to our real enjoyment, and yet the majority of men do sacrifice some of the former to the latter. He who has the moral courage not to do so shows his real wisdom. And by such a course of conduct he blesses others as well as himself—he does something to stem the tide of passion for keeping up appearances which in our age and country is the fruitful source of so much crime and misery—he, and he only, is the truly honest man, for he is content to pass for just what he is as to wealth.

II. The foolish and wicked man who "honours himself." 1. *He is a fool.* Vanity is one of the most despicable passions that can possess a man—it often leads a man to the most childish actions. No man of modern times was more entirely under its dominion than Voltaire, whose only aim in life seemed to be to gain that unsubstantial homage which afforded his spirit at the last such an unsatisfying portion. He did not literally lack bread, but he did find himself in his old age without anything which could give him any real comfort. The man mentioned in our text is so bent upon obtaining this false honour that he will "lack bread"—suffer positive bodily discomfort—rather than not obtain it. 2. *He is a sinner.* He lies in action, if not in word. While he is resorting to the meanest shifts in secret he is trying to make people believe that he is much better off than he really is. By stinting himself in the common comforts of life he sins against his own body and against his Creator, for "the Lord is for the body" (1 Cor. vi. 13), and it is man's duty to feed that house of the soul which is so "fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psa. cxxxix. 14). He therefore sins against himself and against society. It is worth while to inquire whether anybody will honour him after all his foolish efforts. God cannot, for He hates all

hypocrisy. Men may, for their own interest, flatter him, and feign to respect him, but he will obtain no real honour, either from men like him in character, or from those who are better and wiser. "I have read," says Thomas Adams, "of Menecrates, a physician that would needs be counted a god, and took no other fee of his patients than their vow to worship him. Dionysius Syracusanus, hearing of this, invited him to a banquet, and, to honour him according to his desire, set before him nothing but a censer of frankincense, with the smoke whereof he was feasted till he starved, while others fed on good meat." Such smoke as this is all the return such a man as the one pictured in this proverb will get for starving himself, and for sinning against his own body, against society, and against God.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

We give a few of the many renderings of this verse:—

Better is he that laboureth and aboundeth in all things than he that boasteth himself and lacketh bread. *Wordsworth.*

This proverb, like xv. 17, commends the middle rank of life with its quiet excellencies. A man of lowly rank, who is, however, not so poor that he cannot support a slave, is better than one that boasts himself and is yet a beggar. The first necessity of an oriental in only moderate circumstances is a slave, just as was the case with the Greeks and Romans.—*Delitzsch.*

Better is the condition of the poor man, who has the means under his control of aiding his exertions for sustenance, than the nobleman, real or fancied, who is in a state of starvation. *Stuart.*

Each interpretation is tenable grammatically. (1) He whom men despise, or who is "lowly" in his own eyes (the word is used by David himself, 1 Sam. xviii. 23), the trader, the peasant, if he has a slave, *i.e.*, if he is one step above absolute poverty, and has someone to supply his wants, is better off than the man who boasts of rank or descent, and has nothing to eat. Respectable mediocrity is better than boastful poverty. (2) He who, though despised, is a servant to himself, *i.e.* supplies his own wants, is better than the arrogant and helpless.—*Plumptre.*

Some do think it more miserable to be known to be miserable than to be so, and are more grieved to be disesteemed for it than to be pinched by it, wherefore they will feed the eyes of others with a show of plenty, although they have not bread to feed themselves. But he is better who, disesteeming the esteem of others and being servant to himself, does get his own bread, and is contented with it. For as he is servant, so is he master also; and howbeit he serveth, yet it is at his own pleasure. And this is his comfort, that while he serveth himself he hath to serve his need and occasions, when he that *honoureth himself* is fain at last to live by others. Or else take the meaning thus: the ambitious itch of many is so great, and so disquieteth their hearts, that they can lack anything, even bread itself, rather than honour and preferment; so that when they are swollen big in greatness and dignity they are even starved in their estate, and have not of their own the next meal to feed themselves. But better is he, especially if he be a good man, who—having to keep himself and a servant—doth keep within his means; and though he be *despised* by them that overlook him, yet looks upon himself with thanks to God that it is so well with him. And, indeed, how can this man but be better than the other, when his servant is better than the other is. For as Chrysostom speaketh, it cannot be but that he who is the slave of glory should be servant of all, yea, more vile than all other servants. For there is no

servant commanded to do such base things as the love of glory commandeth him.—*Jermin.*

The son of Sirach, who may well be called an interpreter of this book of the Proverbs, hath a very like saying to this where he speaketh thus, "Better is he that worketh and aboundeth with all things, than he that boasteth himself, and wanteth bread" (Ecclus. x. 30). *Muffet.*

When men are such slaves to the opinion of the world, they rebel against Him who makes no mistake in His allotments and often appoints a descent from worldly elevation as a profitable discipline (Jas. i. 10, 11; Dan. iv. 32–37). Yet it is hard, even for the Christian, as Bunyan reminds us, "to go down the valley of humiliation and catch no slip by the way." We need our Master's unworldly elevated spirit (John vi. 15) to make as safe descent . . . "Let our moderation be known unto all men," under the constraining recollection, "The Lord is at hand" (Phil. iv. 5). How will the dazzling glory of man's esteem fade away before the glory of His appearing!—*Bridges.*

Paul travelling on foot, and living on the wages of a tent-maker, was more respectable than the pretended successor of his brother apostle, with a triple crown upon his head.—*Lawson.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 10.

Care for Animals and Cruelty to Men.

Even the animal is benefited by being related to a righteous man.

I. The righteous man regardeth the life of his beast. 1. *Because of the entire dependence of the creature upon him.* Animals which are the property of man are entirely at his mercy. They have no power to change a bad master for a good one—no voice to utter their complaints—no means of getting redress for their wrongs. All these considerations tend to make a good man care for them, for the righteous man's sympathies are always drawn out in proportion to the need of the object. And with regard to the animal creation, it may be that the present life is the only opportunity a man may have of showing kindness to them. If, on the other hand, animals live in another world, it may be all the better for men to treat them well here. 2. *Because of his dependence upon his beast.* Men are very largely indebted to animals for the sustaining of their life—it would be very difficult for the work of the world to be carried on without their help; men would certainly have to labour much harder if they had it not. Therefore, the righteous man feels that he is paying *a debt* when he "regards the life of his beast." 3. *Because the animal is an object of Divine care.* The Bible has many references to the brute creation, and many passages which show that "*God* regardeth the life of the beast." Christ tells us that not a *sparrow* falls to the ground without His Father's notice, and God has given special commands with reference to the care of dumb creatures. "*Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn*" (Deut. xxv. 4). Seeing, then, that "God doth care for oxen," a righteous man will do likewise. 4. *Because of the lessons that may be learned from the animal creation.* God often sends man to learn of them (see Isa. i. 3; Jer. viii. 7), and much suggestive teaching may be got from observation of their dispositions and habits. It would be ingratitude not to repay them with considerate care.

II. The wicked man is cruel. Wickedness is, in its nature, destitute of kindliness. The sea is by nature salt, and its saltness makes it unfit to sustain human life. The father of wickedness is a cruel being—his only aim is to increase the misery of the universe. All his children have partaken more or less of his character since the first human murderer killed his brother. It is said here that even his acts of mercy are cruel. History gives many instances

of men whose so-called acts of mercy were only refined cruelties. It follows that if wicked men are cruel to their fellow-creatures—to men and women of their own flesh and blood, they will be even more indifferent to the welfare of creatures below man.

ILLUSTRATIONS.

Sir Robert Clayton, as commander of a troop of British cavalry, which after service on the Continent was disbanded in the city of York, and the horses sold, could not bear to think that his old fellow-campaigners, who had borne brave men to battle, should be ridden to death as butcher's hacks, or worked in dung-carts till they became dogs' meat, he therefore purchased a piece of ground upon Knavesmire heath, and turned out the old horses to have their run for life. What made this act to be the longer had in remembrance, was the curious fact, that one day, when these horses were grazing, a thunder-storm gathered, at the fires and sounds of which, as if mistaken for the signs of approaching battle, they were seen to get together and form in line, almost in as perfect order as if they had their old masters on their backs.

Sir James Prior tells us, in the last year of the life of Burke, that a feeble old horse which had been a favourite with young Richard—now dead—and his constant companion in all his rural journeyings and sports, when both were alike healthful and vigorous, was turned out to take the run of the park at Beaconsfield during the remainder of his life, the servants being strictly charged not to ride or in any way molest him. This poor worn-out steed it was that one day drew near to Burke, as the now childless and decrepit statesman was musing in the park, and after some moments of inspection, followed by seeming recollection and confidence, deliberately rested his head upon the old man's bosom. The singularity of the action, the remembrance of his dead son, its late master, and the apparent attachment and intelligence of the poor brute, as if it could sympathise with his inward sorrows, rushing at once into his mind, totally overpowered his firmness, and throwing his arms over its neck, he wept long and loudly.

John Howard writes home from the Lazaretto, himself sick and a prisoner: "Is my chaise-horse gone blind or spoiled? Duke is well, he must have his range when past his labour; not doing such a cruel thing as I did with the old mare. I have a thousand times repented of it."—*Jacox.*

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

What the cruelty of the wicked is, at its worst, words might seem wanting to show, after it has been said that the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel. But "a righteous man regardeth the life of his beast." Jacob, as flock-master, is studiously careful for his flocks and herds as well as for his tender children; "if men should over-drive them one day, all the flock would die;" so "I will lead on softly," said he to Esau, "according as the cattle that goeth before me is able to endure." The angel of the Lord standing in the way, rebukes Balaam for smiting his ass three times: that unrighteous man, wishing there were a sword in his hand, too literally regardeth not the life of his beast. . . . We certainly ought not, pleads Plutarch, to treat living creatures like shoes or household goods, which, when worn out with use, we throw away; and, were it only to learn benevolence to human kind, we should be merciful to other creatures. To be kind to these our fellow-lodgers is common humanity. To be cruel to them is to be below it. It is almost, if not quite, to be a little lower than themselves. It is, maintains Sir Arthur Helps, an immense responsibility that Providence has thrown upon us in subjecting these sensitive creatures to our complete sway, and he avowedly trembles at the thought of how poor an answer we shall have to give, when asked the question how we have made use of the power entrusted to us over the brute creation . . . . The question of interposing law has been a vexed one, upon which the humanest have differed . . . So hard-headed and cool-headed a thinker as Stuart Mill is decisive and incisive in his arguments in favour of legal intervention. Mr. Lecky's suggestion of a doubt whether cruelty to animals can be condemned on

utilitarian grounds, is met by the obvious answer that a utilitarian may rationally include in his definition of the greatest number whose happiness is to be the aim of human beings, not only human beings themselves, but all animals capable of being happy or the reverse; beside which it is urged that, even if we limit our view to the good of our own species, the argument is as strong as can be desired. "If the criminality of an action were to be measured simply by its direct effects on human happiness, we might probably urge that the murderer of a grown-up man was worse than the murderer of a child, and far worse than the torturer of a dumb animal. Yet, as a matter of fact, we should probably feel a greater loathing for a man who could torment a beast for his pleasure than for one who should ill-use one of his equals." For such cruelty is held to indicate, as a rule, a baser nature. A murderer, though generally speaking a man of bad character, is not of necessity cowardly or mean; he may not improbably show some courage, and possibly even some sensibility to the nobler emotions. The tormentor of animals, on the other hand, shows callousness of nature, a pleasure in giving pain for the sake of giving pain, which has about it something to be described as devilish . . . John Foster declared it to be a great sin against moral taste to mention ludicrously, or for ludicrous comparison, circumstances in the animal world which are painful and distressing to the animals that are in them; the simile, for instance, "Like a toad under a harrow."—*Jacox.*

Lit. "knoweth." The authorised version gives the right application, but the words remind us that all true sympathy and care must grow out of knowledge. The righteous man tries to *know* the feelings and life even of the brute beast, and so comes to care for it. "*Tender mercies.*" Better "the feelings, the emotions," all that should have led to mercy and pity towards man. The circle expands in the one case, narrows in the other.—*Plumptre.*

When the pulse of kindness beats strong in the heart the warm stream is sent clean through the body of the human family, and retains force enough to expatiate among the living creatures that lie beyond. . . . . Cruelty is a characteristic of the wicked in general, and in particular of antichrist—that one, wicked by pre-eminence, whom Christ shall yet destroy by the brightness of His coming. By their fruits ye shall know them. The page of history is spotted with the cruelties of papal Rome. The red blood upon his garments is generally the means of discovering a murderer. The trailing womanish robes of the papal high priest are deeply stained with the blood of the saints. The same providence which employs the bloody tinge to detect the common murderer has left more lasting marks of Rome's cruelty. The Bartholomew massacre, for example, is recorded in more enduring characters than the stains of that blood which soaked the soil of France. The pope and his cardinals rejoiced greatly when they heard the news. So lively was their gratitude that they cast a medal to record it on. There stands the legend, raised in brass and silver—"*Strages Huguenotorum*" (the slaughter of the Huguenots)—in perpetual memory of the delight wherewith that wicked antichrist regarded the foulest butchery of men by their fellows that this sin-cursed earth has ever seen. That spot will not out with all their washings.—*Arnot.*

It is better to be the beast of a righteous man than the son of a wicked man; nay, it is better to be the beast of a righteous man than to be a wicked man. For the righteous will do right unto his beast; the merciful man hath sense of mercy wheresoever is sense of misery, and while in mercy he regardeth the life of the beast that is beneath him, he is made like unto God, who is so far above him. But the wicked man's tender mercies are "mercies of the cruel," or else his tender mercies are cruel, hurting as much as severe cruelty; and therefore many times a wicked father's fond affection is the utter undoing of a petted child, and

sparing pity, where evil should be chastised, is the breeding nurse of mischief which cannot be helped. The fond mercies whereby the wicked favoureth himself in sloth and idleness, whereby he pleaseth himself with pleasures and delights, whereby he pampereth himself with delicate and luscious meats, whereby he restraineth not his lusts and desires—what are they but cruelties whereby he tormenteth his body with sickness and quickly killeth it, and whereby he wilfully destroyeth his soul.—*Jermin.*

The worldly care of a high prosperous man may seem very tender to those dependent on him and towards others; but the very tenderness of an impenitent example is the higher snare, the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel. . . . Religion has no austerities that make a true saint careless of the life or feelings even of his *beast.* On the contrary, it breeds the most pervading tenderness; whereas the wise worlding, however careful of his home and tender towards all who have any claim upon his care, yet, in admitting that there is a hell, and neglecting all prayer for his household, and all example, except one that braves the worst, breeds children simply to destroy them.—*Miller.*

The tender mercies of the wicked are when base and guilty men are spared that should be smitten with the sword of justice. Pity of this sort is more cruel than cruelty itself. For cruelty is exercised upon individuals, but this pity, by granting impunity, arms and sends forth against innocent men the whole army of evil doers.—*Lord Bacon.*

We have been used to hear much of the benevolence of infidels and the philanthropy of deists. It is all a pretence. Self is the idol and self-indulgence the object, in the accomplishment of which they are little scrupulous about the means. Where self is the idol, the heart is cruel. While they talk of universal charity, they regard not the cruelty of robbing thousands of the consolations of religion. . . . While they speak of harmless gaiety and pleasure they would treacherously corrupt piety and pollute unsuspecting innocence.—*Holden.*

The word regard is of twofold application, and may either apply to the moral or the intellectual part of our nature. In the one it is the regard of attention; in the other it is the regard of sympathy or kindness. But we do not marvel at the term having been applied to two different things, for they are most intimately associated. They act and re-act upon each other. If the heart be very alive to any particular set of emotions the mind will be alert in singling out the peculiar objects which excite them; so, on the other hand, that the emotions be specifically felt the objects must be specifically noticed. . . . . So much is this the case that Nature seems to have limited and circumscribed our power of noticing just for the purpose of shielding us from too incessant a sympathy. . . . . If man, for instance, looked upon Nature with a microscopic eye his sensibilities would be exposed to the torture of a perpetual offence from all possible quarters of contemplation, or, if through habit these sensibilities were blunted, what would become of character in the extinction of delicacy of feeling? . . . . There is, furthermore, a physical inertness of our reflective faculties, an opiate infused, as it were, into the recesses of our mental economy, by which objects, when out of sight, are out of mind, and it is to some such provision, we think, that much of the heart's purity, as well as its tenderness, is owing; and it is well that the thoughts of the spirit should be kept, though even by the weight of its own lethargy, from too busy a converse with objects which are alike offensive and hazardous to both. . . . . But there is a still more wondrous limitation than this. . . . . The sufferings of the lower animals may be in sight, and yet out of mind. This is strikingly exemplified in the sports of the field, in the midst of whose varied and animating bustle that cruelty, which is all along present to the senses, may not, for one moment,

be present to the thoughts. . . . . It touches not the sensibilities of the heart, but just because it is never present to the notice of the mind. The followers of this occupation are reckless of pain, but this is not rejoicing in pain. Theirs is not the delight of savage, but the apathy of unreflecting creatures. . . . . We are inclined to carry this principle much further. We are not sure if, within the whole compass of humanity, fallen as it is, there be such a thing as delight in suffering for its own sake. But, without hazarding a controversy on this, we hold it enough for every practical object that much, and perhaps the whole of this world's cruelty, arises not from the enjoyment that is felt in consequence of others' pain, but from the enjoyment that is felt in spite of it. . . . . But a charge of the foulest delinquency may be made up altogether of wants or of negatives; and just as the human face, by the mere want of some of its features, although there should not be any inversion of them, might be an object of utter loathsomeness to beholders, so the human character, by the mere absence of certain habits or sensibilities which belong ordinarily and constitutionally to our species, may be an object of utter abomination in society. The want of natural affection forms one article of the Apostle's indictment against our world; and certain it is that the total want of it were stigma enough for the designation of a monster. The mere want of religion is enough to make a man an outcast from his God. Even to the most barbarous of our kind you apply, not the term of anti-humanity, but of inhumanity—not the term of anti-sensibility; and you hold it enough for the purpose of branding him for general execration that you convicted him of complete and total insensibility. . . . . We count it a deep atrocity that, unlike to the righteous man of our text, he simply does not regard the life of a beast. . . . . The true principle of his condemnation is that he ought to have regarded. . . . . Our text rests the whole cause of the inferior animals on one moral element, which is in respect of principle, and on one practical method, which is, in respect of efficacy, unquestionable: "A righteous man regardeth the life of his beast." Let a man be but righteous in the general and obvious sense of the word, and let the regard of his attention be but directed to the case of the inferior animals, and then the regard of his sympathy will be awakened to the full extent at which it is either duteous or desirable. . . . . The lesson is not the circulation of benevolence within the limits of one species. It is the transmission of it from one species to another. The first is but the charity of a world; the second is the charity of a universe. Had there been no such charity, no descending current of love and liberality from species to species, what would have become of ourselves? Whence have we learned this attitude of lofty unconcern about the creatures who are beneath us? Not from those ministering spirits who wait upon the heirs of salvation. . . . Not from that mighty and mysterious visitant who unrobed Him of all His glories, and bowed down His head unto the sacrifice, and still, from the seat of His now exalted mediatorship, pours forth His intercessions and His calls in behalf of the race He died for. Finally, not from the eternal Father of all, in the pavilion of whose residence there is the golden treasury of all those bounties and beatitudes that roll over the face of nature, and from the footstool of whose empyreal throne there reaches a golden chain of providence to the very humblest of His family.—*Chalmers.*

He prayeth best who loveth best
All things both great and small;
For the dear God that loveth us,
He made and loveth all.

Coleridge.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 11.

SATISFACTION FROM TILLAGE.

I. Satisfaction as the result of tillage depends—1. *Upon the performance of a Divine promise.* It is long ago since God gave to Noah the promise that "While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease" (Gen. ix. 22), and it has been so invariably fulfilled that men have come to forget upon whom they are depending—in whom they are exercising faith—when they plough the ground and sow the seed. God's regularity in His performance has bred in men a contempt for the promise and the promise maker. Men speak of the laws of nature and ignore the fact that it is by the Word of the Lord that the "rain cometh down and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater" (Isa. lv. 10). But so it is. The promise is the power that set the laws in motion at first and that have kept them in motion ever since. There can be no tillage without dependence upon God either acknowledged or unacknowledged. The promise is an absolute one, and implies power in God to fulfil it to the end of time. It can never fail unless God's power fail, or unless He break His word; these are blessed impossibilities with Him. Therefore, so far as God is concerned the *shall* of the text is absolute. But it depends likewise—2. *Upon men's fulfilment of their duties.* First, it is not *all* tillage that will satisfy a man with bread, the tillage must be painstaking and intelligent. The promise of God does not set aside the necessity for the man to be very laborious and to study carefully the nature and needs of the soil which he tills. Agriculture is a science which must be acquired—a man must learn how to till the ground. God claims to be man's instructor in this matter (Isa. xxviii. 26). Then, again, it must be *his* land that he tills, not land taken by fraud or violence from another. Neither if a man tills the land of another as his servant is he always paid sufficient wages to be satisfied with bread. But this is the greed of man interfering with God's ordinaton.

II. The promise suggests symbolic teaching. We may look at it in relation to the human spirit. As land must be ploughed and sown with painstaking intelligence if a man is to have the satisfaction of reaping a harvest, so the human soul must be the object of spiritual tillage if it is ever to yield any satisfaction to God or man. There is very much to be got out of the land, but no man can obtain the full blessing unless he cultivate it. So it is with the man himself. A human soul left to lie barren can never become as a "field which the Lord hath blessed." (1) It must be prepared to receive the words of God. The "fallow ground" must be broken up, lest the sowing be "among thorns" (Jer. iv. 3), or the seed fall where it can find no entrance (Hosea x. 12; Matt. xiii. 4). (2) Good seed must be sown. The word of God (Mark iv. 14), that "incorruptible seed" by which men are "born again" (1 Pet. i. 23). (3) And the spiritual sower must be persevering and prayerful. It is true of natural tillage that "He that observeth the wind shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap" (Eccles. xi. 4); it is equally so of soul-husbandry. The world, the flesh, and the devil will be always putting difficulties in the way of a man's caring for his "own soul." But these obstacles must be surmounted, and if the seed is watered by prayer God will assuredly send down the rain of the Holy Ghost. (4) And in spiritual tillage there is also a certainty of satisfaction. This also depends upon not *one* Divine promise but upon many—upon the revelation of God as a whole. (Upon the opposite character—him "that followeth vain persons," or vanity, instead of tilling his land or his spiritual nature—see Homiletics on chapters vi. 11 and x. 5, pages 79 and 147.)

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

We might have expected that the antithesis of the second clause would have ended with "shall lack bread," but the real contrast goes deeper. Idleness leads to a worse evil than that of hunger.—*Plumptre.*

Vain persons or "*empty people*"—most signally the impenitent—for they are empty of all good. "That follows after empty people" is a fine characteristic of the impenitent man's decline. Following others is the commonest influence to destroy the soul.—*Miller.*

Special honour is given to the work of tilling the land. God assigned it to Adam in Paradise. It was the employment of his eldest son. In ancient times it was the business or relaxation of kings. A blessing is ensured to diligence, sometimes abundant, always such as we should be satisfied with.—*Bridges.*

Of all the arts of civilised man agriculture is transcendantly the most essential and valuable. Other arts may contribute to the comfort, the convenience, and the embellishment of life, but the cultivation of the soil stands in immediate connection with our very existence. The life itself, to whose comfort, convenience, and embellishment other arts contribute, is by this sustained, so that others without it can avail nothing.—*Wardlaw.*

The only two universal monarchs practised husbandry. . . . . Some people think that they cannot have enough unless they have more than the necessaries and decent comforts of life: but we are here instructed that bread should satisfy our desires. Having food and raiment, let us be therewith content. There are few that want these, and yet few are content. . . . . To be satisfied with bread is a happy temper of mind, and is commonly the portion of the man of industry, which not only procures bread, but gives it a relish unknown to men that are above labour.—*Lawson.*

Sin brought in sweat (Gen. iii. 19), and now not to sweat increaseth sin. . . . . "*But he that followeth vain persons,*" etc. It is hard to be a good fellow and a good husband too.—*Trapp.*

Here is encouragement to those who travail in husbandry. They are of as good note with God for their service, if they be faithful, as others whose trades are more gainful, and better esteemed among men. The merchants, and goldsmiths, and others of such places, are not so often mentioned in Scripture as they be, nor animated with so many consolations as they are. The grand promises for blessing on their labour are made to them in special, and the rest must deduct their comforts from thence by proportion.—*Dod.*

In a moral point of view the life of the agriculturist is the most pure and holy of any class of men; pure, because it is the most healthful, and holy, because it brings the Deity perpetually before his view, giving him thereby the most exalted notions of supreme power, and the most fascinating and endearing view of moral benignity.—*Sir B. Maltravers.*

Ill fares the land, to hastening ills a prey,
Where wealth accumulates and men decay;
Princes and lords may flourish, or may fade;
A breath can make them, as a breath has made:
But a bold peasantry, their country's pride,
When once destroyed, can never be supplied.

Goldsmith.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—*Verses* 12—14.

I. Concerning wicked men we have—1. *A blessed instance of their inability to do all they desire.* Verse 12 speaks of their "desiring the net of evil men"—of their reaching out after larger opportunities of ensnaring their fellow-creatures than they have at their command at present. The desires and abilities of *good*

men are not always equally balanced. They have more desire to be good and to do good than they have ability to be or to do. The first teachers of Christianity desired a "net" that should enclose all to whom they preached the gospel, and this has been the desire of godly men ever since. They desire a "net" in which to catch their fellow-creatures for their good, but their ability always comes short of their desires. This is a saddening truth, but there is no denying the fact. But "the net of evil men" desired by the wicked is one in which to entrap men to their hurt. In this case it is a matter of rejoicing that their desires and their ability are not balanced. If ungodly men had their desires fulfilled they would soon transform the world into a mirror in which they would see them reflected in every human creature. We ought ever to give thanks to God that wicked men lack power to do all they desire to do to good men, and that they cannot even go to the length of their aspirations even with other ungodly men. They hate each other often with deep hatred, and human and Divine law alone prevents the world from being turned into a hell by the fulfilment of their desires against each other. There are outstanding debts always waiting to be settled whenever a net can be found large enough to entrap the victim, but God's providence is a larger net, and so arranges the events of human life that wicked men are often prevented from committing greater crimes than they do against each other. 2. *Retribution falling upon them.* A net is laid, and prey is ensnared, but it is he who desired to entrap his brother who "is snared by the transgression of his own lips" (ver. 13). It is as certain as that water will find its level that men who lay traps for others will be entrapped themselves (see chap. xi. 8). And this will come about not by another man's laying a net for them but by their own plans being turned against them. Thus Haman made a snare for his own feet by the "transgression of his own lips" when he sought to persuade Ahasuerus that "it was not for his profit to suffer the Jews" (Esther iii. 8). He thought this net would enclose Mordecai, but it enwrapped himself in its meshes. So when Daniel's enemies laid their plans against him. Many a time has a godly man had occasion to sing David's song, "*The heathen are sunk down in the pit that they made; in the net which they hid is their own foot taken*" (Psa. ix. 15). It is a law of God's government. "*He that leadeth into captivity shall go into captivity*" (Rev. xiii. 10). This is the "recompense which shall be rendered unto" the man who lays plans to injure others (ver. 14).

II. Concerning righteous men we have—1. *A godly character springing from a root of piety.* The principal thing to be aimed at in building a house is to get a good foundation; if the foundation be insecure, the house will be worthless. That which makes a healthy fruit-bearing tree is a healthy, strong root; however fair the branches may at present look, they will soon betray any disease at the seat of its life. The root of a man's character is his *desire;* if the desire is righteous, he is a righteous—though not a perfect—man. As the wicked man was made by his evil desire, so the good man is made by his desires after that which is true and benevolent. 2. *That which is yielded by such a root.* 1. *Deliverance.* He is delivered from the net laid for him by the evil counsels of the wicked. His character is often the means of bringing him *into* trouble, but the same character is a guarantee that he shall come *out* of it. The time of trouble is by permission or by appointment of God, and it is only for a limited time. Job and Joseph were both brought into trouble because their characters awakened the envy—the one of angelic, the other of human sinners; but their histories are left on record to show to all just men, who find themselves in similar circumstances from the same cause, what the "end of the Lord" is, and will be to them (Jas. v. ii.). There must come a final and blessed deliverance from all trouble for those who yield the fruit of a holy life from the root of a holy character (Rev. xxi. 4). 2. *Satisfaction* (verse 14). One of the

fruits of a righteous man will be his holy and wise speech—speech which blesses men in opposition to that "transgression of the lips" which is meant to injure them (verse 13). From this "fruit of the mouth" he shall be "satisfied with good"—he will have the reward of knowing that his words bless others, and this will be to him a source of satisfaction. Or his wise speech may be the means of bringing him material good and temporal honour.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Verse 12. Man is always restless to press onwards to something not yet enjoyed. The wicked emulate each other in wickedness, and if they see evil men more successful than themselves, desire their net (Psa. x. 8–10; Jer. v. 26–28).—*Bridges.*

The words are somewhat obscure, both in the original and in the translation. The meaning, however, seems as follows: The "net of evil men," as in chap. i. 17, is that in which they are taken—the judgment of God in which they are ensnared. This they run into with such a blind infatuation that it seems as if they were in love with their own destruction. The marginal "fortress" (a meaning given to the feminine form in Isa. xxix. 7; Ezek. xix. 9) gives the thought that the wicked seek the protection of others like themselves, but seek in vain the "root of the just" (*i.e.*, that in them which is fixed and stable), alone yields that protection. The latter rendering is, on the whole, preferable.—*Plumptre.*

Some render the latter clause, *He* (*i.e.*, the Lord) *will give a root of the righteous;* that is, will enable them to stand firm.—*Wordsworth.*

The impenitent does not prefer to work the soil of his soul, as in the last verse, but is in hopes to gain by something easier; he likes to seize as in the chase, or as robbers do. He likes to seize without having produced or earned. But the righteous not only goes through solid processes of piety, but (another intensive clause, chap. xi. 14) earns for others, as well as for himself. While impenitence would take heaven as in a net, religion works for it, and, in so doing, "gives" or "yields."—*Miller.*

The word "*net*" may be understood of *any means* by which the wealth and honours of the world may be acquired. Thus it is used in Habakkuk i. 13–17. The net described here is that of the oppressor, who regards his fellow-men as of any value only as he can render them conducive to his own benefit and aggrandisement, and who uses them accordingly, and when his oppressive powers prove successful vaunts himself in the power and the skill by which the means has been secured. There seems to be a special reference, in the verse before us, to illegitimate or fraudulent means. When "the wicked" see the devices of "evil men" succeed, they desire to try the same arts. . . . If, in any case, conscience *should* remonstrate and restrain, and will not allow them to go quite so far, they yet envy, and regret their restraints. They still *desire* the net, even when they can't bring themselves to use it. They wish they could get over their scruples, and, in this state of mind, the probability is that by and by they will. The "root of the righteous" might be understood as meaning the fixed, settled, stable *principle* of the righteous, and the sentiment may be, and it is an important one, that, *acting on rooted principle*, the righteous may and will ultimately prosper. I incline, however, to think that as "the net" signifies the varied artifice, cunning, and fraud employed to gain riches quickly, the root of the righteous may rather represent the *source of his revenue or income;* and, in opposition to the art of making rich quickly, to excite the surprise and the envy of others, a steady, firmly-established, regularly; and prudently and justly-conducted business, bringing in its profits fairly and moderately, as

a tree, deeply-rooted in the soil, draws thence its natural nourishment, and, "receiving blessing from God," brings forth its fruit in due season. The two views are closely, if not inseparably, connected.—*Wardlaw.*

The wicked seek their good from without; the righteous have it within, their own root, deep and firmly sunk, supplying it.—*Fausset.*

He so furiously pursueth his lusts, as if he desired destruction; as if he would outdare God Himself; as if the guerdon of his gracelessness would not come time enough, but he must needs run to meet it. Thus thrasonical Lamech (Gen. iv. 23) thinks to have the odds of God seventy to seven. Thus the princes of the Philistines, whilst plagued, came up to Mizpeh against Israel, as it were, to fetch their bane (1 Sam. vii.).—*Trapp.*

Verse 13. The words *saphah* (lip) and *lashon* (tongue) occur, the first in verses 13, 19, 22, the second in verses 18, 19 in this chapter. The former occurs about *forty-five* times in this book; and the words connected with them, such as *strife*, *wrath*, *slander*, *scorn*, and their contraries, *love*, *peace*, *truth*, etc., are very frequent, showing the importance to be attached to the right government of the tongue.—*Wordsworth.*

Matters are so arranged, in the constitution of the world, that the straight course of truth is safe and easy; the crooked path of falsehood difficult and tormenting. Here is perennial evidence that the God of providence is wise and true. By making lies a snare to catch liars in, the Author of being proclaims, even in the voices of nature, that He "requireth truth in the inward parts." "The just shall come out of trouble;" that is the word; it is not said he shall never fall into it. The inventory which Jesus gives of what His disciples shall have "now in this time," although it contains many things that nature loves, closes with the article "persecutions" (Mark x. 30). . . . . Those who wave their palms of victory and sing their jubilant hymns of praise, were all in the horrible pit once.—*Arnot.*

All human conduct is represented by the lips (verse 6 and chap xiv. 3). The tongue is aforemost business agent. The impenitent, though he may stand out very clear, and see no tokens of a net, yet, as his life is false his not seeing the snare shows only how the more insidiously he may be entangled in. While the righteous, though he may be born to the snare; originally condemned; and though he may be caught in the toils of great worldly evil, yea, of sin itself; yet out of the very jaw of the trap where he may have foolishly entered, he will in the end be helped to get out.—*Miller.*

They (the just) suffer sometimes for their bold and free invectives against the evils of the times, but they shall surely be delivered . . . . John Baptist, indeed, was, without any law, right, and reason, beheaded in prison as though God had known nothing at all of him, said George Marsh, the martyr. And the same may be said of sundry other witnesses to the truth, but then by death they entered into life eternal . . . . Besides that heaven upon earth they had during their troubles . . . . The best comforts are usually reserved for the worst times.—*Trapp.*

Verse 14. Albeit the opening of the mouth is a small matter; yet, when it is done in wisdom, it shall be recompensed by the Lord with great blessing. For such as use their tongues to God's glory, and the edification of their brethren, instructing them and exhorting them from day to day, shall be loved by God and man, and taste many good things. Now, as good words, so good works shall be rewarded. For the recompense of a man's hands shall reward him; not only shall the wicked be plagued for their evil doing, but the godly shall be blessed for their well-doing.—*Muffet.*

This is the whole question of capital and labour put in a nutshell. *All* is not to be claimed by the *hands*, for there is the mouth that directs

and orders. *As much* is not to be claimed by the *hands*, for the Bible is a good, truthful book, and it claims for the mind more than for the muscle. (See this distinction in Eccles. x. 10.) "*A man of the better sort*," with his education, and expensive capital, earns more, according to the inspired Solomon, than the "labouring man." What he demands of the Christian gentleman is, that he shall make an estimate of all this, and, while he keeps himself "*the earnings of the mouth*," he render carefully to the labourer the wages of his hands. We have no authority for this interpretation. We present it as unquestionably just. The translation it would be hard to give literally. But the words are about thus: "*From the fruit of the mouth of a man of the better class, a good man will be satisfied; and the wage (lit. the work) of the hands of a common man he will render to him.*" This fair, calculating spirit, in all questions between man and man, not tending to communism on the one hand and not yielding to tyranny on the other, is the true spirit of the inspired Gospel.—*Miller.*

There are "empty vines that bear fruit unto themselves" (Hosea x. 1). And as empty casks sound loudest, and base metal rings shrillest, so many empty tattlers are full of discourse. Much fruit will redound by holy speeches to ourselves—much to others. Paul showeth that the very report of his bonds did a great deal of good in Cæsar's house (Phil. i. 14) . . . . One seasonable truth, falling upon a prepared heart, hath oft a strong and sweet influence. Sometimes, also, although we know that which we ask of others as well as they do, yet good speeches will draw us to know it better by giving occasion to speak more of it, wherewith the Spirit works most effectually, and imprints it deeper, so that it shall be a more rooted knowledge than before.—*Trapp.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSES 15 *and* 16.

Two Examples of Foolishness and Wisdom.

I. The man who guides his life by his own self-conceit—rejecting the advice of others. No finite creature possesses sufficient wisdom within himself to direct his path through life. The largest and deepest rivers are dependent upon small streams to sustain their volume of water, and each little stream again must be fed from a source outside itself, and the springs which feed the streams have their origin in the ocean's fulness. So the very greatest minds are in some things dependent upon minds which in many things are their inferior, and it is a mark of wisdom to acknowledge this, and to be willing to take advice of anyone who is able to give it upon matters in which they are better informed. Thus men are led to exercise a mutual dependence on each other, and all to depend upon Him whose wisdom is the parent of all finite counsel that is of any value. (1) A man who will not acknowledge and act upon this principle is a fool, because he practically shuts his eyes to a self-evident fact, and denies that he is a member of a race, the members of which are evidently intended to supply each other's lack in such a manner as to form a mutually dependent body. It is in human society as it is in the individual human body—"the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you" (1 Cor. xii. 21), or if they do say so they only proclaim their great want of wisdom. (2) He is a fool because he declines to profit by the experience of men in the past. To recur to the simile of the human body, it is intended to live upon material outside itself, and a man is counted insane who refuses to take food. So we are intended to profit by the experience of men who have lived before us, and it is quite as foolish to set it aside as useless to

as it is to refuse to eat in order to live. It is indeed like expecting to keep in health and strength by consuming one's own flesh. No man does actually and in all cases refuse to profit by the wisdom and experience of others, but he is foolish in proportion as he does so. (3) He is a fool because he is so declared by the highest authority. God by His offers of guidance, by the very existence of the Bible, declares that men need counsel. (See upon this subject Homiletics on chap. iii. 7, 8, page 34.) The human soul is like a blind Samson, because of the blinding nature of sin relative and sin personal, and all its endeavours to find a right way without hearkening to Divine counsel only result in stumbles and wounds, and finally, if persisted in, in moral ruin. All a man's endeavours only increase his misery, until he take the counsel offered him by God. He is like a shipwrecked mariner suffering from raging thirst from having drunk of the briny water, every draught only increases the disease, and nothing can save him but drinking of pure water. (4) This man is his own destroyer. It is bad to be ruined by the temptations of others, but there is this advantage, we can fall back upon the excuse of our first parents: "The woman gave me of the tree and I did eat," or "the serpent beguiled me" (Gen. iii. 12, 13). But when a man's rejection of counsel ruins him, he finds himself in a "blind alley," from which there is not even the outlet of an excuse.

II. The passionate man. This is often the companion of self-conceit and is indeed a proof of it. If a man is unable to hold a restive horse well in hand, it proves that he has not taken lessons in horsemanship. If a man cannot steer a vessel in ordinary circumstances without running her upon the rocks, it shows that he has not learned the art of navigation. A man who cannot keep his anger from over-mastering him—who cannot keep a firm hold of the rudder of his own spirit—proclaims that he has not subjected himself to moral discipline, that he has disdained to learn the art of moral rulership. Such a man is a fool, because a man in a passion is always despised by others, he often utters words which he would afterwards give much to recall, and generally ends by losing his own self-respect.

III. In contrast to this character stands the man who is in all respects the opposite—him whose character is sketched in the first clauses of these verses, who "loveth instruction" (ver. 1) who acknowledges that "he is a stranger in the earth and needs Divine guidance" (Psa. cxix. 19), that "the way of man is not himself; it is not in man that walketh to direct his step" (Jer. x. 23.—See Homiletics on chap. x. 8, page 151). Such a man is willing to listen to the advice of any who are capable of giving it, and his prudence in this matter is generally accompanied by an ability to "cover shame"—to take a reproof or an insult in silence. He has learned to take George Herbert's advice—

> "Command thyself in chief. He life's war knows
> Whom all his passions *follow* as he goes."

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Verse 15. All through our lost nature the truth of this proverb is visible. A man may be on the road to hell, but think that he is fair for heaven. A man may build by rapine, but think that he is the pink of fair dealing. A man is not a judge about himself. A Christian, therefore, will feel this, and while the impenitent is hard as to his own right, the Christian will be humble, and will be glad, in reasonable ways, to leave his duties to be advised upon by others.—*Miller.*

We have one great "Counsellor" Messiah, who is made unto us "wisdom" (Isa. ix. 6; 1 Cor. i. 30). Let us "hearken unto" Him (chap. i. 33). *Fausset.*

And such a fool is every natural man (Job xi. 12); wise enough, haply

in his generation—so is the fox too—wise with such wisdom as, like the ostrich's wings, makes him outrun others upon earth, but helps him never a whit towards heaven.—*Trapp.*

The worse any man is, or doth, the less he seeth his evil. They that commit the most sins have hope that they stand guilty of fewest; they that fall into the greatest transgressions, imagine that their faults be the smallest; they that sink into the deepest dangers do dream of greatest safety; they that have longest continued in rebellion against God, of all others, for the most part are slowest to repentance. . . . St. Paul testifieth that when he was in the worst case, he knew nothing but that he had been in the best.—*Dod.*

Every man's way is, and must be, in some degree, acceptable to himself, otherwise he would never have chosen it. But, nevertheless, whoever is wise, will be apt to suspect and be diffident of himself. Let men's abilities be ever so great, and their knowledge ever so extensive, still they ought not, and without great danger and inconvenience cannot, trust wholly and entirely to themselves. For those abilities and that knowledge easily may be, and often are, rendered useless by the prejudices and prepossessions of men's own minds. Nothing is more common than for men's appetites and affections to bribe their judgments, and seduce them into erroneous ways of thinking and acting. They are often entangled and set fast, not through the want of light and knowledge, not through any defect of their heads, but through the deceitfulness of their hearts. In many cases where they could easily direct other men, they suffer themselves to be misled, and are driven into the snare by the strength of inclination, or by the force of habit. . . . This acquired darkness, this voluntary incapacity, as well as the want of counsel thereby occasioned, nowhere appears more frequently, or more remarkably, than in the transaction of our spiritual concerns, and what relates to the discharge of our duty. "The way of man," says our royal author, "is right in his own eyes," though the end "thereof be the ways of death." When we have wandered out of the road, and almost lost ourselves in bye-paths, we can make ourselves believe that we have continued all the while in the highway to truth and happiness. . . . But, however lightly we may esteem the helps and directions of men, shall we not attend to the counsels of Our Heavenly Father, and the admonitions of the Most High? Can we have more regard to what is "right in our own eyes" than to what is right in His?—*Balguy.*

Verse 16. "Covereth," with the mantle of patience and charity, instead of exasperating himself, and losing self-control by dwelling on the indignity of the word or deed, and the worthlessness of the injurer. He does not publish the act to the discredit of the other, but consults for the reputation of the other, lest he should add sin to the injury suffered.—*Fausset.*

Truly is *wrath* called *shame*. For is it not a *shame* that unruly passions should, as it were, trample reason under foot, disfigure even the countenance, and subjugate the whole man to a temporary madness? (Dan. iii. 19.) —*Bridges.*

A fool hath no power over his passions. Like tow, he is soon kindled; like a pot, he soon boils; and like a candle whose tallow is mixed with brine, as soon as lighted he spits up and down the room. "A fool uttereth all his mind" (Chap. xxix. 11). The Septuagint renders it "all his anger." For, as the Hebrews well note in a proverb they have, "A man's mind is soonest known in his *purse*, in his *drink*, and in his *anger*." But "A wise man covereth shame" by concealing his wrath, or rather by suppressing it when it would break forth to his disgrace, or the just grief of another. This was Saul's wisdom (1 Sam. x. 27); and Jonathan's (1 Sam. xii. 35); and Ahasuerus's, when, in a rage against Haman, he walked into the garden. The philosopher wished Augustine,

when angry, to say over the Greek alphabet.—*Trapp.*

The meaning of the Holy Ghost is not here to condemn all kinds of anger, for it is one of the powers of the soul which God created as an ornament in men, and godly anger is a part of God's image in him, and a grace commended in Moses, Elijah, etc., and our Saviour Himself, and he that is always altogether destitute of this doth provoke God to be angry with him, for want of zeal and hatred of sin; but it is a *passionate* anger that is here reproved, which is not a power of the soul, but an impotency. He that conceiveth the other is an *agent*, and doth a service to God; but he that is moved with this is a *patient*, and sin hath in that case prevailed against him.—*Dod.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 17 *to* 19, *and verse* 22.

Wounding and Healing.

I. The mischief that may be done by a lying tongue. 1. *In a legal matter.* It is the duty of a witness to testify exactly what he knows, and no more nor less. If a man speaks deceitfully he may bring much misery upon the innocent, whom his straightforward testimony would have acquitted. And he may do this by withholding truth as well as by uttering direct falsehood. The first is "showing forth deceit" as well as the last. 2. *In common conversation.* The word "speaketh," in verse 18, is "babbleth," and seems to point to those who are great talkers, and who are not careful what they say. (See Homiletics on chap. x. 19–21, page 168.) In both these cases words may inflict a more deadly wound than a sword. If spoken *to a man* they may break his heart, if spoken *of him* they may kill his reputation, which no sword of steel can touch, and which to the best men is much more precious than bodily life. A lying or even a *babbling* tongue can pierce a much more vital organisation than flesh and blood—it can enter the human spirit, and hurt it in its most sensitive part; or by slander it can destroy all the joy of a man's earthly life. And as a sword can in a moment sever the spirit and the body of a man, and work such ruin and misery as can never be done away with, so a lying tongue may by one word, or one conversation, do mischief that can never be undone. The sword of steel can divide human friends locally; but it cannot sever their love; it tends rather to increase and brighten the flame; but a word of slander may do all this, and estrange those who were bound in the tenderest ties, until the God of Truth shall bring the truth to light. Though the lying tongue is comparatively "but for a moment," yet in a moment it can deal a thrust that will last as long as life. It can open a wound whence will flow out all the joy of life, as the heart's blood flows from a mortally wounded man.

II. Its judgment and its destiny. It is an abomination in the sight of a God of Truth, and, therefore, its life is comparatively short—it is "but for a moment" compared with the eternal duration of truth. A lying man or devil is the very antipodes of the Divine character. All truthful men instinctively shrink from a liar as the sensitive plant withdraws from the human touch. How much more must he be held in abhorrence by Him who is a "God of Truth, and without iniquity" (Deut. xxxii. 4). Christ characterises lying as the cardinal sin of the greatest sinner in the universe (John viii. 44). It was his lying tongue that "brought death into the world, and all our woe," and so spoiled the Paradise which God had prepared for man. How then can lying be any other than an abomination to Him? But, because it is so, its doom is fixed. It is destined to destruction by the victory of truth, as the night is destroyed by the overcoming light of day. (On this subject see also Homiletics on Chap. x. 18, page 166.)

III. The blessed results of a truthful and wisely-governed tongue. 1. *It will "show forth righteousness."* A man who speaks the truth shows forth righteousness in two ways—(1) *in his own character.* He reveals himself to be a righteous man. He gives a living example of uprightness and integrity. (2) *He helps on righteousness in the world.* By being a faithful witness he furthers the ends of justice and righteousness—he helps on the just administration of the law. 2. *It will heal wounds inflicted by the untruthful tongue.* In nature we have a two-fold exhibition of power. The hurricane comes and breaks the branches of the tree, and strips off its leaves; but a more beneficent power clothes it again with beauty. So the tongue of a fool strips a man of what made life beautiful to him—takes away his good name, or breaks bonds of close friendship—but wise and kind words have a healing power in them—they help to cheer the wounded spirit, and enable the bowed head to lift itself again. Such a tongue of healing had the Divine Son of God, who came "to heal the broken in heart" (Isa. lxi. 1), and to restore the friendship between God and man, which was first broken by the slandering tongue of the devil—that great slanderer of God to man, and of man to God" (Gen. iii. 5; Job i. 10). To Him the "*Lord God gave the tongue of the learned, that He might know how to speak a word in season to him that was weary* (Isa. l. 4). The tongue of all true servants of God is an instrument of healing, for they are enabled to tell to their fellow-men "words whereby they may be saved" (Acts x. 14).

IV. God's estimation of it and its destiny. It is "God's delight," verse 22. Whatever gives delight to a noble and benevolent man must be a blessing to humanity, and everything will delight him that tends to minister blessing to the world. This is pre-eminently true of the good God. Truth is the great need of the race—truth in word and deed and thought. To this end Christ came into the world "to bear witness of the truth" (John xviii. 37), because that alone is the cure for the world's woes. Then every man who is *true* must bless humanity and consequently delight God. A good father rejoices to see his own excellencies of character appear in his son, and the Father of the good likewise delights to see His children copy Him in "dealing truly." (See also on chap. xi. 1, page 191.) And because it is God's delight it will last for ever. Truth of any kind will be established in the course of time. If a man proclaim a scientific truth, however much he may be laughed at and disbelieved at first, his "lip," or his words, will be established in the end. The words of Galileo, when he uttered the truth, that the earth moved round the sun, have long since been "established." Time only is needed for any truth to take root-hold—it can never be overturned, whether it be physical or moral truth. Many truths which were scoffed at by most men, when they were first promulgated, are now regarded as truisms by almost everybody. And the lips that uttered them are now established and held in honour. Such men, for instance, as Cromwell and Milton, when they declared that the right of private judgment in religious matters, the freedom of the press, etc., were the right of every man, are now established in the estimation of this nation, and the truths which they uttered are regarded by all Englishmen as undoubted facts. "This," says F. W. Robertson, "is man's relation to the truth. He is but a learner—a devout recipient of a revelation—here to listen with open ear devoutly for that which he shall hear; to gaze and watch for that which he shall see. Man can do no more. He cannot create truth; he can only bear witness to it; he can only listen and report that which is in the universe. If he does not repeat and witness to that, he speaketh of his own, and forthwith ceases to be true. . . . Veracity is another thing. Veracity is the correspondence between a proposition and a man's belief. Truth is the correspondence of the proposition with fact." It is to such witness-bearers—especially to those who witness concerning moral truth—that the promise of the text applies.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Verse 17. He who is brought to a spiritual discernment of the "*truth*" "breathes" it like his breath, instinctively and unconsciously. (See Critical Notes.) And he who does this not simply "covers shame" (verse 16), but causes others to, for he *advertises* righteousness—*i.e.*, *publishes* it. This, therefore, is the meaning of the sentence: "He that breathes forth truth publishes righteousness"—*i.e.*, saving righteousness: and does it like uttering forth his breath. While the "deceived" (false) witness; literally, *the witness of falsehood;* a phrase which is ambiguous because it might mean a *witness to falsehood* (see chap. vi. 9)—the "deceived witness"—*i.e.*, the man who sees or witnesses falsehood instead of truth, "*publishes* (understood) *delusion*"—*i.e.*, is a constant fountain of deceit to other men. This sense of the witness of falsehood is necessary to many proverbs (chap xiv. 5), and saves a number from tautological or truistic interpretations.—*Miller.*

There is more here than lies upon the surface. It might seem enough for a faithful witness to *speak truth.* But no—he must *show forth righteousness;* what is *just*, as well as what is *true.* The best intentioned purpose must not lead us to conceal what is necessary to bring the cause to a righteous issue.—*Bridges.*

The words read at first almost like a truism; but the thought which lies below the surface is that of the inseparable union between truth and justice. The end does not justify the means, and only he who breathes and utters truth makes the righteous cause clear. *Plumptre.*

He that *speaketh*, ordinarily, in his common speech, that which is true, will *show righteousness*—that is, will carry himself justly, and further righteousness with his testimony, when he shall be publicly called thereunto. There must be a training of the tongue to make it fit for equity and justice, as of the hands, and other parts of the body, to make them skilful in handling a weapon and bearing of arms. . . . No man is competent for any work that is public unless his former upright and honest conversation commend him unto it. The rule which our Saviour gives in another case will hold as firmly in this. "*He that is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in much*" (Luke xvi. 10). For, *first*, the mouth of the man is the mouth of the man's treasure. That which he speaketh he best loveth. That which is most in the lips hath greatest place in the heart. If, therefore, the truth be dear unto him, he will certainly show it forth when he shall stand forth before God and His substitute for that purpose, and so do a good service of love and piety; but if he have any fellowship with falsehood he will now take part with it, being void of the fear of God, and afraid to displease man. *Secondly*, no man exerciseth the truth at any time conscionably, but by the spirit of truth, and that directing men's hearts at other times, in matters of less weight, will not fail them at their greatest need, when they are to perform a duty of so great importance; and so, on the other hand, Satan hath the disposing of their tongues that give themselves to lying. He is their father, he teacheth them their trade, and tasketh them in their work, and they be wholly at his commandment, and who doubteth but he will command them to be on his side, and to take against the truth, so far as a knowledge of the truth shall make against his practices.—*Dod.*

Verse 18. *Wit*, when not chastened and controlled by an amiable disposition, often wounds deeply. Jibes, jests, irony, raillery, and sarcasm, fly about. No matter what the wounds, or where they be inflicted, if the wit be but shown. A *happy hit*, a clever, biting repartee, will not be suppressed for the sake of the feelings, or even the character of a neighbour, or, as it may happen, a friend. The man of wit *must* have his joke, cost what it may.

The point may be piercing in the extreme; but if it *glitters* it is enough; to the heart it will go.—*Wardlaw.*

Abimelech and his fellow priests were killed with the tongue, as with a rapier; so was Naboth and his sons; so was our Saviour Christ Himself. An honest mind is ever more afflicted with words than blows. You shall find some, saith Erasmus, that if they be threatened with death can despise it; but to be belied they cannot brook, nor from revenge contain themselves. How was David enraged by Nabal's railings! Moses, by the people's murmurings! Jeremiah by the derisions of the rude rabble! (chap. xx. 7, 8.)—*Trapp.*

Among all the complaints which the godly, and God's own spirit make against the wicked in the Scriptures, they seldom complain of anything more than of their virulent and pestiferous mouths (Psa. lv. 21, lii. 2; Prov. xxv. 18; Rom. iii. 13). *First*, they cause swords to be drawn, and blood to be shed and men to be slain, and much mischief to be wrought. *Secondly.* The sword, or any other weapon, can only hurt them that are present, and in places near to it; but the stroke of the tongue will light most dangerously upon them that are absent; no place or distance can help against it, and one man may do mischief to a great multitude.—*Dod.*

Verse 19. Liars need to have good memories. A lying tongue soon betrays itself. "No lie reaches old age," says Sophocles.—*Fausset.*

The verse has been differently rendered. "The tongue of truth is ever steady: but the tongue of falsehood is so but for a moment" (*Hodgson*). There is unvarying consistency in the one case; for truth is always in harmony with itself; while there is shifting evasion, vacillation, contradiction, in the other.—*Wardlaw.*

Who will gainsay the martyr's testimony—"Be of good comfort, Master Ridley, play the man! We shall this day light such a candle in England as I trust shall *never be put out.*"—*Bridges.*

The Christian shall utter for ever just the things that he utters on earth. *Miller.*

Verse 22. Not merely they that *speak* truly, but they that *deal* truly. Deeds of true dealing must confirm words of fair speaking.—*Fausset.*

A lie is a thing absolutely and intrinsically evil; it is an act of injustice and a violation of our neighbour's rights. The vileness of its nature is equalled by the malignity of its effects; it first brought sin into the world, and is since the cause of all those miseries and calamities that disturb it; it tends utterly to overthrow and dissolve society, which is the greatest temporal blessing and support of mankind; it has a strange and peculiar efficacy above all other sins to indispose the heart to religion. It is as dreadful in its punishments as it has been pernicious in its effects.—*South.*

Honesty is just *truth in conduct;* and *truth* is *honesty in words.*—*Wardlaw.*

Such as speak the truth in uprightness will not vary in their talk, but tell the same tale again, and be like to themselves in that which they shall say; whereas liars be in and out, affirming and denying, and speaking contradictions in the same matter. Only true men are constant in their words. *First*, their matter will help their memory, for that which is truth once will be truth ever. *Secondly*, the same Spirit that worketh a love and conscience of the truth, whereby men are made to be true, doth never cease to be the same, therefore, as it seasoneth the heart and guideth it at the first, so it will establish it, and direct the lips to the end. For sincerity and uprightness is of all things most durable, and least subject to alteration or change. And that St. Paul assigneth for a cause of his invariable constancy, that he minded not those things that he did mind according to the flesh, whereby there should be with him, *yea, yea*, and *nay, nay* (2 Cor. 1-17).—*Dod.*

Truth is always consistent with itself,

and needs nothing to help it out; it is always near at hand, and sits upon our lips, and is ready to drop out before we are aware; whereas a lie is troublesome, and sets a man's invention upon the rack, and one trick needs a good many more to make it good. It is like building upon a false foundation, which constantly needs props to shore it up, and proves at last more chargeable than to have raised a substantial building at first upon a true and solid foundation.—*Tillotson.*

Dare to be true, nothing can need a lie:
A fault which needs it most grows two thereby.
—*Herbert.*

God "desireth truth in the inward parts" (Psa. li. 6), and all His are "children that will not lie" (Isa. lxiii. 8); they will rather die than lie. As they "love in the truth" (2 John i.) so they "speak the truth in love" (Ephes. iv. 15), and are therefore dear to the Father in truth and love (2 John iii.), especially since they "do truth" as well as speak it (1 John i. 6), and do not more desire to be truly good than they hate to seem to be so only.—*Trapp.*

God doth never hate anything that is not hateful, and that must needs be odious which He abhorreth, and especially when it is abomination. Ye may know by their companions among whom they are marshalled what account he maketh of them (see Rev. xxi. 8) . . . . That truth which is acceptable to God consisteth both in speaking and doing. 1. His Spirit doth make every man that hath attained to the one to be able to do the other. That which St. John setteth down in a more general manner doth strongly confirm this particular point. "*If any man sin not in word, he is a perfect man, and able to bridle all the body.*" His meaning is that some be absolute without sin in word, and perfect, without infirmity in goodness; but that many be gracious without sinfulness, though they have their slips in speeches; and sincere, without wickedness, though they have their frailties in behaviour. 2. Both are infallible and essential fruits of regeneration, and the Apostle doth thereby persuade us thereby to declare ourselves to be of the number of the saints, and faithful, saying, "*Cast off lying, and let him that stole steal no more*" (Ephes. iv. 24, 28). 3. Both are required of them that would know and manifest themselves to be natural members of the Church in this world, and inheritors of salvation in the life to come. (See Psa. xv. 1, 2.)—*Dod.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 20

JOY FROM PEACE.

I. There must be counsel if there is to be peace. There can be no peace either in a soul, a family, or a nation, where there is no counsel given and taken. There must be some centre of authority and rule whence counsel issues, if there is to be any order, and where there is no order there can be no peace. The peace of the text must be peace based upon *righteousness*, indeed all that bears the name that is not built upon this foundation, is false and transitory. It is like that house built upon the sand, which, when the winds come, is swept away, although it may look like a solid structure on a summer day. It is "the work of *righteousness*," that "*shall be peace, and the effect* of *righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever.*" "The mountains shall bring peace . . . by righteousness (Psalm lxxii. 3; Isa. xxxii. 17).

II. Where there is true peace by righteousness there will be joy. Joy is the overflow of peace. Peace is like a river flowing tranquilly between its banks, and joy is like the same river when there is such a volume of water that it overflows the banks. When there is "an abundance of peace" in a soul,

or a family, or a nation, it must overflow into joy—it must take a more active form. (The subject of the first clause of this verse has been treated before. See on verse 5).

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

That deceit is in the heart of him who deviseth evil appears to be a platitude, for the devising is directed against a neighbour. But, in the first place, it says that the evil which a man hatches against another always issues in a fraudulent malicious deception of the same; and, secondly, it says, when taken into connection with the second clause, that with the deception he always at the same time prepares for him sorrow. The contrast denotes not those who give counsel to contending parties to conclude peace, but such as devise peace—viz., in reference to the neighbour, for the word means not merely to impart counsel, but also mentally to devise, to resolve upon, to decree. Hitzig and Zöckler give to *peace* the general idea of welfare, and interpret *joy* as the inner joy of a good conscience. But as the *deception* in the first clause is not self-deception, but the deception of another, so the joy is not that which men procure for others. Thoughts of peace for one's neighbour are always thoughts of procuring joy for him, as thoughts of evil are thoughts of deceit; and thus of procuring sorrow for him.—*Delitzsch.*

Evil counsel most hurteth those that give it. By deceit is here meant a deceitful reward; or an issue of a matter deceiving a man's expectation. —*Muffet.*

They shall have peace for peace; peace of conscience for peace of country; *pax pectoris* for *pax temporis.* They shall be called and counted the children of peace; yea, the children of God.—*Trapp.*

First, no man can soundly seek to reconcile man to God, or one man to another, or give direction for his neighbour's welfare, unless he himself be reconciled to God, and peaceable towards men, and have Christian love in his heart, and these graces are never separated from holy comfort and gladness. For the same sap that sendeth forth the one, doth in like manner also yield the other, as the apostle testifieth (Gal. v. 22; Rom. xiv. 17). *Secondly*, if their counsel be embraced and followed, the good effect thereof, with God's blessing, besides thanks and kindness which the parties holpen by their counsel, will yield to them; as David to Abigail, and Naaman to Elisha, etc. *Thirdly*, though their advice be rejected, yet, as Isaiah saith, their reward is with the Lord, and they shall be glorious in His eyes (Isa. xlix. 4, 5).—*Dod.*

Deceit is in the heart (or cometh back to the heart) of them that imagine evil (or practise mischief). **I. The persons are described.** They are evil-doers, but not every evil-doer, but the practiser, the trader, the artificer in evil, one wholly bent upon sin, not every bungler or beginner, but an expert workman, that can despatch more business of sin in one day than some other in a month or a year. Nor is every evil here aimed at, but evil against others—*mischief.* Many evil men are only greatest enemies to themselves, intent to serve and satisfy their own lusts; but these with whom we have now to do, always have evil in their hearts or hands, in their consultations and executions, whereby to hurt others. Again, this man in our text is subtle in evil; as he is a cunning workman and active in high designs of evil, so he carrieth his business as subtilely, for which the whole work carries in the original the name of *deceit*, pretending all fair weather, as still water is deepest and most dangerous, or like a waterman that looks one way and rows another. **II. The condition of these persons.** Their deceit returns to them that first hatched it; that is, brings unavoidable mischief on themselves. 1. There is no small unquietness in the heart, while it is plotting

evil. 2. Whomsoever they deceive, they cannot deceive God, who will make them deceivers of themselves (See Job v. 12, 13). 3. Whereas sin is a sure paymaster, and the *wages death*, the sin of these men must needs slay them and play the part both of an *officer* to apprehend them, of a *gaoler* to hold them, and of an *executioner* to bring them to shameful death.—*Thos. Taylor, 1650.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 21.

ALL WORKING FOR THE GOOD OF THE RIGHTEOUS.

The first clause cannot, of course, mean that nothing that appears evil—that no sorrow or loss happens to the just. Such an assertion would be contrary to other teachings of Scripture, as well as to experience and history. The righteousness of the first man who is called righteous (Luke xi. 51) led to his murder. If Joseph had been a less virtuous man, the iron of imprisonment would not have entered into his soul (Psa. cv. 18). If John the Baptist had been a time-serving godless man, he would not have had the bitter experience of the dungeon of Machaerus. To these men, and to all the noble army of martyrs, many of the things which happened were very evil in themselves. The Word of God likewise forewarns men that all who will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution, that through much tribulation they must enter into the kingdom of God (2 Tim. iii. 12; Acts xiv. 22). And every just man now living has had experience of evil befalling him in his health, his circumstances, or in some other form. But—

I. No evil shall really injure the godly man. It shall not hurt his better part, that which is the man himself—his spiritual nature, his moral character. The storms that cannot uproot a tree only make it take deeper root-hold, and so add to its strength. If it break some of the branches it makes it more fit to weather another tempest. So all the trials of the just man tend to strengthen his character by causing him to lay a firmer hold upon the things that are unseen and eternal.

> "Affliction then is ours;
> We are the trees whom shaking fastens more,
> While blustering winds destroy the wanton bowers,
> And ruffle all their curious knots and store.—*Herbert.*

The true interpretation of the text is found in the inspired declaration of Paul, "*We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose*" (Rom. viii. 28). Many elements work together to produce a good harvest at the appointed time. Winter winds and snow, summer breezes, gentle rain and noontide heat, all have a part in the work. One of these agencies alone would not bring forth one golden ear, but the "working together" will cover the land with fields of grain ready for the sickle. Many and various materials and agencies must be brought together to build a seaworthy ship. Iron and wood, fire and water, men skilled in many different arts must work together to bring about the required result. And so with the just man. Manifold experiences, failure and success, joy and sorrow, make up his earthly life. Not sorrow alone, nor joy alone, would fit him for his eternal inheritance—would fit him to be presented "faultless before the presence" of his Lord (Jude 24). But it is the combination of both, the many things "working together," that effect the desired good. And so no evil befals him, because all the evil shall work together with the good for his eternal well-being.

II.—The wicked man shall likewise attain to a completion of character. "The wicked shall be filled with mischief" teaches (1) that wicked men are not

so bad as they *can* be. Thorns and briars grow stronger year by year. Time is needed to transform the blade into the full ear. As the present season of probation is but the beginning of man's life, we conclude that men can go on eternally progressing in the character which now belongs to them—that all their present habits of thought and feeling can become much stronger than they are at present. Therefore, a wicked man can grow worse than he is at present. (2) That wicked men are not so bad as they *shall* be. If a stone is set in motion down a hill it will keep on its course unless it is arrested by some opposing force. So, unless a godless man yields to a Divine influence, and so is brought to repentance, he shall "wax worse and worse" (2 Tim. iv. 13). No man can stand still in character; if he do not grow better, he must grow worse. And this "filling up" of the measure of wickedness is but the necessary reaction of his own actions. He is filled with his *own* mischief. As the just man's present actions go to strengthen and develop his spiritual nature, and to complete and perfect his character in goodness, so every act of the godless man is one more link of the chain of evil habit which binds him daily more tightly, and sinks him every day a little lower in the moral universe of God.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

No "evil," or *calamity;* literally nothing *worthless* or *empty.* The root means *nothingness, entire vacuity.* The expression, too, is peculiar. "*There shall not happen to the righteous any nothingness at all.*" But as several of the nouns that mean evil, through a deep philosophy, trace to the same kind of root, "calamity," or *actual evil,* is the proper translated sense. No event that turns out an actual *calamity* can ever happen to the saint. And if anyone points to their tremendous agonies it is well enough to go back to the root, *nothingness.* Nothing *worthless;* that is, nothing that proves not so useful as to be better than present joy. Nothing not actually precious. In the whole course of their lives each is "filled" with "their own proper lot." The wicked, if he have joys, will find them sorrows; and the righteous, if he have sorrows, will find them, not *nothings,* but for his eternal joy.—*Miller.*

The word signifies evil as ethical wickedness, and although it may be used of any misfortune in general, it denotes especially such sorrow as is the harvest and produce of sin (chap. xxii. 8; Job iv. 8; Isa. lix. 4), or such as brings after it punishment (Hab. iii. 7; Jer. iv. 15). That it is also here thus meant the contrast makes evident. —*Delitzsch.*

First, for evil of sin. God will not lead him into temptation; but will cut off occasions, remove stumbling-blocks out of his way; devoratory evils, as Tertullian calls them, he shall be sure not to fall into "That evil one shall not touch him (1 John v. 18) with a deadly touch; nibble he may at their heels, but cannot reach their heads, shake he may his chain at them, but shall not set his fangs in them, or so far thrust his sting into them as to infuse into them the venom of that sin unto death (1 John v. 17). Next, for evil of pain, though "many be the troubles of the righteous" (Ps. xxxiv. 19), and they "fall into manifold temptations" (Jas. i. 2), they go not in step by step into these waters of Marah, but "fall into" them, being, as it were, precipitated, plunged over head and ears, yet are bidden to be exceeding glad, as a merchant is to see his ship come laden in. Their afflictions are not penal, but probational; not mortal, but medicinal. "By this shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged, and this is all the fruit, the taking away of his sin (Isa. xxvii. 9). Look how the scourging and beating of a garment with a stick drives out the moths and the dust; so doth affliction corruptions from the heart; and there is no hurt in that; no evil thereby happens to the just. . . . To treasure

up sin is to treasure up wrath (Rom. ii. 5). "Every bottle shall be filled with wine (Jer. xiii." 12); the bottle of wickedness, when once filled with those bitter waters, will sink to the bottom; the ephah of wickedness, when top full shall be borne "into the land of Shinar, and set there upon her own base" (Heb. v. 8, 11). He that makes a match with mischief shall have his bellyfull of it (Hosea iv. 17; Prov. xiv. 14); he shall have an evil, "an evil, an only evil" (Ezek. vii. 5), that is, judgment without mercy, as St. James expounds it (chap. ii. 13). *Non surgit hic afflictior*, as the prophet Nahum hath it (chap. i. 9); affliction shall not rise up the second time. God will have but one blow at him; he shall totally and finally be cut down at once. The righteous are smitten in the branches; but the wicked at the root (Isa. xxvii. 8); those he corrects with a rod; but these with a grounded staff (Isa. xxx. 32); and yet the worst is behind too. For whatever a wicked man suffers in this world is but hell typical; it is but as the falling of leaves—the whole tree will one day fall on them. It is but as a drop of wrath forerunning the great storm; a crack forerunning the ruin of the whole building; it is but as paying the use-money for the whole debt, that must be paid at last.—*Trapp.*

The great principle of self-preservation implanted in our nature which puts us on our guard against the slightest inconvenience, and maketh us arm for the repelling of a single evil, fails to engage men in the pursuit of that which would powerfully protect us in the most difficult circumstances, and universally secure us against all manner of hazards. Piety alone is that armour of proof which renders those that wear it safe and invulnerable, and yet, as if the Christian were the only infidel, how few of us are so thoroughly convinced of this great truth as to pursue it with an eagerness proportionate to its value. The text assures us—*That a religious life and conversation is the best security against all manner of evils.* All evil to which we can be liable, may be reduced under three heads. **I. Such as are inflicted immediately by God.** Here it is necessary to distinguish between such afflictions as He vouchsafeth in mercy and those with which He visiteth in judgment. The best of men are not exempted from the former, they are not always so intent upon their duty, but that they stand in need of a remembrancer, or it pleaseth God to afflict them for the trial of their faith, for the exercise of their patience, and to wean them from the world. But these are but like the more difficult talks of a discreet and loving tutor; which recommend the pupils to a higher applause and a more excellent advantage, and are, therefore, so far from doing them any harm that they ought to be looked upon as most valuable blessings. Those inflictions therefore of God, which may be justly entitled to the name of evils, are such only as He visiteth in judgment, and from such nothing can more effectually secure us than a godly life and conversation. **II. Such as are occasioned by ourselves.** Many evils are the effect of sin and carelessness, and as it is the work and office of true piety to make us at the same time holy and considerate, it will evidently appear that none of these evils *shall happen to the just.* **III. Such as are brought upon us by the malice of men or devils.** These are only tolerated by God's connivance and permission. The devil, furious and malicious as he is, always drags his chain after him, by which he may be drawn back to his infernal dungeon, and therefore, unless He hath some such favourable ends, as I formerly instanced in His own inflictions, He will certainly keep His own out of their ravenous jaws. Shall we then neglect the only means by which we may be defended against such numerous calamities? To be just is no more than to follow after the thing that is good, and good is desirable in its own nature; we have such an inward tendency towards it that nothing which is ill can debauch our affections, but by taking upon itself the appear-

ance of being good. If, then, a seeming good doth so allure us, how ought we to be enamoured of the real substances. *Nicholas Brady.*

The wicked are hurt, wounded, or grieved, by every occurrence, and nothing turns to their profit.—*A. Clarke.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 23.

THE CONCEALMENT OF KNOWLEDGE AND THE PROCLAMATION OF FOOLISHNESS.

I. The concealment of knowledge is always a mark of self-control. It proves that a man has himself "well in hand." He is like a skilful workman whose tools are all arranged in order, so that he can select or reject them according to his need, or the need of others. Or he resembles a skilful rider who is thoroughly master of his steed, and can either arrest his course or urge him to put forth all his speed at any moment. If a man does not possess this power over himself he can never be a king among men, and even the possession of knowledge will not prove very serviceable either to himself or others. All the treasures of his mind ought to be under the lock and key of his will, and his will under that of his conscience, for,

II. Under some circumstances the concealment of knowledge is a mark of prudence. 1. *It is so when to proclaim it would feed personal vanity.* To reveal our knowledge from no other motive than to let others know that we know is to sin against ourselves by ministering to our pride. In such a case to conceal our knowledge is a means of grace to a man's own soul, and will carry with it the approbation of conscience. 2. *It is also prudent to conceal knowledge when we know that it would not benefit others.* It is not always seasonable to reveal even the most precious knowledge that we possess. Men are sometimes manifestly unprepared for its reception—unable to appreciate it. God concealed the gospel of salvation from the men of the early ages of the world because the "fulness of time" (Gal. iv. 4) had not come, by which we understand that the world then was not in a condition to profit by a revelation of it. Our Lord charged His disciples not to disclose what they had witnessed on the mount of transfiguration until "the Son of Man should be risen again from the dead" (Matt. xvii. 9). He exhorts them also not to "cast pearls before swine" (Matt. vii. 6). Hence we learn that concealment of knowledge is sometimes to be preferred to a revelation of it, and that a due regard must be had to the mental and moral condition of those to whom we would impart it. The revelation of scientific truth would only bewilder people of little education and small capacity, and the revelation of even moral truth would sometimes increase men's guilt. It would only lead them to blaspheme the God of Truth and scoff at His messengers, and thus harden them instead of enlightening them. And even when this is not the case men cannot always receive all kinds of moral truth. A parent conceals from his son when he is a boy a knowledge of things which he will reveal to him when he is a man. A wise teacher does not at once disclose to his pupil all that he desires him to learn. Both bring prudence into exercise, and give "line upon line, here a little and there a little" (Isa. xxviii. 10), following the example of the Great Father and Teacher in His dealings with His ancient people, and that of the Incarnate Son when He said to His disciples, "*I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now*" (John xvi. 12). All who are possessors of knowledge should always remember to bring prudence into exercise in proclaiming it, whether it be Divine or human truth that they have to reveal.

III. The man who tells out all he knows without any regard to the fitness of time and circumstance proclaims only his foolishness. He is as much a

proclaimer of his own folly as he who should sow seed on the high road instead of in ploughed ground. He may be very injurious to others. If a teacher of the young were to tell out all he knows about men and things to those under his care he might inflict on their spiritual nature a life-long injury. Indiscreet parents who utter all their mind and tell out all their experience in the hearing of their children not only "proclaim their foolishness," but are a curse to their family. They are like an unskilful surgeon who takes the first instrument that comes to hand, regardless of its fitness for the needs of the patient. They are like men upon a fiery steed without power to guide him—they not only put themselves in jeopardy but endanger the well-being of others.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Not that he grudges to impart his knowledge to others, but he does not obtrude it or make a display of it, nor babble out all that he knows, in order that he may be counted wise . . . . The fool, trying to make a display of knowledge, only betrays foolishness. Fools, wise in their own esteem, babble out everything at random; not *wisdom*, which they have not, but *foolishness*, which they have. Proclaiming foolishness is attributed to a fool's *heart*, not to his *mouth*, for a fool's heart is in his mouth. He has no sense within. On the contrary, "The mouth of the wise is in their heart" (Ecclus. xxi. 26)—*Fausset.*

The Apostle *concealed his knowledge* for fourteen years, and even then mentioned it reluctantly, to vindicate his own rightful claims of apostleship (2 Cor. xii. 1–6). Elihu, though "full of matter," and longing to give vent, yet *prudently concealed his knowledge*, till his elders had opened his way (Job xxxii. 6, 18, 19). Circumstances may sometimes *prudently* dictate *concealment.* Abraham spared the feelings of his family, and cleared his own path, by hiding the dreadful message of his God (Gen. xxii. 1–7). Joseph *concealed* his kindred for the discipline of his brethren (Gen. xlii. 7). Esther, from a *prudent* regard of consequences to herself (Esth. ii. 10). Nothing can justify speaking contrary to the truth. But we are not always obliged to tell the whole truth. Jeremiah answered all that he was bound to speak; not all that he might have spoken (Jer. xxxviii. 24). In all these cases "the wise man's heart will discern both time and judgment" (Eccles. viii. 5; xv. 2). . . . The fool is dogmatical in dispute, when wiser men are cautious. He is teaching, when he ought to take the learner's place; his self-confidence proclaiming his emptiness (1 Tim. vi. 3, 4). —*Bridges.*

True are the words of Paul, "knowledge puffeth up," and the augmentation of it may only puff up the more. This produces a very anomalous and incongruous combination, a mind filled with solid information and a heart distended with the emptiness of vanity. And this generates the *pedant*, one of the most contemptible and disgusting of all characters—the man who is ever showing off, ever aiming at effect, ever speaking as nobody else would speak, ever dwelling on his own theme in his own terms, and in every word and look and movement, courting notice of *self*, as the only object of his own admiration, or worthy of the admiration of others. What a fool even the man of *knowledge* does at times make of himself! exemplifying the truth of the old quaint adage, "*An ounce of mother wit is worth a pound of clergy.*" Still it is true that, the more extensive the knowledge which a man acquires, he is, generally speaking, the more conscious of remaining ignorance, and consequently the less vain; that it is in the early stages of acquirement that self-sufficiency and conceit are most apparent. It is the *empty* that are usually the most prone to vain glory.—*Wardlaw.*

"*Prudent.*" *subtle*, from a root

meaning *crafty, cunning*; opposed to "*stupid*," literally, *fat, crass*. The saint has the highest *craft*, and the lost are more *fat* in mind than even the beasts around them.—*Miller.*

Another aspect of the truth of chap. x. 14. The wise is not quick to utter even the wisdom that deserves utterance. He broods over it, tests it, lives by it.—*Plumptre.*

We deem them not the most thrifty husbands and wealthiest men that will lock up nothing in their coffers, nor keep anything close in their purses, but carry all their money in their hands and show it to every comer-by, and so do they that have no more matter within their hearts, than all the standers-by shall hear their lips deliver. It is a point of humility to be silent in modesty, and their words are so much more desirable, and better accepted as they are rare, and few, and seasonable. The ointment that is close kept in a box will yield a sweeter savour when it is poured out, than that which is continually open. A wine fresh from the vessel hath a better relish than that which was drawn long before there was any need of it.—*Dod.*

Think not silence the wisdom of fools, but, if rightly timed, the honour of wise men who have not the infirmity but the virtue of taciturnity; and speak not of the abundance, but the well-weighed thoughts of their hearts. Such silence may be eloquence, and speak thy worth above the power of words. Make such an one thy friend, in whom princes may be happy, and great counsels successful. Let him have the key of thy heart who hath the lock of his own, which no temptation can open; where thy secrets may lastingly lie, like the lamp in the urn of Olybius, alive and alight, but close and invisible.—*Sir T. Browne.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 24.

The Reward of Diligence.

I. What is here meant by diligence? *It is not being always active, but active in the right direction*—active in the right use of talents and opportunities. There is an activity that is worse than idleness, an activity that brings men into contempt and bondage instead of enabling them to rule themselves or others. Men may have great talent and keep it in constant exercise, and yet their diligent use of it may be destroying both themselves and others. A machine that is constructed to work in one direction may be very active in going in the opposite direction—this is worse than if it stood still, for it will certainly work injury to itself, and may do so to other things and to those who have to work it. A thief may be very diligent, but his diligent hand will not bring him to "*bear rule.*" It will probably, in the end, bring him into a most irksome servitude. There was once a Roman Emperor who was very active in catching flies; this was certainly not the diligence which would enable him to bear rule. If a man who is capable of a high and noble work spends his time in a childish and ignoble manner, he is not diligent although he may be very active. Diligence consists not in being very busy, but in being busy in what will build up our own moral nature and, as a necessity, bless our fellow-creatures. Moreover, diligence is not the right exercise of our talent or the wise use of our time at intervals, by fits and starts, but a constant and steady continuance of that exercise and activity.

II. The consequence of such diligence. He who is thus diligent will bear rule over the slothful man—over the man who wastes his time or his talent. 1. *This is right.* Even the slothful man himself must, in his conscience, feel that he deserves to be ruled by the diligent. The human conscience will not sanction such waste—such a destruction of character, and, while it is allowed

to speak at all, will utter its testimony against it. And all impartial judges must concede that it is the just reward of diligence—that, when a man has rightly used that which the Great Ruler of the universe has committed to his trust, it is right that he should receive the award, "*Well done, thou good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things*" (Matt. xxv. 21). 2. *It is necessary.* First, *for the slothful man himself.* When he is under the rule of a diligent man he is doing better with his life than if he were left to himself; he is compelled to act, whether he will or not, and he has the guidance of the wisdom of another when his slothfulness has prevented him from gaining any of his own. His slothfulness grows greater, and therefore his guilt is increased every day that he is his own master. His powers will become more and more incapable of being exercised the longer they are unused, and the only thing that can save him from being entirely buried in the grave of his own sloth is that he become a servant to a diligent man. Secondly, *for humanity in general.* A slothful man in power is a curse to society. If he is a husband and father he is a curse to his children; if he is a master he is a curse to his servants, and will endanger their characters and industrious habits. Those who rule ought to be wise, and no slothful man can be a wise man.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

"*Diligent;*" from a root meaning *to cut.* Hence the idea of something *incisive* or *decided.* The primary *idea* is *promptness* or *determination.* "*Sloth*;" primarily *remissness* or what is *indecisive.* In this world, diligence puts a man at the head. In the eternal world, it will have made the man a king, and made all hell, and of course, all "sloth, under tribute" to him.—*Miller.*

This was Joseph's road to *bearing rule* (chap. xxii. 29). But if it does not raise in the world, it will command in its own sphere. The faithful steward is made ruler over his lord's household (Matt. xxiv. 45-47). The active trader *bears rule* over many cities (*Ib.* xxv. 21). Diligence, therefore, is not a moral virtue separate from religion, but rather a component part of it.—*Bridges.*

The slothful are like Issachar, who saw that the rest was good, and bowed down his shoulder to bear, and became a servant to tribute; by their laziness they expose themselves to want, and reduce themselves to a slavish dependence on those who, through the blessing of God on their own diligence, or on that of their fathers, are in better circumstances. Spiritual sloth weakens men, and exposes them to the spiritual sloth of their spiritual enemies. We must be strong, resolute, and active, if we would escape the tyranny of the rulers of the darkness of this world (Ephes. vi. 10-18).—*Lawson.*

The comparison is suggested by the contrast common in most ancient monarchies in the east, between the condition of a conquered race, compelled to pay heavy taxes in money or in kind (like the Canaanites in Israel, Josh. xvi. 10; Judges i. 30-33), and that of the freedom of their conquerors from such burdens. The proverb indicates that beyond all political divisions of this nature there lies an ethical law. The "slothful" descend inevitably to pauperism and servitude. The prominence of this compulsory labour under Solomon (1 Kings ix. 21), gives a special significance to the illustration.—*Plumptre.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 25.

HEAVINESS OF HEART AND ITS CURE.

I. The causes of "heaviness of heart" are many and various. It may arise, 1. *From great bodily pain.* The human mind and the human body act and

re-act upon each other. The mind or spirit may be made heavy by physical pain, as the body may be brought under the dominion of disease by mental suffering. It is only when a more powerful influence comes into operation that pain of body is prevented from exercising a depressing influence upon the spirit. In the case of Job we have an instance of severe bodily suffering, weighing down a spirit that had borne other most terrible calamities without being overcome (Job vii). In the case of Stephen, and many others, we see intense bodily suffering exercising no depressing influence upon the man, because he is lifted above it by supernatural interposition. Where this special grace is not given pain of body will make the heart "to stoop"—that is, it will disqualify the man for duty by depriving him of hope and courage, and will leave him more or less passive in the hands of circumstances. 2. *Heaviness of heart is often caused by bringing the future into the present.* The man that has every day to carry a heavy burden upon his shoulders will find that an attempt to carry the load of two days at once will weigh down his body beyond all his power to rise and stand upright. He must not try to carry more than the load of to-day, if he is to do anything at all. So is it with the spirit of a man if he goes out to meet the cares and difficulties of to-morrow, while he is bearing and battling with those of to-day. The weight of the present is as much as he can carry, his heart must "stoop," if he dwells upon the possible or certain trials of the future. The right way to bear burdens is to take the advice of One who Himself was a burden-bearer. "*Take therefore no thought (no anxious care) for the morrow; for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.* There are many other burdens which make the heart to stoop, we will mention but one more. 3. *A consciousness of unpardoned guilt.* There is no burden so heavy to bear as this. Guilt makes the spirit feel as if the hand of God's displeasure was sinking the soul lower and lower. The language of Scripture is very vivid in describing the feelings of man in such a case. "*When I kept silence my bones waxed old, through my roaring all the day long.*" "*Mine iniquities are gone over mine head; as a heavy burden, they are too heavy for me.*" "*Mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up,*" etc. (Psa. xxii. 3; xxxviii. 4; xl. 12).

II. **The human heart can be uplifted by seasonable words.** "A good word maketh it glad." Such words sometimes take the form of a promise of help. A man bowed down by disease is made glad by the word of the physician, which assures him that his malady can be cured. The debtor who feels himself hopelessly involved is made glad by the promise of one who engages to meet his debts. The man who is bowed down under a sense of guilt is lifted out of his heaviness by the promises of a forgiving God. In all these cases the worth of the word depends upon the character of him who utters them. It is a "good word" if it is not only a *cheering* word, but a *reliable* word—if the promise is uttered by one whom we know would not promise what he was unable to perform. It is this certainty which makes every promise of God so *good a word* to the soul. And when a man's heaviness of heart arises from a source which is beyond the power of human help, there is no greater service that a friend can do him than to remind him of some "good word" of the Heavenly Father which is suitable to his case.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Not "heaviness," but "*anxiety.*" This last is the fashion of most griefs. We are bound to conquer it. The *determined* man (see comments on verse 24) is just the character to do it. "Anxiety" discredits faith. "A good word," and such words are plenty in this very book, should *gladden* it, as

the expression is; or, as a freer translation, "*cheer it away.*" It is a sin for men to be dejected. It is a great folly, too; for it broods over half their lives. Our passage tells all this, and tells the mode to dissipate it. It was the mode of Christ when he quelled the foul fiend. The sword of the Spirit is the "word" of God (Ephes. vi. 17).—*Miller.*

There is nothing that claims our grief so much as sin, and yet there may be an excess of sorrow for sin, which exposes men to the devil and drives them into his arms.—*Lawson.*

A single good or favourable word will remove despondency; and that word, "Son, be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee," will instantly remove despair.—*A. Clarke.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 26.

The Guide and the Seducer.

Translating this verse, "The righteous guides his neighbour aright," we remark:—

I. **That the righteous man guides his neighbour both by his word and by his life.** He guides him by wise counsel—by giving him "a word in season" (see verse 25)—and he more especially guides him by his holy life. His character is a revealer of the way of life. The light which shines through a lantern reveals the path, not only to the man who carries it, but to him who beholds it if he should be disposed to follow in the same road. The righteous man is a light-bearer—he has moral light within him, which breaks forth in the acts of his daily life, and sets a good example to other men, and so, to some extent, his life, like that of his Master's, is a "light of men."

II. **That he guides him aright because he shows him how to make the most of his life.** Men are generally anxious to live long, and the righteous man shows his neighbour how to live *long* by living *well.* A husbandman values his trees, not by the length of time they have stood in the ground, but by the amount of fruit they yield. There are trees which bring forth more fruit in one season than others do during the whole time they stand in the orchard. And the length of a man's life is to be estimated not by the number of years he has been in the world, but in the use which he has made of them. Many men who leave the world comparatively young have lived longer, because to more purpose, than others who have not died until they were a hundred years old (On this subject see homiletics on chap. x. 17, page 164).

III. **That the wicked man also exercises an influence upon his neighbour; but his influence tends to evil.** He is a *seducer*—one who leads astray by false professions and promises. Like the good man, he emits a light, but it is the false light of the ignus fatuus, which is the offspring of the stagnant swamp, and which will only lure him who follows it to destruction. One of the chief employments of the bad, and that which seems to afford them the greatest pleasure, is to carry other men to ruin. And even when the wicked man is not an *active* seducer, his *way*, or his life, seduces his neighbour. The force of an evil example is very great, and men are insensibly influenced by it. Men of ungodliness diffuse around them an atmosphere of moral unhealthiness, which insensibly affects those around them, who are not godly, and strengthens them in all their downward tendencies. Such men are "as graves which appear not" (Luke xi. 44), and are centres of spiritual disease and death.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

If then, the "righteous be more excellent than his neighbour," how is it that men do not follow their way? Because "the way of the wicked, which is apparently more *excellent*, or *abundant* in temporal advantages, seduces

them *(Kimchi in Mercer)*. It "seduceth" with false hopes, doomed in the end to destruction.—*Fausset.*

The way of the godless leads them into error; the course of life to which they have given themselves up has such a power over them that they cannot set themselves free from it, and it leads the enslaved into destruction. The righteous, on the contrary, is free with respect to the way which he takes, and the place where he stays. His view (regard) is directed to his true advancement, and he *looks after his pasture* (see Critical Notes), *i.e.*, examines and discovers where, for him, right pastures, *i.e.*, the advancement of his outer and inner life, is to be found.—*Delitzsch.*

Let him dwell by whomsoever, he is ever a better man than his neighbours; he is "a prince of God" among them, as Abraham was amongst the Hittites. Said Agesilaus, when he heard the King of Persia style himself the Great King—"I acknowledge none more excellent than myself, unless more righteous; none greater, unless better." "Upon all the glory shall be a defence" (Isa. iv. 5)—that is, upon all the righteous, those only glorious, those "excellent of the earth" (Psa. xvi. 2), that are "sealed to the day of redemption" (Ephes. iv. 30). Now, whatsoever is sealed with a seal, that is excellent in its own kind, as Isa. xxviii. 25. The poorest village is an ivory palace, saith Luther, if it have in it but a minister and a few good people. But the wicked will not be persuaded of the good man's excellency, he cannot discern, nor will not be drawn to believe that there is any such gain in godliness, any such difference between the righteous and the wicked. He, therefore, goes another way to work.—*Trapp.*

I. *In regard of their condition in this present life.* They have all prerogatives and preferments. By parentage every one of them is God's child. By dignity they are all kings. By inheritance they have title to heaven and earth; their food is heavenly manna, their clothing is Christ's righteousness, their attendants are the holy angels.—II. *In respect of their state that shall be in the life to come.* They shall have perfect happiness, and be made like unto Jesus Christ, more excellent and puissant than the most glorious angels.—*Dod.*

The "*wicked*" man not only does not "*guide*" his neighbour, but does not guide himself, actually "*leads*" himself "*astray.*" Here is the same climax we have so often noticed (chap. xi. 14).—*Miller.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 27.

I. Even the slothful man may be sometimes roused to activity. He is here represented as having made an effort, he has "taken spoil in hunting." There are probably few men who are not sometimes roused to exertion, who do not every now and then make a start towards an industrious life, but they lack perseverance, they do not let one act of industry follow upon another so as to form industrious habits. Therefore—

II. The slothful man loses by negligence what he has gained. "He roasteth not that which he took in hunting." He is too lazy to finish his work. He neutralises the one action by neglecting to perform the other. The food that he has taken is wasted because he is too lazy to roast it, and therefore he might as well have remained idle altogether.

III. He may thus rob an industrious man. The game which he has taken and wasted might have fallen into better hands. Another man might have taken it and put it to a good use. A man has no right thus to deprive another of what he is too lazy to put to a good use himself.

IV. A diligent habit of life is a fortune in itself. 1. *It is a possession of which a man cannot be robbed by any of the mischances of life.* A habit is a

second nature, and if a man has once acquired the habit of a diligent improvement of his time and opportunities, he can no more lose it than he can his identity. It can be touched by no rise or fall of the market, nor affected by any commercial panic. If he is rich, he will be diligent, and if he become poor he will make the most of what still remains to him. 2. *It is a source of continual satisfaction.* God has made man for work, and a rightly constituted mind is never so happy as when all its powers are actively employed. It is a great source of consolation in times of sorrow to have acquired industrious, active habits, for they often help a man to forget, or to rise above his trials. 3. *It makes a man, in one respect, an imitator of God.* The Eternal Ruler of the universe is ever active; diligence is one of His attributes. It is the boast of the Hebrew prophet, concerning the everlasting God, that "He fainteth not, neither is weary" (Isaiah xl. 28). Christ declares that He and His Father are unceasing in their activities: "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work" (John v. 17).

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

What a diligent man gains becomes, in his hands, precious by the use he makes of it. It is the means of further increase. And his substance becomes "precious" to others as well as to himself. It is industriously, profitably, benevolently used. In *this* lies the true value of a man's substance;—not in the *acquisition*, but in the *use*.—*Wardlaw.*

By translating *remiyah* the *deceitful*, instead of the *slothful* man, which appears to be the genuine meaning of the word, we may obtain a good sense, as the Vulgate has done. "The deceitful man shall not find gain, but the substance of a (just) man shall be the price of gold." But our version, allowing *remiyah* to be translated *fraudulent*, gives the best sense. "The fraudulent man roasteth not that which he took in hunting," the justice of God snatching from him what he had acquired unrighteously. Coverdale translates "A dis-creatfull man schal fynde no vauntage: but he that is content with what he hath, is more worth than golde."—*A. Clarke.*

The substance of a diligent man is great in value, whatsoever it be in quantity, as a small boxful of pearls is more worth than mountains of pebbles. The house of the righteous hath much treasure. He is without that care in getting, fear in keeping, grief in losing —those three fell vultures that feed continually on the heart of the rich worldling, and dis-sweeten all his comforts. Jabal, that dwelt in tents, and tended the herds, had Jubal to his brother, the father of music. Jabal and Jubal, diligence and complacence, good husbandry and a well-contenting sufficiency, dwell usually together.—*Trapp.*

Is not this a graphical picture of *the slothful* professor? He will take up religion under strong excitement. He begins a new course, and perhaps makes some advance in it. But, "having no root in himself," his good frames and resolutions wither away (Matt. xiii. 20, 21). The continued exertion required, the violence that must be done to his deep-rooted habits, the difficulties in his new path, the invitations to present ease, all hang as a weight upon his efforts. . . . . No present blessing can be enjoyed without grasping something beyond (Phil. iii. 12-14). Godliness without energy loses *its full reward* (2 John 8).—*Bridges.*

The impenitent, who wait for something to turn up, are the same type of lazy people as love hunting and fishing better than more regular labour. The wise man goes to the root and says, There are no such hunting gains in the spiritual world. He goes further. He seems to remind his reader that character is all that will be left for a man at the last. He seems to imply

that man will bring home from his hunt nothing but "his laziness," and would ask whether one can "roast" that like a quail or a duck. And though we start at such horrible absurdity, yet it brings out in keen light a very different possibility for diligence. Diligence *can* be roasted. It earns for us an eternal heaven, and yet, for all it gets, it is itself our richest dainty. "*One cannot roast laziness as something he has taken in the chase; but a precious treasure of a man is a diligent one.*" It is tantalising to come so near other and important renderings. Many see very plausibly a meaning like this: *The slothful man roasteth not that which he took in hunting*" (so far the English version), meaning that he is wasteful, and suffers what he has actually now to run to loss; "*but the substance of a common man*" (making the distinction as in verse 14) "*is precious*" (that is, made account of, and kept) "by *a man of diligence.*" A sinner throws away treasures; a saint values the very smallest. This would be a fine sense if the verse before meant that the "*saint gains from his neighbour.*" *Per contra*, though, there are difficulties. "*The slothful man*" (E.V.) in the Hebrew is the "*sloth*" or "*laziness*" itself. And the word is feminine, and must be the object rather than the subject of the verb. The meaning is, that sloth cannot be roasted and eaten, but diligence can. —*Miller.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 28.

I. There is a way of righteousness in the world. 1. *This fact is universally recognised.* Men regard each other as moral and responsible beings. The doctrine of necessity will not do for every-day life. In all positions and conditions, man is met with the assumption that there is a "way of righteousness," and his fellow-men deal with him accordingly. Man could not be held accountable for his actions if a right way of life did not exist, in which it was possible for him to walk. 2. *This fact is confirmed by conscience.* Bad actions are followed by remorse, and good deeds bring gladness to the soul. If there were no way of righteousness, how could this be the case? 3. *It is revealed to us by God.* The Bible sets forth two paths, in one of which man must walk, it foretells a day in which God will judge men, and will hold them guilty who have refused to walk in the way of righteousness after it has been made known to them. Where there is no way of righteousness there can be no transgression, and, consequently, no penalty.

II. The way of life implies—1. *A beginning.* All ways or paths have a starting-point, all methods or plans of life date from some point of time. 2. *An object in view.* If men walk in a certain road it is presumed that they have some purpose in view. 3. *An end or goal.* So the way of righteousness. Its beginning is "repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ;" the object at which it aims by "patient continuance in well-doing" is "glory, and honour, and immortality;" its end is "eternal life" (Acts xx. 21; Rom. ii. 7), for "in the pathway thereof is no death, or immortality" (On this subject see also homiletics on chap. iv. 18).

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

From life being said to be in the way of righteousness, I should urge the lesson that the deeds of the hand have a reflex influence upon the state of the heart. There is life in spiritual-mindedness, and it serves to aliment this life to walk in the way of obedience.—*Chalmers.*

And life, in any sense, is a sweet mercy, a precious indulgence. Life

natural is but a little spot of time between the two eternities, before and after, but it is of great consequence, and given us for this purpose, that glory may be begun in grace, and we have a further and further entrance into the kingdom of heaven here, as Peter saith (2 Peter i. 2). Christ hath unstinged the first death, and made of a postern to let out eternal life, a street-door to let in eternal life. Surely the bitterness of this death is past to the righteous; there is no gall in it; nay, there is honey in it, as once there was in the corpse of Samson's dead lion. And for the second death there is no danger, for they shall pass from the jaws of death to the joys of heaven. Yea, though hell had closed her mouth upon a child of God, it would as little hold him as the whale could Jonah; it must, perforce, regurgitate such a morsel.—*Trapp.*

"*Righteousness*," which is the very path of the righteous man, is itself eternal life. All men have a "*way*," and this implies that all men have an "*end*." The Psalmist had before announced (Psa. i. 6) that "the way of the ungodly shall perish;" that is, not only shall they not reach their end, but their very way shall die down and perish. They shall cease to take an interest in it. But this passage goes deeper. It says the path of righteousness is life itself, and then, contrasting them with the wicked, it says, "*their way is a path*," *i.e.*, it leads somewhere; and then implies that all other ways are "*a death*." These are striking truths. Immortality is a *path*. It travels the ages. It begins among believers. It is itself its destiny. Impenitence is "*a death*." It travels nowhere. The very mind of the impenitent can announce no terminus for his way-worn tread.—*Miller.*

NOTE.—It will be seen from the foregoing remarks that Miller translates the latter clause of this verse, "*The way is a path, not a death.*'

HOMILY ON THE ENTIRE CHAPTER.

On the true wisdom of the children of God as it ought to appear (1) In the *home*, under the forms of good discipline, diligence, and contentment; (2) In the *State*, or in the intercourse of citizens, under the forms of truthfulness, justice, and unfeigned benevolence (vers. 12–22); in the *Church*, or in the *religious life*, as a progressive knowledge of God, a diligent devotion to prayer, and striving after eternal life (vers. 23–28).—*Lange's Commentary.*

CHAPTER XIII.

CRITICAL NOTES.—**1. Instruction**, or "correction." The Hebrew is literally, "**a wise son** *is* his father's correction," *i.e.*, is the product of his father's correction; or "heareth" may be supplied to correspond to the verb in the second clause. **2. Shall eat**, in the second clause, is supplied by the English translation. Many commentators render this clause "the delight of the ungodly is violence." So Zöckler and Delitzsch. Miller translates the verse, "Out of the fair earnings of the mouth of a man a good man will get his food; but the appetite of the faithless out of robbery." **4. Fat**, *i.e.*, abundantly satisfied. **5. Lying**, rather "deceit." Stuart renders it "a false report." Zöckler translates the latter clause of this verse, "the ungodly acteth basely and shamefully." The translations of Stuart and Delitzsch are nearly the same. Miller reads the whole verse, "A deceiving business hates the righteous man, but also shames and disgraces the wicked." **6. Sinner**, literally "sin," hence Miller reads "wickedness subverts the sin-offering," and Zöckler "wickedness plungeth into sin." **7. Maketh**, or "showeth." **8.** The latter clause of this is very obscure, but *rebuke* is generally translated "threatening," and is understood to mean that no threatening can gain anything from the poor as they have nothing to lose. Stuart understands it that "notwithstanding the obvious advantage of wealth, yet the poor man will not listen to those who rebuke him for sloth and wastefulness which have made him

poor. The supposition on this ground is that the man is poor by his own fault." **9. Rejoiceth**, "burns brightly." The words *light* and *lamp* are regarded by most modern commentators as synonymous. **10.** This may be read "Only by pride cometh contention," or "by pride cometh only (nothing but) contention." **11. Vanity.** rather "fraud." **By labour**, literally "by the hand," or "handful after handful." **12.** Latter clause, "a desire accomplished is a tree of life." **13. Shall be destroyed**, rather "is bound," or "is in bonds to it." **Rewarded.** "be at peace." **14. Law**, rather "doctrine," "instruction." **15. Good understanding**, rather "discretion." **Hard**, "stony," "uncultivated." This is the generally received rendering, but the word often signifies "perpetual." Miller says "We find it in thirteen places, and in every one of them it means perpetual. "*Strong* or *perpetual* is thy dwelling-place" (Num. xxiv. 21). "Mighty rivers" are *perpetual*, or perennial rivers (Psa. lxxiv. 17) "Mighty nation" (Jer v. 15) corresponds with next expression "ancient nation," and is to be rendered "perpetual" (or permanent). Umbreit translates it "a standing bog" or "marsh." **16. Dealeth with knowledge**, *i.e.* acteth with foresight. **Layeth open**, rather "spreadeth abroad." Delitzsch says, "There lies in the word something derisive; as the merchant unrolls and spreads out his wares in order to commend them, so the fool deals with his folly." **19.** Literally "quickened desire," "a desire that has come to be." Zöckler and Miller say this cannot be designed to express appeased desire," but Delitzsch renders it "satisfied desire," and Stuart agrees with him. The latter connects the second clause of the verse with the former, thus, "Yet it is an abomination for fools to depart from evil, therefore, they cannot be satisfied; while Delitzsch understands it to mean, "Because satisfied desire is sweet to the fool and his desires are evil, therefore he will not depart from evil." **23.** "Tillage," rather "fallow ground" or "a new field," land which requires hard labour.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 1.

The Wise Son and the Scorner.

I. A condition implied. That the father who gives the instruction, or administers correction, is a *wise father*. There are many fathers who are incapable of instructing their children in the right way, because they do not walk in it themselves. The "father" of these proverbs is always pre-supposed to be one who is himself morally wise—one whose life is a practical exposition of the good instruction which he gives. The father who can only instruct with his *lips*, but not with his *life*, cannot expect to command respect and obedience. He is like a man who tries to save a vessel from sinking by baling out the water in bucketfuls, while he leaves the great leak-hole unplugged. All that which is *done* is more than neutralised by what is left *undone*. If a physician prescribes a certain medicine for a disease from which he is suffering himself, but for which he refuses to take the remedy, he will find that his patients will think, if they do not say, "Physician, heal thyself." And children will not be slow to see if a father's practice fails to endorse a father's precept.

II. He who takes the advice of a morally wise father shows hinself to be wise also. The greatest proof of wisdom is a willingness to learn of those who know more than we do. Other things being equal, a father must know more than a son, and the son who hears his instruction, and submits to his discipline, not only uses the means by which to become wise, but shows that he is already wise enough to use the right means to attain a desirable end. Christians are the sons of God, if they are wise sons they will hear the instructions of their Father. They show their wisdom in proportion as they submit cheerfully to His discipline as to that of the "Only wise God" (1 Tim. i. 17).

III. He who will not listen to parental rebuke is in the last degree a sinner. We understand the last clause of this verse to refer likewise to a father and son. Parental instruction and correction are God's ordained and special methods of training a human soul. There are many reasons why a parent's rebuke should be regarded, if that of strangers is not listened to (see Homiletics on chap. iv. 1, 4, p. 53). He who disregards *that* must be considered in as hopeless a case as he who scuttles the lifeboat sent to save him. When the word of a good father or mother is not obeyed it is practically *scorned*, and a scorner is the most hopeless of sinners.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

The language of this verse is capable of two meanings: either that hearing instruction and not hearing reproof are the effect and manifestation, respectively, of a wise or a scornful mind; this wise son showing himself to be so by "hearing his father's instructions," and the scorner showing himself to be so by "not hearing rebuke," or (reversing cause and effect), that wisdom and scorning are the results, respectively, of hearing or not hearing instruction and rebuke. In other words—"*The son that is instructed by his father turns out to be wise; he who receives no correction turns out a fool.*" In the first of the two senses the admonition is chiefly to *children*—in the second, to *parents.*—*Wardlaw.*

Piety is the fruit of training. If a man is a believer, it is a sign he has had believing nurture; and if a scorner, it is a sign he has had "*no rebuke.*" This text reiterates the promise made to the training of a child. To treat it as in our English version is simply to evolve a truism, and might do very well, grammatically, if the verb were future, and not perfect. The idea embraces the solemn lesson, that Christians are not to be made without training.—*Miller.*

Or heareth and jeereth; as Lot's sons-in-law, as Eli's sons, and afterwards Samuel's. Samuel succeeds Eli in his cross, as well as in his place, though not in his sin of indulgence. God will show that grace is by gift, and not by inheritance or education.—*Trapp.*

There is in the conscience of the scorner a hidden discouragement, and privy despair, both of pardon of his sinfulness, and possibility to leave it: and that doth exasperate him against such as shall be dealing with it. Who is willing to have his wound laid open to his disgrace and torment, when he taketh it to be altogether incurable? —*Dod.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSES 2 *and* 3.

KEEPING THE MOUTH.

The human tongue needs keeping, or guarding. 1. *Because there is a tendency in men to speak as soon as they think.* First thoughts are not always the fittest thoughts to be made public. It is always advisable to view them and review them in the light of our judgment before we give them utterance. Hence our tongue ought to be always "well in hand." 2. *Because when loosed it is a great power for evil as well as for good.* It may bring much good to a man's life. "A man shall eat good by the fruit of his mouth," when his mouth brings forth good fruit—when "out of the good treasure of his heart he bringeth forth that which is good." A tongue wisely used gives a man the respect and confidence of his fellow-men, yields him the satisfaction of having been a blessing to them (See Comments on chap. xii. 6 and 14). But a tongue which is uncontrolled is mischievous to others and to the man himself. "He that openeth wide his lips shall have destruction." As we saw in chapter x. 19, there is often a sin in *much speaking.* Such a tongue as that described in chapter ii. 12, or that in chapter xii. 18 (see Homiletics and Comments on those verses), destroy not only their victims but those to whom they belong. Such a tongue, the Apostle tells us, is "a fire, a world of iniquity: and is set on fire of hell" (Jas. iii. 6). 3. *Because it is the last stronghold which is brought under complete control to spiritual rule—the weak point in the spiritual man's armour where the adversary's arrow may enter.* This we know from inspired authority. "*If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body*" (Jas. iii. 2). We have an example of its truth in the case of Moses. That man who was "meek above all men which were upon the face of

the earth" (Num. xii. 3), forfeited his right of entrance into the earthly Canaan by an unguarded use of the tongue. The prayers of the Psalmist show us the importance which he attached to the keeping of this stronghold and the difficulty attending it, as well as the only sure means of safety, that of calling in Divine help. "*Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips*" (Psalm cxli. 3). Every morally wise man will make the resolve of David, "I will keep my mouth with a bridle," not only "while the wicked is before me," but at all times and in all places. Life is lost and won both in its higher and lower senses by not keeping the mouth.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Verse 2. The "mouth of a man" in that *viva voce* country, as formerly in our southern states, was the great instrument of a business man. He lived by giving orders. The mail conducts our business in our days. A *false lip* stood for all sorts of bad activity (Eccles. x. 12). A good man will be satisfied to earn his living. The bad man, in some way or other, wants to steal it. But apace with this secular meaning is one that concerns the saints. The good man expects to fight for heaven; the lost man to get heaven by deceit (see rendering in Critical Notes). It is true the tendencies might seem reversed. The good man hails a work done for him, and expects a ransom without money and without price. The bad man would intersperse some struggles of his own. But, in fact, the Christian, though saved by grace, works the more for it; and, in fact, the sinner, rejecting grace and interposing his own works, is just the man expecting blessings without costs, and without any earnest toil. Not "*eat good*" (English version) but "a good man will eat" (get his food). "The earnings of the mouth." No one can go into a great city now without noticing how much of men's money they make by their mouth. The gainful merchants are talking all day long. No man can buy salvation; but he reaches it by hard labour, and partly by earnest speech.—*Miller.*

Although the spirit and practice of *retaliation* are nowhere vindicated in Scripture, but everywhere explicitly and strongly condemned: yet a treatment corresponding to their own treatment towards others is what everyone may expect, even independently of what deserves the name of *retaliation.* In the nature of things it cannot be otherwise. It is not in *human* nature, nor in *any* nature, not even in the Divine itself, to love (with the love of complacence) that which is *unamiable.* An amiable disposition alone can secure *love;* and it is greatly indicated by the *tongue.* The man who is charitable in his judgments, and disposed to speak well of others, will be himself the subject of charitable judgment, and of cordial commendation. Thus "he shall eat good by the fruit of his mouth."—*Wardlaw.*

The mouth of a man doth *blossom* when he speaketh fairly and promiseth well, but then it *beareth fruit* when that is performed which is promised. And by this fruit it is, which though others eat, yet a man himself eateth good, as having his soul cheered and nourished by the comfort of it. But as for the soul of the perfidious and false dealers, who make a show to do a thing, and do quite the contrary, although they carry it slightly and without violence, yet violence shall seize upon them, either to compel them to a performance, or else to a just suffering for not performing, which will be bitter food.—*Jermin.*

Verse 3. Speech, though our great activity, gives us more toil in holding it back than in actually employing it. So activity, which it typically represents, is harder to hold than to promote. Religion is an every-day battle. He that is not conscious of it, has no true religion.—*Miller.*

"Keep thine heart" (chap. iv. 23). This guards the citadel. *Keep thy mouth.* This sets a watch at the gates. If they be well guarded the city is safe. Leave them unprotected — thus was Babylon taken.—*Bridges.*

No wonder that the Holy Ghost here labours so much for the reformation of the tongue; for the Apostle also (Rom. iii. 13, etc.), when giving an anatomy of human depravity in the members of the body, dwells more on the tongue than all the rest.—*Cartwright*, from *Fausset.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 4.

The Disappointment of the Sluggard's Desires.

I, The desires of the sluggard cannot be satisfied—1. *Because they are contrary to the ordination of God.* The Divine ordination is, "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread" (Gen. iii. 19), in other words, that reward shall be the result of labour. If a man is to have that which he desires, he must frame his desires in harmony with the law of the universe, or he must be disappointed. If men desire to bring about any material result they take care to work in harmony with physical law. He would be looked upon as a madman who expected to achieve anything by setting at nought the law of *gravitation*, for instance. It is quite as useless for men to desire to set aside God's moral laws. 2. *Because they are contrary to the practice of God.* God, as we saw in homiletics on chap. xii. 24, 27, is a great worker. He desired to save man, but He used means to accomplish His desires, even means which involved the highest self-sacrifice. Shall man expect to realise his wishes without effort, when God "spared not His own Son" (Rom. viii. 32) to bring about the salvation of the world, when Christ "endured the cross" to attain "the joy set before Him?" (Heb. xii. 2). 3. *Because they are unfair to his fellow-creatures.* He desires to consume, but not to contribute to the general good; he wants to have the reward of the diligent without his toil. It would be unjust to the industrious to give to him for *desiring* what others gain by *working.* Therefore,

II. He wearies himself far more by his laziness than he would do by honest labour. If a man is constantly desiring and never having his desires fulfilled, his life must become a weariness to him. Fulfilled desires become an incentive to renewed activity—he who has reaped one harvest as a result of his labour is quickened to new energy to sow for another crop. The sluggard knows not the enjoyment which comes to the man who has worked hard for the reward which he now enjoys; he knows not what it is to enjoy rest and recreation, because true diligence only can give them any true relish. **(See also Homiletics on chap. vi, 6–11 and xii. 24.)**

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

The sluggard in religion *desires* to overcome his bad habits, to enjoy the happiness of God's people. So far, well. *Desires* are a part of religion. There can be no attainment without them. Many have not even the desire, yet the sluggard hath nothing, because it is *desire* without effort. "Hell," says an old writer, "is paved with such desires."—*Bridges.*

Wishes and woulders are never good householders.—*Muffet.*

Doddridge says most people perish by laziness. Laziness is the attribute of a man who desires an object, but will not work for it. The impenitent desires heaven—nay longs for it—yea, confidently expects it (just as many a sluggard expects wealth), but religion never "turns up," it never comes like

game taken in the chase (chap. xii. 27), it is a solid product: we must stir up ourselves to take hold on God (Isa. lxiv. 7). With no exceptions, such as are on "change," it is the "*diligent soul*" that "*shall be made fat*" and the *yearning sluggard*, at the very last, "*has nothing.*"—*Miller.*

The slothful man has one mighty objection against heaven, that he cannot make sure of it in a morning dream.—*Lawson.*

Labour is the original law of man's nature. The *fatigue* and *distress* of labour, are, no doubt, the result of sin. Even in the garden of primeval innocence, it was by his "dressing" and "keeping" that everything was to thrive.—*Wardlaw.*

The sluggard would and he would not, he would have the end, but would not use the means; he would "sit at Christ's right hand," but he would not "drink of His cup," or "be baptized with his baptism. Affection without endeavour is like Rachel, beautiful, but barren. . . . David, ravished with the meditation of the good man's blessedness, presently conceives this desire and pursues it; not "Oh that I had this happiness," but "Oh that I could use the means!" "Oh that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes" (Psa. cxix. 4, 5).—*Trapp.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 5.

A Lawful Hatred.

I. A righteous man hates lying. 1. *Because it is contrary to his ruling disposition.* His own righteous character has been created by believing the truth. His spiritual life is constantly renewed and sustained by believing the truth, and reducing his belief to practice. He is a child of the truth, and, therefore, apart from all the consequences of lying he instinctively abhors it. 2. *He hates it also because of its evil influence upon men.* Confidence in a lie ruined our first parents, and confidence in a lie has ruined whole nations and mighty empires in the past. In proportion as men "believe a lie" (2 Thess. ii. 11) in the same proportion will be their ruin. The righteous man knows that the kingdom of God is a kingdom of truth (John xviii. 37), and as his great desire is to see that kingdom spread he must hate all that opposes it, and thus mars the happiness of the human race.

II. Wicked men are untruthful men. As the righteous man's character is built by truth and upon truth, so that of an ungodly man is built upon falsehood. All such men are the children of him who was a liar from the beginning, and although they may not be *liars* in the common acceptation of the word, there is a lack of truthfulness in the character of the most outwardly moral. In some shape or other he is a liar—he is a subject of him whose kingdom is built upon lying, and who could not retain under his influence a man who "hated lying" in every form and under every disguise. Such a man must come to shame. What would be the fate of a cripple if he were to challenge a man with sound limbs to run a race? Must he not be worsted in the end? Not more surely than will every subject of the kingdom whose foundation was laid in a lie. There is an Italian proverb which says, "A liar is sooner caught than a cripple." If "lying lips are an abomination to the Lord," he who owns the lips must be an abomination also (see Homiletics on chap. xii. 22).

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Clear and round dealing is the honour of man's nature; and that mixture of falsehood is like alloy in coin of gold or silver, which may make the metal work the better but embaseth it. For these winding and crooked courses are the goings of the serpent, which goeth basely upon the belly, and not upon the feet. There is no vice that doth so cover a man with shame

as to be found false and perfidious; and, therefore, Montaigne sayeth prettily, when he inquired the reason why the word of the lie should be such a disgrace and such an odious charge, "If it be well weighed, to say that a man lieth, is as much as to say that he is brave towards God, and a coward towards men. For a lie faces God and shrinks from man."—*Lord Bacon.*

The natural man shuns lying and deceit on account of the outward shame and reproach; the pious abhors them with all his heart for God's sake.—*Starke, in Lange's Commentary.*

The allegiance of the soul to truth is tested by small things, rather than by those which are more important. There is many a man who would lose his life rather than perjnre himself in a court of justice, whose life is yet a tissue of small insincerities. We think that we are hating falsehood when we are only hating the consequences of falsehood. We resent hypocrisy and treachery, and calumny, not because they are untrue, but because they harm us. We hate the false calumny, but are half-pleased by the false praise. It is evidently not the element of untruth here that is displeasing, but the element of harmfulness. Now he is a man of integrity who hates untruth *as* untruth; who resents the smooth and polished falsehood of society, which does no harm; who turns in indignation from the glittering whitened lie of sepulchral Pharisaism which injures no one. Integrity recoils from deception, which men would almost smile to hear called deception. To a moral pure mind the artifices in every department of life are painful. The stained wood which passes for a more firm and costly material in a building, and deceives the eye by passing for what it is not—marble. The painting which is intended to be taken for reality; the gilding which is meant to pass for gold; and the glass which is worn to look like jewels; for there is a moral feeling and a truthfulness in architecture, in painting, and in dress, as well as in the market-place and in the senate, and in the judgment hall. "These are trifles." Yes, these are trifles; but it is just these trifles which go to the formation of character. He that is habituated to deceptions and artificialities in trifles will try in vain to be true in matters of importance; for truth is a thing of habit rather than of will. . . . And it is a fearful question, and a difficult one, how all these things, the atmosphere of which we breathe in our daily life, may sap the very foundation of the power of becoming a servant of the truth.—*F. W. Robertson.*

It is not said that a righteous man never lies. David lied more than once, and yet he could say with truth that he abhorred lying. Though he lied to Abimelech the priest, and to the king of the Philistines, yet his fixed hatred of sin was an evidence of piety, to which those can lay no claim who never spoke a lie in their lives, if their abstinence from this sin was caused by some other motive than hatred . . . . God and men agree in almost nothing but this, that a liar is detestable to both, and therefore he must, sooner or later, come to disgrace.—*Lawson.*

The affections are of as great force in the service of God as the words and actions, and the heart hath no less place than the members of the body. It must be one and the principal agent in love, where they have calling; and it must deal alone with detestation of those abominations which they are discharged to intermeddle with . . . . Here we have instruction to inform our hearts against all manner of wickedness, that they may be the more incensed against it. The less we like sin the more righteous we are, and the better the Lord will love us. And the more agreement there is between sin and our souls, the less peace there is between our souls and God. All the hurts and miseries that have ever come upon us, or on Christ for our sakes, do give us just occasion to fall out with sinfulness, that hath been the cause thereof.—*Dod.*

Where grace reigns, sin is loathsome, where sin reigns the man is loathsome. *Henry.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 6.

OVERTHROW BY SIN.

For Homiletics on the first clause of this verse see on chap. xi. 3, 5, 6.

I. The person overthrown—the sinner. 1. *To be a sinner implies the existence of a law.* Where there is no law there is no transgression. The sinner here spoken of is a transgressor against moral, Divine law. 2. *There may be sin against a law which is in existence but which is not known.* A man may not know of the existence of a law, and thus may sin ignorantly. 3. *But the sinner of the Bible is one who, if he does not possess a written revelation, does possess a "law written in his heart"—his conscience.* (See Rom. ii. 14, 15.) Though the guilt is incomparably greater when a man sins against both conscience and revelation, yet he who transgresses the law of the *first only* is a sinner, and there must be overthrow in both cases, because moral transgression contains within itself the elements of destruction.

II. His overthrow. 1. *For a man to be overthrown by breaking a law, that law must be good.* There have been laws that common integrity has compelled men to transgress, and men have been rewarded by the Great Lawgiver for the transgression. There are still laws in force in the world, the violation of which is a proof of moral courage. But the sinner here doomed to overthrow is a sinner against a law to which his own conscience bears witness that it is holy and just, and good (Rom. vii. 12). 2. *The breaking of this law must overthrow a man, even if no power were ever put forth against him.* Sin debases a man by the law of cause and effect. Nothing can prevent a man who throws himself over a precipice from finding the bottom of the chasm—nothing can keep a sinner from sinking lower and lower in the moral scale. The first man finds a bottom—comes to the end of his fall—he who *sins* keeps sinking lower and lower while he continues in sin. 3. *The law against which the sinner transgresses is backed by the highest authority, and by the greatest power of the universe.* It represents the greatest Being. Sin is not directed against an *abstraction*, but against a *person*. He who has promulgated it is a living personality, and has all power to enforce its penalties. The Almighty God is against the sinner. Must he not then be overthrown? 4. *The sinner can be placed in such a position as will justify him from the guilt of his past transgressions, and will enable him to keep the law in the future.* The Lawgiver has Himself provided this way of escape. He Himself gives the power to obey. Hence he who sins against this law sins against mercy too, and doubles his condemnation, "is overthrown," not by God's law, but by his rejection of God's method of deliverance from the guilt and power of sin.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Wickedness is ruin. 1. It exhausts a man's *property*, whether much or little. Sin is a very expensive thing; a person cannot commit it to any extent, but at a considerable loss, not of time only, but of substance. The passions are clamorous, exorbitant, and restless, till gratified, and this must be repeated. The case of the prodigal is in point, he wasted all his patrimony in riotous living. 2. It blasts his *reputation*. Sin can never be deemed honourable on correct principles; yet while sinners possess means of supporting themselves in their vices, they still keep up their name and rank in the world; not in the Church of God, or in the estimation of heaven. But when the means of supplying fuel to feed the fires of foul desire and tower-

ing ambition fail, then their outward splendours go out into darkness. (See Prov. x. 7; xxiv. 30). 3. It destroys *health*. Intemperance undermines the best constitution; it is a violence done to the physical order of things; it renders a man old in constitution, while he is young in years. 4. It hastens the approach of *death*. Wicked men frequently do "not live out half their days" (Psa. lv. 23), "for when they shall say, Peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh as a thief in the night" (1 Thess. v. 3). Sometimes their passions hurry them forward to the commission of crimes which terminate in the most disgraceful exit. 5. It effects the damnation of the *soul*. A sinner "wrongeth his own soul" (Prov. viii. 36). He quenches the Spirit of grace, neglects the salvation of the gospel, till he goes to his own place. "The wicked shall be turned into hell" (Psa. ix. 17).—*Theta*, from *Sketches of Sermons*.

Righteousness keepeth the upright, so that, though belied or abused, he will not let go his integrity (Job. xxvii. 5). David's "feet stood in an even place" (Psa. xxvi. 12). The spouse, though despoiled of her veil and wounded by the watch, yet keeps close to Christ (Cant. v). Not but that the best are sometimes disquieted in such cases; for not the evenest weights, but at their first putting into the balance, somewhat sway both parts thereof, not without some show of inequality, which yet, after some little motion, settle themselves in a meet poise and posture.—*Trapp*.

As he walketh safely in the way who hath a faithful convoy with him, so he is most sure of a faithful convoy who is a strong convoy unto himself. Righteousness alone is a puissant army, and he cannot perish whom righteousness preserveth. But how can he escape who is beset in the way by his own villany. The Hebrew is, that wickedness overthroweth *sin*. When a sinner is grown settled in sinning, he justly getteth the name of sin, and such an one it is that it is here spoken of.—*Jermin*.

"*Righteousness*," that good claim in law which merit gives some of the creatures. Our *righteousness* comes to us as the merit of Christ. The condition of our being held righteous is faith and new obedience. Therefore, if one is obedient, or, as this verse expresses it, "*is upright*" or "of integrity *in the way*," "*righteousness keeps guard over him*." Once righteous, always righteous. Having the proof of our righteousness now, that righteousness, or good standing in the law, shall guard us for ever; while sin, becoming equally perpetual, does not only not guard us, but (another intensive second clause) rejects what guard we have; that is, as it is most evangelically expressed, "*subverts*" or "*overturns*" the sin-offering. This word, *sin-offering*, instead of *allowing* such an interpretation (see Critical Notes) *has* it in all preceding books. "*Sin*" is the rare rendering. Some of the most beautiful Scriptures, that are Messianic in their cast (Gen. iv. 7), are ruined by the translation "*sin*." Leviticus never has the translation "*sin*" even in the English version.—*Miller*.

There is more bitterness following upon sin's ending than ever there was sweetness flowing from sin's acting. You that see nothing but well in its commission will suffer nothing but woe in its conclusion. You that sin for your profits will never profit by your sins.—*Dyer*.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSES 7 and 8.

The Law of Compensation.

I. There may be pretensions to wealth where there is comparative poverty. Many men endeavour to make other people believe that they are richer than they are—indeed, it seems to be the common vice of modern society. It is to be deprecated for several reasons. 1. *It is an injury to the man himself*. It

very often happens that his foolish artifices fail to blind others; he is like the ostrich who, when he puts his head into the sand, thinks he has hidden himself entirely from observation; he only makes himself an object of ridicule to those whom he thinks he has deceived. If, for a time, he that "hath nothing" succeeds in making people believe he is rich, the truth comes out in time, the bubble bursts, and the pretender comes to such shame as would never have been his portion if he had been content to pass for what he really was—a poor man. 2. *Such pretenders are a curse to others.* One such man makes many others. His costly furniture and brilliant entertainments, and all the adjuncts which are necessary to keep up the reputation of being a millionaire, lead his neighbours and associates to keep up appearances of the same kind, and so the mischief grows. Then such men rob honest men by leading them to trust them with their goods or money, and when the end comes many are brought to ruin. Examples of this truth are not far to seek, they are, alas, far too common in the present day. 3. *Such pretension is base hypocrisy.* A sin against which a righteous God levels His sternest threatenings (see on chap. xi. 9).

II. He who is really wealthy and yet does not use his wealth to the glory of God "hath nothing." 1. *He is poor in relation to his fellow-creatures.* The greatest beggar cannot do less for the world than he does, and he is poor in the love and gratitude of those from whom he might win a rich reward by the exercise of benevolence. 2. *He is poor in spiritual riches.* A miserly, niggardly man must be poor "towards God" (Luke xii. 21)—must be destitute of all that God counts worth possessing. The rich Church of Laodicea was so "increased with goods" that she said, "I have need of nothing," but in the sight of the Son of God she was "poor" (Rev. iii. 17).

III. In a spiritual sense this text is true. Possibly the rebuke to the Laodician Church may refer to that satisfaction in spiritual things "which maketh itself rich yet hath nothing," because its possessor is destitute of any real knowledge of his own spiritual needs and, consequently, of his spiritual poverty.

IV. There are men who are in every respect the opposite of those with whom we have been dealing. 1. *There is the miser who "maketh himself poor, yet hath great riches."* It is difficult to know what motive can prompt a man to do this except covetousness—a fear that he will be expected to part with some of his wealth for the good of others. What, therefore, was said under the second head will apply to him. 2. *There are those who make no show of wealth, yet having enough to sustain their position in life are really rich.* The man who is content to be known for what he really is, and has enough to live honestly, is *rich*, for riches and poverty are merely comparative terms, and the riches of one man would be poverty to another.

> "For he that needs five thousand pounds to live,
> Is full as poor as he that needs but five."

Therefore, "a man that maketh (or sheweth) himself poor" in this sense, has great riches. He has a sufficiency for all his wants, he retains his self-respect and the respect of his fellow-men. 3. *The really poor man is rich when he spends his little with regard to the glory of God.* Who of all those who cast their gifts into the treasury was so rich as the poor widow who cast in "all her living?" She was rich in the commendation of her Lord (Mark xii. 43), and all such as she will have the same recognition and will be rich in the gratitude and love of their fellow-creatures. Such an one shows that he is in possession of the "true riches" (Luke xvi. 11) which alone can preserve from moral bankruptcy. To them belongs the commendation "I know thy poverty, but thou art rich" (Rev. ii. 9). Such "poor of this world" are "rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom" (Jas. ii. 5). 4. *Those who are thus really, because spiritually, rich have always a sense of spiritual poverty.* They esteem themselves "less than the least of all saints" (Ephes. iii. 8), their watchword is "not as though I had already

attained" (Phil. iii. 12), therefore, to them belongs the rich possession of the friendship of "the High and Lofty One, that inhabiteth eternity" (Isa. lvii. 15). Thus "making themselves poor," they "yet have great riches."

V. There are advantages and disadvantages connected both with material wealth and with poverty. "The ransom of a man's life are his riches." This was more literally true in Solomon's days than in ours, and is more so now in Oriental countries than among the western nations. There, even now, a man's riches often excite the greed of some despotic ruler, or one of his irresponsible officials, and he is accused of some crime in order that his accuser may pocket a large ransom. In times of war, too, the rich are exposed to losses and vexations from their conquerors, which the poor escape. Wealth is the magnet which draws the plunderers upon them; although, at the same time, it enables them to ransom their lives. This is one of the penalties of riches. The spirit, although not the letter of the proverb, may be applied to modern European life. It is the hall of the nobleman that is exposed to the visits of the burglar. It is the great capitalist that loses when banks fail, and when there is a commercial panic. But none of these things touch a poor man. The despots pass him over, because he has no riches wherewith to ransom his life; in the time of war he is unmolested, as when Judea was invaded, "the captain of the guard left of the poor of the land to be vine-dressers and husbandmen (2 Kings xxv. 12). No thief plans a midnight surprise upon his humble abode; he cannot lose his money, he has none to lose. Vultures are not attracted to a skeleton, they gather round a carcase covered with flesh. So it is with those who make it their business to live upon the wealth of others. They leave the poor man free. He hears not "rebuke" or "threatening," he is left undisturbed. "He that is down need fear no fall," says Bunyan. "He that hath empty pockets may whistle in the face of a highwayman," says Juvenal. Therefore it is man's wisdom, whether poor or rich, to be content with such things as he has (Heb. xiii. 5); to appear only what he really is, and to dedicate his earnings, or his savings, or his inheritance, to the glory of God; to follow George Herbert's advice—

> "Be thrifty; but not covetous: therefore give
> Thy need, thine honour, and thy friend his due.
> Never was scraper brave man. Get to live;
> Then live, and use it; else, it is not true
> That thou hast gotten. Surely use alone
> Makes money not a contemptible stone."

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

The teaching of chap. xi. 24 finds its echo here. There is a seeming wealth behind which there lies a deep spiritual poverty and wretchedness. There is a poverty which makes a man rich for the kingdom of God.—*Plumptre.*

This is a world of making show, the substance of truth is gone out of it, and ever since man ceased to be what he should be, he striveth to seem to be what he is not. Every sin masking in its own vizard: the vainglorious and the covetous both seeking by their seeming to gain some real advantage to themselves.—*Jermin.*

These opposite faults originate in the same cause, an excessive esteem of worldly riches. It is this that makes poor men pretend to have them, and rich men conceal them for the purpose of preserving them more safely. But although money is sometimes a defence, the want of it is sometimes a shadow under which poor men live unnoticed by the plunderers.—*Lawson.*

Surely it is just that riches should be the ransom of a man's life, for it is by them that a man's life is brought into danger.—*Jermin.*

The seventh verse is terse beyond all expression. Such are all these pro-

verbs. Making oneself rich may be itself the poverty, and making oneself poor may be itself the wealth; inasmuch as these acts may have been sins or graces of the soul, which enter by the providence of Heaven into the very condition of the spirit. The meaning is that outward circumstances are nothing in the question. A saint is poor or rich as is most useful for him. The treasure is himself. "*There is that maketh himself rich and is all nothing;*" because himself, not the wealth, is the important matter. On the other hand, "*There is that makes himself poor,*" and not only "hath great riches," which is the imperfect translation of our Bibles, but "is a great treasure." He himself bereft of wealth, is all the greater for what God may have assigned. Solomon expounds more specially in the eighth verse: *Ransom*, covering—*i.e.*, the covering of his guilt. Property is a mere incident. A man's true opulence is his eternal redemption. He is not poor who is pinched by want; but he who has not listened to rebuke.—*Miller.*

It is not poverty so much as pretence that harasses a ruined man—the struggle between a proud mind and an empty purse—the keeping up a hollow show, that must soon come to an end. Have the courage to appear poor, and you disarm poverty of its sharpest sting.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 9:

The Abiding Light.

I. The analogy between the righteous and the wicked. Both have a light or lamp. The words here translated lamp and light are elsewhere used interchangeably, and are often used to signify *prosperity* (1 Kings xv. 4; 2 Kings viii. 19) *of any and every kind.* Prosperity resembles a lamp in that *it is an attractive force.* A benighted traveller in the darkness is drawn towards a light wherever he sees it, although he does not know whether it is the light of a thief or of an honest man. Tempest-tossed mariners look anxiously for a light in their extremity, and hope for help from it whether it swings from the masthead of a pirate or from a vessel which carries the police of the seas. So prosperity in any man is an attractive force. A prosperous wicked man attracts to himself the needy and unfortunate. The unprincipled gather round him, hoping to share in some degree in the light and heat of his worldly success, and the good man who is poor is often compelled by need to do the same. The lamp of prosperity, like the net of the kingdom, "gathers of every kind" (Matt. xiii. 47), not because of what the prosperous man *is*, but because of what he *has.* Many saints are dependent on sinners for their daily bread. Lazarus lay at the rich man's gate hoping to be fed with the crumbs which fell from his table. The prosperity of the righteous is equally attractive both to good men and bad for the same reason. The great mass of men in the world are toiling upon the sea of life for daily bread like tempest-tossed mariners, and wherever they see the light of prosperity they make for it, hoping for help in their need. And prosperity in the general acceptance of the word is as often given to the good as to the bad—to the wicked as to the righteous. Some commentators regard the *light* or the *lamp* as emblematic also of *posterity.* The words in 2 Kings viii. 19 may be translated "to give him always a light *in* his children" (see Lange on 2 Chron. xxi. 7), and in this sense also the analogy holds good, seeing that both good and bad men become the heads of households, and have joy and honour in their children.

II. The contrast between the righteous and the wicked. 1. *The righteous man will grow more and more prosperous.* Present and material prosperity is but an earnest and a shadow of that higher *light* which shall "*rejoice*" through-

out eternity. For the contrast implies that his light shall *not* "be put out." And this continuance has its root in his character. Although in this world character does not govern circumstances, there is a world in which it does. And, after all, a good man's light—or occasion of satisfaction—consists more in what he *is* than in what he *has*, and this shines "more and more unto the perfect day" (chap. iv. 18).—See Homiletics, page 58. 2. *The wicked man's prosperity will come to an end.* His candle *will* be put out by the hand of death. It may burn well for a time and he may rejoice in its light, but even if it continue to shed its rays around him till the last hour of earthly life, death will put it out. All that has made him a prosperous man has belonged to the earth, and this can shed no light beyond the grave. It *may* be put out by the hand of *retribution* before death. Lamps kindled by unjust means may burn well for a time, and human retribution may never put out their light, because men may not know how they were lighted; but God's providence may put them out. (On this subject see next verse.) Or if Divine retribution reserves its extinguisher for another world, another avenger may "put out" the light. *Conscience* may assert its right, and without actually taking from a man that in which he has promised himself satisfaction, may take the satisfaction from it, and thus as surely "put out" his "lamp."

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

How glowing, then, is the light of the Church in the combined shining of all her members! Many of them have no remarkable individual splendour; yet, like the lesser stars forming the Milky Way, they present a bright path of holiness in the spiritual firmament. . . . But it is the *light* of the righteous that rejoiceth. Sin, therefore, will bring the cloud. Do we hope to shine in the heavenly firmament? Then we must shine with present glory in the firmament of the Church. So delicate is the Divine principle, that every breath of this world dims its lustre.—*Bridges.*

The comfort of the righteous is a heavenly *light*, whose shining is *rejoicing*, and which even in this life maketh the darkness of Egypt to be light in Goshen, maketh the night of troubles to be day; but at length it shall be such a sunshine of glory, as that it dazzleth the human understanding to conceive it now. On the other side, the best comfort which the wicked have is but a lamp or a candle which shineth in the night; for as the light of a candle is shut up within a narrow circle of space, so their comfort is shut up within a narrow compass of time, until at length the candle be put out, never again to be lighted. But what say I *at length*, when Job saith the candle of the wicked is often put out. Upon which words St. Gregory saith, "Ofttimes the wicked thinks his child to be his candle, but when his child, too much beloved, is taken away, "*his candle is put out*," and so with present honour or wealth. He, therefore, that desireth not to rejoice in eternal things, canuot here always rejoice where he would be eternal.—*Jermin.*

They may not always rejoice, but their light will. "*The lamp of the wicked*" shines upon their own transitoriness. They never say that it will last. They know "*that it shall he put out.*" This is rather a dismal provision for being very cheerful. But "*the light of the righteous*," however much they look at it, "*rejoices.*" The more they try it, the more it burns. It does not shine upon its own lack of oil. And, though they are not self-luminous, yet their "*light*" is, for it is the light of the Spirit, and it shines more and more through eternal ages. —*Miller.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 10.

THE PARENT OF STRIFE.

I. Unlawful contention is the offspring of pride. If she is not her *only* child, she is her eldest-born. Scripture language more than hints that pride was the beginning of contention among the angels. Paul, speaking of the qualifications of a "bishop" or teacher, tells Timothy that such an one is in danger of "being lifted up with pride," and thus falling "into the condemnation of the devil" (1 Tim. iii. 6), thus seeming to indicate that pride was at the bottom of all the contention that is at present going on in the universe between light and darkness, between good and evil. From the pride of this fallen star has come contention in heaven, and earth, and hell.

> He it was whose guile,
> Stirred up with envy and revenge, deceived
> The mother of mankind; what time his *pride*
> Had cast him out from heaven, with all his host
> Of rebel angels, by whose aid aspiring
> To set himself in glory 'bove his peers,
> He trusted to have equalled the Most High,
> If he opposed, and with ambitious aim,
> Against the throne and monarchy of God,
> Raised impious war in heaven, and battle proud,
> With vain attempt.

And in the history of man's dealings with man pride is the root of contention. "*Whence come wars and fightings among you?" come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?*" (Jas. iv. 1). And is not the lust of pride, or envy, which is her foster-sister, the great cause of all domestic, and social, and national contentions? Has it not been the cause of every unrighteous war from the days of Chedorlaomer to the present century? And pride breeds contention on a narrower battle-ground still. It often creates war in the human spirit. Pride brings contention between duty and inclination, and, although there is no bloodshed, the contest is often very sharp and painful. The fact that "by pride cometh contention" is so plain that it may be said to be written upon the scroll of time, like Ezekiel's roll, within and without. It is impossible that it should be otherwise. Pride is a thinking more of ourselves than we are—an over-estimation of our own worth. This must lead us to strive for supremacy over others who are our equals, or even our superiors. This must bring contention, for they will not willingly accord to us that to which we have no lawful claim. Therefore, while there is pride in the universe contention will never end. The fountain must be dried up before the streams cease to flow. When a human soul is emptied of pride there will be peace within. In proportion as it ceases to be a ruling force in the world contention will cease. Pride keeps the fallen principalities in contention with heaven, keeps the sinner in contention with his Saviour, and keeps man in contention with man.

II. Those who are not ruled by pride are well advised. 1. *Because of the consequences that obedience to the dictates of pride must bring to men themselves.* There is in all men a wholesome fear of the consequences which flow from certain actions. If a child sees another burnt from playing with the fire, he will avoid doing that which he has seen to bring such pain and deformation to his brother. Self-love deters him from the act. Those who are well advised, because advised by the highest wisdom, know what the consequences of pride have been, and take cognisance of the deformation of character which it works in men around them. Therefore, the natural and spiritual instinct of wholesome self-love leads them to dread that which would bring such an additional scar to their already

too much deformed character. The children of wisdom are well advised to be afraid of pride on account of its consequences to themselves. 2. *Because of the misery it would bring to those nearly related to them.* Isolation is not possible in this world. Every man, woman, and child is more or less nearly related to some others. The relation may be physical, intellectual, political, or moral—in some instances all are combined. A proud man, or woman, or child, makes those who belong to them miserable. A proud father makes his children miserable, a proud king involves his country in war, and brings misery upon his subjects. How many friends has pride severed. How many homes and countries has family or national pride blighted. Surely, then, those are well advised who shun it for the sake of those related to them. 3. *Because of its consequences to humanity,* The miseries of the human race are increased by pride, and the progress of the gospel is hindered by it. The man who does not scruple to pour oil upon a burning house, not only shows that he has no intention to help to extinguish the flames, but that he intends to widen their influence. Each drop that he pours upon the fire increases its intensity, and spreads the destruction. There are men who do not hesitate, by the indulgence of pride, to increase that war of passions which burns so fiercely and destructively in the world and desolates ten thousand hearts and homes. But the well advised, by the exercise of the grace of humility, endeavour to quench the conflagration which, first kindled by hell, has devastated the earth for so many generations.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Pride, if there be no cause of contention given, will make it. *Transcendo non obedio perturbo* is the motto written upon pride's triple crown. . . . Pride is a dividing distemper. Bladders blown up with wind spurt one from another, and will not close; but prick them, and you may pack a thousand of them in a little room. . . . It was a great trouble to Haman to lead Mordecai's horse, which another man would not have thought so. The moving of a straw troubleth proud flesh; whereas, humility, if compelled to go one mile, will go two for a need; yea, as far as the shoes of the gospel of peace can carry it. "The wisdom from above is *peaceable.*"—*Trapp.*

As to the great quarrel with God, which needs the *ransom* (ver. 8), and which is mended by the *righteousness* (ver. 6), how long would that last, if we abandoned pride?—*Miller.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 11.

Two Ways of Growing Rich.

I. Wealth can be gotten. Wealth may be acquired by those who have it not. The wealth of the sea is within the reach of the fisherman. If he put down his net, sooner or later he will probably be rewarded with some gain. There is wealth in the sea of human life. Although the experience of some may be "to toil all night and to take nothing," yet the rule is that men who make an effort will succeed in bringing into their nets more or less of worldly gain. Some degree of skill and toil are needed to do this, but probably there was never a time when talent of any kind, or patient endeavour, was more certain to meet with a reward than in the present day. Aptitude for business will probably make a man a thriving tradesman if it does not make him a merchant prince. Intellectual power and artistic skill have a wide field in which to work, and are

generally sure of liberal reward. Probably there never was an age when those who have nothing but the net of genius to spread upon the sea of life were so certain to land gold upon the shore.

II. But there are two ways of growing rich. There is the way of *vanity.* Some men come into a fortune by a single throw of the dice—by a fortunate speculation—a lucky hit. They may not be dishonest as men generally understand the word, although as a rule such transactions will not bear too much exposure to the sunlight, but it is not the best way to get money. Then there are others who for a lifetime have nibbled at the lawful gains of other men, and have thus become rich. And others have gotten their wealth by some one act of dishonesty, of which society is ignorant or is unable to punish. All these ways of making money are vain in comparison *with that of patient, honest, daily toil.* The reaper gathers in the golden grain in the sweat of his face, an armful at each stroke of the sickle; step by step, "hand by hand," he makes himself master of the field and gathers the wheat into the garner. So patient daily toil is the Divinely-ordained way to grow rich. The daily practice of industrious habits and the exercise of patience, which are thus rendered necessary, are beneficial to a man's moral nature.

III. The possession of wealth will be permanent or short-lived according to the way in which it has been acquired. 1. *Wealth gotten at a leap is generally "diminished" by the man who gained it.* Such men are generally reckless in their expenditure, and squander a fortune in almost as short a time as they gained it. Such a sudden acquisition of wealth has been unfavourable to the formation of thrifty habits, and the man is not equal to his position. Many a gold-digger who has found in a day a nugget worth many thousands, has been a poor man again in a few months, and the experience of most men furnishes them with some similar illustration of the truth although not perhaps so striking. 2. *Wealth gotten by dishonesty will be diminished by God.* Time only is needed to make manifest the righteous judgment of God upon wealth gotten by such "vanity." Like the prophet's gourd, although it affords pleasant shelter to those who sit under it now, there is a worm at the root which will certainly bring it to nothing. Did we but know how some fortunes have been acquired, we should be less surprised at their possessors being suddenly reduced to beggary. It may be that those who are thus brought low are not the makers, but the possessors only, of wealth gotten by vanity, yet they have to pay the penalty. On the contrary, the man who has patiently and honestly gathered, little by little, a sufficiency, or even more, has gathered at the same time wisdom to use it, and has not forfeited the blessing of the Lord (chap. x. 22).

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

"It is easier to make a fortune than to keep it." So say the worldly. Specially forbidden is the keeping of the bread of heaven (Exod. xvi. 19). It was to be gathered every morning. A man who keeps gathering on the hand is the man to stay rich. But the saint who hoards up the past, and lives upon the fortune that he had, is the Israelite who kept the manna, and who found that it "bred worms and stank." Even happiness is not promoted by over-guard. "Things won are done; joy's soul lies in the doing." . . . Continuing to work not only keeps wealth, but "increases it," most particularly spiritual wealth.—*Miller.*

The words admit of three renderings (1) That of the A.V. "Wealth gotten by vanity," *i.e.*, by a windfall, or sudden stroke of fortune, not by honest labour, is soon diminished; or (2) wealth is diminished by vanity, by empty and hollow ostentation; or (3) wealth is diminished quicker than a breath. Of these (1) is believed to

be the best. In any case the general meaning seems to be that the mere possession of riches is as nothing; they come and go; but the power to gain by skill of hand is everything. By labour, "or by the hand," has three possible meanings (1), as in the A.V.; (2) in proportion to his strength; (3) "in due measure."—*Plumptre.*

Ill-gotten goods fly away without taking leave of the owner; leaving nothing but the print of talons to torment him (chap. xxiii. 5). "But he that gathereth by labour shall increase." Howbeit, sometimes, it is otherwise. "Master, we have toiled all night, and taken nothing" (Luke v. 5).—*Trapp.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 12.

Deferred and Accomplished Hope.

I. Two things are necessary to constitute hope. 1. *There is the desire for the real or supposed good.* The man conceives there is in the distance that which he esteems a good, and he desires to possess it. No man desires what he deems is an evil. The fact that he desires it shows that he regards it as a good. 2. *There is expectation.* A man may desire a good thing without hoping for it because he may feel that it is impossible to have his desire fulfilled. He has no expectation of its accomplishment, consequently he has no hope. Hope includes some amount of expectation, some foundation for the hope. A man who knows that his disease is incurable may *desire* to recover his health, but as he has no reason to expect recovery he does not *hope* for it. Sometimes, also, hope is founded on the promise of some person who is presumed to be both able and willing to perform it.

II. The constant postponement of the attainment of the desired and expected good produces mental sickness. Sickness of body enfeebles its powers, so does sickness of soul. A man derives strength to work when he possesses hope of enjoying some good thing in the future. Hope is a kind of spiritual food, by feeding upon which a man renews his energy. But the constant postponement of its realisation renders the hope less and less strong, and has the same effect upon the mind as insufficient food has upon the body, it enfeebles its resolution and lessens its courage. If a hungry man finds each day that his portion of food grows less, he will soon be conscious of loss of flesh and strength, and if the process goes on for many months he will lose all power of action and probably his very life. The same thing takes place in a man's spirit when hope is indefinitely "deferred."

III. The accomplishment of the desire and expectation renews mental health and strength. "It is a tree of life." The fruit of the tree of life in Paradise was designed to lengthen man's life, to perpetuate his youth by constantly renewing his bodily vigour. It is said of the tree of life in the Paradise yet to come that "its leaves are for the healing of the nations" (Rev. xxii. 2). So the realisation of hope renews the life of the spirit, quickens all its powers, perpetuates its youth. And if the hope has been so long deferred as to induce "heart sickness," its "coming" brings healing with it. Bodily health is restored by the operation of something from without. It is not usually brought about by that which is within us, but by the coming to us of that which is without. A man desires something which he has not—something outside of himself—either a material or a spiritual good; and if he comes to possess it, it is to the soul what healing medicine is to the body. And as those who eat of the tree of life in the heavenly world are "children of the resurrection," and sons of undying youth, so realised hope makes the spirit conscious of new life, because it brings

joy, and when a man is filled with joy he feels young, however many years he has lived. And renewed youth brings renewed activity. It lifts up the hands which hang down, and restores the feeble knees, and gives a man a new start in the race of life. Applying the words to the revelation of the New Testament, to the "hope of the Gospel" (Col. i. 23), we remark—1. *That the Christian must be the subject of deferred hope.* He *must* wait for the realisation of his desires and expectations. The "adoption of the body" (Rom. viii. 23) must be waited for. A glorified body would be out of place in an unglorified world. This hope must be deferred until his Lord's expectations with regard to this world are fulfilled. The Son of God is waiting until the Father shall give the word that "time shall be no longer"—until the times of restitution of all things (Acts iii. 21). He is "at the right hand of God; from henceforth *expecting* till His enemies be made His footstool" (Heb. x. 13). When that *expectation* is fulfilled, the *desire* of the Christian with regard to his resurrection body will be fulfilled also. He must also wait until after death for perfect victory over sin and its consequence, for the full revelation of what it is to be one of the sons of God. "*Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be.*" "*When this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, 'Death is swallowed up in victory'*" (1 John iii. 2; 1 Cor. xv. 54). 2. *That even the deferred hope of the Christian is a tree of life.* It is an eater that yields meat. It bears fruit (1) It gives birth to *patience*, and there is no grace that the human spirit needs more. According to apostolic teaching it is needful to "*let patience have her perfect work*," if the Christian is to *be perfect and entire, wanting nothing* (Jas. i. 4). It is the evidence of a great mind to be able to wait. The Eternal is a "God of patience" (Rom. xv. 5). He can wait, because He is infinitely great. (2) It brings forth joy. Paul says, "*We rejoice in hope of the glory of God*" (Rom. v. 2). (3) It sanctifies the soul. "*Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself*" (1 John iii. 3). (4) It gives sympathy with God in relation to unregenerate humanity. God defers the realisation of the Christian's hope, because He is not willing that any should perish (2 Pet. iii. 9). While we wait the Divine desire grows in us also, that "all should come to repentance."

ILLUSTRATION.

Perhaps in all history there is not a more salient instance of hoping against hope deferred than that of Columbus. Years and years were wasted in irksome solicitation; years spent, not indeed in the drowsy and monotonous attendance of ante-chambers, but, as his foremost biographer narrates, amid scenes of peril and adventure, from the pursuit of which he was several times summoned to attend royal conferences and anon dismissed abruptly. "Whenever the court had an interval of leisure and repose (from the exigencies of the Moorish war), there would again be manifested a disposition to consider his proposal, but the hurry and tempest would again return, and the question be again swept away." . . He came to look upon these indefinite postponements as a mere courtly mode of evading his importunity, and after the rebuff in the summer of 1490, he is said to have renounced all further confidence in vague promises, which had so often led to chagrin; and, giving up all hopes of countenance from the throne, he turned his back upon Seville, indignant at the thought of having been beguiled out of so many years of waning existence. But it is impossible not to admire the great constancy of purpose and loftiness of spirit displayed by Columbus ever since he had conceived the sublime idea of the discovery. When he applied again to the court after the surrender of Grenada, in 1492, more than eighteen years had elapsed since the announcement of the design, the greatest part of which had been consumed in applications to various sovereigns, poverty, neglect ridicule, contumely, and the heart-sickness of hope deferred, all that hitherto had come of it. Five years later, when preparations were afoot for his third voyage, we read that, "so wearied and disheartened did he become by the impediments thrown in his way," that he thought of abandoning his discoveries altogether. —*Jacox.*

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

In his analysis of "the immediate emotions," Dr. Thomas Brown adverts to that weariness of mind which one would so gladly exchange for weariness of body, and which he takes to be more difficult to bear with good humour than many profound griefs, because it involves the uneasiness of hope that is renewed every moment, to be every moment disappointed. He supposes a day's journey along one continuous avenue, where the uniformity of similar trees at similar distances is of itself most wearisome; but what we should feel with far more fretfulness would be the constant disappointment of our expectation, that the last tree that we beheld in the distance would be the last that should rise upon us; when "tree after tree, as if in mockery of our very patience itself, would still continue to present the same dismal continuity of line." Lord Bolingbroke, a professed expert in its power to weary and wear out, called suspense the only insupportable misfortune of life.—*Jacox.*

The rule, as expressed in the first clause, is universal, but in the second clause it is applied to a particular case. . . . . The second member is a dividing word. The accomplishment of the desire is "a tree of life." This belongs only to the hope of the holy. Many, after waiting long and expecting eagerly, discover, when at last they reach their object, that it is a withered branch and not a living tree. When a human heart has been set on perishable things, after the sickness of deferred expectation comes the sorer sickness of satiated possession. If the world be made the portion of the immortal Spirit, to want it is one sickness, to have it is another. The one is a hungry mouth empty, the other is a hungry mouth filled with chaff. The clog of disappointed possession is a more nauseous sickness than the aching of disappointed desire. There is no peace to the wicked. They are always either desiring or possessing; but to desire and to possess a perishable portion are only two different kinds of misery to men. They are like the troubled sea when it cannot rest. You stand on the shore, and gaze on the restless waters. A wave is hastening on, struggling and panting, and making with all its might for the shore. It seems as if all it wanted was to reach the land. It reaches the land, and disappears in a hiss of discontent. Gathering its strength at a distance, it tries again, and again, with the same result. It is never satisfied, it never rests. In the constitution of the world, under the government of the Most Holy, when a soul's desire is set on unworthy objects, the accomplishment of the desire does not satisfy the soul. *Arnot.*

Aquinas noteth that hope in itself causeth joy, it is by accident that it causeth sorrow. Inasmuch as it is a present apprehension of good to come, it breedeth delight, but as it wanteth the presence of that good, it bringeth trouble. It is therefore the delay of hope that afflicteth. And indeed a lingering hope breedeth in the heart as it were a lingering consumption. It is a long child-bearing travail of a weak mind, for hope having conceived comfort is still in labour, until it be brought forth. So it is with the servants of God with respect to heaven. They having begun in hope their journey thitherward, it makes them even *sick at heart* to think how long it is until they can get there. Wherefore, St. Gregory saith, the punishments of the innocent are the desires of the righteous. For all having lost heaven by sin, even the just are punished with the *deferred hope* of recovering it.—*Jermin.*

Here is instruction—**I. To hope for nothing but that which is haveable, and may well be had, and whereof we are capable, and that doth belong unto us.** For if protraction cause the heart to languish, what will frustration and disappointment? It is one of the threatenings against the wicked in Deuteronomy, that "*their sons and*

their daughters shall be given unto another people, and their eyes should look for them until they fail, and there shall be no might in their hand" (chap. xxviii. 32). Now what is meant by this is that their expectation deceived should turn them to as much woe as if their eyes had lost their sight. And that was because that they, incurring the curse by their sinful behaviour, did yet presume of a restitution to happiness as though nothing had appertained to them but blessings. **II. Not to limit God or prescribe to Him in what space He shall fulfil His promise.** It was a heathenish speech of the King of Israel's messenger, when he said, in blasphemous manner, that he neither *would* nor *ought to attend on the Lord any longer* (2 Kings vi. 33). But we need not draw admonitions against this from the infidelity of the wicked, but from the infirmities of the godly, as Abraham and Sarah had much ado to believe that a child should be gotten and conceived of their body after their natural vigour was consumed, and therefore, Hagar was brought in to help the matter. **III. Not to depend on man, nor to repose our hope in flesh and blood.** For thereby we shall not only be delayed of our help too long, but defeated of it altogether. For it is a righteous thing with God, that they who will deify creatures with confidence, should be deceived by creatures with confusion. The poor Israelites found and felt this (Lam. iv. 17). **IV. Where we undertake to minister succour, not to grieve the hearts of them that are in affliction by lingering too long before we relieve them.** God doth teach us to show beneficence timely and in due season (chap. iii. 28). This was one testimony of a good conscience that comforted Job in his extremities, that "he had not held the poor from their desire nor caused the eyes of the widow to fail (Job xxxi. 16).—*Dod.*

Hope's hours are full of eternity; and how many see we languishing at hope's hospital, as he at the pool of Bethesda! Hope unfailable (Rom. v. 5) is founded upon faith unfeigned. The desire will come to those who patiently wait on God; for waiting is but hope and trust lengthened. We are apt to antedate the promises and set God at a time as they (Jer. viii. 20) who looked for salvation in summer at furthest. We are short-breathed, short-spirited. But as God seldom comes at our time, so he never fails at His own, and then He is most sweet, because most seasonable.—*Trapp.*

The fourth verse has said that "the sluggard desireth, and hath nothing." This verse declares that longing, accompanied by procrastination, *enfeebles the heart;* but that a bold plunging after the good, and attaining it, is a "tree of life." This, dimly, is true in worldly affairs. A man who desires some worldly good and wavers, enfeebles his heart, but he who will dash boldly in strengthens it. . . . The least taste of arrived-at desire in the spiritual world, like the apples of Eden, breeds "life." The soul will go on after that eternally. *Miller.*

If Jacob serve the churl Laban seven years longer, if he think he shall have Rachel at the end of it, it will be but as seven days. Thus it is that the hope of better days sweeteneth the present sadness of any outward condition. There is no grief so heavy, but if a man tie heaven at the end of it, it will become light, but put them together, and the one will be swallowed up in the other.—*Spencer.*

The world dares say no more of its devices than *Dum spiro spero* (while I breathe, I hope); but the children of God can add by virtue of their living hope, *Dum expiro spero* (while I expire, I hope).—*Leighton.*

Hope is the hunger that makes our food acceptable; but hope deferred, like hunger prolonged, brings a kind of torture. . . . With the child of God "the patience of hope" issues in "the full assurance of hope." What was it to Abraham, when, after long deferred hope, the answer came? Laughter. What was it when the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion, and they were like unto them that

dream? What was it to old Simeon and the waiting remnant when "the *desire* of all nations" *came?* What to the disciples, when, at the manifestation of their risen Lord, their *sickening hearts* believed not for joy, and wondered? . . . But what will be the joy at the grand consummation of hope? (Rom. viii. 23–25).—*Bridges.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 13.

Bound by Law.

The literal translation of the first clause of this verse is "Whoso despiseth the law is bound by it," or "is in bonds to it" (see Critical Notes).

I. Divine law is a necessity of human nature. There must be a standard of right and wrong for moral and responsible creatures, and the law which is that standard ought to be appreciated in proportion to its perfection. Law in a family is a necessity for its right regulation, and in proportion as it approaches perfection it will meet the needs of its members. 1. The law of God is a necessity, in order to educate men's moral sense. The human conscience sometimes lies buried under ignorance, or is passive in the hands of lawless desire, and it needs the law to arouse it to perform its proper functions, and thus prepare men for a Saviour. "Christ," says Paul, "is the end of the law." It arouses men to feel their need of His atonement. 2. It is needed as a basis of punishment and reward. There are some actions upon which men, by almost universal consent, pass judgment, and their judgment is embodied in their law, and thus forms a basis of conviction for the transgressor. And there are other actions which, by the same consent, are allowed to deserve reward, and that universal consent forms a kind of law. So the holy, just, and true law of God is needed as a standard by which men's actions may be judged.

II. Whether men honour or despise the law they are bound by it. There is no place and there are no circumstances in this world in which men are not bound by *physical* law. Every man finds that if he would have health he must inhale pure air. No man can afford to despise this law, but whether he do so or not, it will hold him in bonds. He must obey it if he would have health, to disobey may be death. If a moving object is coming to meet us, if it has more force in it than we have, we shall be overthrown by it if we do not get out of its path. We may do as we please about meeting it, but we cannot be loosed from the law which governs it. These laws of our earthly life may not be universal laws, they are doubtless many of them confined to our present state of being, but the moral law of God is in force throughout the universe and there is no escape from it. What is good here is good everywhere, what is morally right now can never be wrong through all eternity. Whether men obey it or defy it, they will be for ever bound by it.

III. It is seen to be a good law by the results of keeping it. "He that feareth the commandment shall be rewarded," or "shall be at peace." Even when men violate physical law they do not pronounce it bad. But it is seen to be good by its effects on those who keep it. Men who obey the laws of health recommend those laws in their own persons. Those who acknowledge the binding nature of Divine law and fear it, recommend it to others as good. "Great peace have they that love Thy law and nothing shall offend them" (Psa. cxix. 165). Self-love binds men to obey it. "Whoso breaketh" this "hedge, a serpent shall bite him" (Eccles x. 8). The whole Bible is an exposition of this text. (See Homiletics on verse 6).

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

The slave *fears* the penalty; the child *the commandment.*—*Bridges.*

In many things we offend all, but we are not all despisers of the Word of God. Good men have reason to lament their manifold breaches of the commandment, and yet they have a sincere love and esteem for it.—*Lawson.*

Whatever comes with Divine authority is a Divine commandment. The Gospel is on this as well as other accounts called the "law of faith," being the *Divine prescription* for the salvation of sinners.—*Wardlaw.*

This word has a private and personal, as well as a public application; but it is in the providential government of the nations that its truth has been most conspicuously displayed. The kingdoms of this world in these days prosper or pine in proportion as they honour or despise God's Word. . . . . Number the nations over one by one, and see where property is valuable and life secure; mark the places where you would like to invest your means and educate your family; you will shun some of the sunniest climes of earth, as if they lay under a polar night, because the light of truth has been taken from their sky. Traverse the world in search of merely human good, seeking but an earthly home, and your tent, like Abraham's, will certainly be pitched at "the place of the altar."—*Arnot.*

The more we despise the law, the more we are bound by it. "But he that fears." This is a splendid picture of the Christian. He is not one that keeps the law, but "fears" it, *i.e.*, tries to keep it, fears it with a godly fear, and as a climax, frequent in a second clause (see chap. xiv. 11 and *passim*), he is not one who comes simply less under bonds, but is forgiven altogether.—*Miller.*

The word of Divine revelation is here, as it were, personified as a real superhuman power, whose service one cannot escape, and in default of this he comes into bondage to it, *i.e.*, loses his liberty.—*Lange's Commentary.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 14.

LIVING BY RULE.

I. The wise man lives by rule or according to law. "The law of the wise." Wherever there is any *force* or *power* there must be rule, or there will be destruction *from* the power and possibly destruction *to* the power. The power that sets in motion the locomotive must be governed by law, or it will destroy the driver and that to which it was intended to give motion. Under the guidance of law it will minister to man's convenience, left to itself it will injure him and put an end to itself. Power is lodged within the hand of every human being which may be used to bless himself and others, but in order that it may do so it must act in accordance with some law, it must have some rule for its guidance. Nothing on the earth is so powerful for good or for evil as a human soul, because its power is exercised in the domain of spirit, but without rule it cannot exercise its power for the good of others, and will even destroy all its capabilities of working good to itself. Where men live without a rule of life there is power without law, and this must work evil and not good. It is the characteristic of a morally wise man that all his powers of mind and soul are under control, he has them well in hand.

II. Living by rule gives distinctness and definiteness to life, and thus augments its power. The chaff that is lifted from the sieve by the wind has no definite destination, it is entirely at the mercy of the breeze to carry it anywhere that it pleases. How different is the course of the eagle out in the storm

wind! He moves by rule, either facing and cleaving the blast, or utilising its force to bring him to his destination. The vessel that has no hand to hold the rudder is bound for no special port. The sea will take her somewhere, either before or after she has gone to pieces; but it is very uncertain to which point of the compass she will be carried. How different is the steady ploughing of the waves by the ship whose head is under the rule of the helmsman. There is a definiteness in her path, which shows that she has one point to make, one port in view. Those who live without rule are "like the chaff which the wind driveth away." The blasts of passion, the current of outside circumstances, carry them whithersoever they list. But the wise man lives under a law by which these winds are rendered powerless to drive him, and are made to carry him forward in the path which he is treading. The man without a rule is a vessel without a rudder, and is destined, finally, to be washed upon the shore of eternity a wreck. The very gait of the child of wisdom indicates that he is bound for a certain destination. By the way in which he guides his bark he shows that he has a port to make upon the sea of life. And this definiteness is always about him, whether he is in solitude or among the multitude. He lives by rule, in the private recesses of his soul (see on chap. xii. 5), and this enables him to rule his outward life. He finds that the rule which governs his private life is strong enough to keep him in public. The power of the multitude is not strong enough to overmaster the power that is resident in his single will, because that will is under a rule which gives it definiteness; and, therefore, increases its force of resistance. Elijah is a fine example of such a man. He was a man emphatically whose whole forceful nature was under Divine rule. Whether he was in the wilderness or upon Mount Carmel he was in subjection to the law of his God, and this made him a man whose life was possessed with one definite aim and purpose. Hence the mighty wave of opposition with which he was met had no more power to move him than the ocean has to move the solid rock. So with his great antitype, John the Baptist. He lived by rule as much when alone in the desert as he did when he was in the midst of the multitude; and, therefore, neither their applause or blame, nor Herod's outburst of rage, had any power to change his pre-determined course. Hence the question of Him who declared the Baptiser to be the "greatest born of woman," "What went ye out in the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind," implying that he was no reed bending to every blast, but a storm-resisting cedar, which amid the uproar of the storm holds its own, and comes out of it more firmly rooted and grounded by the power of the elements which it has resisted. This is the inevitable consequence of living by rule. The unruled though mighty locomotive wastes and loses its power in destroying, that which is under the guidance of law preserves and increases it. A lawless man possesses a terrible capacity for destruction; but his power diminishes, even while he exercises it, while he who is under Divine rule grows stronger and stronger. Sin weakens a man, goodness increases his power.

III. Snares are laid to turn men's power into a wrong channel—to bring their lives under the dominion of lawlessness. There are "snares of death" set to entrap men's feet. The aim of every tempter, whether human or Satanic, is to lead men to abuse that power which God has put into our hands in giving us a will. This being the supreme force in a human soul, it is the great aim of the devil that it should not be "subject to the law of God." His aim in Eden was to loose the bonds which had hitherto held it firm to the Divine command. The end of the temptation was, and has always been, concealed under a specious pretence of freedom, hence it is a *snare*. It is a *snare of death*, because, as we have seen, power without rule destroys itself and others. As soon as Eve had fallen into the snare of the devil, she began to know what it was to be under the dominion of sin—she was conscious of having lost her hold upon herself,

and of having set in motion within her spirit a mighty power of evil. The great aim of Satan in his temptation of Christ was to get His will to exercise its power, if only for a moment, in antagonism to the will of His Father. If the devil could have prevailed upon the Saviour to have but created a loaf of bread to satisfy His hunger, he would have succeeded in getting Him to use His divine power in a manner which would not have been in accordance with the purpose or plan of God. The same aim is seen in each temptation under different forms, to endeavour to lead the Son of God to free Himself by His Divine power from the law of His Father. But the snare was avoided in each instance by close adherence to the words of the law. "It is written" is a sure preservative from the snares of death."

IV. The rule by which the morally wise are governed is—First, *Abundant.* It is a *fountain.* A fountain is supplied from a living spring—a never-failing source—and it therefore yields an unfailing supply of water for men of all classes and conditions whenever they need it. The Divine rule which governs the child of wisdom originated in God. The fountain of Divine truth came from this holy and Infinite spring. Therefore it is an all-sufficient guide or rule of life for men in all ages, and under all circumstances. Secondly—*Lifegiving.* It is a "fountain of life." By being the conserver and strengthener of his spiritual power, as we saw under the first head, and by being the means of his escape from the great soul-ensnarer. Allowed to flow through the garden of the soul, and exert there its due influence, it produces fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life (Rom. vi. 22). *The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; the statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. . . . . Moreover, by them is thy servant warned, and in keeping of them there is great reward* (Psalm xix. 7-11). This was the testimony of one who had drunk long and deeply of the waters of this life-giving fountain.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Of law there can be no less acknowledged than that her seat is in the bosom of God, her voice the harmony of the world. All things in heaven and earth do her homage; the very least, as feeling her care, and the greatest, as not exempt from her power, both angels and men, and creatures of what condition soever, though each in different sort and manner, yet all with uniform consent admiring her as the mother of peace and joy.—*Hooker.*

The holy instructions of a wise man are to be valued in this world. There is a living virtue in the word of truth, even when earthen pipes are the channel of its conveyance.—*Lawson.*

The figure leads to the idea of death as a fowler (Psa. xci. 3). If it is not here a mere formula for the dangers of death, then the proverb is designed to state that the life which springs from the doctrine of a wise man as from a fountain of health, for the disciple who will receive it, communicates to him knowledge and strength, to know where the snares of destruction lie, and to hasten with vigorous steps away when they threaten to entangle him.—*Delitzsch.*

If we take the *law of the wise* for the law of wise men as given by them, we may thus consider the words. He that goeth on according to the stream and course thereof, shall be sure at last to come to the fountain. The law of the wise is but a stream from the fountain of life, and he that keepeth to the stream shall be sure at last to meet with the fountain.—*Jermin.*

Sin is Satan's snare to catch men to perdition. He that is in the power of it, and entangled therewith, is in great peril of perishing, being caught in a

trap and held fast there, till either grace deliver him or death devour him. There is no safe treading but in the ways of God. Every step without it, through the length and breadth of the whole world, hath somewhat set in it to entangle us.—*Dod.*

Even in defect of literal prescript, the spirit of *the law* will supply practical rules for keeping the heart and life. Dr. Payson says, "By the help of three rules I soon settle all my doubts—viz., to do nothing of which the lawfulness is questionable; to do nothing which indisposes for prayer, or interrupts communion with God; to go into no company, business, or situation in which the presence and blessing of God cannot conscientiously be asked and expected."—*Bridges.*

The "*law of the wise*" can be nothing but the Book of God. . . . It is essentially *life-giving.* Its design is not to publish and confirm the sentence of death, but to show how death may be escaped. The declaration of the sentence of death is only intended to show the necessity, and to impress the importance and value of the tidings of *life. Life* is the end of Divine revelation.—*Wardlaw.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 15.

A Bad Way and a Good Understanding.

I. Favour is here spoken of as a thing to be desired It is desirable to have the favour of *any* man if thereby we can do him any good. It was desirable that Joseph should have Pharaoh's favour, as he was thereby enabled to gain his ear and help him in his perplexity. The favour which Daniel obtained from Nebuchadnezzar enabled him to be a great blessing to that monarch. A man who his regarded by his fellow creatures with favour possesses a powerful instrument which he may use to do them good. On this account the favour of men is to be desired. It is also desirable to have the favour of *good* men as thereby we may *get* good. Good men are the only living representatives of God in the world, and next to the blessedness of having the favour of the parent is the blessedness of having that of His children. Therefore the favour of men is to be desired both for their sakes and for our own.

II. The instrument of obtaining favour. "Good understanding" or "good intelligence." Man's highest and truest intelligence springs from moral relation and sympathy with God. All intellectual intelligence is derived from Him, and this intelligence alone will often gain for men a large share of human favour. There are many men of great mental intelligence, who do not acknowledge the existence of God, who have won high places in the esteem of men. But these words refer to those who have been enlightened by the teaching of the Divine spirit, and are in sympathy with God and with His moral laws. Such men are not less intelligent concerning other matters, but more so. Other things being equal, a godly man's purely intellectual powers are quickened by his godliness. If an ungodly man becomes a true servant of God, all the powers of his mind are thereby strengthened. Observation confirms this, and it is impossible that it should be otherwise. If a man cannot come into communion with a wiser *man*, without gaining in intelligence, how can he come into communion with the *Fountain of all wisdom* without becoming a more intelligent man in every sense of the word? What a capable man of business Joseph was. When quite a youth, and without any previous training, he became controller of the household of an Egyptian nobleman; and when only thirty was not only the first lord of Egypt, but showed himself fully equal to all the exigencies of his position. Whence did his "good understanding" proceed? Was it not from his moral relationship with the God of his fathers? "Can we find such

an one as this is?" said the heathen king,—"a man in whom the spirit of God is" (Gen. xli. 38). The possession of this "good understanding" in temporal and secular matters gives a man favour in the eyes of other men. The possession of *spiritual intelligence* gives him favour in the eyes of all the good. There is a relationship among all true members of the family of God, which is stronger and deeper than any merely human relationship. And this spiritual intelligence gives a man a moral power among all his fellow-men. They cannot withhold the testimony of their consciences, unless they are altogether hardened they must secretly, if not openly, give him their esteem and confidence. "Natural conscience," says Trapp, "cannot but do homage to the image of God stamped upon the nature and works of the godly."

III. The way of those who are destitute of this spiritual intelligence. All such men are "transgressors." Their spiritual nature is dormant—they are without spiritual discernment. In scriptural phrase they are "blind" (Rev. iii. 17) and "dead" (Ephes. ii. 1). Their way is *hard*, however we use the word. (See Critical Notes.) 1. *It is hard in the sense of being a well-trodden way.* It has become hard by being much frequented—by being perpetually used. It has several elements of attraction. 1. *Antiquity is on its side.* It is an *old* way—it has been in use for ages. "No man," says our Lord, "having drunk old wine, straightway desireth new" (Luke v. 39). Men are naturally conservative—naturally inclined to go as their fathers went. True it is that there is an *older* way—the way of the good (see Homiletics on chap. iv. 14-19, page 58), but still the way of the transgressor is very ancient. 2. *Men's natural inclination leads into that way.* Men are led by their inclination, unless there is a stronger principle within them. We are born with a tendency to evil rather than to good—to walk after the devices of our own heart rather than according to the will of God. In most men "inclination is as strong as will," and leads them to tread the "way of the transgressor." 3. *It is attractive because of the numbers who tread it.* "Many there be which go in thereat" (Matt. vii. 13). Many men make that fact a city of refuge wherein to shelter themselves from the admonitions of conscience. "I only do as others do" is regarded by many men as an impregnable citadel wherein they can securely await the righteous judgments of God (See Homiletics on page 8, 2nd head). 2. *It is hard and therefore desolate, unfruitful.* The common highway that is trodden down by many feet is not the place in which to look for a golden harvest. The stony rock is not a soil whence flowers spring. Men do not expect to gather choice fruit on the desolate moorland. Neither can the way of the transgressor yield the flowers or the pleasant fruits of life. Thorns and nettles are there, but no golden harvest. The favour neither of God nor man is his portion. He can only reap as he has sown (See Homiletics on chap. xi. 18–20, page 223). 3. *It is a hard way in the sense that it is a miserable way.* Every act carries with it a present judgment. Every action has its reaction of pleasure or of pain. Every step, therefore, in the way of transgression has its accompanying reproach of conscience. Then the way of sin is a way of self-deception. What is more painful than to be the subject of constant deception? We have just dwelt upon the heart-sickness of hope deferred (verse 12); the sinner is a constant victim of this malady. Nothing can be a more bitter experience than to stake our all upon a promise, and when the time comes for its fulfilment, to find that it was made only to be broken. Yet this is the experience of a transgressor of God's law, not once or twice, but all through his life. It is his lot not only to deceive but *to be deceived* (2 Tim. iii. 13). He is ever promising himself, and is ever being promised by the master whom he serves, satisfaction as the result of his deeds, but he is always finding that the performance falls as far short of the promise as it did when the devil led our first parents into sin, by the promise "ye shall be as gods," and performed it by

making them slaves to himself. This is another ingredient in the hardness of the way. He is a slave to him who has deceived him. Many a man is fully alive to the deceptive nature of sin—to its utter powerlessness to give him real pleasure—and yet he goes on it. Why is this? He is bound by a chain which he finds it well nigh impossible to break. Evil habits, as well as good ones, grow stronger by exercise. Slavery is hard under any master, excepting under Him whose service is perfect freedom. How bitter, then, is slavery to one who has deceived us. Yet this is not the *hardest* part of the *hard* way. None who are thus victims of the great deceiver—none whom he has made his bond slaves but feel that they are so by their own consent. Each evil thought unchecked, each evil thought indulged, has forged a link in the chain. Their condition has been likened, by an old writer, to that of a man who has been busily at work in carrying stick after stick to make a pile of wood, and then finds that he has only been heaping up materials for a fire upon which he is to be burned.

IV. But though the way of transgressors is hard, it is not too hard. Its very hardness is intended to lead them to leave it. Because the end will be worse than the way, it is the tenderest mercy to make the way hard. It only tells him that he has taken the wrong road. The pain that he suffers is only the voice of God, saying, "Do thyself no harm." When a mountain pass becomes so blocked with fallen rocks that every step is a misery, does it not admonish the traveller to turn back before he makes a fatal slip? When in the regions of eternal snow a man feels intense pain from the biting cold, and encounters at every step the corpse of one who has been frozen to death by persistently disregarding the voice of nature, is it not suicide to continue? Can he say he received no admonition? Is not all pain a warning that some good law has been transgressed? Is it not a sentinel with a drawn sword to turn back the unwary from the precipice? Even so is the hardness of the way of the transgressor.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

For the most part the word translated "good understanding" corresponds with that which, in a deep ethical sense, we call fine culture, which shows men how to take the right side, and in all circumstances to take the right key, exercise a kindly, heart-winning influence, not merely to the benefit of its possessor, but such as removes a partition wall, and brings men closer to each other. The word translated "hard" denotes that which stretches itself far, and with reference to time, that which remains the same during the course of time. That which does not change in time, continuing the same, according to its nature, strong, firm, thus becomes the designation of the enduring and the solid, whose quality remains always the same. The fundamental idea of remaining like itself, continuing, passes over into the idea of the firm, the hard, and, at the same time, of the uncultivated and the uncultivatible. The way of transgressors, or of the *treacherous, i.e.*, the manner in which they transact with men, is stiff, as hard as stone, repulsive; they follow selfish views, never placing themselves in sympathy with the condition of their neighbour; they are without the tenderness which is connected with fine culture; they remain destitute of feeling in things which, as we say, would soften a stone. —*Delitzsch.*

Many *seek* favour as the gift of others which it is in their own power to give themselves. For, get a *good understanding*, whereby to understand well what thou goest about, and how to go about it. It is true, as Tertullian speaketh, now and then it falls out, that in a great tempest wherein sea and heaven are confounded, the haven is attained by a happy error; and now and then, in darkness, the way of entrance and going out is found

by a blind happiness. But this is a favour which has no holdfast—it is a *good understanding* that giveth favour. —*Jermin.*

Is not the way of transgressors pleasant in prospect, although it ends in death? No; sin barters away future safety but does not secure present peace in return. Things are not always what they seem. The pleasures of sin are not only limited in their duration, they are lies even while they last . . . The race is torture and the goal perdition . . . But the right way is not a soft and silky path for the foot of man to tread upon; and, if one thing happens to all in the journey of life, what advantage have the good? Much every way, and specifically thus: The hardness which disciples experience in following their Lord is righteousness rubbing on their remaining lusts, and so wasting their deformities away; whereas the hardness of a transgressor's way is a carnal mind in its impotent enmity dashing itself against the bosses of the Almighty's buckler. . . . As the pains of cure differ from the pains of killing, so differs the salutary straitness which presses the entrance at the gates of life, from the hardness which hurts transgressors as they flee from God.—*Arnot.*

Sin, as of its nature, sinks always lower under bond (ver. 13), and must, therefore, *de jure*, be "*perpetual*" (see Miller's rendering, in Critical Notes). For, strange enough, the man without "*good* intelligence," *i.e.*, the best kind of knowledge, neglects to act on what knowledge he has. The worst man has knowledge enough to save him—that is (to expound an averment which is only in one sense true), God's goodness is such that if a man would use the light he had, he would start from that point, and be helped into the kingdom. —*Miller.*

Different senses have been affixed to these words—1. "Good understanding showeth favour to others"—*i.e.*, is mild and conciliatory, while the "way of transgressors is hard, unyielding, stern. 2. "Ingenuous manners procure favour; but rugged is the path of the artful"—*i.e.*, exposing him to incessant difficulties, while open dealing makes a man's way plain before him. 3. More probably the meaning in both parts of the verse terminates on the person's self. Intelligent and sound judgment, by fitting a man to be a wise and useful counsellor, procures him favour. On the contrary, the "way of transgressors," like "By-path Meadow" in the *Pilgrim's Progress*, presents at its entrance all that is tempting to allure into it, but supplies no real enjoyment to the traveller in it at last.—*Wardlaw.*

Wicked men live under a hard taskmaster. "I was held before conversion," said Augustine, "not with an iron chain, but with the obstinacy of my own will." The philosophical infidel bears the same testimony. "I begin to fancy myself in a most deplorable condition, environed with the deepest darkness on every side" (Essays, I. 458). Voltaire, judging of course from his own heart, pronounces, "In man is more wretchedness than in all other animals put together. Man loves life, yet knows he must die." "I wish," continues this wretched witness for his master, "I had never been born." The worldly infidel adds his seal to the record. Colonel Gardiner declared, that in his course of wickedness he had often envied the existence of a dog.—*Bridges.*

The hardness of the transgressor's way. **I. A truth to be confirmed.** It is hard to themselves—to others, to their families, their friends, to society. **II. A dispensation to be approved.** It illustrates the mingled justice and mercy of God, who has made the way to hell difficult. The hardness of the way of sin is often the means of stopping sinners in their course. The sufferings of the wicked operate as a check and preservative to the righteous. **III. A warning to be enforced.** Take care how you take the first step. Be anxious, if you have entered the road, to retrace your step. Remember that the hardness of the way is nothing to the bitterness of the end.—*S. Thodey.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 16.

DEALING WITH KNOWLEDGE.

For a definition of prudence see Homiletics on chap. viii. 12, 13, page 109. Carrying out the thought that prudence is wisdom applied to practice, we remark,

I. That a prudent man deals, or acts with knowledge from a sense of responsibility. 1. *In commercial life.* No prudent man will engage in any business transaction without first making himself thoroughly acquainted with it in all its bearings. He will, if possible, look far into the future and weigh probabilities and calculate results, so as to secure himself from ultimate loss. He will not deal with the matter at all unless he understands it. This we conceive is "dealing with knowledge." And it is the course pursued by every prudent man of business from a sense of responsibility. He feels that he has obligations to fulfil to others and a character to maintain, and therefore he thinks before he acts. A man who values his life at all will not deliberately walk over a precipice, and a prudent man will not go very near the edge, he will know what is the safe distance at which he may walk without even risking the possibility of a false step. 2. *As a teacher or leader of others.* A man who undertakes the guidance of his fellow-creatures in any way, is especially bound to "deal with knowledge." If he is a teacher of youth, and is a prudent man, he will make it his business to know his pupils, to become acquainted with the best methods of imparting instruction and developing their mental and moral powers. He feels that they are in his hands very much as clay in the hands of the potter, and that it depends very much upon him whether they become vessels of honour or of dishonour, and this invests all his dealings with them with a deep sense of responsibility. So with the statesman, the Christian teacher, or any other man who finds himself entrusted with influence over his fellows. Prudence is almost as necessary as goodness and right intentions. A man may have abundance of wealth at his disposal whereby to accomplish some desired end. But if he does not know how to use it, he may as surely miss his aim as if he were poor. So a man may have much spiritual wealth and an earnest desire to use it for the good of others, but if he is not a prudent man—if he neglects to acquire a knowledge of the how, and the when, and the where to do it, he may not only fail to realise his desire, but may cause his good to be evil spoken of. And the principle applies to every good man, however limited his sphere or humble his position. It is the special trade of a *good* man *to do good*, but he may greatly injure his trade by neglecting to "deal with knowledge." "*What king*," says our Lord, "*going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand!*" (Luke xiv. 31). It is implied that this man has a sense of the importance of the undertaking upon which he is about to embark, that he duly estimates the possible loss or gain which may result from it. He may serve as an illustration of what is meant by a prudent man "dealing with knowledge" in any and every step in life, whether it be apparently great or small, weighty or trivial. For there are no *little* things in human life—the greatest issues often hang upon what men ignorantly call trifles.

II. A fool by rash and inconsiderate conduct "layeth open" or "publishes" his folly. It is implied by contrasting him with the prudent man who "deals with knowledge" that he deals without it, that he leaps before he looks and walks in the dark when he might avail himself of a light to guide him. Such conduct arises from a lack of the sense of responsibility. He does not consider what is involved in his failure, how much misery may thus be entailed on himself and others. Every man who does not weigh results proves himself thereby to be a fool.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

He that is wise will not be doing or dealing in anything unless he *know* what it is wherein he dealeth, and unless he deal so as *he knoweth* that he should. He knoweth that a man is known by his dealing. He knoweth that others look on his dealing, and therefore he looketh so to it as that they may know him to be wise by it. But a fool will be dealing, although by dealing he uncover his nakedness. The shame of his folly shall be spread abroad as wide as his dealings are heard of.—*Jermin.*

Observes circumstances, and deports himself with discretion; thrusts not himself into unnecessary dangers; carves not a piece of his heart but to those he is well assured of. See an instance of this prudence in Ezra, chap. viii. 22; in Nehemiah, chap. ii. 5. He calls it not the place of God's worship—such an expression might have disgusted the heathen king—but the place of his father's sepulchres. In Christ, when He was tried for His life; in Paul, who lived two years at Ephesus, and spake not much against the worship of their great goddess Diana (Acts xxiii. 6, and xix. 10).—*Trapp.*

Fools might be esteemed half-wise if they had sense enough to keep their folly to themselves.—*Lawson.*

Wide is the sphere for trading with this responsible talent. *In the family economy* (Judges xiii. 8-12; chap. xiv. 1; xxxi. 27). *In the church;* in a wise accommodation to circumstances (Gal. ii. 2); in the conviction of gainsayers (Tit. i. 9); in forbearing with the prejudices of the weak (Acts xv. 22-29); in the exercise of Christian admonition (Rom. xv. 14). —*Bridges.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 17.

A Social Link.

I. An important link in human society—a messenger. This link may or may not be important *in himself.* He may belong to the highest or to the lowest stratum of human life. He may be a princely ambassador, or he may be a telegraph boy. The link which holds two bodies together may be of great intrinsic value. It may be of wrought gold, and much skill may have been expended on its workmanship; but what it is in itself is not of so much importance as what it is as a link. Its beauty and costliness will not avail much if it gives way when it is subject to strain, and thereby causes loss and vexation to its owner. The link that holds the cable to the anchor is not in itself worth much; but when it holds an ironclad off a rocky coast, there hangs upon it half a million of money, and the sorrow or joy of many human hearts for years to come. Untold loss or gain depend upon whether that ring of iron can bear the strain or not. So it is with a messenger. He may be a person of great intellectual powers, and of great social importance, or he may not have either. But he is always of value in his *relative position.* Like the link in a cable, he always holds in his keeping more than he is. He may be the bearer of the secrets of one who has hanging upon his will an army of many thousands, and a nation of as many millions may be interested in the message which he bears. Whether he be prince or peasant is of no importance in comparison with the fact that he bears a message.

II. The one all-important qualification in a messenger—faithfulness. No greater praise can be given to a man than to say that he is *faithful,* yet nothing less will make him worth anything in human life. All men's hopes for time and eternity rest upon the faithfulness of God. This is the sheet-

anchor of humanity that He is "a faithful Creator" (1 Pet. iv. 19). That He is faithful that promised (Heb. x. 10). It is for *faithfulness*, not for *success*, that He gives the "well done" (Matt. xxv. 21), to His servants. In a messenger it is the one thing needful, and its importance is increased in proportion to what hangs upon his message. Life or death may depend upon it, and often not the fate of an individual merely, but the destiny of a nation. An unfaithful messenger "*falleth into mischief himself.*" He who betrays his trust injures himself. He goes down in the moral scale. He loses his reputation, and is not trusted again. If the link in the cable gives way, it is itself broken. But this is not all, nor the worst. He is the cause of *mischief falling upon others.* How true is this in social life. A message, coloured in its delivery, to gratify some selfish purpose, may divide men who would have been friends, if it had not been for the third person. And its omission, through carelessness, may bring about a like mischief. And it is also true in national relationships. The ambassador, who is entrusted to express a nation's will, may be a fruitful source of mischief if he is negligent or unwary when war and peace hang in the balance. Millions of hearts may be made sad by an under or an over statement of facts. "But a faithful messenger is health," or "healing." He is health in himself. A faithful messenger, apart from his official or representative character, is an embodiment of moral health, and when he is entrusted to make peace where there has been war, he is "healing." He may be only a counsellor of peace between individual men who have been at strife, or he may be the bearer of terms of peace between hostile nations. But, whether in the one case or the other, the faithful discharge of his duties will bring healing: for all real peace must be founded on a truthful statement of facts. This verse is especially true of an ambassador of Christ. He who is truly sent of God will be faithful in the delivery of his message, and will thus bring healing to many. He will "*not walk in craftiness, nor handle the Word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commend himself to every man's conscience in the sight of God.*" And so he will be the means of bringing moral health (2 Cor. iv. 2; 1 Cor. vi. 11).

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Every man is a "messenger," and has an errand, and that is as a witness for God (chap. xiv. 25). The word for "*messenger*" is the word for "angel." How soon did the wicked angel fall, when he became of no use? and men, how long do they tolerate a false messenger? The soul sent out by the Almighty, if wicked, shall fall; but a soul that is "*faithful*" is needed, and will hold its place.—*Miller.*

A wicked messenger hath no sooner a business committed unto him than he falleth into mischief, by betraying the trust reposed in him, and therefore justly doth mischief fall on him. He that is a faithful ambassador is, indeed, the ambassador of truth itself. He, being sent, hath healing under his wings, whereby he giveth soundness and health unto his business, whereby he giveth soundness and health to those that employed him. The proverbial sense is, That the good or bad success of a business proceedeth much from the goodness or badness of him that is employed in it.—*Jermin.*

How much more then, wicked ministers, those "messengers of the churches" (2 Cor. viii. 23) that do the Lord's work negligently (Jer. xlviii. 10), that corrupt His message (2 Cor. ii. 17). Who is blind but my servant, or deaf as my messenger? (Isa. xlii. 19).—*Trapp.*

While the wicked messenger prepares misfortune for himself, as well as for his master, the faithful makes good even his Lord's mistakes.—*Von Gerlach.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 18.

THE WAY TO HONOUR.

I. Man needs instruction because his natural intuitions are not enough to meet the needs of human life. The instinct of the animal is enough to enable it to fulfil its destiny. Its limited powers find sufficient guidance in the use of the faculties which are born with it. But it is not so with man. If, as some philosophers suppose, a man comes into the world without any ideas, if he receives everything from the outside world, instruction is so much the more needed, but even if he does bring with him a small stock of knowledge, experience shows us that the amount is very small, and he needs instruction for body, soul, and spirit from the first day of his dawning intellect to the last of his probationary life.

II. Instruction is to be obtained. Somebody will teach him either directly or indirectly. He will learn much from observation and much from direct teaching. The word here, as in chap. xii. 1, includes the idea of correction. This forms an inevitable part of man's instruction in matters relating both to his bodily and spiritual life. God has provided for man's instruction in relation to his spiritual needs. **It is within the reach of all men in a Christian nation** (See Isa. lv. 1-3).

III. If he refuses what he needs, he will have what he does not desire. He will have *poverty*. This is a calamity when self-inflicted. Whatever is the outcome of sin must be a calamity. If a man refuses to submit to the correction and instruction of others in connection with matters relative to every-day life, he shuts himself up to his own ignorance and shuts out all possibility of advancing in any profession or calling. Therefore he must be poor in worldly wealth. And it is pre-eminently true of him who refuses the disciplinary instruction of God. Such a man must be poor in a spiritual sense throughout eternity. And this will bring shame. Shame is always the result of sin. There is no shame in being poor in material things when poverty is the outcome of righteousness, but there is shame in poverty which is the result of neglected opportunities. What is the root of this rejection of instruction? Is it not pride? (See Homiletics on chap. xi. 2, page 193; also on chap. xii. 1, page 246.)

IV. Reproof is instruction. This is implied here, and in many other passages in this book where the words are used interchangeably. A man who reproves us gives us information about ourselves. He lets us know how we appear in the eyes of others. This ought to be valued by us. We are too partial to see our own defects, therefore we ought to be glad when they are pointed out to us by another.

V. Taking reproof in a spirit of humility is the only road to honour. In the long run, men will give honour where honour is due. They will give their esteem, and respect, and confidence to men who, from moral or intellectual eminence, deserve it. And, as we have seen, this height can be reached only by those who are willing to be taught both by God and by man.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Poverty is in itself a want; but no misery unless shame be joined with it. Shame is in itself a misery; but much greater if joined with poverty, which hath no means to shelter or cover it. Now both are to him that refuseth instruction. For, indeed, instruction is a glorious treasure, offered and opened to him who hath need of it; and, therefore, to refuse it, what can it be but poverty and shame? And, though it be the too common fault of those that are great, either in riches or honour, to despise reproof, yet the

most honour, the truest riches, are to those that embrace it. St. Bernard, therefore, writing unto a great person, but deserving reproof, saith "Charity hath forced me to reproof thee, which grieveth with thee, although thou be not grieved, and which pitieth thee, although thou pitieth not thyself, and therefore it doth lament the more, because thou dost not lament, who art to be lamented; therefore doth it pity thee the more, because thou dost not pity thyself, who art in so pitiful a condition.—*Jermin.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 19.

In common with most commentators we regard the first clause of this verse as embodying the same thought as that expressed in the last clause of verse 12. We will therefore consider the last clause only.

The Abomination of the Fool.

This verse pourtrays a man whose character is most unnatural.

1. He is unnatural because he belies his origin. What should we say if we saw the son of a king taking delight in the society and in the pastimes of the most degraded men? Or if we saw a man finding his enjoyment in herding with the beasts of the field? We should judge that they had lost all sense of their high origin. The sinner who is in love with evil gives the lie to the historic fact that God made man in His own image.

2. He is unnatural, because he burdens himself unnecessarily. In other matters men are not wont to carry heavier burdens than they are obliged. They do not generally desire an increase of their load. They are content with what is allotted to them. The burdens of life that must be borne are numerous and heavy enough for men to bear, yet this moral fool must weigh himself down with the evil that he need not bear—the evil consequences of evil deeds. He prefers to carry about with him the burden of his guilt, and all its accompanying evils. As we saw in verse 15, his way is hard, yet he pursues it. In the face of God's expressed desire (Isa. lv. 7), that he should be rid of his burden, and although it weighs him to the earth "it is an abomination to the fool to depart from evil."

3. He is unnatural, because he is an unnecessary burden on the heart of humanity. He burdens the hearts of God's children. They sigh over him, because he is bad, and refuses to be better. They are weighed down with a sense of his present sad condition, and the retribution that awaits him. He is a burden to those who are less wicked than he, because he prevents their being better, and he adds to the burden of those who are as bad as himself, becauses he increases their guilt by yielding to their temptations.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

The sentence that fulfilled desire does good to the soul appears commonplace; but it is comprehensive enough on the ground of Heb. xi. to cheer even a dying person, and conceals the ethically significant truth that the blessedness of vision is measured by the degree and the longing of faith. But its application in its pairing with the last clause of the verse gives it quite another aspect. On this account, because the desire of the soul is pleasant in its fulfilment, fools abhor the renouncing of evil, for their desire is directed to that which is morally blameworthy, and the endeavour, which they closely and constantly adhere to, is to reach the attainment of this design.—*Delitzsch.*

A canon of interpretation in Proverbs is, *In antithetical clauses an opposite member is often suppressed in one clause and has to be supplied from the opposition of the other member in the corresponding clause (Gataker.)* Thus, here, the desire of the *wise* or *good* being accomplished *by their departing from evil* is sweet to their soul, but as it is an abomination to fools to depart from evil, *their desire being not accomplished is not sweet, nay, "it maketh the heart sick"* (ver. 12). Cf. Psa. cxlv. 19: "The Lord will fulfil the desire of them that fear Him." As the wise desire the possession of the true good, and by departing from evil attain to it, so that it is "sweet to the soul," so fools desire the possession of what is good and "sweet to the soul," but shall have bitter and everlasting grief. Just as if there were two patients, both desiring health; the one avoiding forbidden foods, and using the prescribed drugs, would recover health, to his joy; the other, disliking the remedies, and indulging his appetite, would fail to recover and would die (*Gejer*). The reason why fools abominate to depart from evil is because evil is sweet to them.—*Fausset.*

I give three interpretations of this verse. 1. Solomon has been thought to express the sentiment that the final attainment and enjoyment of a desired good abundantly compensates for all the self-denial and difficulty endured in waiting for it. This is a truth of practical importance, holding out as it does encouragement to perseverance. And it is a truth which holds with unfailing certainty, in regard to spiritual blessings. But the fool cannot be persuaded to deny himself the gratification of the passing moment, even for the sake of the best and highest blessings and hopes. 2. Some render, "It is sweet to the soul to enjoy what we love; therefore it is an abomination" etc. Here the reason or principle is assigned, from which it arises that fools will not depart from evil. Their enjoyment is in it. They feel that there are pleasures in sin. These pleasures they love. And, as these pleasures arise from sin, sin is what they like; sin is sweet, and they will indulge their present propensities, for the sake of the present pleasure they yield. 3. "Desire," subdued, restrained, or overcome "is sweet to the soul; but it is an abomination," etc. According to this translation the former clause expresses the inward satisfaction arising from the successful curbing and subjugation of any sinful desire—any evil propensity. This forms a fine and striking antithesis to the second clause. While the good man can hardly enjoy a greater satisfaction than is imparted by the exercise of self-control, and the overcoming of any powerful and imperative desire that has tempted and endangered his virtue; on the contrary, to the ungodly, the exercise of self-restraint is irksome, the denial of any sinful propensity is misery. They "draw iniquity with cords of vanity, and sin as it were with a cart-rope." The character is portrayed with great spirit in the tenth Psalm.—*Wardlaw.*

A desire that has sprung up is sweet to the Soul. (See rendering in Critical Notes.) A sinner can get on comparatively well when a pious "*desire*" has been once enkindled. What is said of the lips of the strange woman dropping honey (chap. v. 3) is true also in this case. The soul is so near to the sinner that if there is anything sweet to it it is easy to follow it on. The soul once converted and conceiving its first desire will follow it afterward. And, therefore, the Psalmist begs us to "taste and see" (Ps. xxxiv. 8), that we may have this first desire. But the unconverted man finds it loathsome to take the first step. His desires that have "come to be," are of another nature. How can a man will when unwilling? "It is the first step which costs."—*Miller.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 20.

COMPANIONSHIP, CONSTRUCTIVE OR DESTRUCTIVE.

We have here:—

I. Habit, assimilation, and transformation. 1. *Habit.* A habit is formed by the constant repetition of an act. Walking is the constant repetition of an act. The child first gets courage to take a single step, that step leads to another, and by degrees he acquires the habit of walking. To walk with wise men is to have habitual intercourse with them, either through reading their written thoughts or by immediate contact with their living selves. As bodily walking is only acquired by practice, so it is in soul-walking—in mental and spiritual communion. It is at first difficult for the uninitiated to master the arguments of the wise and grasp the truths which they utter. But the power to do so comes by making the effort. If the wise men are morally wise, it may not be easy to apprehend Divine truth as they do with their keener spiritual perceptions. But constant intercourse and communion enables one to do so. The religious faculty—the conscience—is thus developed. 2. *Assimilation.* The law of assimilation is in operation within us and around us in the world of matter. The plant drinks in the moisture and chemical elements of the earth, and they are assimilated to itself and come forth in bud, and flower, and fruit. Man eats vegetable and animal food and it becomes flesh and bone. The man who walks with wiser men than himself imbibes their thonghts, and those thoughts become part of himself. As the health of the body depends upon the kind of food which it assimilates and its power of assimilation, so the health of the mind depends upon the character of the thoughts which it receives and its power of making them its own. 3. *Transformation.* It is implied that those here represented as walking are, when they begin their walk, comparatively ignorant. But a constant reception and assimilation of the wisdom of others, whether it be intellectual or moral wisdom, will in time transform the pupil into a teacher—the student into a master. The ignorant becomes in time a wise man. The strong animal life nourishes the weaker—the new born—life until the weak child becomes as strong as the parent. So in mind and soul life. Hence the constant repetition in this book of exhortations to receive instruction. The assimilating and transforming power of intercourse with the Fountain of all Wisdom by the reception of the Divine thoughts is thus set forth by Paul:—"*But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord*" (2 Cor. iii. 18).

II. That if our companionship is not a constructive influence, it will be destructive. It is implied that human beings will have companionship of some kind—that if a man does not "walk with wise men," he will be "the companion of fools." 1. *Companionship is in early life the outcome of necessity.* A child of foolish parents cannot help being "the companion of fools." This is the sad portion of millions, and it is the destruction of millions in the sense that it is the cause of their missing the great end of life—to glorify and enjoy God. 2. *But there is a companionship of choice.* When a human being comes to years of maturity he chooses his companions. He cannot always choose his *associates*, for then "he must needs go out of the world." And there is no necessity that those with whom duty compels him to associate should exert any evil influence upon his character. But "companion" evidently means him with whom he communes—a man whose society he chooses. And if this society is not morally good, a man begins to deteriorate from the first moment that he enters it. His choice of it is an indication of some moral flaw in his character, and is a strong presumption that he does not intend or desire to resist its destructive

influence. If a sound apple is placed beside one that has begun to decay, nothing is needed to complete the work of destruction in both, but that they should remain in contact. An utter missing of all that makes life worth having —that which our Lord calls the "loss of the soul"—is the portion of every man who does not continually grow in moral wisdom. For there is no standing still. Neglect is ruin in most material things. The house that is not constantly repaired will be ruined by the constant action of the elements. A man is surrounded on all sides by adverse moral influences, and if he only neglects to *grow* he will *die*. And to grow he must "walk with the wise."

ILLUSTRATION.

The following statement was made to a Wesleyan minister by a young man under sentence of death: "I am the child of pious parents, who were connected with the Wesleyan body. At the age of 16, through their instrumentality, and under the preaching of the Gospel, I became the subject of religious impressions. These, in the course of time, were effaced; but I still continued to read the Bible and respect the Sabbath. One Lord's Day I went to hear a celebrated minister deliver a discourse on 'Prophecy.' As I was returning I expressed to an acquaintance whom I met my admiration of the sermon. He replied that no doubt Mr. —— was a superior orator, and it would afford him great pleasure to hear him discuss on any subject having a true claim upon the attention of a rational being; but that such was not the case with religion. A conversation followed, which led him to invite me to his house, to hear his reasons for disbelieving the Bible. There I met others, of a kindred spirit, and from that moment they were my principal, because my favourite, associates. I soon adopted all their opinions as my own, and used every effort in my power to diffuse our common views. I could at this moment almost say the bitterness of death is passed, if I were sure that no one had become an infidel through me. But I have too much reason to fear that many have. Before this time I had married a very respectable young woman, and had entered into business. I was, however, brought to ruin by my own folly and extravagance, and went to America. There, my principles not fully satisfying me, I read *Watson's Apology for the Bible*, and similar works, and again avowed myself a believer in the Word of God. It was my bitter lot, however, soon to see that it is much more easy to renounce the principles of error than to cease from those evil practices of which they are the productive sources. It will not be wondered that, even after I had disavowed the creed of an infidel, I was confirmed in the habits of infidelity, and was *still*, on returning to my native land, ready to perpetrate any deed of darkness which the fury of passion might prompt, or the straits of poverty suggest. The act for which I may soon be suspended on the gallows is the final consummation of a wilful disbelief in the inspired record." The minister continues, "I was often with him, and found him to possess an extensive acquaintance with the Scriptures, and a considerable knowledge of our religious poets. As the person at whom he fired, though severely wounded, was not killed, he seemed to the last to expect a reprieve. The governor of the gaol entered his cell half-an-hour before the time which had been fixed for his execution, saying, 'I have a communication from the Secretary of State.' A smile of hope played for a moment round his pallid face, but it seemed only as if to give the gloom of despair the opportunity of coming in deeper and more terrific shadows over his features, for the governor instantly added, 'but there is nothing said respecting you—*you must therefore die.*' We were again alone, and pacing his cell he said, with deep emotion, 'It is then a fact that I must suffer the extreme penalty of the law. In a few minutes I shall be in eternity, my wife will be a widow, and my children will be fatherless, bearing part of my reproach, notwithstanding they had no part in my guilt.' On his way to the place of execution we passed through the turnkey's room. Seeing a lad seated in a distant corner, he went to him, and said, 'Look at me, and learn never to stand in the way of the ungodly, nor to sit in the seat of the scorner of truth.'" —*Evangelist.*

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

The influence of society upon man is great, and was intended to be great. As the natural world is held together by the influence of matter upon matter by the law of gravitation, so the moral world is held together by the influence of mind upon mind. We are made to attract and to be attracted, to influence and to be influenced, to instruct and to be instructed. But this power of mind over mind is not a neutral power, it is necessarily great for evil or for good. Paul says that "Evil communications corrupt good manners." There is nothing to be expected from evil companions but an increase of sin, and

an increase of punishment. The best is a briar, the most upright is sharper than a thorn-hedge, which will rob us of our fleece, if they do not pierce our skin. Most likely they will do both.—*S. Thodey.*

The literal meaning of the word *rahah,* from which "companion" comes, is to feed; boon-companions, who *feed* together (chap. xxix. 3). There is a play upon like Hebrew sounds, in "companion," and "destroyed," *roheh* and *roang.* The Greek *Theognis* says, "Thou shalt learn good from the good; but if thou wilt associate with the bad, thou shalt lose even the mind thou hast." *Seneca* says, "The road is long by precept; it is short and effectual by example." What one sees makes more impression than what one hears. As bad air injures the strongest health, so association with the bad injures the strongest mind.—*Fausset.*

What you learn from bad habits and from bad society you will never forget, and it will be a lasting pang to you. I tell you in all sincerity, not as in the excitement of speech, but as I would confess and have confessed before God, that I would give my right hand to-night if I *could forget* that which I have learned in evil society; if I could tear from my remembrance the scenes which I have witnessed, the transactions which have taken place before me.—*J. B. Gough.*

In the neighbourhood of Swansea, for miles round, no vegetation exists, owing to the smoke from the large copper-works there: even so, exposure to the influence of bad companions prevents man growing and flourishing in the divine life.—*T. Jones.*

It is not left to us to determine whether there shall be any influence; only, what that influence shall be. Joash, while he *walked with his wise* guardian, was *wise.* But when, after his guardian's death, he became "*a companion of fools,*" he was "*destroyed*" (2 Chron. xxiv.) . . . The first warning to sinners just plucked out of the fire, was—"Save yourself from this untoward generation" (Acts ii. 40).—*Bridges.*

We shall never get the good "desire" (ver. 19) if we keep out among the wicked. In heathen lands all are "*fools,*" and therefore all do badly. In Christian lands piety is in circles and in families, and moves in lines. The mutual influences are immense. A noble way to be "*wise*" is to go boldly among the good, confess Christ, and ask their prayers and influence.—*Miller.*

It is better—safer, I am sure it is—to ride alone than to have a thief's company; and such is a wicked man, who will rob thee of precious time, if he do thee no more mischief. The Nazarites, who might drink no wine, were also forbidden to eat grapes, of which wine is made. So we must not only avoid sin itself, but also the causes and occasions thereof, amongst which bad company (the lime-twigs of the devil) is the chiefest, especially to catch those natures which are most swayed by others.—*Fuller.*

Many scriptural illustrations press for notice. *The family of Lot,* suffering from the fearful contamination of Sodom; *Rehoboam,* following the counsel of his young companions in preference to that of the experienced counsellors of his father, and losing thereby five-sixths of his kingdom, *Jehosaphat,* associating with Ahab "helping the ungodly, and loving them that hated the Lord" (2 Chron. xviii., xix. 1, 2), "wrath, therefore, coming upon him from Jehovah.—*Wardlaw.*

It is not talking with the wise, but walking with the wise that will make you wise. It is not your commending and praising of the wise, but your walking with the wise that will make you wise. It is not your taking a few turns with the wise that will make you wise, but your walking with the wise that will make you wise. There is no getting much good by them that are good but by making them your ordinary and constant companions. Ah, friends! you should do as Joseph in Egypt, of whom the Scripture saith —Psa. cv. 22—(according to the Hebrew phrase) that he tied the princes of Pharaoh's court about his

heart. If ever you would gain by the saints, you must bind them upon your souls. The Jews have a proverb that two dry sticks put to a green one will kindle it. The best way to be in a flame Godward, Christward, heavenward, and holinessward, is to be among the dry sticks, the kindle-coals, the saints; for as live coals kindle those that are dead, so lively Christians will heat and enliven those that are dead. —*Brooks.*

Character affected by intercourse. He that walks with religious men will become religious. Walking signifies a continued course of conduct. To walk with religious men is not to mingle with them occasionally, or to unite with them in performing some of the more public duties of religion. Ahithophel, who died as a fool dieth, walked with David to the house of God in company. It is not to live in a pious family, for a person may do this without making its members his associates. Nor does uniting with religious men in promoting some of the great objects which the Christian world is now pursuing, necessarily prove that we walk with them, for this may be done from a wrong motive. To walk with them is to choose them for our associates, our fellow travellers in the journey of life; and this implies an agreement with them in our views and objects of pursuit. Can two walk together, says the prophet, except they be agreed? In order that two persons may walk together they must be agreed, first, as to the place to which they will go, and secondly, they must agree in opinion as to the way that leads to that place. If they disagree on either point they will soon separate. Every religious man is travelling towards heaven, and all who would walk with them must make heaven the object of their pursuit. The only way to heaven is Jesus Christ, and all who walk with religious persons must at least assent to this truth although they may not immediately and cordially embrace it. He who perseveres in this course will become religious. **1. The simple fact that he chooses** such associates proves that he is already the subject of religious impressions—that the Spirit of God is striving with him. 2. He will see and hear many things which powerfully tend to increase and perpetuate his serious impressions. He moves in a circle where God, the soul, and salvation are regarded as of supreme importance—where religion is presented to him—not as a cold abstraction, but living in the persons of its disciples. 3. No one will continue to walk with religious persons after his serious impressions are effaced, and it is presumed that no one who continued to be the subject of religious impressions for any length of time ever failed to become religious. It is true persons may be seriously affected, occasionally, and perhaps for years together, and at different seasons may associate much with religious characters without becoming religious; but such persons cannot be said to walk with good men in the sense of the text; for their religious impressions are often effaced for a considerable time, and long intervals of carelessness succeed, during which they, in a measure, forsake religious society.—*Payson.*

It is not for us to let our hearts have their own way in the selection of companions. On that choice depend interests too great to be safely left to chance. The issue to be decided is not what herd you shall graze with a few years before your spirit returns to the dust; but what moral element you shall move in during the few and evil days of your life, till your spirit returns to God who gave it. I like this companion; he fascinates me; I cannot want him; an enforced separation would be like tearing myself asunder. Well, if that companion's heart be godless, and his steps already slipping backward and downward, why not tear yourself asunder? The act will be painful, no doubt, but "skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life."—*Arnot.*

He that comes where sweet spices and ointments are stirring, doth carry away some of the sweet savour, though

he think not of it; so holiness is such an elixir as by contraction (if there be any disposition of goodness in the same metal), it will render it of the property. *Trapp.*

All sorts of companions are market men, and they usually traffic together, when they meet together, whether they be good or bad, the wares being commonly precious or vile, according to the dispositions of the persons who utter them.—*Dod.*

It is not said, he that sitteth still with the wise, for both sitting still, neither doth the one teach nor the other learn. But he that when a wise man walketh in the ways of wisdom, walketh also with him by following his example and steps, he it is that shall be wise. To be with the wise, and not in their ways of wisdom, is to be out of the way for getting any good by them. Be therefore with them so as that their wisdom may be with thee.—*Jermin.*

No person that is an enemy to God can be a friend to man. He that has already proved himself ungrateful to the Author of every blessing will not scruple, when it will serve his turn, to shake off a fellow-worm like himself. He may render you instrumental to his own purposes, but he will never benefit you.—*Bishop Coleridge.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 21.

PURSUIT AND REPAYMENT.

I. Evil pursues sinners because sinners pursue evil. The huntsman who pursues the hare in the direction of a precipice is pursuing a course which, if continued, must be followed by evil. It is an evil thing for him to follow such a trifle at such a risk. There is evil before him in the form of the precipice, and evil will follow if he continues to pursue his present course. Should he try his strength against the law of gravitation by leaping over the precipice, he will find that that law will exact its penalty. There are but two things that will prevent evil from pursuing him, either he must desist from his present course or a great law of nature must be suspended. The first alternative rests with himself, the second does not. He will find that this "battle is to the strong," and that "this race is to the swift," even to the mighty law which holds together the material universe. So with sinners against the moral law. "Evil be to him who evil thinks" is a wish that is always fulfilled. It is a law in constant operation. The consequence of pursuing evil in the form of evil thinking *is* evil thinking, the consequence of evil feeling *is* evil feeling, the consequence of evil doing *is* evil doing, for it is the tendency of evil to repeat itself, and this in itself is a punishment. Peter speaks of sinners who "cannot cease from sin" (2 Pet. ii. 14). They have sinned until they have bound themselves in fetters of sinful habit. Evil, in this sense, pursues them, and will pursue them so long as they pursue it. Then there is, of course, the positive retribution, which both in time and beyond time visits pursuers of evil. Of this we have several times treated.

II. Good men are repaid with good because their characters are righteous. The law of repayment runs through nature. He who sows seed is repaid by a harvest. All her forces—rain, sunlight, heat and cold—combine to give back to the husbandman that which he has entrusted to her care. And she repays of the same kind, wheat for the sowing of wheat, thistles for the planting of thistles. She also repays with liberal interest. One head of thistledown scattered over a field will reproduce a hundred heads in a few months. One grain of corn will produce an ear of thirty or forty grains. The law in the kingdom of nature is also the law of the kingdom of grace. Evil sown, as we have just seen under another metaphor, necessitates a reaping of evil. Good sown ensures a reaping of good. And grace is not behind nature in liberal repayment. He who sows

handfuls shall reap armfuls. He that goes forth with the *seed basket* returns with *sheaves* (Ps. cxxvi. 6). The one "corn of wheat bears much fruit" (John xii. 24). This repayment begins in time, and extends beyond it. Righteousness as well as sin is its own present reward, and is the present first fruits. But the righteous man must wait for the "resurrection of the just" for the abundant harvest.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

"*Evil*" is rapacious in its gains. Each inch "*evil*" holds. It never lets back any advance. It is versatile to tempt, and ruins with many instruments, while the good, however, have just the opposite lot. They gain by every advance. Each act that is holy in their lives is rewarded by better acts and higher holiness on through their whole probation,—nay, eternally! The pit is bottomless. But evil never ceases to hound sinners and make them worse. —*Miller.*

The representation here is very striking. "Evil *pursueth* sinners." It follows them every step. It keeps pace with the progress of time. Each moment it comes nearer. Silent and unperceived it tracks them through their whole course. Insensibly it gains upon them; and at last—it may be suddenly and when least expected—it seizes and destroys them.—*Wardlaw.*

Not the smallest good, even "a cup of cold water to a disciple" (Matt. x. 42), or honour shown to his servants (Matt. x. 41; 1 Kings xvii. 16-23) shall "lose its reward" (Heb. vi. 10). And if a single act is thus remembered much more "a course, a fight held out to the end" (2 Tim. iv. 7, 8). How manifestly is this the constitution of grace; that when perfect obedience can claim no recompense (Luke xvii. 10), such unworthy, such defiled work should be so honoured with an infinite overwhelming acceptance.—*Bridges.*

To be out of the hands of evil is not to be free from it; for it still pursueth sinners, and it ceaseth not until it be gotten to the place where they are. . . . For, as St. Augustine saith, that God doth not forthwith avenge sinners is His patience, not His negligence. Wherefore it is to be feared lest by how much He stays the longer that we may repent, by so much He will punish us the more, if that we will not amend. —*Jermin.*

Caius—Agrippa having suffered imprisonment for wishing him emperor—when he came afterwards to the empire, the first thing he did was to prefer Agrippa, and give him a chain of gold as heavy as the chain of iron that was on him in prison. Those that lose anything for God He seals them a bill of exchange of a double return.—*Trapp.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 22.

AN INHERITANCE INCORRUPTIBLE.

I. A good man has always spiritual inheritance to leave his children. He has always his own holy character and example. And this is often of great service to them in a material point of view. Men who have obtained fame in the world leave their children the inheritance of a famous name, which is often a fortune in itself. The son or daughter of a famous man can command positions of worldly advantage which are closed against the children of obscure parents. But while a famous father can leave his fame as an inheritance to his children he cannot ensure to them the possession of the genius by which he gained it. Talent is not hereditary, and it often happens that a very gifted father has very common-place children. But moral worth—a godly character—is an inheritance that not only makes a son respected in the world for his father's

sake, but is very likely to make him also a partaker of the same godliness. A good man's character is not hereditary, but it is very apt to propagate other characters of the same kind. This inheritance of a good man is an incorruptible inheritance. No inheritance of lands or money are entirely out of reach of the changes and chances of human life, but the example, and the memory, and the blessings which have come from a godly parentage, make an inheritance which, like the heavenly one, "fadeth not away." It is the best possible safeguard that a father can leave his children against the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil The remembrance of what belief in the Gospel did for a holy father has saved many a son from drifting on the quicksands of infidelity. There have been times in the history of many a child of godly parents, when such an anchor has been the only one which has held them from "making shipwreck of faith" (1 Tim. i. 19). The character of a good man is such an indisputable fact, and is so entirely unexplainable on any other ground than that of the existence of a supernatural and Divine power, that it constitutes an unanswerable argument for the truth of revelation. And so with every other form of evil that assails men. The inheritance which Christ has left to his disciples—to His spiritual children—is His *character*. This has produced and reproduced its own kind through all the ages since His sojourn upon earth. This has held them to the faith in the dark days of persecution. And when the infidel himself has come face to face with it, even he has been compelled to acknowledge the intrinsic worth of the children's portion. This holy life, lived among sinful men, has been the "unsearchable riches" (Ephes. iii. 8) of one Christian generation after another, for more than eighteen centuries, and it is by virtue of this inheritance that good men have been enabled to transmit to their posterity their own godly lives and examples.

II. A good man may have a material as well as a moral inheritance to bequeath. He may possess both character and substance. But the fact that a man is good is no guarantee that he will have any worldly wealth to leave behind him. If Lord Bacon's assertion be correct, that "Prosperity is the blessing of the Old Testament, and adversity the blessing of the New," he is quite as likely to die poor as rich. Still there is often a blessing of some amount of material riches given to honest labour, and probably there are far more godly men in proportion to their number, who acquire *some* inheritance to leave behind them, than there are godless men (See on verse 11, etc.)

III. Good men sometimes inherit wealth which has been gathered by bad men. It is not a universal rule, but it may be oftener fulfilled than we are aware of. It may be inherited by generations of wicked men and at last come into the hands of a just one. That it should be so is seen to be a wise and good law of providence. 1. *Because a good man will make a far better use of "the mammon of unrighteousness."* He will use it to minister to both the bodily and spiritual needs of his fellow-creatures as well as his own. 2. *Because the laid-up wealth of the wicked has often been obtained by defrauding the good.* God does not always cause it to be repaid to the identical *persons* who were thus defrauded, but He may often cause it to be restored to identical *characters*. This proverb must be taken to assert the straightforward motion of the wheels of providence, although by reason of their "great height" (Ezek. i. 18),—their vast circumference—they take a long time to go round.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

The usurer lightly begets blind children that cannot see to keep what their father left them. But when the father is gone to hell for gathering, the son often follows for scattering. But God is just.—*T. Adams.*

That the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just appears to have been a

prominent feature of the Old Dispensation (chap. xxviii. 8; Job xxvii. 16, 17), and it will be openly renewed in the latter-day glory of the Church (Isa. lxi. 6).—*Bridges.*

This is the direct promise of heaven (Psa ciii. 17; Prov. xxii. 6). That it ever fails, must be by palpable neglect. A man may be saved himself, and lose his children; but the Bible speaks of this as the parent's fault (1 Sam. iii. 13; Prov. xiii. 24), and brands it as the great curse upon the earth (Mal. iv. 6). While the sinner not only cannot send down his wealth, but cannot himself possess it. It is a curse to him. It will be used for the saints (Matt. xxv. 28).—*Miller.*

It is quite clear that in this and other passages an inheritance is regarded *as a good*, and that no blame is attached to "the good man" who leaves it to his children. The principle expressed in the latter clause is the same as that laid down by the apostle, "*All things are yours*," and, among other things, "the world." That may most truly be called mine, from which I derive the greatest possible benefit it can be made to yield. It would be strange, indeed, were I to wish anything else, or anything more. . . . . The wicked man calls his wealth *his own*. But it is *God's*. God is the friend of His children, and holds that property, like everything else, for their good; so that it is *theirs* by being *His*.—*Wardlaw.*

Personal goodness profiteth for posterity. God gives not to His servants some small annuity for life only, as great men used to do, but "keepeth mercy for thousands" of generations "of them that fear Him." The opposite is not perpetually and universally true of every wicked person, ... but, together with their lands, they bequeath their children their sins and punishments, which is far worse than that legacy of leprosy that Joab left his issue (2 Sam. iii. 29).—*Trapp.*

An expression of trust like that in Eccles. ii. 26, that in the long run the anomalies of the world are rendered even.—*Plumptre.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 23.

Land and its Tillers.

I. That untilled land (see Critical Notes) **possesses a latent power to produce food.** There are many things in nature in which there exists a latent power to minister to man's needs; but his hand must be put forth to arouse the sleeping power. There is heat in coal to warm him, but he must kindle the coal before it will put it forth. So in the earth, there are stores of life-giving power wrapped up in its bosom, but the hand of man must till it before it will yield him food. And it will yield food to the poor man as well as to the rich; his hard toil will be rewarded by receiving bread for his labour.

II. That though much food is to be got out of the land by the poor man, yet more is to be got out of it by the rich. This is implied in the contrast, though it is not directly expressed.—(See Fausset's Note in the Comments.) The poor man cannot spend so much upon his land as the rich man can. He can give little beside hard labour, while the man who possesses wealth can call in every appliance to increase the fruitfulness of the land. It is well known that the more liberally a land is farmed the more abundant will be the crop.

III. Yet want of judgment—*i.e.*, **a sense of justice, often leads a rich man to neglect to cultivate his land so as to increase its power of yielding food.** All landowners are responsible to God for a right use of His earth. Holding in their hands, as they do, the power of making food abundant or scarce, they have much for which to give an account to Him whose stewards they are. When they turn into hunting-grounds and parks for their own exclusive use acres of land which, if cultivated, would yield much food, and thus lighten the burdens of their poorer fellow-creatures, they "destroy it for want of judgment," or "justice."

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

By the rule of interpretation by the contrast of opposites, and by supplying the wanting member in one clause from its opposite expressed in the other clause, the sense is, "But there is food (wealth) possessed by rich men that is destroyed for want of honesty in its acquisition and its employment." The poor man's (honest) labour forms the contrast to the rich man's "want of justice" in his acquisitions. The *newly* tilled land of the poor forms the contrast to the rich man's possessions held for some time.—*Fausset.*

What is the practical or extended application? If talents lie inactive, or if their activity is not wisely directed, a rich harvest is *destroyed for want of judgment.* The same ruin flows from a neglect of religious advantages. The harvest of grace withers into a famine. Slothful professor! rouse thyself to *till* the ground; else thou wilt starve for want of *food.* Then let thy roused energy be directed by a *sound judgment;* for want of which, the fruits of industry, temporal, intellectual, and spiritual, will run to waste.—*Bridges.*

There seems an interesting connection between the former verse and this. Talk of *inheritances!* says the poor man, with his scanty means and daily hard toil; *we* have no inheritance, either *from* our fathers, or *for* our children: all is homely with us, and likely to remain so. Well, says Solomon, the poor man is not without his consolations, even of a temporal nature, "*much food is in the tillage of the poor.*" The maxim is not to be confined to the one kind of labour specified, but extends equally to all the different modes in which the poor make their daily bread. The poor peasant, who cultivates his plot industriously and by "the sweat of his brow," will, through the Divine blessing, procure thereby an ample supply of *food* for himself and his family, and industry and tidy economy will make the cottage fireside and table snug and comfortable, and its lowly tenants will enjoy plenty, though in a plain and homely form. On the other hand, how often in the case of those who obtain *inheritances* may the poor see the saying verified, "There is that is destroyed for want of *judgment.*" By prodigality, by bad management, they waste their fortunes. Their lands are extensive, but unproductive; or if productive, the product is mis-spent and squandered; it goes, no one can tell how. To such persons the homely comfort of the poor is a just object of envy; far more, in many cases, than the wealth of the rich is to the poor.—*Wardlaw.*

The proverbial sense is, that a little is made much by God's blessing and pains, and that much is made little by wickedness and carelessness.—*Jermin.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 24.

THE CHILD AND THE ROD.

I. Pain is a necessary instrument in human training. The rod is to be included in the means of education. Some natures need an experience of pain to quicken their *mental* capabilities. Sometimes children are like untilled land (see ver. 23), they have large capabilities lying dormant, which will not awaken unless they are subjected to severe discipline and punished for their shortcomings. And what is necessary in intellectual training is also necessary in moral training. Children must be made to feel that pain is the outcome of transgression, and evil habits must if possible be crushed while in the bud. They can be overcome then at the expense of far less suffering than when they have taken firmer hold, and the pain is as nothing compared with that which the habits themselves will inflict if they are allowed to go on through life and

enthrall the soul entirely. A thorn which has but just entered the skin can be extracted with a very small amount of suffering, even by an unskilful hand; if left for a few days it may produce a festering wound; if not extracted at all, it may end in mortification. The fear of suffering is also a great *preventive* of sin. The Great Father of men uses it as an instrument to dissuade men from breaking His laws. He warns them, over and over again, of the suffering which they will bring upon themselves if they disobey His commands, and their experience of the suffering that has followed sin in the past often leads them to avoid it in the future. And what is effectual in the training of men is effectual also with children. They will often avoid the repetition of an act which they know has brought them punishment before and will do so again. This fear of pain is not the highest motive for abstinence from wrong-doing, but in both the child and the man it may be the foundation of an upbuilding of character which shall by-and-by go on growing in goodness without this instrumentality.

II. That infliction of pain is compatible with the highest love, and is often a token of it. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews tells us that God scourges His children whenever He sees that they need it. And yet they have become His children only by the exercise of His own Infinite love. But we know that He chastens not for His pleasure, but for our profit (Heb. xii. 10); that He has love and wisdom enough to see the "far-off interest of tears." So it is the father or mother, who truly loves his or her child, who is willing to undergo the present suffering of inflicting pain in order to ensure a future blessing to their children. "You only have I known of all the families of the earth; *therefore* I will punish you for your iniquities" (Amos iii. 2). What is true of the Divine parent is true also of the human. It follows—

III. That the neglect of chastisement is a proof of the want of real love. "He that spareth his rod *hateth* his son." What should we think of a father who would see his child bleed to death rather than bind up the wound, because in so doing he would inflict some present bodily pain upon the child, and some mental suffering upon himself? Or of the physician who would not use the knife to stop the progress of mortal disease because the patient shrinks from the incision, and he himself is averse to the sight of blood? We should say they were destroyers of life which had been entrusted to them to preserve. But what shall we say of a parent who is so fond of his child that he cannot inflict pain upon him now for deeds that, if repeated until they become habits, will ruin him for time and for eternity? Such sickly sentimentalism in a parent makes him unworthy of his name, and turns him who should have been his child's highest earthly blessing into his direst curse. Many inmates of our gaols are there because they have been the victims of this so-called love; and when God sums up their misdeeds a large portion of the guilt will fall elsewhere than on the child cursed by such a parent.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Fond parents think it love (that spares the rod), but Divine wisdom calls it hatred.—*John Howe.*

The discipline of our children must commence with self-discipline. Nature teaches us to love them much. But we want a controlling principle to teach us to love them wisely. The indulgence of our children has its root in self-indulgence.—*Bridges.*

This phrase "betimes," or "early in the morning," admonisheth parents to procure the means of their children's welfare before all other matters; and, as it were, as soon as they rise out of their beds. The Lord be merciful to us for the neglect of this duty; for if we have any worldly business to do we go first about that, and then teach and instruct our children at our lei-

sure. O reckless carelessness about the chiefest matters! Oh that as we use to feed our children in the morning so we could once be brought to instruct them also betimes.—*Muffet.*

Justice must be observed in the correction of children. 1. That there is a fault committed. 2. That the fault so committed deserveth punishment. 3. That the punishment do not exceed the quality of the fault, which will otherwise seem to rage and revenge rather than to chastise for amendment. —*Spencer.*

To spare the rod in the first clause being opposed to *chastening* in the second, by the rod must be meant not only that particular instrument of punishment, but everything besides that may prove the means of our correction and amendment. And by chastisement is here intended every instrument of correction, every means of effecting what we intend by chastising, whether it be reproof, restraint of liberty, disappointment of our children's wills, or corporal punishment. By *loving* and *hating* is not here meant the exerting actually those passions in the heart, for then the text would be untrue, but the acting agreeably to the *reason*, and not the *blindness* of those passions; the producing such effects as are in God's account, and in wise men's too, and in our own when freed from partial prejudices; the consequences and fruits of love and hatred acting regularly, such as are commonly esteemed the effects of those two causes, whether they indeed proceed from them or no. For if we are to reckon of love or hatred by the effects, then it is easy to discern when parents hate their children, namely, when, through neglect or fondness, they permit them to enter on a course of ruin, and so let them fall into such miseries as the utmost hatred of their inveterate enemies could neither wish nor make them greater, whatever love there may be at the bottom. A mother is as much a murderess who stifles her child in a bed of roses as she that does it with a pillow-bear (*pillow-case*). The end and mischief is as great, though the means and instrument be not the same.—*Bishop Fleetwood.*

He that spareth the rod from his son maketh him to be *his rod*, wherewith he whips himself, and wherewith God whips both of them. It is better thy son should feel thy rod than thou feel the sorrow of his wicked life. And do not *hate* him in not correcting of him, lest he *hate thee* by thy not correcting of him, and God shew His hatred against both by His wrath upon you.—*Jermin.*

The Koh-i-noor diamond, when it came into the Queen's possession, was a mis-shapen lump. It was very desirable to get its corners cut off and all its sides reduced to symmetry; but no unskilful hand was permitted to touch it. Men of science were summoned to consider its nature and capabilities. They examined the form of its crystals and the consistency of its parts. They considered the direction of the grain, and the side on which it would bear a pressure. With their instructions, the jewel was placed in the hands of an experienced lapidary, and by long, patient, careful labour, its sides were ground down to the desired proportions. The gem was hard, and needed a heavy pressure; the gem was precious, and every precaution was taken which science and skill could suggest to get it polished into shape without cracking it in the process. The effort was successful. The hard diamond was rubbed down into forms of beauty, and yet sustained no damage by the greatness of the pressure to which it was subjected. "Jewels, bright jewels," in the form of little children, are the heritage which God gives to every parent. They are unshapely and need to be polished; they are brittle, and so liable to be permanently injured by the pressure; but they are stones of peculiar preciousness, and if they were successfully polished they would shine as stars for ever and ever, giving off, from their undimming edge, more brilliantly than other creatures can, the glory which they get from the Sun of Righteousness. Those who possess these diamonds in the rough should

neither stike them unskilfully nor let them be uncut . . . Prayer and pains must go together in this difficult work. Lay the whole case before our Father in heaven; this will take the hardness out of the correction, without diminishing its strength.—*Arnot.*

Correction is a kind of cure, saith the philosopher (Arist. *Ethic.* lib. ii.), the likeliest way to save the child's soul; where, yet, saith Bernard, it is the care of the child that is charged upon the parent, not the cure, that is God's work alone.—*Trapp.*

In order to form the minds of children, the first thing to be done is *to conquer the will.* To inform the understanding is a work of time, and must, with children, proceed by slow degrees, as they are able to bear it; but the subjecting of the will must be done at once, *and the sooner the better;* for, by neglecting timely correction, they will contract a stubbornness and obstinacy which are hardly ever conquered, and not without using such severity as would be as painful to me as to the child. I insist upon the conquering of the will betimes, because this is the only strong and rational foundation of a religious education, without which both precept and example will be ineffectual. But when this is thoroughly done, a child is capable of being governed by the wisdom and piety of its parents till its own understanding comes to maturity, and the principles of religion have taken root in the mind.—*Mrs. S. Wesley.*

It is *his* rod that must be used, the rod of a parent, not the rod of a servant.—*Henry.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 25.

WANT AND SATISFACTION.

I. The limited truth of the assertion in relation both to the righteous and the wicked. Read in the light of personal experience, and in the light of history, it is found *true*, and is found *not true* in the case of the righteous. Elijah *ate to satisfaction* beside the brook Cherith, while many of his idolatrous countrymen suffered *want.* But Paul was often in hunger (2 Cor. xi. 27), while Nero lived in luxury. Christians have died from hunger, and others have had all their bodily wants supplied all their lives, and sometimes by most remarkable providential interpositions. Godliness is often profitable in this sense for the "life that now is" (1 Tim. iv. 8), but not always, and wickedness often brings a man literally to the condition of the prodigal when he would "fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat;" but many a wicked man, like him of the parable (Luke xvi. 19), have "fared sumptuously every day" from their cradle to their grave. To take our text as absolutely true of material food would be to contradict the testimony of Scripture itself.

II. Its absolute truth in relation to both characters. 1. *That wickedness gives a man no real satisfaction is a fact of experience.* Men have testified over and over again that while they lived in sin they knew nothing of real heart-satisfaction and rest, and have borne witness to the words of St. Augustine, who spoke from experience when he said, "Thou hast made us for thyself, and the heart is restless till it finds rest in Thee." A man who feeds upon unwholesome food is always in want, because that upon which he feeds is not suited to meet the demands of his physical frame, so is it with the soul of a godless man. 2. *The history of the world testifies that it is so.* The unrest of the ungodly is the explanation of much of the ambition, of many of the selfish schemes of some men, as well as of the voluntary asceticism, the self-imposed sufferings of others. The key to both is that they have spent "*money for that which is not bread, and their labour for that which satisfieth not*" (Isa. lv. 2). The teaching of Christ confirms it. Want was the condition of the prodigal; he wanted the bread which his

father's home and table alone could supply. "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, ye have no life in you" (John vi. 53). On this subject see Dr. Arnot's remarks on verse 12 in the comments on that verse. 3. *That there is satisfaction in sainthood is declared by Christ, and testified to be true by all His followers.* The bread upon which a renewed man feeds is the Divine word—the thoughts of God in the abstract, and the personal thought or word *Jesus Christ.* "As the living Father hath sent Me and I live by the Father, so he that eateth Me shall live by Me" (John vi. 57). And life is but another word for satisfaction. "He that believeth on Me, as the Scripture hath said, out of His heart shall flow rivers of living water" (John vii. 38). Millions of men and women in all circumstances, both poor and rich in worldly wealth, have set to their "seal that God is true" (John iii. 33) when He invites men to "hearken diligently unto Him, and eat that which is good, and let their souls delight themselves in fatness" (Isa. lv. 2).

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

One of the confidences of the wicked is that he, at least, has his pleasure in this world. The inspired Solomon denies it. He himself has left us an experience (Eccles. i). The righteous man seeks righteousness and peace, and these things do satisfy him. He seeks them, not as the world does, under a mistake, but for what they really are. He seeks them more and more as he knows them better, and shall be seeking them and enjoying them through eternal ages. "*But the wicked,*" even in his "*belly,*" wants. His delights, even of the more carnal sort, are not to be directly gazed at. If they are, they vanish. He cannot trust himself to theorise over any solid pleasures. So hollow are they that he would not live over again the history of the past, and so poor that he grows tired of enjoying them.—*Miller.*

Have he more or less, he hath that which satisfies him. Nature is content with little, grace with less. If Jacob may have but "bread to eat and raiment to put on" it sufficeth him; and this he dare be bold to promise himself. Beg his bread he hopes he shall not, but if he should, he can say with Luther (who made many a meal of a broiled herring), "Let us be content to fare hard here: have we not the bread that came down from heaven?" —*Trapp.*

To have to eat is the common mercy of God, who openeth His hand and feedeth all things living. To have enough to eat is a great mercy in itself, and greater than man's nature, which hath never enough of sinning anyway deserveth; but to be *satisfied* with that which is enough is a peculiar property bestowed on the righteous. The belly of the wicked wanting enough to eat in some degree is punished for feeding too greedily on the husks of sin. Wanting all food is more hardly punished, and it may be for the hardness of their hearts in resisting all instruction; but that it shall *want* though it have enough, this is a severe punishment of wickedness, though thought to be the least. The wise man doth not speak of the want of the *mouth* of the wicked as showing that the mouth should have sufficient, and yet the belly be punished with want in not being satisfied.—*Jermin.*

HOMILETIC TREATMENT OF THE CHAPTER AS A WHOLE.

"The true Christian education of children." (1) Its basis: God's Word (vers. 1, 13, 14); (2) Its means: Love and strictness in inculcating God's Word (vers. 1, 18, 24); (3) Its aim: Guidance of the youth to the promotion of his temporal and eternal welfare (vers. 2 sq. 16 sq.)—*Lange's Commentary.*

CHAPTER XIV.

CRITICAL NOTES.—**1. Wise woman,** or "woman's wisdom." **2. He that walketh, etc., or,** "He walketh in his uprightness who feareth Jehovah, and perverse in his ways is he that despiseth Him" (*Delitzsch*). **3. Rod,** or "sceptre." Zöckler reads, "In the mouth of a fool is a rod *for* his pride." Stuart, "Haughtiness is a rod," etc. **5.** Miller here translates, "He who witnesses things correctly, does not lie; but of a deceived witness the very breath is lies" (See his comments on the verse). **6.** Rather, "The scorner has sought wisdom," etc. **7.** Stuart translates the latter clause, "*for* thou hast not discerned," etc.; Miller, "*and* thou shalt not know," etc. **8. Deceit,** or "deception." **9.** Many translators read this verse, "The sacrifice," or "the sin-offering, makes a sport of," or "mocks fools." So Zöckler, Elster, Ewald, Stuart, Wordsworth, etc. Miller translates, "Sin makes a mock at fools." **Among,** or "to." **10.** Zöckler reads the latter clause, "Let no stranger," etc. Miller renders the whole verse, "A knowing heart is a bitterness to itself; but with its joy it does not hold intercourse as an enemy." **11. Tabernacle,** "tent." **13. The heart is sorrowful,** or "will be" (perchance). **14. Filled with,** *i.e.*, "satisfied with." Stuart translates the latter clause, "Away from him is the good man," *i.e.*, he will keep aloof from the backslider. **16. Rageth,** "is presumptuous," or "haughty." **21 Poor,** or "suffering" (*Delitzsch*). **24.** Or, "It is a crown to the wise when they are rich, but the folly of fools remains folly" (*Delitzsch*). **28.** Miller translates "In a *great* people." **30. A sound heart,** "a quiet heart." **Envy,** "passion," "perturbation." **32. Driven forth,** or "thrust lower" (*Miller*). Delitzsch translates, "When misfortune befals him, the wicked is overthrown, but the righteous hath hope even in his death." **34.** The Hebrew word for *reproach* means also "mercy." Hence Gejer and Miller translate "Mercy for nations is the sin-offering," the word *sin* being often used to express the sin-offering. **35.** Miller reads, "The kindness of a king is a wise servant, but his wrath becomes one that bringeth shame" (See his comments).

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 1.

THE HOUSE BUILDER AND THE HOUSE DESTROYER.

I. A woman's special sphere of work—her house. In this word is included all that in any way relates to the home life. Woman's relation to it is threefold. 1. *The house—properly so-called—the interior of the building, is under her especial care.* It is her temple of service, she is its priestess. As the female priestess in the Roman temple and the Hebrew priest in the temple of God were responsible for the internal order of their temples, so is every woman responsible for the order, the cleanliness, and comfort of the house of which she is the social priestess. It is *her* house, and in it she is expected to perform duties to which she is not called in any other house. Her oversight and presence, if not her actual labour, are indispensable to the proper arrangement of everything in it. 2. *The affairs or business of the house is her special care.* It is for her to preside over the domestic economy of the house—over that which we call *housekeeping.* All transactions of this nature seem naturally to fall within her jurisdiction, and it looks odd and out of place to see them in other hands. 3. *She is specially related to the life of the house.* If she is a mother, she, above all others, has the charge of the children, her opportunities for influencing them are greater than those possessed by the father. Her life is always before them. Her words are treasured up and repeated by them. If she is a mistress, the servants are under her special jurisdiction and guidance.

II. The wise woman is a social architect. She "builds her house." 1. *Building implies a plan.* No man sets about building a house without first having a plan, which is well considered in proportion to the wisdom of the builder. No argument-builder, with any wisdom, enters into an argument without first considering what he is going to do, and how he is going to do it, in order, if possible, to arrive at an unanswerable conclusion. So, to build a house in the sense of the text, there must be a plan of action. Every wise woman has an end in view in the government of her household. She has plans in relation to each department. She knows what she purposes to do before she

begins to do anything. 2. *Building implies personal exertion on the part of the architect.* All his work is not done when he has drawn the plan and issued his orders. He must see that they are executed. He must, if needful, show how they are to be carried out. In times of emergency the general of an army must—like Napoleon at the Bridge of Lodi—engage himself in a hand-to-hand fight with the enemy. So will a wise woman. She does not always say, "Go," but sometimes "Come." She does not say, "*That* is the way," when "*This* is the way" is necessary. She never contents herself with saying, "Do this," without assuring herself that *it is* done. 3. *Building implies a union of diverse materials to form a complete whole.* Many and diverse materials are brought together to build a house. It would be impossible to erect a building of usefulness and beauty of one material alone. So a wise woman brings together many different elements, and blends them in due proportion, in order to make the home-life true, and beautiful, and good. Her wisdom is shown in developing the abilities and capacities of each member of the household, so that each may contribute to the strength and comfort of the whole. Upon the female head of the house, more than upon anyone else, depends the unity, peace, and concord of this temple of living stones.

III. An unwise woman, who is at the head of a house, caricatures her position by her conduct. Her position implies that she is a builder-up. Her conduct has the effect of pulling down. A clown upon a kingly throne is not more out of place than a foolish woman who bears the name of mistress, wife, and mother. The reins are in her hands, but she does not know how to guide the chariot; the materials are in her possession but she has no skill to use them. She is not only no centre of unity, she is a source of discord; she not only cannot build the house herself but she makes it impossible for anybody else to do anything towards it. She is not only no "crown to her husband," but she is "rottenness to his bones" (chap. xii. 4).

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

A good wife is heaven's last best gift to a man; his angel of mercy; minister of graces innumerable; his gem of many virtues; his casket of jewels; her voice, his sweetest music; her smiles, his brightest day; her kiss, the guardian of his innocence; her arms, the pale of his safety; the balm of his health, the balsam of his life; her industry, his surest wealth; her economy, his safest steward; her lips, his faithful counsellors; her bosom, the softest pillow of his cares; and her prayers, the ablest advocates of heaven's blessings on his head.—*Jeremy Taylor.*

The following is a translation of a Welsh Triad:—A good wife is modest, void of deceit, and obedient; pure of conscience, gracious of tongue, and true to her husband; her heart not proud, her manners affable, and her bosom full of compassion for the poor, labouring to be tidy, skilful of hand, and fond of praying to God; her conversation amiable, her dress decent, and her house orderly; quick of hand, quick of eye, and quick of understanding; her face benignant, her head intelligent, and provident, neighbourly, gentle, and of a liberal way of thinking; able in directing, providing what is wanting, and a good mother to her children; loving her husband, loving peace, and God.—*New Handbook of Illustration.*

"*House*" means *all interests.* "Has built" is preterite. If all interests are prosperous at present, it has been the work of the past. The second clause wisely returns to the future, which we commonly translate as the present, because the act is steadily running on, and includes both the present and the future. *Wisdom in woman* has built *her house,* beginning a long time ago; but "*folly*" in women is an affair of the present. If it had been at work long, it would have had no house to pull down. As entering upon the

work of the wise, ungodly mothers tear down the house which generations of the righteous have been slowly building. The grand comment, however, is that this womanly wisdom or wise woman, like the woman of grace (chap. ix. 16), or woman of folly (chap. ix. 13) has an allegoric meaning. Women do much toward building up. But the text means more, that "*wisdom*," as personified, is the only builder of a "*house*," and "*folly*," as impenitence, all that can pull it down.—*Miller.*

Only the characteristic wisdom of *woman* (not that of the man) is able to "build itself a house," *i.e.*, to make possible a household in the true sense of the word; for the woman alone has the capacity circumspectly to look through the multitude of individual household wants, and carefully to satisfy them; and also because the various activities of the members of a family can be combined in a harmonious unity only by the influence, partly regulative, and partly fostering, of a feminine character, gently but steadily efficient. But where there is wanting to the mistress of a house this wisdom attainable only by her, and appropriate only to her, then that is irrecoverably lost which first binds in a moral fellowship those connected by relationship of blood—that which makes the house, from a mere place of abode, to be the spiritual nursery of individuals organically associated.—*Elster.*

The fullest recognition that has as yet met us of the importance of woman, for good or evil, in all human society. *Plumptre.*

With calm, clear eyes, deep insight, ready sympathy; active, without bustle; alert, without over-anxious vigilance; ignorant perchance of æsthetic rules, yet with subtle touches transforming into a fine picture the home-spun canvas, and with a soft fairy music blending into harmony the noises of the day; apathetic about stocks and shares, and far-off millions; but with a keen appreciation of new sovereigns and no disdain for sixpences; a mere formalist, if professing interest in city improvements and parochial reforms, but as touching torn curtains and threadbare carpets much exercised in spirit; sure that the commotions of Europe will all come right, but shedding bitter tears at any outburst of juvenile waywardness, and praying earnestly, "Oh, that Ishmael may live before thee!" with small belief in the transcendental philosophy, and allowing that much may be said on both sides, but in the interpretation of the Ten Commandments positive, unreasoning, absolute; in theology hopelessly confounding the theology of the schools, and in an innocent way adopting half the heresies, but drinking direct from the fountain that living water which others prefer, chalybeate, through the iron pipe, or ærated from the filtering pond, and in a style which Calvin or Grotius might equally envy teaching the little ones the love of the Saviour; the angel of the house moulds a family for heaven, and by dint of holy example, and gentle control, her early and most efficacious ministry goes farther than any other to lay the foundations of future excellence, and train up sons and daughters for the Lord Almighty. —*Dr. Jas. Hamilton.*

St. Ambrose noteth that when God asked Abraham, "Where is thy wife, Sarah?"—He was not ignorant where Sarah was; but that He asked the question that by Abraham's answer, "Behold, in the tent," He might teach women where they ought to be—namely, in the house, and not so much in the house as in the affairs of the house, making ready provision to entertain God as Sarah was.—*Jermin.*

The modest virgin, the prudent wife, or the careful matron, are much more serviceable in life than petticoated philosophers, blustering heroines, or virago queens. She who makes her husband and her children happy, who reclaims the one from vice and trains the other to virtue, is a much greater character than ladies described in romance, whose whole occupation is to murder mankind with shafts from their quiver or their eyes.—*Goldsmith.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 2.

FEARING AND DESPISING THE LORD.

I. A wholesome fear. "The fear of the Lord." When we fear to grieve or offend a person because of his or her goodness the fear does not spring from dread of their power, but from our high estimate of their character. It may exist where there is no power to injure. Strong men have sometimes had this fear for little children. There is also a fear which may spring from a conception of both goodness and power. It is the feeling which a child has for a good parent. There is a consciousness of the parent's goodness, and also a consciousness of his power to enforce his authority. In proportion as these elements are combined in relation to human creatures the fear which men have for them is wholesome—is salutary. Benevolence alone tends to weaken the fear—to lessen the reverence. Power alone is likely to produce hatred as well as fear. But when benevolence is linked with power it looks doubly attractive. The fear which a good man has for God arises from a conception of both the Infinite power and the Infinite love of the Divine Father. If the first were wanting it would lack reverence; if the latter it would be a fear that "hath torment."

II. The proof that a man possesses this wholesome fear. "He walks *uprightly*." Fear is a feeling of the mind. It can only be proved to exist when it brings forth action. Uprightness of life is an unanswerable proof that a man speaks truly when he says that he fears the Lord. God asks for no greater (Gen. xvii. 1, 2). This demonstration does not consist in a single act of integrity, but in a constant succession of acts, in a habit of life. It is a *walk*. (On "walking uprightly," see on chap. x. 9, 10, page 153).

III. The character of a perverse man—of a man whose walk is not upright. He is "a despiser of God." His life proves it, even if his words deny it. We despise that to which we do not attach a due value. All men who perversely refuse to accept God's plan of salvation *despise* both the "riches of His goodness and forbearance, and long-suffering," which are intended to "lead them to repentance" (Rom. ii. 4), and also that "power of His anger," of which no man can form an estimate (Psalm xc. 11).

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

I. Grace and sin in their true colours. Grace reigning is a reverence of God. Sin reigning is no less a contempt of God; in *this*, more than in anything, sin appears exceeding sinful, that it despises God, whom angels adore. **II. Grace and sin in their true light.** By this we know a man that has grace, and the fear of God, reigning in him, he makes conscience of his actions, is faithful to God and man. But on the contrary, he that wilfully follows his own way, is a wicked man, however he pretend to devotion.—*Henry.*

A man walking over a field has a certain *level* course (if there be such) that he naturally follows. If he walk not *level*, or if he turn constantly out of his way, men think him either drunk or mad. It is this reasonable instinct of our nature that our text embodies. We do not say *uprightness*, but "*levelness*," for it agrees with the idea of walking. Such meaning is, that folly is self-condemned; that if a man would put one foot before another, or mentally move as he himself thinks level and right, he would practically "*fear*" God; but that he drops out of his own "way," and walks brokenly, and with change of gait. It is careless to define *fear* as anything beside *fear* itself. A holy *fear*, however, is not terror; and yet a being afraid more really and more tremblingly often than the sinner. It is remarkable that when men have escaped wrath they begin most healthily to *fear* it, and when men are faithless

even to their own ways, they despise the most the law of the Almighty. This text, like many another, is pregnant. Pregnant texts are ambidextrous, and the alternative meanings, though distinct, are mutually embracing. Another sense is grammatical and equivalent in thought. It would read "*His*" levelness, and *His* ways, referring to Jehovah. It is only substituting capitals. It would mean, "*He that walks in God's level track fears Him; but he that is turned out of God's way*, that is, he that has got out of the line for which he was made, instead of *fearing*, as he might, chooses that horrid moment for despising God. We would rank this higher than an ambiguity; for God's ways and man's ways, when they are *levelnesses* and suited to our step, are the same blessed track, for we are created in the image of God.—*Miller.*

He that walketh so that the sincerity of his heart maketh the uprightness to be *his*, for a feigned uprightness is of the devil, not a man's own. God is feared where goodness is embraced. And, as St. Basil speaketh, the despising of the laws is the reproach of the lawmaker.—*Jermin.*

Here is consolation to faithful men, though not void of infirmities, against the temptations of Satan, the calumniations of wicked men, and the fears of their own hearts. None are so much accused of contempt against God as those which are most religious. The devil seeketh to persuade them there is nothing in them but fraud. Sinful men, when they can charge against them no misdemeanours or lewdness of life, exclaim that they are hypocrites, and many doubts arise in their own souls by reason of the manifold imperfections of their lives. But are they desirous impartially to keep every commandment, if their power were answerable to their will? Do they endeavour to please God, though they cannot do it perfectly? Then they are upright in their ways, and walk in the law of the Lord; then God testifieth of them here, that they are of the number of them that fear Him, and elsewhere He testifieth that all those who fear Him they are blessed. —*Dod.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 3.

SPEECH A ROD.

I. Speech is a rod because it is emblematic of power. A rod is an emblem of position and authority. It represents more than it is. Speech is a sign of man's superiority to the animal creation. Words in themselves are not much, but they are mighty because of what they represent, viz., the soul of man. The sceptre of a king may not in itself be of much value, but it is of worth because of what it signifies.

II. Speech will be a man's destruction or salvation according to his character. The mouth of the fool represents the soul of the fool. We have before noted the unwisdom and danger of him who is too proud to receive instruction (see chap. xi. 1, page 192; xiii. 18, etc.) His proud boasting speech will by-and-by become the cause of his chastisement—a rod for his own back. And the godly wise speech of the wise will be the means of his preservation and honour (See on chap. xii. 5–8, page 255, vers. 17–19, page 274).

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

The fool's rod of pride is his *tongue*, wherewith he assails and strikes others. But it recoils on himself. The instrument of punishment is called a rod, not a sword, to denote the contumely with which the proud shall be visited.—*Fausset.*

The *rod in the mouth* is often sharper than the rod in the hand (Jer. xviii. 18). Sometimes it strikes against God (Exod. v. 2; Psa. xii. 3, 4; 2 Kings xix. 10); sometimes it is "the rod of His anger against His people" (Isa. x. 5) permitted (Rev. xiii. 5) yet restrained

(Psalm cxxv. 3). Always in the end it is *the rod* for the *fool* himself (Psa. lxiv. 8).—*Bridges.*

The "*mouth*" is the great word in the Proverbs for our whole earthly agency. The word translated "*rod*" is the favourite emblem of sovereignty. A fool's life-work or energy is his sovereignty, by which he would carve his way. But it is a "*sceptre of pride.*" His kingship is a notion of pride. But the "*lips of the wise*" do really win, and do really govern. They have a true sceptre which shall really guard them.—*Miller.*

The lips of the wise preserve them. 1. *From doing wrong to others,* in their loving mildness. 2. *From suffering wrong from others,* by a wary heedfulness. 3. *From the rod of God's anger,* in a humble craving pardon for their errors. The former part of this verse St. Gregory applieth unto arrogant preachers, who desire more sharply to reprove their afflicted hearers, than sweetly to comfort them, for they study more how they may condemn evil things by blaming of them, than how they may commend good things by praising them. They always desire those things which, by fierce chiding, they may beat upon.—*Jermin.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 4.

The Clean Crib.

I An empty and clean crib does not fulfil the end for which it was made. It was made for use; it was made to hold food for the ox, who earns, by his labour, the means of keeping it full. When God first created this world, and saw it lie before him in all its unsullied beauty, He said that it *was very good.* But, beautiful as it was, it was not to remain simply beautiful—it was to fulfil a higher purpose: it was to be a dwelling-place for man. And God gave it into the hands of men to build cities in it, to dig quarries in it, to mar in many respects its first beauty and order, but to make it of more real worth as man's dwelling, as his market, as his workshop. If man had never been compelled by hunger to put forth his hand and blacken its surface, and spoil some of its lovely landscapes, it would not have become what it now is, his training-school for a higher life. It would have been in more perfect order and beauty, but it would not have fulfilled the purpose for which it was created. So with a large manufactory. No doubt it looks cleaner and fresher on the day that it comes from the hands of the builder than it does when its chimneys are pouring forth smoke and its floors are covered with grimy machinery, but if its owner were to build it simply to keep it clean by keeping it empty, he would be looked upon as a madman. So with the crib. So long as there are no oxen to use it, it can be kept empty and clean, but there is no use in having a crib unless it is put to its use.

II. If men want wealth they must not mind the labour and trouble of getting it. This seems to be the idea of the proverb. A clean crib can be kept, if there are no oxen to use it; but without oxen, in Solomon's days (when wealth was chiefly gained by agriculture) there would be no increase. Many men would like to be rich, but they do not like the means by which alone they can obtain it. They would like to handle the golden coins, but they do not like to soil their fingers with honest toil to get it. They would like to gather in a harvest in the sunny autumn, but they do not like to plough and sow in the days of winter. They would like the increase which the ox would bring, but they do not like the trouble of cleaning his crib and caring for his wants. But this is not possible. The toil and the increase go together; the labour must come before the wealth, whether in relation to the body, the soul, or the spirit.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

In its literal meaning a household proverb, "Labour has its rough, unpleasant side, yet it ends in profit." But here, as elsewhere, there may be a meaning below the surface. The life of contemplation may seem purer, "cleaner," than the life of action. The outer business of the world brings its cares and disturbances, but also "much increase." There will be a sure reward of that activity in good works for him who goes, as with "the strength of the ox," to the task to which God calls him.—*Plumptre.*

The literal sense of this verse seems to commend the care and pains of tillage. Or else we may take the words as shewing how the want of any needful instrument denieth the success of that which is desired, though other things be ready. But the words are more useful when taken by way of application. Wherefore, in God's tillage, for "we are God's husbandry" (1 Cor. iii. 9), the oxen are His ministers—they are, as Jerome speaketh, oxen that bear the yoke of the Lord, after whose steps he that soweth seed is blessed; yea, God Himself is pleased to be joined in yoke with them, for they are labourers with God in His husbandry. They plough up the fallow ground by preaching and pressing repentance, they bring the corn into the barn by bringing home wandering sinners into the bosom of the Church; they tread out the grains from the chaff and straw by subduing the corruptions of nature, and separating it from the graces of God's Spirit. Now, where these oxen are wanting, there the room will be empty, swept and *clean* for him to enter in, who quickly will fill it with the filth of the corruption of death. But, by the pains of the minister, much increase there is of corn in the field of the Lord—much increase is there of the seed of grace in the hearts of the people, and of the fruits of godliness in their lives.—*Jermin.*

The ox is the most profitable of all the beasts used in husbandry. Except merely for *speed*, he is almost in every respect superior to the horse. He is longer-lived, scarcely liable to disease, steady, lives, fattens, and maintains his strength on what a horse will not eat, and when he is worn out in labour his flesh is good for food, his horns useful, and his hide almost invaluable. —*A. Clarke.*

For Homiletics on verse 5 see on chapter xii., 17, 19, page 274; also on verse 25 of this chapter.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

The man not *walking in His levelness* (see verse 2) shows by his staggering that he does not "*witness things correctly.*" (*See Critical Notes for Miller's translation of this verse.*) The grand truth is here broached that the man who *lies* does not see correctly. This is a universal doctrine. Moreover, *lies* stand for all sin. All sin, therefore, flows from being deceived. *A deep moral blindness is the source and measure of all possible transgression.* Several proverbs depend for their significance upon this meaning, a "*deceived*" rather than a *deceiving* "*witness.*"—*Miller.*

He that for conscience sake doth speak the truth in common and small matters, he will also speak the truth in things of greater importance; and he that is not ashamed of a lie in his private dealing, he will also without shame bear false witness before a judge. Here, then, we be taught in the least things to ensure our tongues to speak the truth, so shall we be preserved from false-witness bearing, for the Lord would not have us dally with sin. . . . If we would not have Him punish our lesser frailties with greater sins—if we would not have Him punish our secret sins with open and notorious offences, then let us be afraid to tell a lie in the very lightest and most secret causes.—*Greenham.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 6.

SEEKING, BUT NOT FINDING.

I. A contradictory character—a scorner in quest of wisdom. It would be strange to hear a man ask advice of a physician whose opinion he held in contempt, or to ask guidance of a traveller whose judgment and ability he despised. It would be obvious that the advice given or the rules laid down would not be followed. So a scorner, while he seeks wisdom, scorns the only method of becoming wise, He asks advice of those whom he despises, he inquires the way to wisdom, while he holds the road to it in utter contempt. The antithesis of the verse implies that he does not find wisdom because he lacks understanding—because he finds it above his comprehension. Two children may be equally ignorant of knowledge, but if one has the desire and the will to acquire it, and the other has not, what was hard to both at first will only continue hard to him who despises knowledge. So the scorner fails to find wisdom because he does not value it enough to make an effort to acquire it. The spirit in which he seeks is an effectual barrier against his finding.

II. A man of teachable spirit is the only one who will ever find wisdom. The man of understanding knows its value, and therefore scorns neither it nor the means of attaining it. Therefore, to him "knowledge" becomes "easy." A clever man and a dull one may be pupils of the same master, but if the clever one thinks that he needs no instruction and the dull one feels his need, what was above the comprehension of both at first will become easy to the teachable scholar, while it will still remain out of the reach of the self-sufficient one. Even a dull but willing pupil will learn faster than one who has intellectual ability, but lacks the docile spirit. A seeker of wisdom in any department of knowledge must become in relation to it as a child before his teacher; he must acknowledge his ignorance, and be willing to submit to the conditions of acquiring knowledge. The same spirit is indispensable for the attainment of moral wisdom. Those who would *learn* of Christ must take His *yoke;* those who would know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, must be willing to do His will (Matt. xi. 29; John vii. 17).

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

The Greeks sought after wisdom, but Christ crucified was foolishness to them. They were already too wise to admit of the preaching of the cross, and scorned a tent-maker who would inform them of new doctrines which had never entered into their own minds, and who would prove them by other methods than their favourite ones—eloquence and reasoning.—*Lawson.*

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

A page of Hebrew, what is it to a child? It is absolutely nothing. But the whole was easy to the Hebrew eye. "*A scorner has sought wisdom.*" Notice the past sense. Every scorner *has done* it. Take any impenitent man. We may be sure some day or other he has sought spiritual intelligence. But he has done it selfishly. Moreover, he has done it fitfully and feebly. He has groped. He has made a sort of blind man's pass for knowledge, and has come back with the averment that there is no such thing. Light is *simple*, "*easy;*" literally, *light* as opposed to *heavy;* light is obvious; nothing can be more so; but then, as the inspired man advises us, it is only "*easy*" to the "*dis-*

cerning," or "*understanding,*" man.—*Miller.*

It is not by a one-sided action of the thinking power, but only by undivided consecration of the whole nature to God, which therefore involves, above all other things, a right relation of the spiritual nature to Him, that true knowledge in Divine things can be attained. The wise man, however, who has found the true beginning of wisdom, in bowing his inmost will before the Divine, not as something to be mastered by the understanding, but as something to be simply sought as a grace by the renunciation of the very self; he can easily on this ground, which God's own power makes productive, attain a rich development of the understanding.—*Elster.*

Wisdom estrangeth herself from the scorner, as a gentlewoman hideth herself from a suitor whom she fancieth not. . . . As a loving spouse, when he cometh to the door, whom she affecteth, will show herself to him, and run to meet him, so the grace of God's spirit offereth itself, and draweth near unto the humble and modest.—*Muffet.*

By knowledge we may understand, not the knowledge of the letter floating in the brain, and flowing even at the tongue's end (which, indeed, is not worth the name of knowledge); but the true understanding of the word taught by the Spirit, which entereth into the heart, and worketh on the affections, frameth to obedience, and assureth of everlasting life. This, indeed, is healthful knowledge, which the scorners, though they seek, shall never obtain. And hereunto doth our Saviour give witness, when He saith: "*Many shall seek to enter in, and cannot.*"—*Greenham.*

The finding of wisdom is that which needeth help from others. More eyes than the eyes of one are requisite unto it. And, therefore, a *scorner*, who seeketh it with scorning of another's help; yea, who scorneth not only the help of man, but of God also, how can he ever find it? If it be offered to him by another, he will not accept it, and if he seek it never so much in his own ways he shall not obtain it. It is, says Clemens Alexandrinus, to draw out threads and to spin nothing; and, therefore, whensoever he shall stand in need of it, he shall not find it, for wisdom and a scorner shall never meet. But *to him that understandeth* his own defects and infirmities, to him that understandeth how to make use of other men's abilities, and that in the seeking of wisdom, the assistance of God is chiefly to be sought, to him it is a short course to come to it; to him it is an easy matter to obtain it. —*Jermin.*

It is the constant profession of those who read the Bible that they are seeking truth. Their likeness is taken here from life. They seek wisdom, but do not find it. They want the first qualification of a philosopher, a humble and teachable spirit. There is a race of men among us at the present day who scorn bitterly against faith's meek submission to God's revealed will. The divinity, they say, is in every man; which means that every man is a god unto himself. It is, in its essence, a reproduction of the oldest rebellion. A creature discontented with the place which his Maker has given him strives to make himself a god. If men really were independent beings, it would be right to assert and proclaim their independence; but as matters really stand, this desperate kicking against authority becomes the exposure of weakness, and the punishment of pride. We are not our own cause and our own end; we are not our own lords. We are in the hands of our Maker, and under the law of our Judge. Our only safety lies in submission to the rightful authority and obedience to the true law. The problem for man is, not to reject all masters, but to accept the rightful one. . . . In these days, when the pendulum is often seen swinging from scepticism over to superstition, and from superstition back to scepticism again, we would do well to remember that there is truth between these extremes, and that in truth alone lies safety for all the interests of men. . . . . I see two men near each other

prostrate on the ground and bleeding, while one man stands between them, with serenest aspect looking to the skies. Who and what are these? The two prostrate forms are superstition and unbelief. Superstition bowed down to worship his idol, and cut his flesh with stones to atone for his soul's sin. Unbelief scorned to be confined, like an inferior creature, to the earth, and was ever leaping up in the hope of standing on the stars. Exhausted by his efforts he fell, and the fall bruised him, so that he lay as low as the neighbour whom he despised. He who stands between them neither bowed himself to the ground, nor attempted to scale the heavens. He neither degraded himself beneath a man's place, nor attempted to raise himself above it. He abode on earth, but he stood erect there. He did not proudly profess to be, but meekly sought to find God. This man understands his place, and feels his need; to him, therefore, knowledge is easy. To him that hath shall be given. He has the beginning of wisdom, and he will reach in good time its glad consummation. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom."—*Arnot.*

There are *four* things that particularly unfit a man for such a task (the finding of wisdom), viz., a very *proud*, or a very *suspicious* temper, *false wit* or *sensuality*. The two last generally belong to the man whom we call a scorner, the two first are essential to him and inseparable from him . . . . *Pride* makes a man seem sufficient in his own eyes for all manner of speculations and inquiries, and hence it comes that he, not being duly qualified for every search, is fain to take up with light and superficial accounts of things, and then, what he wants in true knowledge, to make up in downright assurance. By consequence it gives him just enough understanding to raise an objection, but not enough to lay it; which, as it is the most despicable, so it is also the most dangerous state of mind a man can be in. He that is but half a philosopher is in danger of being an atheist; a half physician is apt to turn empiric. In all matters of speculation or practice, he that knows but little of them, and is very confident of his own strength, is more out of the way of true knowledge than if he knew nothing at all. And in this character there is always a strange and unreasonable *suspicion*, by which he doubts everything he hears, and distrusts every man he converses with. He is so afraid of having his understanding imposed upon in matters of faith that he stands aloof from all propositions of that kind, whether true or false. Which is, as if a man should refuse to receive any money because there is a great deal of counterfeit; or resolve not to make friendship with any man, because many are not to be trusted. A third part of a scorner's character is a *false wit*, a way of ridiculing arguments instead of confuting them, and a *fourth* is *sensuality*. That this, too, does for the most part accompany a contempt of religion, I appeal to the observation and experience of every man.—*Bp. Atterbury.*

He seeks it as a coward seeks his adversary, with a hope that he shall not find him; or as a man seeks his false coin, which he hath no joy to look upon. "What is truth?" said Pilate in a jeer to Christ, but stayed not the answer. "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" said the carnal Capernaites (John vi. 52), and away they went—who, if they had stayed out the sermon, might have been satisfied on the point. . . . . He that comes to the fountain to fill his pitcher must first wash it, and then put the mouth of it downwards to take up water. So he that would have heavenly knowledge must first quit his heart of corrupt affections and high conceits, and then humble himself at God's feet, "everyone to receive His words" (Deut. xxxiii. 3).—*Trapp.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF PARAGRAPH.—Verses 7—9.

THE FOOL AND THE PRUDENT MAN.

I. How to know a fool. The dead carcase that is above ground is its own evidence. No one needs to inquire what it is, or where it is. The pestilential atmosphere which surrounds it tells its own tale. So a fool is a self-evidencing person. His words proclaim his character. He says nothing that is worth saying. Nothing that can enlighten a man's mind or better his nature is to be found in his conversation. "The lips of knowledge" are not with him. But there is not simply the absence of wisdom. He is not a negative character. No man's soul can remain like an empty house; if wisdom is absent sin comes in and takes up its abode. The *fool* is also a *knave*. "The folly of fools is deceit," and in this also he will sooner or later be his own evidence. Like particles of poisonous matter, his *deceit*, as well as his ignorance, will make its presence known. His words will sooner or later betray his untruthful character. He will also be known by his *profanity*. "Fools make a mock at sin." The most perfect beings in God's universe regard sin as a serious matter, knowing, as they do, the bitter fruits which spring from one sinful action. God Himself treats sin as a terrible and awful reality. Yet men are to be found who make light of it, and others so depraved as to laugh at that which God regards with abhorrence, and visits with retribution.

II. How to treat a fool. "Go from the presence of a foolish man." There are three reasons why we go from the neighbourhood of a polluted and polluting carcase. First, its odour is offensive to us. Secondly, to linger near may generate disease in our bodies. Thirdly, being diseased ourselves, we may become an occasion of injury to others. So a man void of moral wisdom ought to be an offensive presence to every man. Our moral instincts ought to be strong enough without any outside voice to say, "Go from him." The "folly of a fool," being deceit, he is an incarnation of the devil; our own self-love should prompt us to quit his society. The man that mocks at sin is a generator of moral disease, we cannot be in his company without moral injury, and if we catch the pestilence ourselves we shall in turn infect others with the disease.

III. What constitutes a prudent or morally wise man. He "understands his way." A fool cannot be said to have a *way* or method of life any more than the leaf which is driven before the wind, or the timber that is floating down the rapid. Like them, he is the victim of circumstances; he is driven hither and thither by the currents of inclination or passion. He has no "way" to understand. He is as a cloud driven before the hurricane. He floats like a rudderless vessel upon the sea of life. But a prudent man has a "*way*," or method of life (see Homiletics on chap. xiii. 14), and the great business of his life is to "understand" it—to find the best means of bringing his life into conformity with that rule of righteousness which is his standard of life; to gather from the voice of God in revelation, in conscience, and in Providence what course he is to pursue, what at all times is the right thing to do, and what is the right way of doing it. This is the life-study of the man who is morally prudent, and the highest aim that a man can propose to himself is to attain to a right understanding of his way. (On the latter clause of verse 9 see Homiletics on chap. xiii. 14).

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Verse 7. The path of sin is much more easily avoided than relinquished. We can far more easily keep out of the course of the stream than stem the torrent—*Bridges.*

Thou mayest tarry with a foolish man while he holdeth his peace, and while he is willing and patient to hear thee. For he may get knowledge by hearing, and thou mayest have comfort

by speaking. But it is time to be gone when by his lips thou perceivest knowledge to be gone from them.—*Jermin.*

In nature, some creatures are strong and bold, having both instincts and intruments for combat: other creatures are feeble but fleet. It is the intention of their Maker that they should seek safety, not in fighting, but in fleeing. It would be a fatal mistake if the hare, in a fit of bravery, should turn and face her pursuers. In the moral conflict of human life it is of great importance to judge rightly when we should fight and when we should flee. The weak might escape if they knew their own weakness, and kept out of harm's way. That courage is not a virtue which carries the feeble into the lion's jaws. I have known of some who ventured too far with the benevolent purpose of bringing a victim out, and were themselves sucked in and swallowed up. To go in among the foolish for the rescue of the sinking may be necessary, but it is dangerous work, and demands robust workmen . . . The specific instruction recorded in Scripture for such a case is, "save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted with the flesh" (Jude 23). He who would volunteer for this work must fear lest the victim perish ere he get him dragged out, and fear lest himself be scorched by the flame.—*Arnot.*

Ver. 8. We are not to infer, because "*wisdom*" eludes the scorner, that it is, therefore, something mystic. It fits earth so closely, that it actually carves our "*way.*" Nay, more closely still, it is actually path-finding itself. She takes a man from her very gate, and tells him all that he must do. She not only discerns paths, but that is all of her; she does nothing else. "The wisdom of the subtle is the making discernible of his way," while, on the other hand, "the folly of the stupid is *(its own)* delusion." All of us having a way, and all of us following it with the great energy of our lives, "the excellency and knowledge is, that wisdom giveth life to them that have it." Wisdom grasps its end; folly never. Wisdom is the great pathfinder; folly a "delusion."—*Miller.*

Every man has a *final destination* before him. The way of all is the way to the grave, and to eternity. But in that eternity are *two* widely different states. To the opposite states there are *two* ways—"the narrow," and "the broad." Oh the infinite value of true wisdom here,—the wisdom that understands both ways, and rightly chooses between! *The folly of fools is deceit* may mean that the folly of fools proves to them deceit. Their confidence in it, and their expectations from it, are sheer delusion. Or the sense may be, "deceit is the folly of fools." "New stratagems," says Lord Bacon, "must be devised, the old failing and growing useless; and as soon as ever a man hath got the name of a cunning crafty companion, he hath deprived himself utterly of the principal instrument for the management of his affairs,—which is *trust.*" Policy, therefore, on this as on other accounts, is "*the folly of fools.*—*Wardlaw.*

When men are acquainted with everything but what they ought to know, they are only notable fools. If we had hearts large as the sands upon the sea-shore, and filled with a world of things, whilst we remained ignorant of the way of attaining true happiness, we should resemble that philosopher who was busied gazing at the moon till he fell into the ditch. . . . . They are fools who know other people's business better than their own. Some people, if you will take their own word for it, could reign better than the king and preach better than the minister. They know, in short, how to manage in every condition but their own.—*Lawson.*

Religion is an orderly thing, as wise as it is warm. Whatever be the excitement of an irregular course, more good is done by steady consistency. To break the ranks in disorder, to be eager to *understand* our neighbour's way (John xxi. 21, 22), obscures the

light upon our own. The true *wisdom is to understand* what belongs to us personally and relatively (1 Kings iii. 6-9; Eccles. viii. 5). "As God hath distributed to every man, so let him walk, and abide with God" (1 Cor. viii. 17). Let the eye do the work of the eye, and the hand of the hand. If Moses prayed in the mount, and Joshua fought in the valley (Exod. xvii. 10, 11), it was not because one was deficient in courage, and the other in prayer; but because each had his appointed work, and *understood his own way.*—*Bridges.*

Every one that goeth on in the right way doth not *understand* his way. Hence it is that many so often wander out of it, hence that so easily they are drawn from it. But he that is prudent looketh into his way, considereth the dangers of it, provideth himself against the enemies that he shall or may meet with, and being well assured of the righteousness of the way, he goeth on with confidence and safety. And this is *the wisdom of the prudent*, this proves him to be wise . . . Again, the folly of fools, though it be folly in themselves, it is deceit to the devil, who maketh them to think that to be the right way, wherein they are clean out of the way.—*Jermin.*

Verse 9. The word here used signifieth both the fault and the guilt of it, whereby the offender is liable unto wrath and punishment. For they being firmly joined together, the Hebrew joineth them in the same word. Notwithstanding fools not finding the scourge of sin tied immediately unto the act committed, as if they were mocked when they are told of punishment to come, they make a mock at it. The favour, therefore, which the righteous show them is quickly to make them feel the rod of justice. For while they punish the offence they show great love to the offender, not only in stopping the course of his sinning, which is the stopping the increase of his misery, but it may be also working his amendment, which is the salvation of his soul.—*Jermin.*

The idea of sacrificial offering is that of expiation (see Critical Notes for the renderings of the word translated sin): it is a penitential work, it falls under the prevailing point of view of an ecclesiastical punishment, a *satisfaction* in a church-disciplinary sense. The forgiveness of sin is conditioned by this, (1) that the sinner either abundantly makes good by restitution the injury inflicted on another, or in some other way bears temporal punishment for it, and (2) that he willingly presents the sacrifice of rams or of sheep, the value of which the priest has to determine in its relation to the offence. Fools fall from one offence to another, which they have to atone for by the presentation of sacrificial offerings; the sacrificial offering mocketh them, for it equally derides them on account of the self-inflicted loss, and on account of the efforts with which they must make good the effects of their frivolity and madness; while on the contrary, among men of upright character, a relation of mutual favour prevails, which does not permit that the one give to the other an indemnity, and apply the trespass-offering. *Delitzsch.*

"*Sin makes a mock at fools; but between upright beings there is favour.*" Not makes sport, as a fool might, of engaging in his sins. A fool may *make sport* of sin, but hardly could be said to make a mock at it. "Sin makes a mock at fools," but between "upright beings," or "among the righteous," we cannot conceive of any mockery. The upright God, and the upright saint; the upright saint and the upright Saviour; grace and judgment; faith, and the scenes of the last day; between these there must be *goodwill, i.e.*, mutual delight and favour. So 1 John iv. 17, 18, "Herein does the love gain its end between us (that is, between God and us; see ver. 16), that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; *because as He is, so are we in this world,*" etc.—*Miller.*

Among the righteous is favour; that is to say, the practice of virtue and uttering of gracious speeches,

joined with such goodwill and sweet joy as that their meeting is like the precious ointment that was poured on the head of Aaron.—*Muffet.*

The conduct of the man who makes a mock at sin involves—1. *Impiety.* To mock at sin is to despise God's holiness, set at nought God's authority, to abuse God's goodness, to disregard and slight God's glory. 2. *Cruelty.* The scoffer may pretend to humanity, but there breathes not on earth a more iron-hearted monster. He may profess to feel for the miseries of mankind; for the ravages of disease and death over their bodies; of fire, and flood, and storm over their means of life and comfort; of melancholy, and idiotcy, and madness over their minds. But he makes a mock at the prolific *cause* of all. There is not an ill that man is called upon to suffer that does not owe its origin to sin. Like the "star called wormwood" in the Apocalyptic vision, it has fallen on every "fountain and river" of human joy, turning all their waters into bitterness. It is the sting of conscience. It is the venom and barb of the darts of the King of Terrors. It is the very life of the "worm that dieth not." Oh! the miserably-mistaken flattery that can speak of the kind-heartedness of the man who laughs at that which is the embryo-germ of all the sufferings of time, and all the woes of eternity. 3. *Infatuation.* Sin is the evil that is ruining the sinner himself—the disease that is preying upon his own vitals—the secret consuming fire that is wasting his eternal all. Yet the deluded victim of its power makes a jest of it!—*Wardlaw.*

Some men are so like their father, the devil, that they will tempt men to sin that they may laugh at them.—*Lawson.*

To complete the antithesis, the sense must be supplied, fools make a mock at sin (and so incur the wrath of God); but (the righteous regard sin as a serious offence), and therefore among the righteous there is the favour of God.—*Fausset.*

The fool's sport—sin. 1. *Sin*, which is so contrary to goodness that it is abhorred of those sparks and cinders which the rust of sin hath not quite eaten out of our nature as the creation left it. 2. *Sin*, which sensibly brings on present judgments, or if not, is the more fearful. The less it receives here, the more is behind. 3. *Sin*, that shall at last be laid heavy on the conscience: the lighter the burden was at first, it shall be at last the more ponderous. The wicked conscience may for awhile lie asleep, but this calm is the greatest storm. 4. *Sin*, which provokes God to anger. 5. *Sin*, which was punished even in heaven. 6. *Sin*, which God so loathed that he could not save men because of it, except by the death of His own Son. Oh, think if ever man felt sorrow like Him, or if He felt any sorrow except for sin. Did the pressure of it lie so heavy upon the Son of God, and doth a son of man make light of it? Thou mockest at thy oppressions, oaths, frauds; for these He groaned. Thou scornest His gospel preached; He wept for thy scorn. Thou knowest not, O fool, the price of sin; thou must do, if thy Saviour did not for thee. If He suffered not this for thee, thou must suffer it for thyself.—*T. Adams.*

They dance with the devil all day, and yet think to sup with Christ. Their sweet meat must have sour sauce, but among the righteous, though they sin of infirmity, yet forasmuch as they are sensible of and sorrowful for their failings, and see them to confession, God will never see them to their confusion.—*Trapp.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 10.

Secrets of the Heart.

I. Opposite dwellers in the same spirit. "Bitterness" and "joy." The world without us is a type of the world within us. In the world of matter the bitter cold, the desolation of winter, alternates with the brightness and joyous fruitfulness of summer. On the same globe we have at the same time the vine-

clad regions of southern latitudes, and the dreary shores of arctic regions. Bitterness in the human spirit is a fact of human consciousness, and so is joy. There are few hearts that have not been at different times possessed by both. There are few in which there does not dwell at the same time a root of gladness and a root of sadness.

II. A possession which its possessor may keep a profound secret. It is within the power of a human soul to keep his sorrow or his joy to himself if he so pleases, and under certain conditions this is a desirable thing to do. A man or woman often finds himself or herself surrounded by those who are entire strangers to the circumstances, or the persons, or the experiences which have given birth to the sorrow or the joy. To speak of it to such would be worse than useless. It is a comfort in such circumstances to be able to lock the secret within one's own breast. There is a consolation in sorrow, and a sense of increase of joy in not being compelled to lay open our feelings to the inspection of the unsympathetic. There are also sorrows of such a nature as to be entirely beyond the power of the tenderest human love to alleviate. To conceal such from all human ken is a kindness to those who love us. We should inflict sorrow upon them without lightening our own burden; and if we are unselfish, we are glad that it is possible in such a case to keep our bitterness within our own breast.

III. There is One who possesses the secret even more truly than the human possessor, and who should always be invited to intermeddle with our sorrow or our joy. 1. *We should invite God to intermeddle, because we can do so in the strictest secresy of the soul.* It may be impossible sometimes to put into words our joy or our sorrow, and therefore no human being, even the nearest and dearest, *can always* "intermeddle" with our deep emotions. But the *thought* is *speech* to God. He "knoweth what is the mind of the spirit." 2. *Because God's "intermeddling" will bring softening to our bitterness and refinement to our joy.* He "knew the sorrows" of Israel in their bitter bondage (Exod. iii. 7). He sent His Son to "bind up the broken-hearted" (Isa. lxi. 1). That Son Himself has known a bitterness that is unknowable by any creature. And as He can lighten sorrow so He can refine and increase joy.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Within the range of human experience there is, perhaps, no expression of the ultimate solitude of each man's soul at all times, and not merely (as in Pascal's *Je mourrai seul)* at the hour of death, so striking in its truth and depth as this. Something there is in every sorrow, and in every joy, which no one else can share. Beyond that range it is well to remember that there is a Divine sympathy, uniting perfect knowledge and perfect love.—*Plumptre.*

The first half of this proverb treats of life experiences which are of too complex a nature to be capable of being fully represented to others, and, as we are wont to say, of so delicate a nature that we shrink from uncovering them and making them known to others, and which, on this account, must be kept shut up in our own hearts, because no man is so near to us, or has so fully gained our confidence, that we have the desire and the courage to pour out our hearts to him from the very depths. If we were to interpret the second clause as *prohibitive* (see Critical Notes), then this would stand in opposition, certainly not intended, to the exhortation (Rom. xii. 15), "Rejoice with them that do rejoice," and to the saying, "Distributed joy is doubled joy, distributed sorrow is half sorrow;" and an admonition to leave man alone with his joy, instead of urging him to distribute it, does not run parallel with the first clause. Therefore we interpret the future as *potentialis.*—*Delitzsch.*

Not to let a man be private in his house is a great injury, but not to let a man be private in his heart is a wrong inexcusable. And yet this is the strange presumption of some. They know the *heart* of another; they know what troubles it and what pains it. Perhaps by some discoveries thou mayest have some conjectures; but let not a small conjecture make thee a great offender. Wrong not another with unjust surmising. Every key a man meets with is not the right key to this lock; every likelihood thou apprehendest is not a sure sign to make thee know the heart of another.—*Jermin.*

"*A knowing heart is a bitterness to itself; but with its joy it does not hold intercourse as an enemy.*" We venture upon this translation. We find no spiritual sense in the one heretofore given. . . . . A heart spiritually enlightened is a bitterness to itself on the principle which Christ meant when He said, He "came not to send peace, but a sword" (Matt. x. 34); but with its joy, weak as it may be, and small and easily clouded, "it does not," as the impenitent do, "hold intercourse as with an enemy." His *joy* is like his *bitterness*, a friend; and all will work in opposite direction to the joy of the wicked.—*Miller.*

Eli could not enter into the "bitterness of soul" of Hannah (1 Sam. i. 10, 13, 16): nor Gehazi into that of the Shunamite woman (2 Kings iv. 27). Michal, though the wife of David, was "a stranger to his joy" at the bringing up of the ark to Zion (1 Sam. xviii. 13, 20, with 2 Sam. vi. 12-16).—*Fausset.*

The two extreme experiences of a human heart, which comprehend all others between them, are "bitterness" and "joy." The solitude of a human being in either extremity is a solemnising thought. Whether you are glad or grieved, you must be alone. The bitterness and the joyfulness are both your own. It is only in a modified sense, and in a limited measure, that you can share them with another, so as to have less of them yourself. . . . Sympathy between two human beings is, after all, little more than a figure of speech. A physical burden can be divided equally between two. If you, unburdened, overtake a weary pilgrim on the way, toiling beneath a load of a hundred pounds weight, you may volunteer to bear fifty of them for the remaining part of the journey, and so lighten his load by half. But a light heart, however willing it may be, cannot so relieve a heavy one. The cares that press upon the spirit are as real as the load that lies on the back, and as burdensome; but they are not so tangible and divisible. . . . . There are, indeed, some very intimate unions in human society, as organised by God. . . . . The closest of them all, the two "no longer twain, but one flesh," is a union of unspeakable value for such sympathy as is compatible with distinct personality at all. . . . . The wife of your bosom can, indeed, intermeddle with your joys and sorrows, as no stranger can do, and yet there are depths of both in your breast which even she has no line to fathom. When you step into the waters of life's last sorrow, even she must stand back and remain behind. Each must go forward alone. The Indian *suttee* seems nature's struggle against that fixed necessity of man's condition. But it is a vain oblation. Although the wife burn on the husband's funeral pile, the frantic deed does not lighten the solitude of the dark valley. One human being cannot be merged in another. Man must accept the separate personality that belongs to his nature.—*Arnot.*

It is true, observes a philosophic essayist, that we have all much in common; but what we have most in common is this, that we are all isolated. Man is more than a combination of passions common to his kind. Beyond them and behind them, an inner life, whose current we think we know within us, flows on in solitary stillness. Friendship itself is declared to have nothing in common with this dark sensibility, so repellent and so forbidding, much less may a stranger pene-

trate to those untrodden shores. We may apply Wordsworth's lines,—

To friendship let him turn
For succour; but perhaps he sits alone
On stormy waters, tossed in a little boat
That holds but him, and can contain no more.
Jacox.

By this thought the worth and the significance of each separate human personality is made conspicuous, not one of which is the example of a species, but each has its own peculiarity, which no one of countless individuals possesses.—*Elster.*

Who but a *parent* can fully know the "bitterness" of his grief who "mourneth for an only son"—of him who is "in bitterness for his first-born." Who but a parent can sympathise with the royal mourner's anguish over a son that had died in rebellion against his father and his God! Who but a *widow* can realise the exquisite bitterness of a widow's agony when bereft of the loved partner of her joys and sorrows! Who but a *pastor* can know, in all its intensity, the bitterness of soul experienced in seeing those on whom he counted as genuine fruits of his ministry, and on whom he looked with delighted interest, as his anticipated "joy and crown" in "the day of the Lord," falling away—going back and walking no more with Jesus. —*Wardlaw.*

The principal thought of verse 11 has been treated before. See on chapter ii., 21, 22, etc.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

The wicked build houses on the earth; the earth is their home, where they desire to be, and they imagine to settle themselves in it. The upright do set up tabernacles only, seeking another country, and as knowing the uncertainty upon which this world standeth. For though the habitation of the wicked be a *house*, and rooted in the earth, yet it shall not only be *shaken*, but *overthrown*, and though the abiding of the upright be but a *tabernacle* pinned to the earth, yet shall it stand so safely that it shall *flourish* like a rooted tree. Wherefore, when in the Revelation we read "Woe to the inhabitants of the earth" (chap. viii. 13), St. Jerome understands it of the wicked only. For a godly man is not an inhabiter of the earth, but a stranger and a sojourner. And his tabernacle doth so flourish, that it reacheth to heaven, for he hath his dwelling in heaven to whom the whole world is an inn.—*Jermin.*

The "house of the wicked" may be a most prosperous one, and may seem to be full of peace; but it is doomed. It must become "desolate," literally *astonished*; which is the Eastern way of describing grand downfalls. "But the tent of the upright" (another intensive clause) his slenderest possessions; like a sprout; like some poor tender plant, shall *bloom forth*. Such is the meaning of "*flourish*."—*Miller.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 12.

WHAT SEEMS TO BE AND WHAT IS.

I. Human nature needs more light than is found in the human conscience. The way which "seems right unto a man" may be "the way of death." A mariner who has insufficient light to observe correctly the needle in the compass, may think he is steering for the haven when he is taking the vessel straight upon the rocks. He may be very sincere in his conviction that he is going right, but his thinking so will not make it so. He needs more light than he has. So the light of conscience is not enough to guide a man with certainty in the true and

right way. If conscientious sincerity was an infallible guide Paul would not have "delivered to prison" men and women for being followers of Jesus of Nazareth (Acts xxii. 4). The way that in his ignorance seemed right to him, was felt by him to be a "way of death" when his conscience was enlightened. Conscience may be deadened by sin, or warped by prejudice or self-interest; it is not a reliable and certain guide. If it were, it was needless for the Son of God to visit the earth and make known the will of His Father—the revelation of God's will in the books of the Old and New Testaments is a superfluity. The existence of the Bible is explained by the fact which is found to be true by all God-taught men, that "the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps" (Jer. x. 23). God, by speaking unto men in "sundry times and in divers manners," and especially "in these last days by His Son" (Heb. i. 1) declares plainly that man needs something outside of himself to guide him into that path of righteousness which alone is a way of life. The history of the world confirms this truth. Observation of every-day life tells the same tale.

II. The need of human nature has been fully met. All that the mariner needs in order to keep the vessel's head right is light to see the compass. God in Christ is a sufficient light to man. Paul says: "*God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ*" (2 Cor. iv. 6). Christ Himself tells us that it is those only who "follow Him" who have the "light of life" (John viii. 12). That the way thus revealed is fully adapted to meet man's need is proved by the results which follow from walking in it. The progress which a sick man makes towards health is the most convincing proof of the efficacy of his physician's treatment. The light which is shed upon men by the revelation of God, and especially by the Gospel, has been proven by its result upon individuals and upon nations, to be all-powerful to turn men from "darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God" (Acts xxvi. 18). The way of sin is the way of death—death morally, socially, and physically. The way of holiness is the only way of spiritual life to the soul and to the community, and ensures victory over the penalty of bodily death.

ILLUSTRATION.

THE LAST WORDS OF HILDEBRAND.—One of the greatest of the sons of earth (if we measure greatness either by posthumous fame or posthumous influence) lay on his death-bed. Prelates, princes, priests, devoted adherents and attendants stood around. Anxious to catch the last accents of that once oracular voice, the mourners were bending over him, when, struggling in the very grasp of death, he collected, for one last effort, his failing powers, and breathed out his spirit with the indignant exclamation, "I have loved righteousness and hated iniquity, and therefore I die in exile." . . . . That he went into the unseen world consciously and deliberately with a lie in his right hand, is a supposition utterly inadmissible. Passionate earnestness and intense conviction were stamped upon all his words and works. . . . . He had climbed by the slippery steps of intrigue to the Papal throne, and to set that throne above all the thrones of the earth, and to cause everyone, "both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond," to bow down in the dust before it, was thenceforward his sole aim and object. . . . . It was for this that he enforced that celibacy of the clergy which has ever since been the law of the Church. He found thousands of married priests ministering at her altars in innocence of heart, thinking no sin, and fearing no dishonour. . . . He commanded them to put away their wives on pain of excommunication, which meant deprivation of all rights, spiritual, social, and human. . . . . One cry of indignation, one prolonged and bitter wail of agony, arose throughout Europe, from the Apennines to the Baltic Sea. . . . . Wives were torn from their husbands, children from their fathers. Popular fanaticism allied itself with Papal tyranny. . . . . There was no pity for worse than widowed wives, and worse than orphaned children flung out upon the cold world to starve. The Pontiff trod his stern, remorseless way over broken hearts. . . . . But he had a dangerous antagonist to encounter. . . . . The Holy Roman Empire and the Holy Roman Church were together to dominate the world. But which of them was to dominate the other?

Hildebrand's long contest with Henry IV. may be said to have decided the question. But with what weapons was it fought? We see the gallant Saxons tempted by bribes and promises to revolt, and then, in their hour of distress, treacherously abandoned by him who was at once their ally and "spiritual father," and to whom they addressed in vain those noble and pathetic remonstrances which, even to this day, cannot be read without emotion. Thus Hildebrand "loved righteousness." . . . But the Pontiff, so stern to his antagonists, could be mild to his allies. Keen swords in strong hands were necessary to support his power, the heaviest swords in Europe were borne by Norman knights. Robert, the conqueror of Sicily, William, the conqueror of England, were the representative men of this fierce and fiery race. . . . They were bloody, avaricious and unscrupulous. No more cruel conquerors ever turned a fruitful land into a waste, howling wilderness. No more remorseless oppressors ever trod down the poor with a heel of iron. . . . . But their crimes were unrebuked by Hildebrand. . . . . William was "addressed in the blandest accents of esteem and tenderness," while Robert, the tyrant of Sicily, "was embraced and honoured as the faithful ally of Rome." Thus Hildebrand "hated iniquity." That "way" in which he walked all his life long with a consistency of purpose and intensity of energy that moves our admiration, seemed "right unto himself," nay, it seemed to be pre-eminently the way of righteousness, but what shall we say of "the end thereof."—*Etchings from History*, by Miss Alcock. See *Sunday at Home*, February 15th, 1879.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Souls perish always with surprise . . . But yet the *seeming* here noted must be taken *cum grano*. Deep in the lost heart is the knowledge of its "*end*," rather its "afterpart." The way lasts for ever, and its *afterward* "is the ways of death!" Deep in the lost man's heart he knows all this, and this makes a dark ground for his gaieties. (See next verse).—*Miller*.

There are some ways which can hardly "seem right" to any man—the ways, namely, of open and flagrant wickedness. But there are many ways, which, under the biassing influence of pride and corruption, "*seem* right," and yet their "*end*" is "*death*." **I. The way of the sober, well-behaved worldling.** He thinks of the law as if it had been only one table, the first being entirely overlooked. He passes among his circle for a man of good character, and flatters himself, in proportion as he is flattered by others, that all is right . . . . But his way is not the way of life, for God is not in it. **II. The way of the formalist.** He follows, strictly and punctually, the round of religious observance . . . But his heart has not been given to God. The world still has it. He compromises the retention of its affections for the things of sense by giving God the pitiful and worthless offering of outward homage. But it will not do. Those services cannot *terminate in life*, which *have no life in them*. **III. The way of the speculative religionist.** From education, or as a matter of curiosity, he has made himself an adept in religous controversy. He holds by the creed of orthodoxy, and imagines that this kind of knowledge is religion. But speculative opinion is not saving knowledge—is not the faith which "worketh by love" and "overcomes the world."—*Wardlaw*.

Good intentions are not a justification for wrong doing (2 Sam. vi. 6). Judges xvii. 6 gives an awful illustration of the end of "every man doing that which is right in his own eyes." (Cf. the prohibition of this, Deut. xii. 8.)—*Fausset*.

This may be his *easily besetting sin*, the *sin of his constitution*, the *sin of his trade*. Or it may be *his own false views of religion:* he may have an *imperfect repentance*, a *false faith*, a *very false creed*. Many of the Papists, when they were burning the saints of God in the flames at Smithfield, thought they were doing God service. —*A. Clarke*.

The self-delusion of one ends in death by the sentence of the judge, that of another in self-murder; of one in loathsome disease, of another in slow decay under the agony of conscience, or in sorrow over a henceforth dishonoured and distracted life.—*Delitzsch*.

Sin comes clothed with a show of reason (Exodus i., 10); and lust will so blear the understanding, that he shall think there is great sense in sinning. "Adam was not deceived." (1 Tim. ii. 14), that is, he was not so much deceived by his judgment—though also by that too—as by his affection to his wife, which at length blinded his judgment. The heart first deceives us with colours; and when we are once a-doting after sin, then we join and deceive our hearts (James i. 26), using fallacious and specious sophism, to make ourelves think that lawful to-day which we held unlawful yesterday. . . . But it falls out with us as with him that, lying upon a steep rock, and dreaming of good matters befallen him, starts suddenly for joy, and breaks his neck at the bottom. As he that makes a bridge of his own shadow cannot but fall into the water, so neither can he escape the pit of hell who lays his own presumption in the place of God's promise.—*Trapp.*

Some say, surely God will not punish a man hereafter who conscientiously walks up to his convictions, although these convictions be in point of fact mistaken. They err, knowing neither the inspired word of God nor natural laws. Do men imagine that God, who has established this world in such exquisite order, and rules it by regular laws, will abdicate, and leave the better world in anarchy? This world is blessed by an undeviating connection between cause and effect; will the next be abandoned to random impulses, or left to chaos? . . . It is not even conceivable that the direction of a man's course should not determine his landing-place. . . . Perhaps the secret reason why an expectation so contrary to all analogy is yet so fondly entertained, is a tacit disbelief in the reality of things spiritual and eternal. We see clearly the laws by which effects follow causes in time; but the matters upon which these laws operate are substantial realities. If there were a firm conviction that the world to come is a substance, and not merely a name, the expectation would naturally be generated, that the same principles which regulate the divine administration of the world now, will stretch into the unseen, and rule it all. . . . Truth shines like light from heaven; but the mind and conscience within the man constitute the reflector that receives it. Thence we must read off the impression, as the astronomer reads the image from the reflector at the bottom of his tube. When that tablet is dimmed by the breath of evil spirits dwelling within, the truth is distorted and turned into a lie.—*Arnot.*

There is no way which doth not seem right in his eyes who liketh to go in it. For man is led in all things by a seeming good; and such is the foulness of doing amiss, that it must put on the painted colours of doing right, or else it cannot draw the eyes of man's mind unto it. But it is the not seeing the end which causeth the seeming rightness of the way, and it is *to man* that it seems so, who is so apt to be deceived. He that hath a long fight, and in the beginning can see the end, he maketh the shortest journey and speedeth the best in it. If the beginning be a due consideration of the end, the end will be a beginning of true joy and comfort. It is not so in the way which seemeth to be right. For being but *a way*, it is passed and ended, and then begin *the ways of death*, which are said to be many, because there is an endless going on in them.—*Jermin.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 13.

True and False Mirth.

This proverb, as it stands in our English version, cannot be taken as universally true. The first clause is rendered by some translators—"Even in

laughter the heart *may be* sorrowful" (see Critical Notes), and experience and Bible teaching both necessitate our giving a limitation to the second clause also.

1. **Whether mirth will end in heaviness depends upon its character—therefore upon the character of the man who is mirthful.** There is an innocent and right mirth, there is an ill-timed, guilty mirth. The end of lawful mirth is not heaviness. It is good for the *body*. A physician is glad to see his patient mirthful. He knows that it will act most beneficially, and assist his recovery to health. A mirthful man will not suffer so much physical injury from the wear and tear of life as one who is always sombre and melancholy. Lawful mirth is good for the *mind*. It is the unbending of the bow which breaks if it is kept always at its extreme tension. A man who is naturally mirthful—who is ever disposed to see men and things in their brightest colours, must be a creature of hope, and hope has power to surround those who possess her with a paradise of their own creation, which is very independent of outward circumstances. Natural, wholesome mirth will make a man much stronger to do and to bear all the duties and trials of life. But natural, lawful mirth is only proper to godly men. Christians are the only people in the world who have reason to be glad. All those who are worthy of the name ought to be able, amidst all the saddening influences of life, to hold fast such a confidence in God as shall leave room for the play even of mirth. But the man who is in a state of alienation from God has no reason to be mirthful, his mirth must be either feigned or the result of a thoughtless disregard of his own relations to God and eternity. The "end" of such mirth must be "heaviness."

II. **Laughter is not always an index of feeling.** There is doubtless much that passes for mirth among the ungodly that is merely a blind to conceal intentions or feelings deeply hidden in the soul. The seducer laughs at the fears and misgivings of his victim, but his laugh is not the laugh of the light-hearted, God-fearing man. Its very ring tells any unprejudiced hearer that there is a flaw somewhere, and it is only assumed to enable him to effect his purpose. In such laughter there may not be present actual sorrow, but there is an entire absence of gladness of heart. But laughter often veils the deepest and most heartfelt misery. The poor drunkard will laugh at the debauchery of the past night while he feels a bitter consciousness of his degradation. Many a man laughs with his gay companions, and all the while sees a dread future rising up before him which he trembles to meet. The *character* of him who laughs will afford the best clue by which to determine whether or not the laughter is the outcome of genuine mirth.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Already the wise king was beginning to experience what he more fully states in Eccles. ii. 2; vii. 6. Men's very pleasures turn into their opposites.—*Fausset.*

Not of its own nature, of course; for a proverb has already said that there is a "*joy*" which is not our foe. Not this is always the case; but there is such a case. Because the wicked get nothing really but their "ways" (verse 14).—*Miller.*

The sun doth not ever shine: there is a time of setting. No day of jollity is without its evening of conclusion, if no cloud of disturbance prevent it with an overcasting. First God complains, men sing, dance, and are jovial and neglectful; at last man shall complain, and "God shall laugh at their calamity." Why should God be conjured to receive that spirit dying which would not receive God's Spirit living?—*T. Adams.*

As soon might true joy be found in hell as in the carnal heart. As soon might the tempest-tossed ocean be at rest as the sinner's conscience (Isa. lvii

20, 21). He may feast in his prison, or dance in his chains. . . . . But if he has found a diversion from present trouble, has he found a cover from everlasting misery? It is far easier to drown conviction than to escape damnation. . . . . But the end of that mirth implies another with a different end. Contrast the prodigal's mirth in the far country with his return to his father's house when "they began to be merry."—*Bridges.*

Every human heart carries the feeling of disquiet and of separation from its true home, and of the nothingness, transitoriness of all that is earthly; and in addition to this, there is many a secret sorrow in everyone which grows out of his own corporeal and spiritual life, and from his relation to other men; and this sorrow, which from infancy onward is the lot of the human heart, and which more and more deepens and diversifies itself in the course of life, makes itself perceptible even in the midst of laughter, in spite of the mirth and merriment, without being able to be suppressed or expelled from the soul, returning always the more intensely, the more violently we may for a time have kept it under, and sunk it in unconsciousness. From the fact that sorrow is the fundamental condition of humanity, and forms the back-ground of laughter, it follows that it is not good for man to give himself up to joy, viz., sensual (worldly), for to it the issue is sorrow. —*Delitzsch.*

There are two sorts of joys—the joy natural and the joy spiritual; the joy of vanity and the joy of verity; a joy in the creature and a joy in the Creator; a joy in a mutable thing and a joy in a matter immutable. The spiritual joys are the joys of the palace. The natural joys are the joys of prisoners. These are to worldlings that are without God seeming joys, because they know no better. They cannot get Penelope, they will be suitors to her maidens. . . . . The godly are like the ant, they are first weary, then merry; but the ungodly are like the grasshopper, first they sing and then they sorrow.—*Bishop Abernethy*, 1630.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 14.

Satisfaction and Dissatisfaction.

I The position and character of the backslider. The word suggests that there has been a time in the past when his moral standing was high. There must have once been a going forward, if there is now a sliding backward. Up to a certain time progress was made. Of many followers of our Lord it is written that from a certain period "they went back and walked no more with him." (John vi. 66). They had walked with him in outward discipleship at least, and it is probable that their hearts had been more or less influenced for good. Their "walking no more" was a going back probably in outward life, certainly in right disposition towards the Christ of God. The man of our text is "a backslider in heart." Then there must once have been a going forward of his soul towards God and goodness, an onward movement towards righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. But the forward movement has ceased—the retrograde movement has set in within the man, although it may not immediately be seen in his outward conduct. Solomon was himself a sad example of a backslider. In his early days his heart was turned towards his God, his desires after righteousness were strong, his moral progress a reality. No one can read his dedication prayer without feeling that the man who offered it stood in right relations with his God—that his aspirations were after righteousness of heart and life. He is himself a proof of the certain fact that a man can terribly deteriorate in character even after he has given evidence of a progression in the good and the right way.

II. His portion. "He shall be filled with his own ways." Retribution will flow from both his past and present character. The remembrance of what he once was will embitter the present. To think of what *might have been* is in itself a hell when a man feels that by his own act he is now far lower in the moral scale than he once was. How it must embitter the misery of the fallen angels to remember that they once stood sinless before God's throne, and, but for their own act, would stand there still. In one of the writings of Lucian, he represents the ghost of a man who has left the world coming up for judgment before the bar of Rhadamanthus. He had lived so depraved a life that his judge exclaims that a new punishment is needed that will be in some degree adequate to his unparalleled villany. A poor cobbler, standing by, suggests that it will be enough if the cup of Lethe, which was supposed to obliterate all remembrance of the past, and which each shade was permitted to drink as he passed from the dread tribunal, should, in this instance, be withheld. And the criminal was therefore condemned to remember for ever what he had done in life, and this was held to be retribution sufficient for the worst of crimes. And if this is true of every wicked man, surely to be filled with the remembrance of what he once was will be the bitterest cup that can be the portion of every backslider.

III. The portion of the godly man. He, too, shall be filled with his own ways, but it will be the fulness of satisfaction. The foundation of real happiness is in character alone. The blessedness of the Eternal God comes from nothing outside of Himself. It has its foundation in His own perfect character. So nothing outside a man can yield him satisfaction. It must come from what he is—from his partaking in some degree of the character of the ever-blessed God. In proportion as he approaches that—in proportion as he brings forth the fruits of righteousness—will he be conscious of a well-spring of satisfaction which is quite independent of outward circumstances. This well-spring has the advantage of being always at hand. A man may often find himself shut out from external sources of joy, death may part him from those who have largely ministered to his happiness, but wherever he is—whether in this world or another—a "well of water" which is "within him" (John iv. 14) is always at hand. It is needless to remark that this well-spring does not originate with man, but is the outcome of relationship and communion with God.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Temporary backsliding may take place in the true children of God; but the "backslider" *here* is evidently he who, in the language of the apostle, "goes back unto perdition." Solomon alludes to such *perpetual* backsliding on the part of those who thus prove themselves to have been no more than professors—"having the form of godliness, but denying the power thereof." Such characters, whatever appearances they present to the eye of men,—even of the people of God, with whom they associate, never were vitally and savingly one with Christ, and one with true believers in Him. This is as plainly affirmed as it is in the power of language to affirm it. "*They went out from us but they were not of us; for if they had been of us they would no doubt have continued with us; but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us*" (1 John ii. 19).—*Wardlaw.*

Every spot is not the leprosy. Every mark of sin does not prove a backslider. "A man may be overtaken in a fault" (Gal. vi. 1); or it may be the sin of ignorance (Lev. iv. 2., Heb. v. 2) or sin abhorred, resisted, yet still cleaving (Rom. vii. 15-24). *Backsliding* implies a *wilful* step; not always open, but the more dangerous, because hidden. Here was no open

apostasy, perhaps no tangible inconsistency. Nay, the man may be looked up to as an eminent saint, but he is a *backslider in heart.*—*Bridges.*

The upright is satisfied from his own conscience, which though it be not the original spring, yet is the conduit at which he drinks peace, joy, and encouragement.—*Flavel.*

The wicked are travelling; and they seek an end; and they confidently expect it, but they never get it. What they do get, therefore, is their journey. The old man has got about enough of travelling, but enough, if he be an impenitent man, of nothing else, in either world, whatever. The saint may have very little on the earth, but he has made more than his own journey. "*The backslider in heart.*" Not a Christian. A Christian never really backslides. Not, therefore, what our usage means, but a *heart sliding back*, as every lost heart does. The writer has but written a fresh name for the impenitent. Such a sliding heart will just have its journey at last, and nothing for it.—*Miller.*

What a world of sound theology lies in the deliverance of this verse—telling us how much the rewards and punishments of the Divine administration lie in the subjective state, apart from the objective circumstances. —*Chalmers.*

Good men *know within themselves* that they have in heaven a better and more enduring substance (Heb. x. 34); *within themselves*, they know it not in others, not in books, but in their own experience and apprehension. They can feelingly say that "in doing God's will"—not only *for* doing it, or *after* it was now done, but even *while* they were doing it—"there was great reward" (Psa. xix. 11). Righteousness is never without a double joy to be its strength: "Joy in hand and in hope, in present possession and in certain reversion" (Bernard).—*Trapp.*

All engineering proceeds upon the principle of reaching great heights or depths by almost imperceptible inclines. The adversary of men works by this will. When you see a man who was once counted a Christian standing shameless on a mountain-top of impiety, or lying in the miry pit of vice, you may safely assume that he has long been worming his way in secret on the spiral slimy track by which the old serpent marks and smooths the way to death . . . Whatever the enormity it may end in, backsliding begins in the heart . . . There is a weighing beam exposed to public view, with one scale loaded and resting on the ground, while the other dangles high and empty in the air. Everybody is familiar with the object, and its aspect. One day curiosity is arrested by observing the low and loaded beam is swinging aloft, while the side which hung empty and light has sunk to the ground. Speculation is set on edge by the phenomenon, and at rest again by the discovery of its cause. For many days certain diminutive but busy insects had, for some object of their own, been transferring the material from the full to the empty scale. Day by day the sides approached an equilibrium, but no change took place in their position. At last a grain more removed from one side and laid in the other reversed the preponderance, and produced the change. There is a similar balancing of good and evil in the human heart. The sudden outward change proceeds from a gradual inward preparation.—*Arnot.*

Every man, both good and bad, shall feel himself sufficiently recompensed for his service.—*Dod.*

"A good man shall be satisfied from himself." **I. He can bear his own company, his own thoughts.** What is it that makes solitude so irksome to mankind? They cannot bear reflection. . . . . Generally, we know, all is not right. Men do not like to look steadily at themselves, because, like the bankrupt tradesman who dreads striking a balance, they have a secret suspicion that their lives will not bear a rigid scrutiny . . . The good man does not fear to probe his wound to the bottom. **II. He is independent, as other men are not, of earthly vicissi-**

tudes. Men who have their portion here are never safe. The world is a disappointing world, but the good man's eyes are opened to see the glories of a better . . . It is a doomed world, but his treasure is safe . . . Let other men be suddenly driven from the pleasures, occupations, and companions with which habit has made them familiar, and they are like shipwrecked voyagers whose wealth has all gone down in the vessel in which they sailed. He is like a man who has escaped to shore with a casket of jewels in which his whole fortune is invested. **III. He stands for judgment, not at the world's bar, but at the tribunal of his own conscience.** "It is a small thing," said St. Paul, "that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment." Was he, then, a morose man who cared nothing about his neighbours? No, but his conscience was ruled by God's law, and in the very act of submitting himself to Christ as the Lord of his life and soul, he became comparatively independent of all besides.—*J. H. Gurney.*

***MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses* 15—18.**

REVELATIONS OF CHARACTER.

I. Four marks of a foolish man. When a piece of ground is left to itself—left in the hand of nature alone, without the intervention of the hand of man—there will be a variety in its productions, but there will be no wheat—no grain to give seed to the sower and bread to the eater. When human nature is left to itself there will of necessity be a variety in its productions, but, however unlike they may be in many respects, they are all alike in this, that they are equally unprofitable to God and injurious to man. We have here—1. *The man who believes too much in others.* "The simple believeth every word." It is possible to have too much faith. The blessedness of having it in abundance depends entirely upon the foundation upon which it rests—upon the object *in* which a man trusts—in the person in whom he believes. Those who have faith in the words of men and women of worthless character—like the young man of chap. vii. 7—will find their ruin will be in proportion to the confidence. We stigmatise as a fool the man who shows his purse to any wayfarer whom he meets upon the high road; we know that his fellow-traveller may be only seeking a fitting time and place to rob him. In this world of fallen men and women we must withhold our faith until we have some knowledge. There are many now in the world whose foolish credulity has led to the other extreme of universal scepticism. From believing everybody and everything they have come to believe nothing, and to brand "all men" as "liars." He who begins by being a "simple one," who believeth every word, will most likely end in being a disbeliever and a scoffer. We are not required to believe in God without ground for our belief. He does not demand from us an unreasoning credulity, but an intelligent faith. 2. *The man who believes too much in himself.* He "rages," or is presumptuous, and is "confident." As the foolishness of the first man took the form of over-confidence in others, so this man shows his want of wisdom by undue confidence in himself. (On this character see Homiletics on chap. xii. 15, page 271.) 3. *The man who is easily offended.* Such a man reveals his folly by the insignificance of the matters which generally arouse his passion. The man who is "soon angry" is generally more angry about trifles than about things of importance. A parent who is easily vexed by his children's transgressions is generally most severe in punishing those that really least deserve punishment. Such a person does not take into account the amount of moral wrong done, but the amount of immediate and personal inconvenience which he suffers. For if a man is "soon angry" he has no time

to put things in their right light—to weigh the offence in the balance of right and of reason. The man who is soon angry shows that his mind is not filled with high and noble aspirations; if it were, there would be no room for vexation at small offences. God is "slow to anger," because only things worthy of His notice can arouse it—because He is filled with high and holy purposes of good towards the human race. (See also on chap. xii. 16, page 272.) 4. *The man who, by wicked plots against his fellow-men, incurs their hatred.* This man possesses more mental activity than the others. But he uses it against himself, because he uses it against his fellow-men. "He is of wicked devices," and "is hated." A man cannot devise plans of evil any more than of good without mental labour. Probably Satan is the most active creature in the universe. He is ever "going to and fro in the earth, and walking up and down in it." And many of his human children imitate him in this respect. This man has not the simplicity of him who "believeth every word," nor of him who haughtily rejects the counsel of others, nor of him who allows his feelings to carry him away. He sets about his plans with cool deliberateness, but he is a fool for all that. He is a fool, because, as we have seen over and over again, his plans of wickedness will not only fail, but will overthrow himself (see chap. xii. 3, 5, 7). But the special element of foolishness in the man of wicked devices which is here noted is that his way of life is sure to bring him the hatred of his fellow-creatures. No man can afford to set at nought the good-will of his fellow-men. To be an object of universal execration is only the lot of a man who lives to injure others, and it is a very poor investment of life to put it to a use which will only bring such interest.

II. The marks of a wise man. 1. *He walks through life with caution.* To say that a man "looketh well to his going" is only saying that he acts like a rational and responsible creature. Even the animals, in obedience to the instinct of self-preservation, look to their goings, and avoid many dangers which beset them. The smaller birds, though apparently flying about without any care, have a quick eye for the hawk soaring above them, or for the cat crouching beneath. All creatures, whether brutes or men, instinctively look to their goings so far as regards their bodily life. The traveller on a dangerous road instinctively picks his way—does not set down his foot without looking to see where there is firm ground to tread upon. The man whose lot is cast in a city where a pestilence is raging naturally takes all possible precautions to avoid the infection. A mariner does his best to guide his vessel clear of rocks and quicksands. The prudent man extends this caution to every act of his life. As a merchant, he weighs probabilities before he embarks in any enterprise. He does not enter into speculations as men engage in a game of billiards. He considers the results of his actions in relation to others as well as to himself. Above all, he looks to his goings in relation to their morality; he frames his life, as we have before seen (chap. xiii. 14), according to the law of God within him in his conscience, and without Him in the revealed word. 2. *He walks thus cautiously because he recognises moral danger.* He "*fears.*" This makes all the difference in the lives of men. Some recognise the fact that they are in a world full of moral pit-falls and rocks which will be their ruin unless they take heed to their ways, and others do not. Some know the moral atmosphere is laden with moral pestilence, but others do not discern its impurity. The wise man "departs from evil" because he "fears" it—fears it in itself as a soul-destroying power. When a man is a partaker of Divine wisdom, he as instinctively "departs from evil" as he would involuntarily turn aside if he saw a deadly serpent lying in his path, or would parry a sword-thrust made at him by an adversary. His main business is, not to take care of his *life*, but of his *character*.

III. The respective reward of the wise and foolish. The first are *crowned*

by an increase of knowledge, the second have an *inheritance;* but it is only to be given over to their foolishness. The wise man's moral sense becomes more developed, "by reason of use" it is more and more able "to discern good and evil" (Heb. v. 14). He is more and more removed from that simplicity which "believeth every word"—he can "try the spirits, whether they are of God (1 John iv. 1), while the foolish man is more and more the dupe of his own credulity, or of his own self-conceit, and becomes more and more the slave of uncontrolled passion.

ILLUSTRATION OF VERSE 17.

Socrates, meeting a gentleman of rank in the street, saluted him, but the gentleman took no notice of it. His friends, observing what passed, told the philosopher that they were so exasperated at the man's incivility that they had a good mind to resent it. But he calmly made answer, "If you meet any person in the road in a worse habit of body than yourself would you think you had reason to be enraged with him on that account. Pray, then, what greater reason can you have for being incensed at a man for a worse habit of mind than any of yourselves?"

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Verse 15. He who applies himself to wisdom takes heed of his own ways, foreseeing dangers, preparing remedies, employing the assistance of the good, guarding himself against the wicked, cautious in entering on a work, not unprepared for a retreat, watchful to seize opportunities, strenuous to remove impediments, and attending to many other things which concern the government of his own actions and proceedings. But the other kind of wisdom is entirely made up of deceits and cunning tricks, laying all its hope in the circumventing of others, and moulding them to its pleasure, which kind verse 8 denounces as being not only dishonest, but also foolish. — *Lord Bacon.*

"The simple believeth every word," whether true or false, useful or injurious. Charity, indeed, "believeth all things" (1 Cor. xiii. 7), but not things that are palpably *untrue.* It is the *truth* which it readily believes. It believes all that it can with a good conscience to the credit of another, but not anything more. Epicharmus says, "The sinews and limbs of faith are not rashly to believe" (Acts xvii. 11). "The prudent man looketh well to his going" —whether it tends to grace and salvation, or to sin and perdition; he "believeth not every word"—as, for instance, the flattering words of seducers, who commend to him false doctrine or licentious practice (Eph. v. 15).—*Fausset.*

We may apply the verse in all its emphasis of meaning to *eternal concerns.* The simple hear different persons on the subject of religion, and take for granted that all they hear is right. They are easily bewildered by sophistical arguments; led away by appeals to feeling; swayed and mastered by false eloquence; seduced by flattery. They are the sport of all that is novel—"tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine. On the contrary, when interests so vast are at stake the prudent man will feel his way, taking nothing upon trust. He first bends his earnest thought to the question of the divine authority of the Bible—a question next in importance to that of the being of God; and having ascertained its authority, he will go to it, with humble-minded candour and anxiety, to learn its lessons. Having the map he will examine for himself the way to heaven. Having a divine directory, he will trust no human guide.—*Wardlaw.*

History is full of examples of men who have lost their lives by means of their credulity, amongst whom were

those great men, Abner and Amasa . . . Some have been betrayed into the worst of sins, by believing groundless reports of others, as Saul in the case of David, and we might almost add, David himself in the case of Mephibosheth. The nation of the Jews was threatened with desolation by the easy temper of Ahasuerus, who believed without examination the malicious suggestions of the wicked Haman . . . The whole world was ruined by the simplicity of Eve, and the easy credit she gave the serpent.—*Lawson.*

To *believe every word* of God is *faith. To believe every word of man is credulity.* Admit only the one standard; like the noble Bereans, who would not believe even an apostle's word, except it was confirmed by the written testimony (Acts xvii. 11).—*Bridges.*

We are not willing to be blindfolded at our meat, nor to eat our supper without a light, especially in strange places, where we neither know well the fidelity of our host, nor what dishes are set before us, and shall we be more provident for the outward man, than for the inward? Shall we keep out of our bodies such food as is not wholesome and savoury, and receive into our souls such food as will poison us? . . . No wrong is thus done to any man. We use to tell silver and to weigh gold, and yet we prejudge not them at whose hands we receive them.—*Dod.*

Trust is a lovely thing, but it cannot stand unless it get truth to lean on. . . . It is a well-known characteristic of the little child to believe implicitly whatever you tell him. . . It remains a feature of the child until it is worn off by hard experience of the world. . . . In this world a man is obliged to be suspicious. Man suffers more from man than from the elements of nature or the beasts of the field. A time is coming when this species of prudence will be no longer needed. When the people shall be all righteous, there will be no deception on one side, and no distrust on the other.—*Arnot.*

A prudent man looks forward to the consequences of things, and particularly to the consequences of his own conduct. O, how much misery and mischief might be avoided or prevented by attending only to this single principle, for what are most of the calamities we see in the world owing to but this—that men will not look before them? To the want of this wise foresight Moses attributed all the rebellions and enormities of the Jewish people, and therefore breathed forth this ardent prayer on their behalf, "O, that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end" (Deut. xxxii. 29).—*Mason.*

Verse 16. The "evil" from which the "wise man departeth" may mean either *suffering* or *sin.* Both may with propriety be included, the one being the cause of the other.—*Wardlaw.*

Fear is sometimes thought to be an unmanly principle. But look at the terrible extent of *the evil* dreaded. Without it is vanity and disappointment (Rom. vi. 21). Within it is the sting of guilt (1 Cor. xv. 56). Upward we see the frown of God (John iii. 36). Downward everlasting burnings (Mark ix. 44). . . . . The *fool,* however, never *fears* till he falls. . . . Such a *fool* was the *raging* Assyrian, blindly *confident* in his own might, till the God whom he despised turned him back to his destruction (2 Kings xix. 28-37).—*Bridges.*

He (the good man) can never *trust in himself,* though he be satisfied *from himself* (verse 14). He knows that his sufficiency is of God; and the *fear* that causes him to *depart from evil* is a guardian to the *love* he feels. Love renders him cautious; the other makes him feel confident. His *caution* leads him *from sin,* his *confidence* leads him *to God.—A. Clarke.*

They which are in greatest safety are farthest from carnal security. The godly have not so many sins as the wicked, and yet they feel them more, and fear them more, and flee from them faster. And the wicked have not more valour than the godly, nor so much freedom from punishment,

and yet go beyond them in audacity and fleshly confidence. When David was dealt with by Nathan, he confessed his fault, he craved pardon, he set his heart to seek help from heaven against his sin; but when Ahab was spoken to by Macaiah, he persecuted the prophet, he proceeded in his purpose, he promised himself a safe return. Josiah, hearing the law of the Lord read by Shaphan, rent his clothes in grief and fear, but Jehoiakim hearing the words of God read by Baruch, in regard of the curses therein denounced, did tear the book and burn it in wrath and fury.—*Dod.*

A wise man knows that the enemy is strong, and that his own defences are feeble. His policy therefore is, not to brave danger, but to keep out of harm's way. He seeks safety in flight. The fool's character is mainly made up of two features; he thinks little of danger and much of himself. He stumbles on both sides alike. That which is strong he despises, and that which is weak he trusts. The dangers that beset him are great, but he counts them as nothing; the strength that is in him is as nothing, but he counts it great. Thus he is on all hands out of his reckoning, and stumbles at every step.—*Arnot.*

As a foolish fear is a betrayer of the strength of man, so a wise fear is the safety of him. Wherefore Cyprian saith, the divine wisdom hath found out an excellent policy that by the help of fear we should be delivered. Great is the benefit of God's providence, that sometimes fear is made both a virtue and a victory. A wise man departeth from evil before he cometh to it, for then the parting, as most easily, so is most happily made.—*Jermin.*

Fear a religious principle. The beginning of religion in the heart is a subject of curious inquiry and of great practical importance. There is no sufficient reason for supposing that it is in all men alike, we have no rule for saying that religion must either necessarily, or that it does usually proceed from the same cause. Different men are affected by different motives; and what sinks deep into the heart of one makes little impression upon another. . . . Thus it is, that religion sometimes, not seldom indeed, has a *violent* origin in the soul, and begins in terror: "A wise man *feareth* and departeth from evil."—*Paley.*

Verse 17. Some pettish spirits are like fine glasses, broken as soon as touched, and all on fire upon every slight and trifling occasion; when meek and grave spirits are like flints that do not send out a spark but after violent and great collision; *feeble* minds have a *habit* of wrath, and, like broken bones, are apt to roar with the least touch: it argues a very unsanctified spirit to be so soon moved. Let it be like the fire of thorns, quickly extinct.—*Salter.*

As small letters hurt the sight, so do small matters him that is too much intent upon them; they vex and stir up anger, which begets an evil habit in him in reference to greater affairs.—*Plutarch.*

A man who falls into a passion does indeed commit a folly, but yet is far preferable to the coldly and selfishly calculating villain.—*Von Gerlach.*

"A man of wicked devices," one, who when offended, represses the indications of his anger, all the while meditating revenge, and waiting for the opportunity when he can wreak it. As "he that is soon angry dealeth foolishly" as regards himself, so he that wickedly deviseth revenge, while deferring the expression of his anger, bringeth on him the "hatred" of others. Thus there is danger on both sides, in hastiness, and in deferring anger through malice. The latter is the worst offence.—*Fausset.*

The more hot-pulsed sinner may be lost; but the *deep-set* fool excels him both in guilt and danger. Alas! for the well-complexioned, coolly-settled, morally-esteemed, and long-established hypocritical professor. It is not all thinking that this book applauds, but that which is discriminate, the watching of our feet.—*Miller.*

Though religion alloweth to be angry,

yet it forbiddeth to be *soon angry*, because he that is soon angry is as soon dealing foolishly. The haste of his choler maketh him to outrun his understanding, and the smoke of his anger putteth out the light of his judgment.—*Jermin.*

To be angry is to revenge the faults of others upon ourselves.—*Pope.*

As fine gold doth suffer itself to be tried in the fire six or seven times, and yet the heat of the fire doth never change its nature or colour; or as good corn is first threshed with the flail, and then winnowed with the wind, and yet is neither broken with the one nor carried away by the other; even so we should suffer ourselves to be tried by injuries, and yet not by impatience, through anger, change our nature, nor yet our colour, nor be carried away with any inconvenience.—*Cawdray.*

Verse 18. This proverb is especially instructive with respect to the deep inner connection that exists on the one hand between foolish notions, and a poor, unattractive, powerless earthly position, destitute of all influence,—and on the other hand between true wisdom and large ability in the department both of the material and the spiritual. Von Gerlach pointedly says, "There is a certain power of attraction, according as a man is wise or foolish; the possessions also which the one or the other attains are in accordance with his disposition."—*Lange's Commentary.*

The child of Adam is born to folly (Job xi. 12). That is his *inheritance.* He received it from his first father (Gen. v. 3; Psa. li. 5). So long as he remains *simple*, he confirms the title. Unlike an earthly *inheritance*, he cannot relinquish it. He holds it in life, he still holds it firm in death, and reaps its bitter fruits throughout eternity.—*Bridges.*

The prudent has not inherited much at this present date. He has not much of the world. He has not much of another. How shall we express his excellence? He has this poor thing that he calls piety. Where is its worth to him? Why, its worth to him is that it is a splendid "*crown.*" *He makes a crown of knowledge.* That is, he takes his piety, which is a mean, weak beginning, and makes it the badge of a glorious sovereignty. The Christian is a king. And by this is meant, that, when he becomes pious, everything becomes subject to him (1 Cor. iii. 22).—*Miller.*

The world says that none dies without an heir: Religion says that none dies without an inheritance. Everyone dying in this world is heir to himself in the next world.—*Jermin.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 19.

A Levelling Law.

I. This law is now manifest to the inner life of the wicked. If a wicked man has any sense of right and wrong, he is conscious of the superiority of the good man. There is an inward bowing down of the evil to the good which is as real, although invisible, as any outward bending of the person of one man before another. Indeed it is far more real than much outward homage. There are many outward and visible bendings and bowings which are mere matters of form, which are only made to keep up appearances. But the involuntary bowing of the evil man's soul in the presence of the good man is a real act of homage, although there is in it an element of unwillingness. There is a compulsory consent, so to speak, of the man himself against himself. But this genuflexion of soul is no mere pretence.

II. The good man is also conscious of it. He knows that it is so because in the constitution of the universe good is made to rule evil, because the head of the one kingdom—the kingdom of evil—is compelled to acknowledge the

authority of the head of the kingdom of good. His own moral consciousness tells him that it must be so, and he has the declaration of God to confirm it. "*No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper, and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness is of Me, saith the Lord*" (Isa. liv. 17).

III. **What has been occasionally manifested in the outward life, and what is always the inner experience, will one day be universally visible to all the universe.** The revelation of God tells us that there will be a universally visible manifestation of the submission of the evil to the good. And our sense of justice demands that it should be so. A day will come when, at the name of Incarnate Goodness, "every knee shall bow" (Phil. ii. 10), and the servants will have a portion of like reverence. "The sons also of them that afflicted Thee shall come bending unto Thee; and all they that despised Thee shall bow themselves down at the soles of Thy feet" (Isa. lx. 14).—See also Rev. xx. 4. It is also revealed to us *when* this visible manifestation shall take place. "*In the end of this world,*" at the close of the present dispensation, "*the Son of Man shall send forth His angels, and they shall gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity. . . . . then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father* (Matt. xiii. 40-43). "For this manifestation of the sons of God" they wait with "earnest expectation;" "creation groans" for it; Christ Himself awaits it at "the right hand of God" (Heb. x. 12, 13; Rom. viii. 19-22).

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

At one time or other, in one respect or other, the ungodly serve and crouch to the godly. Sometimes they that fear the Lord are lifted up to honour, and then the evil men bow themselves before them. Sometimes, again, the righteous wax rich through God's blessing on their labours, and then come the wicked to their gates for alms and relief. Not only the poor ones, but the great ones, who yet are wicked ones, seek and sue now and then with all submission to the godly for their counsel and help. And I cannot tell how, but such a majesty there is in the godly oftentimes, that most desperately wicked men reverence their faces, and are silent or courteous in their presence.—*Muffet.*

This is not the general rule in the present dispensation. Righteous Lazarus *bowed at the rich man's gate* (Luke xvi. 20). . . . But "the upright shall have dominion over the wicked in the morning" (Psa. xlix. 14; Mal. iv. 1–3). "The saints shall judge the world" (1 Cor. vi. 2).—*Bridges.*

There have been instances in which this proverb was verified in a very remarkable manner. The Egyptians bowed down before Joseph, and Moses, and the Israelites. The proud king of Babylon almost worshipped the captive Daniel, and Elisha's favour was solicited by three kings, one or two of whom were bad men.—*Lawson.*

The wicked serve the righteous; and whether they do it knowingly, they do it wholly, and through eternal ages.—*Miller.*

In times of worldly prosperity, and while the wicked flourish, there is none more lifted up in pride and bravery of outward shows than they are; there is none, then, less esteemed, and more despised, than the good and righteous are. They shall give long attendance before the gates give way to them, and when they are entered a proud eye shall mightily overlook them, a scornful language shall throw them down at their feet. Wherefore Augustine calleth riches wings, by which men in pride fly not only above others, but themselves also. But if the time alter, and either some storm of common calamity beat upon them, or else the hand of God privately seize on them, then none

are more dejected than the wicked, none then more esteemed than the righteous are by them. Then their ways are to the gates of the righteous, and much bowing there is to entreat their prayers unto God, and to obtain help and comfort from them. Then Dives, but fearing hell only, already sees Lazarus in heaven, and fain would come unto him.—*Jermin.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSES 20 *and* 21.

An Aggravated Crime, a Questionable Virtue, and a Present Blessing.

I. A fourfold sin. A man who despises or hates his neighbour sins—1. *In the simple exercise of the feeling.* Hatred, or even the act of despising another, is in itself a sin. Here we must distinguish between hatred of the *person* and hatred of his *practices*—between despising *a man himself* and despising his *actions.* God Himself hates and abhors evil character, but he makes a distinction between a man's character and the man. To hate or to despise any human creature is devilish. 2. *By hating or despising him for his poverty.* Poverty is a calamity often—always a burden and a cross. It is that for which a man should be pitied, and on account of which he should receive the sympathy of his fellow-men. Poverty is a burden heavy enough in itself, to add to it in any way is diabolical. 3. *Because he hates and despises his fellow-sufferer.* It is not a man beneath him, of whose trials he is ignorant, but his *neighbour,* one with whom he is on a level. The proverb speaks of one poor man hating another. Cases are not uncommon in which men who have risen from poverty to wealth hate and despise the class from which they have risen even more than those do who were born to rank and wealth. And sometimes men who have risen are hated by those whom they have left behind in the race. But for a poor man to dislike and to despise another poor man for his poverty, is a most unnatural and aggravated crime. A common calamity generally makes men feel a kinship for each other. Those who partake of a common lot generally feel a common sympathy. The poor do not generally hate and despise the poor. The poor man who does commit this sin against his neighbour commits a double sin against himself, for he knows himself the trials of his poor brother, and, therefore, does not sin through ignorance or inconsiderateness. 4. *Against God.* God "putteth down one, and setteth up another" (Psalm lxxv. 7). It is His ordination that "the poor shall never cease out of the land" (Deut. xv. 11). They are His especial care (Psalm xii. 5, etc.), and He will count any addition to their burden as a wrong to Himself.

II. A questionable virtue. "The rich hath many friends." Friendship with a rich man may spring from *social equality.* There is a natural tendency in men who are equals in anything to form friendships with each other. Men of the same moral standing do so, men of the same intellectual attainments are attracted to each other, and men who are equals in social rank and in wealth are, by the force of circumstances, often thrown into each other's society, and so a friendship which is real *may* be formed. But it is a more questionable bond than that which unites men in the two first-mentioned cases. It may be only a counterfeit of the genuine article, and it is nothing more if wealth is the only bond. Friendships formed upon similarity of intellectual and moral wealth have a far firmer foundation, because they rest upon what is inseparable from the man himself, while friendship founded upon riches has for its foundation what may at any time take to itself wings and fly away. Or the friendship may be one of *social inequality.* A poor man may attach himself to a wealthy man. This, too, *may* be genuine. The friendship *may* be built upon something which both value more than wealth; but if the friendship of the rich with the rich is

regarded with doubt, and requires adversity to test it, much more does the friendship of the poor for the rich. The proof of the genuineness of the metal is the fire, the proof of the seaworthiness of the vessel is the storm, and it is an universally recognised truth that the proof of friendship is power to come uninjured through the fire and storm of adverse circumstances.

III. A present blessedness. "He that hath mercy on the poor, happy is he." 1. Happy because "it is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts xx. 35), because gladness always comes to the heart when an effort has been made to lighten another's burden. 2. Happy in possessing the gratitude and confidence of his poor brother. 3. Happy because he wins the favour of God. (See on verse 31).

ILLUSTRATION OF VERSE 20.

The bees were haunting the flowering trees in crowds, humming among the branches, and gathering honey in the flowers. Said Gotthold, "Here is an image of temporal prosperity. So long as there is blossom on the trees, and honey in the blossom, the bees will frequent them in crowds, and fill the place with their music; but when the blossom is over, and the honey gone, they too will disappear." Temporal gain is the world's honey, and the allurement with which you may entice it whithersoever you will; but where the gain terminates, there likewise do the love and friendship of the world stop.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Ver. 20. Alas! it is a mystery of knowledge to discern friends: "Wealth maketh many friends" (chap. xix. 4); they are friends to the wealth, not to the wealthy. They regard not *qualis sis*, but *quantas*, not how good thou art, but how great. They admire thee to thy face, but inwardly consider thee only as a necessary evil, yea, a necessary devil. . . . Worldly friends are like hot water, that when cold weather comes, are soonest frozen. Like cuckoos all summer they will sing to thee, but they are gone in July at furthest; sure enough before the fall. They flatter a rich man, as we feed beasts, and then feed on him.—*T. Adams.*

How former friendship etween two persons may be transformed into its opposite on account of the impoverishment of one of them, is impressively illustrated by our Lord's parable of the neighbour whom a friend asks for three loaves (Luke xi. 5-8).—*Lange's Commentary.*

The same word in the original which signifieth a friend signifieth a neighbour also, because a neighbour should be a friend. But though a rich man hath friends far and near, a poor man is hated even of his neighbour. He that best knoweth his wants and should most of all pity them, doth least regard him and use him worst. He that is nearest at hand to help him is farthest off from helping him. Wherefore the neighbourhood of man being so bad, God becometh his neighbour, and as it is in the Psalms (cix. 31). *"He standeth at the right hand of the poor to save him."—Jermin.*

Verse 21. The impenitent is the *poorest* among men; and he who neglects him, and lets him go on in his iniquity, of course, is a cruel sinner. "They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that lead many to righteousness, as the stars for ever and ever." He who despises his neighbour "sins," literally "misses," "blunders." He wastes a splendid opportunity, not only for his neighbour, but for himself. The appeal is to *self*, and is made more intense where, instead of "*despising*" our neighbour, we actually "devise evil" against him (See next verse).—*Miller.*

1. *There is sin against the arrangements of God's providence.* 2. *Against the frequent and express commands of His word* (Deut. xv. 7-11); Luke xii. 33; xiv. 12-14). 3. *Against the*

manifestation of His distinguishing love. God has not only avowed Himself jealous for the poor, but "to the poor the gospel is preached," and of those who become the subjects of God's grace, and heirs of glory, a large proportion belong to this class. 4. *In the contempt of God's threatened vengeance against all who neglect them, and of His promised special favour to all who treat them with kindness.*—*Wardlaw.*

We show our contempt of the poor, not only by trampling upon them, but by overlooking them, or by withholding that help for which their distress loudly calls. The Levite and the priest that declined giving assistance to the wounded traveller on the way to Jericho, were notorious breakers of the law of love in the judgment of our Lord. The Samaritan was the only one that performed the duty of a neighbour.—*Lawson.*

Through the gate of beneficence doth the charitable man enter into the city of peace . . . God makes some rich, to help the poor; and suffers some poor to try the rich. The loaden would be glad of ease: now charity lighteneth the rich man of his superfluous and unwieldy carriage. When the poor find mercy they will be tractable; when the rich find quiet, they should be charitable. Would you have your goods kept in peace? First, lock them up by your prayers, then open them again with your thankful use, and trust them in the hands of Christ by your charity.—*T. Adams.*

He that hath mercy on the poor maketh the other's misery to be his own happiness, and as the other is comforted by it, so is he blessed by it. Blessed he is by the poor and his prayers for him, blessed he is by God and His favours upon him. Tabitha had reached out her hand to give unto the poor, and Peter reacheth out his hand in delivering her from death. She had bestowed clothing on the poor, and life is bestowed upon her. Wherefore the exhortation of Chrysostom is, "those things which God hath given us, let us give Him again, that so with advantage they may be again made ours."—*Jermin.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 22.

A Fatal Error and a Certain Good.

I. The mistake of devisers of evil. 1. *They err in relation to the success of their plans.* They think that their wicked devices will succeed, or they would not go to the labour and trouble of devising them. But they make a fatal mistake, because they ignore another plan, which embraces theirs. They forget that there may be a circle of action outside their circle, which may circumvent all their schemes. A man may look at the sea from the lower deck of a vessel and think he can see all that is to be seen. But his thinking so would only prove him to be a fool. The man at the masthead can see much further. A traveller on a plain may have an extensive view, but he who is on the mountain-top takes in all that he can see, and much besides. So it is with the man who devises evil. He can see a little way before him and around him, he thinks, therefore, that he can take in the whole situation at a glance, and can see what is needful for him to do and what can be accomplished to bring his plans to pass. But there is more beyond; God takes a higher position and has a wider outlook. He takes in not only all that the wicked man has seen, but much that he does not see. "*He taketh the wise in their own craftiness; and the counsel of the froward is carried headlong*" (Job v. 13). The device of Haman was so well planned that it seemed to him certain of success. But Mordecai's God had a plan which embraced and out-flanked that of the murderer. The device of Joseph's brethren seemed to embrace all that was necessary to accomplish his ruin, but it was utilised by the righteous Ruler of the Universe to bring to pass his exaltation. The device of evil against the

Divine Son of God is the most palpable instance that the universe has ever seen of the short sighted error of wicked men. 2. *He errs because he will meet with retribution in his own person.* Human rulers are sometimes involved in much perplexity because, although they know that plots are being woven against their government, they are not only at a loss to find a plan by which to bring home the crime to the conspirators, but feel they have no force strong enough to punish them if they are convicted. But God is never at a loss either for means to defeat the purposes of those that devise evil, or to punish them for their devices. He is never driven, by want of power, to yield to those who oppose the good—who work iniquity. (See Homiletics on chap. xii. 12-14, page 268.)

II. The reward of devisers of good. "Mercy and truth." 1. *Even a deviser of good needs mercy.* The very act of devising good sometimes brings a man to need mercy of his *fellow-man.* Daniel devised nothing but good to the king of Babylon, but his very uprightness made him an object of envy and brought him into a condition to need mercy. Or a deviser of good may err in judgment. The best intentioned man is liable to make mistakes. No human being, however benevolent his life, can claim to be exempt from moral infirmities which will sometimes mislead him. Every man therefore needs that his fellow creatures should mingle charity with their judgment of him and with their conduct towards him. And he always needs mercy from *God.* No saint of ancient or modern times has ever been beyond the need of God's mercy, although their very name implies that they are devisers of good. 2. *He equally needs truth.* He needs to be able to depend upon the *word* of another, he needs a certainty of being justly dealt with. A man's success in business largely depends upon his being able to rest upon the fair dealing of others. He wants truth in others to meet his own truthfulness—as he strives to deal justly, and to love mercy, so he desires to be dealt with justly as well as mercifully. 3. *Both these needs shall be met. Sometimes* by men, *always* by God. Experience and history furnish us with many exceptions to the first. Those men of God who have been most eminent devisers of good have often met with anything but mercy and truth from those whom they have desired to benefit. Ignorance or envy has risen up against them, and so the missionary has been slain by the club of the savage abroad, and the reformer has been made the mark of slanderous tongues at home. But everyone has found the testimony of the inspired word to be true in his own experience: *With the merciful Thou wilt show Thyself merciful. With an upright man Thou wilt show Thyself upright* (Psa. xviii. 25).

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

If wicked men employ their thoughts so contrive mischief, and show so much diligence in the service of sin, although they have such a miserable reward, let God's people exercise the same diligence in the service of righteousness, by seeking out and seizing opportunities of doing good, and their labour shall not be in vain in the Lord.—*Lawson.*

Scripture traces actions to principles. Wicked as it is to *do evil,* it is far more hateful to *devise it* (see verse 17). *Devising evil,* therefore, if it comes not to the act, shows the purpose (chap. xxiv. 8).—*Bridges.*

To him who lays himself out in planning and executing designs of benefit to others, there shall be "*mercy and truth.*" From his fellow-men he shall experience universal love and esteem. He shall find sympathy in his distresses and reverses, faithfulness in dealing (for if anything will secure a man from being cheated and defrauded, it will be a character for disinterested

kindness), and the general exercise of practical gratitude. And the Lord will make him to experience His love, and will fulfil to him faithfully all His "precious promises."—*Wardlaw.*

Solomon here is no lawgiver, but an evangelist, leading us unto Jesus Christ. For we can obtain no mercy but in Him only. For "the promises of God are yea and amen in Him."—*Cope.*

Can any one see any flaw in "*Mercy*" and "*Truth?*" *Mercy* is pure benevolence; and *truth* is that other quality of the good, which is commanded in the first table of the law, and answers to a love of holiness. Is there anything right, outside of "*Mercy and Truth?*" Is there anything wrong that the vilest rebel can detect in either one of them? Must "they not err that devise evil," if for no other cause than that "*Mercy and Truth*" stand on the opposite side, and, through eternal ages, are busy in *devising good?—Miller.*

Aristotle relateth of Socrates that he affirmed all virtues to be sciences, all sins to be ignorances. And Aquinas saith of it, that therein he judged in some sort rightly because the will never would incline to evil, unless it were with some ignorance and error of reason. The question, therefore, is not here asked of him that deviseth evil, for he thinketh himself to be right, he doth not think that to be evil which he doth, nor himself to err in doing of it. He attaineth to the end at which he aimeth, and that persuadeth him that he aimeth aright. But so to be in the right way, is quite to wander from the right way; and howsoever such an one may not err in his plans and plots, yet doubtless he erreth from the ways of life.—*Jermin.*

Mercy and truth were the best that David could wish for his fast friend Ittai (2 Sam. xv. 20). These two attributes of God shall cause that good devices shall not miscarry. His mercy moves Him to promise, His truth binds Him to perform. "For Thy word's sake, and according to Thine own heart Thou hast done all these things" (2 Sam. vii. 18–21). "According to Thine own heart," that is out of pure and unexcited love, Thou didst give Thy word and promise, and "for Thy word's sake," Thou hast performed it. —*Trapp.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 23.

The Profit of Labour.

1. *The profit of social honour.* It is both natural and right that a man should desire the respect and good-will of those around him. Nothing is more certain than that he who lives without working in some form or another, either for himself or for others, will not receive this reward. Those who are poor, and do nothing, sink into beggary and consequent dishonour; those who are rich, and have nothing to do—or rather, who do nothing—are not held in honour, either in life or after death. "Pray, sir, of what disease did your brother die?" said the Marquis Spinola one day to Sir Horace Vere. "He died, sir," was the answer, "of having nothing to do." "Alas!" said Spinola, "that is enough to kill any general of us all." Honour cannot come from idleness, but labour brings not only honour while living, but gives us a title to be regarded with respect after we have left the world. Of no man who has lived to any purpose can it ever be said that *he died of having nothing to do.* 2. *The profit of bodily health.* A body which does not labour, either with brain or hand, is an easy prey to disease. The brain if used becomes strengthened for further use. The whole bodily frame is kept in health by wholesome work. 3. *Profit to the moral nature.* Labour calls for some form of self-sacrifice. It developes habits of painstaking and diligence which are helpful to a man's moral nature. It helps the spiritual part of the man by helping the bodily, inasmuch as a strong

and healthy body is the best instrument for a morally healthy soul. 4. *The profit of material gain.* In all free countries a man gets some wages for work. It may not be a fair remuneration, but there is some profit of this kind attached to it. There are, of course, exceptions to this proverb, as for instance, the labour of the man who devises evil in the former verse, or that of those whose poverty compels them to work, even to the injury of soul and body, for a miserable pittance which is not worthy the name of wages. Such, alas, is the lot of many even in our own country. The antithesis of this proverb, simply states that talk will not do instead of work. When men do nothing but talk, their talk is certain to be of that worthless kind condemned in chapter x. 19 (See Homiletics on page 168).

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Get leave to work
In this world—'tis the best you get at all;
For God, in cursing, gives us better gifts
Than man in benediction. God says "Sweat
For foreheads," men say "Crowns" and so we are crowned,
Ay, gashed by some tormenting circle of steel
Which snaps with a secret spring. Get work, get work;
Be sure 'tis better than what you work to get.
. . . . . .
Be sure, no earnest work
Of any honest creature, howbeit weak,
Imperfect, ill-adapted, fails so much,
It is not gathered as a grain of sand,
To enlarge the sum of human action used
For carrying out God's end.

Mrs. Browning.

There is a perennial nobleness, and even sacredness in work. Where he never so benighted, forgetful of his high calling, there is always hope in a man that actually and earnestly works: in idleness alone is there perpetual despair. Work, never so mammonish, mean, *is* in communication with nature: the real desire to get work done will itself lead one more and more to truth, to nature's appointments and regulations, which are truth. The latest gospel in this world is, Know thy work and do it. "Know thyself:" long enough has that poor self of thine tormented thee; thou wilt never get to "know" it, I believe! Think it not thy business, this of knowing thyself; thou art an unknowable individual; know what thou can'st work at; and work at it, like a Hercules! That will be thy better plan. It has been written, "an endless significance lies in work," a man perfects himself by working. Foul jungles are cleared away, fair seed-fields rise instead, and stately cities; and withal the man himself first ceases to be a jungle and foul unwholesome desert thereby. Consider how, even in the meanest sorts of labour, the whole soul of a man is composed into a kind of real harmony, the instant he sets himself to work! Doubt, Desire, Sorrow, Remorse, Indignation, Despair itself, all these like hell-dogs lie beleaguering the soul of the poor day-worker, as of every man: but he bends himself with free valour against his task, and all these are stilled, all these shrink murmuring far off into their caves. The man is now a man. The blessed glow of labour in him, is it not as purifying fire, wherein all poison is burnt up, and sour smoke itself thereby is made bright blessed flame?—*Carlyle.*

Industry need not wish; and he that lives upon hopes will die fasting. There are no gains without pains, then help hands, for I have no lands, or, if I have, they are smartly taxed. He that hath a trade hath an estate, and he that hath a calling hath an office of profit and honour; but then the trade must be worked at, and the calling followed, or neither the estate nor the office will enable us to pay our taxes. —*Franklin.*

He that labours is tempted by one devil; he that is idle by a thousand. *Italian Proverb.*

As in religion, it is not the man who speaks but the man who does that gives proof of his sincerity; so in

earthly business, it is not the man who talks fluently, and lays down plausible schemes of business, but the man who labours and does all his work that has reason to expect the blessing of Providence. Those that wear their working instruments in their tongues are always the most useless, and sometimes the most hurtful members of society.—*Lawson.*

A busy tongue makes idle hands. If the mouth *will* be heard, the noisy loom must stop; and he who prefers the sound of his tongue to that of his shuttle, had need at the same time be a man who prefers talk to meat, hunger to fulness, starvation to plenty.—*Wardlaw.*

Rich beyond conception is the profit of spiritual labour (chap. x. 16). "The Son of Man gives to the *labourer* enduring meat. The violent take the kingdom of heaven by force. The *labour* of love God is not unrighteous to forget" (John vi. 27; Heb. vi. 10). But *the talk of the lips* gives husks, not bread. Where there are only shallow conceptions of the Gospel, and no experimental enjoyment of Christian establishment, it is "all running out in noise." Says Henry: "There is no instruction because there is no 'good treasure within' (Matt. xii. 35). "What manner of communications are these that ye have one to another?" is a searching question (Luke xxiv. 17). Ministers, doctrines, the externals, circumstantials, disputations on religion—all may be the mere skirts and borders of the great subject, utterly remote from the heart and vitals. . . . . A religious tongue without a godly heart tendeth *only to penury.—Bridges.*

This is a difficult sentence. We have found it hard to vindicate its sense. The grammar is all obvious, and on that very account the reading is singularly fixed. But "*all labour*" is anything else than "*profitable;*" and the "*talk of the lips*" (chap. xxxi. 26) is one of the grandest ways of doing good among men. We understand it in a religious sense. All these proverbs might be worldly maxims, some of them actually in use; all of them with a show of wisdom; some of them utterly unsound; but all of them, when adopted by the Holy Ghost, and turned in the direction of the Gospel, true, in their religious aspect. So, now, in this peculiar instance, "*all labour*" might seem to promise well among the thrifty, but sometimes ruins men, even in this world, and is sure to ruin them, if worldly, in the world to come. But now, as a religious maxim, it is without exception. "*All labour*" of a pious kind is marked, and will be gloriously rewarded out of the books of the Almighty. "*All labour*" of the impenitent, for their soul's salvation, has "*profit;*" literally, *something over.* It brings them nearer. If continued long enough, it will bring them in; that is, if it be honest (Heb. xi. 6); while "*the talk of the lips,*" or, possibly, "*an affair of the lips,*" that is, *mere intention,* does "*only*" mischief. Mark the balance between "*all*" and "*only.*" Seeking is "*all*" of it an advance. Intending is "only" a retreat. One gains a step, the other loses one. Starting up actually to work, if honest, is an advance towards wealth; while intention, which is but *an affair of the lips, tends only* to make us poor indeed.—*Miller.*

When God gave man this curse, in labour thou shalt eat, he gave labour this blessing, to increase and multiply. It is a plant that prospereth in any soil, it is a seed that taketh well in any ground. For the labourer's hire is never kept back by God . . . Talking is not truly labour, the labour is rather to hold one's peace. According as St. Ambrose speaketh "It is a harder thing to know how to be silent than how to speak. For I know many to speak, when they know not how to hold their peace." But it is a rare thing for any man to hold his peace, when to speak no way doth profit him. But no labour is so well spared as this, and sitting still is nowhere so commendable as in the lips.—*Jermin.*

They that painfully and conscientiously employ themselves in any vocation, how base and contemptible

soever it seem to be, are in the Lord's work, and Him they serve, as the apostle speaketh even of bondmen, and is it possible that His workmen shall work without wages or sufficient allowance? He reproveth those men which neglect to give to the hireling his recompense for his travail, or fail in due time to discharge it, and shall we think then that He will be careless of His own servants Himself? They have God's word for their security that they shall not be unprovided of so much as is expedient for them. If He say once that in all labour there is profit, they shall never have cause to contradict Him.—*Dod.*

It is only by labour that thought can be made healthy, and only by thought that labour can be made happy; and the two cannot be separated with impunity.—*Ruskin.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 24.

WEALTH WITH AND WITHOUT WISDOM.

I. Both a wise man and a fool may attain to wealth. The intellectually wise, and the man who lacks mental ability, may both possess great riches. There are many who have vast estates and no more wisdom to manage them than an infant, and there are those whose ability is equal to their wealth and position. So with moral wisdom. Abraham, the friend of God, "was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold" (Gen. xiii. 2). Job, who had the Divine testimony to his "perfectness" and "uprightness," was "the greatest of all the men of the east" (Job i. 3). But many godless men like those mentioned in our Lord's parables (Luke xii. 16, 20; xvi. 19–24) have "much goods laid up for many years," and "are clothed in purple and fine linen, and fare sumptuously every day." God is no respecter of persons in the distribution of temporal good in the shape of riches, but if there is any leaning to one class of character more than to another, He would seem rather to favour the ungodly. Because such "have their portion in this life" (Psa. xvii. 14) and in this life *only*; because they have only this heaven upon earth; because they have no desire and conception of anything higher; it seems as if the Ruler of the universe often gives them the only good they are capable of appreciating. Some of the most miserable specimens of humanity that the world has ever seen have sat upon thrones, and a few of the greatest of God's human children have likewise wielded sceptres. So with the crown of wealth; it has been and is worn by men quite irrespective of moral character, but the preponderance seems to be in favour of the moral fool. Looked at in the light of eternity there is no injustice or even mystery in this.

II. But wealth is an adornment to the wise man only. If you dress an Ethiopian in pure white linen you will not change the colour of his skin. The man is what he was though his raiment is changed, and the whiteness of his garments makes his skin look all the blacker. If a tree is barren, the most costly and perfect artificial fruit placed among its leaves will not add to its beauty. It will only produce an incongruity which will be altogether distasteful to the spectator. Its barrenness is only made the more conspicuous. So no wealth can give any dignity to a mental and moral fool. Wealth will not hide the intellectual barrenness, nor cover the black stains upon the man's moral character. Nay, the wealth only brings them more prominently into view. However rich a fool is "the foolishness of fools is folly," and nothing else. But a man who is wise enough to know how to use wealth—especially if he is good enough to put it to the highest and best uses—even though he be neither intellectually great or highly polished, will make his riches a crown—will so

use them as to merit and receive the respect and goodwill of his fellow creatures. Wealth looks best upon the head of one who possesses both intelligence and goodness, but whenever it is studded with the gems of a wise and sympathetic liberality it is a royal diadem—it makes its wearer a king.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

The Christian is rich in this world. We read in the 18th verse of the "prudent making a crown of knowledge." Aladdin was rich when he had nothing but his lamp. If a ray of faith puts creation in bondage to a saint, then not only is his "knowledge a crown," but "his crown is his wealth." What needs Aladdin further than his lamp? The sovereignty of saints, even in a forlorn world, makes a perfect opulence; while "*the folly of fools*," seeing that it could give place to this; seeing that he also could have the lamp; seeing that the crowned princes, the very best of them, were fools like him; and therefore, that it can only be *because he is a fool* that he does not throw off his folly;—all this explains the closing clause, which is terse in its very quaintness; for, for the very reason that "the crown of the wise is their wealth, the foolishness of fools is folly."—*Miller.*

Though, as a fearful temptation (Matt. xiii. 22; xix. 23), no *wise* man would desire riches; yet as the gift of God (1 Kings iii. 13; Psa. cxii. 3)—the gift, indeed, of His left hand (chap. iii. 16)—they may become His *crown*. What a *crown* they were to David and his wise son, as the materials for building the temple (1 Chron. xxix. 1-5; 2 Chron. v. 1); and to Job, as employed for the good of his fellow-creatures (Job xxix. 6-17). So that, though wisdom under all circumstances is a blessing, it is specially pronounced to be "good *with an inheritance*" (Eccles. vii. 11, 12). It is necessary to distinguish between the thing itself and the abuse of it. Wealth is in fact a blessing, when honestly acquired and conscientiously employed. And when otherwise, the man is to be blamed, and not his treasure.—*Bridges.*

What is the most gorgeous and dazzling earthly crown compared with a diadem of which the component parts are the blessings of the destitute relieved, the ignorant instructed, the vicious reclaimed, the afflicted comforted, the dying cheered with the hope of life, the perishing rescued from perdition and brought to God!—*Wardlaw.*

If good men are spoiled of their wealth, they need not lament, as if they had lost their crown. For riches are an ornament of grace to the head of wise men, even when they are lost. Job's patience in the loss of everything, did as much honour to him as his extraordinary beneficence whilst he was the richest man in the East. We honour his memory still more, when he sewed sackcloth upon his skin, and defiled his horn in the dust, than at the time when judgment was his robe and his diadem.—*Lawson.*

As a horse is of no use without the bridle, so are riches without reason.—*Cawdray.*

Not riches but wisdom gives a crown of glory (chap. iv. 9). "The prudent are crowned with *knowledge*," not with riches; therefore, the sense is, *Wisdom* (the opposite of folly), being the crown of the wise constitutes their true riches," and results in the heavenly riches; but the foolishness of fools is not riches to them, as the wise man's crown of wisdom is to him, but is, and continues folly, *i.e.*, emptiness—neither an ornamental crown nor enriching wisdom.—*Fausset.*

The seeming tautology of the second clause is really its point. "The foolishness of fools is . . . ." We expect something else, but the subject is also the predicate. "The foolishness of fools is foolishness." That is the long and the short of it. Turn it as you will, it comes to that.—*Plumptre.*

Wisdom in a poor man is but a petty lord. He may rule himself well, but he shall have little command or power over others. Riches make a wise man a king, and as they crown him with honour by being well used by him, so do they extend his dominion far and wide. Many are subject to the law of his discretion, and the force of his wise authority prevaileth many ways. Well, therefore, doth the crown of riches sit upon his head, whose wise head it is that makes them to be riches. But riches in a fool are his bauble, whereby he maketh himself and others sport. . . . The wise being crowned by them are kings over their riches. They command them to their pleasure and use them to their honour. Whereas it is the folly of fools that they are galley-slaves to their own wealth.—*Jermin.*

Give riches to a fool and you put a sword into a madman's hand; the folly of such fools will soon be foolishness. Why, was it not foolishness before? Yes, but now it is become egregious foolishness. To what end is a treasure, if a man have lost the key that leads to it.—*Trapp.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 25.

DELIVERANCE BY TRUTH.

I. What is implied in a witness bearer. A witness is supposed to give light. Those who have to decide upon a matter seek for the evidence of those who are personally acquainted with the facts. They are expected to testify as to what they have seen and heard, and by thus throwing light upon the subject to further the cause of truth and justice. A witness can only give light by speaking the truth. The words of a truth-teller are like rays of sunlight falling upon an object that was before indistinct, they make plain things which without their aid would be incomprehensible. On the other hand the testimony of a lying witness surrounds everything about which he bears witness with a mist and a darkness, and so foils the efforts of those who are desiring to get a right view of the subject.

II. Life and death are often in the power of those who bear witness. The evidence of a truthful man delivers from death—or from worse than death—those who are innocent, whereas a false witness may deliver them up to punishment. The one is like the lighthouse which enables the sailor to bring his vessel safely into port, the other is like the false light of the wrecker, by means of which the ship is dashed to pieces on the rocks. The first witness for God in Eden who did not belong to the heavenly family was a "false witness who spoke lies." He testified to Eve that God was a hard master, that He had imposed upon her restrictions from a selfish motive, that the punishment which had been threatened would not follow disobedience to the Divine commands. Since this first false witness led our first parents on to death, many a human witness has, in like manner, given to the world false views of the Divine Father which have ended in like results. Both Satan and his servants murder character by bearing false witness. The Incarnate Son of God was pre-eminently "The True Witness (Isa. lv. 4; Rev. i. 5). He came to deliver men by bearing witness of the true character of God from His own personal knowledge (John xvii. 25, 26). "*To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth,*" "*And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free*" (John xviii. 37; viii. 32). "The truth which Christ taught was chiefly on these three points—God, man, immortality. . . . He exhibited *God as love,* and so the fearful bondage of the mind to the necessity of fate was broken. . . . He taught the truth about the *human soul,* that it is not in its right place, that it never is in its right place in the dark prison-house of sin, but

that its home is freedom, and the breath of God's life. . . . He taught truth concerning *immortality*, that this life is not all; that it is only a miserable state of human infancy."—(*Robertson.*) By such testimony this "true witness delivered souls"—"*proclaimed liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound*" (Isa. lxi. 1). On this subject see also on chap. xii. 17, pages 274-276.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

We noticed that what crowned the wise was "*truth*" or "*knowledge*" (verse 18). *Truth* to become *knowledge* must get into the heart. To do so it must be "*witnessed.*" We noticed under the second verse that a man staggered, that is, he did not *walk in levelness*, because he did not see clearly. But, *per contra*, if a man sees clearly he walks in *level ways;* and then, according to our present proverb, he "*saves*' unconsciously the souls of others. This is most clear when the view is negative. Let there be no *witnesses of truth*, and where are the saved? No sinners are rescued in a dead nation. Every Christian is a centre of light. The Church is but a body of Christians. Where there is no Church, where are the penitents? The truth intended to be conveyed is, that he who sees the truth spreads it. While he who sees only "*lies*," which is an exact portrait of the unredeemed, serves in spite of himself as a delusion to his friends, and deceives them into unbelief just in proportion to his influence upon them. Woe be to the wife or child where the husband is a "*deceived witness*" (verse 5). "*Witness*"—not in this case one who bears witness, but one who *witnesses*, in the sense of *seeing.*—*Miller.*

While true testimony may condemn, false testimony may acquit; while the former may destroy life, the latter may save it. It is probable, therefore, that the intended antithesis relates not so much to the *actual fact* of truth saving and falsehood condemning, as to the *dispositions and intentions* of the faithful witness on the one hand and the lying witness on the other. The faithful witness delights in giving testimony that may save life, that will be salutary and beneficial to his fellow-creatures. The lying witness will, in general, be found actuated by a malevolent and wicked purpose; having pleasure in giving testimony that will go to condemn the object of his malice. The sentiment will thus be—*that truth is most generally found in union with kindness of heart, and falsehood with malevolence.* And this is natural; the former being both good, the latter being both evil, falsehood being naturally more akin to malice, and truth to love. *Wardlaw.*

Here again there is something like tautology in the second clause. We expect "destroyeth life" as the antithesis to "delivereth souls." But in this case also there is an emphasis in the seeming absence of it. "A deceitful witness speaketh lies." What worse could be said of him? All destruction is implied in falsehood.—*Plumptre.*

It is the honour of God to be a deliverer of souls, and that is the honour of a true witness. He delivers his own soul and another's: his own from the wrath of God, another's from the injustice of men: his own from wickedness, another's from injury. The deceitful man speaketh not one lie, but many. The lie of perjury to God, the lie of injustice to the judge, the lie of falsehood to the master. Not one but many lies, because one lie usually bringeth many others with it.—*Jermin.*

The special work for which Christians are left in the world is to be witnesses (Acts i. 8). . . Christ does not send his angels to proclaim His word or to wield His power . . . The evidence by which the spirit will convert the world is His truth, uttered from the word, and echoed, still and small, from the meek and quiet life-course of converted

men. . . Two qualifications are required in a witness, *truth* and *love* (Ephes. iv. 15): these are needed, but these will do. . . A witness, in contested cases, after giving evidence in chief, is subjected to cross-examination. A Christian's profession is, and is understood to be, his direct and positive testimony that he is bought with a price, and that he is bound to serve the Lord who bought him: but as soon as this testimony is emitted, the examination begins. If he be not a true witness, he will stumble there. Either or both of two persons, with very different views, may subject a witness to cross-examination—the judge or the adversary. It is chiefly done by the adversary, and in his interests. The Supreme himself puts professing disciples to the test before the court of the world; but when He so tries His children, the truth comes forth purer and brighter by the trial. He who goes about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour, tempts to destroy. He puts the witness to the question in order to break him down. . . . We speak of the evidences of religion, but, after all, Christians are the best evidences of Christianity. . . Let no man who bears Christ's name lay the unction to his soul, that if he does no good he does no evil. One of the heaviest complaints made in the prophets against Jerusalem for her backsliding, is that she was a "comfort" to Samaria and Sodom (Ezek. xvi. 54); that those who had the name and place of God's people, so lived as to make the wicked feel at ease. . . If Christians live as like the world as they can, the world will think itself safe in its sin; and those who should have been the deliverers, will become the destroyers of their neighbours.—*Arnot.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 26.

A Sure Refuge.

I. What is to be found in the fear of the Lord? "Strong confidence." The confidence is in the divine character, and is based upon a knowledge of it, in contrast to a false security which has its foundation in ignorance. There is a reverence of one being for another which is the outcome of ignorance, but this cannot generate that strong confidence which can be a sheet anchor to the human soul. The old Romans, in the early days of their history, had a reverence for their divinities, but it was a reverence of ignorance, it was a reverence for unrealities, and could never yield them that confidence which all men in all ages need to comfort them in trial and inspire them with hope in the mysteries of human life. There are men now who are quite ignorant of the Divine character and yet seem to possess great confidence that all will be well with them—that God, in fact, will not do what He has said He will do in relation to them. But this confidence is also false; it is based, not upon fear of the Lord, arising out of acquaintance with Him, but upon want of knowledge, and consequently upon disregard of His claims. But the strong confidence of our text is the fruit of a reverence which has its foundation in acquaintance with the holiness of the Divine Father, which is the outcome of a knowledge of His laws, of His threatenings, and of His promises. It is the confidence which a child reposes in a good parent, because it knows from experience—from an every-day contemplation of that parent's life—what good grounds it has to reverence and to trust him. This confidence is strong enough to inspire the soul with courage to face the difficulties of human life and to vanquish them. Confidence in a fellow-creature is often inspiration. A soldier's confidence in his general, a seaman's confidence in his captain, inspires to the performance of deeds of heroism. And confidence in the living God, in that King who can do no wrong, in that leader who can make no mistake, has been the inspiration of millions of men

and women in all ages and under all circumstances. It has been found strong enough to enable them to be heroes through a long life of poverty, of ignominy, of sickness, and it has sustained all in the hour of death, and many in the death of martyrdom. By the strength born of this "strong confidence," they have "*subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire,*" *etc.* (Hebrews xi. 33-38).

II. This confidence gives men God for a refuge. 1. *He is a present refuge from conscious guilt.* This is a need which every man feels as soon as his conscience is awakened as surely as the man-slayer felt his want of a stronghold of defence from the avenger of blood. The God against whom man has sinned becomes when His character is understood, the object of hope for pardon. The sinner can only "flee from God, by fleeing to God." 2. *He is a present refuge from al foes, whether spiritual or human.* "Who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?" (1 Pet. iii. 13) is a question which can never be answered. It is impossible that the children of God can ever be without a resource in whatever peril of soul, body, or estate they find themselves, for—"If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. viii. 31.)

ILLUSTRATION.

The Rev. J. W. Fletcher had a profligate nephew, who was dismissed from his post as an officer in the Sardinian army. One day, by presenting a pistol to his uncle, General de Gons, he extorted from him a draft for 500 crowns. With this he called on Mr. Fletcher, and, as he exhibited it with exultation, Mr. F. took it, folded it up and put it into his pocket, saying: "It strikes me, young man, that you have possessed yourself of this note by some indirect method; and in honesty I cannot return it but with my brother's knowledge and approbation." Instantly the pistol was at his breast, and he was told, as he valued his life, to return the draft. "My life," replied Mr. Fletcher, "is secure in the protection of the Almighty power who guards it." This led the nephew to remark that his uncle De Gons was more afraid of death. **"Afraid of death!" rejoined Mr.** Fletcher, "do you think I have been twenty-five years the minister of the Lord of life to be afraid of death now? No, sir, thanks be to God who giveth me the victory! It is for you to fear death who have every reason to fear it. You are a gamester and a cheat, yet call yourself a gentleman . . . . Look, there, sir, look there! See the broad eye of Heaven is fixed upon us. Tremble in the presence of your Maker, who can in a moment kill your body, and for ever punish your soul in hell." The youth was disarmed, and the interview ended in his uncle praying with him, and promising to give him a hundred crowns to relieve his immediate necessities.—*From "The Proverbs Illustrated."*

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Fear is anything but a refuge in itself. But as faith was imputed to the patriarch for righteousness (Rom. iv. 22), so this need not cloud Christ's merit. Christ has so saved us that *fear* becomes our hope. He who has experienced "*fear*" has gone into a retreat; nothing can dislodge him from it. If the lost tremble, let them learn to *fear*; for by *fear* they become children of God, and as *children of God* they have an eternal *refuge.—Miller.*

Fear hath torment (1 John iv. 18; Acts xxiv. 25). It is the trembling of the slave (Rom. viii. 15); the dread of wrath, not of sin. There is no *confidence* here. It is pure selfishness. It ends in self. There is no homage to God. But the true *fear of God* is a holy, happy, reverential principle (see Psa. cxii. 1; xxxiii. 18; cxlvii. 11); not that which love "casts out" (1 John iv. 18), but which love brings in. We fear, because we love. We fear, yet we are not afraid (Psa. cxii. 1-7). The holiest and humblest is the most fixed and trusting heart. The fear of man produces faintness (Jonah i. 3; Gall. ii. 12). The *fear of the Lord*—such is the Christian paradox—emboldens. Its childlike spirit shuts

out all terrors of conscience, all forebodings of eternity. Abraham sacrificed his son in the *fear of the Lord;* yet fully *confident* "that God was able to raise him up from the dead" (Gen. xxii. 12, with Heb. xi. 17-19).—*Bridges.*

What confidence shall be strong, if this is not strong? He confides in that which is all infinite:—the truth, the love, the wisdom, the power of his covenant God! Whatever the love of God has induced Him graciously to promise, no power or combination of powers in existence can stay from being done.—*Wardlaw.*

It does not mean that the fear of God is something on which one can rely, but that it has (xxii. 19, Jer. xvii. 7) an inheritance which is enduring, unwavering, and not disappointing in God, who is the object of fear; for it is not faith, nor anything else subjective, which is the rock that bears us, but this rock is the object that faith lays hold of (Cf. Isa. xxviii. 16).—*Delitzsch.*

Gregory, writing upon those words in Job iv. 6, "Is not this thy fear, thy confidence?" etc., saith that although Eliphaz did wrongfully reprove Job, yet he doth rightly set down the order of the virtues, when he joineth fortitude to fear, For in the way of God we must begin with fear that we may come to fortitude. For as in the course of the world boldness breedeth courage, so in the way of God it breedeth weakness, and as in the course of the world fear begetteth weakness, so in the way of God it bringeth forth confidence.—*Jermin.*

The fear which brings a sinner submissive and trustful to the sacrifice and righteousness of the Substitute is itself a confidence. . . . Those who went early to the sepulchre and looked into the empty grave where the Lord lay, departed from the place with "fear and great joy." A human soul made at first in God's image has great capacities still. In that large place fear and great joy can dwell together. . . . The filial fear of the children may be known by this, that it takes in beside itself a great joy, and the two brethren dwell together in unity. . . . "His children shall have a place of refuge." They "are kept by the power of God." . . . . There are two keepings very diverse from each other, and yet alike in this, that both employ as their instruments strong walls and barred gates. Great harm accrues from confounding them, and therefore the distinction should be kept clear. Gates and bars may be closed around you for the purpose of keeping you in, or of keeping your enemy out. The one is a prison, the other a fortress. In construction and appearance the two edifices are in many respects similar. The walls are in both cases high and the bars strong. In both it is essential that the guards should be watchful and trusty. But they differ in this: the prison is constructed with a view to prevent escape from within, the fortress to defy assault from without. In their design and use they are exact contraries. The one makes sure the bondage, the other the liberty of its inmates. In both cases it is a *keep*, and in both the *keep* is strong—the one to keep the prisoner in, the other to keep the enemy out. The fear of the Lord to those who are within, and have tasted of His grace, is the strong confidence of a fortress to defend them from every foe; to those who look at it from without, it often seems a frowning prison that will close away the sunlight from all who go within its portals, and waste young life away in mouldy dungeons. Mistakes are common on this point, and mistakes are disastrous. . . . Though the refuge is provided, and the gate standing open, and the invitation free, poor wanderers stand shivering without because a suspicion clings to the guilty conscience, that the "strong tower" offered as a safe dwelling place will turn out to be a place of confinement from genial society and human joys.—*Arnot.*

FOR HOMILETICS ON VERSE 27 SEE ON THE PRECEDING VERSE AND ON CHAPTER XIII., 14 PAGE.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Verses 26 and 27. The whole system of religion is expressed in the *fear of God.* A religion which makes this fear the principle of action implicitly condemns all self-confidence and presumptous security, enjoins a constant state of vigilance and caution, a perpetual distrust of our own hearts, a full conviction of our natural weakness, and an earnest solicitude for Divine assistance. It keeps men always attentive to the motives and consequences of actions; always unsatisfied with present attainments; always wishing to advance and always afraid of falling away. The blessings it brings in its train are—1. *Security.* "Strong confidence." "Place of refuge." "Great is the confidence of a good conscience." "Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us, and He *will deliver* us" (Dan. iii. 17). "None of these things move me" (Acts xx. 24). When they told Numa that the enemy was at the gates, he simply answered, "But I am sacrificing." When Antonius was threatened, he replied, "We have not so worshipped, neither have we so lived, that we should fear their conquering us" (*Trapp*). If such was the confidence of heathens, what should be that of Christians? God's children "know in whom they have believed" (2 Tim. i. 12). 2. *Consolation.* "A fountain of life." So called from the constancy of its supply. A confluence of blessings, grace here and glory hereafter—present and future—upper and nether springs. David combines both when he says, "Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsel and afterward receive me to glory" (Psa. lxxiii. 24). He refers to the future when he says, "Oh, how great is Thy goodness, which Thou hast laid up for them that fear Thee, which Thou hast wrought for them that trust in Thee before the sons of men!" (Psa. xxxi. 19). Here he speaks not only of what God has *laid up*, but of what He has *laid out*—not only of what he has in prospect, but of what he has in experience. 3. *Deliverance from dangerous temptations.* "To depart from the snares of death." "The way of this world is like the Vale of Siddim (Gen. xiv. 10), treacherous and slippery and full of snares" (*Trapp*). But he that fears the Lord has many safeguards. "The integrity of the upright shall guide them" (chap. xi. 3).—*S. Thodey.*

Verse 27. "The law of the wise" is "the fear of the Lord," for of both the same things are predicted (chap. xiii. 14).—*Fausset.*

Not only does Christian confidence open a cover from the guilt, but it roots out the power of sin. For among the countless throngs of the redeemed, not one finds a cover from condemnation, who is not renovated into spiritual life. *Bridges.*

The fear of the Lord teacheth wisdom, and wisdom teacheth that an evil feared is much the sooner avoided, and that it is a great safety of life to fear death. Wherefore St. Cyprian saith, "Be ye fearful, that ye may be without fear; fear the Lord, that ye may not fear death." For the same fountain doth not send forth bitter waters and sweet; life and death do not issue from the same spring.—*Jermin.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 28.

A KING'S TRUE GLORY.

I. Human rulers are dependent upon their people for honour. 1. *The safety of the king's crown depends largely upon the number of his subjects.* This was certainly the case in the days of Solomon, and is so now to a large extent. Small kingdoms are very likely even in these days to be engulfed by more powerful states—by those who can bring into the field an overpowering number of warriors.

Numbers hold the diadems on the heads of the rulers of the great nations of Europe. That Palestine was to some extent an exception to this rule was due to the especial providence of Jehovah—that it was ever overpowered by numbers was because its inhabitants forsook their covenant God. But the general rule holds good. 2. *The prosperity of their land depends upon its being well populated.* Other things being equal, a populous kingdom will do more business with other nations—will plant colonies and mix more with the inhabitants of other lands; and all these things extend a nation's influence and so make its ruler's position a more honourable one.

II. **It is therefore a matter of self-interest that a ruler should govern his people righteously.** This is a lesson which the potentates of the earth have been slow to learn although the page of history abounds with so many examples of the peril of disregarding it. It would be the destruction of the head if it were to say to the other members of the body, by which it is sustained in life and health, "I have no need of thee." The existence of the one depends upon that of the other. And it is not less so with the body politic. The safety and honour of the king is bound up in the well-being of his subjects Where the one is dependent upon the many, self-interest, as well as duty, point to his so ruling that his people may enjoy peace and prosperity and so multiply.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

There is a natural tendency in the population of a country to increase. When, therefore, population diminishes, there must be some cause *counterworking nature.* The subjects of a country may be wasted in destructive and depopulating wars; they may be driven by oppression to quit their native land, and to seek a refuge in more distant regions; they may be starved and reduced by measures that are injurious and ruinous to trade—measures that keep up the price of bread and depress the wages of labour. . . . The existence of a thriving vigorous population is a mark of freedom, of wise and impartial legislation, of paternal care—and it is the palladium of all that is desirable in the results of human rule.—*Wardlaw.*

A sentiment arrayed against feeble princes who nevertheless array themselves with disproportionate splendour; and this, as also verse 34, is designed to call attention to the principle, that it is not external and seeming advantages, but simply and solely the inward competence and moral excellence, whether of the head or of the members of a commonwealth, that are the conditions of its temporal welfare.—*Lange's Commentary.*

How great, then, is *the honour* of our heavenly *King in the countless multitudes of His people!* How overwhelmingly glorious will it appear when the completed number shall stand before His throne (Rev. vii. 9, 10); each the medium of reflecting His glory (2 Thess. i. 10); each with a crown to cast at His feet (Rev. iv. 10, 11), and a song of everlasting joy to time to His praise (Rev. v. 9).—*Bridges.*

All grades depend upon their inferiors. The poor have us in their power. To be kind to them is a dictate of common selfishness. Carried into a spiritual light, the truth becomes much wider Half of heaven will be what we did for the poor. Solomon was familiar with this as a king; but he marks the sentence as one for all humanity. If a man wishes to be comfortable on earth, let him make his inferiors great. And, if he wishes to be rich in heaven, let him cultivate with assiduous zest the graces of the perishing.—*Miller.*

The occurrence of this political precept in the midst of the maxims of personal morality is striking. Still more so is its protest against the false ideal of national greatness to which Eastern kings, for the most part, have bowed down.—*Plumptre.*

The people are the king's best treasury; in their scarcity he cannot

be rich. Worthy was the speech of that Goth, a king of Italy, who, speaking of his subjects, saith, "Our harvest is the rest of all."—*Jermin.*

NOTE.—The population of England and Wales in 1700 was about 5,475,000. At the beginning of the present century it was between eight and nine millions; it now exceeds twenty millions.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 29.

GREAT UNDERSTANDING.

I. There are times and occasions when wrath is not only allowable, but right. A man who is incapable of being angry lacks an element of perfection. Anger against wrong-doing is possible without any feeling of vindictiveness or malice towards the wrong-doer. There is much in the Bible about the "wrath of God" (Rom. i. 18), although He is "love" (1 John iv. 8). A child does not honour a parent the less, but the more, because he knows that parent can be angry when there is just occasion. Neither could we reverence God if He was a Being who could not be displeased.

II. But a man who is slow to wrath shows—1. *That he understands himself.* Even the holy and all-perfect God is "slow to anger" (Neh. ix. 17). Although He could not misjudge any creature, and although He could never by any possibility allow His wrath to exceed the bounds of perfect justice and righteousness, He is not "soon angry." The man who understands his own frailty and short-sightedness will not allow anger to take possession of his spirit in a hurry, if he is to "be angry and sin not" (Ephes. iv. 26), he must only be angry after due reflection upon the cause of his anger. 2. *That he understands others.* Hasty and passionate anger never convinces the offender of his guilt, but awakens wrath in his breast also. But the displeasure which is the result of calm consideration may carry some weight with it. On this subject see also Homiletics on verse 17.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

"He that is hasty of spirit *exalteth* folly." He gives folly for the time being the throne and sceptre of his mind, and fulfils her preposterous and mischievous dictates. And when reason, for the time deposed, resumes her vacated seat, she finds no easy task before her to repair the evils which have been done in the brief but stormy reign of passion.—*Wardlaw.*

I. The passion of anger is like wind to the ship: so it is to the soul called to steer its course to Immanuel's land. 1. If there be a dead calm, and the winds blow not at all, or very weakly, the ship does not make way. And if men be so stupid, indolent, and unconcerned, that their spirits will not stir in them, whatever dishonour they see done to God, these are standing still in the way to heaven. And many there be, who are all fire in their own matters, but in those of God their hearts are dead as a stone. Such was the case of Eli: "*His sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not*" (1 Sam. iii. 13). It was not so with Paul: for "*his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry*" (Acts xvii. 16). 2. If the wind is brisk enough, but yet is contrary, the ship will at best have much ado with it, and may be driven into a shore which the crew desired not to see. So if men's anger be in itself sinful, if their anger burn against what is good and just: such anger cannot fail of an unhappy event. 3. Though the wind be not contrary, yet if it be too impetuous and violent, it may dash the ship on rocks, and split it. So though men's anger may have a just ground, yet if it prove excessive and boisterous, it may run men headlong

into great mischiefs. Oft-times reason lets anger into the breast; but then anger turns out reason to the door, and carries on all precipitantly without reason or discretion: like one that brings in coal to his hearth, because of the cold, but unwarily lets it fall on tow, which sets the house on fire. II. He that is slow to wrath. 1. *Is slow to take up anger in his own cause.* It is wisdom indeed to be very tender of God's honour, but more indifferent about our own personal interests, as Moses was. 2. *Manages it warily when it is taken up.* He finds himself on slippery ground, and is therefore slow in his motions. 3. *Is easy to lay it down* (Ephes. iv. 26-27). He shuts it out when there is no more use for it. III. The passionate man proclaims his folly—he proclaims himself—1. *A proud man,* and the proud man is a fool in God's account and in the account of all who understand themselves. 2. *A weak man.* He is a slave to his passions. 3. *An unwatchful man,* who has his enemies within him, without him, round about him, and yet cannot be brought to stand on his guard (Prov. iv. 23, 24).—*Boston.*

Wise anger is like fire from the flint, there is a great ado to bring it out; and when it does come, it is out again immediately.—*Henry.*

The intoxication of anger, like that of the grape, shows us to others, but hides us from ourselves.—*Southgate's "Many Thoughts on Many Things."*

The heaviest body is slowest in going, but his treading is the surest; in like manner, he that is slow to anger recompenses the dulness of his steps with the soundness of his proceeding; for he taketh leisure (as it were) to look to his ways. Tertullian says, "Where the injury is little, there is no need of patience; but where the injury is great, there is the help of patience more needful against it. If they be small wrongs, contemn them for their smallness; if great wrongs, by patience give way unto them in respect of their greatness." The original of *hasty,* is *short-winded.* For as haste in going maketh the breath to be short, so the haste of the soul to anger maketh that to puff and blow on every small occasion; so that the soul is as it were climbing up a great hill, there to *exalt her folly,* for all to behold it.—*Jermin.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 30.

A Sound Heart.

The blessed effects of a contented spirit. The "sound heart" being here placed in contrast to "envy," shows that it means a spirit that is content with its lot in life—that is not ever reaching after the unattainable—that is not jealous of others who are in more favourable circumstances. Such a quietness of spirit is—

1. Favourable to bodily health. The mind of a passionate man wears out the bodily frame, and no passion that can possess the soul is more imperious and agitating, and consequently more injurious to health than envy. Jealousy is said to be as "cruel as the grave" (*Cant.* viii. 6), and it is cruel not only to the objects of it, but also to him who allows it a dwelling-place in his spirit. Its withering effects are felt even in the body, it is "rottenness of the bones" in this sense. But a contented spirit goes a long way to promote and to preserve bodily health. A quiet spirit is a stranger to all those restless feelings which give sleepless nights and anxious days to the envious man.

II. It is indispensable to the attainment of a noble character. Calmness of spirit gives room for the development of all the graces and virtues which go to make up the "perfect man" (Ephes. iv. 13). Growth in nature demands some degree of quietness and calmness to develop itself. The mighty forest

oak of a hundred years has attained its present noble dimensions by processes which have gone on for the most part in days and nights of stillness. So a character of moral strength and beauty can be formed only in the atmosphere of a calm and well-governed spirit.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

"*Envy*," excitement of any kind; *perturbation*; a wise saw, perhaps, of the old hygiene, but true spiritually. Religion rejoices in peace. Mad passion may be overruled; but so can our lusts be. As much as lieth in us, we should have peace. The soul is a temple (1 Cor. iii. 17), and "holiness becometh Thy house, O Lord, for ever" (Psa. xciii 5).—*Miller.*

The word *sound* signifies healthful, free from *moral distempers*—the distempers of "the inner man," such as discontent, malice, and envy. Strictly speaking a "*sound heart*"—a heart entirely free from the evil passions that belong to fallen nature—is not to be found. But in Scripture a *sound* heart, and even a *perfect* heart, are phrases used to signify the real sincerity and predominant rule of right principles and actions. Envy, perhaps the most odious in itself, and the most corroding and torturing to the spirit, is here called "rottenness of the bones"—not a mere *surface sore*, but a deep-seated disease; like *caries*, or inflammation in the substance of the bone itself.—*Wardlaw.*

I. The nature of envy. It is a pain, or uneasiness, arising from an apprehension of the prosperity and good fortune of others; not because we suffer from their welfare, nor that our condition may be bettered by our uneasiness, but merely because their condition is bettered. There is a strong jealousy of pre-eminence and superiority implanted in our nature by Almighty God, for wise and noble purposes, to excite to the pursuit of laudable attainments, and the imitation of good and great actions. This principle is *emulation*. It is also an uneasiness occasioned by the good fortunes of others; but not because we repine at their prosperity, but because we ourselves have not attained the same good success. Its effect is to excite us to great designs, but when it meets with a corrupt disposition it degenerates into envy, the most malignant passion in human nature, the worst weed of the worst soil. So far from stirring up to imitation, envy labours to taint and depreciate what it does not so much as attempt to equal.

II. The cure for envy. 1. *That we endeavour to take a right estimate of things.* The laws of God are the eternal standards of good and evil; what they declare valuable, or enjoin as wise, are truly so, and what they disclaim as hurtful or worthless are, in fact, to be so regarded. 2. *That we try to make a right judgment of our own worth and abilities.* If we do this, we shall find that there are others in the world at least as wise and as good as we are, and perhaps we shall also find, that if merit were the standard of honour and affluence, we should not abound altogether as much as we do. 3. *Reflect seriously upon the vanity of all worldly advantage.* Shall we envy him *whose breath is in his nostrils?* whose glory *fadeth as the flower of grass?*—*Delany.*

Envy is called a passion, and passion means suffering. The patient who is ill of envy is a sinner and a sufferer too. He is an object of pity. It is a mysterious and terrible disease. The nerves of sensation within the man are attached by some unseen hand to his neighbours all around him, so that every step of advancement which they make tears the fibres that lie next his heart. The wretch enjoys a moment's relief when the mystic cord is temporarily slackened by his neighbour's fall; but his agony immediately begins again, for he anticipates another twitch as soon as the fallen is restored

to prosperity. . . . The cure of envy, as wrought by the love of Christ, is not only a deliverance from pain, it is, even in the present world, an unspeakable gain. That man will speedily grow rich who gets and puts into his bag not only all his own winnings, but also all the winnings of his neighbours. . . . . The Nile, contrary to the analogy of other great streams, flows more than a thousand miles without receiving the waters of a single tributary; the consequence is, that it grows no greater as it courses over that vast line. Other rivers are every now and then receiving converging streams from the right and left, and thereby their volume continually increases until it reaches the sea. The happiness of man is like the flow of water in a river. If you enjoy *nothing* but what is your own, your tiny rivulet of contentment, so far from increasing, grows smaller by degrees, until it sinks unseen into the sand, and leaves you in a desert of despair; but when all the acquisitions of your neighbours go to swell its bulk, your enjoyment will flow like a river enriched by many affluents, growing ever greater as life approaches its close. It is some such river that makes glad the city of God. —*Arnot.*

Socrates called envy the soul's saw; and wished that envious men had more eyes and ears than others, that they might have the more torment by beholding and hearing other men's happiness.—*Trapp.*

Envy at last crawls forth from hell's dire throng,
Of all the direfull'st! Her black locks hung long,
Attired with curling serpents; her pale skin
Was almost dropped from her sharp bones within;
And at her breasts stuck vipers, which did prey
Upon her panting heart both night and day,
Sucking black blood from thence, which to repair,
Both day and night they left fresh poisons there.
Her garments were deep-stained in human gore,
And torn by her own hands, in which she bore
A knotted whip and bowl, which to the brim
Did with green gall and juice of wormwood swim;
With which, when she was drunk, she furious grew,
And lashed herself; thus from the accursed crew
Envy, the worst of fiends, herself presents,
Envy, good only when she herself torments.
Cowley

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 31.

THE OPPRESSED AND THEIR OPPRESSORS.

I. Those who are objects of oppression—"The poor." They are made up of three classes. 1. *Those who have never known their supplies to be equal to their positive needs—who have not only always lived from hand to mouth, but whose hands have never been able to obtain a sufficient supply for the mouth.* Such poor ones have this advantage, they have never known better days—their life is like a river whose shallow waters have never overflowed its banks—whose channel has always been much deeper than the stream. There is no force of contrast to add to the present bitterness. 2. *Those who have been reduced from sufficiency to want.* To such poverty is a greater hardship than to those just mentioned. The light and comfort of the past makes the darkness and misery of the present harder to bear. If their own wrong-doing or mistakes have been the cause of their fall, the trial is all the heavier. 3. *There are those whom we call poor who, though not actually in want, have to toil hard and unceasingly for the necessaries of life, and who know nothing of the luxuries of wealth and ease.*

II. The oppression of any or all of these is an insult to God. To oppress the first is to oppress men for what they cannot help—for that for which they are as irresponsible as for the colour of their skin, and therefore it is to reproach Him who appointed them to their lot in life. To oppress the second is to insult God, by afflicting them beyond the affliction which He has permitted to fall upon them. Whether their present condition is retribution or chastisement, its

measure has been appointed by the hand of the All-wise Ruler of men, and it is "reproaching" Him to add to it by oppression. If a child is being corrected by its parent, or a criminal is paying the penalty which the judge has awarded to him for his crimes, it is an impeachment of their judgment to add in any way to the punishment that has been decreed. Those who oppress the third class are guilty of a sin against those who have always been special objects of His favour, and who make up a large proportion of the members of His kingdom. (See Homiletics and Comments on verse 21.)

III. Mercifulness to the poor reveals reverence for God. 1. *It shows that the man regulates his conduct by Divine laws.* God, as we have seen in considering the 21st verse, has been most explicit in the revelation of His will in this matter. 2. *He sees in every man some trace of his divine Creator.*

> "Man is God's image; but a poor man is
> Christ's stamp to boot."
>
> —*Herbert.*

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

"*Oppression*" means something more than the contempt and neglect dealt with in verse 21. He who acts such a part "reproacheth His Maker." For, *first*, he acts as if the poor were of another species—an inferior order of beings; whereas they have all the attributes of the same manhood with him by whom they are condemned. *Second*, he acts as if the circumstances in which the poor are placed were a warrant for him to imitate the Divine conduct and depress them still further, which is a reproach of God, as if He dealt with the poor in a spirit of unkindness or partiality. . . . . A man may have mercy on the poor who does *not* "*honour God.*" Humanity may, and often does, exist without godliness; but godliness cannot exist without humanity.—*Wardlaw.*

We treat God with no respect (1) when "*the poor*," who are His children, are not treated as such; (2) when the poor, who are his dependents, are left unhelped, so as to seem to bring Him into discredit, but (as is most intended, judging from the whole drift of this part of the chapter) (3) when the poor, who are His instruments, and are sent to exercise our virtues, are not treated as such, but our "*Maker*" thwarted in the work of *making us better* by these needy visitants. Life moves by such sort of influences.—*Miller.*

God takes it for an honour, how should this prevail with us? How exceedingly shall such be honoured in that great panegyris at the last day, when the Judge shall say, "Come, ye blessed of My Father, I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat."—*Trapp.*

He that reproacheth the poor reproacheth his own Maker, and showeth himself unworthy to have been made by Him; reproacheth the Maker of the poor, as if either He could not help him, or else as if He had made him to be oppressed by making him poor. But God, who suffereth thee to oppress the poor, will not suffer thee to be unpunished for it, and seeing thou sparest not to reproach Himself, will not spare to scourge thee. Tully saith, "Men in nothing come nearer God than in giving," and Gregory Nazianzen goes further, and tells us, "Thou mayest even by no labour be made God, do not, therefore, neglect the opportunity of obtaining a Deity. Make thyself God to the miserable, by imitating the mercy of God."—*Jermin.*

The ancient Church possessed in full the glorious truth, that of all the real compassion which flows through human channels, the fountain-head is on high. He who gets mercy shows it.—*Arnot.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 32.

THE DEATH OF THE RIGHTEOUS AND THE WICKED.

I. The wicked man dies unwillingly. He is "driven away." Our first parents,—conscious of the severance of a moral bond between them and God—knowing that they had fallen from their original position, in which they would have gone fearlessly and joyfully to any part of God's universe—ignorant of the unknown and dark future that lay before them—left their first home unwillingly. They had to be "driven out" of Eden (Gen. iii. 24). A man who is conscious of a moral distance between himself and God, seldom quits this world willingly. An *undefined* dread, perhaps, but still a dread, of the unknown state beyond death possesses him, and he is made subject to the laws of death "unwillingly." As Adam had to be driven out of Eden, so he quits his present abode, not from choice, but from necessity. His unwillingness to go arises from his condition of heart—from his moral standing. He "is driven away *in his wickedness.*" Adam's consciousness of guilt made him unwilling to quit his abode in Eden. The same consciousness makes men fear to die. "The sting of death is sin" (1 Cor. xv. 56). The man whose sins are unpardoned is conscious that he has much to fear in the unknown future. His spirit witnesses to the truth of the Divine Word, "After death, the judgment" (Heb. ix. 27).

II. But to the righteous man the hour of death is a time of hope. He does not die in his sin. A separation has taken place between him and sin. He is conscious of having been delivered both from its guilt and its dominion. The severance that has already been accomplished has wrought a greater change than that which death can work. The change of *relationship to God* and of *character* which he has already experienced, has made a mere change of *place* a matter of small moment in itself, and the change from this world to the heavenly city an occasion of hope and rejoicing. The angel of death is no officer of justice to bring him before his judge, but a messenger to guide him to his Father's home. The objects of his hope have been considered in Homiletics on chap. x. 24, 28; pages 176 and 181.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

The righteous dies by his own consent. It is a glad surrender, not a forcible separation (Psa. xxxi. 5). The tabernacle is not rent, or torn away, but "put off" (2 Pet. i. 14).—*Bridges.*

"The wicked is thrust lower by his evil" (see Critical Notes). "*Death,*" that is, the worst form of *evil.* Observe the *crescendo.* "*Evil,*" which is supposed to be a discipline, "*thrusts down the wicked;*" *death,* the very grimmest of the list, becomes to the righteous a glorious refuge. "*Thrust lower,*" this is an intensive expression. If trouble thrusts a man lower, how much more must joy and intoxicating wealth. The idea is—all hurts him. Even discipline hurts the lost.—*Miller.*

Oh, the different departures of the reprobate and the Christian! The one knows he changeth for the better; the other mistrusts, for the worse; to the one death is a gulf of sorrow, to the other a port of liberty; he, because he is stripped for a scourging; this, because he lays aside his clothes, after his toil, to go to bed . . . . . All our loathness to depart, and fears in departing, arise from our own unsettledness; we have not made sure to ourselves a dwelling in these glorious heavens; many mansions there be (John xiv. 2), we have not provided ourselves one.—*T. Adams.*

A Christian should be a volunteer in death. Many of the martyrs were as willing to die as to dine; went to the fire as cheerful as to a feast, and courted its pale and ghastly countenance as if it had been a beautiful

bride. . . . Cyprian said Amen to his own sentence of death. Bradford, being told by his keeper's wife that his chain was a-buying, and he was to die the next day, pulled off his hat and thanked God for it. . . . Ann Askew subscribed her confession in Newgate thus, "Written by me, Ann Askew, that neither wisheth for death nor feareth his might, and as merry as one that is bound towards heaven." Indeed it is said of a wicked man that his soul *is required of him*, and that God *takes away his soul* (Luke xii. 20; Job xxvii. 10); but of a godly man that he *giveth up the Ghost*, and he *cometh to his grave* (Gen. xxv. 8; Job iv. 21). . . . Socrates, and some of the wiser heathen, comforted themselves against the fear of death with this weak cordial, that it is common to men, the way of all the earth. Hence it was, when the Athenians condemned Socrates to die, he received the sentence with an undaunted spirit, and told them that they did nothing but what nature had before ordained for him. But the Christian hath a greater ground for a holy resolution, and a stronger cordial against the fears of death, even the hope of eternal life; and surely, if he that exceeds others in his cordials be excelled by them in courage, he disgraceth his physician. . . . It is no marvel that they who lived wickedly should die unwillingly, being "driven away in their wickedness" as a beast that is driven out of his den to the slaughter, or as a debtor driven by the officers out of his house, where he lay warm and was surrounded by all sorts of comfort, to a nasty, loathsome prison.—*Swinnock.*

It is storied of Godfrey, Duke of Bouillon, that when, in his expedition to the Holy Land, he came within view of Jerusalem, his army, seeing the high turrets, goodly buildings, and fair fronts, being even transported with the joyfulness of such a sight, gave a mighty shout that the earth was verily thought to ring with the noise thereof. Such is the rejoicing of a godly man in death, when he doth not see the turrets and towers of an earthly, but the spiritual building of a heavenly Jerusalem, and his soul ready to take possession of them. How doth he delight in his dissolution, when he sees grace changing into glory, hope into fruition, faith into vision, and love into perfect comprehension.—*Spencer's "Things New and Old."*

If this be true, it is a demonstration on the side of religion, and that upon three accounts. (1) Because the principles of religion, and the practice of them in a virtuous life, when they come to the last and utmost trial, do hold out. The belief of a God, the persuasion of our own immortality, and of the eternal recompense of another world—that *Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners*—is commonly more strong and vigorous in the minds of good men when they come to die; they have then a more clear apprehension and firm persuasion of the truth and reality of these things, than ever they had at any time of their lives, and find more peace and joy in the belief of them. . . . . And the principles of infidelity and vice are most apt to shrink and give back at such a time. (2) The principles of religion minister comfort to us in the most needful and desirable time. If it be true of every day of our lives, *sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof*, much more of the day of death. It is surely enough to have that one enemy to encounter, at which nature startles even when the sting is taken away. . . . . If there were nothing beyond this life, it were worth while to provide for a quiet death. There is no man that calculates things wisely that would, for all the pleasures of sin, forfeit the peace and comfort of a righteous soul, going out of the world full of the hopes of a blessed immortality. (3) When men are commonly most serious and impartial, and their declarations are thought to be of the greatest weight, they give this testimony to religion and virtue, and against impiety and vice. Even Lucretius says, "Men's words then come from the bottom of their heart, the mask is taken off, and things then appear to them as indeed they are." In these

circumstances men generally declaim most vehemently against their sins and vices, and declare on the side of piety and virtue. Surely this is a great testimony on the side of religion, because it is the testimony not only of its friends, but of those who have been its greatest enemies.—*Tillotson.*

A clear testimony to a future state of rewards and punishments.—*Wordsworth.*

Though there was no revelation of immortality and resurrection then, still the pious in death put their confidence in Jahve, the God of life and of salvation—for in Jahve there was for ancient Israel the beginning, middle, and end of the work of salvation—and believing tha they were going home to Him, committing their spirit into His hands (Psa. xxxi. 6), they fell asleep, though without any explicit knowledge, yet not without the hope of eternal life. Job also knew that (xxvii. 8) between the death of those estranged from God and of those who feared God there was not only an external, but a deep essential distinction; and now the wise man opens up a glimpse into the eternity heavenwards (chap. xv. 24), and has formed (chap. xii. 28) (see Critical Notes) the expressive and distinctive word for immortality, which breaks like a ray from the morning sun through the night of the *Sheol.—Delitzsch.*

We are not able to form a right conception of what it is to be and to abide in wickedness. Because it is so near us, we do not know it. If it were a body standing before us, we could examine its proportions and describe its appearance; but because it is a spirit transfused through us, we remain ignorant of its character and power. . . . A ship is lying in a placid river when winter comes, and is gradually frozen in. The process was gentle, and almost imperceptible. There was no commotion and no crash. The ice crept round, and closed in upon the ship without any noisy note of warning. . . . . Her own element closed and held her. . . . The ship is not shaken. No creaking is heard—no strain is felt. She feels firm and easy. Even when the pines of the neighbouring forest are bending to the blast, she sits unmoved in her solid bed That bed she has made for herself, and it therefore fits her. This is very like the wicked in his iniquity, and before he is driven away. . . . He stands steady in his element, and no ripple disturbs its surface. When the ice of the river goes away, the embedded ship goes with it. It is a dreadful departure. The water swells beneath; the ice holds by the crooked banks awhile; but, after a period of suspense, the flood prevails, and the trembling, rending mass gives way. Reeling icebergs and foaming yellow waves tumble downwards in tumultuous heaps, and the ship is swept away like a feather on a flood. If we had a sense for perceiving spiritual things, the most heart-rending sight in the world would be a sinner set fast in his element, and the flood of wrath secretly swelling from beneath . . . . But he who has been begotten again to a living hope has it at the time when humanity needs it most. A friend in need is a friend indeed. Stars are a grateful mitigation of the darkness; but we do not want them by day. Hope, always lovely, is then sweetest when it beams from heaven through the gloom that gathers round the grave. . . . . The ship has set sail, and kept on her course many days and nights, with no other incidents than those that are common to all. Suddenly land appears; but what the character of the coast may be the voyagers cannot discern through the tumult. The first effect of a near approach of land is a very great commotion on the water. It is one of the coral islands of the South Pacific, encircled by a ring of fearful breakers at some little distance from the shore. Forward the ship must go. The waves are higher and angrier than any they have seen in the open sea. Partly through them, partly over them, they are borne at a bound; strained, and giddy, and almost senseless, they find themselves within that sentinel ridge

of crested waves that guard the shore, and the portion of sea that still lies before them is calm and clear like glass. It seems a lake of Paradise, and not an earthly thing at all. . . . . Across the belt of sea the ship glides gently,—and gently soon touches that lovely shore. It is thus that I have seen a true pilgrim thrown into a great tumult when the shore of eternity suddenly appeared before him. A great fear tossed him for some days; but when that barrier was passed, he experienced a peace, deeper, stiller, sweeter than ever he knew before. A little space of life's voyage remained after the fear of death had sunk into a calm, and before the immortal felt the solid of eternal rest. On life's sea as yet was the spirit lying, but the shaking had passed; and when at last the spirit passed from a peaceful sea to a peaceful land, the change seemed slight.—*Arnot.*

This text looks like the cloud between the Israelites and Egyptians; having a dark side toward the latter, and a bright side toward the former. It represents death, like Pharaoh's jailor, bringing the chief butler and the chief baker out of prison; the one to be restored to his office, the other to be led to execution. The wicked are driven from this world to the other—from the society of saints on earth into that of the lost in hell; out of time into eternity; out of their specious pretences to piety; away from all means of grace. . . . . The following circumstances make the godly in their death happy and hopeful. 1. *They have a trusty good Friend before them in the other world.* Jesus Christ, their best friend, is Lord of the land to which death carries them. When Joseph sent for his father to come down to Egypt, and Jacob "saw the wagons Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of Jacob revived" (Gen. xlv. 27). He resolved to undertake the journey. I think when the Lord calls a godly man out of the world, He sends him such good tidings, and such a kind invitation to the other world, that his spirit must revive when he sees the wagon of death sent to carry him thither. 2. *They shall have a safe passage to another world.* They have the Lord of the land's safe conduct, His pass sealed with His own blood. . . It is safe riding in Christ's chariot. 3. *They shall have a joyful entrance into the other world.* . . Is the bird in worse case, when at liberty, than when confined in a cage? Death comes to the godly man, as Haman came to Mordecai, with the royal apparel and the horse.—*Boston.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 33.

THE HIDDEN MADE MANIFEST.

I. The God-ordained place for moral wisdom—"the heart." The divinely ordained place for the sap of the vine is its *root.* 1. *It has its centre and spring there, that thence it may diffuse itself into every branch and leaf, and give life and health to the whole tree.* So the divinely-ordained place for moral wisdom is the *heart*—the *affections* of a man. If it has its seat there it will certainly influence all his thoughts, and words, and deeds. 2. *It is not only the most influential part of a man, but it is the most secure.* There, if anywhere, it is out of the reach of harm. If it is only in the *head*—in the intellectual part of a man—temptation may rob him of it—false reasoning or adversity may shake it from its seat, but if it has hold of the heart, it will hold its own against every foe. 3. *It is the only place from which it can reach and bless other human hearts.* The sap of the tree must issue direct from its root if there is to be fruit that will sustain and give satisfaction to the eater. So a life will bring forth no fruit to feed others unless its religion is a religion of the heart. There is no way to the heart except from the heart, those who have only an intellectual

hold upon moral wisdom cannot feed hungry souls. 4. *It is the only place whence can issue glory to God.* The whole man, spirit and soul and body, must be under the guidance of moral wisdom if he is to render acceptable service to God. Nothing less will satisfy Him who "searches the heart of the children of men" (Jer. xvii. 10). If the heart is right, the external service will not be wanting. (See Homiletics and Comments on chap. iv. 23).

II. Where this wisdom of the heart is lacking, the life will betray it. In all natural life there is a law by which its hidden secrets are manifested in outward signs. The health of the root is seen in the health of the tree, the disease of the internal bodily organs manifests itself in the outward appearance. So it is with moral health and disease. However men may try to appear what they are not, the natural tendency of human nature often proves too strong for the artificial restraint that is put upon it, and sooner or later men reveal what they really are. "That which is in the midst of moral fools is made known," although time is needed for the folly fully to develop itself.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

"Resteth" implies the tranquil and modest spirit of the wise, and the permanence of their keeping of wisdom; and especially that it is the fruit of the spirit from above descending and abiding on them (Numb. xi. 25, 26; Isa. xi. 2; 2 Kings ii. 15). Contrast Eccles. vii. 9. The wise does not draw forth his wisdom from its resting place within his heart at random, but in proper place and time, as the occasion may require. But fools cannot long disguise their folly (see chap. x. 14, xii. 23, xiii. 16). The Hebrew adage says, "A vessel full of coins will make no noise; but if there be only one coin in it, it will make a rattle." The more learned one is, the more modest he will be; the more unlearned, the more presumptuous and ostentatious.—*Fausset.*

In the heart of the understanding wisdom remains silent and still, for the understanding feels himself personally happy in its possession, endeavours all the more to deepen it, and lets it operate within.—*Delitzsch.*

There she keepeth residence and there she ruleth, and thither she bringeth her treasures and her comforts, and every good thing that is to be wished for. And therefore she calleth for it, as most meet for her to possess; and safest for every wise man to yield unto her. "My son, give me thine heart."

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 34.

National Salvation.

I. Some standard of right and wrong is necessary to national existence. There are men who have affirmed that there is no such thing as virtue and vice—that they are only inventions of those who desire to rule their fellow-creatures, and that the world could do without them. But experience teaches the contrary. Every nation, if it is to have an existence, even if it rejects a Divine revelation, or is ignorant of it, must have some standard by which to judge human actions. Without the recognition of such a standard, even if it is only based upon the light of reason, not only would national prosperity be impossible, but national existence. Rome and Greece had such standards as well as Israel, although the first-mentioned nations had no revelation from heaven except that of the natural conscience, and if all the existing codes were abolished to-morrow men would find it necessary to form others in order to preserve their national, if not their individual existence.

II. The prosperity and influence of a nation is in proportion to its national righteousness. This is not the case of the individual man. His present condition and circumstances, the measure of power that he possesses, or the amount of the influence he exerts, is no index of the amount of righteousness which he possesses. He may be a noble of the land, or he may have no social standing; he may fare sumptuously every day, or he may subsist on the crumbs that fall from the rich man's table, and neither from the one lot or the other can any conclusion be drawn as to what his moral standing is. There is another world in which the righteous *man* will be exalted, and the unrighteous *man* will reap the reward of unrighteousness; but national righteousness and unrighteousness receive their reward in this world. 1. *Righteous dealing in a nation promotes its commercial prosperity.* If the merchants of a nation are known to be honest in their transactions and truthful in their words, they will gain and hold a high place in the markets of the world. 2. *It secures it an influence among the governing powers of the world.* In proportion as its intercourse with other nations is marked, not by a lust for conquest or a desire to rule, no matter by what means—but by a recognition of the rights of all—in that proportion will it acquire a power far more real and far more lasting than that gained by its ability to outdo other nations in the number of its soldiers or the size of its navy.

III. National reproach for sin will be in proportion to its possession of a high or low moral standard. "Sin is a reproach to *any* people;" but it is the greatest reproach to those who possess the greatest light. The sin of Israel was a greater reproach to them than the sin of the Philistines was to them, because the one possessed the light of a Divine revelation, and the other did not. So in the present day, the nations who sin against the light of the revealed word of God are far greater sinners than those upon whom that light has never shone. The principle to which the Divine Son gave utterance concerning the Jewish nation is the one by which He judges nations in the present day. "*If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin; but now they have no cloak for their sin* (John xv. 24).

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

As there is nothing in religion to counteract the design of a wise system of civil polity, so there is nothing in a wise system of civil government to counteract the design of the Christian religion. The exaltation of the nation is the end of civil polity. Righteousness is the end of religion, or rather is religion itself.—*Saurin.*

It is the nature of sin (1) to lesson and diminish a people; (2) to sink and depress the spirit of a people; (3) to destroy the wealth of a people; (4) to deprive them of the blessings of freedom; (5) to provoke the displeasure of God and to draw down His judgments.—*Emmons, in "Lange's Commentary."*

Righteousness is both "the prop to make it subsist firm in itself and a crown to make it glorious in the eyes of others" *(Bp. Sanderson).* Greece in her proud science, Rome in the zenith of her glory, both were sunk in the lowest depths of moral degradation (Rom. i. 23-32 was a picture of the heathen world in the best ages of refinement). Their greatness consisted only in the visions of poesy or the dream of philosophy. Contrast the influence of *righteousness*, bringing out of the most debased barbarism a community impregnated with all the high principles that form a nation's well-being. Thus to christianise is to regenerate, to elevate the community, to "exalt the nation," and that not with a sudden flash of shadowy splendour, but with a solid glory, fraught with every practical blessing. "Those princes and commonwealths who would keep their governments entire and uncorrupt, are, above all things, to have a care of religion and its ceremonies,

and preserve them in due veneration. For in the whole world there is not a greater sign of imminent ruin than when God and His worship are despised." Such was the testimony of the profligate politician Machiavel. . . . What an enemy an ungodly man is to his country! Loudly though he may talk of his patriotism, and even though God should make him an instrument to advance her temporal interest; yet he contributes, so far as in him lies, to her deepest *reproach.*—*Bridges.*

Religion and virtue do naturally tend to the good order and more easy government of human society, because they have a good influence both upon magistrates and subjects. 1. *Upon magistrates.* Religion teaches them to rule over men in the fear of God, because though they be gods on earth, yet they are subjects of heaven, and accountable to him who is higher than the highest in this world. Religion in a magistrate strengthens his authority because it procures veneration and gains a reputation to it. And in all affairs of the world so much reputation is so much power. 2. *Upon subjects.* First, it makes them obedient to government, and conformable to laws; and that not only out of fear of power, which is but a weak and loose principle of obedience, but out of conscience, which is a firm, and constant and lasting principle, and will hold a man fast when all other obligations will break. Secondly, it tends to make men peaceable with one another. For it endeavours to plant all those qualities and dispositions in men which tend to peace and unity, and to fill men with a spirit of universal love and goodwill. It endeavours likewise to secure every man's interest, by commanding the observation of that great rule of equity, "Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so to them."—*Tillotson.*

We find the great general principle of Divine Providence, in regard to nations, thus laid down by Jehovah Himself to the prophet Jeremiah—"At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up and to pull down, and to destroy it; if that nation against whom I have pronounced turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil which I thought to do unto them. And at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it; if it do evil in My sight, that it obey not My voice, then I will repent of the good wherewith I said I would benefit them" (Jer. xviii. 7–10). This was a principle, not applicable to *Israel* exclusively—for we find it expressly applied to the Amorites, the Canaanites, and the inhabitants of Sodom and of Nineveh. And the Old Testament bringing before us specimens of the Divine administration, the Spirit of God letting us so far into the secrets of its principles and laws, we have every reason to believe that in the government of God over the world, the same principle is still in operation, though *we* may not be able to trace it—that, had we only an inspired record of what takes place now, we should see it clearly in all cases; and even without such a record there are cases in which it would be equal impiety and blindness not to discern and own it.—*Wardlaw.*

"*Righteousness*" means *saving righteousness,* and "*Sin-offering*" is literally *sin.* (See Critical Notes). "*Righteousness*" lifts to the very skies. "*The mercy of nations,*" as the words literally are, is not wealth, or peace, or a good king, or broad lands of plenty, but an interest in Christ, "the sin-offering," and a home amongst the happy.—*Miller.*

"*Peoples*" is plural, whereas "*a nation*" is singular, implying the paucity of the nations observing *righteousness.* The Hebrew word for reproach meaning also mercy, Gejer translates, "Mercy is an expiratory sacrifice for sin." Not that mercy puts away sin before God, but before men, who are by *mercy* reconciled to those who had before been unmerciful to them.—*Fausset.*

MAIN HOMILETICS ON VERSE 35

A Wise Servant.

In this verse we adopt Miller's translation as being the more probable meaning. See Critical Notes and also his Comment.

I. The law of kindness is a law of power. Whether a man be the ruler of a nation or the ruler of a family, if he would acquire real power over those whom he rules, he must obey this law himself. Human nature is in a fallen condition, and it cannot be lifted into a state of obedience even to wise and good laws except they are enforced in a spirit of kindness. Kindness will bind men to loyal devotion with a far firmer chain than any force. There is, indeed, no principle in obedience to the latter; it rules only the bodily actions, and is powerless over the heart. Those who desire more than the service of half the man must issue their commands—must exercise their authority—in the spirit of mercy. The king, the master or the father, who is a despot, is only obeyed because he has power to punish. Consequently the obedience will only last as long as the power. This is a thought which parents especially should lay to heart.

II. The law of kindness is a law of policy. He who rules to-day may one day be at the mercy of him whom he rules. Kings have often needed favour of their subjects—the master has often been at the mercy of his servant; and what has happened before will happen again in the changes and chances of life, and those who have shown mercy will be the most likely at such times to receive it. "With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again" (Matt. vii. 2) holds good in this case. Therefore, the "kindness of a king is a wise servant; but his wrath becomes one that bringeth shame." For remarks on the text as rendered in the authorised version, see below.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Solomon gets back to his king-craft. These maxims were familiar to him. It is rarely wise for "a king" to get in a passion with his people (see verses 29, 30). "If thou wilt be a servant unto this people" was said to the successor of this very man (1 Kings xii. 7); if thou wilt "answer them, and speak good words to them, then they will be thy servants for ever." But, more than king-craft, it is a rule for saints. The law of "kindness" should be on our lips. The power of gentleness is irresistible. If "*the mercy for nations is the sin-offering*" (see last verse), then we are all sinners together, and modesty forbids that we should go among the lost with anything but tenderness. The English version is due to the presence of a preposition. "The king's favour is towards a wise servant." But that preposition becomes idiomatic in certain cases. I say, "I want such a thing *for* a shelter." "The kindness of a king is *for* a wise servant," *i.e.*, serves as one. There is no preposition before the words "brings shame;" but, on the contrary, the word *is* is written out, and, as usual in that case, means "*becomes;*" all of which state of facts is in favour of our new version.—*Miller.*

These words state what *ought to be.* No one ought to be the king or the queen's servant who is not wise; and toward every such wise servant the royal favour should be specially extended. And who *is* a *wise* servant? Not a servant who flatters royal vanity; accommodates itself to royal foibles; indulges royal prejudices; chimes in with royal caprices; tolerates and connives at royal vices, whether personal or official. No; a wise servant must be a servant of conscientious principle, and of bland but unflinching fidelity. He is one who gives prudent and faithful counsel; who "speaks truth

as he thinks it in his heart;" whose counsels are dictated by a right understanding of the times, and knowledge of what such times require, not by a wish to ingratiate the minister with the prince, and so to promote his own personal advantage, but by the principles of genuine patriotism as well as loyalty . . . . . That servant "causeth shame" by whom that is encouraged from which reproach arises —who gives counsel to his prince which must prove either prejudicial or abortive; such as can hardly fail to render him unpopular with his subjects, and expose him, by their failure, to the derision of foreign states—a derision in which the kingdom as well as the throne, the people as well as the monarch, are involved.—*Wardlaw.*

Thus it is with the great King. All of us are His *servants,* bound to Him by the highest obligations; animated by the most glowing encouragements (1 Cor. vi. 19, 20; Matt. xxiv. 44-46 xxv. 21-23). All of us have our responsibilities, our talents, our work, our account. Towards the "faithful and *wise* servant," who has traded with his talents, who has been diligent in his work, and who is ready for his account—*His favour* will be infinitely condescending and honourable (John xii. 26). But *against him that causeth shame*—reflecting upon his Master, neglectful in his work, unprepared for his account—His *wrath* will be tremendous and eternal.—*Bridges.*

Surely well is favour bestowed, where it reflecteth unto the giver's honour: worthily is favour received, where wisdom's hands are the receivers of it.—*Jermin.*

CHAPTER XV.

CRITICAL NOTES.—1. Grievous, "bitter," "trying," **stir up;** lit., "**make to ascend,**" **like a** flame fanned by bellows (Fausset). **2. Useth knowledge aright,** rather "makes knowledge attractive," *i.e.*, speaks so as to win the attention of the listeners; **poureth out,** or "bubbleth up." **3. Beholding,** rather "watching," "observing" (so Stuart, Miller, and Delitzsch). **4. Wholesome,** "gentle," "soft," **perverseness** or "transgression," **a breach,** "a crushing," "a wounding." **6.** Miller translates the first clause, "The house of the righteous is great treasure" (see his Comment); **revenue,** rather "gain." **7. Disperse;** some translators read "winnow," or "sift." Stuart translates the last clause of this verse "The heart of the fool is not stable;" Delitzsch reads, "Direction is wanting to the heart of fools," *i.e.*, it has not the *right* direction. **10. Correction is grievous,** or, "there is grievous correction." Miller reads, "Discipline is an evil to him." **11. Hell and destruction,** "Sheōl," and "Abaddōn" two different names for the world of the departed. "Sheōl" is the unseen world in general, "Abaddōn" the place of *destruction, i.e.,* the place where their bodies are destroyed (so Stuart, Zöckler, etc.). **How much more.** Miller translates these particles by "because also" (see his Comment). **14. Mouth,** or "the countenance." **15. Afflicted,** or "toiling." **17. Dinner of herbs,** literally "a traveller's meal." **18. Stirreth up,** lit. "mixes," implying the reciprocal idea of giving and taking offence (Fausset). **19. Made plain,** "is paved," or "is a highway." **21. Walketh uprightly,** rather "goes straightforward." **24. The way of life is above,** etc., rather "An upward path of life," etc. **Hell,** Sheōl, as in verse 11. **25. Establish the border,** or "Keep fixed the landmark" **26. The words of the pure are pleasant,** or "pure in His sight are pleasant words. **27. Gifts,** *i.e.*, "bribes." **28. Studieth,** *i.e.*, "*considers.*" **33. Instruction of wisdom,** rather a discipline of wisdom," or "a training to wisdom."

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSES 1 *and* 2.

THE USE OF KNOWLEDGE.

I. Knowledge is for use. The various gifts and acquirements of men in every grade of social life, of whatever kind they are, are intended by God to be used for the benefit of all. One man has what another lacks, that he may use

what he possesses for their mutual good. Those who have wealth are bound to use it—they are not expected to keep it locked up in their coffers, but to lay it out for their own and their poorer neighbours' good. So with knowledge. He who has a knowledge which can profit the body, the mind, or the heart of another sins if he holds it back. He will find that such a possession unused will be a witness against him in the day of reckoning. He will be accused of wasting his Master's goods by not using them (Matt. xxv. 27).

II. Wisdom is needed to put knowledge to a right use. There are many people who know a great deal, but they do not know how to use it, either for themselves or others. They cannot make it of any practical use—they cannot enlighten and help others with it. Or they may put it to a wrong use. This is often the case with those who possess intellectual knowledge, but who lack moral wisdom. They put a good thing to a bad use.

III. One mark of knowledge combined with wisdom, is the right use of the tongue in the presence of anger.—A "soft answer" in the presence of anger indicates a knowledge of human nature, and also wisdom and self-possession to apply the knowledge. A man who can hold the helm of the vessel in the presence of a storm, and keep her well in hand, shows that he not only possesses knowledge but wisdom, and he to a great extent disarms the fury of the tempest by his calm discretion.

IV. A soft answer may turn away merited wrath. There are occasions when the most holy beings—the Most Holy One Himself—display a wrath which is only a proof of their perfect holiness. The "soft answer," the pleading words of an intercessor, may turn away this wrath. The wrath of Jehovah was often kindled against Israel during their wilderness journey, but the "answer" of Moses "turned it away." (See Exod. xxxii. 11-14; Numb. xiv. 11-20, etc.)

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Verse 1—

Calmness is great advantage: he that lets
Another chafe may warm him at his fire,
Mark all his wanderings and enjoy his frets,
As cunning fencers suffer heat to tire.—
Herbert.

"*A trying word;*" literally a word of labour or pain. In dealing with sinners we ought to make the Gospel plain at first and not start unnecessary difficulties. Paul did this (1 Cor. iii. 2). Words that are not wrathful are often "*trying,*" as presenting to an angry inferior our reply in an easily misunderstood shape. We are to feed men with milk, and not with strong meat, all the more for being in a condition of fault.—*Miller.*

Look at the effect of the quiet and dignified reply of Gideon to the exasperated men of Ephraim, and at the case of Abigail and David. And as an exemplification of the opposite style of answer, you may be reminded of the contention between the men of Israel and Judah at the time of David's restoration after the death of Absalom, when the *fierce words* of the latter drove off the former under the rebellious standard of Shebna, and of the case of Rehoboam, who by refusing to give "*a soft answer*" to the people deprived the house of David of the subjection of the ten tribes.—*Wardlaw.*

Nothing doth better stop the fury of a bullet than a mud wall: nothing doth sooner *turn away* the fury of *wrath* than a *soft answer.* But where the pot is boiling, grievous words make it to boil over. Wherefore Chrysostom tells thee that thine enemy reconciled is more in thine own power than in his.—*Jermin.*

If gentle words prevail so mightily with most men to appease their anger of what force shall the submissive supplications of penitent persons be with the Lord?—*Dod.*

We greatly need an instrument capable of turning away wrath, for

there is much wrath in the world to turn away. . . . . That patent shield is a soft answer. Christianity makes it of the solid metal, and education supplies at a cheaper rate a plated article, useful as long as it lasts, and as far as it goes. . . . . The Roman battering-ram, when it had nearly effected a breach in walls of solid stone, was often baffled by bags of chaff and beds of down skilfully spread out to receive its stubborn blow. By that stratagem the besieged obtained a double benefit, and the besiegers suffered a double disappointment. The strokes that were given proved harmless, and the engine was soon withdrawn. In our department a similar law exists, and a similar experience will come out of it. . . . . After praying to "Our Father" for your offending brother and yourself, you may speak to him with safety. . . . . Pass your resentment through a period of communion with Him who bought you with His blood, and it will come out like Christ's, a simple grief for a brother's sin, and a holy jealousy for truth.—*Arnot.*

Verse 2. Eloquence, widely ordered, is very commendable, and availeth much. "The tongue of the wise useth knowledge aright"—deals kindly with her, offers her no abuse by venting her unseasonably, and making her over cheap and little set by. But eloquence abused may well be termed the attorney general, that makes a good cause seem bad, and a bad far better than in truth it is.—*Spencer's "Things New and Old."*

Paul, instead of exasperating his heathen congregation by an open protest, supplied their acknowledged defect, by bringing before them the true God "whom they were ignorantly worshipping" (Acts xvii. 23). He pointed an arrow to Agrippa's conscience, by the kindly admission of his candour and intelligence (Acts xxvi. 27, 29). This *right use of knowledge* distinguishes "the workman approved of God, and that needeth not to be ashamed" (2 Tim. ii. 15).—*Bridges.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 3.

Divine Intelligence.

I. The Eternal has a perfect knowledge of all places. The sun, in its meridiar height, can only penetrate half the globe at the same time, and even then there are deep valleys and caves of the earth, and ocean beds where its rays never come; but God's eye rests at once not only on all places of His dominion in this planet, which is but as a grain of sand amongst the worlds, but upon every spot in His boundless universe.

II. He has a perfect knowledge of the spirits of His creatures. The human soul has power to hide its secrets from the gaze of every fellow creature. "For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of a man which is in him?" (1 Cor. ii. 11). But God's omniscient eye pierces into the hidden mazes of the soul and reads the silent thoughts and intents of the heart. In this most secret region He walks at large. "*O Lord, Thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, Thou understandest my thought afar off*" (Psa. cxxxix. 1, 2). God is the one potentate and judge who can claim a perfect knowledge of all His subjects from personal acquaintance with each individual. Not one is lost in the crowd; each one stands before Him as distinctly as if He were the only creature in the universe.

III. God's perfect knowle ge of His creatures leads Him to contemplate both what is c ngenial and what is repugnant. He "beholds the evil and the good." Men, when by Divine grace they become partakers of the Divine Nature, are much moved to gladness by the sight of that which is morally good, and turn with loathing from the evil which they must also contemplate. Yet their

happiness springs from that which is within them and not from that which is around, or the preponderance of evil would make life unbearable. So the ever-blessed God, conscious of His perfect rectitude, has within Him a source of eternal satisfaction notwithstanding the "evil" that He beholds with Divine indignation and sorrow.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

He mentions the "evil" first because they avowedly, or else practically, deny God's providence (Jer. xvi. 17).—*Lausset.*

When we perceive that a vast number of objects enter in at our eye by a very small passage, and yet are so little jumbled in the crowd that they open themselves regularly, though there is no great space for that either, and that they give us a distinct apprehension of many objects that lie before us, both of their nature, colour, and size, and by a secret geometry, from the angles that they make in our eye, we judge of the distance of all objects, both from us and from one another—if to this we add the vast number of figures that we receive and retain long, and with great order, in our brains, which we easily fetch up either in our thoughts or in our discourse, we shall find it less difficult to apprehend how an Infinite Mind should have the universal view of all things ever present before it.—*Burnet.*

The darkness of the air may hide thee from men, and the darkness of thine understanding may hide thee from thyself, but there is no darkness can hide from God. . . . . It was a pretty fancy of one that would have his chamber painted full of eyes, that which way soever he looked he might still have some eye upon him. And it was a wise answer of Livius Drusus, when an artist offered so to contrive his house that he might do what he would and none should see him. "No," saith Drusus, "contrive it so, rather, that all may see me, for I am not ashamed to be seen." If the eyes of men make even the vilest forbear their beloved lusts for awhile, and they that are drunk are drunken in the night, how powerful will the eye and presence of God be with those that fear His anger and know the sweetness of His favour. The thoughts of this omnipresence of God will quicken thee to holiness. The soldiers of Israel and Judah were prodigal of their blood in the presence of their two generals (2 Sam. ii. 14). Servants will generally work hard while their master looks on. The eye of God, as of the sun, will call the Christian to his work. Those countries that are governed by viceroys seldom flourish or thrive so well as those kingdoms where the prince is present in person. Conscience, God's viceroy, may much quicken a Christian to holiness, but God, the Prince, much more. "I have kept Thy precepts," saith David, "for all my ways are before Thee."—*Swinnock.*

He is all-eye, and His providence like a well-drawn picture, that vieweth all that come into the room. I know Thy works and Thy labour (Rev. ii); not Thy works only, but Thy labour in doing them. And as for the offender, though he think to hide himself from God by hiding God from himself, yet God is nearer to him than the bark is to the tree, "for in Him all things subsist" (Col. i. 17) and move (Acts xvii. 28); understand it of the mind's motions also. And this the very heathen saw by nature's rush candle. For Thales Milesius being asked whether the gods know not when a man doth aught amiss, "Yea," saith he, "if he do but think amiss." "God is nearer to us than we are to ourselves," saith another. Repletively He is everywhere, though inclusively nowhere. As for the world, it is to Him as "a sea of glass," a clear, transparent body; He sees through it. No man needs a window in his breast (as the heathen Monus wished) for God to look in at: every man before God is all window (Job. xxxiv. 22).—*Trapp.*

Such is the extent of wickedness

that in every place He beholdeth the evil and the good. Yea, if there be but one in a place, that one is both evil and good, and God beholdeth both his evil and his good. The *evil* God beholdeth first, but they are the *good* on whom He resteth, as approving of them, and as delighting in them. For their eyes are upon God in every place, as God's eyes are upon them. The other looketh not after God, and so God looketh after them, as that He looketh from them in anger at their wickedness. He contemplates and considers, which is more than simply to behold, for contemplation addeth to a simple apprehension a deeper degree of knowledge.—*Jermin.*

The doctrine of Divine omniscience, although owned and argued for by men's lips, is neglected or resisted in their lives. The unholy do not like to have a holy eye ever open upon them, whatever their profession may be. If fallen man, apart from the one Mediator, say or think that the presence of God is pleasant to them, it is because they have radically mistaken either their own character or His. They have either falsely lifted up their own attainments or falsely dragged down the character of the judge . . . . . In every place our hearts and lives are open in the sight of Him with whom we have to do. The proposition is absolutely universal. We must beware, however, lest that feature of the word which should make it powerful only renders it indefinite and meaningless. Man's fickle mind treats universal truths that come from heaven as the eye treats the visible heaven itself. At a distance from the observer all around the blue canopy seems to descend and lean upon the earth, but where he stands it is far above, out of his sight. It touches not him at all; and when he goes forward to the line where now it seems to touch other men, he finds it still far above, and the point which applies to this lower world is distant as ever. Heavenly truth, like heaven, seems to touch all the world around, but not his own immediate sphere, or himself its centre. The grandest truths are practically lost in this way when they are left whole. We must rightly divide the word, and let the bits come into every crook of our own character. Besides the assent to general truth, there must be specific personal application. A man may own omniscience and yet live without God in the world.—*Arnot.*

The subjects of verses 4 and 5 have been considered before. (See Homiletics on chap. xii. 17, 18, page 274, and on chap. xiii. 1, page 293.)

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Verse 4. Rueetschi carries the idea of *gentleness* (see Critical Notes) through the two clauses as the central idea: "It is precisely with this gentle speech, which otherwise does so much good, that the wicked is wont to deceive, and then one is by this more sorely and deeply stricken and distressed than before."—*Lange's Commentary.*

That tongue which is "a witness of truth," and therefore "saves souls" (chap. xiv. 25), "*is a tree of life.*" Go into any garden of the lost, and where no such tree is, all are pagans. One sees, therefore, how the figure is kept up. If I am born into a land where there are gospel *tongues;* that is, if, when I grow up, I am not in China, and not in India, but in a Christian village, where people have and spread the gospel, that "*tongue, as a healing thing,* is (my) *tree of life.*" Where I get "life" is from its branches.—*Miller.*

This verse may be compared with the second. The tongue which "useth knowledge aright" has a morally and spiritually healing influence. It imparts instruction to the ignorant. It speaks peace to the troubled conscience. It soothes the anguish of the afflicted. It subdues the swelling of passion. It allays the self-inflicted tortures of

envy. It heals divisions and animosities. These and other blessed fruits entitle it to the designation, "a tree of life;" productive, as it is, of genuine, varied, and valuable joys to all within the reach of its influence. And when the tongue makes known God's saving health,"—the salvation revealed by Him in the gospel,—it then gives life in the highest and most important sense.—*Wardlaw.*

A high image of what the tongue ought to be; not negative, not harmless, but *wholesome*, or *healing*, as the salt cast into the spring cleansed the bitter waters (2 Kings ii. 21). . . . . But the meekest of men felt *perverseness a breach in the spirit* (Numb. xvi. 8-15). The tongue of Job's friends broke "the bruised reed" (Job xiii. 1-5). Even our beloved Lord, who never shrunk from external evil, keenly felt the piercing edge of this sword (Psa. lxix. 19, 20).—*Bridges.*

One stripe of the tongue woundeth three—the backbiter, him that giveth ear to the backbiting, and the backbitten.—*Cawdray.*

Saith the old philosopher, "Than a good tongue there is nothing better, than an evil nothing worse. It hath no mean; it is either exceedingly good or excessively evil. It knows nothing but extremes, and is either best of all, or worst of all (Jas. iii. 8). The tongue is every man's best or worst moveable. . . . A good tongue is the best part of a man, and most worthy of the honour of sacrifice. This only when it is well seasoned. Seasoned, I say, with salt, as the apostle admonisheth; not with fire" (Col. iv. 6).—*T. Adams.*

Everlasting benediction be upon that tongue, which spake, as no other ever did, or could speak, pardon, peace, and comfort to lost mankind. This was the *tree of life*, whose leaves were for the healing of the nations.—*Bishop Horne.*

The root of this tree goeth down to the heart, whence it sucketh the juice of wisdom; its body lieth in the head, where things are ruminated and concocted by it; the branches of it are the several speeches of the mouth; the fruit of it is spread abroad as wide as good occasion is offered.—*Jermin.*

Not a *silent* tongue; mere abstinence from evil is not good. . . . Idleness is evil under the administration of God. . . . Not a *smooth* tongue: it may be soft on the surface, while the poison of asps lies cherished underneath. The serpent licks his victim all over before he swallows it. Smoothness is not an equivalent for truth. . . . . Not a *voluble* tongue; that active member may labour much to little purpose. . . . Not a sharp tongue: some instruments are made keen-edged for the purpose of wounding. . . . Not even a *true* tongue. Truth is necessary, but it is not enough. The true tongue must also be *wholesome*. Before anything can be wholesome in its effects on others it must be whole in itself. . . . "Winged words" have fluttered about in poetry and prose through all the languages of the civilised world from old Homer's day till now. The permanence and prevalency of the expression proves that it embodies a recognised truth. Words have wings indeed, but they are the wings of seeds rather than of birds or butterflies. We are all accustomed in autumn to observe multitudes of diminitive seeds, each balanced on its own tiny wing, floating past on the breeze. . . . Words are like these seeds, in their winged character, their measureless multitude, and their winged speed. They drop off in inconceivable numbers: they fly far: they are widely spread. It is of deep importance that they should be for good, and not for evil. The tongue is a prolific tree, it concerns the whole community that it should be a tree of life, and not of death.—*Arnot.*

Verse 5. He that regardeth reproof is prudent. Wise he is, and wiser he will be. This made David prize and pray for a reprover (Psa. cxli. 5).—*Trapp.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 6.

LIKE IN CIRCUMSTANCES, BUT UNLIKE IN CHARACTER.

I. The wicked and the righteous are often on a level as regards material wealth. One may have "much treasure" and the other great "revenues," or *gain*. The laws of nature have no respect to character. God makes His sun to "shine upon the evil and the good, and sendeth rain upon the just and upon the unjust" (Matt. v. 45), so that the wicked man reaps a harvest as abundant as that of the righteous man. And all the laws of Providence move with the same even step, certainly showing no favour to the good man over the bad.

II. But though their possessions may be equal, there is a great inequality in the enjoyment of them. Character makes all the difference here. Even "a little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked" (Ps. xxxvii. 16). The wicked man is troubled by a sense of being out of harmony with all that is holy, and just, and true in the universe of God, and with a foreboding of future retribution. The wealth of the spirit is so much more than material wealth as the spirit is so much more than the body. It is wealth to have "*a conscience purged from dead works to serve the living God*" (Heb. ix. 14), and to "lay up treasure" without being thus "rich toward God" (Luke xii. 21) is only to "*spend money for that which is not bread, and labour for that which satisfieth not.*" (See on chap. iii. 14, 15, viii. 11-19, etc.)

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

"The *treasure* in the house of the righteous" may be understood not of mere wealth, but of whatever is possessed with contentment and cheerfulness, with gratitude to God, with an assurance of His fatherly regard, with the peace that passeth all understanding, with resignation of spirit to the Divine will, with the present enjoyment of spiritual blessing, and the well-founded "hope of glory, honour, and immortality." . . . We may suppose the revenues of the wicked to be *acquired* and *enjoyed* wickedly. But if not—yet if possessed and expended without the fear of God, and if the means themselves of banishing that fear, and preventing the choice of a better portion,—it may truly be affirmed that in them there is "*trouble.*" —*Wardlaw.*

"*The house,*" as we have repeatedly seen (see on chap. ix. 1, xiv. 1), means a man's *whole interest*. The mere *interest* of the "*righteous,*" whether it seem high or low; his lot, whether it be on high or on a dunghill; his hap, just as it is, whether it be easy or under pain, is, under the covenant of the Almighty, an enormous riches; while not "*the house of the wicked*" (for the wise man intends another of his climaxes); but stating his condition in the most favourable way, "*the revenue of the wicked,*" imagining that to be of the most favourable kind; and not "*the revenue of the wicked,*" but *in* the revenue, as though the trouble were in the revenue itself, is, literally, *the being troubled* (Niphal). The splendours of the lost will involve but *trouble* in the whole eternity.—*Miller.*

The treasures of the wicked are too much for their good and too little for their lusts. . . . . But is it not the crown of the Christian's crown, and the glory of his glory that he cannot desire more?—*Bridges.*

The riches of the wicked, in which they pride themselves, often consist of paper, and if bonds and charters make a man rich, the righteous cannot be poor, when they have bonds upon God Himself for everything they need, and the charter which shows their sure title to an everlasting inheritance. The devil robbed Job, but he could not make him poor, for his chief treasure lay quite out of reach of the enemy. —*Lawson.*

Every righteous man is a rich man, whether he hath more or less of the things of this life. For, *first*, he hath plenty of that which is precious. Secondly, *Propriety;* what he hath is his own; he holds all in *capite-tenure* in Christ; he shall not be called to account as a usurper. "All is yours" (1 Cor. iii. 22), "because you are Christ's, and Christ is God's." And although he hath little, many times, in present possession, he is rich in reversion.—*Trapp.*

His house is God's treasury, himself is God's treasure; wherefore God watcheth over his house to defend and preserve it; and himself God keepeth, as the apple of His eye.—*Jermin.*

Even the trifling sum which the righteous keeps in his house is a great treasure, because it has God's blessing; but all the revenues, the large annual rents of the wicked from all his vast estate, are mere troubles.—*Burgon.*

The thought of verse 7 has been treated before. (See verse 2, etc.)

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Utterance is a gift, and dumb Christians are blameworthy as well as dumb ministers. "Speak, that I may see thee," said Socrates. When the heart is full, it overfloweth in speech. We know metals by their tinkling, and men by their talking.—*Brooks.*

In their houses, they catechise their children; in the company of their neighbours, they entreat of God's word and works; in the church, if they be teachers, they publish wholesome doctrine.—*Muffet.*

Most commentators say *scatter* or *disperse.* "*Winnow,*" which has usage (Ruth iii. 2), bears better upon the second clause. (See renderings in Critical Notes.) *Winnowing knowledge, i.e.,* letting the lips, under the guidance of wisdom, be an instrument for holding folly back and giving utterance to knowledge, must be the finest practice for giving strength to piety; while the second clause shows the incompetence of folly to "*winnow*" anything, by saying that "*the heart o the foolish is not fixed*" (and therefore lacks the first principles of choice, in separating one thing from the other).—*Miller.*

The foolish sow cockle as fast as wiser men do corn, and are as busy in digging descents to hell as others are in building staircases for heaven.—*Trapp.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSES 8 and 9.

Praying and Living.

I. God loves righteous men with a special love. God has a love for all His human creatures—a love which springs out of His relationship to them as their Creator. He loves the "world" (John iii. 16), but this love cannot be said to spring from likeness of character between Him and the objects of His love. There is a spontaneous love welling up in the mother's heart towards her child long before that child has developed any qualities to win love. The love springs from the relationship that exists between the child and its parent, and it exists before there has been time and opportunity to develop a loveable character. And there is still love in the mother's heart from the relationship, if, after there has been time to form a loveable character, no such character is manifested—if there is no response to the parent's love. There is this spontaneous love in God for all His human children—a love that, even when it meets with no response, does not cease to pity those who reject it. "*God commended His love toward us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us*" (Rom. v. 8). "*But,*

after the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us" (Titus iii. 4, 5). But the special love which God has to righteous men—to men of integrity—to men who are sincere in their love of righteousness, and who make conformity to it the end and aim of their life (see on chap. xi. 3, page 196), is a love which springs from likeness of character. It is the personal love of a perfectly Righteous Being for persons whose characters, in some degree, resemble His own. The good human father loves to see his own character in miniature in that of his child. He delights to see his son *"following after"* him in his holy habits and feelings—he loves him with a deeper and more joyful love as he sees in him the germs of holy desires and aims which he knows will be more fully developed as he grows into manhood. And so the "Heavenly Father" loves with the love of delight (chap. xii. 22) those of His human sons and daughters who have begun to reflect His image in their hearts and lives, and waits with patience until the blade changes to the ear, and the ear into the full corn—until they are not only *just men,* but *"just men made perfect"* (Heb. xii. 23).

II. **One act of a righteous man which God regards with special pleasure.** "The *prayer of* the upright." 1. *Because it is an expression of conscious need.* A sense of spiritual need and weakness is indispensable, even to the continuance of a righteous character, much more to its growth. While a man feels his need, he will not only keep what he already has, but will be in the way of getting more. While he feels that he has not *"already attained"* neither is *"already perfect"* he will *"follow after"* perfection, he will *"reach forth unto those things which are before, and press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God"*—(Phil. iii. 12–14), even to entire and absolute holiness of character. When he prays, he expresses his sense of need, and thus gives proof of that lowliness and contrition of heart without which no man can receive supplies of Divine grace. Therefore God delights in his prayer. 2. *It is an expression of filial confidence.* He not only knows what he wants, but he knows who is able and willing to supply his need. Prayer is in itself an act of faith—it is an expression of belief that *"God is and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.* (Heb. xi. 6.) A human benefactor, especially a human parent, feels that application to him for help is a tribute to his goodness and to his power—it is a manifestation that those who seek his aid are assured of his willingness and ability to meet their need. So with the Divine Friend and Father. He loves to have His compassion and His power confided in by His creatures. 3. *It is an act of obedience.* God has commanded "men always to pray." (Luke xviii. 1.) It was a condition to be observed under the Old Testament dispensation, as well as under that of the new. *"Thus saith the Lord, I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them."* (Ezek. xxxvi. 37). *"Ask and it shall be given you"* (Luke xi. 9). The conditions are easy, but they are indispensable. No wise parent gives his children what they desire, except certain conditions are fulfilled. They may be very easy, but in no well-governed family are they dispensed with. So in God's family. True he knows what his children need before they ask Him, even better than the wisest and most tender human parent, but the command is absolute, the condition without exception. Prayer is therefore acceptable to Him because it is an act of obedience to His command.

III. **God abhors the way of the wicked.** 1. *Because they are at war with their better nature.* There are instincts in every man which are opposed to wrong-doing. There is a light which lightens every man that cometh into the world. When men sin they war against their own better nature. Cain possessed instincts which he must have stifled and trampled down before he could shed his brother's blood, and so it is with every son of Adam. God must hate that

which debases the creature whom He created in His own image. 2. *Because their ways are at war with His purpose to bless them.* A wise statesman may conceive a plan which he sees by his superior intelligence is calculated to bring great blessings to his nation. He labours to make the nation see it also—he uses all his reasoning power and all the force of his eloquence to bring it into operation, to make it the law of the land. But the very people whom it is intended to benefit may, from ignorance and prejudice, oppose his wise and beneficent efforts. He looks upon their opposition with the deepest displeasure, because it is opposed to their own welfare. If a son rebel against the plans which a wise and good father has formed for his benefit, the father must be deeply displeased at the obstinacy which thus frustrates his purpose of love and wisdom. God's complaint against Israel was, "*I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against Me*" (Isa. i. 2)—rebelled against all His gracious plans and purposes concerning them, and that is His quarrel with the ways of wicked men in general that crosses all His purposes of mercy towards them.

IV. Their acts of worship are especially displeasing to Him. They are offered with no sense of spiritual need—with no desire to forsake sin. When such men engage in outward acts of worship it is as if a thief were to offer to his judge some of his unlawful gain as a bribe to be allowed to go free of punishment. God so regarded the sacrifices of Israel when they came into His courts with "*hands full of blood.*" "*Your new moons and your appointed feasts My soul hateth*" (Isa. i. 14, 15). They were an abomination to Jehovah because the hearts of the men who offered them were in love with sin and desired only, if possible, to escape the penalty due to it. Men in all ages would have been well pleased to "be pardoned and to retain the offence," but the very suggestion of such a thing is a gross insult to the righteousness of God, and as this is the only construction that can be put upon a drawing near to Him in outward service while the heart is far from Him (Isa. xxix. 13), the *sacrifice* of the wicked must be the act most abhorrent to God of a way which is altogether an "abomination unto Him."

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Verse 8. When an ungodly man prays, it is not the *act of prayer* that constitutes the sin, it is the want of a *praying heart.* The sin is *in him,* not in his prayer.—*Wardlaw.*

The formal devotion of a faithless man is not worth the crust of bread which he asks.—*T. Adams.*

Man judges by acts, God by principles. *The sacrifice of the wicked,* though it be part of God's own service, yet "will be found in His register in the catalogue of sins to be accounted for" (*Bp. Hopkins*). Is he then finally rejected? Far from it. His desire to seek the Lord would be the beginning of the prayer that ensures acceptance. That which brings acceptance is—not the perfection, but the simplicity of uprightness.—*Bridges.*

"Sacrifice and prayer" are not here contrasted as the higher and the lower, but "sacrifice" is a gift to God, "prayer" is desiring from Him (Comp. Isa. i. 11, 15, etc.) Yet this is by no means an essential difference; for both sacrifice and prayer, which indeed fall likewise under the category of offering in the broadest sense (Ps. cxix. 108; Heb. xiii. 15) come under consideration here only as general tokens of reverence for God; and the value of both is clearly defined by this test, whether the state of heart is or is not well pleasing to God.—*Lange's Commentary.*

It is not works that make the man good, but when a man is justified his works are also good. God in His grace makes well pleasing to Himself the

works that come of faith, even though great imperfections still mingle with them.—*Starke.*

"*The sacrifice of the wicked*," though it may be very costly—the column of Stylites, the hook-swinging of the east, the millions of anxious charity—without grace must be purely sin. "*The prayer of the upright*," though it *asks* instead of *gives*, yet is a *delight*, where the other is an *abomination*. A man may serve God out of sheer selfish wickedness. Moreover, *all* are abominable. There is no just man upon earth. But the righteous has the righteousness of Christ; while these others are left, without a cover, to their own abominable guiltiness.—*Miller.*

Works *materially* good may never prove so *formally* and *eventually*, viz.: (1) When they proceed not from a right principle; (2) When they tend not to a right end. The glory of God must consume all other ends, as the sun puts out the light of the fire. But the prayer that proceeds from an upright heart, though but faint and feeble, doth come before God, even "into His ears" (Psa. xviii. 6), and so strangely charms Him (Isa. xxvi. 16) that He breaks forth into these words: "Ask me of things concerning my sons, and concerning the works of my hands command ye me" (Isa. xlv. 11). Oh that we understood the latitude of this royal charter!—*Trapp.*

Verse 9. "The way of the wicked is abomination." Not his sacrifices only, but his civilities: all his actions—natural, moral, recreative, religious—are offensive to God. The very "ploughing of the wicked is sin" (Prov. xxi. 4). . . . "But He loveth him that followeth after righteousness, although he fulfil not all righteousness, yet if he make after it with might and main, if he pursue it and have it in chase, "if by any means he may attain to the resurrection of the dead" Phil. iii. 11); that is, the height of holiness that accompanies the resurrection: this is the man whom God loves. Now God's love is not an empty love; it is not like the winter sun, that casteth a goodly countenance when it shines, but gives little warmth and comfort. "Thou meetest him that rejoiceth and worketh righteousness; those that remember Thee in Thy ways" (Isa. lxiv. 5), "that think upon Thy commandments to do them" (Psa. ciii. 20), that are weak but willing (Heb. xiii. 8), that are lifting at the latch, though they cannot do up the door: "Surely, shall every such one say, in the Lord have I righteousness and strength" (Isa. xlv. 24). "Righteousness," that is, mercy to those that come over to Him, and "strength" to enable them to come, as the sea sends out waters to fetch us to it.—*Trapp.*

The way of the wicked and the abomination of the Lord go on with equal paces. It is his way, because he leadeth himself in it, refusing to follow the guide of instruction: and God's way it is, wherein His abomination pursueth after him. . . . St. Bernard saith, "God loveth, neither doth this arise from anything in others, but Himself it is from whence He loveth; and therefore the more vehemently, because He doth not so much love, as rather Himself is love."—***Jermin.***

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 10.

OUT OF THE WAY.

I. There is a pre-ordained way for man to walk in. 1. *Nature suggests this.* Everything there speaks of law and order. 2. *Conscience suggests it.* 3. *Revelation declares it.* (On this subject see Homiletics on chap. xii. 28; xiii. 13, 14; pages 291 and 313.)

II. A man may break loose from this God-ordained path. That he *can* do this is his glory; that he *does* do it is his shame. A convict is compelled to

keep to a certain path, he is obliged to conform to a routine laid down for him by another. His outward life is governed by no will of his own, all his acts are prescribed by an authority which he cannot resist. But God will not keep men in the way in which He desires them to walk by such means. He did not so fence about the angels in heaven. They were "free to fall," and so are we. God treats His creatures as free men, not as prisoners. They have power to choose whom they will serve; they are free to choose the way in which they will walk. All the force that is exerted over them is the force of moral suasion.

III. The correction that follows this forsaking of the way is intended to punish and to reclaim. In all well-ordered human governments, and in all well-governed families, the main intention of punishment (except in the case of capital punishment) is improvement of character. This ought to be the chief aim of all human correction. It is the main intention in all the chastisements of God in this world. There is no retribution which comes to man in this world which will not, if accepted in a right spirit, become a means of restoring him to the forsaken path; therefore

IV. To hate reproof is to shut out all possibility of moral restoration. A man who will not be reproved denies the imperfection of his nature. Every imperfect being must need correction, and for man to rebel against the chastisement of God is to pass sentence of death upon himself. (On this subject see Homiletics on chapters iii. 11, 12; xii. 1; xiii. 18; pages 247, 323, etc.)

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

We would always look hopefully at a sinner under *correction*. For, surely, so long as the physician administers the medicine, there is no ground for despondency. . . . This costly teaching brings us on wonderfully. Lord! let me know the smart of Thy rod rather than the eclipse of Thy love.—*Bridges.*

There are three sorts of passengers that go out of the way. He that mistaketh the way, he that forsaketh his way, and he that loveth to be out of the way. Many miss the way who never were in it, or, being in the way, were missed from it, and these, oftentimes, are glad to be corrected and brought into the way. He forsaketh the way who at first is set in it, and seeing how to go on aright, yet willingly departeth from it: to such an one correction is grievous, and he suffereth it with trouble, but yet many times he is reduced by it. He loveth to be out of the way who hateth reproof, and of his amendment there is little hope. . . . . The force of the verse is, that the suffering of correction is grievous, but that the hating of reproof is most pernicious.—*Jermin.*

Of all sinners, reproofs are worse resented by apostates.—*Henry.*

"*Discipline is an evil to him who forsakes the path.*" (See rendering in Critical Notes.) In our common version this idea is not brought out. It is a very grave one. Men not converted, but steadily "*forsaking the path of holiness,*" are injured by "*discipline.*" In "*hating reproof*" they go through the very soul-action which we mean when we say, "*they die.*" Each "*hating*" emotion kills them. And this is the very philosophy of the *letter-killing* (2 Cor. iii. 6); not that it is poison in itself, but that the gospel awakens opposition, which, on its part, corrupts the mind.—*Miller.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 11.

Two Worlds.

I. Two worlds out of the reach of the human senses—the world of departed men and the human soul. Both these mysterious worlds are shut out or shut in

from the eye of man by the bolts and bars of his bodily senses. How exceedingly small a portion of the vast universe of God is revealed to the eye of sense! The small globe upon which man finds himself is nearly all that he can possibly know with his bodily vision. Reason may tell him that there is much more, faith may afford him clearer evidence of things not seen (Heb. xi. 1), but over all there is a veil drawn. The vast world, where dwells the great majority of the human race—that unseen home, peopled with the spirits of just men made perfect, and the dwelling-place of the spirits of the unjust—are regions entirely beyond the reach of human sight. And there is another world equally out of the reach of his vision. He has never seen the soul of any one of the thousands of his fellow-men with whom he has come in contact. He has never read the heart of his most intimate friend. His own "living soul," even that which is *himself*, has never been apprehended by his bodily senses. He has never touched or looked upon *that*.

II. But both these invisible worlds are entirely open to the eye of God. The world of spirits and the individual soul of each man are seen by Him as plainly as we see the material world around us, or as we see the bodies of our fellow-creatures. And they are far more fully comprehended by Him than the visible things upon which our eyes rest every day are comprehended by us. For what do we really know of the essential properties of that by which we are surrounded? Is not our very bodily organism a mystery to us? But each soul of each individual man in the body, and each "unclothed" (2 Cor. v. 4) spirit in the worlds of the departed is "naked and open" in the eyes of Him with whom each one "has to do" (Heb. iv. 13) as really and as intimately as if in all the universe there was only one creature of whom the omniscient Creator had to take cognizance.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

It is the gross persuasion of some, as if hell and destruction were only things that God did set before us, and that they were not before Him; as if they were things wherewith God did only terrify us, and which should never be. But the wise man telleth us, that they are before the Lord, and that though we know not where hell is and what is done there, yet it is before God's eyes. And, therefore, though the heart of the children of men be made as deep as hell by hellish devices, yet much more is that manifest to God. The heart of man is more manifest to Him than it is to himself. Wherefore St. Augustine, speaking unto God, saith, "Thou wert within, and I was without." For, indeed, God is often within and knoweth what our hearts are, when we ourselves are without and do not know them.—*Jermin.*

This terrible truth these hearts secretly know, and their desperate writhings to shake it off show how much they dislike it. The Romish confessional is one of the most pregnant facts in the history of man. It is a monument and measure of the guilty creature's enmity against God. . . . . We have wondered at the blindness and stupidity of our common nature in permitting a man, not more holy than his neighbours, to stand in the place of God to a brother's soul. There is cause for grief, but not ground for surprise. The phenomenon proceeds in the way of natural law. It is the common, well understood process of compounding for the security of the whole, by the voluntary surrender of a part. The confessional is a kind of insurance office where periodical exposure of the heart to a man is the premium paid for fancied impunity in hiding that heart altogether from the deeper scrutiny of the all-seeing God. . . . . It is God's love from the face of Jesus Christ shining into my dark heart that makes my heart open and

delight to be His dwelling-place. The eye of the just Avenger I cannot endure to be in this place of sin; but the eye of the compassionate Physician I shall gladly admit into this place of disease. —*Arnot.*

"*Because also the hearts of the children of men.*" (See Miller's rendering in Critical Notes.) The intimation is *God knows hell because He knows men.* He knows that "hating reproof," we die (verse 10), and just how fast we die or sink by each act of hating. In other words, he knows how fast sin grows under an administration of justice; and, therefore, how far a given sinner will have gone down, at any date, through his eternal age.—*Miller.*

The verse may denote that the deepest machinations of the prince of hell, and of all his legions of fallen angels, are open to the Lord's inspection, and must end in their disappointment and deeper torment; how, then, can man, who is so inferior in sagacity and subtilty, expect to hide his counsels from God, or to prosper in rebellion against Him?" There is nothing so deep or secret that can be hid from the eyes of God, much less man's thoughts." —*Scott.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 12.

SELF-DESTROYED.

I. That a scorner is in hopeless ignorance. "Neither will he go unto the wise." If a thirsty man will not go to the river to which he has free and easy access, there is no hope of his thirst being quenched. If he will not apply to the only source whence his need can be supplied, he must remain in his needy condition. If a man who is sick will not apply to him who is able to cure his malady, the probability is that he will remain under the influence of disease, and die of his malady If a man who is ignorant of the revelation of God, and of the healing power of Divine truth, refuses to go where wisdom is to be found—viz., among those who have been enlightened by Divine wisdom, there is no hope of his ever emerging from his state of ignorance. God uses one divinely enlightened man to turn another from darkness to light. This is the method of His procedure in His kingdom, and if the scorner rejects this means, he must remain in darkness. He may "go unto the wise" by listening to the voice of the living man, by observing the life of the morally wise, or by reading their thoughts, especially those of the divinely-inspired writers of the Scriptures. Men have begun to learn wisdom by each one of these methods; generally there is the combined influence of the three.

II. The true source of the scorner's dislike to the company of the wise. He "hates reproof." As reproof is knowledge (see page 323) so an increase of knowledge, if it is not used, is reproof. The words of the wise and the lives of the wise reprove the scorner by increasing his light, and thus adding to his guilt. He therefore "cometh not to the light lest his deeds should be reproved" (John iii. 20). He is like a man who is conscious that he is suffering from a dangerous disease, but who will not submit to the examination of the physician because he knows he would prescribe treatment which, though it would cure, would be painful. No men love reproof any more than they love the surgeon's knife; but wise men submit to the one and the other for the sake of the health to soul and to body which will follow. But the scorner hates the keen-edged weapon of reproof because he does not value the good that would result from patiently bearing the incision.

III. Every scorner, therefore, is a self-destroyer. A man commits suicide if, when he is sick, he refuses to use the means by which he might be healed. If he die, he takes away his life as truly as if he thrust a sword through his

body. He is not accountable for his disease, but he is responsible and blameworthy for neglecting means of cure within his reach. So with men in relation to spiritual knowledge. Ignorance is a crime only when the means of enlightenment are within reach. He who scorns to avail himself of those means, he who will not submit to reproof, he who rejects the invitation and despises the threatenings of Divine Wisdom (see chap. i. 22–32) is a moral suicide. (See also on chap. xiv. 6, page 346.)

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Men should "run to and fro to increase knowledge" (Dan. xii. 4). The Shunamite rode ordinarily to the prophet on the Sabbaths and other holy days (2 Kings iv. 23). Those good souls in Psalm lxxxiv. 7 passed on "from strength to strength," setting the best foot forwards for like purpose; yea, those that were weak and unfit for travel would be brought to the ordinances upon "horses, in chariots, and in litters" (Isa. lxvi. 20). But now the scorner holds it not worth while to put himself to this pains, and is ready to say with Jeroboam, "It is too much for men to go up to Jerusalem," to go up "to the mountain of the Lord, to learn His ways" (Isa. ii. 3). Yea, he set watches to observe who would go from him to Judah to worship, that he might shame them at least, if not slay them (Hos. v. 1). He would never have gone to the prophet to be reproved, and when the prophet came to him, he stretched out his hand to apprehend him. So Herod had a desire to see Christ, but could never find a heart to go to hear him; and yet our Saviour looked that men should have come as far to Him as the Queen of Sheba came to Solomon.—*Trapp.*

Here is instruction for all men, to observe the state of their own souls, and the better, when occasion is offered, to inform themselves of others by the company which they most delight to frequent. He that delighteth to associate himself with good men, is never to be deemed a friend to evil ways, and he that embraceth the fellowship of sinful persons, must needs be judged an enemy to godly behaviour. When David would clear himself to be none of the wicked, he made it fully manifest by this, that *he went not with vain persons, neither kept company with dissemblers: that he hated the assembly of the evil, and companioned not with the wicked.* When he would prove himself to be one of the righteous, he evidently confirmed it by this, that *he was a companion of all them that feared the Lord and kept His precepts.—Dod.*

There is none that loveth more truly, that loveth more profitably, than he that lovingly reproveth what he seeth amiss. And yet there is none that a scorner loveth less. But what marvel if he loveth not another, that loveth not himself! Where scorning is, there can be no love, that was never love's disposition. Let no one that reproveth a scorner look for love from him. . . . But let the wise reprove him notwithstanding, and as St. Cyprian speaketh, if they cannot persuade him, to make him to please Christ, let themselves perform to Christ that which is their part, and let them please Christ by keeping his commandments.—*Jermin.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 13.

A Cheerful Face and a Broken Spirit.

I. The outer man is to a large extent an index of the inner life. The joy of the heart is made visible upon the countenance. This is one of the infinitely kind and wise arrangements of God which minister so much to human happiness.

We have but to consider the influence of a cheerful face to know how great a blessing it is that a merry heart maketh a cheerful countenance. "How blank would be the aspect of the world," says Dr. Arnot, "if no image of a man's thought could ever be seen glancing through his countenance! Our walk through life would be like a solitary walk through a gallery of statues—as cold as marble, and not nearly so beautiful.

II. The effect of sorrow upon the human spirit. It "*breaks*" it. When a vessel's timbers are shivered by the fury of the storm she may not go to pieces altogether. But she is no longer able to hold her own against the elements, which she could once use as forces to convey her from land to land. If she were now to put to sea, instead of riding over the waves and making them her servants, she would be a passive thing in their hands, a mere helpless bundle of timbers to be tossed whithersoever they pleased, instead of "walking the waters like a thing of life." So it is with the human spirit when the cross seas and angry winds of adverse circumstances have quenched the hope and paralysed the energy that once governed and inspired the man. He is no longer able to face the storms of life, and outride them, or even make them advance his interests. He is passive amid the changes and chances of mortal life, and they drift him on wheresoever they will. But this can never be the case unless a man has lost faith in the character of God and his own high and immortal destiny. Then, indeed, the elements which he was built to rule will rule him, and he will fail to fulfil the end for which God launched him on the sea of life.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

I have always preferred cheerfulness to mirth. The latter I consider as an act, the former as a habit, of the mind. —*Addison.*

The "*sorrow of heart*" here spoken of, we may consider as that which arises from an evil conscience, from envy, discontent, and other similar sources.—*Wardlaw.*

A "merry" or "glad" heart is one of the attributes of piety. It (literally) "*does good to the countenance,*" *improves it,* as we say in our idiom, "Come with us, and we will do thee good" (Numb. x. 29).—*Miller.*

This word *merriment* is of frequent use among our old writers. It is Foxe's favourite description of the holy joy of the martyrs.—*Bridges.*

It sits smiling in the face, and looks merrily out of the windows of the eyes. But this is not till faith has healed the conscience, and till grace has hushed the affections, and composed all within. Stephen looked like an angel when he stood before the council (Acts vi. 15); and the apostles went away rejoicing (Acts v. 41). There are that rejoice in the face only, and not in the heart (2 Cor. v. 12); this is but the hypocrisy of mirth, and we may be sure that many a man's heart bleeds within him when his face counterfeits a smile. It is for an Abraham only to laugh for joy of the promise, and for a David to "rejoice at the word as one that findeth great spoil" (Psalms cxix. 162), wherein the pleasure is usually as much as the profit. Christ's chariot, wherein he carries people up and down in the world, and brings them at length to Himself, is "paved with love" (Cant. iii. 9, 10); He brings them also into His wine cellar (Cant. ii. 4), where He cheers up their hearts, and clears up their countenances, and this is Heaven beforehand. These are some few clusters of the grapes of the celestial Canaan. But as the looks are marred, so the spirits are dulled and disabled by sorrow, as a limb out of joint can do nothing without deformity or pain. Dejection takes off the wheels of the soul, hinders comfortable intercourse with God, and that habitual cheerfulness, that Sabbath of the spirit, that every man should strive to enjoy.

Afflictions, saith one, are the wind of the soul, passions the storm. The soul is well carried when neither so becalmed that it moves not when it should, nor yet tossed with tempests of wrath, grief, fear, etc., to move disorderly. Of these we must be careful to crush the very first insurrections; storms rise out of little gusts, but the top of those mountains above the middle region are so quiet that ashes, lightest things, are not moved out of place.—*Trapp.*

Mirth and cheerfulness make a man not only fitter for the occasions of this world, but even for spiritual affairs also. Wherefore Elisha calleth for a minstrel that, being angry with the king of Israel, by the melody of the music a more soft and sweet disposition might possess him. . . . . "Joy," saith Aquinas, "is, as it were, a juice spreading itself over the whole man, dispersing the comfort of itself to all the faculties of the soul, and all parts of the body. But, now, what is it that maketh a merry heart? Surely not the things of this world. They only do besot the heart with a dream of mirth, they do only make the heart drunken with some flushings of joy. A merry heart indeed is that which the assurance of God's favour rejoiceth, and that will make the countenance cheerful in any trouble, even in death itself. It is true also that by sorrow of heart the spirit is broken, the heart and the spirit being but one string of life. But what is it by which the heart should be made sorrowful? Surely not the things of this life, seeing the life of the heart is so far above them. For it is a shameful folly to hurt a better thing for that which is far worse. No; nothing should make the heart sorrowful but repentance for sin, and as that casteth down the spirit, so will it raise it up again. Wherefore Augustine saith, "Let the penitent always be grieved, and let him rejoice for his grief." Nothing should make the heart sad but the fear of God's displeasure, and if that break the spirit, it will heal it again with endless consolation.—*Jermin.*

The principal thought of verse 14 is a repetition in a slightly varied form of a truth that has been considered before. (See on chap. xii. 1, xiii. 18, etc.)

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

They are the wisest men that are most sensible of the imperfection of their wisdom.—*Lawson.*

"*The mouth of fools feed,*" etc., literally, *pastures*, like a brute. A thing fed takes the texture of its nourishment. The "*mouth*" or "*face*" (see Critical Notes) of the fool grows more and more inane and brutal.—*Miller.*

As a hungry man seeks meat, or a covetous man gold, the more he hath the more he desires. Moses was no sooner off the mount where he had seen God face to face, but he cries, "Lord, show me Thy glory!" David, that knew more than his teachers, cries ever and anon, "Teach me Thy statutes." Job prefers knowledge before his necessary food (chap. xxiii. 12). The wise man finds no such sweetness in the most delicate and dainty dishes, as in the search after Divine knowledge (Psa. cxix. 103). Even Aristotle saith that a little knowledge, though conjectural, about heavenly things is to be preferred above knowledge, though certain, about earthly things. And Agur saith it is to ascend into heaven (Prov. xxx. 4).—*Trapp.*

First, because the one sort is after the spirit, and therefore they favour the things of the spirit; and the other sort is after the flesh, and therefore they favour the things of the flesh. *Secondly*, because the one sort is guided by judgment, and choose that which will comfort their consciences; and the other is altogether led by lust, and seek only that which will satisfy their senses. *Thirdly*, faith makes the one sort to cast an eye to that which will follow hereafter; and sensuality causeth the

other (like brute beasts, made to be destroyed) only to look to that which is present.—*Dod.*

Knowledge is necessary for us, not only to manage the affairs of this life, but also to perform the service of our Maker. Conscience may dictate to us that things are right or wrong, but conscience may be mistaken in her decisions, unless she call in reason to her assistance, for a clear knowledge of the revealed will of God cannot be understood without application of mind . . . . The desire of knowledge is in some sense natural to us all and is manifested very soon. We see how early curiosity exerts itself in lively children. But this natural desire may be misused. 1. *It may be too little.* Some persons do not desire knowledge so much as they ought, especially they are negligent in acquiring religious knowledge. This negligence may proceed from too warm a pursuit of other things. But what will this world avail us, if we are excluded from an inheritance in the next? It may proceed from mere sloth. But the unprofitable servant, who suffers his talents to lie useless, is to be cast into outer darkness. 2. *It may be too much.* Some things there are which we ought not to know, and a vain curiosity after them is an abuse of our natural desire of knowledge. This curiosity brought on the fall of our first parents, and still reigns among their posterity. Sin should only be known, as the rocks at sea, that they may be avoided. It becomes us also to be contented with such a knowledge of the Divine nature, and the Divine administration, as we are capable of acquiring, and of future events so far as God hath seen fit to reveal them.—*Jortin.*

The mouth of fools—the mouth of their souls and understandings—feedeth upon anything; even foolishness itself is good food unto them. Their distempered palate judgeth not the worth of things. They have a mouth to receive knowledge, but they have not a heart to consider and discern what they do receive. None is so ill a feeder as fools. Such fools are they in the prophet Isaiah who say, "Prophecy not unto us, right things speak unto us," as the original word is, *bland* things, pleasing things; but the word signifieth in the first place *scattered* things, such as coming from a shattered brain have no order and aim at no material point. Or else scattered things which may strike at none, which may hurt none, do no good to any. And, indeed, too many such there are. The world is full of speakers and talkers, that speak things they know not, and teach things they have not learned.—*Jermin.*

The Queen of Sheba, "coming from the utmost parts of the earth;" Nicodemus and Mary "sitting at the feet of Jesus;" the Eunuch, journeying to Jerusalem; Cornelius and his company drinking in the precious message of salvation; the Bereans, carefully "searching the Scriptures," all these show "*the understanding heart seeking* a larger interest in the blessing."—*Bridges.*

That in "*seeking* knowledge" the idea of feasting on it is included, is evident from the terms of the antithesis. It is a feast of "knowledge" above all, of *divine knowledge.* He who has "understanding,"—who is enlightened of God, and discerns the excellency and glory of divine truth —"*seeketh*" such knowledge. From experience of the joy already imparted by it, he seeks more and still more—the appetite growing by gratification, delighted with every new discovery, yet never tiring of the old (1 Pet. ii. 1-3). "But the mouth of fools *feedeth on* foolishness." That is what they like; that is therefore what they seek, and from which they have their own poor and pitiful enjoyment. In regard to *religion itself* they are taken with everthing that serves the present purpose of keeping all quiet within; that lets conscience alone; that dispenses with serious thought, and, preventing inward disturbance, allows them to go on easily and comfortably. They have a relish for all doctrines of this unannoying description—that "prick not

their hearts; that embitter not present sweets by any forebodings of the future; that "prophecy smooth things, and cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before them"—the *scarer* of their thoughtless mirth and sinful gratification. They have an appetite for everything of that kind.—*Wardlaw.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 15.

The Continual Feast.

I. All men have days of affliction. They may be traced to one of four sources—1. *Men are afflicted by reason of their relation to the first head of the human race.* Every man inherits bodily weaknesses of some kind—is, in apostolic phrase, made subject to vanity (Rom. viii. 20) of some kind or another for which he is not personally responsible—which is not the fruit of his own character or conduct, nor of that of his immediate ancestors. Mental sorrows are also born of this remote relationship. The human mind is not now what it was when it came first from the hand of its Creator. God at the beginning made man perfect—his spirit was a reflection of the perfect law of God, and all within was consequently harmony and peace. But it is not so now, even with the best of the human race. There has been a subjection to vanity through sin, and this is the fruitful source of much mental pain and sorrow to all men, although they are often unconscious of the origin of the darkness that envelopes their spirit. 2. *Men are afflicted by reason of their immediate relationships.* A child who has a bad father suffers much and grievously, the father who owns a wicked child often has many days of deep affliction. A nation may be deeply afflicted by reason of the viciousness or unwisdom of its rulers. Many and various are the afflictions which come to men through those to whom they are related, whether by family or national ties. 3. *Afflictions arise from personal transgression of God's laws.* These transgressions may be either of a negative or positive character—they may consist in doing what we ought not to do, or in leaving undone that which it is our duty to do. Much affliction comes to men because they have neglected to do for mind, body, or estate that which they are commanded by God to do. Men who neglect to work, or who neglect to conform to the laws by which their mind or their body is governed, must pay the penalty, and often suffer much affliction from the mere neglect of duty. And much more will those know days of affliction who are positive transgressors of any Divine law, whether physical or moral. 4. *Affliction comes to men sometimes by Divine permission, either to chasten men for sin or to increase the goodness of their characters.* Affliction came to Job, and he had many evil days, not because he was a sinner, but because he was a saint. Good man as he was, he had many days of affliction—days which were to him very evil—but they arose neither from his remote or immediate relationships, nor from personal or relative transgression, but were the outcome of Satanic agency, acting by Divine permission.

II. Days of affliction are evil days. While the patient is under the knife of the surgeon he is undergoing an experience which is in itself an evil, which is an experience to be dreaded and avoided if possible, however good may be the days of health which are the result of it. No one can feel that affliction in itself is anything but an evil—much good may come out of it, but that does not make the actual suffering of body or mind good in itself. If the sufferings of the present life were unconnected with the blessings which will spring out of them, if they were not regarded in the light of Divine revelation they would be unmitigated evils.

III. Evil days work good to him who can rise above them. If a seaman can

be cheerful and hopeful in the midst of a storm, he is all the better for having passed through it. His courage is strengthened and his experience is enlarged, he is more of a man than before he entered into conflict with the winds and waves. While others have been overwhelmed with terror, he has been full of a calm self-possession, and that which has shown how weak many men are, has shown how strong he is. But in order thus to rise above outward circumstances, there must be internal resources. Only those can came through the storms of life the stronger and the better for having passed through them who have an unfailing well of hope and comfort within. The martyrs of old revealed that they had a continual feast within, although they had many days of affliction without. Their "merry hearts," filled with true and unfailing gladness, lifted them above the bitterness and evil of their circumstances. Thus to glory in tribulation is to take "meat out of the eater and sweetness out of the strong." But only those can practise this art who, like their Master, "have meat to eat" of which men in general "know not of." (John iv. 32.)

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

The feast of him who is of "a merry heart," who has within himself the sources of true joy, is not terminated—is not even suspended—in the season of affliction. *His* feast is independent of changing condition. He often relishes it most when other sweets are embittered. Often is his inward spiritual festivity the richest, when the supply of his outward and earthly comforts is scantiest.—*Wardlaw.*

Affliction, as the fruit and chastening of sin, is an evil. . . . Though the abounding consolation of Christian affliction does not blot out its penal character, yet the child of God is not so miserable as he seems to be (2 Cor. vi. 10). The darkest of these *evil days* can never make the consolations of God small with him (Job xv. 11). He can sing in the prison (Acts xvi. 25), can "take joyfully the spoiling of his goods" (Heb. x. 34), can praise his God when He has stripped him naked (Job. i. 21). What real *evil* then can affliction bring? Or rather what does it bring but many feast days? A few days' feasting would soon weary the epicure. But here the *merry heart hath a continual feast.—Bridges.*

"*All the days of the toiling are evil, but a good heart is a continual feast.*" A glorious comparison! A sour heart is fed by a hard life; and yet, though the hard life is common to all, a brightened spirit masters it, and not only masters it but sweetens it. *Toiling.* The word is very peculiar. "*Afflicted*" our version has it. "*Humble*" is the translation in many cases. Toiling strikes us best, (1) because such is the root—the verb, first of all, means to *toil*—and (2) because such is the sense; the toiling character of life makes all groan together. We are not paid. Such is the toil of our spirits that life is a battle. As a worldly maxim, "*a good heart*" carries the day; but, as an adopted text, the wise saw strengthens itself. Under the toils of life, "*a good heart,*" regenerate by grace, greets the same toil the lost man does, and finds the "*heart*" itself "*a continual feast.*"—*Miller.*

This is diligently to be observed, that none can have a cheerful mind indeed but only such as, through faith in Christ having peace with God, pollute not their consciences with detestable iniquities. For indeed evils enter into such to trouble their minds, to profane their joys, and to pull them from the continual feast of security here spoken of, who either walk in the committing of gross offences, or are close hypocrites and dissemblers.—*Muffet.*

He that hath a heart merry in a good contentment can always invite himself to a full feast. When he hath not wherewith to feast others—yea, even when he wanteth perhaps what to

eat, he wanteth not wherewith to feast himself. It is not a feast that must have time to provide it, and to make it ready, and which, being ready, is soon passed over; but it is a continual feast, ever ready, and never ended.—*Jermin.*

The sincere heart, the quiet conscience, will not only stand under greatest pressure, as did St. Paul (2 Cor. i. 9-12), but goes as merrily to die in a good cause as ever he did to dine, as did divers martyrs. Be the air clear or cloudy, he enjoys a continual serenity, and sits continually at that blessed feast, whereat the blessed angels are cooks and butlers, as Luther hath it, and the three Persons in the Trinity gladsome guests. Mr. Latimer saith the assurance of heaven is the sweetmeats of this feast. There are other dainty dishes, but this is the banquet. Saith St. Bernard, "Wilt thou, O man, never be sad? wilt thou turn thy whole life into a merry festival? get and keep a good conscience." A good man keeps holiday all the year about.—*Trapp.*

So far as we would live a comfortable life, we should seek to build up our inward man more than our outward estates; that our hearts be better furnished than our houses, and our consciences than our coffers, that our stock of faith and everlasting goodness may exceed our store of coin and temporal goods: and so shall we be fenced against all perils, and provided for against all wants, and secured against all accidents whatsoever.—*Dod.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 16.

A Treasure without Trouble.

The fear of the Lord is better than worldly treasure—I. *Because the fear of the Lord tends to peace of mind.* In any piece of complicated machinery the condition of the internal works is a much more important matter than the ornamenting of the exterior. It is of much more consequence that all within a timepiece should move in harmony than that it should have a golden face or be set with jewels. It is of more importance to a man that all his internal bodily organs should be in perfect health than that he should be possessed of much external beauty. A strong frame, and pure blood, and health of body will minister much more effectually to his comfort than the most comely countenance. And the state of a man's inner life has infinitely more to do with his real happiness than his external circumstances. He who has the fear of the Lord has the foundation-stone of peace within, and he who has that does not need an abundance of that which can only minister to the outer man. A little material wealth will content him who has the rich inheritance of a peaceful and contented spirit. Peace with God and love to man are included in the fear of the Lord, and neither the one nor the other of these good and perfect gifts can be bought with the treasure of this world. The first is the very salt of life without which all else is insipid and insufficient to satisfy the cravings of the human soul, and where the first is there will the second, which is also a great sweetener of poverty—(see ver. 17), be found also. II. *Because of the trouble that is inseparable from worldly wealth.* The treasure of this world has a certain value—it can do much for a man, both intellectually and materially. It can be so used by him as to bring blessings upon himself and others; but it is never unaccompanied by drawbacks. 1. There is trouble in *getting* it. The bare sufficiency to sustain life may be got without much strain or anxiety; but if a man sets out to make a fortune, he must be content to have many cares and anxieties—many weary days and sleepless nights—before he obtains his object. Those that *will* be rich cannot avoid much real trouble in carrying out their determination. 2. There is trouble *after it is gotten.* When

men have accumulated great treasure they are not freed from trouble in connection with it. There is the care of retaining it, the desire, and almost the necessity, of increasing it. The more a man has the more he generally desires, and the more he seems to need. New demands are the outcome of a new position, and he who has amassed great treasure rarely contents himself with what he has, but strains every nerve to make the much, *more*. 3. There is great trouble attendant on its *loss*. Even if a rich man possesses the higher wealth—the fear of the Lord—he is more to be pitied if he loses his worldly wealth than a poor man is. The fall is so much greater, as the height from which he has fallen so far exceeds that from which a poor man can fall the hope of climbing it again is so much fainter, and he is in a more helpless and hopeless condition than his brother, who had but little to lose. But if he is destitute of the real treasure of human existence, then he has trouble without any compensation. He may say with Micah, "Ye have taken away my gods and what have I left?"

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

The preposition gives choice of meanings. It may be, *by* "*the fear of Jehovah*," in which case it would mean the "little" earned by piety: or it may be "*in* the fear of Jehovah;" in which case it would mean the little held and got possession of in a devout state; or it may be "*along with*," as the word often means. All the ideas are correct. We choose as our English version, and, of course, for both parts of the sentence; for the expression "therewith," has the same familiar preposition, and the same chance of either of the alternative meanings. "*Better*" is a Christian's shieling, than an impenitent man's palace (chap. xiv. 11). And that, not on account of heaven alone, but for the intrinsic joys of piety (see next verse).—*Miller.*

Judas is bursar, and he shuts himself into his pouch; the more he hath, the more he covets. The apostles, that wanted money, are not so having: Judas hath the bag, and yet he must have more, or he will filch it. So impossible is it that these outward things should satisfy the heart of man. *Soli habent omnia qui habent habentem omnia*—They alone possess all things that possess the possessor of all things. The nature of true content is to fill all the chinks of our desires, as the wax doth the seal. None can do this but God, for (as it is well observed) the world is round, man's heart three-cornered: a globe can never fill a triangle, but one part will still be empty; only the blessed Trinity can fill these three corners of a man's heart . . . . The bag never comes alone, but brings with it cares, saith Christ (Matt. xiii. 22); snares, saith Paul (1 Tim. vi. 9) . . . It is none of God's least favours, that wealth comes not trolling in upon us; for many of us, if our estate were better to the world, would be worse to God. The poor labourer hath not time to luxuriate: he trusts to God to bless his endeavours, and so rests content; but the bag commonly makes a man a prodigal man, or a prodigious man; for a covetous man is a monster . . . . It is no argument of God's favour to be His purse-bearer; no more than it was a sign that Christ loved Judas above the other apostles because he made him His steward: He gave the rest grace, and him the bag; which sped best? The outward things are the scatterings of His mercies, like the gleaning after the vintage: the full crop goes to His children.—*T. Adams.*

Here also we trace the harmony of wisdom, *i.e.*, of the Divine Word, speaking through many different channels, and in different tones. The proverb has its completion in the teaching which bids us "seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness" (Matt. vi. 33), and finds echoes in the

maxims of the wise among other nations who have uttered like thoughts. —*Plumptre.*

It is not the great cage that makes the bird sing. It is not the great estate that brings always the inward joy—the cordial contentment. The little lark with a wing sees farther than the ox with a bigger eye, but without a wing. Birds use not to sing when they are on the ground, but when got into the air, or on tops of trees. If saints be sad, it is because they are too busy here below. . . . . If the bramble bear rule, fire will arise out of it that will consume the cedars; the lean kine will soon eat up the fat, and it shall not be seen by them. It is hard to handle these thorns hard and not to prick one's fingers. Riches, though well got, are but as manna; those that gathered less had no want, and those that gathered more, it was but a trouble and annoyance to them. —*Trapp.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 17.

Two Feasts.

I. The equality here existing between the poor man and the rich man—they both have a dinner. This is as it ought to be. God gave the earth to the children of men, and when He enriched them with this large donation He intended that every living creature upon the earth should have enough to eat every day. When men lack sufficient food it is not because there is any lack in God's gifts, either of herbs or oxen. When both the rich man and the poor man are fed out of the abundance of God's gifts His Divine purpose in giving them is accomplished.

II. The inequality between the dinner of the poor man and that of the rich. The poor man is sustained upon the same kind of food as the rich man's ox is fattened upon. In common with the beast he lives upon the produce of the earth. The rich man eats the ox which has been fed upon that which is the only food of the poor man. This is not as it should be. God never intended that one part of His human family should enjoy a monopoly of any of the food which He has provided. When He gave the earth into the hands of the first man He intended that all His children should be partakers of all the kinds of food which the earth afforded, and which were suited to the part of the world in which they lived. When it is otherwise it arises from sin, either personal or relative. Poverty does not always spring from indolence, or from inability to subdue the earth, and to obtain from it a full share of all that it affords, and when it does not, the man who is compelled to eat a dish of herbs while his neighbour feasts from the stalled ox, is either sinned against in the present, or has been sinned against in the past.

III. Opposite states of mind which more than compensate the poor man for his humbler meal. Hatred takes away all enjoyment from any of God's gifts. If a rich man bears malice against the guest whom he is entertaining at his table—if while he feeds him upon the best, he desires for him the worst—he knows nothing of the pleasures of hospitality. Hatred is murder in the germ, and he who harbours such a devil within his breast cannot possess that peace of soul without which the choicest viands cannot be enjoyed. But *love* is a large compensation for a dinner of herbs. Love to husband or wife, to parent or to child, makes sweet every family meal, however homely the fare—that charity which "*seeketh not her own, thinketh no evil, beareth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things,*" is a sauce to the humblest dish which one man can set before another, and more than lifts it above the rich man's feast given for the sake of custom or expediency to guests to whom he has not a particle of goodwill.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

A feast of salads, or Daniel's pulse, is more cherishing with mercy, than Belshazzar's banquet without it.—*T. Adams.*

Ruth and Naomi were happy when they lived on the gleanings of the field of Boaz, and in the fulness of their satisfaction poured their blessings on the head of him that allowed them the scanty pittance. . . . The conversation of friends is far pleasanter than any dish at the table. Where hatred is, there is silence or sullenness, or at least hollow mirth and tasteless ceremony; but where love and the fear of God are, the table conversation is delightful and useful. We find even a heathen poet reflecting on the pleasures of such an entertainment. (*O noctes cœnæque deûm*!—Hor). How blessed were the disciples of our Lord, when they sat at meat with Him! Barley loaves and fishes were probably ordinary fare with them, but they were entertained with Divine discourse. Such pleasure as they enjoyed we cannot now expect; but His religion is admirably fitted to promote our present happiness, for love is His great commandment.—*Lawson.*

The sentiment is applicable, with a special force of emphasis, to *domestic life.* In proportion to the delightful sweetness of the concord in which the fond affections of nature and grace bind the members of a family in one happy social circle—all being of one heart and of one soul—dividing the cares and more than doubling the enjoyments of life by mutual participation and sympathy, all bosoms throbbing with a common pulsation, all lips wearing a common smile, and all eyes filled from a common fountain of tears, in proportion to the delightful sweetness of such a scene is the wretchedness of its reverse; and there is no one who has experienced either the sweetness or the wretchedness—especially the former—that will not subscribe to the sentiment so simply yet so strongly expressed.—*Wardlaw.*

"*An allowance of vegetables.*" Not only "*vegetables,*" but the lighter sorts of them; more nearly "*herbs;*" not only light fare, like that, but a *limited amount;* not only *flesh* on the other scale, but "*stalled*" beef; not only "*stalled*" *beef,* but no limit; "*a stalled* ox." Not only might this well be a worldly proverb to represent the married state, and all the arena of human affection, but signal, when brought into religion. "*A dinner of herbs,*" with the blessed "*love*" of the Redeemer, is better than a pampered feast and the gloom of the impenitent.—*Miller.*

If love be the entertainer, it matters not much what the provision be: if true friendship be set upon the table of his heart that inviteth thee, let that make thee to esteem well of whatsoever is set on the table before thee. Thou comest with a gluttonous appetite—not the affection of a friend—if thy cheer be that which thou lookest after. Wherefore, then, though it be a dinner of herbs, yet if they come from love's garden it is worthy of thine acceptance: thou mayest be sure that no serpent lies hid in those herbs. If it be but so small a dinner as a *traveller* taketh with him (see Critical Notes), yet if it bring affection with it, thou mayest be sure that no hurt is coming to thee. But if thy dinner be a fatted ox, and hatred be the hand that carveth it unto thee, perhaps it is but to fat thee for the like slaughter.—*Jermin.*

Mark well, it is neither said in the Bible, nor found in experience, that they are all happy families who dine on herbs, and all unhappy who can afford to feast on a stalled ox. Some rich families live in love, and doubly enjoy their abundance; some poor families quarrel over their herbs. Riches cannot secure happiness, and poverty cannot destroy it. But such is the power of love, that with it you will be happy in the meanest estate; without it, miserable in the highest. Would you know the beginning, and the middle, and the end of this matter,

the spring on high, the stream flowing through the channel of the covenant, and the fruitful outspread in a disciple's life below—they are all here, and all one—Charity :—"God is Love," "*Love is of God*," "Walk in love."—*Arnot.*

There were many great feasts in the times of the apostles, and yet none of them are so much commended in the Scriptures as the meetings of believers, who did eat together *with gladness and singleness of heart*, notwithstanding they had neither so much meat, nor so costly dishes, as divers others had. It is noted of Abraham that he entertained God and His angels to dinner. The Lord Himself would be his guest, since he would be so good a housekeeper; and yet the victuals which are mentioned are only butter and milk, and veal that had not time to cool between the killing and dressing; notwithstanding his hospitality is preferred before the Persian king's royal banquet, for the one purposed to show his greatness in pomp, and the other his goodness in love. The one dealt exceeding unkindly with his own wife and the other very courteously with them that seemed to him to be mere strangers. They that dress most meat are not always the kindest men, for our Saviour was full of liberality when He gave but barley-bread and fish to His disciples, and Nabal was but a churl, though he killed both sheep and oxen for his sheep-shearers.—*Dod.*

The subject of verse 18 has been treated in verse 1. (See Homiletics on page 400, also on chap. xiv. 29, page 386.)

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

In the pit, the blasphemy will rise and swell, as it is stirred up one man by his neighbour. *Upbraidings* (ver. 13) are contagious, even in this world. Ordinary quarrels are wonderfully quieted, if a man waits. But *Divine quarrels*, if we stay to look at God, and observe His reasonings, are wonderfully held back, and by His grace signally prevented.—*Miller.*

Observe the principles of *hatred and love*, contrasted in active exercise. Some persons make it their occupation to sit by the fire, to feed and fan the flame, lest it be extinguished. A useful and friendly employment, were it a fire to warm. But when it is an injurious, consuming, and destructive element, it would seem difficult to discover the motive of these incendiaries, did we not read, that "out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, wickedness, an evil eye, pride, foolishness" (Mark vii. 21, 22).—*Bridges.*

Surely it is a *wrathful man* that is the lawyer's best client. He is altogether for *scire faciam*, I will make thee to know what thou hast done, what thou has said; which the lawyer does but turn into a *scire facias*, although at last himself pay dearest for the knowledge which is gotten. But he that is slow to anger, hath a *Quietus est* for any suit before it is begun. His care is rather to buy his peace with loss, than to sell his rest for gain. He considereth it to be true which St. Ambrose teacheth him, that to be freed from the loss of strife is not a little gain.—*Jermin.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 19.

The Way of the Slothful and the Righteous.

I. The one thing common to these opposite characters—a "way." The eagle and the snail have both a way of motion, although the one swiftly cleaves the air, and the other drags itself slowly along the ground. Unlike as they are in form and in habit, they are both impelled to some kind of motion. So with

the sluggard and the man who complies willingly with God's ordinance of labour —they are both compelled to some exercise of their bodily and mental organs, but there is as great a contrast in the way in which they exercise them as there is between the way of the snail and the eagle.

II. The contrast between the ways of these opposite characters. 1. *That of the sluggard is a way of self-prevention.* He lessens his power by neglecting to use it. The man who has power to pull against a rapid at a certain point of the stream and will not use it, but allows his boat to drift on until he comes into a current against which he can make no headway, has thrown away his power, and is his own destroyer. The effort which he neglected to put forth at a time when it would have been effectual, is of no avail now that the time has passed. Every man in health of body and mind has physical, and mental, and moral powers which at a certain period in his life are equal to the overcoming of all ordinary obstacles to his moral and physical well-being. But if he neglects to use them the tide against him will grow stronger, because his power will decrease, and his neglect and inertness, whether in material or in spiritual things, will raise around him a hedge of thorns, which will require much extraordinary and painful effort to break through. A thorn-hedge in its beginnings may be easily stepped over, or it may be almost as easily uprooted; but if it is allowed to grow and strengthen itself for several years it makes an almost impassable barrier—at least, a barrier which cannot be overcome without a great and painful effort. So with the sluggard, temptations to indolence—to neglect of powers which God has given him to be used—might once have been easily overcome, and have been so completely conquered as to cease to be temptations. But yielded to until they have become habits, they form around him as impassable a barrier, or one which can be broken through only by as great and as painful exertion as a hedge of thorns. Often we hear him complaining of the difficulties in the way, and truly they are there, but they are mainly of his own creation, the hedge is about him, but it is of his own planting—the lion is there (chap. xxvi. 13), but the lion was placed there by the man who is afraid to face him. 2. *The way of the righteous—of him who is willing to strive after his moral and physical well-being—is a way in which it is easier to walk the longer it is pursued.* It is "made plain," or it is a "paved way." (*a*) *God helps to smooth his way, because it is a Divinely ordained way.* He who rules the world has ordained that many material gifts and all the most precious mental and moral gifts shall be the reward of those only who earnestly strive after them. The way of diligent continuance in well-doing is as old as God Himself, and it is the way in which He requires His creatures to walk. This being so, those who tread it may rely upon His help to exalt the valleys, to level the mountains, and to make the rough places plain which lie in their road. *(b) The way is made plain by the man himself.* The continued repetition of acts makes habit, and he who pushes boldly and fearlessly forward in the way of righteous exertion finds the hard become easier and the stony places smoother by the very constitution of his nature. He makes his way plain by his resolution to walk in it, he leaps the hedge while his slothful neighbour is counting the number of feet it is from the ground. It is well to look before we leap, but some look so long that they never take the leap, and the slothful man looks so long at the difficulties in his way that he never finds courage enough to grapple with them. But the very resolve to try brings strength for action, and the power grows by use until what is a hedge of thorns to an indolent man is a level road to his righteous neighbour. The word righteous being here placed in antithesis to slothful shows how great a sin it is to neglect to use the opportunities which God has given to men to ensure their real and highest interests. (See also on chap. xiii. 4, page 296.)

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

God's Word recognises the universal law of work. By frequent precept and cheering promises, it consecrates our daily labour. Mindful of the old Latin maxim, "*Laborare est orare*," "toil is prayer," the Christian learns from the record of God's will that honest, faithful, diligent, God-fearing, and God-honouring work is itself a worship acceptable to the great All-worker. Toil, hard toil, is duty. Even the heathen world confessed that the gods gave nothing to men without it had been earned by severe exertion. . . God enjoins diligence upon us by precept and by example. About us, all things perform their allotment of work, and do it promptly and without a thought of delay. The winds sweep over the face of the earth, attent alone on the fulfilment of their appointed mission. Here they come on silent pinions, to bear away the rising exhalation of death from the lowlands or the pest-house; there they carpet the earth with the sere and yellow leaves of autumn, covering the earth with russet and gold. Now their task is the flushing of some sick one's pale cheek, as they rustle through the spring blossoms, laden with sweet health. There they hinder and destroy the else invincible Armada, creeping forth on its purpose of spreading far and wide destruction and death. Thus, too, the never-resting sea. Lashing its worn and rugged shore, the incoming tides bear on their bosom the wealth of trade; or else, lifting its waves in its fury, it engulfs those who go down into the sea to do business in the deep waters. Thus, too, the hidden fires of earth, ever smouldering within, ever restless in their workings—now tossing the foam and spray of the geysers in their play, or now opening in wide fissures of molten death, to scorch the surface of the earth with the poisonous sulphur smoke, or bury for centuries in dust and ashes, and under the lava tide, the homes and haunts of the men of the past. Thus God teaches men by His own ceaseless workings through ten thousand ever busy forces. And revelation utters the same bidding to unremitting toil. . . . Diligent hands are speedily rendered expert. Long use gives practice and perfection, until that which was at first the toilsome labour of hours becomes the easily attained result of a few moments' application. And the diligent hand teaches and trains the wary and observant eye.—*Life Lessons from the Book of Proverbs, by Dr. Perry, Bishop of Iowa.*

The wise man mentions righteousness in this place rather than diligence, because the latter is included in the former, and is not sufficient without it to make a man's way plain.—*Lawson.*

Observe God's estimate of the slothful man. He contrasts with him not the diligent, but the righteous, marking him as a "wicked, because a *slothful*, servant" (Matt. xxv. 26). The difficulties are far more in the mind than in the path. For while the slothful man sits down by his hedge-side in despair, *the way of the righteous* (in itself not more easy) *is made plain.* He does not expect God to work for him in an indolent habit. But he finds that God helps those that help themselves. . . . Following His commands, feeding upon His promises, continuing in prayer, in waiting and watching for an answer to prayer, *his way is raised up* before him. He believes what is written, and acts upon it without delay. As soon as ever the light comes into his mind, at the very first dawn, this determines the direction of his steps, and the order of his proceedings. Thus his stumbling-blocks are removed (Numb. xiii. 30, xiv. 6–9; Isa. lvii. 14). —*Bridges.*

Grace has not only a *brighter* (ver. 15) but an *easier* time. We see the like in worldly matters. Nothing is more striking than the ease with which a prompt man works. His tackle is all right, so is his ground, it has been made smooth by his last year's toil. His hands are not blistered. His lazy neighbour admires, and longs after his

chance. Laziness begets labour. In the round year, the sluggard fevers himself more than the diligent; while, in the spiritual world, the proverb is more signal still. Just where the *upright* stands there is a smooth path—and let it be observed the upright means the *smooth*, the *level*. Just where the sinner stands is a *thorn hedge*. He *cannot* enter into life; so he imagines. And yet he is a *sluggard*, for he will not do the plainest duties. The proverb is right, therefore, that it is the principle of sluggardism to create "a hedge of thorns;" and that it is far smoother to take hold of the faith by the right handle, and at once, than to be eternally kicking against the pricks of the Gospel.—*Miller.*

Because the latter part of the verse speaketh of the righteous, we may by the slothful understand the wicked; for it is slothfulness in not using the graces of God offered that maketh to be wicked. . . . God giveth the righteous pleasure, even in the troubles of serving Him. . . . In their conversation, by the lightsomeness and leap, as it were, of eternal hope and internal contemplation, they do pass over the impediments of temporal adversity.—*Jermin.*

The way of a slothful man is perplexed and letsome, so that he gets no ground, makes no riddance; he goes as if he were shackled when he is to go upon any good course, so many perils he casts and so many excuses he makes—this he wants, and that he wants, when in truth it is a heart only that he wants, being wofully hampered and enthralled in the invisible chains of the kingdom of darkness, and driven about by the devil at his pleasure. . . . Never any came to hell, saith one, but had some pretence for their coming hither. —*Trapp.*

Every good service is hard or easy, according as men's wills are inclined unto it. He that hath his mind pressed and ready to the practice of any duty, either of piety, justice, or mercy, will observe all the inducements that may lead him to the same: and he that is averse and backward, will look to all the impediments that may discourage him from it. That Israel should root out the Canaanites, the unfaithful spies thought it no less impossible, than for grasshoppers to overcome giants; but Caleb and Joshua knew it to be no more unlikely than for armed soldiers to vanquish naked people, or for hungry persons to eat up meat. *First*, the one is fortified by the force of *love*, which is unresistable and *strong as death*, that nothing can withstand it: and the other being destitute of all love to any goodness, is likewise void of all power to proceed in, and go through with any work that is good. *Secondly, faith* showeth to the one what help God will minister, and what reward He will render to all them that apply themselves to His service. And infidelity persuadeth the other that well-doing is needless and fruitless, or chargeable and troublesome.—*Dod.*

For Homiletics on verse 20, see on Chapter x. 1, page 136.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

One particular in which children show themselves *wise* or else *foolish* and so can gladden or else *sadden* their parents is by giving or withholding due honour. "A foolish *man*." No age or state exempts children from honouring their parents. Grown young men are sometimes apt to look with some contempt on their mothers, because of the weakness of the feminine mind.—*Fausset.*

As for him that despiseth his mother—and who doth not so that despiseth her careful admonition?—he is not a son, the spirit of God doth not here style him to be so: he is a *foolish man*. For how can he be otherwise, who knoweth his own mother so little as that he doth despise her?—*Jermin.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 21.

OPPOSITE TASTES.

I. Joy is a revealer of human character. A stone cast into a lake will reveal the nature of its bed. If there is mud at the bottom this simple test will reveal its existence by bringing it to the surface. So objects presented to the mind show what is hidden in the heart. The emotions produced by certain scenes or events are tests of character. What a man rejoices in reveals what he is. Some objects brought before the human mind excite the most opposite feelings in different men. That which gives pleasure to the one gives pain to the other, and when a man rejoices in that which is the outcome of human depravity it is a certain sign that he is himself deeply depraved. Like the stone cast into the water, it brings the hidden mud to the surface. The same evil thought lodged in the minds of two men, one of whom is a moral fool, and the other a "man of understanding," will bring joy to the countenance of the first, and indignation to that of the latter, and thus it becomes a revealer of the state of each man's heart, and he to whom "folly is joy" is thus declared to be "destitute of wisdom" in the real and highest signification of the word.

II. The joy of the moral fool turns him out of the way, and keeps him out of the way. This is implied in the antithesis, which should be "a man of understanding goes straight forward." He has found a source of joy in "*whatsoever things are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report*" (Phil. iv. 8), and this joy holds him in the path which leads to them. We are largely governed by that which holds our affections, and love to that which is morally right, draws us into the path of righteousness—leads us to pursue a steady and undeviating line of conduct in obedience to the law of holiness, as revealed by God. But the joy which the ungodly man feels in sinful pursuits and habits draws him out of this good and true way, and allures him into a path where he meets with objects that call forth this unholy pleasure. Being governed by passion instead of by principle, his walk in life is unsteady and uncertain—destitute of fixed purpose. (On this subject see Homiletics on chap. xiii. 14, page 313.) A vessel is held on her course by reason at the wheel, and wind in the sails. The wind impels her to go forward, but if the understanding at the compass did not hold the wind in subjection, there would be no safety for the vessel; nobody could say where she might be carried. Yet without the wind she could not be carried forward at all—the compass and the helm would be useless. So, although the "man of understanding" is a man of emotion—a man whose life is under the influence of that which gives him joy, he brings his emotions into subjection to the dictates of moral wisdom, and before he follows their leadings he makes sure that they are in harmony with that which is pure and holy. Then he may safely yield himself to their guidance, and be sure that they will impel him *straightforward*. Such a man is *constrained* by the delights which godliness yields to him to press on to higher attainments (2 Cor. v. 14; Phil iii. 12, 13), while the man to whom "folly is joy" allows the pleasures of the world and the flesh to hold him from the right path, even against his conscience and his better judgment. Such a man can give no more convincing proof that he is destitute of wisdom.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

This book of instruction proves our profession. What think we of *folly?* Not only does the ungodly practise it, but *it is joy* to him. . . . . That which has turned this fair world into a sepulchre; nay, that which hath kindled "*everlasting burnings,*" is *his joy.—Bridges.*

Tastes differ widely, and so, therefore, do enjoyments. Water is the

element of one creature, and air the element of another. The same material is to this poison and to that food. Each species differs in nature from all others, and nature will have her own way. Among men, viewed in their spiritual relations, there is a similar variety of tastes and pleasures. There is first the grand generic difference between the old man and the new. . . . . Besides the first and chief distinction between the dead and the living, many subordinate varieties appear, shading imperceptibly away into each other, according as good or evil preponderates in the character. Two persons of opposite spiritual tastes may be detected for once in the same act of evil; but they do not walk abreast in the same life-course. . . . . Two young men, of nearly equal age, and both the sons of God-fearing parents, were seen to enter a theatre at a late hour in a large city. They sat together, and looked and listened with equal attention. The one was enjoying the spectacle and the mirth; the other was silently enduring an unspeakable wretchedness. The name of God and the hopes of the godly were employed there to season the otherwise vapid mirth of the hollow-hearted crowd. One youth, through the Saviour's sovereign grace, had, in a distant solitude, acquired other tastes. The profanity of the play rasped rudely against them. He felt as if the words of the actor and the answering laugh of the spectators were tearing his flesh. He breathed freely when, with the retiring crowd, he reached the street again. It was his first experience of a theatre, and his last. It is a precious thing to get from the Lord, as Paul got, a new relish and a new estimate of things. This appetite for other joy, if exercised and kept keen, goes far to save you from defilement, even when suddenly and occasionally brought into contact with evil; as certain kinds of leaves refuse to be wet, and though plunged into water come out of it dry.—*Arnot.*

A man of understanding walketh uprightly, and he doth it with delight, as the opposition implies. Christ's "burden" is no more "grievous" to him than the wing is to the bird. His sincerity supplies him with serenity; the joy of the Lord, as an oil of gladness, makes him lithe and nimble in ways of holiness.—*Trapp.*

The folly here meant is the folly of wickedness, and he that joys in that, may well be proclaimed a notorious fool. St. Ambrose saith, all vile dispositions are delighted with the follies of others: but how vile, then, is his disposition who is delighted with his own folly. And yet, how many are there so drunken with this folly that they reel and stagger, and hardly go a right step in all their lives. Now, what is this joy, but a sign of the habit of wickedness generated within them? But a man of understanding considereth his joy, and what it is that causeth it: in joying he considereth, what it is he doth, and how far he goeth, that so he may both *walk uprightly* to joy, and *walk uprightly* in joy. This being his chiefest joy to walk uprightly in all his ways.—*Jermin.*

Not so much, "*folly is joyful;*" for that is only partially the case. We have already seen (ver. 13) how sin crimps the countenance. But "*folly is joy;*" that is, the life of a sinner is like a grazed ox, who strikes for the sweetest pasture. The text marks a vital difference:—"*A man of discernment, or understanding, makes a direct track.*" That is, as a thrifty housekeeper tumbles up her rooms, and makes things right, whether it be pleasant or not, so the Christian, for love of the Almighty, makes things straight, whether a joy or not. Note, then, the vital difference. *Folly is joy.* It does not arrive at it; but its quintessence is, that it thought it would. While the good, not stupidly either, but as "a man of discernment," puts duty first, and takes joy as it comes; so answering the words of Christ:—"*For whosoever will save his life, shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life, for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it*" (Mark viii. 35).—*Miller.*

FOR HOMILETICS ON VERSE 22, SEE ON CHAP. XI. 14 AND CHAP. XX. 18.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

It is a note of Beda: There are three which in the law are read to be unhappy. He that knoweth and doth not teach, he that teacheth and doth not live accordingly, he that is ignorant and doth not ask counsel. Wherefore in matters of moment it is good not to purpose without counsel: for a purpose ill-settled is never likely to take good effect, and if counsel direct the purpose itself, it will much the better be able to accomplish it. For purposes without counsel are like an earthen vessel broken in the hands of the potter. Turned they are about with the wheel of imagination, but quickly broken in the hand of execution. Be not therefore without counsel, that thou go not without thy purpose; and if thou canst, get many counsellors, whereby thou art likely the sooner to get thine end. For many counsellors are like many hands joined together, and can reach far in attaining thy desire.—*Jermin.*

I. No mortal man can attain unto such depth of judgment and understanding, to be able sufficiently, of his own knowledge, to manage all his affairs: God will have every man stand in need of his brother's direction: that is revealed to some which is hid from others; and many eyes may clearly apprehend that which no one could possibly have pierced into. II. Every man by nature is somewhat partial to his affection, and may easily be induced to add weight by colour of reason, to that end of the scale whereunto his desire more inclineth; whereas he that leaneth on neither side, may discern the stronger motives to be on the other side.—*Dod.*

Many eyes see more than one, and many souls think more than one: therefore never esteem thyself so wise that thou shouldest not seek others' counsel.—*Hasius.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 23.

JOY FROM A SEASONABLE WORD.

I. A good word yields the speaker a present joy. There is a present reaction of joy following every right deed which is its present and immediate reward. If a man gives his money to a right object from the highest motive he is silently repaid, even while he is in the act of giving, by the joy which he feels. So the man who having neither silver or gold gives help by words of advice or sympathy. Good words are sometimes more precious than gold to the sinning or the suffering, and for such gifts there is the reward which follows every effort to help and bless others. How much of the joy of Christ's life on earth must have arisen from the enlightening and life-giving answers of His mouth, to those who sought to learn of Him.

II. It yields the speaker joy on reflection. There is nothing equal to the joy of performing a good deed, except the joy of reflecting upon it. This is a more lasting joy, and can be repeated again and again. Happy is he who, in looking back upon the "answers of his mouth," can derive joy from the consciousness that he spoke the right word at the right time.

III. Such a word is an unending source of joy, because it is an unending influence for good. None can tell "*how good it is*"—none can say that its influence will ever cease. A stone thrown into the ocean is but the act of a moment; but wise men tell us that the influence of that act is felt long after the stone has found the bed of the ocean. The word spoken by the Highest Wisdom to Saul on his way to Damascus, how good was it for the man to whom it was addressed, and how good it has been, and will be for millions throughout the ages of eternity. None but God can estimate the power of the evil that was then averted from the Church of God, the depth of personal guilt from which

the man addressed was delivered, or the amount of blessed influence that was then set in motion. And many a word of the disciple has been good in the same manner, although not in the same degree, as that word of the Master.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

It must be *a word spoken in season* (chap. xxv. 11), though it be from feeble lips. For though "there are some happy seasons, when the most rugged natures are accessible" (*Bishop Hopkins*), yet many a good word is lost by being *spoken* out of season. Obviously a moment of irritation is out of season. We must wait for the return of calmness and reason. Sometimes, indeed, the matter forces itself out after lengthened and apparently ineffectual waiting. It has been long brooded over within and must have its vent. But this explosion sweeps away every prospect of good, and leaves a revolting impression. Instead of a fertilising shower, it has gathered into a violent and destructive tempest. It is most important, that our whole deportment should bring conviction, that we yearn over the souls of those whom we are constrained to reprove. . . . Never commence with an attack; which, as an enemy's position, naturally provokes resistance. Study a pointed application. A word spoken for every one, like a coat made for everyone, has no individual fitness.—*Bridges.*

The verb usually translated to "*answer*" means primarily to sing, or rather, *to break out with the voice;* rather, "*to speak after a silence;*" which, of course, would usually be in making "answer." Hence the idiom, "*answered* and *said*," literally, *broke silence*, and *said.* Such an utterance would become very oracular in the more solemn decisions of life. A "*decree*," as we have translated it, is a noun out of the above described verb. It means an *uttered decision;* such as an answer may be to a business speech; such as is alluded to on God's part (chap. xvi. 4); and such as may be overmasteringly momentous in the business and results of life. Solomon sees in it a rare truth in respect to decisions for immortality. "*A word!*" Why, it may win eternity! An offer presses! *A word* refuses! *A word* snatches possession for ever! Lo! the amazing difference! Body and soul hang upon "*a word.*" "*Great counsel*" (ver. 22) indeed, that is, that prompts a man to say, Yes! and "*a word (spoken) in* season" truly! if it be a confession of Christ! and if it take the offer of an eternal blessedness! Because there is no drawing back after that beginning (ver. 24).—*Miller.*

The words have probably a special reference to the debates in council implied in ver. 22. True as they are at all times, they also bring before us the special characteristic of the East, the delight in ready, improvised answers, solving difficulties, turning aside anger. Such an answer, to a people imaginative rather than logical, has much more weight than any elaborate argument. Compare the effect produced on the mind of the scribe who heard our Lord's dispute with the Sadducees, when he saw that He had "answered well" (Mark xii. 28).—*Plumptre.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 24.

THE UPWARD AND THE DOWNWARD PATH.

I. **The existence of a place of retribution stated as a fact.** The word *Sheol*, here and elsewhere translated *hell*, signifies first the place of all departed spirits, whether they be saints or sinners. Those who dwell in *Sheol* are those who have quitted the relations and conditions of time and sense, and who dwell in a world

invisible to human eye. But the connection of the word here makes it necessary to understand it as having reference to a place of retribution. That there is such a place beyond death is suggested by analogy, and affirmed by the Word of God. In every city and centre of human life we find a place of retribution inhabited by those whose characters are supposed to merit such a dwelling. All nations upon the earth find it necessary to have their prisons—to have places in which to confine those whose crimes call for their separation from their more virtuous fellow-creatures. The existence of such places is as much a fact as the existence of men upon the earth. Hence we might have inferred that there was such a place for like characters in the world which is beyond our vision, but which men, both good and bad, are continually quitting this world to inhabit. The existence of such an abode seems to be imperatively demanded, when we consider that some of the worst of the human race never find their way to a prison in this world, and it seems a merciful proceeding towards the offenders themselves that their course should be arrested in another life. The Book of God tells us that there is such a place—that the dwelling of the "devil and his angels" is the destination of those who quit this world in a state of unforsaken and unforgiven sin (Matt. xxv. 41).

II. There is a hell of character as well as a hell of place. That which renders a serpent an object of abhorrence is the poison in its sting. That which makes hell, either in devils or men, is enmity against God. This is the fuel that feeds the undying flame that cannot be quenched—this it is that constitutes the misery of the place of retribution. This mental hell has an existence in time as well as beyond it. Christ taught us that He considered such a disposition a mental Gehenna when He said, "*Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation* (condemnation) *of hell?*" (Matt. xxiii. 33).

III. There is the hell of confederation against God and goodness which is made up of individuals belonging both to the visible and the invisible worlds. Every kingdom has its place of central government, but its dominion may extend over many countries. The divisions made by mountains and seas do not make it any the less one kingdom. The centre of the kingdom which exists in the universe in opposition to the kingdom of God, has its seat of government in the unseen world, but it numbers among its subjects all who are at enmity with God and His children, whether in time or beyond it. Although the place of central government, "*the gates of hell*" (Matt. xvi. 18) is in *Sheol*, its influence is mighty upon the earth.

IV. That to escape from all these is the aim of the truly wise man. He desires to escape from retribution hereafter, and to be freed from the misery of being in opposition to God in the present life. He does this by obtaining a right relation to God and to His law. Our physical relationships have much to do with our physical well-being—to be in relation to those who are vicious or diseased is to be in a wrong relation so far as bodily health is concerned. Our social and political relations are most important to our comfort and well-being, and are more subject to our own will than are our physical relationships. We may be unwillingly related to an evil social or national law, but we may also stand in an antagonistic relation to a good law, and then the change of relationship is in our own hands. Every sinful man stands in a wrong relation to God's holy and good law, and the aim of the wise man is to fall in with the conditions offered to him, by which he may come into right relationship to this law. These conditions are revealed to him in the Divine revelation—by accepting the atonement of Christ, he is delivered from the guilt of his transgressions and so escapes the hell of retribution; by the same act, followed by a life of communion with the ascended Saviour, he is freed from all that makes hell within him, and escapes all the snares laid by the *tempter* for his spiritual ruin. This relationship with Him, who is the fountain of all moral and material life, places him in

a new position in the universe—lifts him from the dominion of sin, which is death, into the kingdom of holiness, which is a *way of life*, because it leads to and prepares for a state beyond death, which is everlasting life of body, soul, and spirit.

V. Such a change of relationship is the beginning of moral climbing. "*The way of life is above*," rather, "leads upward." The change of relationship is but the first step in a new life. The place of halting to-day becomes the place of departure on the morrow, and each day's journey places him upon a higher level and in a purer atmosphere. The wise man's first step is to depart from hell beneath, but his mere escape from retribution is not the whole of his aim—he is always in quest of an increase of love and joy and peace, of a deepening of all holy emotions and a strengthening of all holy habits. He "*goes from strength to strength*" (Psa. lxxxiv. 7); his watchword is "*not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect*" (Phil. iii. 7).

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

All men are travellers, either to heaven above, or hell beneath. The writers of Scripture know nothing of a middle place. . . . . Our everlasting abode must be either in heaven or hell. Salvation from hell is the half of heaven. The threatenings of hell are a fence about the way to heaven, and whilst we are travelling in it they are of great use to make us serious and earnest in pursuing our course; for how is it possible that we can flee with too much speed from everlasting burnings, when our flight is directed, not like that of the manslayer, to a place of banishment, but to a world of happiness.—*Lawson.*

The *way of life is above*—of heavenly origin—the fruit of the eternal counsels—the display of the manifold wisdom of God. Fools rise not high enough to discern it, much less to devise and walk in it. Their highest elevation is grovelling. God does not allow them even the name of life (1 Tim. v. 6). Cleaving to the dust of earth they sink into the hell beneath. But the wise are born from *above;* taught from *above;* therefore walking *above*, while they are living upon earth. A soaring life indeed! The soul mounts up, looks aloft, enters into the holiest, rises above herself, and finds her resting-place in the bosom of her God. A most transcendant life! to be partaker of the Divine nature!" (2 Pet. i. 4). The life of God Himself (Ephes. iv. 18) in humble sublimity, ascending above things under the sun, above the sun himself.—*Bridges.*

Let "the words spoken in season" (see comments on verse 23) be "Lord, I believe, help Thou mine unbelief;" and let the word be genuine, *i.e.*, a turning from *Sheol* (the figure of the pit—Psa. ix. 17), and the man's joy is won. His path after that shall be *upward* perpetually.—*Miller.*

A reference to heaven as the final limit of this upward movement of the life of the righteous is so far indirectly included as the antithesis to the "upward," the "hell beneath" (hell downwards, hell to which one tends downward), suggests a hopeless abode in the dark kingdom of the dead as the final destination of the sinner's course of life. Therefore, we have here again the idea of future existence and retribution (comp. xi. 7; xiv. 32).—*Lange's Commentary.*

On the summit of one of those distant mountains—upon whose snowy tops, as they throw back the sunlight, we can look from our Eastern coast—there trickles forth a silvery spring. Near the source there is a slight obstruction in the way of the flow of the streamlet, and the waters are divided right and left. Part trickles down the mountain side towards a river, and thence are borne on to the limitless sea. Part goes the other side, and is lost, ere long, midst the thirsty sands, that are never satiated. Thus divergent are man's two paths—the shining

and the dark one; thus dissimilar their course in life—their close at death. And these two paths are the only ones leading out into eternity. . . . . And when we seek in spiritual union and communion with our Maker the noblest exercise of the soul's faculties and powers, and there comes to the heart *peace*, sure and certain, because depending upon the inviolable Word of God, and *love* springing from the outwellings of the Divine love, and *hope* reaching into the eternal world, and grasping there at blissful immortality and joy ineffable, and prepared of God—oh! then even the foregleamings of these things, reserved for us, or else already the heritage of the soul—light up a path so shining that earth's glare and glitter fade, in comparison, wholly out of sight. For into eternity itself do these divergent paths lead. The soul, in choosing the one or the other here, is choosing for the life to come, as well as for the life that now is.—*Bishop Perry.*

The wise man goes a higher way than his neighbour, even in his common businesses, because they are done in faith and obedience. He hath his feet where other men's heads are; and, like a heavenly eagle, delights himself in high-flying. Busied he may be in mean, low things, but not satisfied in them as adequate objects. A wise man may sport with children, but that is not his business. Wretched worldlings make it their work to gather wealth, as children do to tumble a snow-ball; they are scattered abroad throughout all the land—as those poor Israelites were (Exod. v. 12)—to gather stubble, not without an utter neglect of their poor souls. But what, I wonder, will these men do when death shall come with a writ of *habeas corpus*, and the devil with a writ of *habeas animam?* . . . . Oh, that they that have their hands elbow-deep in the earth, that are rooting and digging in it, as if they would that way dig themselves a new and nearer way to hell!—oh, that these greedy moles would be warned to flee from the wrath to come, to take heed of hell beneath, and not sell their souls to the devil for a little pelf.—*Trapp.*

The difference between an earthly man and a heavenly man is this—that the way of an earthly man is under his feet, and the way of a heavenly man is over his head. A fool doth not conceive what this upper way can be, but to the wise man it is the plain way of life. He knoweth that it is by the fall of man that he walketh so low, and he considereth that unless he change his way, and, though against his nature, do make his way above, by having his conversation in heaven, even while his habitation is on the earth, his sin will be sure to thrust him lower still even to the pit of death. Take heed, therefore, of the ways of the earth, they are the way to *hell*. From whence to keep thee, be sure to keep aloft by fixing thine heart on Christ, who is the way of life, and now is set down in the highest places.—*Jermin.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 25.

DESTRUCTION AND ESTABLISHMENT.

I. The character of those doomed to destruction. In looking at the trees of a vast forest, the eye of the beholder is drawn to some which, towering far above their fellows, form the most prominent features in the landscape. Yet these trees, although they look as if they would stand for ages, may be doomed to a much shorter standing than others which look more frail and are less attractive to the eye. The tree which is admired so much for its girth and breadth of foliage may contain within itself elements of destruction, and it may only need to be left to itself for a little while to come to the ground by its own weight. Every increase in its spreading foliage only renders its overthrow more certain,

because the rottenness of the trunk is less able to bear the mass of branch and leaf. Or the woodman may not wait for the inevitable result—he may deem it necessary for the health of the surrounding trees that the axe should interpose and so prevent the fall. He may see that such a tree is absorbing nourishment to minister to its own decay, that trees around would utilise to sustain their healthy life. And so to prevent the soil from being impoverished by a mere cumberer of the ground, the sound of the axe and the crash of falling timber may resound through the forest. Such a tree is an emblem of the man described in our text. To him may be addressed the words spoken to the proud King of Babylon: "*The tree that thou sawest, which grew and was strong, whose height reached unto the heaven, and the sight thereof to all the earth, whose leaves were fair and the fruit thereof much, and in it was meat for all, under which the beasts of the field dwelt and the fowls of the heaven had their habitation: it is thou that art grown and become strong, for thy greatness is grown and become strong, and reacheth unto heaven,*" etc. (Dan. iv. 20–22). He has attained to a position of power and influence in the world, but, like Nebuchadnezzar, his greatness has only revealed a radical moral defect in his character. Like him he refuses to acknowledge that "*the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men,*" and that it is by His favour alone that he has attained to such a height of prosperity. He holds within him the elements of his own destruction, and time will bring about his fall without any special interposition of the Divine hand. Pride grows upon what it feeds, and such a man will presume more and more upon his fancied security, until he falls by the working out of the ordinary laws which govern the moral universe. But God does not always wait for this issue. To prevent his continuing to rob humanity of their rights, the Almighty Governor of men may anticipate the natural result by applying the axe of a special judgment, and a "*watcher and a holy one*" from heaven may be heard saying, "*Hew the tree down and destroy it*" (Dan. iv. 23), "*Cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground?*" (Luke xiii. 7.) All despots and tyrants must sooner or later succumb to the operation of natural social law; those whom they have wronged, goaded to desperation by their injustice, will rise up against them and overturn them. The King of all the earth often takes the work into His own hands, as he did in the case of Nebuchadnezzar.

II. Those who are special objects of the Divine care. "He will establish the border (or landmark) of the widow." The widow is a type of all the needy and the sorrowful of the human race. Deprived of her natural provider and protector, and her dearest earthly relative, she, more than any other, is at the mercy of the proud and selfish, and stands in need of a helper and consoler. God by the very goodness of His nature is drawn to take sides with such a one. He makes Himself known, again and again, as the judge of widows" (Psalm lxviii. 5). The Bible contains many laws for their protection and reproaches against those who wrong them (Deut. xxiv. 17, 19, 20, 21; Isa. i. 23; Matt. xxiii. 14). One of the main features of moral beauty in the Divine character is that He "*delivereth the needy when he crieth,*" *the poor also, and him that hath no helper* (Psa. lxxii. 12), and the widow is here a type of all such. The sorrow of her who is "a widow indeed" is very deep and overwhelming, and sorrow takes away physical and mental strength. The strong and mighty God charges Himself with the care of all such spirits weakened by sorrow, and warns all the world who would take advantage of their weakness that in so doing they enter the lists against Him.

III. Because of such dealing God's kingdom will increase and strengthen. The champions of the weak, and the opposers of the tyrants, always gain the most influence in the end. Love is the strongest influence in the world, and those who can gain men's hearts are the real and mighty kings. While they live they wield a mighty power, and their influence is felt sometimes even more

powerfully after they have left the world. Those who never saw them in the flesh, but who are enjoying the liberties which they gained for them, yield them a silent homage. And in the song which foretells the universal dominion of the All-Righteous King this is given as a reason why His kingdom shall grow and be established. "*He shall have dominion from sea to sea, and from the rivers unto the ends of the earth. The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall bring presents; the kings of Seba and Sheba shall offer gifts. Yea, all kings shall fall down before Him; all nations shall serve Him.* FOR *He shall deliver the needy when He crieth; the poor also, and him that hath no helper. He shall spare the poor and needy, and shall save the souls of the needy. He shall redeem their souls from deceit and violence, and precious shall their blood be in His sight*" (Ps. lxxii. 8-14).

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

From the style of the antithesis we are naturally led to conceive a special allusion to the haughty oppressor of the desolate and unprotected—to the overbearing worldling, who insolently abuses his power in lording it over his poor dependents. . . . . We may well tremble to think of promoting our own advantage in any way, or in any degree, at the expense of the widow or the fatherless. Woe to the man who does so! God will see to it. What is so acquired cannot be enjoyed with either a quiet conscience or the smile of heaven. It is an accursed thing. It is the wedge of gold and the Babylonish garment, by which the blessing of righteousness and mercy is turned away.—*Wardlaw.*

"*The house,*" *i.e.*, every interest (chap. xiv. 1). "*Destroy,*" or *pull down;* because even worldly men have noticed the precariousness of pride. "*The widow:*" even worldly eyes have noticed that these are wards of the Almighty. But Solomon adopts each proverb spiritually. "The proud" is the man too well satisfied in his own mind (chap. xxi. 24) to *utter the good word, and have joy* (ver. 23); and the "widow" is the poor in heart, who is ready with the availing *answer,* "Lord, I believe."—*Miller.*

God abhors pride even in them whom He dearly loves, and shows His resentment of it by humbling providences, that remove man from his purpose, and hide pride from man. David was proud of the vast numbers of his subjects, but God soon showed him that great hosts save not a king, and that three days may greatly lessen the numbers of a people. Hezekiah's heart was lifted up, but he was soon obliged to humble himself, being assured that the treasures which he had so ostentatiously showed to the Babylonish ambassadors should be carried with his posterity to their own land.—*Lawson.*

Did He not provide for sorrowing Naomi a staff in her faithful daughter, and ultimately establish her borders in Israel? Did He not supply the pressing need of the minister's widow (2 Kings iv. 1-7), and take up the Shunamite's oppression, and again establish her border? (2 Kings viii. 1-6). And shall we forget how He teaches the returning penitent to plead the gracious manifestation, "In Thee the fatherless findest mercy?" (Psa. xiv. 2, 3).—*Bridges.*

The Lord will destroy the house of the proud. He will surely unroost him, unnest him, yea, though he hath set his nest among the stars, as he did proud Lucifer, who "kept not his first estate but left his habitation" (Jude 6), which, indeed, he could hold no longer. . . . *But He will establish the border of the widow.* Not the rest of her goods only, but the very utmost border of her small possession. She hath commonly no great matters to be proud of, nor any patrons to stick to her. She hath her name in Hebrew of *dumbness,* because either she cannot

speak for herself, or, if she do speak, her tale cannot be heard (Luke xviii. 4).—*Trapp.*

A young body is too often the *house of the proud*, where strength being the pillars of it, beauty the trimming, vanity the roof, fond conceit imagineth itself to be married to a long life, never minding the mud walls whereof it consisteth. But God, who was the builder of it, seeing so ill an inmate as pride received into it, pulleth down His own work to destroy the devil's work, and cutting the thread of life dissolveth the marriage knot, when expectation thought it to be strongest tied. On the other hand, where affliction hath humbled the heart of the widow, and may seem to have brought her to the border of her days, then doth God establish length of days, lifting up the light of His countenance upon her when lowliness of spirit hath virtuously cast her down.—*Jermin.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 26.

WICKED THOUGHTS AND HOLY WORDS.

I. A present power of the wicked man—he thinks. The ideas and purposes which fill his mind concerning himself, his fellow-men, and God, are the result of a mental process just as the potter's vessel is the result of a certain manipulating process. His thoughts are the result of the exercise of a God-given power, just as the potter's vessel is the result of a power which has been given to him by God. From the same source comes the power to think and the power to turn the wheel. But although the power to think comes from God, it rests with man as to what kind of thoughts shall be the outcome of that power. God holds him responsible for the use which he makes of the power given him. It would be useless for the potter to say that the vessel which leaves his hand took its form by chance—we hold him responsible for the shape which the clay assumes under his hands. And it is equally vain for a man to say that he has no power over his thoughts. God holds him guilty if he thinks thoughts of sin.

II. The thoughts of the wicked are abhorred by God. 1. *Because of the harm they do to his own soul.* If the body is held bound under the sway of a deadly malady it becomes weak and unable to fulfil the end of its creation, and if it continues long under its influence it dies. So soul-disease and moral death are the result of the rule of evil thoughts to the man who thinks them. He becomes incapable of fulfilling the high spiritual destiny for which God called him into being. 2. *Because of the misery they inflict upon others.* All the evil words and deeds that have ever been done in the world were once thoughts. While they were only thoughts the harm they inflicted was confined to the thinker of them, but as soon as they became words or deeds the moral poison spread, and others became sufferers from them. God hates whatever will increase the misery of his creatures, and therefore the thoughts of the wicked—those fruitful germs of sin and suffering—must be an abomination to Him. 3. *Because they are utterly at variance with God's thoughts and purposes.* The thoughts of God towards the wicked themselves are opposed to the thoughts and purposes which they have concerning themselves. God's thoughts towards them are "*thoughts of peace and not of evil*" (Jer. xxix. 11). He desires that "*the wicked forsake his way*" and "*return unto Him.*" He declares that His thoughts even concerning sinners are as much higher than their thoughts concerning themselves as "*the heavens are higher than the earth*" (Isa. lv. 7, 8). This is one ground of God's quarrel with the thoughts of the wicked, that they cross His gracious plans for redeeming them. But—

III. The words of the pure are pleasing to God. Likeness of character draws men together—the pure delight in those who are pure, and the words of a pure

man are pleasant to the ear of another man of purity. Pure men are like God in character, and He must find pleasure in those who reflect His own image, and who are one with Him in sympathy. Delighting in them, their words are pleasant unto Him. He delights in them when they take the form of *prayer* (See Homiletics on verse 8, page 407). The "prayers of saints" are as sweet incense to Him (Rev. v. 8, viii. 3). They are well-pleasing when they take the form of *praise*. He has commanded men to render honour where honour is due (Rom. xiii. 7), and when it is rendered to Himself the most worthy to "receive honour and glory and blessing," it is a most acceptable sacrifice (Lev. vii. 12, Heb. xiii. 15). The words of the pure are pleasant to God when they are spoken *to console and bless their fellow-creatures.* (On this subject see Homiletics on chap. xii. 18, page 275.)

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Pleasant words are pure. (See Critical Notes.) This is the Scripture ethics. If we desire to know whether "*words are pure*" (and, *words* here, for Eastern reasons, mean actions as well as words; nay, really mean the whole round of conduct; see Job. xx. 12; Isa. x. 7), if we wish to know whether a man's whole life is pure, all we have to ask is—Is it *kind?* It is the *plans of mischief* that are the abomination of Jehovah.—*Miller.*

How lightly do most men think of the responsibility of their thoughts! as if they were their own, and they might indulge them without restraint or evil. One substantial sin appals men, who quietly sleep under the mighty mass of *thinking* without God for months and years, without any apprehension of guilt. But thoughts are the seminal principles of sin.—*Bridges.*

"*Words of pleasantness are pure*"—the gracious words that seek to please, not wound, are to Him as a pure acceptable offering, the similitude being taken from the Jewish ritual, and the word "pure" used in a half ceremonial sense, as in Mal. i. 11.—*Plumptre.*

The words of the pure are pleasant words. Such as God books up, and makes hard shift to hear, as I may so say; for He "hearkens and hears" (Mal. iii. 16).—*Trapp.*

God seeth that Himself is not in all the thoughts of the wicked, and what can it be but abomination to God where God is not? It is God in all things that is pleasing to Himself, and it is the absence of God in anything that makes it to be abominable. But as for the thoughts of the pure, they are words of pleasantness, wherein they sing and make melody in their hearts to the Lord. In them they sweetly converse to themselves, by them they heavenly converse with God. Pleasant they are to themselves by the joy they have in them, pleasant they are to God by the delight He taketh in them. The wicked, though alone, and though doing nothing, yet are doing wickedly; for even then their thoughts are working, and working so naughtily as to be an abomination to the Lord. There is no need of company to draw them into villany, they have always a rout of mischievous thoughts on hand to give them entertainment. And as great is the pleasure which themselves take in them, so great is the abomination which God hath of them.—*Jermin.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 27.

THE CURSE OF COVETOUSNESS.

I. A definition of a covetous man. "He that is *greedy* of gain." He desires more than enough, and he desires it to the exclusion of the rights of others. It

is lawful and right to desire to possess some amount of substance in the world; he who was without such a desire would be hardly a man. It is good to ask for neither poverty nor riches, but for such an amount of the world's wealth as will prevent us from being harassed with care, and at the same time keep us free from the temptations and anxieties which accompany great riches. But when a man is consumed with a desire for more than sufficient for his necessities, he is "greedy of gain," and is in moral danger. If a vessel finds enough water in the river to carry her on her voyage, all bids fair to be safe and prosperous; but if the water is so high that it pours over her deck and gets into the hold, she is in great danger of sinking. So a moderate desire after worldly gain is an impetus to a man's activity, and is a blessing both to himself and to the community; but an inordinate desire after riches is a dead weight upon his spiritual progress, and is often the cause of his going down in the moral scale. Desiring more than enough often leads to using unlawful means of satisfying the desire. The second clause of the verse seems to refer to the temptation of a judge to accept bribes. Men holding such an office, and possessed by this greed of gain, have been known, under its influence, to commit the enormous crime of knowingly acquitting the guilty and condemning the innocent; and in all positions and stations of life the sin of covetousness is a fruitful source of other crimes. "*But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil*" (1 Tim. vi. 9, 10).

II. The evil effect of covetousness is not confined to the covetous man himself. "He that is greedy of gain troubleth his own house." Many men try to excuse their covetousness by the plea that they only desire to make ample provision for their family, but it is upon the family that the curse of greediness falls most heavily. If the head is diseased the members must suffer. A covetous man is a selfish man, and those who are most nearly related to a man who is eaten up with a desire to grow rich feel most keenly the blighting influence of the passion upon all the joys of family life. And a man who is thus greedy of gain brings trouble upon his house by involving them in the curse of his sin. Those whom he has wronged by his injustice hate his children for the father's sin, and as we have before seen—"the wealth of the sinner"—of him who has grown rich by unfair dealing—is "laid up for the just" and his own children inherit only the misery of having had such a father. (See Homiletics on chap. xiii., 11-22, pages 307-332.)

III. The man of opposite character, "the hater of gifts," shall live. 1. *He does live now.* Life and death are in a man's character. A leaf that has lost all its beauty and greenness is *dead* although it still exists. The leaf is there—the shape and outline exist—but all that made it lovely is gone, because all vitality is gone. A flower may still have all its petals upon the stalk, but if all fragrance and colour are gone we know that life is gone. The life or the death of the leaf or flower are states or conditions of its existence, and not the simple adherence or separation of its particles. So is it with a man. His life or his death is not existence or non-existence, but the condition of his spiritual nature. If he is destitute of righteousness he is *dead*—if he is a man of true integrity—such a man as is described in chap. xi. 3 (see on that verse) he is *alive.* God is the "living God" not simply because He has an eternal existence, but because He possesses moral life—in other words, because He is perfectly holy, just, and true. Now the man who "hates gifts"—who abhors every kind of unfair dealing—gives proof by his hatred that he is morally alive. 2. *He shall live in the esteem of posterity.* Nothing lasts like a good character. The memory of the just man is embalmed in the hearts of men long after his body is gone to dust. (See chap. x. 7.) 3. *He shall live in the esteem of God.* We are naturally disposed to regard with favour those who show us honour and

endeavour to further our purposes and desires. The "just God" is a lover of those who strive to "do justly, to love mercy and walk humbly with him" (Micah vi. 8.), and such men shall live in the sunshine of His eternal favour. (Psalm xxx. 5.)

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

A man may be said to be covetous when he takes more pains for the getting of earth than for the getting of heaven. He will turn every stone, break his sleep, take many a weary step for the world; but will take no pains for Christ or heaven. The Gauls, after they had tasted the sweet wine of the Italian grape, inquired after the country, and never rested till they had arrived at it; so a covetous man, having had a relish of the world, pursues after it, and never leaves it till he hath got it; but he neglects the things of eternity. He could be content if salvation would drop into his mouth, as a ripe fig drops into the mouth of the eater (Nahum iii. 12). But he is loth to put himself to too much sweat or trouble to obtain Christ or salvation. He *hunts* for the world, he *wisheth* only for heaven. . . . Covetousness is (1) a *subtle* sin, a sin that men do not so well discern in themselves. This sin can dress itself in the attire of virtue. It is called the "cloke of covetousness" (1 Thess. ii. 5). It is a sin that wears a cloke; it clokes itself under the name of frugality and good husbandry. It hath more pleas and excuses for itself than any other sin. (2) It is a *dangerous* sin. It damps good affections, as the earth puts out the fire. The hedgehog in the fable came to the coney-burrows in stormy weather, and desired harbour, but when once he had gotten entertainment he set up his prickles, and did never cease till he had thrust the poor coneys out of their burrows; so covetousnes, by fair pretences, wins itself into the heart; but as soon as you have let it in it will never leave till it hath thrust all religion out of your hearts. . . . . Covetousness chains men to the earth, and makes them like the woman which Satan had bound together that she could not lift up herself (Luke xiii. 11). You may as well bid an elephant fly in the air as a covetous man live by faith. We preach to men to give freely to Christ's poor; but covetousness makes them to be like him in the Gospel who had a withered hand (Mark iii. 1). . . . . Covetousness shuts men out of heaven (Ephes. v. 5). What should a covetousness man do in heaven? . . . . Like a bee that gets into a barrel of honey, and there drowns himself, like a ferryman that takes in so many passengers to increase his fare that he sinks his boat, so a covetous man takes in more gold to the increasing of his estate that he damns himself in perdition.—*Watson.*

It is not enough to abstain from evil, we must also *hate* it.—*Fausset.*

Who is ignorant of the woeful success which Achan found in coveting unlawfully the gold and silver in Jericho? He hoped to get more there than any man in Israel; but no man in Israel lost so much as he.—*Dod.*

He that maketh gain to be the gain that he looketh for in all things, he may hope to fill his house with wealth, but he shall be sure to fill it with trouble. He that is given to gain, and hath made himself the prey as it were and gain of gain, he may have his hand open to take gifts, but with the same hand taketh in disquietness into his heart. . . . Now, because such are often crying — How shall I live? therefore the wise man telleth them he that hateth such things shall live.—*Jermin.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 28.

STUDYING TO ANSWER.

I. Every righteous man is a student. The aim of study in any department of knowledge is, first to gain possession of certain facts, and then to make the knowledge of practical service in life. If a man intends to be a builder he must first be a student. He must first gain certain theoretical knowledge, and then make use of it. And so with every profession or calling—each requires thought before any work is entered upon. Every righteous man is a man with a profession—he is a professor of righteousness—he gains a knowledge of righteous precepts with the view of reducing them to righteous practice. A knowledge of what is right and true in the abstract will be of little use to himself or to any other man unless the knowledge influences his words and deeds. The proverb before us sets forth the righteous man as a student of his speech. His aim is to speak the "word in due season," spoken of in verse 23, and to do this he must be a student of the human heart—1. *He must study the workings of his own heart.* This is a study peculiar to the righteous man. Many men study themselves and others as frameworks of bone and muscle, who never bestow a thought upon the soul, of which the body is but the raiment. Other men watch the operations of the mental powers and tabulate all the movements of the mind as they are brought to light by internal consciousness. But the godly man goes deeper. He ponders his thoughts and feelings in the light of moral truth and righteousness—he weighs his words in the balance in which he knows that God will weigh them. 2. *He must study other men's hearts.* He desires that his words should not only be harmless but beneficial to others; he desires to answer wisely questions relating to God, and man, and immortality; he sets his speech in order before he opens his mouth upon any of these weighty matters, and he considers the circumstances and dispositions of those to whom he speaks that like one of old, his "*doctrine may drop as the rain, his speech distil as the dew,*" when he "*publishes the name of the Lord*" (Deut. xxxii. 2, 3). Before his thoughts become words he submits them to the revision of his conscience and his judgment, and asks himself if they are such as he can hope God will bless to the edification of others.

II. All men who do not thus study their thoughts and words are the authors of much mischief. They are those who have never made what they think a matter of conscience, and consequently their words are the outcome of an unsanctified heart. As is the fountain, so must be the stream. For the words of such a man to be other than evil is an impossibility. "*How can ye, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. A good man, out of the good treasure of the heart, bringeth forth good things; and an evil man, out of the evil treasure, bringeth forth evil things* (Matt. xii. 34, 35).

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

The tongue is the heart's messenger. So often as it speaks before the heart dictates, the messenger runs without his errand. He that will not speak idly, must think what he speaks; he that will not speak falsely, must speak what he thinks.—*Adams.*

What is before said (verse 2, and chap. xii. 23) of the *wise and the foolish,* is said here of the *righteous and the wicked:* and what is before said of the utterance of *wisdom and folly,* is here said of the utterance of *good and evil.* We have repeatedly seen how Solomon identifies these in his statements. Wickedness is folly; goodness is wisdom.—*Wardlaw.*

"*Mouth,*" all agency. Religion is

so much like politeness, that a polite man "winnows" (ver. 7) his acts till they look sometimes like religion; but watch men where the guise of kindness fails them, viz., their aim to be polite, and their "*mouth pours out evils.*" There is a recklessness of act that only a religious purity can essentially restrain.—*Miller.*

The wicked, speaking so *much*, cannot but speak "evil things" (chap. x. 19. Not his *heart*, as in the case of the righteous, but his *mouth* takes the lead.—*Fausset.*

I. It is not easy at the first to apprehend the right, because error at the first ken standeth usually in men's light, and hindereth them from seeing the truth, whereof they may better inform themselves by serious deliberation. II. When the mind hath time and liberty to ponder upon, and will to weigh the point to be spoken unto, it findeth out good arguments for good causes, and digesteth the same in so apt a manner as may best persuade the hearts of the hearers. III. A meditating heart affecteth itself for that which it provideth for others to hear, and such men speak not only truly and pertinently, but faithfully also, and conscionably: their souls having first feeling of that within, which after their mouths are to deliver out.—*Dod.*

The *answer*, which I conceive the heart of the righteous to *study*, is the answer of obedience unto God's commandments—the answer of thankfulness for His favours and mercies received. For, as St. Gregory speaketh, to answer to God is to render to His precedent gifts the duties of our service. Now, *this study* is the study of the whole life of a righteous man. Whatsoever he goes about, he knows that he must answer to God for it, and therefore he considereth before he doth it, that it be answerable unto God's law —*Jermin.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 29.

God Near and Far Off.

I. God is not far from the wicked in a local sense. The most wicked man upon the face of the earth lives and moves and has his being by reason of his relation to that God whom he practically ignores. The power of life that he possesses is not self-originated, and although we do not know exactly how he lives in God, we know that in this sense he is near to Him, for "*He is not far from everyone of us*" (Acts xvii. 27). But—

II. God is far from the wicked in a moral sense. There is often a wide moral distance between those who are locally near each other. The father who lives and toils for his children, and eats with them at the same table may be as far from them morally as he is near to them locally. Judas lived for three years with the Son of God—often shared the same hospitality and partook of the same meal. There was a local nearness to Christ but a wide moral gulf between the Master and the professed disciple. This moral distance between God and the wicked is the subject of the first clause of this verse. Notice—1. *The cause of this distance.* The ungodly man cherishes purposes and desires which are directly opposed to the will and purpose of God. God has one view of life and the ungodly man has another. That which God esteems of the highest moment is lightly esteemed by a wicked man. This being so, there can be no sympathy between the creature and his Creator—a great gulf is fixed between them. 2. *The wicked man is to blame for remaining at this distance from God.* God invites him to bridge the chasm. "*Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him: and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon*" (Isa. lv. 7). He rolls upon him the responsibility of the separation. "*Say unto*

them, As I live," saith the Lord God, "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way, and live" (Ezek. xxxiii. 11). 3. *This distance, if not annihilated, will increase with time and continue through eternity.* Sinful habits and desires, if yielded to, grow harder to overcome—a man never stands still in the way of transgression. And no local change from one world to another can have any effect upon the moral distance. It is not to be bridged by change of place but by change of character. Either the man must turn to God or be ever getting farther from Him. But—

III. **There is a sympathy between God and the righteous man which keeps the Divine ear open to his prayer.** As we have before noticed, the foundation of sympathy is likeness of character, and those who have sympathy with each other have open ears for the reception of each other's thoughts and desires. The godly man has an open ear for the commands and promises of his God, and God, in return, "heareth the prayer of the righteous." There is a like-mindedness between the righteous God and a righteous man—a oneness of desire and purpose—that makes the words of each acceptable to the other. 1. *God's ear is the first that is open to the prayer of the righteous.* The sentinel watching on the height for the first streaks of dawning day has a view of the objects around him before those in the valley are able to perceive them. They are unable to see what he sees, because they are still shut in by the darkness. But if this sentinel had power to pierce the darkness of night, he would not even have to wait for day in order to discern all that lies around him. God is such a sentinel over the children of men. Others are dependent upon the light that comes from words before they discern the desires of others, but God can see into the darkest corner of the human soul—can discern the unuttered desire of the heart long before it shapes itself into words. God's ear is open to hear before the man's mouth is open to pray. He "*understandeth his thought afar off*," knows it before it has even shaped itself into a petition, or even into a desire in the man's own heart, and consequently long before it is known to any other creature. 2. *No power outside the righteous man can come between his prayer and God's ear.* When we present a prayer or express a desire to any human benefactor, it is possible that some opposing influence may prevent our suit from being favourably received. A third person may come between, and by misrepresentation or by other means, may hinder our request from receiving impartial consideration. But God's *first-hand* knowledge of all His children makes it a blessed certainty that all their requests will enter His ear and receive impartial treatment at His hands. (For other thoughts on this subject see Homiletics on verse 8, page 407).

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

We may perhaps trace a reference to this maxim, a proof how deeply it had taken root in men's heart's, in the reasoning of the blind man in John ix. 31.—*Plumptre.*

The Lord is far from the wicked. He was so from the proud Pharisee who yet got as near God as he could, pressing up to the highest part of the temple. The poor publican, not daring to do so, stood aloof, yet was God far from the Pharisee, near to the Publican. "Behold a great miracle," saith Augustine, "God is on high, thou liftest up thyself and He flies from thee; thou bowest thyself downward and he descends to thee. Low things He respects, that He may raise them; proud things He knoweth afar off, that He may depress them." *But He heareth the prayer of the righteous.* Yea, He can feel breath when no voice can be heard for faintness (Lam. iii. 56). When the flesh makes such a din that it is hard to hear the Spirit's sighs, He knows the meaning of the Spirit

(Rom. viii. 26, 27), and can pick English out of our broken requests; yea, He hears our "afflictions" (Gen. xvi. 11), our "tears" (Psa. xxxix. 12), our "chatterings" (Isa. xxxviii. 14), though we cry to Him by implication only, as "the young ravens" do (Psa. cxlvii. 9).—*Trapp.*

The second clause of this verse becomes exegetical of the first. God is not far from anybody (Psa. cxxxix. 8). But He is far from many people's "*prayer.*"—*Miller.*

Faith is the soul, and repentance is the life of prayer; and a prayer without them hath neither life nor soul. If we believe not, we are yet in our sins; if we repent not, our sins are yet in us . . . But first "will I wash my hands in innocency, and then will I compass thine altar" (Psa. xxvi. 6). "Then shall my prayer be set before thee as incense, and the lifting up of my hands like the evening sacrifice" (Psa. cxli. 2). When, with the sword of severe and impartial repentance, we have cut the throat of our sins and done execution upon our lusts, then let us solicit heaven with our prayers; then pray, and speed; then come, and welcome. Then the courtiers about the King in heaven shall make room for prayers. Then the Prince Himself shall take our prayer into His own hand, and with a gracious mediation present it to the Father. Then is that court of audience ready to receive our ambassadors, which be our prayers and our tears. Then St. John sees twelve gates in heaven, all open, and all day open, to entertain such suitors.—*Adams.*

Learn to distinguish betwixt God's hearing and His answering the saint's prayer. Every faithful prayer is heard and makes an acceptable report in God's ear as soon as it is shot; but God doth not always thus speedily answer it. The father, at the reading of his son's letter (which comes haply upon some begging errand) likes the motion, his heart closes with it, and a grant is there passed; but he takes his own time to send his dispatch and let his son know this. Princes have their books of remembrance, wherein they write the names of their favourites whom they intend to prefer, haply some years before their gracious purpose opens itself to them. Mordecai's name stood some while in Ahasuerus' book before his honour was conferred. Thus God records the name of His saints and their prayers. "The Lord hearkened and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him, of them that feared the Lord and thought upon His name." But they hear not of God in His providential answer, haply a long time after. . . . There comes oft a long and sharp winter between the sowing time of prayer, and the reaping. He hears us indeed as soon as we pray, but we oft do not hear of Him so soon. Prayers are not long on their journey to heaven, but long a-coming thence in a full answer. Christ hath not at this day a full answer to some of the prayers He put up on earth; therefore He is said to expect till His enemies be made His footstool.—*Gurnall.*

When the season has been cold and backward, when rains fell and prices rose, and farmers desponded and the poor despaired, I have heard old people, whose hopes, resting upon God's promise, did not rise and fall with the barometer, nor shifting winds, say, We shall have harvest after all; and this you may safely say of the labours and fruits of prayer. The answer may be long in coming—years may elapse before the bread we have cast upon the waters comes back; but if the vision tarry, wait for it! Why not? We know that some seeds spring as soon almost as they are committed to the ground; but others lie buried for months, nor, in some cases, is it till years elapse that they germinate and rise, to teach us that what is dormant is not dead. Such it may be with our prayers. Ere that immortal seed has sprung the hand that planted it may be mouldering in the dust—the seal of death on the lips that prayed. But though you are not spared to reap the harvest, our prayers are not lost. They bide their time, God's "set

time." For in one form or another, in this world or in the next, who sows in tears shall reap in joy. The God who puts his people's tears into His bottle will certainly never forget their prayers.—*Guthrie.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 30.

Cheerfulness and Good Tidings.

Two views are taken of the meaning of the first clause of this verse. Some understand it to mean that the objective light that plays upon the eyes of the body rejoices the heart of the man who is under its influence; and others understand by "the light of the eyes" that "cheerfulness of countenance spoken of in verse 13, which has such an inspiriting effect upon those who behold it. We suggest a line of thought upon both views.

The light of the material sun rejoices the heart. 1. *Because of its healthful influence upon the bodily frame.* It is well known that sunlight is favourable to bodily health—that a dwelling into which it does not freely enter has a most depressing influence upon its inhabitants, because it deprives them of natural bodily health and vigour. Other things being equal, health of body adds much to cheerfulness of spirit, to gladness of heart. Everyone can testify from personal experience how a low state of bodily health depresses the spirit, and how returning health after sickness revives and gladdens it. Therefore, in this sense the "light of the eyes rejoices the heart." 2. *Because of its beautifying influence upon all that the eyes behold.* If we go from the light and brightness of noonday into a dark cave or dungeon where the sun's rays never penetrate, we find none of that beauty of colour or contrasts of light and shade, which afford us such exquisite enjoyment in the landscape outside. When we come again into the light of day we realise that "light is sweet, and that it is a pleasant thing to behold the sun" (Eccles. xi. 7), for to its blessed influence we owe all the joy that fills our hearts when we look abroad upon the beauties of the natural world. 3. *It ought to rejoice the heart of man on account of its symbolic suggestions.* God intends the light of nature to be a symbol to the children of men of blessed realities which can be appreciated only by the eye of the soul. Light is symbolic of the glory of the Divine nature (1 Tim. vi. 16), and of the perfect purity of the Divine character (1 John i. 5). The beneficent influence of sunlight is a symbol of the soul-warming and soul-gladdening influence of the Divine presence (Psalm lxxxiv. 11). And as the light of the sun rejoices the heart of the beholder, so does light and cheerfulness upon one man's face gladden the heart of him who looks upon it. Cheerfulness upon one man's countenance brings cheer to the heart of those with whom he comes in contact. Upon this subject we remark—1. *That there is a great difference between levity and cheerfulness.* Two men may be swimming in a river, and one may keep himself afloat by artificial appliances, and the other by his natural strength skilfully used. The beholders may not for a time observe any difference in the two; but should the first man, by any mishap, lose his floats, then the difference will be at once manifest. He will be in danger of going to the bottom while his companion will keep steadily on his way. The natural strength and long practice of the latter has made it second nature to keep on the surface of the water. There is just such a difference between gaiety which depends for its continuance upon good fortune and external excitement, and the cheerfulness that springs from a never-failing and internal source. In the first case, if the floating-tackle is cut away the poor man sinks into despondency and gloom, but in the second there is a buoyancy

of heart which, if overwhelmed for a moment by some sudden wave of adversity, brings him again to the surface and re-awakens hope within him. The first is of earth, but, although natural temperament may do much towards the second, real and heartfelt cheerfulness can only be born of a consciousness of reconciliation with God and goodwill to men. It is not, however, a universal characteristic of good men and women. But—2. *It is a man's duty to cultivate this cheerfulness of heart. It is good for the man himself.* If sunlight gives strength to the body this sunlight of the soul is strengthening to the whole man. Cheerfulness gives courage to face the difficulties of life—that gladness of heart which springs from "doing justly, loving mercy, and walking with God" is a power which no man for his own sake can afford to throw away. *But it is also a duty which we owe to others.* In this sense "the light of the eyes rejoices the heart," the incoming of a cheerful man into a house where the inhabitants are depressed and sad is like the entrance of sunlight into a darkened room—it changes the entire aspect of things. The influence of such a man is like a shower upon the parched earth—everything seems to spring into new life after it. If it has so reviving and cheering an effect in a world where there is so much to sadden and to weaken men's energies, every man is bound to cultivate a habit of cheerfulness as a matter of duty. *It is part of the duty which men owe to God.* It is a manifestation of confidence in His righteous character and merciful purposes towards His creatures. It reveals contentment with the lot in life which He has assigned to us—a spirit of submission to His will. Therefore it is an apostolic command, "*Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, rejoice*" (Phil. iv. 4). The second clause of the verse relates to another very fruitful source of gladness, viz., the reception of a "*good report,*" or good news. 1. *A good report gives joy, or "maketh the bones fat" in proportion as such news was desired.* If the sick man, who has been awaiting the verdict of the physician, receives from him the assurance that he will recover his health, his heart is filled with joy at the tidings. He can testify that his "bones waxed old" while he was filled with fear and doubt as to his case, but the "good report" makes him renew his youth, and is the first step to renewal of health. The good news that the guilt of the soul can be removed fills the soul with joy in proportion as the misery of unforgiven sin has weighed upon the spirit. This was David's experience: "*When I kept silence*" (while my sin was unconfessed) "*my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long.*" . . . "*I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin.*" And the consciousness of forgiveness enabled him then to sing of the blessedness of him "*whose transgression is forgiven and whose sin is covered*" (Psa. xxxii. 1-5). 2. *The joy imparted by a "good report" of this nature is shadowed forth by the gladness which is imparted to men who have long sat in darkness, when they greet again the light of day.* What must be the joy of an arctic traveller, when, after months of night, he sees the first streak of returning sunlight? Who can describe the feelings of a prisoner who has been for years immured in a gloomy dungeon when he again finds himself in the sunshine? Or who but those who have passed through the experience can conceive what the blind man feels who has never seen the light of day, when first his eyes are opened? So none but he who has been in darkness of soul on account of unpardoned sin, and has felt the joy of a sense of reconciliation with his God, can know how the "good report" that "Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners" "maketh the bones fat," in other words, gives him a sense of new life.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

We may conceive this verse to show the comfort of life as it cometh from God, and from man. From God in the light of the eyes, and in seeing those good things which He bestowed upon us. From man in hearing the good report and testimony which he giveth of us. Or else we may take the first part of the verse more literally, to speak only of the joy of the heart, which by the light of the eye from the pleasant objects thereof, is conveyed to it, and so the good contentment of a man from a good report to be compared to it. Now well may these be compared together, for report is the eye whereby the world judgeth of a man, and it is also a useful eye whereby a man judgeth of himself. . . . . Certainly it must be the care of the godly, not only to keep a good conscience, but to have a good report.—*Jermin.*

It is riches enough to be well reputed and well spoken of. It pleased David well that "whatsoever he did pleased the people." It pleased John well that his friend "Demetrius had a good report of the truth" (3 John 12), and he "had no greater joy than to hear that his children walked in the truth."—*Trapp.*

The bones may be called the foundation of the corporeal structure, on which its strength and stability depend. The cavities and cellular parts of the bones are filled with the marrow, of which the fine oil, by one of the beautiful processes of the animal physiology, pervades their substance, and, incorporating with the earthy and silicious material, gives them their cohesive tenacity, a provision without which they would be brittle and easily fractured. "Making the bones fat," means supplying them with plenty of marrow, and thus strengthening the entire system. Hence "marrow to the bones" is a Bible figure for anything eminently gratifying and beneficial. The import, then, of the expression of the text is, that a good reputation contributes eminently to enjoyment, to comfort, health, active vigour, spirit, life, and happiness. By some, however, "*a good report*" is understood of *good tidings*, and they conceive "the light of the eyes" to refer to the happy glancing looks of the messenger of such good tidings.—*Wardlaw.*

"The light of the eyes" means the look of a pleased friend. When He is the Almighty, how it "rejoices the heart." And when the rapture of another sense is secured by "*a good report*" (*a good hearing*, as it is in the original), the *good news* being also from on high, it reaches the very penetration of our comfort.—*Miller.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 31—33.

How to Give and Take Reproof.

I. Reproof is good when it is given with a good intention and when it is given wisely. Those who undertake to handle the amputating knife should be men who are intent upon the healing of the patient, and must also know where to cut and how much to cut, otherwise the operation may tend to death rather than to life. The reprover, if he would administer a "reproof of life," must be wise and kind. He must desire to do good to the man whom he reproves, he must know how to administer the reproof, and must leave off reproving as soon as the necessary wound has been inflicted; if he does not, he may injure the soul instead of destroying the sin.

II. He who takes such reproof displays the highest wisdom and the truest humility. We admire the fortitude of a man who will bear without a murmur a painful operation for the sake of the good that will come to him afterwards. We praise him for the pluck and courage which he shows in enduring bravely,

that which we know gives him intense pain of body. And we ought to give as much praise to him who will submit to reproof in a spirit of humility, for there is nothing which is more unpalatable or painful to a man's spirit. Nothing is a surer sign of true wisdom than such submission.

III. He who will not submit to such reproof can never attain to true honour. There can be no honour where there is ignorance, and there can be no knowledge where there is an unwillingness to receive reproof. The greatest kings and statesmen, who are now enthroned by the honour and submission of millions of their fellow-creatures, had once to submit to the instruction of their nurses and tutors. There is no honour in holding a high position unless he who holds it knows how to fill it worthily; and such knowledge can only be acquired by stooping not only to instruction but to reproof, which is always a necessary element of instruction. (For fuller treatment of the subject of these verses, see Homiletics on chapters iii. 11, 12; xii. 1; xiii. 18; xv. 10. Pages 247, 323, 410, etc.).

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Ver. 31. There is a reproof not of life, but of death, when hatred seeketh disgrace or ruin by it, and when it is used, as St. Bernard speaketh, not to instruction in the spirit of meekness, but to destruction in the spirit of fury. When it is reproach, and not reproof, it amendeth not, but hardeneth the offender in his wickedness. But with the wise there is the reproof, not of death, but of life; that is, direction unto a virtuous life, and teaching true wisdom, which is the life of the soul. The words of the wise, saith the Preacher, are as nails fastened: for as nails are driven in, but it is not so much to make a hole as to fasten and strengthen; so the words of the wise in reproof do pierce, but it is not so much to wound, as to fasten their reproof, and to give strength unto it.—*Jermin.*

Oh, it is a blessed thing to have others tell us of our faults, and as it were to pull us out of the fire with violence, as Jude speaks; rather to pull us out with violence, with sharp rebukes, than we should perish in our sins. If a man be to weed his ground, he sees need of the benefit of others; if a man be to demolish his house, he will be thankful to others for their help; so he that is to pull down his corruption, that old house, he should be thankful to others that will tell him, "This is rotten, and this is to blame;" who, if he be not thankful for seasonable reproof, he knows not what self-judging means. If any man be so uncivil when a man shows him a spot on his garment to grow choleric, will we not judge him to be an unreasonable man? And so when a man shall be told, "This will hinder your comfort another day;" if men were not spiritually besotted, would they swell and be angry against such a man?—*Sibbes.*

Ver. 32. Wilt thou destroy that for which Christ died? (1 Cor. viii. 11). What shall a man give in exchange for his soul? There is no great matter in the earth but man; nothing great in man but his soul, saith Faverinus. "Whose image and superscription is it" but God's? "Give," therefore, "to God the things that are God's," by delivering it up to discipline. . . . "Suffer," saith the great apostle, "the word of exhortation;" suffer them in God's name, sharp though they be, and set on with some more than ordinary earnestness. Better it is that the vine should bleed, than die. Certes, "When the Lord shall have done to you all the good that He hath spoken concerning you, and hath brought you to His kingdom, this shall be no grief unto you, nor offence of heart," as He said in a like case (1 Sam. xxv. 30, 31), that you have hearkened to instruction, and been bettered by reproof.—*Trapp.*

There are two things that cause men

to rage against reproof. 1. *Guilt of the sin objected.* Guilt makes men angry when they are searched, and, like horses that are galled, to kick if they be but touched. The mildest waters are troublesome to sore eyes. There is scarce a more probable sign that the crime objected is true than wrath and bitterness against the person that charges us with it. 2. *Love to sin makes men impatient under reproof.* When a person's sin is to him as "the apple of his eye," no wonder that he be offended at any that touch it. —*Swinnock.*

Ver. 33. Abigail was not made David's wife till she thought it honour enough to wash the feet of the meanest of David's servants (1 Sam. xxv. 40). Moses must be forty years a stranger in Midian before he become king in Jeshurun. . . . Luther observed that ever, for most part, before God set him upon any special service for the good of the Church he had some sore fit of sickness. Surely as the lower the ebb the higher the tide; so the lower any descend in humiliation the higher they shall ascend in exaltation; the lower this foundation of humility is laid the higher shall the roof of honour be overlaid.—*Trapp.*

Not only doth humility go before honour in the course of things, but is also before honour in the dignity and excellency of it. So that when humility hath brought a man to honour even then his greatest honour is humility.—*Jermin.*

"*Reproof,*" which has been twice used, and "*instruction,*" or rather *discipline,* which is now made to balance it in these last important texts, have a respect of painfulness: and Solomon, in this verse, tempers that pain, by showing what discipline really is:—"*The fear of Jehovah.*" "*Fear* hath torment," says the apostle John (1 John iv. 18). That fear is not altogether the fear of our text, but is a part of it. I do not remember the fear of the Almighty as a title applied in heaven. "*The fear of Jehovah*" has some particle of painfulness; and that painfulness makes it of the nature of "*discipline.*" The best discipline of the saints is the abiding fear of the Almighty. The proverb seems to imply that it will not last always; that it is painful; and that we shall not continue pained; that it is necessary for us to be under just that gentle sort of discipline that *fear* can give while we are in this world. And that necessity he states, in that "*before glory is affliction.*" Not honour (as in the English version), so much as *weight,* or "*glory.*" Not *humility,* but primarily, *toil; ergo,* more generally, "*affliction.*" "We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God" (Acts xiv. 22).—*Miller.*

"I am not worthy," is the voice of the saints. They know God, and God knows them. Moses was the meekest man upon earth, and therefore God is said to know him by name (Exod. xxxiii. 17). "I am less than the least of all thy mercies," saith Jacob (Gen. xxxii. 10). Lo, he was honoured to be father of the twelve tribes, and heir of the blessing. "Who am I, O Lord?" says David. He was advanced from that lowly conceit to be king of Israel. "I am not worthy to loose the latchet of Christ's shoe," saith John Baptist (Matt. iii. 11). Lo, he was esteemed worthy to lay his hand on Christ's head. "I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof," says the centurion, therefore Christ commended him. "I have not found so great faith; no, not in Israel (Matt. viii. 8). "I am the least of the apostles," saith Paul; "not worthy to be called an apostle" (1 Cor. xv. 9). Therefore he is honoured with the title of *the* apostle. "Behold the handmaid of the Lord," saith the holy virgin; therefore she was honoured to be the mother of the Lord, and to have all generations call her blessed. This *non sum dignus,* the humble annihilation of themselves, hath gotten them the honour of saints. In spiritual graces let us study to be great, and not to know it, as the fixed stars are everyone bigger than the earth, yet appear to us less than torches. Not to be

high-minded in high deserts is the way to blessed preferment. Humility is not only a virtue itself, but a vessel to contain other virtues; like embers, which keep the fire alive that is hidden under it. It emptieth itself by a modest estimation of its own worth, that Christ may fill it. It wrestleth with God, like Jacob, and wins by yielding; the lower it stoops to the ground the more advantage it gets to obtain the blessing. All our pride, O Lord, is from the want of knowing Thee. The leper casts himself down, and Christ bids him arise. Humility is the gentleman-usher to glory. God that sends away the rich empty from His gates loves to "fill the hungry with good things" (Luke i. 53). The air passeth by the full vessel, and only filleth that is empty. This is the difference between the proud and beggars; both agree in not having, differ in craving. The proud are *pauperes spiritus*, the humble are *pauperes spiritu*. "Blessed are," not the poor spirits, but "the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven," (Matt. v. 3). Such as felt their wants sought and besought God for supply. "Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain be brought low" (Luke iii. 5). The lowly mind shall be exalted, the high-towering ambitious shall be thrown down. How should God say to the merchant that glories in his wealth, to the usurer that admireth his moneys, to the gallant that wonders that his good clothes do not prefer him, "Arise!" Alas! they are up already; they were never down. A dwarf in a great throng, seeming low on his knees, was bidden by the prince to stand up; alas! he was before at his highest. God cannot be so mistaken as to encourage their standing up who never yet had the manners to cast themselves down. Says Augustine, "Descend, that ye may rise up to God; for you have fallen by rising up against God." He that is a mountebank must level himself even with the ground; if humbleness hath once thrown him down and brought him to his knees, he shall hear the patron and pattern of humbleness comforting him with a *surge*—"Arise. . . . . ." The guest that sets himself down at the lower end of the table shall hear the feast-maker kindly remove him, "Friend, sit up higher" (Luke xiv. 10). If Esther fall at Ahasuerus' feet, he will take her by the hand, and bid her arise. When Peter fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me; I am a sinful man, O, Lord" (Luke v. 8–10), he presently was raised up with, "Fear not, thou shalt catch men." . . . . . Who is heard to say with Paul, "I am the chief of sinners?" (1 Tim. i. 15) such a humble confession scarce heard of. But Christ had given him a *surge* on his former humbling: "Arise and bear My name before Gentiles and kings," etc. Let us all thus cast ourselves down in humility, that the Lord may say to us in mercy, "Arise."—*Adams.*

The more humble, the fitter to come to God, and He the more willing to come unto the soul and dwell in it. The highest heavens are the habitation of God's glory; and the humble heart hath the next honour, to be the habitation of His grace.—*Leighton.*

The truly humble spirit is, in society, to the proud and haughty, what the valley is to the mountain: if less observed, more sheltered and more blessed, valleys see the stars more brightly than the mountains that often veil their proud heads with clouds. The mountains filter the waters upon which the valleys live, and send down in soft music to their ears the stormy thunders that beat with violence on their lofty brow. The great sun stoops to the valleys and touches them with a warmth which it denies to the high hills; and kind nature, which leaves the towering heights amidst the cold desolations of death, endows the humble vales with richest life, and robes them in the enchanting costume of sweetest flowers.—*Dr. David Thomas.*

You must go to honour before humility. This is the law—the law of God. It cannot be changed. It has its analogies in the material creation. Every height has its corresponding

depth. As far as the Andes pierce into the sky, so far do the valleys of the Pacific, at their base, go down into the heart of the earth. If the branches of a tree rise high in the air, its roots must penetrate to a corresponding depth in the ground; and the necessity is reciprocal. The higher the branches are, the deeper go the roots; and the deeper the roots are, the higher go the branches. This law pervades the moral administration as well as the higher works of God. The child Jesus is set for the fall and the rising again of many in Israel; but it is first the fall and then the rising; for "before honour is humility." Fall they must at the feet of the Crucified before they can rise and reign as the children of the Great King. . . . . There are two mountains in the land of Israel, equal in height, and standing near each other, with a deep, narrow valley between. At an interesting point in the people's history, one of these mountains bore the curse, and the other received the blessing (Deut. xi. 26-29). If you had stood then on Ebal, where the curse was lying, you could not have escaped to Gerizim to enjoy the blessing without going down to the bottom of the intervening gorge. There was a way for the pilgrim from the curse to the blessing, if he were willing to pass through the valley of humiliation; but there was no flight through the air, so as to escape the going down. These things are an allegory. All men are at first in their own judgments on a lofty place, but the curse hangs over the mountains of their pride. . . . . All the saved are also on a lofty height, but God dwells among them, and great is the peace of His children. All who have reached this mountain have been in the deep. They sowed in tears before they went forth rejoicing to bear home the sheaves.—*Arnot.*

CHAPTER XVI.

CRITICAL NOTES.—**1.** Nearly all commentators agree in reading this verse, "*To man belong the preparations of the heart, but the answer of the tongue is from the Lord.*" **Preparations,** lit. "*arrangements,*" "*orderly disposings,*" as those of an army in array, or as the loaves of the shewbread set in order. **2.** Miller translates this verse very differently. See comments on the verse. **3. Commit,** rather *roll.* **Thoughts,** or "*plans.*" **4. For Himself.** Many read "for its own purpose, or end." There is much in favour, however, of the reading of the authorised text. **5. Though hand join in hand,** literally "*hand to hand,*" as in chap. xi. 21. This phrase is variously understood. Stuart renders it "*Should hand be added to hand,*" *i.e.,* although a haughty man should employ all his powers of resistance, "*he shall not go unpunished.*" Delitzsch and Zöckler render it "*assuredly,*" as in chap. xi. 21. See also the comments on the verse. **6. Purged.** Heb., *kaphar,* "expiated," or "covered." **9. Deviseth.** The form of the verb denotes anxious consideration. **10. A Divine sentence,** literally "*divination,*" *i.e.,* "*an oracle,*" or "*a decision.*" "**His mouth transgresseth not.**" Stuart and Delitzsch read, "*In judgment his mouth should not prevaricate, or err.*" **11. A just weight,** literally "*the scale,*" "the upright iron in scales which the weigher holds in his hand" (Fausset). **Weights,** literally "*stones,*" which were anciently used as weights. **13.** "**They love him**" etc., rather "*he who speaketh right, or uprightly, is loved.*" **18.** "The Hebrews observe that this verse stands exactly in the centre of the whole book" (Fausset). **19. Lowly,** or the "*afflicted.*" **20.** Delitzsch and Zöckler translate the first clause "*He that giveth heed to the Word findeth good.*" Stuart and others. "*He that is prudent respecting any matter.*" Miller says, "*Literally, wise about a word.*" **21. Sweetness,** or "*grace.*" **Learning,** or "*instruction.*" **22. Instruction,** rather "*discipline,*" "*correction.*" **26. He that laboureth, laboureth for himself,** etc. Zöckler translates "*The spirit of the labourer laboureth for him, for his mouth urgeth him on.*" Stuart—"*The appetite of him who toils is toilsome to him* (*i.e.,* make him exert himself) *for his mouth urgeth him on.*" Delitzsch—"*The hunger of the labourer laboureth for him,*" etc. Miller—"*The labouring soul labours for it, for its mouth imposeth it upon him.* (See his comment.) **28. A whisperer,** *i.e.,* "a *backbiter.*" **30. Moving, or** *compressing,* indicating resolution, or *biting,* indicative of scorn and malice.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 1.

THE HEART AND THE TONGUE.

I. The human heart needs preparation. 1. *It needs to be prepared for the reception of moral truth.* When the earth was "*without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep,*" it was not in a condition to receive seed into its bosom. There was a need of preparation before it was fit to receive seed which would produce "herb after its kind." Light must play upon its surface, heat and moisture must penetrate the soil. And man's heart, in his present fallen condition, is like the earth before the "*Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters, and God said, Let there be light: and there was light.*" It needs some preparation before it can receive the truth of God so as to be benefited by it—before it is that "*good ground*" into which, when the "*good seed*" falls, it "*brings forth fruit, some an hundred-fold, some sixty-fold, some thirty-fold*" (Matt. xiii. 3–8). As the plough must break the clods before the seed can be sown with any hope of harvest, so the "*fallow-ground*" of the heart must be broken up—must undergo some preparation before it can be a profitable receiver of moral truth (Hosea i. 12). Our Lord, in the parable of the sower, teaches most distinctly the truth that the good which is derived from hearing Divine truth depends upon the state of heart of him who hears. 2. *It needs to be prepared to yield moral truth.* All the preparation of the earth is to the end—not that it should be a *receiver*, but a *giver*. The seed is sown not that it should remain in the soil, but that *the earth should "bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater"* (Isa. lv. 10). So it is with the human soul. It takes in the thoughts of God, that it may translate them into holy words and deeds. The "preparation of the heart" is but a means to "the answer of the tongue." Out of the "good treasure of the heart" good things are expected to issue (Matt. xii. 35). But unless there is preparation to *receive* there can be no *giving* out of anything that is worth the giving. The quality of the water that comes to the lip of the drinker depends upon the quality of the spring that fills the well. As we have often before remarked, the "tree" must be first "good," and then the "fruit will be good" (Matt. xii. 33). He whose heart is prepared by Divine influence to receive the Divine Word will not be at a loss for such an "answer of the tongue" as will bring glory to God, honour to himself, and blessings to others.

II. The preparation of the heart, and, therefore, the answer of the tongue, depends upon God. In nature laws are constantly at work to bring to pass certain facts and results, and man works with these laws, and in obedience to them. But behind the laws there must be a law-giver—behind the working there must be a worker—and this worker and law-giver is God. The preparation of the earth is the work of man; yet both the preparation of the earth and the answer of the earth to that preparation is from God. There would be no harvest if the husbandman did not toil; but there would be no harvest if behind him and his toil there was not the Life-Giver. God is the spring of all activities, not only in the sower of the seed, but in the seed which is sown and in the earth in which it germinates. So in the preparation of the heart, and the right use of the tongue. Man's freedom and responsibility in these matters are insisted upon in the oracles of God. He and he alone is to be blamed if his heart is not prepared to receive the words of God. He is commanded as we saw just now to "break up his fallow ground" (Jer. iv. 3)—to prepare his spirit for the reception of Divine truth. Yet if a man's heart is thus prepared, and if by preparation of heart his tongue is able to speak good words, he is not the sole producer of the result. Behind the springs of thinking—behind

the means used by the man himself—God is working "both to will and to do of His good pleasure." God claims to be the Author of all good, whether in the bud of thought or in the fruit of action. From Him "all good counsels and all just works do proceed." This is the teaching of this verse as it stands in our English Bible, but many commentators translate the verse differently. (See Critical Notes.) The thought as thus translated is similar to that in verse 9, upon which see Homiletics.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

The great doctrine of all Scripture is, that *heart* religion is true religion. In nothing is Christianity more distinguished from all other systems of religion than in the moral purity which it inculcates and which it provides the means of producing. Other religions multiply articles of faith and ritual observances, and pompous ceremonials: this alone fixes upon the internal character of the worshipper and the actual state of the heart before God. God first gives grace, and then owns and honours the grace which He gives. "The preparations of the heart are of the Lord;" "The prayer of the upright is His delight" (chap. xv. 8). This was discovered long before Solomon's time. It was from the very first the primary design of the religion of the Bible. "*By faith* Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain" (Heb. xi. 4). . . . . It is God's prerogative to prepare the heart for Himself, and he does this especially, by establishing the principles of grace and holiness in the mind, and then actuating the habits of grace which His own spirit has implanted. We need preparation—1. *For spiritual worship.* The worship of God, as it necessarily includes all the devout affections, is the most spiritual act in which we are engaged. In prayer, in reading and hearing God's word, and in approaching the sacramental table, we have especially to do with God, in the gracious relations in which He stands to us. And as these exercises raise us above the ordinary level of the world, and are foreign to our ordinary habits of thought and emotion as the creatures of dust and time, we need especial assistance to fix our attention, to purify our motives, and to realise the presence of the Master of assemblies. We need "grace whereby to serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear" (Heb. xii. 28). This preparation of the heart is God's gift, it is God's promise, it is the Church's hope, and it has been realised in the experience of God's faithful people in the ordinances of His appointment. 2. *For active service.* Christians have much to do for God in the world, in the family, in the Church, in the disposal of their ordinary business, etc. In all these things wisdom is needed to direct, and wisdom should be sought from him. 3. *For patient suffering.* It is a great thing to have a heart prepared for suffering. One important requisite is, *to anticipate its approach*, that that day may not come upon us unawares, that trial may not entangle us in temptation, but may, like the overflowings of the Nile, leave the means of fertility behind. Another requisite is that we should *expect to meet with God in affliction.* When God announces a long succession of national judgments, He says, "And because I will do this, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel" (Amos iv. 12). This text is usually applied to death and judgment, but it really relates to worldly disasters, and teaches that God would have us *prepare to meet Him* in the distressing changes of human life. 4. *For enjoyment.* If there is much to be suffered there is also much to be enjoyed. But a time of prosperity needs *heart preparation*, lest a time of ease be a time of danger. "It is the bright day brings out the adder, and that craves wary walking." It was when Noah had escaped the deluge, and had gathered in his first

vintage from the grapes he had planted, that he drank of the wine and was drunken. David, safe in the wilderness, was entangled in fatal snares when walking on the roof of his palace. (*Note.* Though heart preparation is from God, it is not given as a premium to sloth, but in proportion to the earnestness with which we seek the grace. The following passage from a letter of Colonel Gardiner tells how that man of God sought preparation from God for the Lord's Supper. "I took a walk on the hills and mountains over against Ireland. And could I give you a description of what passed there, you would agree that I had much better reason to remember my God from the hills of Port P—— than David from the Hermonites, the land of Jordan, and the hill Mizar. In short, I wrestled with the Angel of the Covenant some hours, and made supplication to Him with strong crying and tears until I had almost expired, but He strengthened me till I had power with God. You will be able to judge by what you have felt upon like occasions, after such a preparatory work, how blessed the Lord's Supper was to me.")—*S. Thodey.*

Man may lay out his plans, but God alone can give them effect in answer to the tongue of prayer (ver. 9; chap. xix. 21; 2 Cor. iii. 5).—*Maurer.*

Often what you dispose in the aptest order in your heart you cannot also express suitably with the tongue. What one aptly speaks is from God.—*Mercer.*

Men often determine in heart to say something, but God overrules their tongue so as to say something utterly different, as in Balaam's case (Num. xxiii).—*Menochius.*

God takes the stone out of the heart that it may feel (Ezek. xxxvi. 26); draws it that it may follow; quickens it that it may live. He opens the heart that He may imprint His own law, and mould it into His own image (Acts xvi. 14; Jer. xxxi. 33). He works, not merely by moral suasion or by the bare proposal of means of uncertain power, but by invisible Almighty agency. The work then begins with God. It is not that we first come, and then are taught; but first we learn, then we come (John vi. 45). . . . Shall we then wait indolently till He works? Far from it. We must work, but in dependence upon Him. He works not without us, but with us, through us, in us, by us, and we work in Him (Phil. ii. 13; Job xi. 13). Ours is the duty, His is the strength; ours the agency, His the quickening grace. "The work, as it is a duty, is ours; but as a performance it is God's" (Bishop Reynolds).—*Bridges.*

Undoubtedly we arrange and plan. That is a matter of consciousness. But these are but the tools of the designer. He uses our plannings to shape the last word to His mind. . . . The "*arrangings of the heart*" are, indeed, as much God's as the final "*decree*," because, in brief, everything is. He destines everything; but not in the same sense in which they are consciously man's. They precede the end, and are present. They cannot determine the end, that is future. I cannot determine now what I will say the next moment. God can. I can and do arrange. But at any convenient point, at any interval, even the very least, God can swing me round. What I shall say is a part of His providence. I cannot ordain to say it in such a way as that it shall be said. In the smallest interval that follows God may tempt Pharaoh, and he may have new views as to letting the children of Israel go. God cannot tempt me to evil; but He can govern by the privation of good. And, therefore, "the king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water. He turneth it whithersoever He will." This, of course, implicates God, to our weak seeming, in the sins of the wicked. The next verse discharges Him from any such accountability. (See Miller's rendering of verse 2, in his comments.)—*Miller.*

Though a man have never so exactly marshalled his matter in hand, as it were, in battle array, as the Hebrew imports, though he have set down with himself both what and how to speak, yet he shall never be able to bring

forth his conceptions without the help of God. . . . Digressions are not always unuseful. God's spirit sometimes draws aside the doctrine to satisfy some soul which the preacher knows not. Put though God may force it, yet man may not frame it.—*Trapp.*

This is a matter of experience to which the preacher, the public speaker, the author, and every man to whom his calling or circumstances present a weighty difficult theme, can attest. As the thoughts pursue one another in the mind, attempts are made and again abandoned; the state of the heart is somewhat like that of chaos before the creation. But when, finally, the right thought and the right utterance for it are found, that which is found appears to us, not as if self-discovered, but as a gift; we regard it with the feeling that a higher power has influenced our thoughts and imaginings; the confession by us "our sufficiency is of God" (2 Cor. iii. 5) in so far as we believe in a living God, is inevitable.—*Delitzsch.*

Man doth not carry himself one-half of the way, and then as one wearied is carried the rest by God. But it is God who supporteth him in the heart as well as in the tongue: it is He that supporteth man in the preparations of the heart, and well as in the subsequent proceedings of the man. He is a God of the valleys as well as of the hills; and it is He that worketh as well in the lowest degree of goodness as in the highest. His praise reacheth from the root of the heart to the tip of the tongue, and all man's goodness is from His grace.—*Jermin.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 2.

The Weigher of Spirits.

I. One man has many ways. The text speaks of "all the ways of a man," implying they are numerous and varied. Man is a compound creature—the animal and the spiritual—mind and matter—both go to make up a man, and from this union of different elements come many different wants and wishes, hopes and desires, and from these many *wants* come many *ways*—many and diversified efforts to satisfy his cravings. He finds himself having many bodily wants, and he seeks many different ways of supplying them. He is generally conscious of intellectual desires, and he seeks ways of satisfaction for them. If he listens to the voice within him, he feels that he has moral needs, and he tries to satisfy them also.

II. As a rule men generally look with approbation upon their own ways or methods of life. A man does this because they are *his* ways. What is our own generally looks well to us because it is ours. This is especially the case if it is ours by choice—if we have been the main instrument in its becoming ours. The builder looks with partial eyes upon the house that he has planned, the poet upon the poem that he has composed, the painter upon the picture that he has painted, the statesman upon the law that he has introduced. Most men are disposed to judge partially of their own deeds; ungodly men always regard their "own ways" as "clean." The sinner has a way of life which he has chosen for himself, and because it is *his* way he thinks it is a good way to walk in.

III. There is therefore need of an impartial Judge to pass sentence upon men's ways. Those who look upon us and our ways are generally better judges of us and of them than we are ourselves. They are good judges in proportion as they are wise and disinterested, and have a sincere desire to do us good. From them, if we are not given over to our own conceit and self-will, we may gain much very important truth about our ways. God is a judge who must be perfectly unbiassed, and He can have no object in view except our good,

therefore when He passes judgment upon our ways, we must accept it as truth. He declares that a man's ways, though clean in his own eyes, are not clean in His; we must not question the decision of absolute goodness and wisdom, and by refusing to have our ways condemned and to accept "His ways" (Isa. lv. 6-8), shut out from ourselves all hope of bettering our lives.

IV. However one man's ways may deceive another, there is no danger of mistake on the part of God. "The Lord weigheth the *spirits*." A man may deceive *himself* as to the goodness of his ways. Saul of Tarsus certainly did. When he "persecuted unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women" (Acts xxii. 4), his ways were "clean in his own eyes." But God weighed his spirit and found him wanting. And a man may deceive *others*. His outer garment may be so spotless that his fellows may not suspect what is hidden beneath. But there is an eye that can go beneath the surface—"*discerning the thoughts and intents of the heart;*" there is One whose glory it is that "*He shall not judge after the sight of His eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of His ears,*" and whose judgment, therefore, is "*righteousness*" and "*equity*" (Isa. xi. 3, 4).

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

"*As to all the ways of a man, pure in His own eyes, while yet he weighs out spirits, is Jehovah.*" This change is very bold, and yet, really, not so bold as the old readings. It explains why "*pure*" if found to be in the singular. The common version, besides that disagreement of number, is strained, is sense, materially. There are instances of like thought (Prov. xxxvi. 2), and, in one case, great similarity of language (chap. xii. 15); but the emphasis, in the present instance, seems stronger than in any of the rest, and would make us pause. It is not altogether true, the "all the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes." Moreover, the case most like it (chap. xxi. 2), and which might seem irrefragably to establish it in its sense, we shall find habited in the same way. . . . And while our common version would jump needlessly into another subject, the one I give fits most perfectly. God moves man as He lists (ver. 1), and yet, as to the ways of a man, He is right in His own eyes while "*He weighs out spirits.*" *He weighs out* to all that which determines them, and that is, gifts according to the measure that He ordained in the Redeemer. He "weighs out" in the sense of taking strict account.—*Miller.*

Weighing them, as goldsmiths do their plate and coins, finding them *light* and *counterfeit* oftentimes.—*Muffet.*

His "weighing the *spirits*" implies that *here* the moral good or the moral evil really lies. The mere action is in itself incapable of either, independently of what it indicates in the agent. When we speak of a moral action, we mean the action of a moral agent. A dog and a man may do the same action—may carry off, for instance, for their own use respectively, what is the property of another. We never think of calling it a *moral* action in a dog, but we condemn the man for the commission of a crime against his neighbour, and a sin against his God. An action may even in its effects be beneficial, which in regard to the doer of it is inexcusably *bad:* it may be good in its results, but bad in its principles.—*Wardlaw.*

They that were born in hell know no other heaven; neither goes any man to hell but he has some excuse for it. As covetousness, so most other sins go cloaked and coloured. All is not gold that glitters. A thing that I see in the night may shine, and that shining proceed from nothing but rottenness. . . . . But God turns up the bottom of the bag as Joseph's stewards did, and then come out all our thefts and

misdoings that had so long lain latent. —*Trapp.*

The important doctrine deducible from this text is that conscience (simply as *conscience*) is no safe guide, but requires to be informed and regulated by God's will and word, and that a *right intention* is not sufficient to make a good action.—*Wordsworth.*

How unclean are man's eyes, in whose eyes all his ways are clean. Certainly whatever a man's sentence may be of himself, there is something in him that gives another judgment. There is a spirit in man whose eyes, though dazzled much, cannot be put out. That seeth and condemneth much uncleanness, which man's wilful blindness and seeing darkness will needs have to be purity. There is a conscience in man which, though enslaved much, yet in many ways goeth contrary to man's perverseness, and condemneth those ways which man approveth. But God is greater than man's heart, and by the exact weights of His omniscience discerning the errors of the conscience He pronounceth all a man's ways to be unclean.—*Jermin.*

ILLUSTRATION OF VERSE 3.

The Establishment of Thoughts.

I. There is an intimate connection between a man's works and a man's thoughts. Where there is no thinking there can certainly be no profitable work. The skilful workman has the plan of his work in his mind before he begins to use his fingers to execute it, and throughout its progress his thought is as busy as his hand. A work undertaken and carried through without thought is generally a useless work; indeed, it is impossible for working to be entirely independent of thinking.

II. For the establishment of work there must first be the establishment of the thoughts. When a ship is under the guidance of one master-mind, and this mind is self-possessed and thoughtful, all the crew under his rule move with the regularity of clock-work. Order reigns in the leader, and therefore order rules the subordinates. He is the head and they are the hands, and because the one moves in obedience to a fixed purpose, the others do also. His thoughts are established, and therefore the work is done. Every man's thoughts ought to be the guide of his work, and if his thoughts and his intentions are fixed, or established, by being in harmony with the righteous law of God, his works will partake of the same character. The orderliness of his outward life will be the effect of an order which reigns within.

III. If the thoughts are to be established, our undertakings must be committed to God. The learner tells the master what work he intends to undertake—he unfolds to him the plan of the machine he is going to construct, or shows him the design of the house he hopes to build, or the picture which he intends to paint, that he may be strengthened and encouraged in his undertaking, and that he may find out whether he has the approval of one who is much wiser than himself. If his master approves of his plan his mind is more fully made up, he is strengthened in his determination, his thoughts are established. Before he might have wavered, but now that he has submitted all his plans to one in whom he has full confidence and has obtained his approval, he sets to work with a goodwill which is an earnest of success. If in all our undertakings in life we lay our plans before the Lord, and if we find, upon consulting His word, that they are not in any way contrary to His will, but appear to be in conformity with it, our minds have rest, our hopes of success grow stronger, and our energy is quickened to go forward. The establishment of our thought tends to the establishment of our work.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

I consider that work as good as done, that trial as good as borne, which I have solemnly committed to God in prayer.—*Flavel.*

This counsel implies—1. *That all our purposes and doings should be in accordance with God's will.* How is it possible to commit them to God otherwise? . . . We ought not to form or pursue any purpose unless we can, *with confidence,* acknowledge God in it. The maxim by which, as Christians, we should be regulated, is to be found in the words—"Whatsoever is not of faith"—whatsoever does not proceed from a full conviction of right—"is sin" (Rom. xiv. 23). 2. *That none of our works can prosper without God.* This is a lesson of which the Divine word is full (Psa. cxxvii. 1; Dan. v. 23; James iv. 13–16), etc. 3. *That it is, therefore, the obvious and imperative duty of intelligent creatures to own their dependence* . . . . This is a counsel to which, despite all the theories and speculations of infidelity, natural conscience gives its sanction. 4. *That what is our duty is at the same time our interest.* The act of committing all things into the hands of God to be regulated as He may see fit, preserves the spirit from corroding anxiety. 5. *God will graciously smile on the efforts, and accomplish the purposes and wishes of him who seeks His blessing.* God will second and prosper, and fulfil the purposes he forms, and the desires he cherishes, crowning his endeavours with success.—*Wardlaw.*

Roll thy doings in the direction of Jehovah; and they shall have success according to thy plans. "*Roll,*" not exactly *commit.* "*In the direction* of" the preposition *towards. Trust,* therefore, is less implied than an attitude of *service. Roll forward thy work in the direction of Jehovah;* that is, with an eye to Him; in a harmony with Him, recognising His plans (ver. 4): and what will be the result? Why, God means to have His way at any rate. Our works will "*have success,*" one or the other fashion, in His scheme of Providence. He works in the work even of Beelzebub. But if we act "*in the direction of*" His will, they will have success *as we planned them.* That seems to be the meaning. We might read, "thy plans shall have success." . . . The whole would then mean, "*thy doings*" shall "*have success*" (literally, be made to stand), *as* thy plans, or *in the shape* thy plans gave them. Or, in other words, God, having an express purpose for all you do (ver. 4), will give success to your work at any rate. He has the exact niche for all you work at. But, if you turn it *in His direction,* and aim with it at His will, He will aim at yours; that is, He will give a success *after your plan;* if not in its actual letter, still, in what is far the best, in the way best suited to your peculiar interest.—*Miller.*

Never is the heart at rest till it repose in God; till then it flickers up and down, as Noah's dove did upon the face of the flood, and found no footing till she returned to the ark. Perfect trust is blessed with a perfect peace. A famous instance of this we have in our Saviour, "Now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour, but for this cause came I to this hour. Father, glorify Thy name" (John xii. 27). All the while the eye of His humanity was fixed upon deliverance from the hour of His temptation; there was no peace nor rest in His soul, because there He found not only uncertainty, but impossibility. But when he could wait on, acquiesce in, and resign to the will of His Father, we never hear of any more objection, fear, or trouble. —*Trapp.*

The word commit most properly signifieth *cast,* or *tumble* thy works unto the Lord. Now, in casting or tumbling, there are three things. First, a regardlessness of any merit in them, for such things are usually tumbled as are little cared for. Secondly, a speediness, for commonly things are tumbled to make the greater haste.

Thirdly, there is a weakness and lightness in the things tumbled, for things of weight and strength are not so easily removed. Now, plainly, such are the works of man: there is little solidity or stability in them; tumble them, therefore, upon the Lord—commit them into His hands. And do it speedily; do not defer it until thou seest no farther help in man, but at first betake thyself unto Him, for that will best show the confidence thou hast in Him. And do not fret and vex thyself with care, but tumble and cast thy care upon God. The less thou carest in that manner the more He will care for thee. So that by Him thy works shall be established which of themselves are frail and uncertain; by Him no time shall be lost for the well ordering of them, if thou lose no time in the committing of them to Him. Or else we may take the meaning of the words thus, Put over thy works unto the Lord, and whatsoever thou doest well let Him have the praise of it—let Him have thanks for it. . . . . To this purpose Chrysostom borroweth a similitude from the play at ball, saying, "We must cast back and return our works unto God, even as in the play of tennis, the one tosseth, the other tosseth back the ball, and so long the sport handsomely continueth, as the ball tossed and tossed back again between the hands of both doth not fall down." The comfort of that which we have received from God is so long happily continued to us as we return God thanks for it.—*Jermin.*

Verses 2, 3. The first of these verses tells us how a man goes wrong, and the second how he may be set right again. He is led into error by doing what pleases himself; the rule for recovery is to commit the works to the Lord, and see that they are such as will please Him. When we weigh our thoughts and actions in the balances of our own desires we shall inevitably go astray. When we lay them before God, and submit to His pleasure, we shall be guided into truth and righteousnesss. . . It is a common and sound advice to ask counsel of the Lord before undertaking any work. Here we have the counterpart equally precious—commit the work to the Lord after it is done. The Hebrew idiom gives peculiar emphasis to the precept—roll it over on Jehovah. Mark the beautiful reciprocity of the two, and how they constitute a circle between them. While the act is yet in embryo as a purpose in your mind, ask counsel of the Lord, that it may be crushed in the birth, or embodied in righteousness. When it is embodied bring the work back to the Lord, and give it over into His hand as the fruit of the thought you besought Him to inspire. . . . These two rules following each other in a circle, would make the outspread field of a Christian's life sunny, and green, and fruitful, as the circling of the solar system brightens and fertilises the earth. . . . Perhaps most professing Christians find it easier to go to God beforehand, asking what they should do, than to return to Him afterwards, to place their work in His hands. This may, in part, account for the want of answer to prayer—at least the want of a knowledge that prayer has been answered. If you do not complete the circle your message by telegraph will never reach its destination, and no answer will return. We send in earnest prayer for direction. Thereafter we go into the world of action. But if we do not bring the action back to God the circle of supplication is not completed.—*Arnot.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 4

All Things for God.

I. There is one Person in the universe who knows the history of all things. Jehovah knows all things because He made all things. Some men know the history of their nation and the history of many nations. Others know the

history of the philosophies of the world, can tell when and by whom certain ideas were first promulgated and certain methods adopted. There are other men who are acquainted with the history of natural objects, and whose knowledge is so extensive that it embraces the heavens above and the waters under the earth. But there is only One Being who can claim a knowledge of all things and all persons, and that is the Maker of all things. The smith who has beaten a ploughshare out of rough iron can give us the history of the share because he made it. The sculptor who calls into shape and form a beautiful statue knows the day and hour when that statue ceased to be a thing of the imagination only by the first application of his chisel. And he can give the history of its progress from that day until this because he is the author of its existence. So God, having called all things into being at first, and having upheld them ever since by the word of His power, has a perfect knowledge of their history. But He goes farther. No human worker knows anything of the essential nature of the material out of which he fashions his work—he finds that ready to his hand, and can tell us but little about it. But God is the Creator of matter; He called it into being at first, and therefore knows not only the history of the formation of things as we see them but the essential qualities of the material out of which they are formed.

II. Creation is the work of One Being. Most things made by man need co-operation. Although they are but inanimate objects they cannot be made by the unaided efforts of one creature. He must have the skill and strength of others to help him, either in the actual work itself, or in the preparation of the material, or the tools which he uses. A palace can be built only by the united effort of many hundreds of intelligent creatures, and when they have finished it they have only made a lifeless thing. A ship when in full sail is as much "like a thing of life" as any work of man, yet the movement that makes it look so life-like is not in itself but comes from an external power. Yet inanimate though it is, how many a man gave his toil and his strength to bring into existence this new thing. One thing made by man requires the strength and skill of many, and when made is without life; but the One God is the maker of all things that we see around us, many of which are full of life.

III. The world is not co-eternal with God. Matter is one of the "all things" which He has made. This being the case it is not as old as God. He was before the material was out of which "*in the beginning He created the heavens and the earth.*"

IV. The One God is the absolute Lord of all His creatures. This is the thought which must be expressed in the second clause of this verse. In considering it we must remember—1. *That the infinitely good God can do no wrong.* In proportion as men are good, certain acts are impossible to them. There are human beings whom we feel are incapable of certain immoral acts. In proportion as men approach in their characters to the character of God it becomes a moral impossibility for them to do wrong to any creature. It is, therefore, conceivable that if we could find a man who was perfectly true and good we should find a being who could do no wrong. We cannot find such an absolute being among fallen men, but we have such a Being in God. He is absolute goodness and righteousness and truth—as to His character, "*He is light, and in Him is no darkness at all.*" It is, therefore, impossible for Him in any way to be the author of sin. Being absolute goodness, He cannot make a wicked man. He hates sin, and cannot increase it by creating wickedness. It is an impossibility for him to be the author of wrong in any way. 2. *That all His plans and purposes are manifestly directed to making men good.* If any person were to declare that God delighted or purposed that His creatures should live in darkness, we should point to the sun in the heavens as a direct refutation of such a statement. To any who declare that God is indifferent as to whether

men live in sin or not, we point to the Bible and to the incarnation and death of His Son as the most emphatic denial of such an assertion. And if, in the face of such facts, it is impossible to believe that God is indifferent as to human character, it is a thousand times more impossible to conceive the possibility of His creating a "wicked man." 3. *Therefore no man can be brought to a "day of evil" except by his own consent.* No man can be brought to perform an evil deed except by his own consent, and consequently he cannot be brought to the consequences of evil without the exercise of his own free will. The human tempter cannot destroy the virtue of his victim unless he first gain his consent, and whatever evil day comes as the consequence, the sinner feels that it is the fruit of his own act. The sting would be removed if he felt that it had come upon him without any deed of his own. Satan certainly believes that he can bring no man to a day of evil without that man's consent. Consequently his great work is that of a *tempter*—a *persuader*—his great aim is to win the will of every man as he won that of our first parents. Nor can God bring a man to a day of evil unless that man consent. He has made man free, and His nature forbids Him to tempt His creatures to evil (Jas. i. 13), much more it makes it impossible that he should coerce their will to the committal of sin, which is the sole cause of all the evil that is found in the universe. The declaration of the text therefore is: 1. That all men exist by the will of God, who desires them to use their present life, so as to be fitted for a higher one. 2. That if a man crosses God's desires and purposes in this matter, he will come to a day of evil. 3. God will use the actions of those who oppose His will against themselves, and for the furtherance of His own purpose. God was the Author of Pharaoh's existence, and if he had yielded to the Divine will he would by obedience have been raised to a higher condition of life. But when he opposed the will of God, and put away from him the opportunities of Divine enlightenment, *then* it might be said that "God created him for the day of evil"—then God over-ruled His opposition to His glory and to Pharaoh's destruction. And so he deals with all who exalt themselves against His will, refusing to fall in with His purpose of mercy towards them.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

"*Even the wicked for the day of evil,*" *i.e.*, to experience the day of evil, and then to receive His well-merited punishment. It is not specifically the day of final judgment that is directly intended (as though the doctrine here were that of a predestination of the ungodly to eternal damnation), but any day of calamity whatsoever which God has fixed for the ungodly, whether it may overtake him in this or in a future life. Comp. the "day of destruction" (Job xxi. 30), the "day of visitation" (Isa. x. 3).—*Lange's Commentary.*

The day of evil is generally understood, and I have myself been accustomed so to explain it, of the day of *final visitation and suffering to the wicked themselves.* But I am now inclined to doubt whether "the day of evil" has here this meaning at all. There is another, of which it is alike susceptible, and which, in Scripture, it frequently bears—namely, the day of primitive visitation, in the infliction of judicial vengeance, in the course of God's providential administration. I question if the *suffering* of the wicked be intended, and am disposed to refer the phrase to the *instrumental agency* of the wicked. "The Lord hath made all things for Himself" will thus mean that He employs all as instruments in effecting His purposes, and that thus He makes the wicked as a part of His agency: employing them, without at all interfering with their freedom and

their responsibility, as the executioners of wrath, "when He cometh out of His place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity," thus rendering their very passions the means of accomplishing His designs, making "the wrath of man to praise Him, and restraining the remainder of wrath."—*Wardlaw.*

If by God's making all things for Himself be meant that He aimed at and intended the manifestation of His wisdom, and power, and goodness in the creation of the world, 'tis most true that in this sense He made all things for Himself; but if we understand it so, as if the goodness of His nature did not constrain Him thereto, but He had some design to serve ends and necessities of His own upon His creatures, this is far from Him. But it is very probable that neither of these is the meaning of this text, which may be rendered with much better sense, and nearer to the Hebrew, thus, "*God hath ordained everything to that which is fit for it, and the wicked hath He ordained for the day of evil;*" that is, the wisdom of God hath fitted one thing for another, punishment to sin, the evil day to the evil-doer.—*Tillotson.*

God made things without life and reason to serve Him passively and subjectively, by administering occasion to man to admire and adore his Maker; but man was made to worship Him actively and affectionately, as sensible of, and affected with, that Divine wisdom, power, and goodness which appear in them. As all things are of Him as the efficient cause, so all things must necessarily be for Him as the final cause. But man is in an especial manner predestinated and elected for this purpose. "Thou art mine; I have created him for my glory; I have formed him; yea, I have made him" (Isa. xliii. 1–7).—*Swinnock.*

God, in His revelations, hath told us nothing of the second causes which He hath established under Himself for the production of ordinary effects, that we not perplex ourselves about them, but always look up to Him as the first cause, as working without them, or by them, as He sees good. But he hath told us plainly of the final cause, or end of all things, that we may keep our eyes always fixed on that, and accordingly strive all we can to promote it.—*Beveridge.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 5.

HEART-PRIDE.

I. That which may be hidden from all others is ever manifest to One Being. There is coin in the world that is not money nor money's worth, although it often passes through the hands of many before its worthlessness is detected. But there are eyes which could tell at once that it was not genuine, and hands which if it came into their possession would soon reduce it to its true level among the baser metals. So there is in the world a feigned humility, which has so much the appearance of the genuine article that no earthly creature suspects that it is the covering of a heart big with pride. But when God judges whether a man is proud or humble He looks through the words and actions at the *heart.* "Everyone that is proud in *heart,*" etc.

II. God abhors pride. 1. *It is entirely contrary to His own nature.* God is entirely without pride. His condescension is one of His most remarkable attributes. God manifest in flesh abased Himself beyond the possibility of any finite creature. "*Being in the form of God He made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross*" (Phil. iii. 7, 8). We always find that in proportion as men are holy and god-like they are destitute of pride. The

proudest men are always those who have least to be proud of. Therefore pride can have no place in the character of the holy and ever-blessed God. 2. *It is opposed to the possessor's well-being.* God not only abhors pride because He is Himself supremely good, but He holds it in abomination because He desires men's good. Whatever is opposed to God's nature must be opposed to man's interest. He who desires the salvation of all His creatures hates pride because it holds men tied and bound in fetters which hinder their approach to Him; because it makes men akin to the fallen angels. (On this subject see also on chapters xi. 1; xiii. 10, page 305, etc.)

III. Union is no guarantee against punishment. "Though hand join in hand, he shall not be unpunished." When that which is an abomination to God is the foundation of a confederation, it must be overthrown by the power of the stronger arm. And it contains within itself an element of overthrow. A house may have an appearance of compactness which may lead a casual onlooker to think it is destined to stand for many a century. But its foundation is in the sand, and its fall is only the work of time, even if storms and tempests never beat upon its walls. So there may be an appearance of strength where pride is the basis of union, but it can be only an appearance. Pride is a dividing force and not a binding one, and all confederations against God being based upon it, they rest only upon a foundation of sand. (See also on chap. xi. 21.)

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

(1.) If God has made everything for His purpose (ver. 4), how foolish the man who arrogantly forgets Him! (2.) If God has besought us to work under His plans (ver. 3), how wicked the man who proudly mutinies. If God works even in kings (chap. xxi. 1), how absurd the man who would work away from Him. How can it work well? "Hand to hand," *i.e.*, in close quarters (chap. xi. 21), as we shall come all of us at the last, how can the workers outside of the Almighty possibly "*go unpunished?*"—*Miller.*

How many sins are in this sinful world, and yet, as Solomon saith of the good wife (Prov. xxxi. 29), "Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou surmountest them all." So I may say of pride, many sins have done wickedly, but thou surmountest them all; for the wrathful man, the prodigal man, the lascivious man, the surfeiting man, the slothful man, is rather an enemy to himself than to God; the envious man, the covetous man, the deceitful man, the ungrateful man, is rather an enemy to men than to God; but the proud man sets himself against God, because he doth against His laws, he maketh himself equal with God, because he doth all without God, and craves no help of Him; he exalteth himself above God, because he will have his own will, though it be contrary to God's will. As the humble man saith, "Not unto us, Lord, not unto us, but to Thy name give the glory" (Psa. cxv. 1); so the proud man saith, "Not unto Him, not unto Him, but unto us give glory." . . . . Therefore God is specially said to resist the proud, because the proud resist Him. Here is heaven against earth, the Creator against the creature, the Father against the Son, the Prince against the subject—who is like to win the field? . . . . It had been too heavy for them, if he had said the Lord doth not care for them; for God's care preserveth us, and our own care doth but trouble us; but to say that the Lord doth resist them, is as if Michael should denounce war with the dragon till he hath cast him into the pit.—*Henry Smith*, 1590.

Some make "hand in hand" to be no more than "out of hand," "*immediately*," or "with ease," for nothing is sooner or with more ease done than

to fold one hand in another. God "shall spread forth His hands in the midst of them, as he that swimmeth spreadeth forth his hands to swim, and He shall bring down their pride together with the spoil of their hands" (Isa. xxv. 11). The motion in swimming is easy, not strong; for strong strokes in the water would rather sink than support. God, with greatest facility, can subdue His stoutest adversary when once it comes to handy-gripes—when once his hands join to the proud man's hand—so some sense this text—so that they do *manus conserere*, then shall it appear that it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the Living God (Heb. x. 31).—*Trapp.*

From hand to hand expresses the consecutive connection of causes through which the Lord works; though the proud escape one occasion of His punishment, yet he is reserved for another. —*Mercer.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 6.

The Purging of Iniquity.

I. There is in the human heart and in human life that which is not conducive to human happiness, viz., iniquity. Iniquity is *inequality*, or *injustice*, and a sinner is an *unjust* man. 1. *He is unjust to himself.* He is bound to render to himself what is due to his own nature—to care for his own real and highest interests—but this no ungodly man does. 2. *He practises iniquity towards his neighbour.* This follows from the first as a necessary consequence. Shakespeare thus admonishes us—

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

But if a man is not true to himself, it follows as certainly that he will not be true to any other man—will not in its real and broad sense be a just man in his relations to others. 3. *He practises iniquity towards God.* He does not render to God that which is His just due, and this is indeed the foundation of his iniquity towards himself and his fellow-men.

II. Human nature cannot find within itself a remedy for its own iniquity The man who is smitten with fever cannot find a remedy for his disease in his own diseased body—he must look somewhere else for a cure. There are remedies powerful in curing his disease, but they must be administered from without, they are not resident within him. So there is a cure for human iniquity, and that cure is to be found in contact with mercy and truth, but neither of these is to be found in fallen human nature, or, if some traces exist among men, the mercy is not abundant enough, and the truth is not unalloyed enough to effect the cure.

III. There is enough mercy and truth in God to do away with human iniquity. He has devised a plan by which His abundant mercy and His unsullied truth shall be brought into contact with sinful men in such a manner as to cure them of their sin. Mercy without truth could not meet the need, neither could truth without mercy. Mercy is needed to do away with the guilt of sin—to give remission for past transgressions, but it is equally needful that some standard of truth and righteousness should be also given, lest men "sin that grace may abound." Mercy frees the sinner from the penalty of sin, but truth is brought into contact with his soul to free him from the power of sin. Being "*made free from sin*" men must "*become servants of God*," and "*have fruit unto holiness.*" (Rom. vi. 22.) And to obtain this end there must be a reception into the human soul of Divine truth to transform it—to regenerate it. Hence when the "*Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us*, and men "*beheld His glory*, it was a glory "*full of grace and truth.*" (John i. 14). For Homiletics on the second clause of this verse, see on chap xiv. 15 (page 364).

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Loving and faithful conduct towards one's neighbour is not in and of itself named as the ground of the expiation of sin, but only so far forth as it is a sign and necessary expression of a really penitent and believing disposition of heart, and so is a correlative to the fear of God, which is made prominent in the second clause; just as in the expression of Jesus with reference to the sinning woman (Luke vii. 47), or as in Isa. lviii. 7; Dan. iv. 34, etc.—*Zöckler.*

The *purging of iniquity* seems here to direct us to expiation, and considering that Divine mercy and truth are frequently exhibited in connection with this invaluable blessing, the analogy of faith appears to link it here with these combined perfections which kiss in Christ the Mediator (Psa. lxxxv. 10), and with that covenant of grace in which they shine so brightly. Should this view be thought not to cohere with the general tenor of this book, which deals more with practical points and matters of common life than with the deeper articles of faith, it may be observed that, when some of its pages are so fully illuminated by evangelical sunshine (chap. viii. 9), we might naturally expect—besides this connected splendour—occasional rays of doctrinal light to rest upon this system of Christian morals. . . . . God purges iniquity by sacrifice, not nullifying the sanctions of the law by a simple deed of *mercy*, but combining the manifestations of His *truth* by fulfilling these sanctions upon the Surety which *mercy* provided (Isa. liii. 6, 2 Cor. v. 21). . . . . So gloriously do these two attributes harmonise. We inquire not to which we owe the deepest obligation. *Mercy* engages, *truth* fulfils the engagements. *Mercy* provides—*truth* accepts—the ransom. Both sat together in the Eternal council. Both made their public entrance together into the world. Both, like the two pillars of the temple (1 Kings vii. 21), combine to support the Christian's confidence. . . . . The exercise of forgiveness is to implant a conservative principle. "*By the fear of the Lord men depart from evil.*" The supposition of pardon for a sinner continuing impenitent would be to unite the two contraries of reconciliation and enmity.—*Bridges.*

The gospel in (1) *Justification* and (2) *Sanctification* is here as beautiully announced as by any of the apostles. Justification makes its appearance as a covering of iniquity by *mercy and truth.* "*Mercy and truth*" is the sum of holiness. How does holiness, therefore, which is "*mercy and truth,*" cover sin? Undoubtedly by the gospel method . . . . But then there is to be a *turning from evil.* This is Sanctification. How is it to be accomplished? By ourselves, as the indispensable instrument. Mercy and truth win for us the Spirit; and then, under this outfit, we are to set out upon the journey. The man in the temple must lift forth his hand (Matt. xii. 10). But how are we to begin? This book tells us again and again. "*The fear of Jehovah*" is the beginning of wisdom (chap. ix. 10). The *turning* is by an access of fear. But how are we to continue? The *turning* is to be kept up. It is more like a *departing.* Sin, being slow to wear out, the turning has to go on; and it becomes a journey; and we travel each day, just as we set out . . . . And the very last of the journey, like the very beginning, is by "*the fear of Jehovah.*" The actual *fear* of Jehovah, tempered by love, is a thing of "discipline" (see on chap. xv. 33), which drives the Christian away from his iniquity.—*Miller.*

To fear the Lord and to depart from evil, are phrases which the Scriptures use in very great latitude to express to us the sum of religion and the whole of our duty. 1. *It is very usual in Scripture to express the whole of religion by some eminent principle or part of it.* The great principles of religion are knowledge, faith, remembrance, love, and fear. And religion is called the "knowledge of the holy"

(Prov. xxx. 3), and the "remembrance of God" (Eccles. xii. 1), and the love of God (Rom. viii. 28, etc.), and here and elsewhere the "fear of the Lord" (Mal. iii. 16, etc.). So likewise the sum of all religion is often expressed by some eminent part of it, as it is here expressed by departing from evil. It is described by seeking God (Heb. xi. 6) and by calling on His name (Acts ii. 21), etc., etc. 2. *The fitness of these two phrases to describe religion.* The fitness of the first will appear if we consider how great an influence the fear of God hath upon men to make them religious. Fear is a passion that is most deeply rooted in our natures, and flows immediately from that principle of self-preservation which God hath planted in every man. Everyone desires his own preservation and happiness, therefore everyone has a natural dread of anything that can destroy them. And the greatest danger is from the greatest power, and that is omnipotency. So that the fear of God is an inward acknowledgment of a holy and just being, who is armed with an almighty and irresistible power; God having hid in every man's conscience a secret awe and dread of His infinite power and eternal justice. Now fear, being so intimate to our nature, is the strongest bond of laws, and the great security of our duty. . . . For though we have lost in a great measure the gust and relish of true happiness, yet we still retain a quick sense of pain and misery. So that fear relies upon a natural love of ourselves, and is complicated with a necessary desire of our own preservation. And therefore religion usually makes its entrance into us by this passion; hence, perhaps, it is that Solomon more than once calls it the "*beginning of wisdom.*" As for the second phrase, the fitness of it will appear if we consider the necessary connection that there is between the negative and positive part of our duty. He that is careful to avoid all sin will sincerely endeavour to perform his duty. For the soul of man is an active principle, and will be employed one way or other, it will be doing something; if a man abstain from evil he will do good. "Virtue begins in the forsaking of vice; and the first part of wisdom is not to be a fool." . . . The law of God, contained in the Ten Commandments, consists mostly of prohibitions which yet include obedience likewise to the positive precepts contained in those prohibitions.—*Tillotson.*

No object can well be more dull and meaningless than the stained window of an ancient church, as long as you stand without and look upon a dark interior; but when you stand within the temple, and look through that window upon the light from heaven, the still, sweet, solemn forms that lie in it start into life and loveliness. The beauty was all conceived by the mind, and wrought by the hand of the ancient artist whose bones now lie mouldering in the surrounding churchyard; but the beauty lies hid until two requisites come together—a seeing eye within, and a shining light without. We often meet with a verse upon the page of the Old Testament Scriptures very like those ancient works of art. The beauty of holiness is in it—put into it by the Spirit from the first, and yet its meaning was not fully known until the Sun of Righteousness arose, and the Israel of God, no longer kept in the outer court, entered through the rent veil, and from the Holy of Holies, looked through the ancient record on an illuminated heaven. Many hidden beauties burst into view upon the pages of the Bible, when Faith's open eye looks through it on the face of Jesus. One of these texts is now before us. . . . The first clause tells how the guilt of sin is forgiven; the second, how the power of sin is subdued. Solomon unites the two constituent elements of the sinner's deliverance in the same order in which his father experienced them: "I have hoped for thy salvation, and done thy commandments" (Ps. cxix. 166). It is when iniquity is purged by free grace that men practically depart from evil. . . . Mercy and truth meet in the Mediator. In Christ the fire meets the water without drying it up: the

water meets the fire without quenching it out.—*Arnot.*

By iniquity God and man are severed, and never can iniquity be pardoned until God and man meet again. To procure this meeting there must be a meeting of mercy and truth, of mercy in God and truth in man. And these do call the one for the other. The mercy of God being ready to forgive iniquity, calleth for truth in man to confess iniquity; the truth of man being ready to confess his iniquity calleth for the mercy of God to pardon his iniquity. Now these two readily concurring, God and man are rejoined, and by their reunion iniquity is purged. But then there must follow a departing from iniquity. . . For iniquity, forgiven and not forsaken, doubleth the iniquity both in man's guilt and God's wrath. Wherefore, let the mercy of the Lord breed a fear in thee, and let the truth of thy repentance appear, as well in shunning iniquity as in forsaking of it.—*Jermin.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 7.

Pleasing God.

I. There are times when men's ways do not please the Lord. *The ways of the ungodly do not at any time please the Lord.* Because they have no sympathy with His laws, and are at variance with His character. "*God is not in all their thoughts*" (Psalm x. 4), and it is impossible for God to be pleased with the ways of them who do not think Him worth thinking about. A man must forsake his own ways and come into God's ways before his ways can please the Lord. *The ways of good men do not at all times please the Lord.* They sometimes stray from the royal road—the highway of righteousness—and get into bye-paths, and thus bring down upon themselves the displeasure of their God. David, though in the main a "man after God's own heart," more than once walked in paths that were displeasing to the Lord, and several incidents in his life teach us plainly that some ways of a godly man may be very contrary to the Divine mind.

II. But God can be pleased by a man's ways. Those who strive to conform to our desires—who are in sympathy with our minds—naturally yield us pleasure. And a good man's main desire is to conform his ways to the will of God—he is in sympathy with the mind of God, and his life is the outcome of that sympathy. Therefore he can yield pleasure to the Eternal. If the Creator, in looking upon the inanimate works of His hands, pronounces them "good" (Gen. i. 31) when He sees them fulfilling the design of their creation, how much more good in His sight is it when a moral and responsible creature who has power to turn out of the path ordained for him seeks patiently to continue in well-doing notwithstanding all the temptations he has to encounter.

III. The consequence upon men's minds of thus giving pleasure to the Divine mind. The way of pleasing the Lord promotes "favour and a good understanding in the sight of God and man" (chap. iii. 4). He whose aim is to please God will desire and strive to live at peace with men. And in cases where his godliness provokes the enmity of the ungodly, God, by His overruling Providence, often directly interferes on his behalf. He did so in the case of Jacob and Laban, in that of Joseph and his brethren, etc.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

The doctrine of this verse stands in apparent contradiction to 2 Tim. iii. 12. The truth seems to be that neither of the passages is to be taken *universally.* The peace possessed by those who please God does not extend so far as to exempt them from having enemies, and though all godly men must be

persecuted, yet none are persecuted at all times. The passage from Timothy may, therefore, refer to the native enmity which true godliness is certain to excite, and the proverb to the Divine control over it.—*A. Fuller.*

There would be more sunlight in the believer's life if he could leave the dull negative fear of judgment far behind as a motive of action, and bound forward into the glad positive, a hopeful effort to please God. . . . . This is one of two principles that stand together in the word, and act together in the Divine administration. Its counterpart and complement is, "If any man would live godly in Christ Jesus, he must suffer persecution." . . . Both are best; neither could be wanted. If the principle that goodness exposes to persecution prevailed everywhere and always, the spirit would fail before Him and the souls that He has made. Again, if the principle that goodness conciliates the favour of the world prevailed everywhere and always, no discipline would be done, and the service of God would degenerate into mercenary self-interest. . . . A beautiful balance of opposites is employed to produce one grand result. . . . . A Christian in the world is like a human body in the sea—there is a tendency to sink and a tendency to swim. A very small force in either direction will turn the scale. Our Father in heaven holds the elements of nature and the passions of men at His own disposal. His children need not fear, for He keeps the balance in His own hands.—*Arnot.*

If it is manifest that God makes Himself known, bestowing blessings on a man, there lies in this a power of conviction which disarms his most bitter opponents, excepting only those who have in selfishness hardened themselves.—*Delitzsch.*

Whatsoever a man's ways are, it is part of every man's intention to please howsoever; it is the object that maketh the difference. All men strive to please, but some to please themselves, some to please other men, and some few to please the Lord . . . . The last is—1. *A duty whereunto we stand bound by many obligations.* He is our Master, our Captain, our Father, our King. He is no honest servant that will not strive to please his master. And he is no generous soldier who will not strive to please his general. And that son hath neither grace nor good nature in him that will not strive to please his father, and he is no loyal subject that will not strive to please his lawful sovereign. And yet there may be a time when all those obligations may cease, for if it be their pleasure that we should do something that lawfully we may not, we must disobey, though we displease. But we can have no colour of plea for refusing to do the pleasure of our heavenly Lord and Master, in anything whatsoever; inasmuch as we are sure nothing will please Him but what is just and right. With what a forehead, then, can any of us challenge from Him either wages as servants, or stipends as soldiers, or provision as sons, or protection as subjects, if we be not careful in every respect to frame ourselves so as to please Him? 2. *It is our wisdom, too: in respect of the great benefits we shall reap thereby.* There is one great benefit expressed in the text, and the scope of those words is to instruct us, that the fairest and likeliest way to procure peace with men is to order our ways so as to please the Lord. . . . . The favour of God and the favour of men are often joined together in the Scriptures as if the one were consequent of the other. See Luke ii. 52; Prov. iii. 3, 4; Rom. xiv. 18, etc. . . . . But it may be objected that sundry times when a man's ways are right, and therefore pleasing to God, his enemies are nothing less, if not perhaps much more, enraged against him than formerly. . . . . Sundry considerations may be of use to us in the difficulty, as, first, if God have not yet made our enemies to be at peace with us, yet it may be He will do it hereafter. Neither is it unlikely that we do not walk with an even foot, and by a straight line, but tread awry in something or other

which displeaseth God, and for which He suffereth their enmity to continue. . . . . Or if He do not presently make our enemies to be at peace with us, yet if He teach us to profit by their enmity, in exercising our faith and patience, in quickening us unto prayer, etc., is it not in every way, and incomparably better? Will any wise man tax Him with a breach of promise, who, having promised a pound of silver, giveth a talent of gold? Or who can truly say that that man is not as good as his word who is apparently much better than his word?—*Bp. Sanderson.*

It is our peace with God that maketh Him to make our enemies to be at peace with us, and it is our enmity against God's enemies that maketh God to be at peace with us. Now, the enemies of God are the sins of men, and if we be in a continual war with those, then do our ways please God. Then it is that He is ready to please us, when our ways please Him. Neither is He hard to please—a willingness, a desire to please, is accepted by Him. He looks not—He requireth not—that we should do exactly all that is contained in His commandments, but if we go about to please Him—if we put ourselves carefully in the way—then do our ways please Him. And then will He give us that glorious victory over our enemies which is above all others. For to subdue our enemies is but to make ourselves happy in their misery; but to make our enemies at peace with us is a victory for God's hand, and giveth man a double triumph, as well over the hatred as the power of our enemies.—*Jermin.*

The subject of verse 8 is substantially the same as that of chap xv. 6 and 17. See Homiletics on page 405, etc.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

"Better," for the tranquillity of conscience, for the present enjoyment of this life, and for the life to come. In chap. xv. 16, we are warned against gain without religion, in chap. xv. 17, against gain without *love to our neighbour:* here, against gain without *right.*—*Fausset.*

Abraham would not take to himself of the spoils of Sodom so much as the value of a shoe-latchet, that it might never be said in after times that the king of Sodom had made Abraham rich; so neither will any godly man that hath learned the art of contentation, suffer a penny of the gain of ungodliness to mingle with the rest of his estate, that the devil may not be able to upbraid him with it afterwards to his shame, as if he had contributed something towards the increasing thereof.—*Bishop Sanderson.*

A *little* that is a man's own is better than a *great deal* that is another body's. Now that which a man hath with *righteousness* is his own, for there can be no better title than that which righteousness maketh. But that which thou hast *without right* cannot be thine, howsoever thou mayest account it, or others may call it. Possession may be a great point in human laws, but it is nothing in God's law: the want of right overthroweth whatsoever else may be said. 'Tis true, thou mayest have quiet possession on earth, but there be adversaries that do implead the unrighteous at God's judgment bar, where they are sure last to be cast, and where themselves will give the verdict which the wise man here doth.—*Jermin.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 9.

MAN PROPOSES, GOD DISPOSES.

I. This is a fact of national and individual history. In both inspired and uninspired records we meet with abundant confirmations of this truth. There is no more striking illustration of it than in the life of Joseph. He leaves his father's house, as he supposes, for a few days, little dreaming that he is

traversing a path by which he will never return. He only purposes to find his brethren, and "see if it is well with them, and bring his father word again." But God is then directing his steps into a far-off land—into slavery, to a prison, and through both to a throne. So the shepherd boy of Bethlehem sets out with the unambitious intention of carrying supplies to his brethren, and of seeing how the battle is likely to go, and becomes himself the central figure in the camp, and the hero of his nation. And David's predecessor goes in search of his father's asses, and finds a crown and a kingdom at the end of his journey. Cromwell, despairing of enjoying liberty in England, planned to make a home in America, and, it is said, actually went on board a vessel which was about to sail. But God, using as an instrument the man to whose throne he was to succeed, directed his steps in another direction, and being forbidden to quit the country, he becomes not only England's deliverer, but a great and powerful ruler, whose influence was felt throughout Europe. Clive went out to India as a clerk, because he had no prospects of getting a living at home, and lays the foundation of our Indian empire. And there is hardly a man living who, if he reflects upon his past life, cannot remember passages in his own history which confirm the truth of the text. He makes certain plans, and purposes to accomplish certain designs, and the result of his doings is quite different from his intentions, or leads him to a place, or a position, or into relationships which were entirely out of his calculation when he "devised his way."

II. This is a law which must be in operation till the end of time. Unexpected events must be the outcome of man's plans and purpose, because he is finite and very short-sighted, and there is an Infinite and Omniscient Ruler of the universe, who comprehends in His plan of the universe all the plans of His creatures, and in His plan concerning every man all that man's devices and deeds. "God professes in His word," says Dr. Bushnell, "to have purposes pre-arranged for all events; to govern by a plan which is from eternity even, and which, in some proper sense, comprehends everything. And what is this but another way of conceiving that God has a definite place and plan adjusted for every human being? And without such a plan, He could not even govern the world intelligently, or make a proper universe of the created system; for it becomes a universe only in the grand unity of reason which includes it, otherwise it were only a jumble of fortuities without counsel, end, or law." This being so, a man can rejoice in the truth that "The Lord directs his steps"—that the events of his life are not the outcome of chance, but are all under the control of a supremely wise and benevolent King and Father. Not that God's foreknowledge is the cause of man's actions, but that seeing He must know what shall come to pass nothing takes Him by surprise, and therefore nothing finds Him unprepared to arrange all a man's affairs after the counsel of His own will. Nothing happens without His permission; no good thing comes to a man's life without His instigation and co-operation, and, if a man is willing to yield himself to His guidance, He will not only direct his steps, but direct them so as to further that man's true well-being—will make "all things work together for good" to him (Rom. viii. 28). The fact here declared will redound to a man's eternal gain or loss according to the attitude which he takes towards God. "There is then, I conclude, a definite and proper end, or issue, for every man's existence; an end which to the heart of God is the good intended for him, or for which he was intended; that which he is privileged to become; called to become, ought to become; that which God will assist him to become, save by his own fault. Every human soul has a complete and perfect plan cherished for it in the heart of God—a Divine biography marked out which it enters into life to live. This life, rightly unfolded, will be a complete and beautiful whole, an experience led on by God and unfolded by his secret nurture, as the trees and the flowers, by the secret

nurture of the world; a drama cast in the mould of a perfect art, with no part wanting; a Divine study for the man himself, and for others; a study that shall for ever unfold, in wondrous beauty, the love and faithfulness of God; great in its conception, great in the Divine skill by which it is shaped; above all, great in the momentous and glorious issues it prepares. What a thought is this for every human being to cherish! What dignity does it add to life! What support does it bring to the trials of life! What instigations does it add to send us onward in everything that constitutes our excellence! We live in the Divine thought. We fill a place in the great everlasting plan of God's intelligence. We never sink below His care—never drop out of His counsel. But there is, I must add, a single and very important qualification. Things all serve their uses, and never break out of their place. They have no power to do it. Not so with us. We are able, as free beings, to refuse the place and the duties God appoints; which, if we do, then we sink into something lower and less worthy of us. That highest and best condition for which God designed us is no more possible. . . . . And yet, as that was the best thing possible for us in the reach of God's original counsel, so there is a place designed for us now, which is the next best possible. God calls us now to the best thing left, and will do so till all good possibility is narrowed down and spent. And then, when He cannot use us any more for our own good, He will use us for the good of others—an example of the misery and horrible desperation to which any soul must come when all the good ends, and all the holy callings of God's friendly and fatherly purpose are exhausted. Or it may be now, that, remitting all other plans and purposes in our behalf, He will henceforth use us—wholly against our will—to be the demonstration of His justice and avenging power before the eyes of mankind, saying over us, as He did over Pharaoh in the day of His judgments, "Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might show My power in thee, and that My name might be declared throughout all the earth." Doubtless He had other and more general plans to serve in this bad man, if only he could have accepted such; but, knowing his certain rejection of these, God turned His mighty counsel in him wholly on the use to be made of him as a reprobate. How many Pharaohs in common life refuse every other use God will make of them, choosing only to figure, in their small way, as reprobates, and descending, in that manner, to a fate that painfully mimics his"—(*Bushnell*).

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

The thought of the first verse, coming to be repeated, this versatile sentence-maker calls it back with different scenery. "*The answer*" or "*decree of a tongue*" (ver. 1) is one pregnant act, *the "step" of a foot* is another. Both may make a man or ruin him, for this world, or that which is to come. The critical thing, in either case, is controlled by the Almighty. . . . . "*Heart*," more intellectual than the English *heart*. "*Devises*" too intellectual for our emotional nature. It means *studies*, or *deeply meditates*. The sinner really reflects upon his future wisdoms. Alas! they are too future! And when the future come, he "*plants*," "*sets firm his step*" quite differently from what he had decreed.—*Miller*.

The doctrine of Providence is not like the doctrine of the Trinity—to be received by faith. Experience gives a demonstrable stamp of evidence—even in all the minutiæ of circumstances, which form the parts and pieces of the Divine plan.—*Bridges*.

It *must* be so. If there is a God at all it cannot be otherwise. It were the height of irrationality as well as impiety for a moment to question it—to imagine the contrary possible. How otherwise could God govern the world? Were not all human schemes under supreme and irresistible control,

what would become of the certainty of the Divine ?—*Wardlaw.*

When it is said that a man's heart deviseth his way but the Lord directeth his steps, we must not think that the purpose of the creature is condemned as an impertinence. It is an essential element of the plan. Neither human purposes, the material on which God exercises His sovereign control, nor the control which He exercises on that material could be wanted. If there were no room for the devices of men's hearts, providence would disappear, and grim hate, the leaden creed that crushes Eastern nations in the dust, would come in its stead. If, on the other hand, these devices are left to fight against each other for their objects without being subjected all to the will of a Living One, faith flees from the earth and the reign of Atheism begins. The desires of human hearts, and the efforts of human hands, do go into the processes of providence, and constitute the material upon which the Almighty works. When God made man in His own image, a new era was inaugurated and a new work begun. Hitherto, in the government of this world, the Creator had no other elements to deal with than matter and the instincts of brutes; but the moment that man took his place on creation, a new and higher element was introduced into its government. The sphere was enlarged and the principle elevated. There was more room for the display of wisdom and power. The will of intelligent moral beings being left free, and yet as completely controlled as matter and laws, makes the Divine government much more glorious than the mere management of a material universe. For God's glory man was created, and that purpose will stand; a glory to God man will be, willing or unwilling, fallen or restored, throughout the course of time, and at its close. The doctrine of Scripture regarding Providence neither degrades man, nor inflates him. It does not make him a mere thing on the one hand, nor a god on the other. It neither takes from him the attributes of humanity, nor ascribes to him the attributes of Deity. It permits him freely to propose, but leaves the ultimate disposal in a mightier hand.—*Arnot.*

The doctrine of the text—I. *Should correct immoderate care about the future events of our life.* What means this mighty bustle and stir—this restless perturbation of thought and care—as if all the issues of futurity rested wholly on thy conduct? Something depends upon thyself, and there is reason, therefore, for acting thy part with prudence and attention. But upon a hand unseen it depends, either to overturn thy projects, or to crown them with success, therefore thine attention should never run into immoderate care. II. *Should enforce moderation of mind in every state.* How little ground the real situation of the most prosperous man affords for the vain *elation* of mind, for he is dependent every moment on the pleasure of a superior. III. *Places the vanity and folly of sinful plans in a very strong light.* The sinner has against him, first, the general uncertainty which belongs to all the designs of men. And he hath also engaged against himself one certain and formidable enemy. IV. *That an interest in God's favour is far more important than all the wisdom and ability of man.* In a world so full of uncertainty, let us take pains to secure to ourselves one resting place, one habitation that cannot be moved.—*Blair.*

God having made man lord of the earth, He hath made him lord also of the ways of the earth. He is not tied to this way or that way, but as his heart deviseth, so he may go. And herein is the dignity of a man above a beast. For that way must a beast go which he is driven: but man, not driven by fate, or constellation, or any other necessity, as master of himself, chooseth his own courses wherein to walk. Notwithstanding, man is not without an overseer, a ruler, by whom his steps are directed. The wicked chooseth an evil way, but God directeth it to a good end. The good chooseth a good way, but it is by God brought to a good issue.—*Jermin*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 10—15

KINGS.

It is obvious that some of these proverbs as they stand in our authorised version, do not admit of universal application in relation to human monarchs. History and experience both contradict the assertion that a "Divine sentence" is always, or has been generally, in the lips of a human king, but if we understand the verse, as Miller does (see his comment) as an application of the truth set forth in the preceding verse and in verse 1, that God is behind and above all the decrees of earthly potentates, we can at once admit the fact and rejoice in it. Again, it cannot, alas! be said that as a rule "righteous lips are the delight of kings," or that "in the light of the king's countenance is life." Many kings have been themselves incarnations of iniquity, and have bestowed all their favour upon men like themselves, and persecuted often to the death those who have dared to tell them the truth. If this proverb admitted of universal application, Ahab would not have sought to slay Elijah, Jeremiah would not have been imprisoned by Zedekiah, and Herod would not have put to death John the Baptist. And the favour of most of the men who have sat upon the thrones of the world would have had no life in it for some of their subjects. There has been a faithful few in all ages of the world to whom the favour of their wicked rulers would have been very unlike "a cloud of the latter rain." But the truths taught here are :—

I. That a king ought to be God's prophet and vicegerent upon the earth. All painters have an ideal in their minds to which they desire to attain in their handiwork. They must place before them the highest model, if they would rise to anything like excellence. And Solomon, as a great theoretic moralist, is here setting before himself, and before all rulers, an ideal king. Kingship among men ought to be a type and symbol of Divine kingship. The loyal obedience which the majority of men have always been ready to yield to those whom they have regarded as their appointed rulers, has its root deep down in the constitution of human nature—it is a prophecy of a need which is only fully met in the rule of the true and perfect King of men—that King whose right it is to reign, and who can do no wrong to any of His subjects. "That was not an inconsiderable moment," says Carlyle, "when wild armed men first raised their strongest aloft on the buckler-throne, and, with clanging armour and hearts said solemnly, Be thou our acknowledged strongest (well named King, *Kön-ning*, Canning, or Man that was Able), what a symbol shone now for them—significant with the destinies of the world! A symbol of true guidance in return for loving obedience; properly, if he knew it, the prime want of man. A symbol which might be called sacred, for is there not, in reverence for what is better than we, an indestructible sacredness?" And when a king realises what idea he embodies, and strives to fulfil worthily the duties of his high calling, and in proportion as he does so, he is a representative of God to men. Then he will have a *Divine sentence* in his mouth because he will be a truth-speaker. His lips will be a reflection of his character. Being a man of truth, he cannot do other than speak the truth. He will be able in a limited sense to use the words of His Divine Ideal, and say, "*To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness of the truth*" (John xviii. 37). And as all truth and justice is from God (ver. 11), he who is a truth-speaker—he from whose lips come only just decisions, utters a "Divine sentence"—is a representative of Him whose "is a just weight and balance," whose "work are all the weights of the bag." To such an one it will be "an abomination to commit wickedness"—any kind of iniquity will be detested by him. He will not—he cannot—be a sinless man; the desires and intentions of every good man are always beyond

his deeds—he can always say, "To will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good I find not" (Rom. vii. 18), but he will not commit sin because he loves it. Such a king will be a real benefactor to his nation by exalting the true and the good, and so blessing all. It is a blessing for all men—whether they be good or bad—when the best men in the nation are in the fore-front—when the righteous fill the highest positions in the State. And a true king will gladly avail himself of the service of men of "righteous lips," and so will be a source of blessing to all his people. The "latter rain" which refreshes the thirsty earth after a long season of drought lets its life-giving drops fall upon the parched leaves of the humblest weed as well as upon the stately oak. And the influence of a wise and godly monarch is beneficial to all classes of his subjects from the highest to the lowest. All such are types—dim foreshadowings—of that "*king who reigns in righteousness and who is as an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land*" (Isa. xxxii. 1, 2).

II. That the stability of a throne is in proportion to the moral excellence of him who sits upon it. The power that men have over other men is lasting in proportion as it has its origin in character. The father's kingship over his children is immutable in proportion to his goodness. If his rule has its foundation only in his position, his children will not be slow to shake it off as they reach manhood; but if it is founded upon his godliness, they will be compelled to acknowledge it to the day of his death and even beyond it. His throne in his family is "established by righteousness," the consciences of his children consent to his right to reign among them and over them. The throne of the universe is established by righteousness. "*Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: the sceptre of Thy kingdom is a right sceptre. Thou lovest righteousness and hatest wickedness; therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows*" (Psalm xlv. 6, 7). This King of Righteousness is now enthroned in the affections and consciences of myriads of His subjects, and He who rules men's *hearts* has set his throne upon a firm foundation. And there will come a day when every creature will be compelled by his conscience to yield to "*Him that sitteth upon the throne*," the right to reign over them for ever (Rev. v. 13), because they will feel that all his ways are and ever have been "*just and true*" (Rev. xv. 3). If we read the history of the past or look around us now, we find this truth abundantly illustrated. Thrones which have been backed up by mighty armies, and whose occupants have for a few short years been the arbiters of the destinies of millions, have been overturned in a few weeks. And we have but to look at the steps by which such men came to power to find a reason for their fall. None can doubt from the experience of past ages, and from the very constitution of men, that the thrones of the present are founded upon a rock or upon sand, in proportion as those who sit upon them take as their model the king who "*judges His people with righteousness and the poor with judgment*" (Psalm lxxii. 2).

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Ver. 10. "A Divine sentence" may be understood either as to its *character*, or as to its *authoritative effect*. If taken in the former sense, it means a sentence according to perfect *equity;* if in the latter, the idea is, that as every judgment or "sentence" of God is *decisive and effectual*, so that the execution of it cannot be evaded or resisted, such, in measure, is the case with the sentence of kings among men, and in the general idea of a Divine sentence may fairly be included both character and efficiency—both equity and power. When understood of equity, the latter part of the verse, according to the principle of Hebrew parallelisms, will be a kind of counterpart or echo

to the former, and when understood of *power*, the verse might be rendered—"A Divine sentence is in the lips of the king; *let not* his mouth transgress in judgment." In proportion to the authoritative and efficacious nature of his sentence, ought he to see to it that the sentence be right. He should weigh well his decision ere he pronounces it, seeing it involves consequences so certain, immediate, and important. And the principle of this lesson applies to all in situations of authority and influence, whether more private or more public.—*Wardlaw.*

The glaring fact of what Solomon avows in ver. 9 can be seen in the instance of "*a king.*" The word of a king can ruin France, and change the whole system of the world. How, possibly, could God govern, unless He could a king? Eternal ages will not get over the edict of a prince, and the banded universe will feel its differences. Must not God control that word? Our passage answers that He does. He may be George III. of the low forehead; his speech is shaped omnisciently. He may be as treacherous as Charles; he does not betray by a hair the counsel of the Almighty. This is a grand thought. A poor princeling may be governed by a girl, and yet, though his utterance might move the globe, we need have no fear. There is "*a divination,*" *i.e.*, "an oracle," behind "*his lips.*" He says what God pleases. And though "*his mouth*" may have the very treachery of the cup, it has no treachery—even to a grain—to the plans of the All Wise.—*Miller.*

It cannot be denied but that there is a nearer reference between God and His immediate deputies, the kings of the earth, than any other persons. He that maketh them kings maketh Himself to be their counsel. But then they must make Him the president of their council.—*Jermin.*

For Homiletics on verse 11, considered by itself, see on chap. xi. 1, page 190.

Ver. 11. The proposition expresses an ownership in Jehovah as the first cause, for, like agriculture (Eccles. vii. 15), God instituted weights and measures, as an indispensable ordinance and instrument in just business intercourse.—*Zöckler.*

Weight and measure, as the invisible and spiritual means by which material possessions are estimated and determined for men, according to their value, are holy unto the Lord, a copy of His law in the outer world, taken up by Himself into His sanctuary; and, therefore, as His work, to be regarded as holy also by men.—*Von Gerlach.*

The heathen poet Hesiod says, "God gave justice to men."—*Fausset.*

He is not only just, but justice *belongs* to Him. He is not only partly just, but "*His work*" (and we see at a glance that God's *work* is the total universe) is in its very self considered, "all the stones of the bag." *Stones*, better weights than iron, because not altering by rust. *Bag*, in which the stone weights were carried, in the peripatetic barter of the old tradespeople. No difficulty should be had in understanding all of which the sentence is capable. God's *work* is justice, and justice is His *work*. The very ideas of equity sprang out of the Eternal Mind. If all this were not so how could God govern the creation, for "*It is an abomination to kings to commit wickedness*, etc. (ver. 12).—*Miller.*

The Jews are said to have kept their standard weights and measures *in the sanctuary*. The fact might arise from the particularity of the law, and might operate as a remembrancer of the righteousness of Him by whom the law was given, and the weights and measures fixed. . . . All adulteration of them was therefore a *sacrilege*. It was not cheating men merely, but defrauding Jehovah, changing what He had fixed. . . . . And from the connection in which the words are here introduced they lead us to observe that while kings are called up to "do justly"

themselves in their whole administration and in every department of it, it is, at the same time, a most important part of their official duty to promote among their subjects, to the utmost of their power, the principles and the practice of equity between man and man.—*Wardlaw.*

Ver. 12. This is true of earthly monarchies. "*A throne,*" without some equity in it, could not last an instant. If it were unmitigatedly bad, it would be swept out of existence. A king must be just to his people, or else to his soldiers, who support him against his people. His strength is justice, somewhere. The strength of a bad throne is precisely that part of it that is just. But if this be true of a world's throne, where it has been seen that God governs as well as the king, how not of a Divine throne, that rests solely on its Maker? It is impossible to conceive of a universe without justice, or of anything so complicated being eternally possible without every sort of harmony, and especially that sort which is highest and best. Hence many of the expressions in the eighth chapter (verses 22, 30, etc.), the personage being personified Wisdom, which is holiness or moral light, and which includes all the attributes of justice.—*Miller.*

The greater men be, the more grievous their faults are when they fall into sin. For—1. The more bountiful God hath been to them, the more grateful they ought to be to Him, and as He hath increased their wages, so they ought to mend their work; large pay doth duly challenge large pains, and therefore, contrariwise, their great offences must needs deserve the greater punishment. 2. Their sins are very pernicious and pestilent, they bring evil into request, and men by their example will practise it for credit's sake. When Jeroboam is mentioned, he is usually described by this, that *he made Israel to sin.* 3. They draw down the plagues and judgments upon the places and people that are under them, as David did. And the strokes which the fearful sins of Manasseh, Jehoiakim, and others brought upon the city and inhabitants of Jerusalem were very lamentable in those days, and very memorable still in these times. . . . . The goodness and justice of men in authority doth better uphold their estate than greatness and riches. "The throne is established by righteousness," for—(1) There, and nowhere else, is stability and assurance, where God is a refuge and defence; they stand all firm whom He protecteth, and down they must whom He neglecteth. And whom doth He prefer but the righteous? And what righteous man was ever forsaken? (2) Equal and upright administration of justice doth knit the hearts of a people to their governors, and the love of the subjects is a strong foot and a mighty munition for the safety of the ruler. (3) When the magistrate doth right to all and wrong to none, every good and indifferent man will reverence him, and stand in the greater awe of his laws, so that none but such as are desperately rebellious will dare to attempt anything against him.—*Dod.*

Ver. 13. There never was a kingdom so corrupt that its courts of justice were not used, in the main, against wickedness. There never was a Nero, or a Borgia, who, on the very account of his own crimes, did not find crime sore, and a trouble to him, in those about him. It is one of the strangest miracles of Omnipotence that a universe can take in transgression and yet last. And, while God has made even the wicked "for his decree" (ver. 4), yet "a pleasure to kings are lips of righteousness, and he who speaks right is loved."—*Miller.*

We have here in this passage Solomon's king, and in these words the delight of his king. For, whereas, many are, and well may be, the delights of kings, this one it is, the delight of righteousness, which sweetens all the rest unto them. This is a royal delight indeed, which makes the king of righteousness to delight in them. And surely needful it is that a king's

lips should delight in righteousness. For *fear* may compel others, but *delight* must carry him unto it. Needful is it that righteous lips should be a king's delight, because it is in kings' courts that there is too much lying. We read of one who said that he would be a lying prophet in the mouths of all Ahab's prophets (1 Kings xxii. 22), to which the answer of God is, Thou shalt go and prevail. Upon which the note of Cajetan is, "God manifested the efficacy of this means—namely, of lying in the Court." It is needful, therefore, that the king should delight in lips of righteousness, for he that doth himself delight in them will also love others that speak right; yea, will therefore love them that they also may delight in it. For then is righteousness best spoken when delight openeth the door of the lips.—*Jermin.*

Ver. 14. The report of one may be a mistake, but the relation of many carrieth more force with it. The wrath, therefore, of a king is as *messengers* of death, enough to pull down the stoutest heart; and if his moved spirit send down this message to any, it is sufficient to tell them and to assure them, that they had need to look unto themselves. But well it is that the wrath of a king is as the *messengers* of death, and not the *executioners* of it. For so it ought to be, that himself may have time either to alter or recall his message, and they may have time to whom it is sent to answer for themselves. St. Peter was hasty in wrath when he cut off the ear of Malchus, whereupon Tertullian saith, "The patience of God was wounded in Malchus." And surely the mercy of God is often wounded in the hasty wrath of a king. Plutarch saith well, that as bodies through a cloud, so through anger things seem greater than they are. To put therefore wrath to a journey, is a good way to moderate, if by nothing else, by wearying the hasty fierceness of it. And let a wise man have respite to meet with it, he will with gentle blasts of cool air easily mitigate the violent force of it. Let him be told of a king's wrath against him, he need not be told that he take care to prevent it. But, though great be the wrath of heaven against careless sinners, and though many be the messengers that He sendeth to them, yet they all cry, "Who hath believed our report?" Did they hear one word of an earthly king's anger against them, it would more move them than the whole word of God doth, wherein the message of His anger is so often repeated. The answer which they send back to the message of God's wrath, is obstinate rebellion in their sinful courses.—*Jermin.*

ILLUSTRATION.

Executions in the East are often very prompt and arbitrary. In many cases the suspicion is no sooner entertained, or the cause of offence given, than the fatal order is issued. The messenger of death hurries to the unsuspecting victim, shows his warrant, and executes his orders that instant, in silence and solitude. Instances of this kind are continually occurring in the Turkish and Persian histories. Such executions were not uncommon among the Jews under the government of their kings. Solomon sent Benaiah as his capidgi, or executioner, to put to death Adonijah, a prince of his own family, and Joab, the commander-in-chief of the forces during the reign of his father. A capidgi likewise beheaded John the Baptist, and carried his head to the court of Herod. To such silent and hasty executioners the royal Preacher seems to refer in the proverb. From the dreadful promptitude with which Benaiah executed the commands of Solomon on Adonijah and Joab, it may be concluded that the executioner of the court was as little ceremonious, and the ancient Jews nearly as passive, as the Turks or Persians. The prophet Elisha is the only person on the inspired record who ventured to resist the bloody mandate of the sovereign (2 Kings vi. 32). But if such mandates had not been too common among the Jews, and in general submitted to without resistance, Jehoram had scarcely ventured to despatch a single messenger to take away the life of so eminent a person as Elisha.—*Paxton's Illustrations.*

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Ver. 15. As the wise man before teacheth subjects to fear the king's wrath, and to seek his favour, so here he teacheth kings to join the light of mercy, the softness of clemency, unto the hardness and severity of wrath. Or else we may thus meditate upon the words—the true favour of a king is not only to shine with a cheerful countenance upon them whom he affecteth, but sometimes to look through a thick cloud upon them. For as the light of the sun giveth life to the fruits of the earth, but the cloud of latter rain giveth bigness and fulness unto them, so the light of the king's countenance giveth life to the fruits of earthly honour, but it is the dewy cloud of his wise displeasure, when things are amiss, that giveth fulness of worth unto them whom his favour honoureth. The latter rain many times does them more good and sheweth in the king greater favour to them than his former sunshining countenance. But to apply the verse unto a fuller profit. The light of the countenance of the King of heaven is Jesus Christ our Lord, who is the brightness of His glory; and in this light there is life indeed. For as He is light and in Him is no darkness, so He is life, and in Him is no death. It was in the *latter time* that He was *clouded* with the veil of our flesh, and that He became a heavenly *cloud of the latter rain* unto us, pouring out the glorious dew of His precious blood for us, that so, we being watered therewith might even swell in grace, and grow to a fulness of glory in heaven. . . . . In Judea usually about harvest time there are evening clouds which, yielding a sweet rain, do much increase the largeness of the fruits; and in the evening of the world, when the harvest was great, this heavenly cloud was sent unto us, whereby the fruit of God's Church, confined before to Judea, was enlarged throughout the world.—*Jermin.*

For Homiletics on ver. 16, see chap. viii. 10, 11, page 107.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Not wisdom, but "to get wisdom." Wisdom itself is glorious. Wisdom in God is above all praise. It will be the gem of Paradise. It will be the grand opulence of the family of the skies. But what the great Preacher would confine us to in the language of the text is, our *getting* wisdom as the evangelical condition; our getting it, moreover, in time, like "the latter rain," so as to be in season for the crop; for, as a former sentence urges (chap. iv. 7), "As the chiefest thing in wisdom, get wisdom." Because, "what shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, if God is his "King," and "the wrath of the King" makes all His providences but as messengers of gloom (ver. 14).—*Miller.*

Let us call to mind in word-outline the scene on a spring morning in the city of David, when David's son was "king in Jerusalem." Before the portico of the fragrant cedar-house of Solomon, the royal guards, Cherithites and Pelethites, executioners and messengers of the king's behests, waited their master's coming. Impatient steeds from Arabia, or the far-off banks of the Nile, pawed the highway, and shook with pride their plumes and costly accoutrements. Soldiers, with silken standards blazoned with the sacred Name, and throwing back the sunlight from their targets and shields of beaten gold, kept their ranks firm and close, as if the foe were at hand, and the silver trumpets waited but to sound the battle charge. Veterans, grown grey in David's service, and wearing the laurels of many a hard-fought field, were driven all along the line in their chariots of State, and the grim faces of these old warriors gleamed with satisfaction as they looked about them on the evidences of their nation's

military strength. . . . . But now the trumpets sound, and the echoing shout of welcome rises on the morning air. Solomon, arrayed in all his glory, appears, and the cry, "God save the king!" is heard on every side. Children chanting their sweet hosannahs to David's son and David's heir strew the path with the lilies of the field, or the roses of Sharon, and the boughs of palms. Others throw their garments upon the dusty highway as the long procession moves to the soft music of Eastern minstrelsy along the narrow streets, and out upon the broader pathway leading to the royal gardens, or the cool retreats of Olivet, each beaming face by the wayside, or peering from latticed balcony, each welcome shout and song from the daughters of Jerusalem, or the trained singers of the temple choirs, attest the affection of a grateful people, and make of the monarch's morning progress a triumphal ovation. Such was Solomon in all his glory; such the popular acclaim, and we might go on to tell until the tale were tiresome to tell how "Solomon surpassed all the kings of the earth," in riches, splendour, fame. But was this the principal thing? Had Solomon in getting all this glory, and in winning all this praise, gained that with which his soul was satisfied, and the cravings of his nobler self appeased. Years before. . . . "Give me wisdom and knowledge," was his prayer. . . Even in the wishes of one so lately invested with royal power, wisdom in its relation to his Maker, knowledge so far as it concerned his fellow-men, seemed the principal thing. And that prayer was heard in heaven. . . He to whom God gave such gifts may well direct us to the possession of this principal thing. We need not ask for an earthly teacher with higher qualifications.—*Bishop Perry.*

Gold is the crown of metals, wisdom is the crown of knowledge. Silver beareth the image of an earthly king, understanding beareth the image of the King of heaven. Gold is the treasure of the purse, wisdom the treasure of the soul. Silver is the price of outward commodities, understanding is the price of inward virtues; by that sought, by that bought. Wherefore by how much knowledge is better than metal, virtue than worldly commodities, the image of God than the image of man; by so much wisdom and knowledge are better than silver and gold. But they are not wisdom and understanding that are here compared with them, there being no comparison between them. But the very *getting* of wisdom and understanding, the very pains taken in procuring of them, the very honour of being a possessor of them, is better than all the gold and silver in the world.—*Jermin.*

The question only is written in the book; the learner is expected to work out the answer. We, of this mercantile community, are expert in the arithmetic of time. Here is an example to test our skill in casting up the accounts of eternity. Deeper interests are at stake; greater care should be taken to avoid an error, more labour willingly expended in making the balance true. . . . . The question is strictly one of degree. It is not, whether wisdom or gold is the more precious portion for a soul. That question was settled long ago by common consent. All who in any sense make a profession of faith in God, confess that wisdom is better than gold; and this teacher plies them with another problem, *How much better?* Two classes of persons have experience in this matter—those who have chosen the meaner portion, and those who have chosen the nobler; but only the latter class are capable of calculating the difference suggested by the text. Those who give their heart to money understand only the value of their own portion; those who possess treasures in heaven have tasted both kinds, and can appreciate the difference between them. . . . . As the man born blind cannot tell how much better light is than his native darkness—as the slave born under the yoke of his master cannot tell how much better liberty is than his life-long bondage—so he who has despised treasures at God's right

hand cannot conceive how much more precious they are to a man in his extremity than the riches that perish in the use. . . . . But even these cannot compute the difference. Eye hath not seen it, ear hath not heard it. Wisdom from above, like the love of God, passeth knowledge. . . . . How much better is wisdom than gold? Better by all the worth of a soul—by all the blessedness of heaven—by all the length of eternity. But all these expressions are only tiny lines that children fling into the ocean to measure its depth withal. . . . . In a time of war between two great maritime nations, a ship belonging to one of them is captured upon the high seas by a ship belonging to the other. The captain, with a few attendants, goes on board his prize, and directs the native crew to steer for the nearest point of his country's shore. The prize is very rich. The victors occupy themselves wholly in collecting and counting the treasure, and arranging their several shares, abandoning the care of the ship to her original owners. These, content with being permitted to handle the helm, allow their rivals to handle the treasure unmolested. After a long night, with a steady breeze, the captured mariners quietly, at dawn, run the ship into a harbour on their own shores. The conquerers are in turn made captives. They lose all the gold which they grasped too eagerly, and their liberty besides. In that case it was much better to have hold of the helm which directed the ship, than of the money which the ship contained. Those who seized the money, and neglected the helm, lost even the money which was in their hands. Those who neglected the money and held the helm, obtained the money which they neglected and liberty too. They arrived at home, and all their wealth with them. Thus they who make money their aim suffer a double loss, and they who seek the wisdom from above secure a double gain. The gold with which men are occupied will profit little, if the voyage of life be not pointed home. If themselves are lost, their possessions are worthless.—*Arnot.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 17.

SOUL-PRESERVATION.

I. The main object of an upright man's care—his soul. Every human creature is possessed of an instinct to preserve his bodily life and well-being. An upright man has also a spiritual instinct which leads him to guard carefully his spiritual life—his soul. He is desirous of keeping a conscience purged from dead works—free from bruise or moral taint. 1. *He seeks to preserve his soul because of the value he places upon its powers.* We are wont to value material things according to the power they possess to fulfil certain ends. A skilful workman values a piece of mechanism in proportion to the complicated and various movements which it can execute. And in proportion to the value set upon it will be the care taken to preserve it. Human life is valued according to its abilities to do things which cannot be done by many. The life of a great statesman, of a skilful physician, is of more value to the race than the lives of a hundred ordinary men, because their power to minister to the welfare and health of their fellow-creatures so far surpasses the power of ordinary men. And the upright man values his soul because of its mighty and almost infinite capabilities and powers. In its present undeveloped condition it can suffer much and can enjoy much, it can become a partaker of the "Divine nature" (2 Pet. i. 4.), and he knows that its powers will be mightily increased and multiplied after the death of the body. 2. *He seeks to preserve it because of the value God sets upon it.* If we come into possession of a precious gem and desire to know its value, we take it to

one whom we are certain is qualified to judge in such matters, and our estimate of it is increased or lessened in proportion to his opinion. He who wants to know the value of his soul must go to the only Being in the universe who is certain not to err in the price he sets upon it. Jesus Christ Himself has given to men His estimate of the worth of the human soul, both in His word and in His deeds. He who is fully acquainted with all its powers and possibilities for good and evil—of suffering and of joy—has said, "*What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul, or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?*" (Matt. xvi. 26). And He has gone beyond words. To save men's souls He, "*being in the form of God, took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men, and being found in fashion as a man, humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross*" (Phil. ii. 6). The wise man values his soul according to the estimate of Gethsemane and Calvary, and therefore he counts it the chief business of his life to guard it.

II. There can be no preservation of the soul except by departure from evil. The human nature of even the best men in this world is duplex. The ruling power in a godly man is good, but there are also evil tendencies within him still. He subscribes to the apostolic confession, "evil is present with me" (Rom. viii. 21). But there must be a constant departure from evil by a constant effort to do good. The strengthening of holy affections will most effectually check the power of sinful desires. The dominion of sin will be weakened by the formation of holy habits. In other words, keeping the highway of the upright is in itself a departure from evil—"following after righteousness is fleeing from sin" (1 Tim. ix. 11).

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

"*The highway,*" a way *cast up.* Such ways were convenient in the East;—first, for being found; second, for being travelled. "*Departing from evil*" is a way that opens itself as we press on. One evil cured, like the big coal lump in the digging, clears the way to another. So much (1) for its being found; then (2) as to its being travelled. Conceive of how a man could get to heaven except on such a "*highway.*" We cannot move nearer except on some sort of *way.* There is no sort of "*way*" except the discipline of wisdom. There is no discipline of wisdom except "*the departing from evil.*" The only thing a soul can do for itself under the grace of the Spirit is to exercise itself unto godliness (Num. iv. 7). And therefore the last clause is important, which intimates the fact that we cannot "*guard our souls*" directly,—that we *watch our souls* by *watching our way*—and that the plan to fit a lost spirit for Paradise is, under the grace of the Redeemer, to observe its steps—to see that one by one they are taken so as to depart from evil.—*Miller.*

The highway of the upright is to depart from evil. That is his road, his desire and endeavour, his general purpose, though sometimes (by mistake, or by the violence of temptation), he step out of the way, and turn aside to sin, yet there is no "way of wickedness in him" (Psa. cxxxix. 24). *He that keepeth his way preserveth his soul.* As if a man be out of God's precincts he is out of His protection. "He shall keep thee in all thy ways" (Psa. xci. 11), not in all thine outstrays. He that leaves the highway, and takes to byeways, travelling at unseasonable hours, etc., if he fall into foul hands, may go look his remedy, the law allows him none.—*Trapp.*

I should say that this last clause is a notabile; and the lesson that I should read and give forth from it is: "*the reflex influence of the outward walk upon the inner man.*—*Chalmers.*

Our English word highway doth well express the force of the original. And as we call it the highway, either because it is the king's way, who is the highest, or else because it is made higher than the rest, for the more clearness of it, *so the way of the upright is a highway*, because it is the way of the King of Heaven; and because it is higher, and so cleaner from the dust of the world. . . . . There is hardly any so perpetual follower of wickedness as that he doth not sometimes *depart from evil.* And this it is which many other times doth embolden him in the embracing of it. For if a wicked man once do well he conceiveth it so great a matter as that he imagineth that God ought to pardon his doing ill many times for it. But *to depart from evil is the way of* the upright. It is their common and ordinary course, wherein they go as frequently as passengers do go along the highway of the earth. All may see what they do, they care not who looks on, for their way being to depart from evil they walk as in the highway, where everyone may view them. And there they walk the rather that others also may follow them, and departing from evil may be joined to them in the highway to heaven.—*Jermin.*

Every man has a highway of his own. It is formed, as our forefathers formed their roads, simply by walking often on it and without a pre-determined plan. Foresight and wisdom might improve the moral path, as much as they have in our day improved the material. The highway of the covetous is to depart from poverty and make for riches with all his might. In his eagerness to take the shortest cut he often falls over a precipice, or loses his way in a wood. The highway of the vain is to depart from seriousness, and follow mirth on the trail of fools. The highway of the ambitious is a toilsome scramble up a mountain's side towards its summit, which seems in the distance to be a paradise basking in sunlight above the clouds; but when attained is found to be colder and barer than the plain below. The upright has a highway too, and it is to "depart from evil." The upright is not an unfallen angel, but a restored man. He has been in the miry pit, and the marks of the fall are upon him still. . . . . The power of evil within him is not entirely subdued, the stain of evil is not entirely wiped away. He hates sin now in his heart, but he feels the yoke of it in his flesh still. His back is turned to the bondage that he loathes, his face to the liberty which he loves. . . . The preserving of your soul depends upon the keeping of your way. . . . It is in the *way*, the *conduct*, the *life*, that the breach occurs whereby a soul is lost that seemed to bid fair for a better land. It is probable that with nine people out of ten in this favoured land the enemy finds it easier to inject actual impurity into the life than speculative error into the creed. A shaken faith leads a life astray; but also a life going astray makes shipwreck of faith. I do not teach that any righteousness done by the fallen can either please God or justify a man; but I do teach on the authority of the Bible that a slipping from the way of righteousness and purity in actual life is the mainstay of Satan's kingdom—the chief destroyer of souls. . . . . The miners in the gold-fields of Australia, when they have gathered a large quantity of the dust, make for the city with the treasure. The mine is far in the interior. The country is wild: the bush is infested with robbers. The miners keep the road and the daylight. They march in company, and close to the guard sent to protect them. They do not stray from the path among the woods, for they bear with them a treasure which they value, and they are determined to run no risks. Do likewise, brother, for your treasure is of greater value — your enemies of greater power. Keep the way, lest you lose your soul.—*Arnot.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSES 18, 19.

THE END OF PRIDE.

I. Pride has a present place and power in the world. All human history bears witness to the existence of pride in the human heart, and to the mighty influence it has always exerted upon the destinies of men. And it is in the full exercise of its power to-day; in various forms, and under various modifications, it still holds its place in the nation, in the social circle, and in the individual heart. Would that we could speak of it as an existence of the past, and had only to mourn over the mischief that it has wrought in bygone ages. But we cannot speak of it as a mighty tyrant who once held sway over men to their destruction, but whose dominion has long ceased to exist. To-day, as in the days of old, we must use the present tense and say, "Pride goeth." Pride is not like some monster who lived in pre-historic times, of whose life and deeds we know nothing but what we can infer from the skeleton dug up by the geologist, and which we now gaze upon as a curiosity, but which is a *thing* only, and not a living power in the world. Pride is living and active. Like the mighty being to whom it owes its origin, it is ever "going to and fro in the world, and walking up and down in it." Without doubt, while it rules some men, it only exists under protest in others, but the most godly man upon earth is not altogether free from its blighting influence. It lived in ages past in the souls of prophets and apostles, and to-day it has a place and power in the Church, as well as in the world.

II. Pride is always a forerunner of evil to its possessor. Wherever and whenever found, the mischief that it brings in its train is always proportionate to the rule which it has been allowed to exercise. It is like the officer who comes to the condemned criminal to announce the hour of execution—after him comes destruction; or like the advanced guard of a destroying army, the pledge and promise of the ruin that is on its way. Where pride enters there destruction of some kind—humiliation and sorrow in some form or other—is sure to follow sooner or later. Pride was the forerunner of the deepest humiliation—of the most entire destruction—of Belshazzar when he drank wine out of the vessels which his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken out of the temple at Jerusalem (Dan. v.), and a "haughty spirit" was the forerunner of a terrible fall to Peter when it led him to utter the boast "Though all shall be offended, yet will not I" (Mark xiv. 29). It therefore follows—

III. That fellowship with poverty and humility is better than fellowship with wealth and pride. 1. *When a man is in the society of the proud he is in danger of becoming proud himself.* We are all moulded unconsciously by those by whom we are surrounded; our own moral health depends very much upon the moral atmosphere we breathe, and therefore fellowship with the proud is injurious to a man's spiritual well-being. But fellowship with those who are "poor in spirit" (Matt. v. 3) may make us like-minded. Intercourse with the lowly in heart is likely to have a blessed influence upon our own hearts, and to help us also not to estimate ourselves too highly. This holds good whether the proud man be rich or poor, and whether the lowly man be high or low in station, for pride and wealth have no necessary connection with each other any more than poverty and humility have. But when pride and riches are found united in one person, fellowship with them is more to be avoided, inasmuch as we may not only be influenced to become as proud as they are, but may be tempted to over-value their external possessions, and, perhaps, to envy the possessor. But in the society of the poor we are free from both dangers, and intercourse with those who are poor in this world's goods as well as poor in spirit, will be a good lesson in the science of true happiness. 2. *But such fellowship is not only better*

for a man's spirit, it may also be better for his material warfare. Seeing that every proud man must experience the destruction of that upon which his pride has fed, and that every haughty spirit will have a fall, association with such may involve a participation in their misfortune. To divide spoil with the proud may make us partakers of the penalty which follows the proud. (See also on chap. xi. 2.)

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Verse 18. *Shame and contempt the end of pride.* 1. By natural tendency. 2. Because of God's detestation and resolution to punish it.—*Waterland.*

The danger of pride is plain from every history of the great transactions that have come to pass in heaven and earth. The prophets describe the destructive consequences of this sin with all the strength of their Divine eloquence, and all the sublimity of the prophetic style (Isa. xiv.; Ezek. xxix. 31). The history of the evangelists shows us what amazing humiliation was necessary to expiate the guilt contracted by the pride of man. And the tendency of the preaching and writings of the apostles was to cast down every high imagination of men, that no flesh might glory but in the Lord (1 Cor. i. 29). Might not this loathsome disease become a cure for itself? Can anything afford us greater cause of humiliation, than to find ourselves guilty of a sin so exceedingly unreasonable and presumptuous as pride? Shall a worm swell itself into an equality with the huge leviathan? What is man that he should be great in his own eyes? or, what is the son of man, that he should magnify himself as if he were some being greater than an angel? Was the Son of God humbled for us that we might not perish for ever, and shall pride be suffered to reign in our souls?—*Lawson.*

Before, in the presence of, in a confronting local sense. "*Before ruin is pride;*" that is, when its terror-fit has come, "*pride*" is to appear as the wretched cause of it.—*Miller.*

"God resisteth the proud;" and good reason, for the proud resisteth God. Other sins divert a man from God, only pride brings him against God, and brings God against him. There is nothing in this world worth our pride, but that moss will grow to a stone.—*T. Adams.*

The *haughty spirit* carries the head high. The man looks upward, instead of to his steps. What wonder, therefore, if, not seeing what is before him, he falls? He loves to climb. The enemy is always at hand to assist him (Matt. iv. 5, 6); and the greater the height, the more dreadful the fall.—*Bridges.*

It is the nature of pride that it seeketh to go before, and to take place, and so God hath placed it. He hath appointed it to *go before*, but it is *before destruction* and *before a fall.* It is the quality of a haughty spirit to love to be waited on, and God hath appointed attendants for it, but they are the attendants of ruin and confusion. No doubt as the pride of a haughty spirit disdaineth them that follow him, so it disdaineth to hear of either falling or destruction, notwithstanding they shall pursue and overtake him also. He that sees pride go before may quickly tell what will follow after: he that heareth the major proposition of an angry spirit may easily infer the conclusion of a certain destruction. Indeed it is but one falling that goeth before another; and, as St. Augustine speaketh, the falling which is within, and whereby the heart falleth from Him than whom there is nothing higher, this hidden falling, whilst it is not thought to be a falling, goeth before the outward and manifest falling of destruction.—*Jermin.*

Ver. 19. It is a pleasant thing to be enriched with other men's goods; it is

a gainful thing to have part of the prey; it is a glorious thing to divide the spoil. But what are all outward possessions to the inward virtues of the mind? What will goods ill-gotten profit the possessors thereof? Finally, what is the end of a proud person but to have a fall? Surely it is better to be injured than to do injury; it is better to be patient than to be insolent; it is better with the afflicted people of God to be bruised in heart and low of port than to enjoy the pleasures or treasures of sin or of this world for a season.—*Muffet.*

Such an one is happier in having the favour of God and man, immunity from perils, and tranquillity of conscience. Whereas the proud, who seek their own aggrandisement by oppressing their fellow-men, lose the favour of these as well as of God, are in danger of destruction at any moment, and have a guilty conscience whenever they dare to reflect.—*Fausset.*

Although pride were not followed by destruction, and humility were attended with the most afflicting circumstances, yet humility is to be infinitely preferred to pride. The word here rendered *humble* might, by an inconsiderable variation, be rendered *afflicted.* Humility and affliction are often in Scripture expressed by the same word, and described as parts of the same character. Low and afflicted circumstances are often useful, by promoting humiliation of spirit. The reverse sometimes takes place, but it is an evidence of a very intractable spirit if we cry not when God bindeth us, and continue unhumbled under humbling providences. The cottager that has his little Babylon of straw is less excusable than the mighty Nebuchadnezzar walking in his pride through the splendid chambers of his stupendous palace.—*Lawson.*

There are main gates to the city of peace; there is a little postern besides, that is, humility: for of all vices, pride is a stranger to peace. The proud man is too guilty to come in by innocence, too surly to come in by patience; he hath no mind to come in by benefaction, and he scorns to come in by satisfaction. All these portcullises be shut against him; there is no way left but the postern for him; he must stoop or never be admitted to peace. Heaven is a high city, yet hath but a low gate. . . Men may behold glory in humility, they shall never find peace in ambition. The safest way to keep fire is to rake it up in embers; the best means to preserve peace is in humbleness. The tall cedars feel the fury of tempests which blow over the humble shrubs in the low valleys.—*T. Adams.*

Better is it to be conquered by God than to be conqueror of the whole world. For if God conquer thee, the devil is conquered by thee; if pride be driven from thee, meekness is triumphant in thee, and where thou art so spoiled thou hast gotten the spoil of thy spiritual enemies, the love of God, the comfort of His spirit, the expectation of glory which they hadst gotten from thee, and which the earth cannot value, much less be an equal value unto them. But then thou must be not only of a humble look, or of a humble speech, but of a humble *spirit.* —*Jermin.*

I. The one is rich in his soul by the endowments and force of the spirit, and the other hath a beggarly mind and impotent heart. II. The one is acceptable to God and amiable to good men, whereas the Lord doth abhor the other, and good men shun his society. III. The one is rising and growing to a better state, and the other is coming down and falling into misery.—*Dod.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSES 20 *and* 21.

The Fruits of Trust in the Lord.

I. There can be no real blessedness in life unless there is trust in the Lord. Men are so constituted that, if they are to have soul-rest, they must confide in

the power and wisdom and love of a Being who is stronger and wiser and better than they are. Let a man be ever so great intellectually or morally, there will be times in his life when he will feel the absolute need he has of the guidance of One who is far wiser than he is, of the help of One who far exceeds him in ability and in goodness. If he has not such a helper and guide to whom he can turn, he will be a stranger to that calmness of soul which alone makes a man truly blessed. 1. *A trust of this kind must rest upon a knowledge of the Divine character.* If a man is following a guide in some difficult and dangerous path, it is necessary to his peace of mind that he should know enough about his guide to be assured that he will lead him aright. If he does not know enough about him to know this, he may be haunted by underlying doubts and fears which will banish all comfort from his mind. When a ship's crew have so little knowledge of their captain's character and ability as to be uncertain whether he is able or whether he intends to bring the ship safely to her destined port, they will be possessed by a spirit of uneasiness. But if they know that all his powers will be directed to that end, and that his ability is equal to the task, they will sail through the deep in comparative rest and peace. So no human soul can possess a confidence in God which will keep it calm and restful amid the waves of life's sea, unless he has made himself acquainted with the character of God—unless he knows so much about Him as to feel assured that His ways and works are perfectly wise and good. 2. *God has given men means of acquiring this knowledge.* He has no motive for holding back from His creatures a knowledge of what He is and what His purposes are concerning them. Those who endeavour to conceal what they are and what their intentions are in relation to their fellow-men, do so from a consciousness that if they revealed them they would not be trusted. But God has no such motive for concealing His character and intentions, and He has therefore revealed to men what He is and what He desires to do for them as fully as they are able to receive it, and with clearness and certainty enough to be the basis of an unwavering trust. This is indeed the end of all revelation of Himself—to lead men to "*know the only true God and Jesus Christ*" (John xvii. 2), so that they may have faith in both the Divine Father and the Divine Son,—that a trust may be begotten of the knowledge that will make them truly blessed.

II. An intelligent trust in the Lord is true wisdom. Wisdom has been often defined as the application of knowledge to practice, and a man whose knowledge of God has begotten within him a trust in the Lord, is the only man who is capable of "handling wisely" either matters connected with his own life or with the lives of others. When Adam lost his trust in God he gave evidence of his folly—when his confidence in the Divine character became unsettled, he lost his ability to do the best with his own existence as a whole, or with any particular matter connected with it. It is a mark of the truest wisdom to handle all matters whether they are more immediately connected with our spiritual or material welfare, in a spirit of trust in the perfect wisdom and love of God, and it is a mark of the highest folly to endeavour to do it without dependence upon Him. He who, in all his ways, rests upon a Divine guide, is the only man who deserves the name of a "prudent" man (ver. 21). If a child comes into possession of vast estates—of large revenues—he is quite unable by reason of his undeveloped capacities and of his limited experience to use what he possesses to the best advantage. Unless his inheritance is to suffer from misuse, there must be the help of a higher intelligence and a more extended experience than he possesses; and many men possess a great inheritance of intellectual endowments, or of wealth and position, but because they fail to apply to the Highest Wisdom for help to use it rightly, they are neither blessed themselves in the possession, nor do they bless others by the possession.

III. Such a wise and prudent man finds good and does good. 1. *He will*

get good to himself. He will get a godly character, for trust in the Lord is not only the foundation of all true soul-rest, but of godliness of heart and life. "*He shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit*" (Jer. xvii. 8). Here the prophet teaches that he who possesses within him a constant well of spiritual happiness from confidence in God will manifest it in godly deeds, and thus will become the possessor of the greatest good in God's universe—a holy character. 2. *He will do good to others by his wise and holy conversation.* "The sweetness of the lips increaseth learning," and the speech of a man who trusts in the Lord will be of so attractive and winning a nature as to lead others to know God and to trust in Him.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Ver. 20. Combined view of the two chief requisites to a really devout life; (1) Obedience to the Word of God. (2) Inspiring confidence in God.—*Lange's Commentary.*

In doubtful cases to hold fast to God's word, and believingly hope in His help, ensures always a good issue. —*Geier.*

Wise about a word. (See Critical Notes.) By usage, "*wise about a thing*," hence "*shrewd, though it be but in one transaction.*" How often in London might mansions be pointed out of men opulent at a stroke! Such a stroke is faith! See the same marvel in chap. xviii. 21. What a wonder is it that a man can win palaces of light by "*one act*" of casting himself upon the sacrifice. "*Act*," literally, *word.* But men acted so by the *word* in that country, that it grew to mean *affair.* (Gen. xx. 8.) The very name of Christ (John i. 1) seems to be coloured by this Eastern usage. "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made" (Psalm xxxiii. 6). Blessed in every sense whatever. What other "affair" ever produced as much as the *affair* of faith? (Mark ix. 23).—*Miller.*

The obvious sense is that thorough understanding of business and prudent management of it *tend* to ensure a prosperous issue. And if the business is another's, the intelligent, cautious, successful conducting of it, will procure benefit by the favour it conciliates, and the character it establishes. One business well conducted brings a man another. This is the way to get forward in the world. And in proportion as the entrusted transaction is difficult and delicate, will the "handling of it wisely" prove advantageous. Still there is no amount of human understanding and discretion that can render success in any transaction *certain.* The result rests with God. Hence a very natural connection of the latter clause of the verse with the former. Here is the true secret of happiness—*the union in all things of prudence and diligence, with trust in God.* Trust must be associated with effort. . . . Let it be further observed that "handling a matter wisely" does not mean handling it *cunningly* with artifice and what the apostle calls "fleshly wisdom"—the policy of this world; but with a wisdom and prudence in harmony with the most rigid and straightforward integrity. Double dealing may be misnamed wisdom, the arts of a tortuous cunning may be dignified with the designation of prudence; but when *such* wisdom, *such* prudence has been employed, even the greatest amount of success can impart little that deserves the name of happiness. And no man who is using the arts of a crooked policy can exercise *trust in God.* The two things are incompatible. Who can unite obedience and confidence? How could David trust in God for the success of his plan against Uriah the Hittite? There was art in it, but there was not wisdom.—*Wardlaw.*

This is in all cases true wisdom—to make man the excitement to diligence, God the object of trust. . . . "I have had many things," said Luther, "in my hands, and have lost them all. But whatever I have been able to trust in God's I still possess." . . . "I will therefore," says Bishop Hall, "trust Him on His bare word, with hope, beside hope, above hope, against hope, for small matters of this life. For how shall I hope to trust Him in impossibilities if I may not in likelihoods. This simple habit of faith enables us fearlessly to look an extremity in the face. Thus holding on, it is His honour to put His own seal to His word. (Psalm ii. 12; Jer. xvii. 7, 8).—*Bridges.*

Many meddle with more matters than they do well quit themselves of; and many a time a good matter is made ill by the ill *handling* of it. And he that handleth a matter wisely shall find good, although the matter be ill; and well doth he acquit himself, although the matter may not succeed well . . . . To put our trust in God, and not to use a wise care, is to deceive ourselves; to use a wise care, and not to trust in God, is to dishonour God.—*Jermin.*

Verse 21. Piety is sure to be discovered; but many a pious man has less influence for want of courtesy. The *suaviter* may be really stronger than the *fortiter.* The last word is literally *a taking,* from the verb to *take.* This noun is often *learning.* A *taking* may very legitimately be "*a lesson.*" The idea is, that sweet lips *increase the taking, i.e.,* make more wisdom to be taken by the men around. The duty, therefore, is evolved, of being kind in speech that our good may not be evil spoken of (Rom. xiv. 16).—*Miller.*

If the "wise in heart" be understood of the truly, spiritually, divinely wise, then the phrase "*shall be called* prudent" must be interpreted, according to a common Hebrew idiom, as meaning "*is* prudent"—*deserves* to be so called. The sentiment will thus be the oft-repeated one, that *true religion is the only genuine prudence.* And is it not so? we ask anew. Take as a standard the ordinary maxims of prudence among men. Is it the part of prudence to be considerate? to look forward? to anticipate, as far as possible, the contingencies of the future? to provide against evil? to make sure of lasting good? Then is true religion the very perfection of prudence.—*Wardlaw.*

That our wisdom may be useful, we should endeavour to produce it to advantage by a graceful and engaging manner of expression. It is not uncommon with bad men to set off their corrupt sentiments by dressing them in all the beauties of language, and by this means multitudes are seduced into error and folly. Is not wisdom far better entitled to this recommendation than folly?—*Lawson.*

There is no sweetness that entereth into the lips to be compared to the sweetness that cometh from the lips. The fig-tree must leave her sweetness, and all the trees of delight their pleasantness, when the fruit of the lips is mentioned among them. And most fitly is eloquence styled the sweetness of the lips. How daintily doth it sweeten all matters of knowledge! What a delicate relish doth it give unto them! With what pleasure doth it make them to slip into the ears of men! How doth it mollify the hardness and sharpness of reproof! How doth it qualify the bitterness of sorrows! How doth it warm the dull coldness of apprehension and attention! And therefore, though wisdom in the heart is of the chiefest worth, yet eloquence of the lips is an addition to it. St. Augustine, speaking of himself, saith, that when he heard St. Ambrose preaching, "I stood by as one careless of the matter he spake, and a contemner of it, and I was delighted with the sweetness of his words; but together with the words which I respected, the matter came into my heart which I neglected, and while I opened my heart to receive how *eloquently* he spake, it entered also into my heart how *truly* he spake."—*Jermin.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSES 22—24.

AN UNFAILING SPRING.

I. Moral intelligence is its own reward. A healthy state of body is its own reward. It is a well-spring whence men may draw much bodily comfort—it adds much to the joy of existence. Moral intelligence—a good understanding—is a condition of moral health, it is a state of soul in which the moral capabilities of a man are well-developed, and it is a constant source of satisfaction to the possessor. "*Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him, a well of water springing up into everlasting life*" (John iv. 14).

II. It is also a means of giving spiritual life and comfort to others. A well is a place where weary men find refreshment and consolation. And no morally wise man lives for himself alone; his "heart maketh his mouth wise," and his "pleasant words" strengthen and comfort weary wayfarers on the journey of life. No man who is himself acquainted with God can fail to speak words which will help and comfort others. He who drinks of the water which Christ gives will be a fountain-head whence "*shall flow rivers of living water*" (John vii. 38).

III. A moral fool may be in the seat of instruction. "The correction," rather "*the instruction* of fools is folly" (ver. 22). A man is not necessarily a wise man, either intellectually or morally, because he assumes the position which ought only to be held by a wise man. Many fools are found sitting as instructors of others. The Scribes and Pharisees in the days of our Lord were destitute of moral wisdom, and yet they were found "*in Moses' seat*" (Matt. xxii. 2). And in all ages of the Church men have been found speaking in the name of God who have been entirely ignorant of Divine truth—"*watchmen*" who have been "*blind*," . . "*shepherds that could not understand*" (Isa. lvi. 10, 11). Men of such a character are like wells of poisoned water, their teachings are not simply unsatisfying and powerless to bless, but they are positively injurious to those who imbibe their doctrines. All who come under their influence will by their own lack of moral strength show that "the instruction of fools is folly."

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Verse 22. This spiritual understanding is not a work on the surface; not a mere forced impulse; not the summer stream, but a deep-flowing fountain. If it be not always bubbling, there is always a supply at the bottom-spring.—*Bridges.*

Two things are necessary to the opening and flow of well-springs—deep rendings beneath the earth's surface, and lofty risings above it. There must be deep veins and high mountains. The mountains draw the drops from heaven; the rents receive, retain, and give forth the supply. There must be corresponding heights and depths in the life of a man ere he be charged as a well-spring of life from above. Upward to God and downward into himself the exercises of his soul must alternately penetrate. You must lift up yourself in the prayer of faith, and rend your heart in the work of repentance; you must ascend into heaven to bring the blessing down, and descend into the depths to draw it up. Extremes meet in a lively Christian. He is at once very high and very lowly. God puts all His treasures in the power of a soul that rises to reach the upper springs, as the Andes intercept water from the sky sufficient to fertilise a continent. And when the spirit has so descended like floods of water, the secret places of a broken heart afford room for his indwelling, so that

the grace which came at first from God rises within the man like a springing well, satisfying himself and refreshing his neighbours.—*Arnot.*

Verse 23. 1. That which a wise man utters is *in itself* good—instructive, edifying, "profitable to direct." The streams bear analogy to the fountain. 2. The wise man uses the understanding imparted to him for the benefit of others. The wisdom that is in his heart passes to his lips. 3. His self-knowledge, his experience of his own heart, his incessant self-inspection, ... his knowledge both of the "old man" and of the "new man" in their respective principles and influences as they exist and contend within himself, all qualify him for wisely and judiciously counselling others, according to their characters and situations. 4. The truly wise man will, in his wisdom, accommodate the *manner* of his instructions and counsels to the varying characters and tempers of his fellowmen. A vast deal depends on this. The end is often lost, not for want of wisdom in the lesson itself, but for lack of discretion in the *mode* of imparting it. A thorough knowledge of anatomy is necessary to a judicious and successful practice in the operations of surgery. Ere he venture to make his incision, the surgeon ought to understand all about the region where it is to be made—what arteries, veins, glands, nerves, lie in the way of his instrument; and should be fully aware of the peculiarities of the case under his treatment. In like manner an intimate acquaintance with the *anatomy of the heart* is necessary to discriminative and successful dealing with *moral cases*—to the suitable communication of instruction and advice. Without the surgical knowledge mentioned, a practitioner may inflict a worse evil than the one he means to cure. And so, through ignorance of *moral* anatomy, may the injudicious adviser, who treats all cases alike, and makes no account of the peculiarities of character and situation with which he has to do.—*Wardlaw.*

Who does not know the difference between one who speaks of what he has read or heard, and one who speaks of what he has felt and tasted? The one has the knowledge of the gospel—dry and spiritless. The other has the *savour* of this knowledge (2 Cor. ii. 14)—fragrant and invigorating. The theorist may exceed in the quantum (for Satan—as an angel of light—is a fearful proof how much knowledge may be consistent with ungodliness); but the real difference applies, not to the extent, but to the character of knowledge; not to the matter known, but to the mode of knowing it . . . It is not, therefore, the intellectual knowledge of Divine truth that makes the divine. The only true divine is he who knows holy things in a holy manner; because he only is gifted with a spiritual taste and relish for them. . . . . And this experimental knowledge gives a rich unction to his communications. Divinity is not said by rote. *The heart teacheth the mouth.*—*Bridges.*

Every wise man is both a master and scholar, and that unto himself; as a master he sitteth in the chair of his heart, and giveth thence lessons to his several scholars, that are within the school of his own person, of his own life. His hands he teacheth what to do, and how to work; his feet he teacheth whither to go, and how to walk; his ears what to hear, and how to listen; his eyes what to see, and how to look; his mouth what to say, and how to speak. And that being an unruly scholar, and like a wild youth, much care he hath, and much pains he taketh to instruct it well and to keep it in good order.—*Jermin.*

Verse 24. The words express the twofold idea of *pleasantness* and of *benefit.* Many things have the one quality which have not the other. Many a poison is like honey, sweet to the taste; but instead of being *health* to the bones, it is laden with *death.* So it may be in regard to their present effect, and their ultimate influence with *words.* Harshness and severity never

afford pleasure, and seldom yield profit. If they were, in any case, requisite to the latter, we should be under the necessity of giving it the preference, for profit must ever take precedence of mere pleasure. But it will be usually found that *both* are united. *Pleasant* words, however, must be distinguished from *flattering* words. The latter may be at times palatable, but they can never be otherwise than injurious; for they are not words of *truth.*—*Wardlaw.*

Verse 25 is a repetition of chap. xiv. 12, for which see Homiletics.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

These words concern not so much the course of the open sinner as of the mistaken and self-deceived man. . . . The practice of sin seems expedient, seems pleasant, seems unavoidable, but it does not seem *right.* Those who live in the open practice of it are in the ways of death, and they know it. They are blinded, infatuated, intoxicated, if you will, but they are not *mistaken.* There is, however, a very different class of persons, to whom the text directly applies, and to whom the warning is very solemn; persons whose course lies just short of that degree of divergence from right where the conscience begins to protest, and yet is sure, as every divergence must if followed, to lead very far from it at last. . . . . It is this sort of travellers wherewith, in our day, the downward road is lavishly crowded; men who walk not with the sinful multitude, but on convenient embankments so contrived as to make the great broad road appear immensely distant and precipitous beneath, and the narrow path comfortably near and accessible above. . . . . It does not say of these apparently right ways that they *are* themselves ways of death, but that they *end* in ways of death. And this is important; for nothing is so common as for the man, when warned, to vindicate himself by endeavouring to show, and often by successfully showing, that there is nothing destructive in his present course. . . . . The ways are mainly of two kinds—errors in practice and errors in doctrine. . . . . There is (1) *A life not led under the influence of practical religion.* . . . Improbable as it may seem that this correct man, this blameless and upright liver, should perish at last, it is but a necessary consequence from his having rejected the only remedy which God has provided for the universal taint of our nature. (2) *Those believing from the heart yet notoriously and confessedly wanting in some of the main elements of the gospel.* Or, (3) *Those who, while professing zeal for religion in general, nourish some one known sin or prohibited indulgence.* . . . . . And regarding errors of doctrine, there is nothing in life for which we are so deeply and solemnly accountable as the formation of our belief. It is the compass which guides our way, which, if it vary ever so little from the truth, is sure to cause a fatal divergence in the end.—*Alford.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 26.

The Mainspring of Human Industry.

I. God intends every man to be a labourer. Adam in Paradise was required to dress and keep the Garden of Eden, so that the labourer's patent of nobility dates from before the fall. The Son of God, in human flesh, laboured with His own hands for the supply of His daily wants, and thus for ever sanctified the ordinary toil of life. (On the profitableness of labour, see on chap. xiv. 23.)

II. God has taken means to ensure the continuance of labour. He has so

created man that if the majority do not labour neither can they eat, nor can those eat who do not labour. There must be always a large proportion of workers in the great hive of human creatures, or both they and the drones would starve. It is hunger that keeps the world in motion, and it is the craving of man's mouth that builds our cities and our ships, that stimulates invention, and sends men abroad in quest of fresh fields of industry. It is this necessity to eat that keeps all the members of the human family in a state of ceaseless activity, and prevents them from sinking into a state of mental stagnation and bodily disease. It is a noteworthy fact that those nations who have to work hard to supply their physical wants are more intellectually and spiritually healthy than those who live in lands where the needs of life are satisfied with little labour. God has promised that "while the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest shall not cease" (Gen. viii. 22); but He has also, by the constitution of man, ordained that he must be unceasingly active if he is to reap the fruits of the earth—if, indeed, he is to continue to exist upon the face of the earth; and He has so ordained because of the many blessings which flow from this necessity.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Since that which causes us to labour and trouble becomes a means of our subsistence, it in turn helps us to overcome labour and trouble, for this very thing, by virtue of God's wise regulating providence, becomes for us a spur to industry.—*Von. Gerlach.*

A man's industry in his calling is no sure sign of virtue, for although it is a duty commanded by God, and necessary to be practised, yet profit and necessity may constrain a man to labour, who has no regard either to God or man. But this proves that idleness is a most inexcusable sin. It is not only condemned in the Scripture, but it is a sign that a man wants common reason as well as piety, when he can neither be drawn by interest, nor driven by necessity, to work. Self-love is a damning sin where it reigns as the chief principle of action; but the want of self-love where it is required is no less criminal.—*Lawson.*

To labour is man's punishment, and that man laboureth for himself is God's mercy. For as it is painful to labour, so it is made more painful when another reapeth the fruit thereof; but when ourselves are comforted with the fruit thereof, the labour is much eased in the gathering of it. God himself does not look for any benefit from our labour, it is all for ourselves, whatever we do. And therefore as God doth command labour, so the mouth of our benefit doth call for it.—*Jermin.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 27—30.

Different Species of the same Genus.

I. Human depravity manifests itself in a variety of forms.—There may be many lawless children in a family, but they may not all sin against the same law—they may all rebel against what is true and good, but some may be pre-eminent transgressors in one way and some in another. One son may be a notorious liar and another may be a slave to ungovernable passion, while a third may be addicted to another and different vice. It is so in the great human family—all unregenerate men are transgressors against God's good and righteous law, but their transgressions may take different forms.

II. But all ungodliness is subversive of human happiness.—If a man sets at nought the law of God, he will be a curse to those around him. There are many such men who seem to delight in increasing the misery of mankind, they

make it their business to "dig up evil," they work diligently to bring to light that which it is most desirable should be hidden and forgotten, and so they are like a scorching, consuming fire to the peace of many of their fellow creatures. And if they are not so openly and manifestly bad, if they are untruthful men, they must sow around them seeds of suspicion and discord which hinder men from being bound together in bonds of friendship or break such bonds when they have been formed.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Verse 27. "*A worthless man.*" This is the farthest an impenitent moralist will go in condemning himself. He may be a worthless man (a man of Belial, *i.e.*, of no profit), but he is not a harmful man. . . . . Solomon calls this mild gracelessness a digging up of evil. Recurring to the potency of the tongue, he says, "The *lips* of such men, sweet as they may seem, fairly scorch and burn."—*Miller.*

In the expression "diggeth up evil" two ideas may be included:—1. *Taking pains to devise it.* We dig or search for treasure in a mine, or where we fancy it lies concealed: thus the wicked man does in regard to evil. It is his treasure—that on which he sets his heart; and for it, as for treasure, he "digs" and "searches"—ay, often deep and long. His very happiness seems to depend on his reaching and finding it. He is specially laborious and persevering when anyone chances to have become the object of his pique or malice. Marvellous is the assiduity with which he then strains every nerve to produce mischief,—plodding and plotting for it,—mining and undermining,—exploring in every direction, often where no one could think of but himself,—and with savage delight exulting in the discovery of aught that can be made available for his diabolic purpose. 2. *Taking pains to revive it after it has been buried and forgotten.* He goes down into the very graves of old quarrels; brings them up afresh; puts new life into them; wakes up grudges that had long slept; and sets people by the ears again who had abandoned their enmities, and had been for years in reconciliation and peace. As to "evil," whether old and new, "the son of Belial" is like one in quest of some mine of coal, or of precious metal. He examines his ground, and wherever he discovers any hopeful symptoms on the surface he proceeds to drill, and bore, and excavate. The slightest probability of success will be enough for his encouragement to toil and harass himself night and day until he can make something of it. The persevering pains of such men would be incredible were they not sadly attested by *facts*:—"*They search out iniquities; they accomplish a diligent search: both the inward thought of every one of them, and the heart, is deep*" (Psalm lxiv. 1–6).—*Wardlaw.*

Whisperers are like the wind that creeps in by the chinks and crevices of a wall, or the cracks in a window, that commonly proves more dangerous than a storm that meets a man in the face upon the plain.—*Trapp.*

Ver. 28. The idea is, sin cannot keep silence. In its quiet hour it speaks, *rolling out* (literally) articulate influences. The very idea is terrible. It *separates friends.* That is, the world being knit together by the law of love, the impenitent separate it asunder. They separate man from his race, and destroy that highest friendship that he might have with the Almighty.—*Miller.*

Ver. 29. Yet though a wicked man be never so violent, he cannot compel thee to his ways, he can but *entice* thee, he can but *lead* thee; it is still in thine own power whether thou wilt follow him or no. Wherefore though it agree to his violence to lead, let it be thy care to keep back from his ways. —*Jermin.*

Unbelief can hardly be libelled, and Solomon's very thought is to show how *violent* it is! It is the match even of hell, for it derides it! It is the robber even of God, for it thieves from Him. It takes life without paying for it. It assaults the Maker upon His throne. It stares broadly at the truth each Sunday when it listens, and flouts it as though never heard. Unbelief is "*violence;*" and yet, as though it were the most seductive charm it "seduces" (*entices*) one's neighbour.—*Miller.*

The sons of Belial are also *tempters of others.* A fearful employment—a fearful delight! Yet the employment would not be followed were there not pleasure in it. The pleasure is fiendish—laying plans and putting every vile art into practice, to seduce the virtuous and unsuspecting youth from the way of rectitude! . . . As there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, so is there a malicious *joy in hell* when such tempters succeed in turning any from the right to the wrong, from the narrow to the broad way. This is the joy of fiends, the other of angels.—*Wardlaw.*

Ver. 30. Wicked men are great students; they beat their brains and close their eyes that they may revolve and excogitate mischief with more freedom of mind. They search the devil's skull for new devices, and are very intentive to invent that which may do hurt; their wits will better serve them to find out a hundred shifts or carnal arguments, than to yield to one saving truth.—*Trapp.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 31.

A Crown of Glory.

I. Hoary heads may be found which are not in the way of righteousness. A hoary head in the way of ungodliness is one of the saddest sights that a thoughtful mind can look upon. 1. *Because in such a man the tendency towards evil has been strengthened by the habits of a long life.* In childhood there is a condition of comparative innocency to start with, and there is hope that this freedom from actual transgression may develop into a tried virtue in the passage from youth to old age. But when childhood has passed away, the condition of comparative innocence has passed away too, and if the evil tendencies of human nature are not resisted they grow stronger as the man grows in years, and old age finds him more under the dominion of sinful habit than any former period of his life. An ungodly man is more ungodly when he is old than he has ever been before, and is therefore a sadder object of contemplation then than he was in his youth or in his prime. Such a hoary-headed sinner often wishes that it was now as easy to do right as it was in his youth, but he finds that it is not so. "To will" may be "present" with him (Rom. vii. 18), but he finds that by reason of his long indulgence in sinful habits it is less easy now to perform that which he wills than it was when his locks were black and his form unbent. The man whose limbs are palsied by age finds that they do not move in obedience to his will so readily as they did in the days of his health, and the aged man finds also that his moral actions are not so easily controlled as they were when he was young—the vessel does not answer to her helm so quickly as it did then. It is always sad to look upon a slave, even upon one who is only a slave in body. But it is far sadder to see a man who is in spiritual bondage—one who is "taken captive by the devil at his will" (2 Tim. ii. 26), and we look upon such an one whenever we look upon a hoary head in the way of ungodliness. 2. *Because such a man is growing old in soul as well as in body.* When he was a child the seeds of perpetual youth were implanted within him; if he had then given himself up to holy influences

old age would have found him as young in heart as when he was a boy, because although the outer man of all men perishes daily, the inner man of the godly is renewed day by day (2 Cor. iv. 16). But ungodliness deprives a man of the blessedness of being for ever young—of retaining to the latest hour of life the freshness of feeling which characterises the young, and of leaving the world with a certainty that all his mental and spiritual powers will be renewed throughout eternity. His soul sympathises with his body, and the weakness and decay of the shell is a symbol of what is going on within. 3. *Because he is nearing the mysterious exodus from this world which must be accomplished by all without being prepared for it.* All men are near to death—men of all ages are uncertain whether they will be here on the morrow, but the old man knows certainly that his race is almost run—that he must shortly put off this tabernacle. And there is nothing more depressing to a man than to feel that he is utterly unprepared to meet the demands of a great crisis in his life which is near—that he has soon to meet a person who holds his destinies in his hand and that he has nothing to hope, but everything to fear from him—that he has to embark on a voyage to a distant land without any knowledge of what shall befall him when he arrives there. And if a long course of ungodliness has blunted his capability of seeing his own true position, it is clear to thoughtful onlookers, and the sight fills them with sadness.

II. But a hoary head in the way of righteousness is a kingly head. There is nothing kingly in old age considered in itself. An old man's body is not such a kingly object to look upon as a young man's—it does not give us the idea of so much power and capability. And an ungodly old man—as we have seen—is not a king but a slave—a slave to sinful habits, to the infirmities of age, and to the fear of death. But the hoary head of a righteous man—1. *Tells a tale of conquest.* It speaks of many temptations met, and wrestled with, and overcome. His passions are not his masters, but his servants—he has learned to bring into subjection even his thoughts; he reigns as king over himself, and so his hoary hairs are a symbol of his kingship. 2. *It is a sign of spiritual maturity.* In all the works of God we expect the best and the most perfect results at the last. There is a glory and a beauty in the field covered with the green blades of early spring, but the period of its perfection is not in the spring, but in the autumn, when the full corn in the ear stands ready for the sickle. The mind of the youthful philosopher may be mighty in its power, but its capabilities are greater when he has spent a long life in developing them. It is in harmony with all the methods of God's working that all that is of real worth in a man should be nearer perfection the longer he lives, and it is so with all those who are willing to bring their lives into harmony with the Divine will. If an old man is a godly man, he is more like God in his character and disposition in his old age than he ever was before, and this spiritual maturity invests him with a kingly dignity. 3. *It is an earnest of a brighter crown which is awaiting him.* To him death is not an unwelcome visitor, and God is a Being in whose presence he expects to realise "fulness of joy" (Psa. xvi. 11), and the country beyond the grave a place to which he often longs to depart. All such hoary-headed servants of God can adopt the language of the aged Paul, and say, "*I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day*" (2 Tim. iv. 7, 8). To all such it is especially fit that kingly honours should be paid. "*Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head, and honour the face of the old man*" (Lev. xix. 32).

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

We honour them whose heads have been encircled with crowns by the hands of men, and will we refuse honour to those whom God himself hath crowned with silver hairs?—*Lawson.*

The word *if* is a supplement. The verse may be read, "The hoary head is a crown of glory: *it shall be* found in the way of righteousness." Two things are implied:—The conduciveness of righteousness to *the attainment of old age*, and its conduciveness to the *respectability and honour of old age.* —*Wardlaw.*

The hoary head is the old man's glory and claim for reverence. God solemnly links the honour of it with His own fear (Lev. xix. 32). "The ancient" are numbered with "the honourable" (Isa. ix. 15). The sin of despising them is marked (Isa. iii. 5), and, when shown towards His own prophet, was awfully punished (2 Kings ii. 23, 24). Wisdom and experience may be supposed to belong to them (Job xii. 12), and the contempt of this wisdom was the destruction of a kingdom (1 Kings xii. 13–20). But the diamond in the *crown* is, when it is found in the way of righteousness. Even a heathen monarch did homage to it (Gen. xlvii. 7–10); an ungodly nation and king paid to it the deepest respect (1 Sam. xxv. 1; 2 Kings xiii. 14). The fathers of the Old and New Testament reflected *its glory.* The one died in faith, waiting the Lord's salvation; the other was ready to "depart in peace" at the joyous sight of it (Luke ii. 28, 29). Zacharias and Elizabeth walked in all the ordinances of the Lord blameless; Anna, "a widow indeed," in the faith and hope of the Gospel; Polycarp, with his fourscore and six years, in his Master's service. Crowns of glory were their hoary heads, shining with all the splendour of royalty. Earnestly does the holy Psalmist *plead* this *crown* for usefulness to the Church (Psa. lxxi. 18); the Apostle, for the cause of his converted slave (Phil. 9).—*Bridges.*

The old age is to be reverenced most which is white, not with grey hairs only, but with heavenly graces. Commendable old age leaneth upon two staves—the one a remembrance of a life well led, the other a hope of eternal life. Take away these two staves, and old age cannot stand with comfort; pluck out the grey hairs of virtues, and the grey head cannot shine with any bright glory. . . . . The grey head is a glorious ornament, for, first, hoary hairs do wonderfully become the ancient person, whom they make to look the more grave, and to carry the greater authority in his countenance; secondly, they are a garland or diadem, which not the art of man, but the finger of God, hath fashioned and set on the head.—*Muffet.*

Hoariness is only honourable when found in a way of righteousness. A white head, accompanied with a holy heart, makes a man truly honourable. There are two glorious sights in the world: the one is a young man walking in his uprightness, and the other is an old man walking in ways of righteousness. It was Abraham's honour that he went to his grave in a good old age, or rather, as the Hebrew hath it, with a good grey head (Gen. xxv. 8). Many there be that go to their graves with a grey head, but this was Abraham's crown, that he went to his grave with a good grey head. Had Abraham's head been never so grey, if it had not been good it would have been no honour to him. . . . . When the head is as white as snow, and the soul is as black as hell, God usually gives up such to scorn and contempt. . . . But God usually reveals Himself most to old disciples, to old saints: "With the ancient is wisdom; and in length of days understanding" (Job xii. 12). God usually manifests most of Himself to aged saints. They usually pray most and pay most, they labour most and long most after the choicest manifestations of Himself and of His grace, and therefore He opens His bosom most to them, and makes them of His cabinet council. "And the Lord said,

Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do," etc. (Gen. xviii. 17–19). Abraham was an old friend, and therefore God makes him both of His court and council. We usually open our hearts most freely, fully, and familiarly to old friends. So doth God to His ancient friends.—*Brooks.*

Age is not all decay; it is the ripening, the swelling of the fresh life within that withers and bursts the husk.—*George Macdonald.*

Aged piety is peculiarly honourable. 1. It hath long continued. When it is said "If it be *found*," etc., intimates that such a one has been long walking in that way. 2. It is founded on knowledge and experience. They are well acquainted with the suitableness and sufficiency of the Redeemer. They have made many useful observations on the methods of providence towards themselves, their families, and the Church of God. They know much of the evil of sin, of the nature of temptations, and of the many devices of Satan. 3. It is proved and steadfast. The aged Christian is "rooted in the faith," grounded and settled, his habits of piety are become quite natural. 4. It is attended with much usefulness. The piety of an aged Christian is much to the glory of God, as it shows especially the Gospel's power to bear the Christian on through difficulties and temptations. And aged saints are very *useful to mankind.* Their steadfast piety puts to silence the ignorance of foolish men who complain of the restraints of religion as unreasonable and intolerable, and of the Redeemer's laws as impracticable. They are living witnesses to mankind of the kindness of God's providence and the riches of His grace.—*Job Orton.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 32.

Taking a City and Ruling the Spirit.

I. A man who takes a city may do a good work. When Solomon says that the man who rules his spirit does a better work than he who takes a city, he by no means implies that the taking of a city is a wrong action. In the records of God's dealings with the nations of old, we find that He sometimes laid it as a duty upon His chosen servants to take a city. The overthrow of a city is sometimes necessary for the preservation of the morality of the human race, and it is as indispensable for its well-being as the amputation of a diseased limb is for the health of the individual man. Large cities are favourable to the development and increase of crime, and sometimes become such moral pesthouses that God, out of regard for His human family, causes them to be wiped from off the earth, and sometimes uses His own servants to do the work. It was He who commanded Joshua to take the city of Jericho and the other cities of Canaan, and they were destroyed because of the sin of those who dwelt in them. Or the overthrow of a city may be the downfall of a tyrant, and the deliverance of the oppressed, and then also we know that it is well-pleasing to God. The Bible has in it many songs of praise to God for His overthrow of those who held their fellow-men in bondage—songs which were not only acceptable to Him, but which were the fruit of the inspiration of His Spirit, and therefore we know that the taking of a city which was followed by such a result might in itself be a righteous and praiseworthy act.

II. A man may do a good work in taking a city, and yet be under the dominion of sinful habits. Many a man has acquired vast power over others without ever learning how to master his own evil passions—many a city has been taken by him, and good may have been the outcome of some of his conquests, and yet he has been ever an abject bondslave to his own evil impulses. Many a conqueror of cities has been himself brought more and more into

captivity to the vices of the mind as his conquests advanced, and though God may have used him to further His wise and beneficent purposes to the race, he may, by his inability to rule himself, have lived and died a miserable victim of sin—in greater bondage to himself than any of those whom he conquered could ever be to him.

III. **Self-rule is nobler than the possession of rule over others.** 1. *This conquest is over spirit and the other may only be over flesh.* We cannot rule the whole of our fellow-man by physical force; if circumstances make us masters over his body, there is a spiritual part of him which we cannot enslave without his consent. A "city" and a man's "spirit" belong to entirely different regions, and the latter cannot be ruled by the same weapons as the other. But "spirit" is far higher than matter, and when a man has learned to rule his own inner man he has made a conquest which is far more difficult, and therefore nobler, than he who "takes a city." The man who can check a lawless thought or desire, must be as much greater than he who can only subdue men's bodies, as mind is greater than matter, and he must do a more glorious work because he lessens the power of sin in the universe. It may sometimes be a necessary and good thing to drive the sinner out of the world, but it is infinitely better to kill sin, and this is what he who rules himself is always doing. 2. *It requires the exercise of greater skill and is a more complete victory.* If there is a spiritual part of a man which cannot be subdued to our will without his consent,, this consent can only be obtained by the exercise of weapons which require more skilful handling than the sword of steel. God never attempts to conquer the human spirit by physical force; He has created it to bow only to spiritual forces, and it is by these that He brings men into obedience to His will. A city may be surprised into submission, but dominion over the soul must be gained step by step. And the man who rules his own spirit uses these spiritual weapons, and achieves his conquest little by little. But if the weapons are more difficult to wield, and if the victory is more slowly won, the conquest is much more complete. For when the spirit is ruled the entire man is ruled. 3. *The battle is fought and the victory won in silence and in secret.* When men take a city they are conscious that the eyes of many are upon them, and that the news of their victory will be spread throughout half the world, and that thus they will acquire great renown among their fellow-creatures. And this nerves them to the conflict. But the man who fights upon the battle-ground of his own heart fights in secret, and his victories bring him none of that renown which falls to him who takes a city. No eye looks on but the omniscient eye of God, and although Divine approval is infinitely beyond the praise of a world of finite creatures, yet it has not always such a conscious influence as that of our fellow-men. 4. *The conflict and victory works nothing but good.* Even when the taking of a city ends in the good of the majority, there must be suffering for some who are innocent. But the bringing of the spirit under dominion to that which is good and true brings blessings on the man who wins the victory, and works no ill to anyone, but is a source of good to many. 5. *The glory of self-rule will last much longer than the glory of any material conquest.* Alexander of Macedon took many cities, but the glory that once shed a halo around his name has died away as the world has grown older. And even if the fame of an earthly warrior could last to the end of time, it would last no longer if it rested only on his military achievements. But the glory of self-rule is the glory of goodness which will never grow dim, but shine with increasing brightness as the ages roll.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Now the Lord has made so glorious a conquest over those proud enemies that rose up against you, I beseech you consider, of all conquests the conquest of enemies within is the most honourable and the most noble conquest; for in conquering those enemies that be within, you make a conquest over the devil and hell itself. The word that is rendered "ruleth," signifies to "conquer," to "overcome." It is this conquest that lifts a man up above all other men in the world. And as this is the most noble conquest, so it is the most necessary conquest. You must be the death of your sins, or they will be the death of your souls. Sin is a viper that does always kill where it is not killed. There is nothing gained by making peace with sin but repentance here and hell hereafter. Every yielding to sin is a welcoming of Satan into our very bosoms. Valentine the emperor said upon his deathbed, that among all his victories, one only comforted him; and being asked what that was, he answered, "I have overcome my worst enemy, mine own naughty heart." Ah, when you shall lie upon a dying bed, then no conquest will thoroughly comfort, but the conquest of your own sinful hearts. None were to triumph in Rome that had not got five victories; and he shall never triumph in heaven that subdueth not his five senses, saith Isidorus. Ah, souls! what mercy is it to be delivered from an enemy without, and to be eternally destroyed by an enemy within?—*Brooks.*

To follow the bent and tendency of our nature requires no struggle, and being common to all, involves no distinction. But to keep the passions in check—to bridle and deny them; instead of letting loose our rage against an enemy, to subdue him by kindness—this is one of the severest efforts of a virtuous or of a gracious principle. The most contemptible fool on earth may send a challenge, and draw a trigger, but "not to be overcome of evil, but to overcome evil with good," demands a vigour of mind and decision of character, far more difficult of acquiring than the thoughtless courage that can stand the fire of an adversary. —*Wardlaw.*

The *taking of a city* is only the battle of a day. The other is the weary, unceasing conflict of a life. . . But the magnifying of the conflict exalts the glory of the triumph. Gideon's *rule over his spirit* was better than his victory over the Midianites (Judges viii. 1 3). David's similar conquest was *better* than could have been the spoils of Nabal's house. (1 Sam. xxv. 33). Not less glorious was that decisive and conscious mastery over his spirit when he refused to drink the water of Bethlehem, obtained at the hazard of his bravest men; thus condemning the inordinate appetite that had desired the refreshment at so unreasonable a cost (2 Sam. xxiii. 17). . . . . To rule one's spirit is to subdue an enemy that has vanquished conquerors. . . . . Meanwhile victory is declared, before the conquest begins. Let every day then be a day of triumph. The promises are to *present* victory (Rev. ii. 7, etc.). With such stirring, stimulating hopes, thou shall surely have rule if thou darest to have it.—*Bridges.*

It may be harder to keep from toppling over a precipice, than to lift, by sheer strength, our body over a wall. The reason is obvious. A feather might keep our balance, so we could lean and be safe; but the difficulty is where to get it. We have strength enough if we only had wherewithal it could be applied. The difficulty of *ruling our spirits* is, that they are *ourselves.* The difficulty of an inebriate in resisting a desire, is—that it is his desire. What can he resist it with? It might be far slighter, and yet, if there be nothing to oppose, like the slight weight that topples one upon the Alps, it is as sure to ruin him as a thousand tons.—*Miller.*

Such an one is more excellent than he that is strong of body; for he can

bear reproaches, which are more intolerable burdens than any that are wont to be laid upon the backs of the strongest.—*Muffet.*

Therein stands the office of a king,
His honour, virtue, merit, and chief praise,
That for the public all this weight he bears;
Yet he who reigns within himself, and rules
Passions, desires, and fears, is more a king;
Which every wise and virtuous man attain;
And who attains not, ill aspires to rule
Cities of men, or headstrong multitudes,
Subject himself to anarchy within,
Or lawless passions in him which he serves.
Milton.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 33.

The Lot and its Disposer.

I. There is a special Providence of God in the midst of His universal government. In nature there is a manifestation of a universal Providence ruling over all God's creatures. But the individual is not lost in the multitude—each bird of the air and every blade of grass in the field is under the special supervision of its Creator. And God is Ruler in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth, but He does not deal with either angels or men in the mass as human rulers must do, but knows, and cares for, and guides the destinies of the individual man—the disposal of the lot of each one is from the Lord.

II. The special Providence of God works through human instrumentality. Reference is here doubtless made to the ancient custom of casting lots to ascertain the Divine will. This was done at the division of the land of Canaan among the children of Israel, on the occasion of the election of their first king, and in choosing the apostle who took the place of Judas among the twelve. In all these cases it was recognised that there was no chance in the disposal of the lot—that the decision in each case was from the Lord Himself—but in each case human instrumentality was used by Him to make known His will. This linking of human instrumentality with Divine sovereignty is found in all God's dealings with men. He has promised that seedtime and harvest shall not cease while the earth continues, but he requires men to sow the grain to bring about the harvest. The "casting of the lot" is symbolic of the part that human effort takes in the government of the world—although God is above and behind it, he does not work without it.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

One general principle regarding the employment of the "*lot*" is sufficiently manifest, namely, that it should never be introduced except in cases where reason and evidence are incompetent to decide. And we may, I think, safely go so far as to affirm that in cases of importance and of extremity—that is, where other means of arriving at a satisfactory conclusion or a harmonious agreement have failed—there does not appear to be anything in Scripture by which such an appeal can be considered as interdicted. . . . Still, if there is nothing interdictory of the use of it, there is nothing that makes it *obligatory* in any specified circumstances; and it is clear that, if used at all, it should be used seriously and sparingly. It is very wrong, and the reverse of truth, to speak of any matter whatever as being in this way referred to *chance*. There *is* no such thing. Chance is nothing—an absolute nonentity. It is a mere term for expressing *our ignorance*. Every turn of the dice in the box is regulated by certain physical laws, so that, *if we knew* all the turns, we could infallibly tell what number would cast up. Besides, in no case is there a more thorough disavowal of chance than in

the use of *the lot*. It is the strongest and most direct recognition that can be made of a particular providence—of the constant and minute superintendence of an omniscient, overruling mind.—*Wardlaw.*

Everything is a wheel of Providence. Who directed the Ishmaelites on their journey to Egypt at the very moment that Joseph was cast into the pit? Who guided Pharaoh's daughter to the stream just when the ark, with its precious deposit, was committed to the waters? What gave Ahasuerus a sleepless night, that he might be amused with the records of his kingdom?—*Bridges.*

CHAPTER XVII.

CRITICAL NOTES.—**1. Sacrifices**, literally *killings*, *i.e.*, **slain beasts, not necessarily animals** killed for sacrifice. **2. A son that causeth shame**, rather, **a** *degenerate son.* (*Delitzsch and Zöckler*). **4. A liar**, literally, *a lie, falsehood.* **7. Excellent speech**, literally "a lip of excess or prominence, an assuming, imperious style of speech" (*Zöckler*). **A prince**, rather, *a noble*, a man of lofty disposition. **8. A gift.** Some expositors understand this in the sense of a bribe. Delitzsch translates the whole verse—"The gift of bribery appears a jewel to its receiver, whithersoever he turneth himself he acteth prudently," *i.e.*, "it determines and impels him to apply all his understanding, in order that he may reach the goal for which it shall be his reward." Zöckler understands it to refer to the gift of seasonable liberality which secures for its giver supporters and friends. **9. Repeateth a matter.** Most expositors understand this repetition to refer to a revival of a past wrong, but Miller translates "He who falls back into an act," *i.e.*, transgresses again after forgiveness. 11. Many commentators translate the first clause "*Rebellion*," or "*a rebel*" seeketh only after evil, *i.e.*, brings retributiou upon himself. 12. Miller translates the latter clause "but not a fool his folly." (See his comment.) **14. Meddled with**, rather "*pours forth*." **17.** "**Friend and brother** are related the one as the climax of the other. The friend is developed into a brother by adversity." (*Lange's Commentary*). **20. A froward heart**, rather. *a false heart.* **22. A broken spirit.** Miller renders "*an upraiding spirit*," *i.e.*, spirit which cavils at God's providential dealings. **23. A gift**, *i.e.*, *a bribe*, **judgment.** *i. e., justice.* 24. Many explain this verse to mean that the wise find wisdom everywhere while the fool seeks it everywhere but in the right place. Delitzsch and others understand the proverb to mean that wisdom is the aim of the man of understanding while the fool has no definite aim in life. **26. Also**, rather, *even.* It emphasizes the verb immediately following, viz., *to punish, i.e.*, to inflict a pecuniary fine. Zockler renders the verse. "*Also to punish the righteous is not good, to smile the noble contrary to justice*," and explains the meaning thus, "The fine as a comparatively light penalty which may easily at one time or another fall with a certain justice even on a just man, stands contrasted with the much severer punishment with stripes; and as these two verbal ideas are related, so are also the predicates 'not good' and 'contrary to right' (above desert, beyond all proportion to the just and reasonable) in the relation of a climax." Delitzsch reads, "*Also to inflict punishment on the righteous is not good; this, that one overthrows the noble on account of his righteousness*," *i.e.*, it is not good when a ruler makes his power to punish to be felt by the innocent as well as by the guilty. Miller translates, "*Even deserved punishment to the righteous does not seem good, when designed to chasten the willing with a view to holiness*," and explains his translation of the word generally translated *princes*, or *the noble*, by a reference to the Hebrew root from which it is derived and which may be rendered *willing* or *generous.* **27. Excellent**, rather a *cool* **spirit.**

The homiletic teaching of verse 1 is the same as that of chap. xv. 17. (See pages 421, 422.)

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 2.

THE FOOLISH SON AND THE WISE SERVANT.

I. High social position is not necessarily the outcome of mental ability or moral worth. Many a man is born heir to a great estate, or even to a throne, who brings shame upon the name he bears and the place he occupies. He may be inferior in intellectual power to many of the dependents upon the house, or he may be worse in his character than they are. Or if he is not so degraded in character, or of such limited ability as to be surpassed by the majority, there

may be one who serves him whose aim in life is far more lofty than his own, and who has far greater capabilities than he has.

II. A wise man will acquire influence, whatever position he fills. A servant who understands his duties, and conscientiously fulfils them, will win respect and confidence, and these will give him influence in his master's house, and over all with whom his business brings him into contact. There are many instances, both in the history of private families and in the history of courts, in which the judicious conduct of a subordinate person has averted evils which would otherwise have followed the crimes of a son of the house, and the father of such a son can but acknowledge such services, and reward them, if he is possessed of any gratitude. But whether he does so or not, it is an ordination of God's providence, which we see in constant operation around us, that *a wise man is a fool's master.* It is a law of nature that a stronger physical body shall govern the weaker, if no other power interferes, and it is a law in the universe of mind that the stronger mind shall rule the weak, and make it serve his purpose in some way. This is the secret of many of the social changes which are always going on, in which some who were born to affluence come down to penury, and those who were born in obscurity take their places.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Eliezer will show the custom that suggests the type. He was a *wise servant.* Abraham thought he would have to be his heir (Gen. xv. 2, 3). All commentators put "*son*" in apposition with him *who causes shame; i.e.*, make them the same person. But to be the same person they should be in the same form grammatically, and "*son*" is in the construct. The *causer of shame*, therefore, is the father. And this is more consistent, for a wise father could uphold a *son*, or could give the inheritance to other *brethren.* In the worldly sense there could be no difficulty. In the spiritual what noted instances!—in the Israelites, who, unlike Abraham, failed to command their households (Gen. xviii. 19), and who gave place to their bought servants, the hated Gentiles!—in Satan, who has given place to man (Psalm viii. 2)!—in modern men who have professed the faith, but have debauched their children till they see them hardening under their very eyes, and some far-off waif gets before them into the everlasting kingdom. Better, says the last proverb, the utmost poverty, with peace and love; better, says this proverb, the poorest hold upon the Church, if there be the humbler hold upon the service of the Most High.—*Miller.*

If wisdom make us free, then are we free indeed: as on the other side, he is altogether a servant that dealeth unwisely. But he that is wisdom's freeman is not only a freeman but a master, not only a master but a *son*, not only a son but an *heir*, *an heir among the brethren.* So highly doth wisdom exalt. But thus it is with the Father of the world, it is not so with worldly fathers. Their foolish love doth honour their son, though his foolish life doth fill them with shame: their proud carriage despiteth their servant, though his wise carriage exalteth their estate. The son shall have all though he deserve nothing, the servant shall not have his wages though they be due unto him. But the wisdom of God bestoweth His love, the justice of God divideth His inheritance in another manner. Oftentimes, even in this life, he putteth the servant in the son's place . . . Be wise, then, though thou be a servant, and thou shalt be His son who is the Father of wisdom. Be not wicked, though the son of rich parents, and, it may be, heir to a great estate, for He, the Lord of all, can quickly make thee a poor servant for thy sins, who has made thyself a servant to thy sins.—*Jermin.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 3.

THE TRIER OF HEARTS.

We have here an analogy implied between men's hearts and gold and silver.

I. Both have an intrinsic worth. Gold and silver have not only an artificial value, but they have qualities in themselves which render them of especial worth. So the heart of man—that spiritual and immortal part of him which constitutes him a man—is of priceless worth because of its infinite capacities of good and evil, its infinite capabilities of enjoyment and of suffering.

II. Both must be separated from worthless alloy if they are to attain their real value. Gold and silver are comparatively worthless until they are separated from every other mineral; they must be unalloyed with baser metal, or nearly so, before their intrinsic excellences and capabilities become apparent and they can be put to the uses for which they are so peculiarly fitted. So the human soul cannot rise to the high destiny to which it is appointed until there is a separation made between it and sinful habits, motives, and desires.

III. Both human souls and precious metals are subjected to a testing process. The gold and the silver ores are thrown into the crucible and placed over the fire, in order that it may be made manifest how much there is of real worth in them, and the human soul is subjected to trials of various kinds by the Great Searcher of hearts, in order that both the good and the evil that is therein may be seen, and the one separated from the other. The proverb seems rather to refer to the *testing*, than to the purifying process.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Trying is more than simply *discerning*. The Lord does not need to *try* in order to make any discovery for Himself. He "knoweth what is in man." But He "tries" in order to bring to light what may lie concealed from men, and especially from the individual himself. And this He does in order to the person's conviction and benefit; and that He may be vindicated in His final judgments He "tries," in different respects, both the wicked and the righteous. By the dispensations of His providence He often elicits the latent evils that are in the hearts of the ungodly and the worldly. He brings out their hidden abominations. He manifests the deceitfulness, the hypocrisy, the "desperate wickedness" of their "inward parts," their rebellions and unsubdued dispositions. He exposed the simulation of dissemblers, and of those whose religion only seems to thrive when their profession of it brings no suffering, and demands no sacrifice. . . . . In the same manner, too, does God try and bring out to view the inward graces and virtues of His children. And while disclosing He refines and purifies them, He detects and removes the alloy—the dross and tin of self and the world, separating the "vile" from the "precious," and so rendering the precious the more excellent.—*Wardlaw.*

Silver is refined by getting the silver out from among the dross. Christians are refined by putting the silver in among the dross, and refining the dross away. Men in a natural state are not an ore of silver, but are dross, and they are nothing else. He who sits to purify them (Mal. iii. 3) does not disengage the gold, but supplies it as He goes along. In other respects the emblem is complete. (1) The "*furnace*" takes out the dross. So does "*Jehovah.*" (2) The "*furnace*" burns out the dross. So does "*Jehovah,*" with biting flames. (3) The "*furnace*" is a gradual worker. So is God.—*Miller.*

Man trieth many things, and many things in man are tried by man. The *silver* of a man's *word* is tried by a wise care: the *gold* of a man's *deeds* is

tried by the fruit of them: the *silver* of a man's *wit* is tried by dangers and distresses, the *gold* of a man's *understanding* is tried by weighty and important business; the *gold* of a man's *strength* is tried by hard and burdensome labour; the gold of his *knowledge* by hard and difficult questions; the silver of a man's *diligence* is tried by the haste of affairs; the gold of a man's *faithfulness* by trust reposed in him: the silver of a man's estate is tried by a careful account, the gold of his virtues by troubles and temptations. Thus there is a *fining-pot for the silver, and a furnace for the gold:* and the heart of man trieth other things, but the *trier of the heart is the Lord alone.* The fine silver, the pure gold that lie in that, can be proved by nothing but by His touch. Whoever else taketh upon him to search the secrets of the heart, layeth open his own sin and folly. The heart itself cannot try itself; God is the goldsmith for it. Or else the original will bear well this sense, that God, by troubles, trieth the heart of man. Wherefore Tertullian saith, When we are burned in the heat of persecution then are we tried in the hold-fast of our faith. . . . . And surely if Seneca could say, "I gave thanks unto fortune because she would try how much I esteemed honesty, so great a thing ought not to stand me in a little," then certainly the servants of God ought to thank God when He, by troubles, trieth how well they love Him.—*Jermin.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 4.

The Evil Speaker and the Listener.

I. That which men give heed to reveals their character. If a man will listen to another whom he knows to be false—if he permits him to be continually pouring into his ear that which he knows to be untrue—he is a liar himself. He could not make himself a receiver of lies if he were not of a kindred spirit with the liar. We classify animals according to the food which they eat, and we can classify men when we know upon what mental and moral food they love to feed. He who gives heed to falsehood and lying lips is a false man himself.

II. Delight in wicked speech leads to wicked actions. Those who use ungodly language never stop there. There is but a step between wicked words and wicked deeds. Neither do those who begin by giving heed to men whose speech is prompted by him who is the father of lies (John viii. 44) stop with the mere listening. The listening, as we have seen, implies a certain degree of sympathy with the listener; this sympathy leads to imitation, and he who gives heed to false lips not only becomes himself a man of wicked speech but a "wicked doer."

III. The liar and he who listens to him divide the responsibility of the sin between them. These two characters help to increase each other's guilt by strengthening each other in their ungodliness. The liar is encouraged to go on in his lying by those who give heed to his lies; if there were none willing to listen to him he would soon cease to sin in this direction. So that the receiver of falsehood will have to share the punishment of him who propagates it. Then the liar increases the wickedness of the wicked doer by his false words, which help to make his heart yet more ungodly and his doings yet more wicked. Thus ungodly men exert a reciprocal influence upon each other for evil.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Wicked men have a great treasure of evil in their hearts, and yet have not enough to satisfy their own corrupt dispositions. They are like covetous men, in whom their large possessions only increase their lust of having, and

therefore they carry on a trade with other wicked men, who are able to add to their store of iniquity, by flattering and counselling them in sin.—*Lawson.*

"*A liar*" is of essential use to the evil-doer. He can suborn him. He can get him to bear witness in his favour—to perjure himself to get him off, when in danger of being convicted. Such characters, too, it may be noticed, are fond of the lies of *false teachers.* They keep their ear greedily open to these. They are soothed, and flattered, and encouraged by them in their evil courses. They cannot but like the doctrine that allays their fears; that palliates sin; that makes light of future punishment; that tells them of a God all mercy; that assures them of ultimate universal salvation. Thus it was of old; and thus it is still (Isa. xxx. 9-11). *Wardlaw.*

A man most mischievous himself yields most mischievously to the mischief of other sinners. "*A lie*" is the most weakly credulous. This is often noticed among the earthly. The biter is often most bitten, the tyrant most tortured. The cunning is often most caught, and what is singularly the fact, the sceptic is often the most believing. It is not a complete proverb, though, for earth, because it is not universal. It is spiritually, as with all these other texts, that the truth has no exception. The greatest harm-doer is Satan, and so the greatest harm is done to Satan. He is the father of lies, and has been the most lied to. He was more deceived in Eden than his victim, and on Calvary than the men who crucified our Lord. And all his followers take from the world equal mischief with that which they inflict upon it.—*Miller.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 5.

A Double Revelation.

I. Revealing crime. *He who mocketh the poor reveals his own character.* If we find one brother of a family mocking another brother, we feel that his conduct is a revelation of the state of his heart. We feel that such a man must be destitute of all right feeling—that he has no regard for their common parent—none of that tender feeling which ought to bind members of the same family. God has made of one blood all nations of the earth, and he who mocks the poor mocks one of the same great human family as himself, and thus shows that he lacks all true humanity and all right feeling towards the common Father of both. *The displeasure with which God regards such a man reveals the Divine character.* If the ruler of a country identifies himself with the most defenceless and friendless of his subjects—if he exacts the severest penalties for any wrong done to them—if, in short, he reckons an offence against them as committed against himself—he reveals that he is a man of true benevolence. The displeasure with which God regards not only them who oppress the poor, but also those who mock them—and a man does this when he gives empty words but no sympathy and help—reveals the tender compassion of His nature. On this subject see also Homiletics on chap. xiv., page 31.

II. An aggravated crime. "*He who is glad at calamities,*" etc. It is a sin both against God and human nature to mock the poor—to treat men with indifference and contempt because they are in a lowly station—because they are compelled to labour much and labour hard for the supply of their daily wants; he who is guilty of such conduct reveals a nature that is entirely opposed to the nature of God, and lays himself open to retribution. But when a man is not only indifferent to the miseries of others, but can actually find in them an occasion of gladness, he is as near to Satan in character and disposition as a man out of hell can be. He is not only ungodlike, but he is devilish. It is a prominent characteristic of the evil one that he finds a fiendish delight in the calamities of men, and a man cannot give a more convincing proof that

he is of his "father the devil" (John viii. 44) than by imitating him in this particular crime.

III. A heavy retribution. We can form some estimate of the weight of punishment which must fall upon this last offender, by remembering how God regards the first. If He convicts him who mocks the poor of casting reproach upon his Maker, how much more will he visit Him who "is glad at calamities."

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

So Tyrus is threatened, because she was glad at Jerusalem's calamities, saying, "I shall be replenished now she is laid waste" (Ezek. xxvi. 2). And Edom similarly (Obad. 12.)—*Fausset.*

It is a sad thing when one "potsherd of the earth," because it happens to have got from the hand of the potter a little gilding and superficial decoration, mocks at another "potsherd of the earth" which chances to be somewhat more homely in its outward appearance, or, perhaps, formed of a little coarser material than the other; both the work of the same hands, and both alike frail, brittle, and perishable.—*Wardlaw.*

Why should I, for a little difference in this one particular of worldly wealth, despise my poor brother? When so many and great things unite us, shall wealth disunite us? One sun shines on us both; one blood bought us both; one heaven will receive us both, only he hath not so much of earth as I, and possibly much more of heaven.—*Bishop Reynolds.*

To pour contempt upon the current coin with the king's image on it, is treason against the sovereign. No less contempt is it of the Sacred Majesty, to despise *the poor*, who have, no less than the rich, the king's image upon them (Gen. ix. 6). This view marks the contempt of the poor as a sin of the deepest dye.—*Bridges.*

If God should appear in human shape, would we dare to insult him? Would not the fear of a just and dreadful vengeance deter us? And to mock the poor, amounts to the very same thing. God did actually appear in our nature, and He was then poor for our sakes; and those that despise the poor, despise them for a reason that reflects upon our Saviour Himself when He dwelt among us.—*Lawson.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 6.

FATHERS AND CHILDREN.

Two things are implied in this proberb:—First, that the fathers are good men. An aged man who is not a godly man cannot in any sense reflect any glory upon his descendants. Secondly, that the children are also godly and true, otherwise they are anything but a crown to their parents. The Wise Man is here speaking of those who are in both relations what God intended them to be. When such is the case—

I. The children bring honour to their parents. They testify that the parents have trained them in the way that they should go—that they have given them a good example as well as good advice, and every child is then like a separate mirror, reflecting the character of the godly parent by whose influence he has become what he now is. And the greater number of these mirrors there are, the more brilliant is the crown of honour which is worn by the godly ancestor whose virtues are thus reproduced in his children and in his children's children, even long after he has left the world. Every tribute of respect that is paid to the children is another jewel placed in the crown of the godly ancestor.

II. The parents are the glory of their children. Men glory in being

descended from ancestors who have been great warriors or who have left them a vast inheritance of material wealth, but an inheritance of goodness reflects as much more glory upon those who are its heirs as the glory of heaven exceeds that of earth. Goodness holds a very old patent of nobility, and when children can boast of a long line of God-fearing ancestors, they can boast of a dignity which is as old as God. To be the descendants of those who are now before the throne of God is a glory before which all earthly glory fades away.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 7.

A Twofold Incongruity.

I. Truth from the mouth of a godless man. This is not an unknown case. A man of immoral practices may inculcate precepts of purity—a dishonest man may, for the purpose of cloaking his own character, be loud in his praises of integrity and uprightness. But the speech of such a man will fall powerless on his hearers, even if they do not know thoroughly the character of the speaker. There will be a lack of the true ring of sincerity about his words—being words only, and not convictions, they will be "as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal." Suppose that a barrister, who was very ignorant of law and possessed of very limited mental capacities, having undertaken the defence of an important case, were to apply to one of his most learned and eloquent legal brethren to write his speech for him. When he got up to deliver that which was not the production of his own mind—that which he was not able thoroughly to appreciate himself—would not the listeners be struck with a sense of incongruity, would they not feel that, however good the arguments, however vivid the illustrations, however powerful the appeals, there was something lacking—that the speaker was a stripling wearing the armour of a giant? Something of this same feeling is experienced when an immoral man gives utterance to moral sentiments—he does not know the meaning of his own words, he lacks the experience necessary to give weight to what he says. He speaks what is in itself true, but he is not a true man himself, and consequently the utterance is like a "jewel of gold in a swine's snout."

II. Untruth from the mouth of a man of exalted station. A prince (*i.e.*, one who holds a high place among his fellow-men) is especially bound to be a man of truth and honour. It is here implied that he is to be an embodiment of truthfulness—that whether he owes his position to wealth, to birth, or to intellectual gifts—whatever else he lacks, he ought to be a truthful man; his words ought to be excellent, and they ought to be the reflection of excellence of character.

III. The second incongruity is more mischievous than the first. "Excellent speech becometh not a fool, *much less* do lying lips a prince." If a moral fool is a man who holds no position in the world, what he says will not be of so much consequence, because his influence upon others is little. He will injure himself, and those immediately connected with him, but the harm done will not be so widely spread as if he were one of the great of the land. The first man, if he puts on a garb of morality, and adopts language which does not represent his true self, is a liar, but his lying does not injure others so much as it does himself. But a "lying prince" is an instrument of wide-spread evil. To lie in a cottage is a sin against God and man, but to lie in a palace is a greater sin, because the inmate of a palace holds in his hand an immense power for good and for evil. What he says and does is felt more or less indirectly throughout his dominion, and as his responsibility is so great, the guilt of using it wrongly is great also.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

God likes not fair words from a foul mouth. Christ silenced the devil when he confessed Him to be the Son of the Most High God. The leper's lips should be covered, according to the law.—*Trapp.*

Lying lips are no less unbecoming in the mouth of a prince, who ought to honour the dignity of his station by the dignity of his manners. A prince of our own is said to have frequently used this proverbial saying, "He that knows not how to dissemble knows not how to reign." You may judge from the text before us whether he deserved to be called the Solomon of his age. It was certainly a nobler saying of one of the kings of France,—that if truth were banished from all the rest of the world it ought to be found in the breasts of princes. A man's dignity obliges him to a behaviour worthy of it, and of him whose favour has conferred it. All Christians are advanced to spiritual honours of the most exalted kind. They are the children of God, and heirs of the eternal kingdom, and ought to resemble their heavenly Father, who is the God of truth. When a young prince desired a certain philosopher to give him a directory for his conduct, all his instructions were comprised in one sentence, "Remember that thou art a king's son." Let Christians remember who they are, and how they came to be what they are, and act in character.—*Lawson.*

Force not thyself above, degrade not thyself below thy condition.—*Wohlfarth.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 8.

THE POWER OF GIFTS.

I. All men value gifts. Whether they be gifts which are of intrinsic value from their beauty or their rarity or whether they are of little worth in themselves, but are the expressions of the love and gratitude of those who offer them, there is a certain pleasure in receiving them. A free-will offering is more acceptable to a right-minded man than that which is bestowed upon him as a matter of necessity. The fact that it is a gift invests it with a value beyond that which would otherwise be attached to it—makes it as a "precious stone" to the receiver. The good-will that prompts the gift turns a pebble into a diamond.

II. All the blessing of a gift does not rest with the receiver.—As a precious stone reflects rays of light in whichever way it is held, so generous-hearted liberality blesses him who gives as well as him who takes. The giver has the gratitude and love of the recipient and experiences the truth of the words of the Lord Jesus: "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts xx. 35). (For the opposite meanings which different commentators attach to the word gift, see Critical Notes.)

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

1. Those that have money in their *hand* think they can do anything *with* it. Rich men, whithersoever they turn this sparkling diamond, expect it should dazzle the eyes of all, and make them do just what they would have them do in hopes of it. 2. Those who have money in their *eye* will do anything *for* it. It has great influence upon them, and they will be sure to go the way it leads them.—*Henry.*

Viewed as referring to the person who *confers* the gift, or *has it to bestow*, —we may notice *first*, that the reference may be to the man who *is known* to have something to bestow *which all*

covet. In this case, every one desires his favour, strives to oblige him, tries every means of insinuation into his good graces. A man who has any skill in manœuvring may, in this way, render what he has to confer a capital instrument for pushing forward his own prosperity; keeping all in expectation,—cherishing hope,—making his desired and coveted gift look first one way, then another, then a third; perhaps partially bestowing, and still reserving enough to hold expectants hanging on, so as to have them available for his own ends. *Secondly:*—On the part of those who have gifts to bestow, uses may be made of them that are honourable and prudent,—quite consistent, not with mere self-interest, but with right principle. They may be employed to avert threatened evil, and for the more sure attainment of desired good. Such was Jacob's gift to his brother Esau; when, in setting it apart, he said, "I will appease him with the present that goeth before me, and afterward will I see his face." Such was the gift of the same patriarch, at a later period, to "the man the lord of the country," when he sent his sons the second time to Joseph in Egypt.—*Wardlaw.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 9.

How to Make Friends and How to Separate them.

We have before noticed various ways in which love covers sin or transgression. (See Homiletics of chapter xv. 12, page 157.) This proverb sets forth—

I. That he who thus covers sin is a great benefactor of the human race. The great need of a fallen world is such a state of heart as will promote love among men. One of Christ's last commands to his disciples was "*Love one another as I have loved you*" (John xvi. 12). And there is no more effectual way of promoting love than by freely forgiving an offence and at the same time endeavouring to turn the transgressor from the error of his way. A stream in winter may, by reason of the biting cold, be congealed into a rock-like solid mass, but when the summer sun shines upon it, it cannot long resist the influence, but melts and begins again to ripple and sparkle under its beams. So a sense of guilt and shame hardens the human heart, but a consciousness that the sin has been freely forgiven and forgotten melts it into contrition and love if it is not utterly dead to moral influences. This is the great power which binds sin-forgiven men and women to God—having been forgiven much they love much (Luke vii. 47-50).

II. A man of opposite character is a curse to his race. Friendship is the greatest boon of human existence, and he whose words or deeds tend to break any such tie does his fellow-men a great wrong. There is no more effectual way of doing it than by a constant repetition of the faults of others, either by reminding the offender himself of his shortcomings or by speaking of them to a third person. Solomon may refer to either of these habits—both are bad, and show a disposition entirely opposed to that of Him who, when he forgave His ancient people, promised that He would "remember their sin no more" (Jer. xxxi. 34).

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Seeketh love! A beautiful expression, much to be kept in mind! It shows a delight in the atmosphere of *love*—man's highest elevation in communion with his God (1 John iv. 16). It implies not the mere exercise of *love*, where it is presented, but the searching and making opportunity for it. But how seldom do we rise to the high standard of this primary grace, exalted as it is pre-eminently above "the best gifts" (1 Cor. xii. 31; xiii.); and

illustrated and enforced by no less than the Divine example! (Eph. v. 1, 2.) Yet too often it sits at the door of our lips, instead of finding a home in our hearts; forgetting that the exhortation is not, that we should *talk* of *love*, but that we should "walk in it;" not stepping over it, crossing it, walking by the side, but "*in it*," as our highway and course. One step of our feet is better than a hundred words of the tongue.—*Bridges.*

All *unnecessary repetition* even of *real* faults comes under the category of *scandal*, and is sinful and mischievous. You may fancy you are within the limit of blameworthiness, when you are telling no more than what is *true:* but, if you are telling even truth *needlessly*, for no good and laudable end, you are chargeable with the offence.—*Wardlaw.*

Alas! how many things are there to be suffered, how many things to be forgotten, how many things, though seen, to be as it were unseen, that love may be preferred. He that covereth transgression warmeth affection, and he that seeketh the love of man shall be sure to find the love of God. The way to seek and find other things is by uncovering that which is hid; but the way to seek and find love is by covering the offence.—*Jermin.*

If one has been our enemy it has been for some trespass. The best way to abate the enmity is to cover up and smother over, and thus erase from memory our act against him. He that does this "*seeks love.*" "He who falls back into the wrong," *i.e.*, iterates or doubles over his offence, drives away everything. (See Critical Notes.) . . . Spiritually, a man is not to complain of the alienation of his Maker, if he wilfully retain his sin. If God has given us a special way for *covering sin*, and we postpone it, and go tumbling back into our acts, the strife is ours. —*Miller.*

There are two ways of making peace and reconciling differences; the one begins with amnesty, the other with a recital of injuries, combined with apologies and excuses. Now I remember that it was the opinion of a very wise man, and a great politician, that "he who negotiates a peace without recapitulating the grounds of difference rather deludes the minds of the parties, by representing the sweetness of concord, than reconciles them by equitable adjustment." But Solomon, a wiser man than he, is of a contrary opinion, approving of amnesty, and forbidding a recapitulation of the past. For in it are these disadvantages: it is as the chafing of a sore; it creates the risk of a new quarrel (for the parties will never agree as to the proportions of injuries on either side); and, lastly, it brings it to a matter of apologies: whereas either party would rather be thought to have forgiven an injury than to have accepted an excuse.—*Lord Bacon.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 10.

CORRECTION MUST BE ADAPTED TO THE CHARACTER OF THE OFFENDER.

I. Some men can be influenced by moral means. A man whose moral nature is developed can be brought to a sense of error by an appeal to his own sense of right and wrong. Although he has fallen into sin he does not love it, and the rebuke from without finds an echo in the monitor within his own breast. His susceptibility to reproof arises—1. *From a deep sense of his obligations to God.* He knows what God has done to put away sin and its effects from the universe, and gratitude to Him opens his ear and his heart to reproof. 2. *From a sense of his own true interest.* A man would be counted a fool if he were to be angry with the physician who desired to free him from the dominion of a bodily disease, and a morally wise man is too keenly alive to the worth of his own soul not to listen to a wise reproof.

II. But there are men who can only be aroused to a sense of wrong-doing by physical suffering. Such men, by a long course of crime or by a constant resistance of moral influences, have sunk almost to the level of the brute. They are like the horse and mule which have no understanding, whose mouth must be held with bit and bridle (Psalm xxxii. 9). Nothing can awaken their sleeping consciences but severe and startling judgments or bodily chastisement, and even these "stripes" may fail to bring them to a right state of mind. Let men, then, beware, lest being often reproved and hardening themselves against it (ch. xxix. 1), they become so callous to the words of God and good men, or to the visitations of Providence, as to be "past feeling." (Eph. iv. 19).

ILLUSTRATION.

It was a maxim of Bishop Griswold—"when censured or accused, to *correct*—not to justify my error." A certain minister, with more zeal than discretion, once became impressed with the thought that the bishop was a mere formalist in religion, and that it was his duty to go and warn him of his danger. Accordingly he called upon the bishop, very solemnly made known his errand, and forthwith entered upon his reproof. The bishop listened in silence till his visitor had closed a severely denunciatory exhortation, and then in substance replied as follows :—"My dear friend, I do not wonder that they who witness the inconsistency of my conduct, and see how poorly I adorn the doctrine of God my Saviour, should think I have no religion. I often fear for myself that such is the case, and feel very grateful to you for giving me the warning." The reply was made with such evidently unaffected humility, and with such deep sincerity, that if an audible voice from heaven had attested the genuineness of his Christian character it could not more effectually have silenced his kindly intending but mis-judging censor, or more completely disabused him of his false impressions.—*Episcopal Record.*

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Fools have sometimes received correction and made a good use of it, but they were fools no longer, for the rod and reproof gave them wisdom; but it is a sign that folly is deeply ingrained when an hundred rods leave men as great fools as they found them.—*Lawson.*

A look from Christ brake Peter's heart and dissolved it into tears. . . . But Jeroboam's withered hand works nothing upon his heart.—*Trapp.*

The folly of simplicity is a softness of nature; the folly of sin is a hardness of heart; the folly of conceit is a stiffness of will, and little doth a rod enter into any of them. For though the first be soft, it is hard to work upon it, although it be with hard and many strokes of the stick. The woolliness of the sheep's skin keeps back the force of the beating rod. . , The rock in the wilderness first denied water to the Israelites, as, withstanding nature's force and the first stroke of Moses, it resisted as opposing the infidelity of sin, to the second stroke it yielded as submitting to God's power. But it is not the power of God's rod that enters into a fool.—*Jermin.*

A needle pierces deeper into flesh than a sword into stone.—*Bridges.*

David is softened with *Thou art the man;* but Pharaoh remains hardened under all the plagues of Egypt.—*Henry.*

Even amongst the children of God themselves there are great diversities of temper; some requiring harder dealing than others to bring them down, and to reclaim them from their follies, as is the case often with children in the same family. A word, or a look, will go with melting and heart-breaking power to the very soul of one, while the severest correction, and oft-repeated, will fail to bring down the stubborn and fractious spirit of another. O for more of the spirit of Job and less of the spirit of Jonah!—for more of that truly child-like disposition which gives way before every divine admonition, which melts into penitence under the eye of an offended God, and looks up with a child's submission at the slightest touch of His corrective rod! *Wardlaw.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 11—13.

PHASES OF EVIL.

I. The main characteristic of a sinner is that he is a rebel against the moral order of the universe. "He seeketh only rebellion." The planets in their courses describe their orbits in obedience to the law of gravitation, and because they do so the order of the heavens is preserved. God is the sun of the moral universe, and before sin entered it all His creatures kept the path of obedience to His will, held to their allegiance by the love and confidence which they bore to their Lawgiver. But sin snapped the bond, and the word sinner stands for one who has broken away from the moral law of God; every sinner seeketh rebellion.

II. A sinner is a restless being. He *seeks* rebellion. These words seem to depict the restless character of the ungodly man. When a soul has lost its centre of gravity—when the will of God is not the polestar of life—it drifts about in obedience first to one lawless passion and then another, following in the footsteps of the great leader of rebellion, the first sinner, who, by his own confession, is continually going to and fro in the earth, and walking up and down in it (Job. i. 7).

III. A sinner is an injurious man. No man can set himself in antagonism to the law of God, which tends to the happiness of his creatures, without bringing misery upon others, and the more determined his rebellion the more cruel are the effects of his sin upon them. A bear is naturally a cruel beast, but when a bear is robbed of what her instinct leads her to guard most jealously she is an object to be dreaded and avoided. Yet a wicked man is more to be feared, for there are in him capabilities of mischief beyond those possessed by the furious brute. The anger of the beast might be diverted or appeased—even a bear robbed of her whelps would forget her anger if a carcase were thrown in her path upon which she might wreak her vengeance. But the wrath of an angry man is less easily appeased. The mischief which the furious bear can do is more limited. The superior skill of man can soon put a stop to the ravages of a wild beast, but the angry folly of a single fool has often destroyed many lives and broken many hearts.

IV. A sinner is an ungrateful being. Many an ungodly man would deny this charge, but everyone who continues in a state of rebellion against God is continually rewarding evil for good. But the sin of the text doubtless refers to the ingratitude towards a fellow-man. This sin cannot be charged home upon every ungodly man—there are those who, though careless of rendering to God that which is His due, are content with rendering to their fellow-men evil for evil, and would not knowingly render evil for good. But while the heart is in a state of rebellion against its rightful sovereign, every evil tendency is continually growing stronger, and men by degrees descend to depths of evil from which they would once have recoiled with horror.

V. God will, sooner or later, call His rebellious subjects to account. Although men sometimes go on in open rebellion against God for many years, not one shall finally escape. A writ has been issued for the apprehension of each one, although the execution is in some cases deferred. "*Every one of us shall give an account of himself to God*" (Rom. xiv. 12), and the messenger that summons the ungodly man to the Divine tribunal will be "cruel" because looked at through the medium of a guilty conscience.

VI. The sinner brings evil upon his posterity. It is a truth which is illustrated by the experience of our daily life that no man stands alone in the world—that the sins of the fathers are, in some measure, visited upon the children—that "whoso rewardeth evil for good," not only brings evil upon himself but upon "*his house.*"

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Verse 11. God sometimes employs terrible messengers to chastise His own people. When David numbered his subjects, 70,000 of them were destroyed in three days by a visible messenger of severity, under the direction of an invisible minister of providence. If God takes such vengeance of the rebellions of some whom He pardons, what will the end be of them that seek only rebellion!—*Lawson.*

God hath forces enough at hand to fetch in His rebels. . . . The stones in the walls of Aphek shall sooner turn executioners than a rebellious Aramite shall escape unrevenged.—*Trapp.*

Many things there are which an evil man proposeth to his seeking: sometimes pleasures, sometimes profit, sometimes honour, sometimes favour, but in truth it is only rebellion against God that is sought by him. For these things are not to be found in the ways of wickedness, and therefore it is only his deceived imagination that looketh for them there. But rebellion against God is found in all his ways.—*Jermin.*

There are men that are summoning a cruel messenger to be sent against themselves. . . . They are "only the rebellious." A door of mercy! and a ransom fixed for sin! and only one class to fail! and they spontaneously rebels! These are the men that go in search of evil, and this is the meaning of the wise man.—*Miller.*

Ver. 12. Witness Jacob's sons putting a whole city to fire and sword for the folly of one man; Saul slaying a large company of innocent priests; Nebuchadnezzar heating the furnace sevenfold; Herod murdering the children in Ramah; "Saul breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord"—was not all this the rage of a beast, not the reason of a man? Humbling, indeed, is this picture of man, once "created in the image of God" (Gen. i. 27).—*Bridges.*

For the "fool," what a meeting! when he has been robbed of every earthly chance! and is dead eternally! and the "*folly*," that has robbed him, is shut up with him in everlasting misery!—*Miller.*

See Miller's rendering of the verse in Critical Notes.

Ver. 13. To render good for evil is Divine, good for good is human, evil for evil is brutish, evil for good is devilish.—*Trapp.*

The most striking illustration of this sentence, is the history of the Jewish nation. Never was such ingratitude showed to any benefactor, as they showed to the Son of God, and never was the punishment of any people so dreadful, and of so long continuance. That scattered people proclaim to every nation under heaven how dangerous the sin of ingratitude is, especially when God our Saviour is the object of it.—*Lawson.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 14.

THE BEGINNING OF STRIFE.

I. This moral pestilence is of great antiquity. It began with the angels who "kept not their first estate" (Jude 6), and from that far-distant period until now the universe has never been free from discord—good and evil have striven against each other, and strife has also reigned between those who are on the side of evil. There was strife between the first two human brothers born into this world, and since the day when Cain slew Abel because his own works were evil and his brother's righteous, this terrible enemy of human happiness has been slaying his victims wherever men were to be found.

II. Strife is a thing of growth. There is a moment when the fire which

will presently destroy a town is only a tiny spark which the breath of a child could extinguish,—the leak which at last sinks the vessel and sends a hundred brave men to a watery grave was once no larger than a pin-hole—and the breach in the dam through which a torrent of water rushes, leaving desolation behind it, begins with an opening through which not more than a few drops of water can force their way. So it is with strife. It does not attain to its full dimensions in a moment. The hatred in the heart which is the root of strife may be at first but a passing feeling, but if it is not overcome at its first appearance it grows in strength from day to day. And its outward manifestation in strife may begin with but a few angry words—an apparently trifling disagreement. But those who have indulged in it will presently find themselves in the grip of a giant—overmastered, and carried headlong by passion to crimes of which they once thought it impossible they could ever be guilty.

III. If the miserable effects of strife are to be avoided, it must be attacked in its beginnings. Seeing how disastrous are the effects of the leak in the ship, and how much desolation is caused by the ravages of fire or the bursting forth of pent-up water through its banks, it behoves all who are in any way responsible in these matters to be watchful for the first indications of mischief, and to put a stop to it before it gets beyond their power. And if a man would avoid being a party to a quarrel, he must watch narrowly the first risings of anger in his heart and take care that he never utters the *first* angry word. If the *first* remains unspoken, a *second* can never pass his lips; but if in an unguarded moment the angry feeling finds an outlet in angry speech, the speaker himself cannot tell where and how the mischief will end. It may go from words of strife to deeds of strife, and both will entail more misery upon their author than upon him who is the subject of them. The self-interest of every man ought to prompt him to check the beginnings of strife in himself and in others; it is so great an enemy to our social well-being that we are all as much interested in putting a stop to its ravages as we are in arresting the progress of a pestilential disease. But the children of God are specially called to this work. They are bound to be imitators of their Father in this matter, and He is "the God of peace" (Rom. xv. 33). All the plans and purposes of God have for their aim "peace on earth" (Luke ii. 14), and His children ought to emulate His example. And they cannot do otherwise. They have been made partakers of the Divine nature (2 Peter i. 4), and the nature of God is eminently peace-loving. If, therefore, a man has been born of God He must delight in social peace and harmony—he must recoil from strife and discord. It is *peacemakers* who shall be called "*the children of God*" (Matt. v. 9), and "*He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now*" (1 John ii. 9).

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Man is a sociable-living creature, and should converse with man in love and tranquillity. Man should be a supporter of man; is he become an overthrower? O apostasy, not only from religion, but also from humanity! The greatest danger that befalls man comes from where it should least come, from man himself. Lions fight not with lions; serpents spend not their venom on serpents; but man is the main suborner of mischief to his own kind. . . . . God hath hewn us all out of one rock, tempered all our bodies of one clay, and spirited our souls of one breath. Therefore, saith Augustine, since we proceed all out of one stock, let us all be of one mind. Beasts molest not their own kind, and birds of a feather fly lovingly together. Not only the blessed angels of heaven agree in mutual harmony, but even the very devils of hell are not divided, lest they ruin their kingdom. We have one

greater reason of love and unity observed than all the rest. For whereas God made not all angels of one angel, nor all beasts of the great behemoth, nor all fishes of the huge leviathan, nor all birds of the majestical eagle, yet He made all men of one man.—*T. Adams.*

We are but several streams issuing from one primitive source; one blood flows in all our veins; one nourishment repairs our decayed bodies; we are co-habitants of the same earth, and fellow-citizens of the same great commonwealth; and he that hates another detests his own most lively picture; he that harms another injures his own nature. . . . . The heavenly angels when they agree most highly to bless and to wish the greatest happiness to mankind, could not better express their sense than by saying, "Be on earth peace, and good will among men."—*Barrow.*

It is easier to abstain from a contest than to withdraw from it.—*Seneca.*

Both the destructive elements—fire and water—illustrate the danger of the beginning of strife (chap. xxvi. 21). To neither element can we say, "Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further!" (Job xxxviii. 11). . . . . Seldom when we have heard the first word do we hear the last. An inundation of evil is poured in. . . . . The bank is much more easily preserved than repaired. . . . . For, as one strongly observed, "Man knows the beginning of sin, but who bounds the issues thereof?"—*Bridges.*

Quietness is like a pleasant pond full of sweet fish sporting themselves up and down in it, and multiplying continually to a great increase; so in a quiet life men's affairs do prosper, and their estate is increased to plenty and abundance, so that they bathe themselves in the comfort of it. But let the sluice be taken up, the fishes are quickly gone, the waters stay not until they be gone also, and nothing but mud and mire is left; and even so let the gap of contention be opened, all comforts flee away, and usually the estates sink lower and lower until it be dried up to beggary and misery. Make up, then, all breaches as soon as they appear, or rather keep all sound by watchfulness, so that no breach may appear. And let not the serpent get in his head, for, because the scales of his body stand the other way, it is not easy to get it out again; because the mind of thine adversary is made averse from thee, it is not easy to end a strife begun.—*Jermin.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 15.

I. A present inversion of moral order. There is an established law, by which things spiritual are governed as well as things material. According to this law, punishment ought to come to the unrighteous, and the righteous should be justified; that is, they should be declared to be righteous and treated accordingly. This law must and will prevail in the upshot and issue of things, because the Great Lawgiver of the universe is perfectly just and holy; but it does not always govern the dealings of men with men. Injustice may be meted out to a man by his fellow-man from *ignorance.* A human judge may pass an unjust sentence upon a prisoner, or society may condemn a man undeservedly simply because they are ignorant of all the facts of the case. We are so little capable of weighing all the motives of our fellow-creatures, that we may unwittingly sometimes justify the wicked and condemn the just. But the proverb is evidently directed against those who do it because they are themselves *unrighteous*—against those who are prompted by motives of self-interest or malice or by a simple hatred of good wherever it is found.

II. A future restitution of moral order. If a man has an ear for music, all discordant tones are displeasing to him; but when the law of harmony is entirely subverted, all his musical sensibilities are outraged. So when a

righteous man becomes cognizant of some gross injustice his whole soul rises up in protest against it. What therefore must be the light in which the perfectly pure and just God regards such subversion of moral order? He can but regard it with repugnance. But the certainty of this fact makes another fact no less certain—viz., that there will come a period in the history of the universe when this inversion shall cease, when moral order shall be restored, and it shall be no longer possible for the wicked to be justified, or for the righteous to be condemned. Thus saith the Lord, "*Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness. . . . . which justify the wicked for reward and take away the righteousness of the righteous from him. Therefore as the fire devoureth the stubble, and the flame consumeth the chaff, so their root shall be as rottenness, and their blossom shall go up as dust; because they have cast away the law of the Lord of hosts, and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel*" (Isa. v. 20, 23, 24). When this sentence is completely carried out moral order and harmony will be restored to the universe.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

This verse shows that the term justify (Hebrew, *matzeddik*) is forensic, to *pronounce just* one, even though not just in himself; a keyword in the doctrinal Epistle to the Romans: the opposite of "*condemn*" or *pronounce impious (mareshiang).—Fausset.*

That "*both*" should be, the expression "*even*" seems to point to as wonderful. They are both very plain propositions; and yet neither of them, in the mind of the sinner, is free from half-conscious surprise. That God "will by no means clear the guilty" (Exod. xxxiv. 7), and, therefore, that "without the shedding of blood is no remission" (Heb. ix. 22), when learned, is half the gospel. To learn it easily, would imply that "then hath the offence of the Cross ceased" (Gal. v. 11). God will not condemn Himself in His "righteous" action, and He cannot "*justify the wicked*" without a mediator; and Solomon, without being able to clear all the difficulties, sets in this sentence as one of the great timbers of thought, which he looks to to defend the gospel. —*Miller.*

He spareth the wolf and so hurteth the lambs; He toucheth the members of Christ and the very apples of the Lord's eye.—*Muffet.*

But let us place ourselves before the "Judge of all" accused by Satan, our own conscience, and the righteous law of God; convicted of every charge; yet justified. Does God then in thus "justifying the ungodly" (Rom. iv. 5) contravene this rule? Far from it. If He *justifies the wicked*, it is on account of righteousness (Ib. iii. 25, 26). If He *condemns the just*, it is on the imputation of unrighteousness. Nowhere throughout the universe do the moral perfections of the Governor of the world shine so gloriously as at the cross of Calvary. The satisfaction of the holy law, and the manifestation of righteous mercy, harmonise with the justification of the condemned sinner. And this combined glory tunes the song of everlasting praise.—*Bridges.*

That condemning the just is a grievous crime, there is no doubt. But some will be startled at the wise man's assertion, that justifying the wicked is a crime of the like nature and malignity. But we rebel against God by turning to the right hand, as well as by turning to the left, from that way in which we are commanded to walk. Justifying the wicked has an appearance of mercy in it, but there is cruelty to millions in unreasonable acts of mercy to individuals. It was not altogether without ground observed by a senator to the Emperor Cocceius Nerva, when his detestation of his predecessor's cruelty seduced him into extremes of clemency,—That it was bad to live in a

state where every thing was forbidden, but worse to live in a state where every thing was allowed. Historians tell us, that the provinces of the empire suffered more oppression under the administration of this mild prince, than in the bloody reign of Domitian.—*Lawson.*

As in the administration of justice, in the world or in the Church, so in the official declaration of doctrine and of duty, *faithfulness* is the first and most essential qualification. No "gift," no bribe, no love of gain,—or, in the apostle's words, "greed of filthy lucre," —must ever be allowed to corrupt "the man of God," and tempt him either to pervert or to keep back the truth—to "shun to declare" any part of "the counsel of God," or to utter a single sentiment but what he believes to be a lesson of God's word, a divinely authorised message. For a minister of Christ either to say what is false or to withhold what is true, from a wish to please those on whom he may feel himself dependent, is as unworthy of him as for a judge on the civil bench to pervert justice, and may be to others unspeakably more mischievous. The decisions of the latter can affect only what is temporary; the effects of the former's unfaithful temporising may extend to eternity. The guilt of the former, therefore, may be greater than that of the latter, in the proportion of the value of the *soul* to the *body*, of *eternity* to *time*. There must be no bribery or corruption here. O to be able to say with Paul, "I am clear from the blood of all men."—*Wardlaw.*

When Jacob, blessing the sons of Joseph, put his hands across, and laid his right hand on the head of Ephraim the younger, and his left hand on the head of Manasseh the elder, the thing displeased Joseph. But Jacob refused to have his hands removed. Now that which Jacob did in the blessing of his grandchildren, the same is the cursed doing of many who in the world are seated in the place of justice. For those whom God setteth on His right hand they set on the left, those whom God setteth on His left hand they set on the right. . . And though God Himself call to them, *Not so*, yet they refuse to alter their sentence. . . And though their hands in justifying go across, yet being joined together in wickedness they are both an abomination to the Lord.—*Jermin.*

He that saith to the wicked, thou art righteous (1) condemneth the law of God, for that condemneth the wicked; (2) doth as much as he may to bring sin into credit, that others also should practise it without fear or reproach; (3) hardeneth the heart and hurteth the soul of the offender, debarring him from corrections, which are God's medicines for the curing of evils. He dealeth as a murderer under the name of a physician that encourageth his patient to eat the poison freely.—*Dod.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 16.

NEGLECTED OPPORTUNITIES.

I. One of the uses which ought to be made of wealth. Men ought to use it to "get wisdom." It is obvious that a wealthy man has more opportunities of gaining knowledge than a poor man has, and an increase of knowledge ought to make a man wiser. A rich man's wealth gives him access to the wisdom of the great minds of past ages, and it often obtains for him the companionship of the most learned men of his own generation. It enables him to gain a knowledge of the world on which he lives and of the men who people it; by travel he can stand face to face with all the glorious works of God in nature, and he can mingle with men of various races and see human nature in all its various phases. And these experiences ought to make him a wise man. Wealth is given to men for this purpose, among others, to make them intellectually and morally better—

for although spiritual blessings cannot be purchased for money, yet where the grace of God is in the heart, the "price in the hand" will increase a man's opportunities of growing in the knowledge of God and in the practice of godliness. Those who are "*rich in this world*" may and ought to lay "*up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life*" (1 Tim. i. 17–19). Their wealth ought not to be a hindrance but a help to high spiritual attainments. When we use bread rightly we get strength out of it; when we use water rightly we get refreshment out of it; when we use light rightly we get guidance out of it; and when the gift of wealth is rightly used, men get wisdom out of it.

II. Wealth bestowed, where we can give no reason for its bestowal. Wealth in the hand of a fool seems thrown away. If we saw a bundle of bank-notes in the hands of an infant we should at once say they were in the wrong hand; but many a princely fortune is at the disposal of men who are as incapable now of putting it to a good use, as they were when they were children. Neither the head nor the heart are capable of guiding the hand—there is neither moral nor intellectual capability to make the riches the means of blessing even the possessor. "*Wherefore,*" then, "*is there a price in the hand of a fool to get wisdom,*" especially when there are so many men in poverty who would make the best possible use of riches? We cannot answer the question. Even the wise man does not attempt to solve the problem. Men daily come face to face with facts connected with human existence which they cannot explain. In some of these they can see adaptation; although they cannot tell *how* it is that the thing is so, they can discern a *fitness* in its being so. But there are other facts in the government of God for which we can assign no reason, and the "price in the hand of a fool" is one of them. The Divine Ruler of men's destinies fulfils His wise purposes in ways and by means which often perplex His finite creatures."

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

We understand the term "*a price,*" as signifying *whatever puts it in anyone's power to acquire* the particular object. The phraseology is borrowed from the *market.* Any article, we are wont to say, may be had there, if a man has but the price to pay for it. What the "*price*" is to the article wanted, the *means of acquiring* are to "*wisdom.*" When we wish to put any article of ordinary merchandise within a person's power, we furnish that person with the price at which it is valued. There are cases, however, in which this may not be enough. The price may be in a man's hand, and yet the article may not be within his reach, not, at the time, to be had. Happily, it is never so with the wisdom here spoken of. If the means are possessed of acquiring it, it may always be acquired. It is in the hand of God himself; and He is never either at a distance that we cannot repair to Him, or unwilling to bestow it upon us when we come to Him for it—*bestow* it, I say, for we must remember, with regard to divine wisdom, that, in a literal sense, it *cannot be purchased.* It must be had "*without money and without price.*" It is not to be "gotten for gold." Why is it, then, that in so many cases in which "the price is in the hand to get wisdom," the means of securing it possessed, its lessons remained unlearned, the mind ignorant, the heart unimproved? . . . Here is the answer—the only one that can with truth be given,—there has been "*no heart to it.*" The principle is of wide application, and might be largely illustrated. . . There is no maxim more thoroughly established by experience, than that a man cannot excel in anything to which *his heart does not lie.* When do men succeed best in the pursuit of any object? Is it not when they *have a heart to it?* What is it

that keeps all men astir in the pursuit and acquisition of wealth? Is it not that *they have a heart to it?* How do men acquire celebrity in any of the departments of science or of art? Is it not when they *have a heart to it?* —some measure of enthusiastic eagerness and persevering delight in the pursuit? . . . I put it to your consciences,—whether there be anything else whatever, that keeps you from the knowledge and the fear of God, wherein true religion consists, than your *having no heart to them?* Talk not to me of *inability:*—your inability is entirely moral, and consists in nothing else whatever than your "*having no heart*" to that which is good. And is this not criminal? If not, then there is no sin nor crime on earth, in hell, in the universe; nor is the existence or the conception of such a thing as moral evil possible. The want of heart to that which is good, is the very essence of all that is sinful. You offer anything but a valid excuse for your want of religion, when you say you "*have no heart to it.*" You plead in excuse the very essence of your guilt. If you desired to fear God, and could not help the contrary, your inability might be something in your behalf. But the thing cannot be. To desire to fear God, and not to be able, is a contradiction in terms. The having of the desire is the having of the principle. There can be no desiring to fear without fearing, no desiring to love without loving.—*Wardlaw.*

No means can make a man wise who wanteth a good will to learn heavenly wisdom. Ishmael had good education, and Ahithophel had quick capacity, and the fool spoken of in the Gospel had great wealth, and none of all these attained to any grace. One of them was strong, and another witty, and another wealthy, but never a one wise and godly. Judas had as good a teacher as Peter, or any other apostle, and had as good company, and saw as many miracles; and yet they having good hearts became worthy and excellent persons, and he having a false heart became a traitor and a devil.—*Dod.*

Wherefore serve good natural parts, either of body or mind; or authority, opportunity, or other advantages, if they be not rightly improved and employed? Certainly they will prove no better than Uriah's letters to those that have them; or as the sword which Hector gave to Ajax, which, so long as he used it against his enemies, served for help and defence, but after he began to abuse it, turned into his own bowels. This will be a bodkin at thy heart one day: "I might have been saved, but I woefully let slip those opportunities which God had thrust into my hand." —*Trapp.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSES 17, 18, *and of CHAP. XVIII.* 24.

TRUE FRIENDSHIP.

I. A true friend loves under all conditions. 1. *He loves in times of separation.* The distance between our earth and the sun does not prevent the one from influencing the other—there is a power in gravitation which can make itself felt even when the objects affected by it are thousands of miles apart. So true love is quite independent of space—oceans may roll between the friends, yea, the very grave may separate them, and yet the gravitating force which first drew the heart of one man to another will make itself felt. It has been said that the dead and the absent have no friends, but this is a libel upon human nature. A friend loveth whether the object of his love is present or absent, and will, if needs be, defend his friend's character when he is not present to speak for himself. 2. *He loves even in times of temporary estrangement.* Transitory differences are not incompatible with the most genuine friendship, and while human nature is in its present imperfect condition it will

sometimes happen that one real and true friend will disappoint and grieve another. But if the real and true feeling is in the heart it will be as unshaken by these temporary disturbances as the root of the tree is by the storm-wind that moves its branches.

II. Friendship is especially precious in times of trial. True friends are not like the locust, which seeks only the green pastures and fruitful fields, and leaves them as soon as it has taken from them all that it could feed upon, but they are like the stars, the value of whose light is only really understood when all other lights are absent. When all is going well with a man he may underestimate the value of his friend's regard; he may not really know how heartfelt it is; but when misfortune, or sickness, or bereavement overtake him, he realises that a "brother is born for adversity."

III. There is a bond stronger than any tie of blood-relationship. We have abundant and melancholy proofs that the mere fact of being brothers according to the flesh does not make men one in heart. The first man who tasted death was murdered by his brother, and many sons of the same father since that day have been separated from each other by a hatred as deep and deadly as that which prompted Cain to murder Abel. In the family in which Solomon was a son there was one brother with the blood of another upon his head (2 Sam. xiii. 28–30). Something stronger and deeper than the mere tie of blood is needed to make men one in heart. The most beautiful example of friendship upon record existed between the son of Saul and the shepherd of Bethlehem where there was no relationship according to the flesh, and where the heir-apparent to the throne loved as his own soul the youth who was to supplant him. There is no friendship so firm and enduring as that which is based upon doing the will of God (Mark iii. 35), no brotherhood so perfect and lasting as that which has its origin in a common discipleship to Him who is not ashamed to call them brethren (Heb. ii. 11), and who is Himself the "Friend above all others," whose love can span the distance between His throne in glory and the meanest hovel upon earth, and the greater distance between Divine perfection and human sinfulness, and who was in all things "*made like unto his brethren*," that having Himself "*suffered being tempted, He might be able to succour them that are tempted*" (Heb. ii. 17), and thus prove Himself to be pre-eminently the "Brother born for adversity," and the "Friend that sticketh closer than a brother."

IV. It is an evidence of great folly to treat men as bosom-friends before we know them. There are men who will trust in a comparative stranger to such an extent as to lend their credit and their good name to him without any reasonable security. Such a man Solomon here characterises as being "void of understanding." It is a mark of a fool to enter into any engagement without deliberation, and in nothing does lack of wisdom more plainly manifest itself than in the formation of hasty friendships, especially if the friendship involves a man in any kind of suretyship. From lack of prudence in this matter many a man has been "all his lifetime subject to bondage." It behoves all men in the matter of friendship to follow the advice of Polonius:—

> The friends thou hast, and their adoption tried,
> Grapple them to thy soul with hooks of steel;
> But do not dull thy palm with entertainment
> Of each new-hatched, unfledged comrade.

ILLUSTRATION OF TRUE FRIENDSHIP.

Damon was sentenced to die on a certain day, and sought permission of Dionysius of Syracuse to visit his family in the interim. It was granted on condition of securing a hostage for himself. Pythias heard of it, and volunteered to stand in his friend's place. The king visited him in prison, and conversed with him about the motive of his conduct, affirming

his disbelief in the influence of friendship. Pythias expressed his wish to die, that his friend's honour might be vindicated. He prayed the gods to delay the return of Damon till after his own execution in his stead. The fatal day arrived. Dionysius sat on a moving throne drawn by six white horses. Pythias mounted the scaffold and thus addressed the spectators, "My prayer is heard; the gods are propitious, for the winds have been contrary till yesterday. Damon could not come, he could not conquer impossibilities; he will be here to-morrow, and the blood that is shed to-day shall have ransomed the life of my friend. Could I erase from your bosoms every mean suspicion of the honour of Damon, I should go to my death as I should to my bridal." . . . . As he closed a voice in the distance cried, "Stop the execution!" and the cry was taken up and repeated by the whole assembly. A man rode up at full speed, mounted the scaffold, and embraced Pythias, crying, "You are safe now, my beloved friend! I have now nothing but death to suffer, and am delivered from reproaches for having endangered a life so much dearer than my own." Pythias replied, "Fatal haste, cruel impatience! What envious powers have wrought impossibilities in your favour? But I will not be wholly disappointed. Since I cannot die to save you, I will not survive you." The king was moved to tears, and, ascending the scaffold, cried, "Live, live, ye incomparable pair! Ye have borne unquestionable testimony to the existence of virtue, and that virtue equally evinces the existence of a God to reward it. Live happy, live renowned, and oh! form me by your precepts, as ye have invited me by your example, to be worthy of the participation of so sacred a friendship."

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Ver. 17. "*The Friend.*" We are to notice the article. It does not impair the proverb for its secular use. We have such an idiom: "*the friend,*" *i.e.*, *the true friend.* Even a worldly friend, to be worth anything, must be for all times; and what is a brother born for, but for distress? But spiritually, the article is just in its place. There is but One Only "*Friend,*" and a "*Brother*" who would not have been "*born*" at all, but for the distress and straitness of His house.—*Miller.*

Friendship contracted with the wicked decreases from hour to hour, like the early shadow of the morning; but friendship formed with the virtuous will increase like the shadow of evening till the sun of life shall set.—*Herder.*

Extremity distinguisheth friends. Worldly pleasures, like physicians, give us over, when once we lie a-dying; and yet the death-bed hath most need of comforts. Christ Jesus standeth by His in the pangs of death, and after death at the bar of judgment; not leaving them either in their bed or grave. I will use them, therefore, to my best advantage; not trust them. But for Thee, O my Lord, which in mercy and truth canst not fail me, whom I have found ever faithful and present in all extremities, kill me, yet will I trust in Thee.—*Bp. Hall.*

A friend shares my sorrow and makes it but a moiety; but He swells my joy and makes it double. For so two channels divide the river and lessen it into rivulets and make it fordable, and apt to drink up at the first revels of the Syrian star; but two torches do not divide, but increase the flame. And though my tears are the sooner dried up when they run on my friend's cheek in furrows of compassion; yet when my flame has kindled his lamp, we unite the glories, and make them radiant, like the golden candlesticks that burn before the throne of God; because they shine by numbers, by unions, and confederations of light and joy.—*Jeremy Taylor.*

When a man blind from his birth was asked what he thought the sun was like, he replied, "Like friendship." He could not conceive of anything as more fitting as a similitude for what he had been taught to regard as the most glorious of material objects, and whose quickening and exhilarating influences he had rejoiced to feel.—*Morris.*

A brother for adversity is one who will act the brother in a season of adversity. Of such an one it is said, *he must or shall be born*, possibly, *he is born.* I do not understand this last clause unless the assertion is, that none but such as are *born brethren*, *i.e.*, kindred by blood, will cleave to us in distress. Yet this is true only in a

qualified sense. But another shade of meaning may be assigned to the passage, which is, that such a man as a friend in adversity *is yet to be born*, *i.e.*, none such are now to be found; thus making it substantially equivalent in sense to the expression: "How few and rare are such faithful friends."—*Stuart.*

As in the natural, so in the spiritual brotherhood, misery breeds unity. Ridley and Hooper, that when they were bishops, differed so much about ceremonies, could agree well enough, and be mutual comforts one to another when they were both prisoners. Esther concealed her kindred in hard times, but God's people cannot; Moses must rescue his beaten brother out of the hand of the Egyptian, though he rescue his life by it.—*Trapp.*

Man in his weakness needs a steady friend, and God in His wisdom has provided one in the constitution of nature. Not entrusting all to acquired friendship, He has given us some as a birthright inheritance. For the day of adversity a brother is born to many who would not have been able to win one. It is at once a glory to God in the highest, and a sweet solace to afflicted men, when a brother or a sister, under the secret and steady impulses of nature, bears and does for the distressed what no other friend, however loving, could be expected to bear or do. How foolish for themselves are those who lightly snap those bonds asunder, or touch them oft with the corrosive drops of contention! One who is born your brother is best fitted to be your friend in trouble, if unnatural strife has not rent asunder those whom their Maker intended to be one in spirit. . . . . "*There is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother.*" He must be a fast friend indeed, for a brother, if nature's affections have been cherished, lies close in, and keeps a steady hold. . . . Oh, when hindering things are taken out of the way of God's work, a brother lies very close to a brother. He who comes closer must be no common friend. . . . It is the idea of a friendship more perfect, fitting more kindly into our necessities, and bearing more patiently with our weaknesses, than the instinctive love of a brother by birth. From God's hand-work in nature a very tender and a very strong friendship proceeds: from His covenant of mercy comes a friendship tenderer and stronger still. Now, although the conception is embodied in the communion of saints, its full realisation is only found in the love wherewith Christ loves His own. . . . The precious germ which Solomon's words unfold, bore its ripened fruit only when He who is bone of our bone gave Himself the just for the unjust. Thus by a surer process than verbal criticism, we are conducted to the man Christ Jesus, as at once the Brother born for adversity, and the friend that sticketh closer than a brother. . . . . In the day of your deepest adversity even a born brother must let go his hold. That extremity is the opportunity of your best friend.—*Arnot.*

Ver. 18. It is good to try him whom we intend for a bosom friend before we trust him; as men prove their vessels with water before they fill them with wine. Many complain of the treachery of their friends, and say, with Queen Elizabeth, that in trust they have found treason; but most of these have greatest cause, if all things be duly weighed, to complain of themselves for making no better choice.—*Swinnock.*

Seeing he hath not understanding to keep himself from hurt, it were good if he had not power in his hand to do himself hurt. . . . Surely such a fool may quickly wring his hands together in sorrow, who before did clap his hands in joy, and may strike himself in anger with the same hand, wherewith in the foolish kindness of surety he struck the hand of another. . . . . For often this over-kind part of a friend is the breaking of friendship if it bring no further mischief.—*Jermin.*

The evil effects of *strife* and *pride*, which form the subject of verse 19, have been treated before. See on verse 14, and on chaps. xi. 2, and xvi. 18. Some expositors attach a slight difference to the meaning of the latter clause. See below.

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"*Sets high* (exalteth) *his gate;*" a figure that is probably misunderstood. It probably means *belligerence.* A moat over which issued armed bands, with banners and mounted spearmen, required high space to let them go forth. "Lift up your heads, O ye gates," etc. The soul that fixes itself that way against the Almighty, ready to march out upon Him on any occasion of quarrel, "*seeks*" ruin.—*Miller.*

The slothful man exposes himself to misery; but he waits for it till it comes upon him like a traveller. The aspiring man, that cannot be happy without a stately dwelling, and a splendid manner of living beyond what his estate will bear, *seeks for* destruction, and sends a coach and six to bring it to him.—*Lawson.*

"*And he that exalteth his gate seeketh destruction.*" Some take this for a comparison:—As surely as he that exalteth his gate (enlarging it out of due proportion) seeketh destruction to his house, by thus weakening its structure,—*so surely* does he that loveth strife generate transgression. The phrase "*exalteth his gate,*" however, instead of being thus understood literally, may, with more propriety, be interpreted of a man's *ambitiously affecting a style of living beyond his income*—disproportionate to the amount of his means of maintaining it. The *general character* is described by one particular manifestation of it—the high style of the exterior of his mansion. The "exalting of the *gate,*" applies to the entire style of his household establishment—not to his dwelling merely, but to his equipage, his table, his servants, his dress, and everything else. He who does this "*seeks destruction:*" he courts his own downfall, as effectually as if it were his direct object to ruin himself. Matthew Henry, in his own quaint and pithy way, says—"He makes his gate so large, that his house and estate go out at it."—*Wardlaw.*

There is none that loveth strife more than he that *exalteth his gate,* either the gate of his ears to hear the tales of others, and the praises of himself, or else the gates of his eyes overlooking others with scorn and disdain, and his own worth by many degrees, or else the gate of his mouth, which is properly the gate of man, with big and swelling words, with high and lofty terms which usually are the sparks that kindle contention. But what doth such an one do, but even *seek for destruction,* which at his lifted-up gate, findeth easy passage to run in upon him.—*Jermin.*

For homiletics on the subjects of verses 20 and 21, see on chapter x., 1, 13, 14, etc., and on verse 24.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 22.

THE MERRY HEART.

I. The mind acts upon the body. It is a fact which no observant man would deny, that there is an intimate connection between sorrow of soul and sickness of body, and that cheerfulness of spirit tends to physical health. A physician always tries to keep his patient in good spirits, and when he discerns that he is weighed down by some mental burden, he wisely seeks to lighten that as well as to administer remedies to the body. And when a man is in health cheerfulness of disposition tends to keep him so; while a depressed condition of mind makes him a more easy prey to disease. That "a merry heart doeth good like a medicine, but a broken spirit drieth the bones," is a convincing proof of the mysterious sympathy that exists between the *man* and his *earthly dwelling-place.*

II. What will conduce to cheerfulness of spirit—to what Solomon here calls "a merry heart"? 1. *A heart at peace with God.* Some poisons taken into the system produce for a time a calming and quieting influence upon the body, but it is a quiet and a calm which comes from deadening the capabilities of feeling. Opium may send a man to sleep, but it is a sleep which gives neither refreshment nor strength. A quiet conscience is the first and indispensable element of heart-cheerfulness, and there are other methods of getting free for a time from pain of conscience beside "that peace with God which comes from being justified by faith" (Rom. v. 1). But all other quiet of soul comes from opiates whose power is but for a time, while this peace comes from the consciousness of reconciliation with God—from a sense of standing in a right relation to all that is right and true in the universe. 2. *A vivid realization of unseen realities.* Though a state of reconciliation with God will give freedom from the sense of guilt, it does not always give that active state of cheerfulness which can be called "a merry heart." A river sometimes glides along between its banks in a state of undisturbed calmness; but there are times when the volume of water is so great that it overflows its channels. Peace is like a calm river, but joy is like one whose waters cannot contain themselves within its boundaries, but must pour forth on the right hand and on the left. *Peace* has been defined as "love resting," and joy as "love exulting." The one is a passive state of mind, while the other is active. But it is the latter, rather than the former, which makes that cheerful spirit which "doeth good like a medicine," and it is the fruit only of a vivid sense of "things not seen" (Heb. xi. 1). Those who live on high lands and breathe the pure mountain air, are conscious of an exuberance of animal life, of which even perfectly healthy people who live in the valleys know nothing. So, men who live in the higher regions of spiritual life know a "joy in God"—are sensible of an uplifting of spirit—to which ordinary and every-day Christians are strangers. They are not only *believers*, but they are filled with "all joy and peace in believing;" they not only have "peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ," but they "rejoice in hope of the glory of God" (Rom. v. 1, 2). 3. *A life of active love.* A selfish man can never be a cheerful man—he who lives for himself alone can never know the healing power of "a merry heart." There can be no abiding cheerfulness of heart without joy in God, and there can be no abiding joy in God without love to man. "There is nothing," says *Dr. Maclaren*, "more evanescent in its nature than the emotion of religious joy, faith, or the like, unless it be turned into a spring of action for God. Such emotions, like photographs, vanish from the heart unless they be fixed. Work for God is the way to fix them. Joy in God is the strength of work for God, but work for God is the perpetuation of joy in God."

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Mirth is short and transient, cheerfulness fixed and permanent. Those are often raised into the greatest transports of mirth who are subject to the greatest depressions of melancholy. On the contrary, cheerfulness, though it does not give the mind such an exquisite gladness, prevents us from falling into any depths of sorrow. Mirth is like a flash of lightning, that breaks through a gloom of clouds, and glitters for a moment; cheerfulness keeps up a kind of daylight in the mind. . . . . Cheerfulness is the best promoter of health. Repinings and secret murmurs of heart give imperceptible strokes to those delicate fibres of which the vital parts are composed, and wear out the machine insensibly; not to mention those violent ferments which they stir up in the blood, and those irregular disturbed motions which they raise in the animal spirits. I scarce remember, in my own observation, to have met

with many old men, or with such who (to use our English phrase) wear well, that had not at least a certain indolence in their humour, if not a more than ordinary gaiety and cheerfulness of heart. The truth is, health and cheerfulness mutually beget each other. —*Addison.*

The verb means, *to cure*, and, as far as we can fix it, the noun means, not a *medicine*, but a final "*cure.*" In the world at large cheerfulness is an immense gift; but in religion the wise man wishes to say that hopefulness is strength (Neh. viii. 10); that it is better to look cheerfully upon God, than with complaints; that if we are to be *cured* at all, a glad heart will help it.—*Miller.*

All true mirth is from rectitude of the mind, from a right frame of soul. When faith hath once healed the conscience, and grace hath hushed the affections, and composed all within, so that there is a sabbath of the spirit, and a blessed tranquillity lodged in the soul, then the body also is vigorous and vigetous, for most part in very good plight and healthful constitution, which makes man's life very comfortable. . . . . They that in the use of lawful means *wait on the Lord, shall renew their strength* (Isa. xl. 31).—*Trapp.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 23.

BRIBERY.

I. Its nature. An act of bribery may be committed without any monetary transaction taking place. It is not necessary that gold should pass from hand to hand to make a man guilty of bribery. It is not even necessary that there should be a distinct promise of any good either in the present or the future. A man bribes another if he merely implies by word or deed that he can make him suffer for speaking what he knows is the truth, and for acting according to the dictates of his conscience. And a man is guilty of accepting a bribe if he abstains from such speech or action from a fear of loss or from a hope of gain, although no distinct promise or threatening has been made by those whom he wishes to propitiate.

II. Its cause. Want of integrity on the part of both the man who offers the bribe and him who accepts it. There are some men in the world to whom even a man who held their lives in his hand would not think of offering a bribe of any kind. He knows it would be as useless to attempt to make such men swerve from the path of right as to try to alter the course of the earth round the sun. There are many, we know, in this country, notwithstanding its many timeservers and place-hunters who, like Samuel of old can say, "*Whose ox have I taken, or whose ass have I taken, or whom have I defrauded, whom have I oppressed, or of whose hands have I received any bribe to blind mine eyes therewith?*" (1 Sam. xii. 3). Only one thing is needed to destroy bribery—in its most impalpable and shadowy forms as well as in its more glaring and shameless manifestations—and that is universal honesty of character. When every man loves truth and right more than he loves material gain then bribery will cease, but not before. Men may be restrained by shame from being guilty of it openly, and will call it by some less obnoxious name, but the spirit of bribery will be at work so long as there are men upon the earth who love gain more than godliness.

III. The universal testimony of the human conscience against it. "The wicked man taketh a gift *out of his bosom*"—it is a transaction of secrecy—there is a shame connected with the act which proves that conscience condemns it. The man who offers the bribe does not do it openly, which shows that he is fully conscious that he is transgressing the law of right; and the man who

accepts it does not boast openly that he has done so for the same reason. Bribery is a sin which is repeatedly denounced by God (Isa. i. 23, 24; Ezra xxii. 13), but men who have not possessed the light of revelation have denounced bribery as a crime.

IV. Its effect. It "perverts the ways of justice." Its effect is to bring about that abomination mentioned in verse 15—the justification of the wicked and the condemnation of the just. (See Homiletics on that verse.)

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

An honest man would rather lose his cause, however just, than gain it by such a base thing as a bribe. It must have been a great bondage for Paul to have been confined in a prison, when he loved the pulpit so well, had not his will been sunk in the will of God; yet he would not offer the least bribe to his covetous judge, who detained him in prison, expecting that money would be offered for his freedom (Acts xxiv. 6).—*Lawson.*

Is not the child of God often pressed with this temptation? Does the influence of a gift, the sense of obligation, never repress the bold consistency of godliness? Does no bias of friendship, no plausible advantage, entice into a crooked path?—*Bridges.*

There is a gift of thankfulness, there is a gift of reconciliation, there is a gift of goodwill, all these are lawful. Besides these there is a gift of corruption; this is unlawful.—*Muffet.*

Bribery is an officious fellow, and a special bidder to the fatal banquet. (Prov. ix. 17, 18.) He invites both forward and froward: the forward and yielding by promises of good cheer, *secunda dies*, that they shall have a fair day of it; the backward, honest man, by terrors and menaces that his cause shall else go westward (indeed, it goes to Westminster!). Yea, with pretence of commiseration and pity, as if the conscience of their right did animate him to their cause. Thus with a show of sanctimony they get a saint's money; but indeed, argentum fæcundum, argumentum *facundum*,—there is no persuasion more pathetical than the purse's. Bribery stands at the stairfoot in the robes of an officer, and helps up injury to the place of audience; thus Judas's bag is drawn with two strings, made of silk and silver, favour and reward. All officers belong not to one court; their conditions alter with their places. There are some that seem so good that they lament the vices, whereupon they yet inflict but pecuniary punishments. Some of them are like the Israelites, with a sword in one hand and a trowel in the other, with the motto of that old emblem, *In utrumque paratus;* as the one daubs up justice, so the other cuts breaches of division. They mourn for truth and equity, as the sons of Jacob for Joseph, when themselves sold it; they exclaim against penal transgressions. . . . If the party be innocent, let his cause be sentenced for his innocence's sake; if guilty, let not gold buy out his punishment. If the cause be doubtful, the judge shall see it worse when he hath blinded his eyes with bribes. But the will of the giver doth transfer right of the gift to the receiver. No; for it is not a voluntary will. But as a man is willing to give his purse to the thief rather than venture life or limb, so the poor man gives his bribes rather than hazard his cause. Thou sayest the thief has no right to the purse so given; God saith, Nor thou to the bribe. . . Far be from our souls this wickedness, that the ear which should be open to complaints is thus stopped with the ear-wax of partiality. Alas! poor Truth, that she must now be put to the charges of a golden ear-pick, or she cannot be heard.—*T. Adams.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 24 IN CONNECTION WITH THE FIRST CLAUSE OF VERSE 22.

THE EYES OF A FOOL AND THOSE OF A WISE MAN.

I. Even a fool is conscious that there is good to be found. If we meet a traveller in search of a certain city, even although he is journeying in the very opposite direction to that in which the city lies, yet the fact that he is journeying at all shows that he is conscious of its existence. His eyes may be turned away from it instead of towards it, his feet may be carrying him every moment farther from it, yet he would not be seeking it in any direction if he had not a persuasion that it was in existence. A man may be digging for gold in a soil in which gold has never been found, nor ever will be, but the fact that he is digging anywhere proves that he is alive to the fact that there is gold in the world. So the fool is here represented as seeking—which shows that he is persuaded that there is a certain good and desirable thing which is attainable. Most men are seeking—"*There be many which say, Who will show us any good?*" (Psalm iv. 6). They are in one direction and another looking for that which will satisfy and ennoble them, and this universal quest proves a universal sense of the existence of some desirable good.

II. But the fool looks afar for what he needs while it is close at hand. An idle, unpractical man of business spends his time in fancies that he could make his fortune if he were in some far-off land, and all the time misses the opportunities of doing so which are within his reach at home. The idle youth dreams of the great things he would do if he were a man, and neglects to do that which would ennoble and bless his present life. It is a very common characteristic of moral fools to imagine that they would be blest if they possessed something which is entirely beyond their reach, whereas means of obtaining the only real and lasting good are scattered around them so abundantly that they trample them every day under their feet. Every sinful man feels that it would be good for him to stand in a different relation to God, but he does not always seek that good in the direction in which it is to be found. He feels his need of a different disposition and character, but he does not go in quest of them where they may be found. In verse 22 the wise man traces this habit of the moral fool to its source. He finds "no good" because he "is froward in heart." The fruitlessness of his search is due to nothing else but to his own perversity. He would rather demand external evidence for the truth of revelation than test it by compliance with its precepts. He excuses his neglect of the plain commands of God, by dwelling upon mysteries connected with His gospel, which finite minds cannot solve. Israel of old was warned against this error. "*For this commandment which I command thee this day, it is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that thou shouldst say, Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it and do it? Neither is it beyond the sea, that thou shouldst say, Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it and do it? But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it* (Deut. xxx. 11–14). And Paul convicts them of the same sin after the coming of the Messiah. The Scribes and Pharisees in the days of Christ perversely looked everywhere for light, except to the moral sun which was shining in their midst.

III. The man whose understanding is enlightened not only knows what he needs, but he knows where to find it. It is a mark of practical sagacity in human affairs to know what is wanted, and to know also where to look for a supply of the want. A traveller ought not only to know the name of the city which he

wants to find, but he ought to know upon which road to travel to find it. The physician ought not only to know what his patient needs, but he ought to know where to find the remedy. The statesman ought to be able to detect the nation's needs, and he ought also to know where to look for a supply of the need. And so in every department of social life. A man's life will be a failure if he can only discern that something is wanting in himself, in his family, or in his business, but does not know where to turn to supply the want. So is it in spiritual things. But he who is morally wise knows what is the real good to be aimed at, and knows where to seek it. He knows that "*happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding*, that "*the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold*" (chap. iii. 13, 14). And he knows that it is "before him"—that the "*fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding*" (Job. xxviii. 28); and that he need not go "to the ends of the earth" in quest of this, but that it is within the reach of every sincere and earnest seeker. (Many expositors give this verse a different rendering. See Critical Notes. It would then express a truth similar to that contained in Homiletics on chap. xiii. 14, page 313).

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Heaven is able to know so much more plainly than hell. The very thing which is the best enlightener, the minds of hell will be entirely without. "The depth saith, It is not in me; and the sea saith, It is not in me. Destruction and death say, We have heard the fame thereof with our ears." Hell, therefore, will always cavil. If saints judge better than sinners, how much better God than saints, "*Wisdom is before* (His) *very face*," while the "*eyes*," not of the "*stupid*" only, but of Gabriel himself, must be in the respect of the contrast, "*at the end of the earth.*" "*At the end*," not in the middle, where the thing can be best judged, but at the dark extremity.—*Miller.*

The countenance is the glass of the mind, and the star of the countenance is the eye. "In the face of the prudent wisdom is present." In the whole countenance of the discreet person, and in every part thereof, there is a wise moderation; for in his brows he carrieth calmness, in his eyes modesty, in his cheeks cheerfulness, in his lips comeliness, in his whole face a certain grace and staidness. "But the eyes of the fool are in the ends of the earth." On the contrary, he who is simple or vain governeth not his very eyes aright, but letteth loose unto them the bridle in such sort as that they roll or rove after every vanity, or pry into every corner.—*Muffet.*

We must not only learn wisdom, but keep it in our eyes, that it may be a light to our feet; for a man that has wisdom in his mind, and forgets to use it, is like one that has money in his chest, but forgets to carry some of it with him when he is going a long journey, to bear his necessary expenses. He will be at a great loss, on many occasions, that has money in his house, but none in his pocket.—*Lawson.*

"*But the eyes of a fool are in the ends of the earth.*" He has no fixed and steady principle or rule; nothing on which he fixes his eye for his guidance. His thoughts are incessantly wandering after matters he has nothing to do with,—anything and everything but that which he should at the time be minding;—roving after every vanity, and keeping steadily to no pursuit. It is specially true of "things pertaining to salvation." Wisdom, in this matter above all others, is "before him that hath understanding." He looks to one point. He sees *one thing to be needful.* He sees the wisdom of God providing for it. There he fixes. And this is wisdom. It is ever before him. *One* end—*one* means. Whereas "the fool's eyes are in the ends of the earth." He

has examined nothing. He roves at random, with no determinate ideas about the most interesting, by infinite degrees, of all concerns. Ask him *how he hopes to be saved*, and you immediately discover his thoughtless unsettledness. He is in "the ends of the earth." His answer is to seek. It is here, it is there, it is nowhere. He hesitates, he supposes, he guesses, he is at a stand—he cannot tell. . . . . There is another character that may here be meant, namely, the *schemer*, the *visionary projector*. The truly intelligent man applies the plain and obvious dictates of common sense to the attainment of his end; but the scheming visionary fool is ever after out-of-the-way plans, new and far-fetched expedients.—*Wardlaw.*

Wisdom is full in the sight of the man of understanding, he beholdeth the beauty and perfection of it, he looketh into the worth and happiness of it. He sets it before him as a pattern, by which he frameth and ordereth all his ways, all his doings. His eye is never from it. It is the glass by which he espieth out the blemishes and defects of his life, and if he see in it a true resemblance of himself, it is not the glass that must be said to be true, for that cannot be false, but it is himself that is a man of true worth; the glass approving his goodness, not he the goodness of the glass. But a fool beholds wisdom as a thing afar from him; he discerneth not what it is, nor what is the glory and excellency of it: he perceiveth nothing whereby either to take direction from it, or liking to it. He thinketh that he must go to the ends of the earth to get it, and if ever, it is in the end of his life, that he hath any sight of it. . . . . Or else we may understand the latter part of the verse thus: That a fool's eyes are in the ends of the earth, because in any trouble or distress he looketh all up and down the earth from one end of it to the other for help and succour, and in the end as a fool remaineth helpless. But wisdom is before him that hath understanding, and stooping his eyes from looking too much that way, turneth them and directeth them up to heaven, where help ought to be sought and is sure to be found.—*Jermin.*

Verse 25 is a repetition of the thought in verse 21. For Homiletics and Comments see on chap. x. 1.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 26.

SMITING THE JUST.

This verse has been variously rendered and explained. (See Critical Notes and the comments of different expositors.) It suggests, however—

I. That punishment in itself is sometimes necessary and desirable. When the laws of the family are wise and good, it is a great misfortune for the children, and a great sin against them, not to visit their transgressions with a suitable punishment. And it is absolutely essential to the existence of a well-ordered state, that there should be punishment for those who rebel against righteous laws. Civil rule is of Divine ordination—"the powers that be are ordained of God" (Rom. xiii. 1). When, therefore, there is no just cause for civil rebellion, it is a sin not only against the state but against the Ruler of all the kingdoms of the earth, to break the established laws. Punishment forms a necessary part of the government of the universe. God has, both by example and precept, shown its necessity. When there was rebellion in heaven against a perfect government, punishment followed, which was proportioned to the greatness of the transgression—the sentence passed upon the first rebel in the universe and upon those who were confederate with him was a terrible one, but it was only commensurate to the exceeding magnitude of the offence. If rebellion against such a govern-

ment had been allowed to go unpunished, it would have made way for universal anarchy. And a community of any kind without punishment for transgressors, is lacking in a most essential element of its peace and stability.

II. **But those whose moral character fits them to be the awarders of punishment are often the victims of it.** The natural and right order of things in this respect is often exactly the reverse of what it ought to be, and just and noble men are treated as transgressors and suffer the punishment which ought to fall upon their persecutors. Might is very far from being right in this world, and even in this country Richard Baxter stood at the bar while Judge Jeffries sat upon the bench. The apostles of the Lord suffered scourging at the hands of the council at Jerusalem (Acts v. 40); Paul was condemned to death by Nero, and Incarnate Righteousness was crucified between two thieves at the instigation of some of the worst men that the world has ever seen. In all these cases, and in ten thousand others, the just were smitten, and as a rule they have suffered, not merely *although* they were righteous, but *because* they were so—it was their integrity that aroused the enmity of their persecutors—these moral "*princes*" were "*stricken for equity.*"

III. **Such an abuse of power will in its turn be visited with punishment.** Those who have thus unjustly condemned the righteous, have found in their own personal experience that "to punish the just is *not good*"—"not good" for their own peace of mind—not good for their future reputation—not good for the nation who instigated them or permitted them to do the deed. Haman found that it was not good for him to aim a blow at the upright Mordecai when he was himself hanged upon his own gallows; the Persian princes found it was not good to strike a prince for equity when they were themselves cast into the den of lions; Judge Jeffries found it out when he lay face to face with death in the Tower. And among all the nations whose history has confirmed the truth of the text, none stands out so prominently as that one whose king was the author of the proverb. The punishment of the *just*—the striking of *moral princes* for equity—was one of the most prominent of their national crimes, and He whose death at their hands filled up the measure of their iniquity, declared that it was the great cause of their national ruin. "*Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous, and say if we had been in the days of our fathers we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves that ye are the children of them that killed the prophets . . . Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and Scribes; and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them ye shall scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city; that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar*" (Matt. xxiii. 29-35). The Jewish nation has been for nearly nineteen centuries a witness that "to punish the just is not good, nor to strike princes for equity."

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Even deserved punishment to the righteous does not seem good when designed to chasten the willing with a view to holiness. "*Even.*" This seems to have been treated as a word *de trop.* King James' men make it *also;* as though Solomon grew tired of sameness, and broke the monotone by a new opening vocable. But with the above rendering it takes its usual sense. "*Righteous.*" This word and "*punishment*" bear the weight of the word "*even.*" *Even the righteous,* who ought to know better; and "*even*

punishment," which the righteous, at least, ought to be willing to bear.—*Miller.*

Often is the wise man's meaning much beyond his words. *To punish the just* not only *is not good,* but it is "the abomination" (verse 15)—"an evident token of perdition" (Philip. i. 28). If rulers are "a terror to good works," they are ministers of God in authority, but ministers of Satan in administration. And how will such injustice "abide the day of His coming," when He shall "lay judgment to the line, and righteousness to the plummet!"—*Bridges.*

The word *prince* signifies *noble,* and is differently understood. It may be applied to the nobility of *station,* or to that of *mind.* Some give preference to the latter; and by interpreting it of the *noble-minded,* and the "*just*" in the former clause, of *the righteous* or the *people of God,* make the two clauses thus to correspond, and to have much the same import. It seems, however, both more natural and more comprehensive to consider *two* ideas as expressed; the one relating to the duty of the *ruler,* and the other to that of the *ruled.* It is the incumbent duty of the ruler, on the one part, to administer justice with strict impartiality. It is the duty, on the other part, of subjects to countenance, encourage, and support the ruler in the equitable administration of his trust. To "*strike*" is evidently to be understood, not literally alone of actual striking, but of "smiting with the tongue" as well as with the fist or the rod,—of all kinds of vituperation and abuse, and attempts to bring the throne into disrepute and odium, and unsettle its stability, by shaking the confidence and attachment of the community. There are many occasions in which a man may be tempted to this. He may, in particular cases, have his mind biassed by pride, by self-interest, by partiality towards a friend, by political predilections; so that even when all has been done with impartial investigation, and the judgment pronounced according to the legitimate rules of evidence and demands of equity, there may be unfair, unreasonable and angry dissatisfaction; and the prince may be smitten for justice. Every man ought to be on his guard against this. The higher the responsibility,—the more burdensome and difficult the trust,—and the more serious the results of bringing authorities and the laws into disesteem, and unsettling public confidence in them,—ought to be the amount of our reluctant caution in pronouncing censure. Another remark may be ventured. One of the great difficulties with which governments of great nations have to contend, arises from the variety of crossing and contending interests with which they have to deal. How anxious soever they may honestly be, to allow no undue bias to draw them from the line of impartial justice, yet there is hardly a measure they can adopt that does not affect differently different classes of the community; so that, from their various predisposing circumstances, that shall appear to one class—to those in one particular department of trade or commerce—the very essence of injustice, which by another is lauded as a most unexceptionable exemplification of impartial equity. This ought surely to have the effect—I do not by any means say of forbidding the most vigilant observance and the freest and most searching scrutiny and discussion of every measure, and the exposure of its evil or questionable character and tendency—but assuredly of procuring some allowance for the difficulty of the task of pleasing all parties, and some moderation in the tone of censure even where to us the grounds for it are clear and palpable. No man who knows himself will affirm, in almost any case, that, placed, in other circumstances, he might not see with other eyes. I speak in general. There are cases in which the interests of a suffering country are, to a vast extent, involved, in which it becomes every man's paramount duty to speak out and to speak plainly, and to make the ears of the rulers to tingle with the outcry of humanity and justice.

I would further apply the spirit of this verse to the case of *arbitrators*. We have ourselves, it may be, consented to submit a litigated point to arbitration. We do so with a full persuasion of our being in the right—of our claim being the just one. But the arbiters unite in giving it against us. It would be most unreasonable on our part to retain a grudge, especially at the one appointed by ourselves, on this account. Our reference implied confidence in his impartiality and honour, and implied a pledge of cheerful acquiescence. To grumble, to censure, and to withdraw our friendship, would be indeed to "*strike him for equity.*" He would have proved himself unworthy of his trust, if his disposition to please and serve us had been too strong for principle, conscience, and oath. There is *one* government, in which "the just" are never "punished"—all whose laws and all whose sanctions are the perfection of equity. But alas! it is under that very government that the spirit expressed by the phrase "striking princes for equity" is most fearfully manifested. All the murmurings of sinners against either the law of God or its revealed and threatened penalty, are the very essence, in its deepest malignity, of this spirit.—*Wardlaw.*

Righteous men are princes in all lands (Psa. xlv. 16); yea, they are kings in righteousness as Melchisedec. Indeed they are somewhat obscure kings as he was, but kings they appear to be, by comparing Matt. xiii. 17 with Luke x. 24; "many righteous," saith Matthew, "many kings," saith Luke. Now, to strike a king is high treason; and although princes have put up blows, as when one struck our Henry VI., he only said, "Forsooth, you do wrong yourself more than me, to strike the Lord's anointed."—*Trapp.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSES 27, 28.

Two Badges of a Wise Man.

I. Reticence of speech. This subject has been dwelt on before. See on chap. x. 19-21. The verses before us suggest further that a man who is sparing of words is not necessarily a man of abundant wisdom, for even a fool may hold his peace sometimes. Solomon elsewhere tells us that "a fool uttereth all his mind" (Prov. xxix. 11); but the fool of this text is not so foolish as to do that. It has been remarked that "by silence a fool abates something of his senselessness, and since he gets the opportunity to collect himself and to reflect, a beginning of wisdom is developed in him" (*Von Gerlach*). It argues some amount of wisdom in a man if he is silent when he has nothing to say which is worth the saying. But the false conclusion must not be drawn, that every man who is not given to much speech is a man of great understanding and of vast mental resources. It is much better that the stone should remain upon the mouth of a well of impure water, but it must not be taken for granted, because the well is kept closed, that there is a supply of life-giving water within.

II. Calmness of temper. It is a mark of wisdom to strive after a "cool" (excellent) "spirit." 1. *It makes life more pleasant.* A man who allows himself to be vexed and irritated by all the annoyances of every-day life has no enjoyment of his existence. A fretful and hasty temper makes every bitter draught more bitter, and takes the sweetness out of the cup that would otherwise be a pleasant one. 2. *It makes a man more respected and more useful.* A man who cannot curb his temper is a despicable object, and will certainly be despised. A passionate man may be pitied and excused, but he cannot be respected. Hence he cannot have much influence for good upon others. This subject also has been treated before. See Homiletics on chap. xiv. 17 and 29, pages 363 and 386.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

"*He that restrains his words knows knowledge.*" The words are precise. It is the fact that he "knows knowledge" that impels a man to restrain his words. If he did not "*know knowledge,*" if he had not *light,* and did not know it when he saw it; if he did not see light in God, and know it when he has seen it, and really see enough of it to convince him that "God is light," he could not stand the darkness. The unfortunates in hell have no light to enable them to endure the dark. But the saint, *knowing knowledge,* and seeing that it exists in God, is balanced enough against the mysteries to enable him to restrain his words. . . . . The wise man asserts that this silence is a chief mark of piety. . . . . If a man do shut his lips he is wise. . . . . The fool is a wise man when he is silent, and when, in meek submission, he bows to what he cannot understand.—*Miller.*

He cannot be known for a fool who says nothing. He is a fool, not who hath unwise thoughts, but who utters them. Even concealed folly is wisdom. —*Bp. Hall.*

He that hath knowledge hath not many words: the fulness of the one causeth in him a scarcity of the other. And there is nothing that he spendeth idly more unwillingly than his words. But yet, *having knowledge,* he knoweth both when to spare and when to spend. . . . . The original words here are *knowing knowledge,* for many know much, but it is not knowledge that they know. Some labour hard and waste their time to know needless vanities, which, being better unknown, have not true knowledge in them. . . . Right knowledge is the knowledge of the Lord, and he that knoweth this spareth his words to spend them to God's glory. And as it is in many the penury of their knowledge that causeth the superfluity of their words, so chiefly it is the lack of this knowledge. For by this knowledge we learn that an account must be given for every idle word. . . . . Silence being so rare a virtue, where wisdom doth command it, it is accounted a virtue where folly doth impose it. He that fails of this first help, and is so far gone in folly as that his tongue outgoes his understanding, yet hath a second help, and that is to stop, and shut his lips before they go too far, which, though not the first, yet is a second praise; and he hath the repute of some understanding who either seeth, or is thought to see, his want of understanding.—*Jermin.*

It has been safely enough alleged that of two men equally successful in the business of life, the man who is silent will be generally deemed to have more in him than the man who talks: the latter "shows his hand;" everybody can tell the exact length of his tether; he has trotted himself out so often that all his points and paces are a matter of notoriety. But of the taciturn man, little or nothing is known. "The shallow murmur but the deep are dumb." Friends and acquaintances shake their heads knowingly, and exclaim with an air of authority, that "So and so" has a great deal more in him than people imagine. They are as often wrong as right, but what need that signify to the silent man? . . To follow out one of the Caxtonian essayist's illustrations,—When we see a dumb strong-box, with its lid braced down by iron clasps and secured by a jealous padlock, involuntarily we suppose that its contents must be infinitely more precious than the gauds and nicknacks which are unguardedly scattered about a lady's drawing-room. "Who could believe that a box so rigidly locked had nothing in it but odds and ends, which would be just as safe in a bandbox?"—*Jacox.*

CHAPTER XVIII.

CRITICAL NOTES.—**1. Through desire, etc.** The readings and expositions of this verse are many. Zockler translates, "*He that separateth himself seeketh his own p'easure, against all counsel doth he rush on,*" and the renderings of Stuart, Miller, and Delitzsch are substantially the same, except that Delitzsch translates the latter clause—"*against all that is beneficial he shows his teeth.*" Other readings are "*A self-conceited fool seeks to gratify his fancy and intermingleth himself with all things*" (*Schultens*); "*He who has separated himself agitates questions as his desire prompts, and breaks his teeth on every hard point*" (*Schulz*); "*He seeks occasion, who desires to separate himself from his friends*" (*Hodgson*). Others read as in the authorised version. (See Comments). **3. Ignominy.** rather, "*shameful deeds.*" **4.** The last clause of this verse may be divided into two smaller ones and placed in apposition, thus: "*a bubbling brook,*"—*a fountain of wisdom.* Fausset remarks that the Hebrew word used for *man* is *ish*, *a good* man, not *adam*, the general term for man. **6. Calleth for.** Stuart understands this in the sense of "*to deserve.*" **8. Wounds.** The word so translated occurs only here and in chap. xxvi. 22, and will bear very different renderings. Some translate it *words of sport* (Stuart and Zockler); others, with Delitzsch, *dainty morsels*; others, "*whispers, soft breezes.*" **9. Waster,** or *destroyer.* **10. Safe,** or, *lifted high.* **14. Infirmity,** *i.e.*, sickness, disease of body. As in similar verses, Miller translates "**a wounded spirit:**" *a spirit of upbraiding.* Here again, as in verse 4, the Hebrew word *ish* is used for man. **16. A man's gifts.** "Hebrew, *adam*, the gift of a *man*, however humble and low" (*Fausset*). **19. "Is harder to be won;"** these words are not in the original, but have been inserted to supply the sense. Some translators read "*a brother offended resisteth more than a strong city.*" Miller reads, "*When a brother is revolted away, it is from a city of strength.*" **20. Satisfied.** "If this word is taken in a good sense the *fruit* must be good; but it may be ironical, meaning false or malignant words will find ample retribution. Perhaps the next verse helps us to determine the meaning" (*Stuart*). **21. They that love it,** *i.e.*, "make it a special object of gratification" (*Stuart*). 24. The first clause of this verse should be "A man of many friends will prove himself base, or is so to his own destruction," *i.e.*, he who professes to regard everybody as his friend will, in so doing, involve himself in trouble.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 1 *and* 2.

Reference to the Critical Notes and to the Comments will show the widely different translations and expositions given to the first verse. We follow the authorised version.

SOLITUDE.

I. Solitude is indispensable to the attainment of wisdom. If a tree is to become well-proportioned—if it is to spread out its branches on every side so that its girth is to be proportioned to its height, it must have space—a degree of separation is indispensable to its perfect development. It must be free to stretch out its roots and shoots on every side, and to appropriate to itself those elements in the earth and in the atmosphere which will make it strong and vigorous. So if a man is to be a wise man, if his mental and spiritual capabilities are to be developed as his Creator intended they should be, he must at times separate himself—a certain amount of solitude is indispensable. If he would grow wise in the mysteries of the natural world he must oftentimes shut himself away from the haunts of men, and ponder the manifold phenomena which creation presents to him, and endeavour to unravel her secrets. If he desires to become wise by acquaintance with the thoughts and deeds of the great and mighty men of past ages he must withdraw himself at certain seasons from the society of his fellow-men, and give himself up to study and reflection. And if he desire to acquire what, after all, can alone make him a truly wise man—an acquaintance with himself and with God—he must have seasons of separation in which to listen to the voice of his own heart and to the voice of His maker. A man, when he is alone, is more likely to see things as they really are; he is less under the influence of the seen and temporal than when he is in the market, or on the crowded highway, and consequently things unseen and eternal have a more powerful influence over him at such a season. No man

can be wise unless he has some self-knowledge, and no man can subject himself to much inspection while in company, hence the advice of George Herbert—

> "By all means use sometimes to be alone;
> Salute thyself; see what thy soul doth wear;
> Dare to look in thy chest, for 'tis thine own,
> And tumble up and down what thou find'st there.
> Who cannot rest till he good fellows find,
> He breaks up house, turns out of doors his mind."

and it is equally true that no man is possessed of true wisdom who has not some knowledge of God as He has revealed Himself in the written Word, and solitude is very favourable to a growth in Divine knowledge. Men can gain much, even of the highest wisdom, from intercourse with their fellow-men, but all human guides are fallible and all human teaching is imperfect—there must be seasons when a man "separates himself" from them all and stands face to face with the fountain of all truth, if he would "intermeddle" with pure wisdom.

II. Those who are truly wise seek wisdom for its own sake. Many men seek secular knowledge for the sole purpose of acquiring fame by the acquisition. Some men spend days of solitude in patient investigation for no other purpose than to make a name for themselves. Some men even profess to be seekers after true and spiritual wisdom, when they are only striving to gratify some unworthy ambition. Such a man seems to be pourtrayed in the second verse as the "fool who hath no delight in understanding but that his heart may discover itself." (If he seeks knowledge at all, it is neither for its own sake nor for the purpose of fitting him for usefulness, but solely for the ends of self-display—*Wardlaw.)* (He "hath no delight" in knowledge, "but in the displaying of his own thoughts."—*Hodgson.)* But the true lover of wisdom is impelled to seek from the love of truth—from the desire which possesses his soul to "intermeddle with knowledge." When Sir Isaac Newton gave himself up to the pursuit of scientific truth, he "separated himself" simply from a "desire" to *know*, and without the remotest desire or expectation of his present world-wide fame. And if it is so with every true lover of merely intellectual wisdom, it is pre-eminently so with the man who seeks spiritual wisdom. He is impelled to the search simply by a desire which is born of his appreciation of its worth—by a knowledge of its power to bless his life.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

A certain degree of solitude seems necessary to the full growth and spread of the highest mind; and therefore must a very extensive intercourse with men stifle many a holy germ, and scare away the gods, who shun the restless tumult of noisy companies, and the discussion of petty interests. *Novalis.*

Desire is the chariot-wheel of the soul, the spring of energy and delight. The man of business or science is filled with his great object; and *through desire he separates himself* from all lets and hindrances, that he may *intermeddle with* its whole range. "This one thing"—saith the man of God—"I do" (Philip. iii. 13). This one thing is everything with him. *He separates himself* from all outward hindrances, vain company, trifling amusements or studies, needless engagements, that he may *seek and intermeddle with all wisdom.* John *separated himself* in the wilderness, Paul in Arabia, our blessed Lord in frequent retirement, in order to greater concentration in their momentous work. Deeply does the Christian minister feel the responsibility of this holy *separation*, that he may "give himself wholly to" his office (1 Tim.

iv. 15. 2 Tim. ii. 4). Without it—Christian—thy soul can never prosper. How canst thou *intermeddle with the great wisdom* of knowing thyself, if thy whole mind be full of this world's chaff and vanity? There must be a withdrawal, to "commune with thine own heart" and to ask the questions —"Where art thou? What doest thou here?" Much is there to be inquired into and pondered. Everything here calls for our deepest, closest thoughts. We must walk with God in secret, or the enemy will walk with us, and our souls will die. "Arise, go forth into the plain, and I will there talk with thee" (Ezek. iii. 22). "When thou wast under the fig-tree I saw thee" (John i. 48). Deal much in secrecy, if thou wouldst know "the secret of the Lord." Like thy Divine Master, thou wilt never be less alone than when alone (Ib. xvi. 32). There is much to be wrought, gained, and enjoyed. Thy most spiritual knowledge, thy richest experience will be found here. And then, when we look around us into the infinitely extended field of the Revelation of God, what a world of heavenly *wisdom is there to intermeddle with!* In the hurry of this world's atmosphere how little can we apprehend it! And yet such is the field of wonder, that the contemplation of a single point overwhelmed the Apostle with adoring astonishment. (Rom. xi. 33). Here are "things, which even the angels desire to look into" (1 Pet. i. 12). The redeemed will be employed throughout eternity in this delighted searching; exploring "the breadth, and length, and depth, and height," until they be "filled with all the fulness of God" (Eph. iii. 18, 19). Surely then if we have any *desire*, we shall *separate ourselves* from the cloudy atmosphere around us, that we may have fellowship with these happy investigators of the Divine mysteries.—*Bridges.*

The *separated one* here is the impenitent. "*The aims of a man left to himself*" is really a translation of but two words, meaning *a separated one seeks.* "*At the mere dictate of desire*" is but one noun with a preceding particle, meaning *after*, or, *according to.* The noun means a *longing.* The sentence means that when a man gets separated from his place in the universe he *seeks*, or *has a pursuit*, after his present bent or longing. The word translated *wisdom* in the second clause is derived from a verb that means to *be* or *stand* with some stability (see comment on chap. ii. 7), yielding the sense the lost man sits careless to what is "*stable.*" He does not regard it. He strikes for what he desires. A pretty thing for him to cavil! since "*against everything stable he just lets himself roll.*" . . . The whole meaning is that the lost man is in high chase under the spur of appetite, and ruthlessly bears down *everything stable.*—*Miller.*

"*Through desire*" (through self-willed and self-seeking desire of wisdom) —"*wisdom,*" Heb. *tushigyah*, lit. all that is solid and stable: subsistence, essence, existence. The Pharisees were such; from the Hebrew, *pharash*, to separate. They trusted in themselves, and in their own wisdom, despising others (Luke xviii. 9, xvi. 15; Jude 19). All heresy has more or less originated in the self-conceit which leads men to separate themselves from the congregation of the Lord (Ezek. xiv. 7; Hosea ix. 10; Heb. x. 25). The two evils censured are (1) that of those who think they are born for themselves, and that others ought to be ministers of their self-seeking desires; (2) that of those who intermeddle with what does not concern them. The motive is through (his own) "*desire*" of being esteemed singularly learned, as verse 2 shows, not from sincere "delight in understanding." His aim is singularity, through self-seeking desire (Psa. x. 3; cxii. 10) of raising himself to a separate elevation from the common crowd, and of being thought versed in all that can be known: so "he intermeddleth with all wisdom." His restless appetite for making himself peculiar and separate from others is marked by the indefinite verb "seeketh," it not being added what he seeketh, for he hardly knows himself what.—*Fausset.*

If we have to decide between the two interpretations, one blaming and the other commending the life of isolation, the answer must be that the former is more in harmony with the broad, genial temper of the Book of Proverbs.—*Plumptre.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 8.

This verse also, as will be seen from a reference to the Critical Notes, and also from the Comments, is susceptible of several interpretations. We think it treats of—

The Short-lived Prosperity of Evil Men.

I. Wicked men do come into places of power and influence. This fact has often tried the faith of righteous men. Asaph's "*steps had well-nigh slipped*" when he saw "*the prosperity of the wicked*"—that "*violence covered them as a garment,*" and that they "*set their mouth against the heavens;*" and yet that "*their strength was firm,*" and "*they had more than heart could wish*" (Psa. lxxiii. 2–8). The tiller of the soil knows from experience that the useless weeds and noxious plants often seem to absorb all the nutriment from the earth, and so make it well-nigh impossible for the useful herb and sweet-scented flower to grow in the same field or garden. And moral weeds seem to have a like capability of utilising everything that comes in their way to their own advancement—the unrighteous man makes a fortune, or a position, or a name for himself, while his godly neighbour is struggling for a bare subsistence. In the field of the world, the tares grow as well as the wheat (Matt. xiii. 26), and often they seem for a time to be more flourishing. Ahab and Jezebel dwell in Samaria, and Elijah is compelled to flee into the desert. Herod feasts in the palace, while John the Baptist is beheaded in the dungeon.

II. Contempt and reproach are their final portion. Their day of power is short-lived. David has recorded as his experience that he had "*seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay-tree*"—but he "*passed by, and lo, he was not*" (Psa. xxxvii. 35). And however their success may dazzle men's eyes and warp their judgment for a season, contempt is their portion at last. They are often held in contempt even while living, and the reproaches of those who have been made to suffer by them are heaped upon their heads. Many of those who fawned upon them and flattered them while they were prospering will be most ready to scorn and upbraid them, if the day of their retribution arrives before they quit this world. And if they keep their power and influence throughout the term of their human probation, their names will be contemned by posterity, and in the day when "everyone receives the things done in his body" (2 Cor. v. 10), they shall "*awake to shame and everlasting contempt*" (Dan. xii. 2).

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

When a "*wicked*" man enters upon the stage, that creature, the most degraded of the universe, and who has the least right to show any *contempt*, is the *very* person to be the most *contemptuous;* and the mortal who is himself most *disgraced*, shows the readiest mind to cry shame upon and to *reproach* and that even the Most High. Doubtless there is secular truth in all this. The *disgraced* citizen is often the most *reproachful.*—*Miller.*

I. They bring "contempt," not to themselves only, but to the places they fill, and the societies to which they become united—to themselves, for the unworthy manner in which they fulfil the duties of the trust they have

assumed, or have had committed to them; and to their places and societies, with which their names are associated. They entail "*ignominy and reproach*" upon all they have to do with. And in no case is this more true, than with regard to offices in the Church. O what an amount of scorn and reproach has been brought upon the sacred office of the ministry by the intrusion, under numberless pretexts, and from numberless causes, of wicked, worldly, ungodly men into its holy functions! How full is Church history of this deplorable evil!—and how many infidels and scorners has Church history by this means produced. Thus it was under the old dispensation. The wickedness of the sons of Eli made men "abhor the offering of the Lord." And thus it is still. Of the "false teachers" who should arise in the latter days, it is said—"by reason of them the way of truth shall be evil-spoken of." From few other sources, if from any, has there proceeded a greater profusion of unmerited "reproach" of the name and doctrine and kingdom of the Lord; or has "the chair of the scorner" drawn a greater number and variety of its sarcastic sneers and bitter revilings. II. The phrase may mean—"When the wicked cometh" into *intimacy, companionship, familiarity,* "then cometh contempt."—He who admits the wicked to his intimacy—makes him his associate—must share the infamy of his ill-chosen companion. Many a time too has *this* been exemplified.—*Wardlaw.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 4.

A Good Man's Mouth.

We must understand Solomon here to refer to a good man—to a man whose words are in harmony with the mind of God. Of such a man it may be said that his words are as deep waters and as a living spring.

I. Because his soul is in communication with an exhaustless source of spiritual life and wisdom. Rivers and wells that are fed from the mountain recesses which are filled with eternal snows never dry up—they are fed from a source that is never exhausted. So long as the lasting hills remain, and the present natural laws govern the world they must give forth every day abundant streams. A communication has been established between the soul of a good man and the living God—he holds constant communion with a source of spiritual life which can never fail, and consequently he can never be at a loss for subjects upon which to discourse—his mind is always filled with new thoughts of God, and new hopes of heaven upon which to meditate himself and which he can communicate to others.

II. Because that which flows from his lips is beneficial and refreshing to others. The waters in a shallow and stagnant pond give little or no refreshment to the thirsty traveller; they may even be the means of imparting disease to those who drink of them, or who live near them. But the water from a well, or from a deep and flowing stream, is generally pure and wholesome to the taste, and refreshing to the land through which it flows. And so it is with the speech of a godly man. Very mighty are the influence of words for good or for ill. Our first parents lost Eden by listening to the words of the tempter, and the speech of the wicked always diffuses an unwholesome moral atmosphere around it, if it does not eject a deadly poison into the soul. But the conversation and teaching of the godly are always a means of moral health to others; by their words they witness for the truth of God, and are the means of "*opening men's eyes, and turning them from darkness to light, from the power of Satan unto God*" (Acts xxvi. 13). And, like their Divine Master, they "*know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary*" (Isa. l. 4), and thus

that which flows from their lips is as refreshing and healthful to weary and struggling men and women on the highway of life as the living, cooling water-course is to the dusty and thirsty traveller.

III. Because the flow is natural and spontaneous. Water may be sent through a tract of country by artificial means; fields may be watered and reservoirs filled by calling in science to supply natural deficiencies. But there is, after all, no comparison between this kind of forced irrigation and that which is the result of natural causes. If there is water beneath the surface of the earth it must force its way and find an outlet; it needs no hand of man to come to its aid; it penetrates the soil and forms a fertilising stream in obedience to natural law. And so the speech of a good man has nothing forced or artificial about it. It is the overflow of heartfelt experience. Like the apostles of old, he "*cannot but speak the things which he has seen and heard*" (Acts iv. 20). The "*good things*" of his lips are the natural outcome of the "*good treasure of his heart*," "*for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh*" (Matt. xii. 24, 25).

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Talleyrand defined speech to be the art of concealing one's opinions. Speech, even without any attempt at concealment, must be endlessly deep and wide as uttering all our being. Who can translate all its outgoings? If this be so with man, who shall judge of God and censure His obscurer revelations? Solomon is satisfied with one great difference,—that while man's speech is "*deep*," God's speech is both "*deep*" and "*living*." One has a vital source, the other is dead and stagnant. Grant that both are obscure. One is the darkness of a pool, the other the breadth and gush of an overflowing water. We ought to submit to mystery in God, for the tide of His utterance is to flow on for ever.—*Miller.*

One "greater than Solomon" "astonished the people" by the clearness, no less than by the *depth of the waters* (Matt. vii. 28, 29). No blessing is more valuable than a "rich indwelling of the word," ready to be brought out on all suitable occasions of instruction. If the wise man sometimes "spares his words," it is not for want of matter, but for greater edification. The stream is ready to flow, and sometimes can scarcely be restrained. The cold-hearted, speculative professor has his *flow*—sometimes a torrent of words, yet without a drop of profitable matter; chilling, even when doctrinally correct; without life, unction, or love. Lord! deliver us from this barren "talk of the lips" (chap. xiv. 23). May our *waters be deep*, flowing from thine own inner sanctuary, refreshing and fertilising the Church of God!—*Bridges.*

In the two clauses of the verse, on the principle of parallelism, there appears to be an inversion of the same sentiment; for, properly speaking, the words uttered are not the "deep waters," but the stream that issues from them; and, on the other hand, "the wellspring of wisdom" is not "the flowing brook," but the deep and copious fountain or reservoir from which it issues. Another passage may serve to confirm this view. "Counsel in the heart of man is like deep water; but a man of understanding will draw it out." Here, the counsel is the deep water, not the words. But the words are the stream which the deep waters send forth. The words bring out and contain the counsel.—*Wardlaw.*

It must be remembered that "deep waters" are associated in the Old Testament with the thought of darkness and mystery (xx. 5; Psalms lxix. 2; Eccles. vii. 24), and we get a more profound thought if we see in the proverb a comparison between all teaching from without and that of the light within. The words of a man's

mouth are dark as the "deep waters of a pool, or tank; but the well-spring of wisdom is as a flowing brook, bright and clear." So taken the verse presents a contrast like that of Jeremiah ii. 13. —*Plumptre.*

When this word *vir* is used for man in sacred Scriptures it signifieth one who is strong and mighty, and for his strength great and excellent, and then by a man here we may understand him who is mighty and great in knowledge; the words of such a man are as deep waters, to the bottom whereof the shallow capacity of every one is not able to reach. But yet where the spring of those waters is a well-spring of wisdom, though sometimes it send forth deep waters, yet it doth not always; for that were to overwhelm the hearers. But at other times it is as a flowing brook, more shallow for capacity, but more forcible also in the stream of it, and either by persuasive exhortation carrying on the hearers to a pursuit of virtue and godliness, or else by a dissuasive reproof carrying them away from the practice of wickedness, and in both washing away the stains of their sinful lives. Wherefore St. Gregory saith, so must every preacher deal with his hearers as God dealeth with him; he must not preach to the simple as much as he knoweth because himself doth not know of heavenly mysteries as much as they are.—*Jermin.*

The subject of verse 5 has been treated in the Homiletics on chap. xvii., verses 15 and 26.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 6—8.

FOLLY AND ITS RESULTS.

1. None but a foolish man seeks contention. As we saw in the previous chapter (ver. 14) contention or strife is an evil of which none at its beginnings can see the end. It may seem a very insignificant deed to strike a flint and steel together so as to produce a single spark, but one spark may produce a terrible and destructive fire. When a settler in a forest rubs two dry sticks together the act seems a trifling one, but the friction in time develops the latent heat of the wood, and there is enough fire brought into activity to lay low many a mighty forest tree. None but foolish men and children ever play with fire, and when they do it they generally suffer themselves first, but they are often not the only sufferers. So is it with contention, or a dispute in words. Wise men are often obliged to contend for truth and right, but they never *seek* an occasion of dispute. But there are moral fools who think it only an amusement to pick a quarrel, little heeding what the consequences of it may be, not caring if blows succeed to angry words, or perhaps even desiring that they should do so. But although a man may play with fire and escape unharmed, or may even apply a torch to his neighbour's house without singeing so much as a hair of his own head, no fool's lips enter into contention or call for strokes without bringing retribution upon his own head. "His mouth" is in his own "destruction," and "his lips are the snare of his soul," for it is a law as old as the universe that "*with what measure ye meet it shall be measured to you again*" (Matt. vi. 1, 2). The man who seeks contention will alway find others like-minded with himself who will be willing to do for him what he has done for others, and he who "calls for strokes" upon his fellow-creatures will receive them upon his own head with compound interest.

II. None but a cruel man will be a tale-bearer. A quarrelsome, passionate man is a fool, and he is also a cruel man, but he is not so cruel as the tale-bearer. The first man wounds, but he inflicts his injury in open daylight and in the front of his victim, but the second is like the treacherous footpad whose face is never seen and whose step is never heard, but who comes up

behind his prey in the dark and leaves no trace behind but the mortal sword-thrust. But it must not be forgotten that there must always be two persons implicated in the guilt and cruelty of thus killing the reputation of a fellow-creature. The tale-bearer must have a repository for his slanders—the busy tongue must have a listening ear or no mischief would be done, and tale-bearing would die out for want of an atmosphere in which it could live. A reference to the Critical Notes will show that the word translated "wounds" may be rendered "dainties," and it is because evil reports of others are so keenly relished by an unsanctified soul that the words of a tale-bearer are able to inflict such suffering and work so much ill in the world.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Ver. 6. The emperor Julian used to banter the Christians with that precept of our Lord, "When thine adversary smites thee on the one cheek, turn to him the other also:" but Christians consult their ease as well as their consciences when they obey this precept in the spirit of it; whereas proud and passionate fools, when they give vent to their rancorous spirits, because they cannot bear the shadow of an indignity, not only turn the other cheek to their adversary, but smite, and urge, and almost force him to strike and destroy them.—*Lawson.*

Ver. 8. The bite of a viper is not so deadly as the wound of these "tale-bearers'" stories and insinuations. The truth is they contrive to infuse *their* poison without a bite. If they would but appear in their true character;—would they but show their fangs, and make us feel them, we should be put upon our guard. We know the viper. We shun it. And when it has unhappily succeeded in wounding us, we instantly have recourse to means for preventing the poison from getting into the mass of the blood, and pervading the system. But these *human* vipers infuse their poison in the language of kindness and love. "Their words are smoother than oil; yet are they drawn swords;"—envenomed fangs, of which the virus gets into our system ere we are aware, works its mischievous and morally deadly effects, and becomes incapable of extraction. Every attempt at its removal still leaves some portion of it behind. There is, in the original word, an implication of softness, simplicity, undesignedness, which only gives the secret weapon with which the wound is inflicted the greater keenness.—*Wardlaw.*

The tongue of the tale-bearer is a two-edged sword, at once it cutteth on both sides, and his words are his wounds, at once wounding both him of whom he speaketh and him to whom he speaketh. To the one he gives the wounds of his slandering, to the other the wounds of his flattering. The one he woundeth so, that his blow is neither heard, seen, nor felt. The other he woundeth so, that though his blow be heard, seen, and felt, yet it is not perceived: in both they go down into the heart, as revealing the heart of the one, and as removing the heart of the other from him. . . . . Or the words may be translated, *the words of a tale-bearer are as smoothing words:* for he frameth his own words to as much softness, as those which he reporteth he maketh to be hard. And indeed, as they sound, they are commonly so pleasing, that they easily slip down into the heart, where they are readily entertained.—*Jermin.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 9.

TWIN-BROTHERS.

I. Slothfulness and prodigality have the same origin. As brothers are the children of a common parent, so sloth and waste have their root in the common sin of ungodliness; men are spendthrifts or they are lazy, because they have no right sense of their obligations to God and to man—because they do not look upon their life as a stewardship for which they must give an account (Rom. xiv. 12), but as a gift which they are at liberty to spend as they please. The acts of the prodigal and the slothful man differ in themselves, but they all spring from that spirit of self-pleasing which is the essence of ungodliness.

II. The slothful man is a waster of God's most precious gifts. Twin-brothers are often so much alike that it is difficult for onlookers to distinguish one from the other. And there is an aspect in which we may view the slothful man in which we not only note the close resemblance he bears to his prodigal brother, but in which he is transformed into a prodigal himself. For the negative sinner—the man who does nothing—is a waster of his time and of his talents, and is therefore guilty of a positive crime. The man who "hid the Lord's talent" was visited with a stern sentence as a positive transgressor (Matt. xxv. 25). If we convict a man of prodigality for wasting gold, what shall we say of him who wastes what no gold can buy? "Time," says J. A. James, "is the most precious thing in the world. When God gives us a moment, He does not promise us another, as if to teach us highly to value and improve it, by the consideration, for aught we know, it may be the last. Time, when gone, never returns. We talk about 'fetching up' a lost hour, but the thing is impossible. A moment once lost, is lost for ever. We could as rationally set out to find a sound that had expired in air, as to find a lost moment." And when we reflect what infinite results depend upon what a man does with his time, we can see the force of the proverb, because the slothful man is a waster of the most precious commodity in this world.

III The results of both extravagance and sloth are the same. It makes no difference in the end whether a man gets nothing, or spends all that he gets, he can come to poverty by either road. The one has been compared to a man who dies by a rapid and violent disease, and the other by a slow and subtle consumption. But the grave, sooner or later, receives them both.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

The practical lesson is, that in personal and domestic interests, *diligence* and *economy* should *go together*, and that the one without the other never can avail for either obtaining or securing even the comforts of life. Of what use is industry if its proceeds are not prudently managed when they come in?—if husband, or wife, or both, be destitute of discretion, improvident and thriftless? if there is the absence of all sober and considerate calculation, and, as a consequence, no due proportioning of outlay to income, but a reckless and wasteful expenditure, leaving an unlooked-for deficiency—a woful amount *minus*—at the year's end? The poor inconsiderate fools never think what they are about. They keep no daily reckoning—no accounts; and so their money is gone, they can't tell how—they had no idea they were living at such a rate!—and even when they have made the discovery there is no improvement. They say, possibly, *they must take care;* but they only *say* it, and immediately forget it. Things go on as before; and still (to use rather a colloquial, but sufficiently expressive phrase),

what is taken in by the door is thrown out by the window; and still the wonder continues *how it goes!* They are ever marvelling how *other folks do.* They can't understand it. For *their* parts, all that comes in finds its way off from them as fast as it comes, and many a time faster! Thus, as might be expected, there are the same appearances of bareness, and cheerlessness, and want, in the dwelling of the *thriftless* as in that of the *slothful.* Extremes thus meet. . . . *Diligence,* let me remind you, is as necessary for the acquisition of spiritual as of temporal good — of the riches of Divine knowledge to the mind, as of the blessings of the Divine life to the heart. And not less is *economy of means.* How often may it be seen, that with means of a very limited and stinted amount, there is more of spiritual prosperity in one instance, than is discoverable in another, with means the most varied and abundant. Many believers, it is to be feared, are spiritual spendthrifts. They use their privileges on no principle of economy. They read, they hear, they frequent ordinances—and yet their progress in spiritual attainments bears no proportion to the extent of their advantages. Rich in privileges, they are poor in the graces and enjoyments of the life of God in the soul. Why? The answer is plain. They who thrive on slender means, make the most of what they have; whereas they who live in the midst of abundance get into habits of carelessness, and of the prodigal use of what they have.—*Wardlaw.*

The word also here used may seem to refer this verse to that which goeth before it; and then it is a further description of a talebearer. For he is commonly a fellow slothful in his work, being busy in his words, and he is indeed brother to him that is a great waster, spoiling his own estate by his slothfulness, and by the mischief which his talebearing falleth upon him; and spoiling him to whom he talketh by the ill mind which he putteth into him.—*Jermin.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSES 10 *and* 11.

Two Citadels.

I. The citadel of him who trusts in the Lord. "*The name of the Lord.*" God has revealed Himself to men by many names, each one of which is intended to set forth some attribute of His perfect nature. The name "I AM," by which He revealed Himself to Israel (Exod. iii. 14) set forth His eternal self-existence, but He has also revealed Himself by names which are used to express human relations, such as king, judge, husband, father. These names are often borne by men who are destitute of the qualifications and feelings proper to the relationships which they express, but when any one of them is applied to God it is applied to one who combines within Himself all those attributes of character in perfection which ought to be possessed in some degree by men who are called by these names. The righteous man's refuge, then, is a Living Personality—a Self-existent and Eternal King and Father, infinite in power, in wisdom, and in tenderness. It is therefore 1 *An ever-present refuge.* "God is not far from every one of us" (Acts xvii. 27), and being ever near, is always accessible. 2. *An impregnable refuge.* Before an enemy can attack those who have taken refuge in a fortress, they must carry the citadel itself. So before any enemy can harm a righteous man, he must overcome the Almighty God; he must circumvent His plans, and overthrow his purposes.

> "When His wisdom can mistake,
> His might decay, His love forsake,"

then, but not till then, will those be exposed to danger who have put their trust in Him. 3. *An eternal refuge.* The "*arms*" of strength that defend the

children of God are "*everlasting arms*" (Deut. xxxiii. 7). Many of the ancient fortresses that are scattered over our land were once deemed impregnable refuges. But although they bade defiance to many an assault of men in battle-array, they have had to yield to a more subtle enemy. Time has crumbled their once mighty walls, and made them unfit for purposes of defence. But the righteous man can say to Him who is his "strong tower," "*Lord, Thou hast been our dwelling-place in all generations. . . . . Even from everlasting to everlasting Thou art God*" (Psa. xc. 1, 2).

II. **The stronghold of the man who trusts in riches.** 1. *Riches are no defence against a man's most powerful enemies.* While a man has wealth he is defended from many bodily ills and from many vexations of spirit. A man of narrow means has often to fight a hard battle to supply his bodily necessities, and is a stranger to those luxuries which make life, in this respect, so comfortable to a rich man. And a poor man has also to bend his will to the will of his richer neighbour—to endure often "th' oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely." Wealth is a defence against all these enemies to a man's comfort. But there are troubles far heavier than any of these, from which riches afford no protection. Disease and death cannot be turned aside with money—a troubled soul cannot be comforted with gold. A bed of down cannot do much for a man whose body is racked with pain—it can do nothing for him whose soul is bowed down by sorrow, or smitten with a fear of death. In any of these straits a soul can find no "strong city" of refuge in the possession of untold millions; these enemies laugh at such a wall of defence. The man who trusts in material wealth as his chief good, has either made too low an estimate of his own needs, or too high an estimate of the power of wealth. 2. *Wealth is a fortress with a most uncertain foundation.* Granted that it is a defence against some very real ills, who can insure to himself a continuance of his present possessions? The uncertainty of riches has been a subject upon which the sages and moralists of all ages have dwelt—the millionaire of to-day may be a beggar to-morrow, and he who was last year surrounded by this "high wall," which shut in so much that was agreeable to his senses and shut out so many discomforts from his temporal life, may be standing to-day a forlorn, unsheltered creature, with only the ruins of his once imposing fortress around him. On this subject see also Homiletics on chap. xi. 28.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

This strong refuge is not only safe, but "*set aloft*," so the word signifies, out of the gunshot. None can pull out of His hands. Run therefore to God by praying, not fainting. This is the best policy for security. That which is said of wily persons that are full of fetches, of windings, and of turnings in the world, that such will never break, is much more true of a righteous, praying Christian. He hath but one grand policy to secure him against all dangers, and that is, to run to God.—*Trapp.*

To this tower the wicked are sometimes driven in distress, then seeking help here, when it is nowhere else to be found. But the righteous in any distress runneth presently unto it. Thither their eyes look, thither their hands are stretched, thither their hearts carry them. Yea, they are not only carried *unto* it but *into* it, by placing their confidence in it, and making it their safety. They are well acquainted with the way, and therefore can make speed; they have cast off the clogs of worldly impediments and so are fit for *running;* they think it much longer until they come to God, than impatient hearts do until they come to help.—*Jermin.*

To "the righteous" God is good, and he nestles and shelters himself in that;

"*runs into*" the nurture and shelter of God's love, and, in the comfort of this *strong tower*, "*is lifted high.*" But there is a profounder sense. The very "*name*" that is cavilled at by the lost is the foundation of the Christian's safety. "What the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh," God did by His "*name.*" He gave it to Christ's humanity. More specifically speaking, He used it in the "*name*" of His own righteousness, to balance our guilt and to give weight and value to the price of His redemption. We are repeatedly said to be saved by the "*name*" of God (Psa. liv. 1; John xvii. 11, 12). And this is the meaning. The perfect holiness of God, which the lost man would upbraid, is what is vital in the cross of Christ. It is not only "a strong tower," but our only defence. And the act of faith is a renouncing of self and a snatching at "the name," that is, the righteousness or substituted standing of our Great Deliverer. *Miller.*

Take the sinner in his first awakening conviction. He trembles at the thought of eternal condemnation. He looks forward—all is terror; backward—nothing but remorse; inward—all is darkness. Till now he had no idea of his need of salvation. His enemy now suggests that it is beyond his reach; that he has sinned too long and too much, against too much light and knowledge; how can he be saved? But *the name of the Lord* meets his eye. He spells out every letter, and putting it together, cries—"Who is a God like unto thee?" (Mic. vii. 18.) He runs to *it, as to a strong tower.* His burden of conscience is relieved. His soul is set free, and he enjoys his *safety. Take—again—the child of God*—feeble, distressed, assaulted. "What, if I should return to the world, look back, give up my profession, yield to my own deceitful heart, and perish at last with aggraved condemnation?" You are walking outside the gates *of your tower;* no wonder that your imprudence exposes you to "the fiery darts of the wicked." Read again *the name of the Lord!* Go back within the walls—See upon the *tower the name*—"I am the Lord; I change not" (Mal. iii. 6). Read the direction to trust in it—"Who is there among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant: that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? *Let him trust in the name of the Lord,* and stay upon his God" (Isa. i. 10). Mark the warrant of experience in this trust—"They that know *thy name* shall put their trust in Thee; for thou, Lord, hast not forsaken them that seek Thee" (Psalm ix. 10). Thus sense of danger, knowledge of the way, confidence in *the strength of the tower*—all gives a spring of life and earnestness to *run into it.* Here the *righteous*—the man justified by the grace, and sanctified by the Spirit, of God—*runneth* every day, every hour; realizing at once his fearful danger, and his perfect security.—*Bridges.*

For Homiletics on verse 12, see on chap. xi. 2 and xvi. 18.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 13.

Answering Before Hearing.

I. A man who gives judgment in a matter before he has heard all the facts of the case wrongs himself. If he were to give his opinion upon a building as soon as the builders had dug out the foundation, or were to criticise a picture when the artist had only sketched its outline upon his canvas, he would be deemed a fool, and what he said would have no weight whatever. Men would justly say that the house or the picture had as yet no existence, and therefore could not be judged. **And a man who has only heard a part of "a matter" is in no better**

position to judge in it, and commits as great a folly if he attempts to do so. He does violence to his own understanding—to those mental faculties which enable him to place things side by side and to compare them, and to sift and weigh evidence before he arrives at a conclusion. Unless he does this, the opinion that he forms to-day will be altered to morrow, and his mind will never be firmly made up on any subject. As a necessary consequence, nobody will give much heed to his judgment—no thoughtful person will attach much weight to his words—and he will thus deprive himself of that consideration and respect which he might otherwise have enjoyed.

II. Such a man often deeply wrongs others. A half-told story often makes the state of matters appear so different from the truth that it is a gross injustice to condemn or justify any person when that is all that is known. A man who does it proclaims that he values very lightly the reputation of those concerned, and is often a robber of what is more to a man than his purse, viz. his good name.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Secularly, this is beyond a doubt; judicially, here is a great outrage; socially, a something very impolite; but religiously, a thing altogether a "*shame.*" Men born yesterday might certainly afford to listen. Life is a wide thing; and might, at least, be acted through, before in the darker points we insist upon a judgment. . . *Folly*, and therefore, mischief; *shame*, and therefore, ill desert. These elements often appear together.—*Miller.*

According to Mr. Stuart Mill, it might be plausibly maintained that in almost every one of the leading controversies, past or present, in social philosophy, both sides were right in what they affirmed, though wrong in what they denied; and that if either could have been made to take the other's views in addition to his own, little more would have been needed to make its doctrine correct. . . . Nicodemus did well to start the seasonable query, "Doth our law judge any man before it hear him, and know what he doth?" Festus did well to protest that it was not the manner of the Romans to deliver any man to die before that he which was accused had the accusers face to face, and had licence to answer for himself concerning the charge laid against him. And in the same spirit and by the same rule, otherwise applied, had Felix done well to defer hearing Paul's defence until Paul's accusers were present. . . . . Aristides, they tell us, would lend but one ear to anyone who accused an absent "party," and used to hold his hand on the other, intimating that he reserved one ear for the absentee accused. . . . Cicero, "the greatest orator, save one, of antiquity," has left it on record, as we are pertinently reminded on the *Essays on Liberty*, that he always studied his adversaries' case with as great intensity as his own, if not still greater. And what Cicero practised as the means of forensic success, requires, as the essayist urges, to be imitated by all who study any subject in order to arrive at the truth. For he who knows only his own side of the case is convicted of knowing little of that; his reasons may be good and no one may have been able to refute them, but if he is equally unable to refute the reasons on the opposite side, if he does not so much as know what they are, what rational ground has he for preferring either opinion?—*Jacox.*

We ought to be the more cautious in forming and pronouncing opinions, because we are so little disposed to admit conviction if we fall into mistakes, or to retract them upon conviction. It is commonly supposed that ministers cannot repent, although they do not claim, like the Pope, the gift of infallibility; and there is too much reason for the supposition, pro-

vided it be not restricted to that order of men; for the same pride that makes one set of men stubborn in their wrong opinions is to be found in other men, although it is not perhaps so much strengthened by particular circumstances, nor so visible in their conduct, because they meet not with the same temptations to discover it. How many do we find who will not change their sentiments about religion, or about persons and things, upon the clearest evidence, and give way to anger upon the least contradiction to their favourite notions, as if their dearest interests were attacked! Saints themselves are not entirely delivered from this selfish disposition, as we see in the behaviour of David to Mephibosheth, after he had pronounced a rash sentence in his case.—*Lawson.*

The sources of the evil are various. There is—1. Natural or acquired *eagerness of spirit*, and *impatience of protracted inquiry.* Such minds cannot bear anything that requires close and long-sustained attention. They become uneasy, fretted, and fidgetty; and are ever anxious to catch at any occasion for cutting the matter short and being done with it. 2. The *sympathy of passion with one or other of the parties.* One of them happens to be their friend; and whether it be he or his adversary that makes the statement, partiality for him stirs their resentment at the injury done to him; the blood warms, and, passion thus striking in, they hastily interrupt the narration—will hear no more of it—and at once proceed to load the enemy of their friend with abuse and imprecation. They know their friend, and to them it is enough that he has been a sufferer; they take it for granted that he must be in the right. 3. *Indolence—indisposition to be troubled.* This is a temper the very opposite of the first, but producing a similar effect. The former jumped to a conclusion from over-eagerness; this comes soon to a close from sheer sluggishness of mind. It is to a man of this stagnant and lazy temperament an exertion quite unbearable to keep his mind so long on the stretch as to listen even to a statement, and still more to an argument or pleading, that cannot be finished in a breath and done with. His attention soon flags; he gets sick of it; he seems as if he were listening when he is not, and with a yawn of exhaustion and misery he pronounces his verdict, and at times with great decision, for no other purpose than to get quit of the trouble. He can stand it no longer. 4. *Self-conceit*—the *affectation of extraordinary acuteness.* This would be an amusing character, were it not, at the same time, so provoking. The self-conceited man assumes a very sagacious and penetrating look—sits down with apparent determination to hear out the cause on both sides, and to "judge righteous judgment." But it is hardly well begun, when the self-conceited man sees to the end of it . . . . It is surprising with what agility this spirit of self-conceit gets over difficulties. It sees none—no, never.

"Where others toil with philosophic force,
Its nimble nonsense takes a shorter course;
Flings at your head conviction in the lump,
And gains remote conclusions at a jump."—
Wardlaw.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 14.

SICKNESS OF BODY AND WOUNDS OF SOUL.

I. A man can rise above pain of body. Men who do not seek supernatural help sometimes do it. They are endowed with a natural courage which makes them scorn to be overcome by physical pain, or they are naturally very hopeful, and are enabled in some measure to look beyond the present suffering to a time of relief in the future. Or intense excitement of the mind renders them for a time at least oblivious of bodily sensations. How many illustrations of this

last case we have in men who have been desperately wounded in battle, and yet have been so intensely absorbed in the terrible contest that they have seemed scarcely aware of it, and have kept their position until their strength has utterly failed. But it is pre-eminently the godly man who can "sustain" infirmity of body. It is a fact of history that godly men and women have been even joyful in spirit when suffering great bodily pain. Instances are common in which those who have been in agony of body from some terrible disease have been full of comfort in their spirits, and have borne witness that they were conscious of a sustaining power outside themselves—of supernatural help from above which enabled them to "glory in tribulation." But this ability of human creatures to rise above bodily suffering has been most remarkably exemplified in those who have suffered because they were the servants of God—who have been witnesses for the truth of the gospel of Christ. Even women have borne the most severe bodily sufferings not only with fortitude but with exultation—lifted above their bodily pain by a vivid realisation of unseen and spiritual realities and an intense consciousness of the favour of God.

II. But a wounded spirit crushes the entire man. The spirit of the man is the man himself, his power to love, to hope, and to enjoy. When these have lost their energy, there is nothing to lift him up, and existence becomes an intolerable burden. The spirit can sustain the body under its trials, but sensual gratifications and physical comforts can do nothing towards alleviating spiritual distress. But observe:—1. *That all sorrow of heart does not crush a man.* Sanctified sorrow, although it wounds the spirit, yet it only wounds it to raise it to a higher level—to make it capable of a more refined enjoyment. Bereavement, the faithlessness of friends, disappointed hopes, often deeply wound the spirit, yet men bear these wounds and often are made better and stronger by them. A sense of the favour of God and a peaceful conscience will prevent men from being overwhelmed by even very keen mental sorrow. 2. *An unbearable wound of spirit can be the portion of those only who have no sense of the favour of God.* So long as a man has this no pain of body or sorrow of soul can cast him down entirely, but without it he has little power to bear manfully the burdens of life, and a sense of the absence of it would be enough to crush him utterly although he had no other burdens to bear.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Spiritual sickness varies (as some diseases do in the body according to the constitution of the sick) thereafter as the soul is that hath it, whether regenerate or reprobate. The malignancy is great in both, but with far less danger in the former. 1. In the elect, this spiritual sickness is an afflicted conscience, when God will suffer us to take a deep sense of our sins, and bring us to the life of grace by the valley of death, as it were by hell gates unto heaven. There is no anguish to that of the conscience: "A wounded spirit who can bear? They that have been valiant in bearing wrongs, in forbearing delights, have yet had womanish and coward spirits in sustaining the terrors of a tumultuous conscience. If our strength were as an army, and our lands not limited save with east and west, if our meat were manna, and our garments as the ephod of Aaron; yet the afflicted conscience would refuse to be cheered with all these comforts. When God shall raise up our sins, like dust and smoke in the eyes of our souls . . . when He either hides His countenance from us, or beholds us with an angry look; lo, then, if any sickness be like this sickness, any calamity like the fainting soul! Many offences touch the body which extend not to the soul; but if the soul be grieved, the sympathising flesh suffers deeply with it.

The blood is dried up, the marrow wasted, the flesh pined, as if the powers and pores of the body opened themselves like so many windows to discover the passions of the distressed prisoner within. It was not the sense of outward sufferings (for more men have borne the agonies of death undaunted) but the wrestling of God's wrath with His spirit, that drew from Christ that complaint, able to make heaven and earth stand aghast: "My soul is heavy unto death" (Matt. xxvi. 38) . . . Neither is this sickness of conscience properly good in itself, nor any grace of God, but used by God as an instrument of good to His, as when by the spirit of bondage He brings us to adoption. So the needle that draws the thread through the cloth is some means to join it together. . . . 2. Spiritual sickness for sin befalling a reprobate soul, is final and total desperation. This is that fearful consequent which treads upon the heels of presumption. Cain's fratricide, Judas's treachery, presumptious, aspiring, heaven-daring sins, find this final catastrophe, to despair of the mercy of God. . . . As if the goodness of God, and the value of Christ's ransom, were below his iniquity. As if the pardon of his sins would empty God's storehouse of compassion, and leave His stock of mercy poor . . . This is that sin which not only offers injury and indignity to the Lord of heaven and earth, but even breaks that league of kindness which we owe to our own flesh. To commit sin is the killing of the soul; to refuse hope of mercy is to cast it down to hell. Therefore St. Jerome affirms that Judas sinned more in despairing of his Master's pardon than in betraying Him; since nothing can be more derogatory to the goodness of God, which He hath granted by promise and oath—two immutable witnesses—to penitent sinners than to credit the father of lies before Him.—*T. Adams.*

"The spirit of a man may control his sickness, but a spirit of upbraiding, who can carry that?" To give all up, and simply lie back and murmur, is bad even for worldly disorders; but Solomon derives out of it a much more profound spiritual sense. The "spirit of a man," at least among those to whom Solomon wrote, had truth enough to save him if he would only *listen. Control.* The original is *contain*, as wine in a bottle, *sickness*—literally what is physical; but in this same book employed for the spiritual malady. If the soul, therefore, would lie quiet, and yield to its own light, it would be joined by what is higher, and would contain, or control its own malady; God helping, as He would, would check, and get the better of it; but "a spirit of upbraiding"—and by this is meant precisely the *quarrel* (chap. xvii. 19) with God which has been so long discussed—is what ruins all. It is upon them that are *contentious*, and will not obey the truth, (Rom. ii. 8)—that truth being in all of them through "the invisible things" which are seen "by the things that are made" (Rom. i. 20)—that the apostle denounces "tribulation and wrath, indignation and anguish." Not that men can save themselves, but that they would save themselves under God's influences if they did not contend with Him; that it is "*rebellion*" that turns the scale (Psa. lxviii. 6); that there is light enough in every man to draw him to saving light if he would only follow it; and that on this very account it is the great sorrow of the sinner that he has this "spirit of upbraiding," which, in the spiritual world, no moral malady "can carry."—*Miller.*

St. Gregory saith by patience we possess our souls, because, while we learn to bear rule over ourselves, we begin to possess that which we are. And surely, if thou be courageously patient, whatsoever thou mayest lose yet thou enjoyest that which thou hast; or, if thou hast nothing, yet thou shalt enjoy thyself, thou shalt enjoy the comfort of thy own spirit. Whereas impatiency for anything that is lost taketh away the comfort of all that remaineth, yea, the comfort of thine own self.—*Jermin.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 15.

PRUDENCE AND KNOWLEDGE.

We have before given a definition of prudence as wisdom applied to practice; a prudent man is likewise defined as one "cautious to avoid harm." Taking in both definitions, the text suggests—

I. That ignorance exposes men to danger. This is true in relation to any and every kind of evil to which men are exposed. A man who is in the general sense of the term an ignorant man—who does not possess even the rudimentary knowledge of an ordinary schoolboy—is liable to be imposed upon and deceived by those who know more. Ignorance of physical and scientific truth often leads men to expose themselves to bodily danger without being aware of it, and ignorance of spiritual truth often causes men to become victims of great moral evil without realising their danger. If a man, therefore, desires to avoid harm to body, mind, and soul, he must set himself to acquire knowledge both in relation to things material and spiritual.

II. Prudence, i.e., wisdom applied to practice, is an indispensable qualification for obtaining knowledge. If a man possesses an estate beneath whose surface he knows there lies buried much precious mineral treasure, he must bring much wisdom and skill into play before he has the treasure in his hand. Wisdom must be reduced to practice in sinking the shaft and in working the mine before the hidden wealth is brought to light to enrich its owner. He must work, he must work in harmony with certain fixed laws if he is to become possessor of the treasure. So with obtaining knowledge. A man must exert himself—he must seek—and his exertions must be wisely directed if he is to possess that knowledge which is better than any material treasure because it enriches the better part of a man. It is not enough to be active, but he must see that his actions are wisely directed, that the means are adapted to the end in view. If there is effort without wisdom to guide it there may be *seeking* without *getting*.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

A heart made discerning gains in knowledge, etc. This is a beautiful fact. Snow gathers snow as we roll it on the ground. A wood gathers wood, like all vegetable or vital growths. A sinner stands dead like a blasted oak, but a saint not only lives by growing, but grows by living.—*Miller.*

"The *heart* is here, as in many other instances, apparently used for *the mind* in general, including both the intellect and the affections. There is in "the wise" a love of knowledge, and an application of the mental powers for its attainment. And as "*the ear*" is one of the great inlets to instruction, it may here, with propriety, be considered as comprehending all the ways in which knowledge may be acquired.—*Wardlaw.*

The common course is that *seeking* goes before *getting*, but here getting is first, and seeking follows after. For surely they are the best seekers of knowledge, and are most earnest after it, who have already gotten it. They who have not gotten it do not know the worth of it, and so have no mind to look after it, or if they have the mind, they have no knowledge how to seek it. But they who have already found it are so affected with the worth of it, so directed by the light of it, as that they still seek more, still get more.—*Jackson.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 16.

THE INFLUENCE OF TALENT.

Understanding the gift here spoken of as a special mental endowment (see Hitzig), we remark—

I. That great abilities are gifts from God. There are certain mental capabilities which are the common inheritance of men in general, but it cannot be denied that there are men who, apart from all the differences made by circumstances and education, have capacities and abilities which far exceed those of ordinary men. The gift of one talent is more common than the gift of ten, yet both the ten and the one are gifts from the same hand. Although the Divine Creator gives to all men *liberally*, He does not give to all *equally*, but seeing that man is not responsible for this inequality, those who are most richly endowed should find in the fact of their superiority matter for gratitude and not for self-glorification.

II. Such a gift tends to the exaltation of the man who possesses it. It "maketh room for him" in the world—it opens up to him many opportunities of social advancement, and it "bringeth him before great men,"—men who are either great in wealth and position or intellectually and morally great, or are great in both senses of the word. As surely as water will find its level, so a truly gifted man will find some outlet for his talents—some sphere large enough to use what has been bestowed upon him for the very purpose of being used. Even Daniel, although a captive in Babylon, found that the God-given powers within him made room for him at a heathen court and brought him before more than one mighty monarch.

III. Such a gift to a man is a gift for men. Although it tends to his own personal exaltation and benefit, it is not bestowed for that purpose only or chiefly. When God bestows upon one man capabilities and endowments far above the common order, He does not intend to bless that man alone by the gift, but he holds him responsible for the use of the power put into his hand—He expects him so to employ his talents that his fellow-men also may be blessed by the gift. Thus the administrative ability which was bestowed upon Joseph was not given to him simply or chiefly to bring him before Pharaoh for his own advancement, but to bring blessing to the Egyptian nation, and to further God's purposes concerning his own family. When the Lord reckons with His servants, He will account that talent mis-used which is used for self-aggrandisement alone.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 17.

CROSS-EXAMINATION.

I. The evidence of one person alone must not be too much depended on. This is but another way of putting the old proverb that "One tale is good till another is told." And this does not necessarily imply that the first teller of the tale is an untruthful person, but we are so apt to apprehend facts through the medium of our own prejudices—to see things in the light in which we wish to see them—that even two truthful men may sometimes vary much in their version of the same occurrence. This will be more certainly the case if it is a man's "own cause" that is under discussion, self-interest is then very likely to lead him to give a one-sided statement. He may unintentionally leave out facts which in the eyes of another person may be very important, or he may bring others into a prominence to which an impartial judge may not consider them entitled. Hence—

II. The need of cross-examination—of another to "come and search him." Questioning may not convict the first person of any mis-statement, but it may elicit other facts which give quite a different colouring to the whole. The wife of Potiphar seemed "*just in her cause*" when she declared that Joseph left his garment in her hand and fled. This was not an untruth, and appearances were certainly very much against her innocent victim, but if Joseph had been allowed to tell his story too, the truth might have come to light. Therefore we learn that we must not give a verdict for or against an accused person until both he and his accuser have been heard.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

The first clause reads thus in the Hebrew, "*A righteous one, the first in his quarrel,*" and has a brevity which is practically too great. The *righteous* is not a *righteous* man *pro vero*, but only *righteous*, he having the first chance to speak. How true this is, men for the first time in a court can easily imagine. Each last strong speech comes out victorious. Now the lost has done all the strong speaking as yet. Wait till God speaks, and the case will look very differently.—*Miller.*

In every cause, the first information, if it have dwelt for a little in the judge's mind, takes deep root, and colours and takes possession of it, insomuch that it will hardly be washed out unless either some clear falsehood be detected or some deceit in the statement thereof.—*Bacon.*

Saul made himself appear *just in his own cause.* The necessity of the case seemed to warrant the deviation from the command. But Samuel *searched him*, and laid open his rebellion. (1 Sam. xv. 17–23.) Ziba's cause *seemed just* in David's eyes, until Mephibosheth's explanation *searched him* to his confusion. Job's incautious self-defence was laid open by Elihu's probing application. (Job xxxiii. 8-12.) —*Bridges.*

In religious disputes it is a great injustice to depend for the character of a sect, or an impartial representation of their doctrines, upon one whom partiality has blinded and rendered unfit, however honest he may be, to do them justice. Party spirit has as much influence as gifts to blind the eyes of the wise, and to pervert the words of the righteous.—*Lawson.*

This word, falling from heaven on the busy life of man, is echoed back from every quarter in a universal acknowledgment of its justness . . . This scripture reveals a crook in the creature that God made upright. There is a bias in the heart, the fountain of impulse, and the resulting life-course turns deceitfully aside. Self-love is the twist in the heart within, and self-interest is the side to which the variation from righteousness steadily tends . . . . The heart makes the lie, deceiving first the man himself, and thereafter his neighbours. The bent is in the mould where the thought is first cast in embryo, and everything that comes forth is crooked. In my early childhood a fact regarding the relations of matter came under my observation which I now see has its analogue in the moral laws. An industrious old man, by trade a mason, was engaged to build a certain piece of wall at so much per yard. He came at the appointed time, laid the foundations according to the specifications, and proceeded with his building, course upon course, according to the approved methods of his craft. When the work had advanced several feet above the ground, a younger man, with a steadier hand and a brighter eye, came to assist the elder operator. Casting his eye along the work, as he laid down his tools and adjusted his apron, he detected a defect, and instantly called out to his senior partner that the wall was not plumb. "It must be plumb," rejoined the builder, somewhat piqued, "for I have laid every stone by the plumb-line." Suiting the action to the word he grasped the rule, laid it

along his work, and triumphantly pointed to the lead vibrating and settling down precisely on the cut that marks the middle. Sure enough the wall was according to rule, and yet the wall was not plumb. The rule was examined, and the discovery was made that the old man, with his defective eyesight, had drawn the cord through the wrong slit at the top of the instrument, and then from some cause which I cannot explain, using only one side of it, had never detected his mistake. . . . It is on some such principle that people err in preparing a representation of their own case. They suspend their plumb, not from the middle, but from one edge of the rule, and that the edge which lies next their own interests.—*Arnot.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 18.

THE USE OF THE LOT.

We have before had the lot as a symbol of human freedom and Divine pre-ordination (chap. xvi. 33, page 499). In this verse the thought is the advantage of its use as putting an end to contention. That it is thus a means to a most desirable end appears when we consider—

I. **That it prevents waste of time.** Time is to human creatures a very precious commodity, because the longest life lived in this world is comparatively short. If a man has a very small inheritance he cannot afford to have one and another of his neighbours encroaching upon his land and taking a portion here and there, or others putting their hands into his pockets and helping themselves to what is only sufficient for his own needs. If a young artist has a sketch given to him by his master which he is to fill up in a given time, he cannot afford to spend the moments in disputing with his fellow-pupils about their respective rights to certain brushes and colours; while he is contending the hours are going, and when the master calls for the picture he will have none to show. A man's life is a limited inheritance, given to him by God, to use first of all for his own spiritual good, and he cannot afford to be robbed of any part of it. It is an outline which God has given to him to be filled up in a certain time—spiritual and mental capacities and abilities are bestowed upon him which he is expected so to use as to form a godly noble character, and he cannot afford to waste any of the life given him for this purpose in contention with his brother man, thereby arousing the devil within himself and in him with whom he disputes. The use of the lot is therefore desirable under certain conditions and restrictions, because in ending contention it saves time. When the eleven Apostles were awaiting the seal of their commission, they felt that they had no time to waste in contending who should fill up the empty place in their band—they knew that, although they were brethren in Christ, they might differ in their opinions in the matter—and they therefore wisely determined to decide it by referring to the lot. There have been, since, Christian men and women who resort to the same method of avoiding contention; and with the example of the Apostles before us, we can have no doubt that they are justified in so doing. But—

II. **It prevents waste of material wealth.** If the kings and great men of the earth had resorted to this method of "causing contentions to cease and parting between the mighty," how many homes and cities would have escaped overthrow, how many a fruitful and prosperous country would have been preserved from desolation, and how many a princely fortune would have remained in the hands of its rightful owners. God divided the land of Israel by lot, and if men had generally been content to permit Him to divide the earth among them in a similar manner, how much more rich and prosperous would they have been.

III. It prevents waste of human life. It would be indeed a blessing if property was the most precious thing wasted in the contentions of men. But, alas, disputes often lead to far more serious consequences, and that life of man, which is at the best so limited, has been made much shorter by the sword of his fellow-man. Sometimes family feuds have led men to resort to this terrible method of settling disputes, and men of the same parentage have fought till one shed the other's blood. And sometimes it has been a nation that has contended with another, and then not one has fallen a victim, but hundreds on both sides. And when we think not only of the wounds thus inflicted, and the lives thus cut off, but of the wounded hearts and darkened lives of those who mourn them, we must allow that any means of ending contention is better than permitting it to work its deadly work. And the fact that the lot was used by Israel at the command of God, and sanctioned by Him in the early history of the Christian Church, makes it certain that if used in a right spirit it might still be employed so as to be acceptable to Him.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

As the lot was had recourse to when causes were such as admitted not of determination otherwise, there seems to be a natural enough relation of suggestion between this verse and the preceding. In cases when representations differed, and the evidence between them was such as to leave it impossible to say certainly on which side was the preponderance, or when the parties would not submit to arbitration, or when they were too powerful to be safely meddled with, then "the lot caused contentions to cease, and parted between the mighty."—*Wardlaw.*

There seems no Scriptural prohibition to the use of this ordinance, provided it be exercised in a reverential dependence upon God, and not profaned for common purposes or worldly ends. At the same time the Word of God appears to be more fully recognised as the arbiter of the Divine will. . . . . Perhaps it is more easy to abide by the decision of the lot than of the Word. The last requires more self-denial, humility, and patience, and therefore is more practically useful.—*Bridges.*

He that hath commanded to cease from labour, hath much more commanded to cease from strife. He that was pleased to make the Sabbath of rest, is also pleased with those who make a Sabbath of peace. This is a Sabbath altogether moral, never to be abrogated. Wherefore let reason and indifferency hear the differences that are between any, and if it can be done let them be reconciled. But if otherwise it cannot be ordered then let a *lot* be the compromiser of them. In that there can be no partiality, and though itself cannot judge of right, yet He that guides it is the most righteous Judge of the world. If a lot have erred, it is when men's understanding could have put things right, for God, having given power to men, He looks that men should use it. But God so loveth peace, that, where men cannot, He will do right, if that the lot refer unto His arbitrament. Wherefore, when the mighty strive, and might of reason standeth on both sides equally, being too strong for man to decide, let the Almighty by His lot decide it.—*Jermin.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 19.

CASTLE BARS.

The state of things treated in this verse reveals most conclusively that man has fallen. Contention between any men is a plain proof that there is some

flaw in human nature, that the relations of human creatures are not what they ought to be. If the disputants are men of the same nation, their contention seems more unnatural than if they belonged to different races, but when sons of the same father—men brought up at the knees of the same mother, are found in a state of enmity, we have a very strong proof that the race is not what its head was when he came fresh from the hand of his Creator. Such enmity Solomon compares to the bars of a castle—

I. Because it is hard to break through. The bars that guard the outlet of a fortress are strong, and when the iron crowbar is applied to them with a view of making an entrance, the weapon finds itself resisted by a substance as unyielding as its own. The bars strike against each other, but neither being more brittle than its antagonist, no progress is made. It is no ordinary difference that makes a ground of quarrel between brothers; there are so many ties to be broken and so many motives of self-interest to bind them, that the enmity must be deep to separate them at first, and being deep and strong, it is not easily broken down.

II. Because it is the only thing that separates them. Friends who dearly love each other and are one in spirit sometimes find nothing between them but a few bars—the iron grating of a dungeon may be all that keeps them apart. But although it is only that, it is a very real and terrible barrier. And a dispute between brethren is like iron bars, dividing those who ought to be one more truly and sadly than any prison door could separate them. They may be dwelling under the same roof, and so have every opportunity of enjoying each other's society and gladdening each other's life. But contention builds around each one a more impregnable barrier than the highest walls of the strongest fortress.

III. That to subdue such enmity requires more wisdom and skill than to take a city. There are several methods by which a city may be won. It may be taken by superior physical force, it may be surprised and captured, or its inhabitants may be starved into a surrender. But it is not so easy to capture a human heart—an angry brother must be subdued by different means, and by weapons which require more skilful handling. No physical force can break down enmity of heart—even God cannot reconcile men unto Himself by His physical omnipotence, but wins them by love. And this is the only power which can win "a brother offended." If he has been in the wrong we must approach him with a free forgiveness, and if the wrong has been on our side we must approach with submission and acknowledgment of our fault.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

"When a brother is revolted away, it is from a city of strength; and contentions are like the bars of a citadel." The whole meaning is, that one "*brother*" "*revolted* away" from another, is "*revolted from a city of strength*," that being what one is to all the rest. In other words, brothers are a shelter to brothers, and quarrels lock up that resort. . . Notice, that a brother is not only a commoner defence, but a "citadel;" and a "bar" to that keep shuts a man out of his best earthly dependence. It is a fine adage, even for this world . . . but when applied to our Great Brother, and to our God and King, it is one of the noblest of inspired texts. He who offends our Brother Prince shuts a high tower (Psa. xviii. 2). He who quarrels with our Surety snaps to the lock of a citadel; and then, alas, it shall be, just as the wild rush of embittered enemies should have roused him to enter in.—*Miller.*

The sweeter the wine the sharper the vinegar; accordingly, the greater the love implanted by nature, the more

bitter the hate where this love is violated.—*Zeltner.*

The *matter of fact* is here stated—and there are natural enough reasons to account for it. More is justly expected from a brother than from a stranger—more of affection, gratitude, kindly treatment, fidelity, and trustworthiness. When such expectations are disappointed, the wound in the spirit is proportionately deeper, and more difficult of healing—the breach wider, and harder of being made up. Besides, the slower a person is to take offence—the longer he forbears—the more he forgives—the more difficult it is fairly to overcome the yearnings of affection, and break the bonds of brotherhood—the more inveterate may the spirit of resentment be; the more sullen and distant the alienation, when it is actually produced.—*Wardlaw.*

Whether it be a brother by race, place, or grace; those oft that loved most dearly, if once the devil cast his club between them, hate most deadly. . . . . As for brethren by profession, and that of the true religion too, among Protestants, you shall meet with many divisions, and those prosecuted with a great deal of bitterness. No war breaks out sooner, or lasts longer, than that among divines, or that about a sacrament; a sacrament of love, a communion, and yet the occasion, by accident, of much dissension.—*Trapp.*

The original word here used is a brother revolting or departing by disloyalty; or else a brother offended by disloyal departing. For such ought to be the command of love between brethren, that he that breaks it is a disloyal rebel unto it. And surely they had need to be firmly tied, because, being divided, they are so hardly joined. For as that which being whole is most strongly united, being broken is farthest from being made whole; and as a stick of hard wax, being broken, may more easily be conjoined than a stick of hard wood, so are the divisions of brethren more hardly composed than the contentions of others.—*Jermin.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSES 20 *and* 21.

THE POWER OF THE LITTLE MEMBER.

Solomon again and again reverts to the mighty influences for good and evil which flow from the use of the tongue—that "little member" upon which such great issues often depend. He here notices—

I. **The power of words over the man who utters them.** He declares that the state of the inward man—its rest or unrest, its gladness or its gloom—depends very much upon the use that is made of the tongue. A little thought and observation will convince us that this is true. Beginning with the familiar intercourse of every-day life, how true it is that the utterance of kindly words of sympathy, and advice and warning, have a tendency to make sunshine in the heart of him who utters them, while censorious, hasty, harsh words embitter and darken the spirit of their author. Going beyond these to utterances which have a wider influence, the proverb is no less true. The painter that has conceived a picture in his mind, and then, seeing it upon canvas, thinks of the many eyes who will gaze upon it with interest, and of those who perchance will be elevated and instructed by it, feels a satisfaction in the thought that it owes its existence to him—that without the working of his brain and hand it would not have been. "He is filled with the increase" of his skilful hand. So the man whose words are listened to and waited for by other men—whether he be the skilful barrister, or the powerful statesman, or the preacher of the Gospel, has a satisfaction in being able so to put forth his conceptions as to give to his fellow-men new ideas—to show them things in a light in which they might never have seen

them but for this power which he possesses. He has joy in being the originator of fresh and living thoughts, and in being able by clothing them in words to impart them to others. But upon the moral quality of the "fruit of his mouth" will depend the length and depth of his satisfaction. The simple power to influence men by speech will gratify for the moment—but if the increase of the lips is to be an abiding source of contentment there must be a consciousness that the power has been used to benefit mankind in some way or other—that the skilful pleading has been on the side of right, that the powerful logic has been used to expose the false and to defend the true, or the brilliant oratory has had for its aim the moral enlightenment and strengthening of the listeners. If it be not so, the fruit of a man's mouth will be like the roll given to the apocalyptic seer, "in the mouth as sweet as honey," but afterwards "bitter." (Rev. x. 10.) How sad must be the reflections of those who have possessed this God-given power for good or ill when they have to look back upon its misuse.

II. **The power of words over those who hear them.** The tongue in its mighty influence is a king having the power of life and death. No other member of the human body can lay claim to such wide-spread and regal authority. The eye can influence men, but not so powerfully as the tongue, nor can its influence reach so many at once. The hand can strike down the body of a single foe, or of two or three at once. But the tongue can reach a thousand hearts at one time, and make men its slaves, not in twos and threes but in masses. And as it sways the affections and takes a man's will captive, it wields the power of life and death not over the body of the man but over the man himself. The tongue of the tempter can drag its victims down, body and soul, to hell, while the tongue which is touched with a living coal from off the altar of God can be the means of persuading men to be reconciled to their Heavenly Father, and so of making them partakers of eternal life. Seeing, then, what issues of life and death are dependent upon this king, it is manifest that men should keep him in absolute control; if so much depends upon his action he ought to be under the strictest supervision. If one member of the body politic, by the position which he holds and the ability which he possesses, is able to exercise a very powerful influence in the kingdom for weal or for woe, men watch him narrowly and jealously to see how he uses his power, and if they are anxious for the well-being of the State they endeavour to restrain him when he is going wrong and stimulate him when he is using his influence for the right. So ought every man to watch and guard his own tongue; seeing that life and death are in its power, he ought to bring all his words to the bar of conscience and try them there, severely condemning them if they have not been such as would minister life to the hearers, and remembering that his Master has said, "*By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned*" (Matt. xii. 37).

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

If a man were possessed of a field exceedingly productive, either of good fruits or of noisome and poisonous herbs, according to the cultivation bestowed on it, what pains would he use to clear it of every weed, and to have it sown with good grain! and yet, when the harvest is come, he may take his choice whether he will eat of the product or not. Such a field is the tongue of man, with this difference, that a man is obliged to eat the fruit of it, although it should be worse than hemlock. What care, then, should we use to pluck from our hearts every root of bitterness, and to have them furnished with knowledge and prudence, that our discourse may be good, to the use of edifying!—*Lawson.*

There is a sense in which we may

understand the language, even taking the former clause of the twentieth verse *literally*—"A man's *belly* shall be satisfied with the fruit of his mouth." You may smile and say, A man cannot live upon words! Very true. But the way in which a man uses his lips and his tongue, as the organs of speech, may contribute not a little to his getting, or his failing to get, "the meat that perisheth." I mean not that any of you should, in the slightest degree, try to work your way in life by words of flattery; but when a man's general conversation is such as to procure for him a character for discretion, courtesy, gratitude, straightforward integrity, and trustworthiness, this may surely contribute, eminently and directly, to the temporal sustenance and comfort of the man himself and his family: while an opposite style of intercourse may tend to penury and starvation. A man may, in various ways, make his "lips" the instrument of either want on the one hand, or plenty on the other.—*Wardlaw.*

Our understanding of ver. 20 is, that as the outward wants of a man are satisfied by his daily acts, so he himself is, and that simply *as* his acts, or because of the intimate sympathy between the man and what he does. This thought is still clearer in the verse that follows:—"Death and life are in the power (literally the *hand*) of the tongue." There can be no doubt that men's conduct (for tongue is but the leading instrument of it) determines *death* or *life*, yet, in spite of the adventurous hazard, their *love* to it (or literally, *just as they love this or that sort of tongue*), they shall eat its fruit, and incur, of course, fearful responsibilities.—*Miller.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 22.

A Twofold Good.

I. Polygamy cannot be recommended by those who have practised it. A thousand counterfeit coins, even if they pass as genuine for a time, are nothing worth in comparison with one real golden sovereign. Both may bear the image and superscription of the king, but the one is an insult to the name it bears while the other has a right to be imprinted with the royal name. The author of this proverb was a polygamist—his great experience qualified him to give an opinion upon the subject—but we do not here find him dwelling upon the satisfaction of the harem, but upon the blessedness of a *wife*. He was fully conscious of the fact that a real partner of his life—one woman to be a help-meet for him according to the Divine intention—would have added much more to his real welfare than the thousand counterfeits to whom it was an insult to God to give the name of wives. More than once he bears testimony to the blessedness of marriage in the true sense of the word, but we never find him praising the practice which was so great a curse to his own life. In this proverb he indirectly condemns himself and warns others by his own example. A vessel that has gone to pieces upon the rocks may still be used to prevent others from sharing her fate. The broken timbers may serve to light a beacon fire which may warn other vessels to take another course. Polygamy was the rock upon which Solomon shipwrecked his social happiness and much more (1 Kings xi. 3), and he seems here and elsewhere to warn his descendants not to follow in his footsteps in this respect and conform to the custom of the heathen monarchs by whom they were surrounded.

II Monogamy brings a double portion—a good thing and the Divine favour. The favour of a good parent is a thing prized highly by a dutiful child, and enhances the value of every other blessing. The favour of a good king is in itself a fortune which few men would despise. The favour of God is a fortune

for a period which extends beyond that named in the marriage vow, it is a fortune which no creature can afford to despise, and a blessing which those who know Him prize before all things in earth or heaven. When a man enters into the marriage relation according to the Divine intention—making a woman his wife in the true sense of the word—he not only adds to his own comfort and consults his own interest, but he does that which is pleasing to God—he takes a step upon which he can fearlessly ask for the Divine blessing.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

"Findeth" implies the *rarity* of the thing obtained (Eccles. vii. 27, 28), and the need of circumspection in the search. Blind passion is not to make the selection at random.—*Fausset.*

The married who is truly Christian knows that, even though sometimes things are badly matched, still his marriage relation is well pleasing to God as His creation and ordinance, and what he therein does or endures, passes as done or suffered for God.—*Luther.*

There is a secular and a spiritual in every proverb. These two are not apart, but flow easily into each other. Secularly, a wife is the highest treasure. It is a vapid distinction to say a good wife, and the Bible many a time hurries on without any such distinction (comp. ch. iv. 3). A bad "wife" is no "*wife*" at all. A wife is the holiest of all relations; in this world the most powerful for good. . . . . A good marriage is a means of grace, . . . of course any relation that is near and potent is covered by the passage.—*Miller.*

I shall always endeavour to make choice of such a woman for my spouse who hath first made choice of Christ as a spouse for herself; that none may be made one flesh with me who is not made one spirit with Christ my Saviour. For I look upon the image of Christ as the best mark of beauty I can behold in her, and the grace of God as the best portion I can receive with her.—*Bp. Reynolds.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 23.

The Rich and Poor.

This proverb treats of a twofold aspect of human life which furnishes a strong proof of the fallen condition of human nature. There is, probably, no part of this earth—teeming although it is with riches enough to satisfy the needs of every living thing—in which those are not to be found who have to struggle hard for their daily bread, and who even then come off with but a scanty share. Poverty seems as universal as disease and death, and must be referred to the same source. For those who know anything of the character of God, know that it was not a part of his original intention that men should be placed in such circumstances; and when they look abroad upon their fellow-creatures, they see that all the poverty of the poor can be traced to wrong-doing on the part of men—to the sefishness of some, and to the indolence and vice of others. It is quite certain that, when God's will is done on earth as it is in heaven, the miserable poverty which now surrounds us on every side will cease to exist. Solomon here sets forth—

I. **One of the many evils of poverty.** He has before mentioned some of its advantages (see chap. xiii. 8, page 302), but the evil of the text is a very real and common one. A poor man has not only a very small share of the material comforts of life, but even for these he is often compelled to sue as for a favour. Even if he is an honest and able man, he may be so dependent upon the caprices

of the wealthy as to have to entreat their help and patronage before he can use his powers to his own advantage. Such a state of things is often felt to be hard and is undoubtedly so, and unless a poor man is noble and self-respecting, it has a tendency to make him cringing and servile—to dispose him to barter his conscience and his rights in order to satisfy his bodily needs. We know there have been many noble exceptions to this rule—that there have been hundreds of poor men who have preferred starvation to a forfeiture of any part of their God-given inheritance—but the temptation of the poor man in this direction is often very strong by reason of his great necessity.

II. One of the many temptations of wealth. It would be a difficult matter, and perhaps an impossible one, to enumerate all the respective moral advantages of poverty and riches, and strike the true balance between them. There can be no doubt that each has its peculiar temptations (see chap. xxx. 8, 9), and that one of the sins to which the rich man is most liable is that of inconsiderateness of the claims of his poor brother, and even of insolence towards him. It is a universal tendency of fallen humanity to look exclusively on his own things and not on the things of others, and the wealth of the rich man enables him to indulge this tendency to its utmost. And men are prone to go even beyond this—the children of the same common Father often take delight in making their poor brethren feel their dependence on them, and instead of giving sympathy and help freely and after a brotherly fashion, they withhold the first entirely, and if they give the latter they do it coldly and even contemptuously. That this is by no means the rule we have many proofs, but that the tendency is strong we know not only from observation but from the frequent warnings against it in the Word of God. The Apostle James charges even the professed followers of Christ with having "despised the poor" (Jas. ii. 6).

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

The angels smile at the way the sinner cavils. He reverses what the proverb pronounces natural. For He who is supremely *rich* is meek and tender, and he who is profoundly poor is loud in his reproach!—*Miller.*

The languages of several countries are not so different as of the poor and rich man in one and the same country, and a stranger of another land is not such a foreigner as in the same land a poor man standing at the door of the rich. The one when he speaketh is not understood by the ear, the other when he speaketh is not understood by the heart: the words of the one are not apprehended, the wants of the other are not apprehended; the one is heard, but not conceived; the other is conceived, but not heard. When two talk in diverse languages they are known to be men of diverse countries; but when the poor and rich talk together, so different is their speech that one would hardly think them to be both men, and of the same nature. The one speaks as if he had hardly breath to bring forth his words, the other speaketh with such a strong breath that the harshness of it giveth an ill scent a great way off.—*Jermin.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 24.

The Obligations of Friendship.

It will be seen from the Critical Notes that most modern critics translate the first clause of this verse very differently from the rendering in our Bibles. Some expositors, however, adhere to the old translation, and we therefore look at it—

I. As expressing a need of human nature. It matters not in what condition man is found, whether in riches or in poverty, whether ignorant and rude or highly civilized and educated, he needs the friendship of one or more of his fellow creatures. The special good-will of some who can feel with him and for him in all the vicissitudes of life is indispensable to his happiness. Among all the gifts which an Almighty Father has given to His children, there is perhaps none, after his own gracious favour, which is so necessary to their welfare or is so productive of joy as this gift of friendship. Men cannot live a life of isolation and know anything of the enjoyment of life. We cannot conceive of even perfect creatures living such a life—we know the angels and redeemed saints derive much of their bliss from the friendship of each other, and how much more does man in his present imperfect state need it. And the need can be supplied even in this selfish world. Men have been, and still are, able to find among their fellows those who are worthy of the name of friend. True it is that there is much that is called friendship that is unworthy of the name, but as we do not reject the real coin because there are base imitations of it, so we must not permit the counterfeit of friendship to shake our confidence in the real thing.

II. As setting forth an indispensable condition of making and keeping friends. If a man desires to know the sweets of real friendship he must be prepared to be himself a real friend. The selfish and morose man who will not deny himself for another's good, or who cannot rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep, cannot expect others to deny themselves for him and to sympathise with his joy and sorrow. If there is to be a genuine friendship there must be mutual confidence and a mutual recognition of excellencies, for if the trust and admiration is on one side only the fire will soon burn out for want of fuel. There are men whose love cannot be extinguished by coldness and distrust, but they are few and far between, and the wise man's words hold good as a general rule that "a man that hath friends must show himself friendly." (The latter clause of this verse was treated in Homiletics on chap. xvii. 17-18, page 518.)

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

A man of friends is apt to be broken all to pieces. (This is Miller's rendering only.) The significance of the whole is that a man of *wide acquaintance* is apt to *break*. Human friendships cost. In the strife to appear well, in the time it takes, in the industries they scatter, in the hospitalities they provoke, and in the securityships they engender, broadening our socialities will try every one of us well. It is not so with heavenly friendships. All spiritual communisms bless.—*Miller.*

Solomon delivers a warning against the vainglorious passion of aspiring to an universal acquaintance and an empty popularity, such as was courted by his brother Absalom, which will bring with it no support in adversity, but will ruin a man by pride and rashness and prodigal expenditure.—*Wordsworth.*

SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER.—That the chapter before us treats mainly of the virtues of social life, of sociability, affability, love of friends, compassion, etc., appears not merely from its initial and closing sentences, the first of which is directed against misanthropic selfishness, the latter against thoughtless and inconstant universal friendship, or seeming friendship, but also from the various rebukes which it contains of a contentious, quarrelsome, and partisan disposition, *e.g.* verses 5, 6, 8, 17-21. But in addition, most of the propositions that seem to be more remote may be brought under this general category of love to neighbours as the sum and basis of all social virtues; so especially the testimonies

against wild, foolish talking (verses 2, 7, 13, comp. 4 and 15); that against bold impiety, proud dispositions and hardness of heart against the poor (vers. 3, 12, 23), that against slothfulness in the duties of one's calling, foolish confidence in earthly riches, and want of true moral courage and confidence in God (vers. 9-11; comp. 14). Nay, even the commendation of a large liberality as a means of gaining for one's self favour and influence in human society (ver. 16), and likewise the praise of an excellent mistress of a family, are quite closely connected with this main subject of the chapter, which admonishes to love towards one's fellow-men; they only show the many-sided completeness with which the theme is here treated.—*Lange's Commentary.*

CHAPTER XIX.

CRITICAL NOTES.—1. Delitzsch translates the last clause, "*Than one with perverse lips, and so a fool.*" 2. Sinneth, literally "goeth astray." Delitzsch reads the last clause, "*He who hasteneth with the legs after it goeth astray.*" 3. **Perverteth,** rather "overtures," "ruins." 5. **Speaketh lies,** rather "*whose breath is lies.*" 6. **The prince,** rather "the noble or generous man." It seems to refer to one of rank, who is also of a benevolent disposition. "*Entreat the favour,*" literally "*stroke the face.*" 7. **He pursueth them.** &c. This clause is variously rendered. Zockler reads, "*He seeketh words* (of friendship), *and there are none;*" Delitzsch, "*Seeking after words which are vain;*" Miller, "*As one snatching at words, they come to stand towards him;*" Maurer and others, "*He pursueth after* (the fulfilment of the) *words* (of their past promises to him), *and these* (promises) are not (made good). 8. **Wisdom.** Literally *heart.* 9. **Speaketh lies,** "*whose breath is lies.*" 10. **Delight.** Most commentators translate this word "*luxury.*" Miller, however, as will be seen from his comment, retains the reading of the English version. 11. **Discretion,** or "*intelligence.*" 13. **Calamity.** The word so translated is in the plural form, so as to express the continuance of the trouble. 16 Miller reads this verse "*He that guards the commandment guards himself; in scattering his ways he dies.*" (See his comment.) Hitzig's rendering of the last clause agrees with Miller's. 18. **Let not thy soul spare for his crying** The translations of most expositors here differ widely from the authorised version. Grotius, Maurer, Delitzsch, Zöckler, etc., read, "*Let not thy soul rise to kill him,*" "*Go not too far to kill him,*" etc., all understanding the precept to be directed against excessive severity. Cartwright renders it "Let not thy soul spare him, *to his destruction.*" 20. **Latter end,** rather *afterwards.* 22. **The desire of a man,** &c. Rather "*A man's delight* (or glory) *is his beneficence,* or *A man's kindness is what makes him desirable,* or *is a desirable adornment.* 24. **In his bosom,** rather, *in the dish.* This is of course a hyperbolic expression to set forth the inactivity of the slothful man. "Athenæus," says Fausset, "describes (vi. 14) the slothful man as waiting until the roasted and seasoned thrushes fly into his mouth begging to be devoured." 27. **Cease my son.** &c. "That causeth" are not in the original and the instruction spoken of may therefore be evil or good. "Two conceptions are possible: 1. The instruction is that of wisdom itself, and therefore a good wholesome discipline that leads to life; then the words can be only ironical, presenting under the appearance of a dissuasion from discipline in wisdom a very urgent counsel to hear and receive it (so Ewald, Bertheau, Elster). 2. The instruction is evil and perverted, described in clause 2 as one that causes departure from the words of wisdom. Then the admonition is seriously intended" (*Zöckler,* in Lange's Commentary). On Zöckler's first interpretation Dr. Aiken remarks, "To call this 'irony' seems to us a misnomer. Cease to hear instruction only to despise it What can be more direct or literally pertinent?" Delitzsch says, "The proverb is a dissuasive from hypocrisy, a warning against the self-deception of which Jas. i. 22-24 speaks, against heightening one's own condemnation, which is the case of that servant who knows his lord's will and does it not (Luke xii. 47.)"

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 1.

I. A reference to an unexplained mystery of human life. It is here implied, though it is not directly expressed, that the fool who is perverse in his lips—who sets himself in speech and action against the moral law of the universe—is

not so poor a man as he who walks in integrity. (We have before had this latter character before us. See Homiletics on chap. xi. 3, page 196.) It seems as strange that power and influence should be so often given to those who know least how to put them to a good use, as it would be to see a parent put a knife into the hand of a child who was incapable of using it, yet it is a sight which meets us on every hand, and a mystery which has presented itself to the minds of thinking men in all ages. Solomon had met with such instances in his day—he had seen the godly and upright walking in the shade and treading the bye-paths of life, while the perverse and foolish man was basking in the sunlight of worldly prosperity in the highways of society.

II. An assertion, that, notwithstanding contrary appearances, the better portion is with the better man. It is not, after all, what a man's portion is, but how he uses it, that makes his life a blessing or a curse. A man who walks in integrity makes the righteous law of his God the rule of his life, and this keeping of the Divine commandments brings with it a reward (Psa. xix. 11) of which the rebellious fool knows nothing. He knows how to use his more limited opportunities and influence to the best advantage—how to put out his small capital so as to obtain the best interest upon it—how to trade with his five talents so as to make them other five, and so he is daily laying up a treasure which is better than all the fame and wealth that belongs to this world, for it is the riches of a righteous character by which he is raised himself to a higher spiritual level, and by which he is able to make the world better than he found it.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Integrity is itself a life, and a whole enjoyment, and better, therefore, than worldly interests which are nothing of the kind. Walking is an eastern figure, and we have failed to substitute it by a western one. A *way* in the East means a man's total course. *Walking*, therefore, means his total life or being. *Better is a poor man, etc.*, refers, therefore, to a man not living in his money, nor indeed, in his horses or in his hounds, not *living in* his integrity, but *walking* in it, *i.e.*, spending his whole time in it, staying in that way; of course, taking his pleasure in it (see verse 22.) We have before seen that *speech* means *whole conduct.* The mouth, in those days, was the great implement of action. It is so still. The commonest labourer bargains out and orders out half his living by his mouth. "Perverse" or "crooked" in speech means speaking (*i.e.* acting) athwart of what we ourselves know in many particulars; first, athwart all moral truth; second, athwart deep personal conviction; third, athwart all personal interest (as our text implies.) A Christian talks straight, because he speaks (acts) coincidently with all of these. A sinner is crooked of lip, because he says what he does not think, and traverses for his lusts all the best principles of his moral nature.—*Miller*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSES 2 and 3.

IGNORANCE LEADING TO SIN.

I. The soul of man cannot be absolutely without knowledge. There is some knowledge which comes to the soul without any effort on the part of the man, which he has but to live to acquire, just as he has but to open his eyes to see. He is conscious of his own existence—of his personal identity as apart from all the beings and things by which he is surrounded, and of his capability of suffering and enjoyment, of hope and despair. And because of the light within him he cannot be altogether ignorant of the difference between right and wrong, between

truth and falsehood. But his necessary knowledge extends to beings and things outside of himself. He knows without any effort much about the men and things which surround him, and the visible things of creation make it impossible that he should be altogether ignorant of the existence of the invisible God and Creator. So the apostle argues in Rom. i. 20.

II. **There is a knowledge which it is good to be without.** There is a knowledge which human nature in its original dignity and sinlessness did not possess, the absence of this experimental knowledge was an essential element of its blessedness. The ignorance of evil was a blessed ignorance in which man's Creator would have kept him but for his own wilfulness, and the knowledge of which brought him misery. It is the blessedness of the unfallen spirits who have kept their first estate, that although they are conscious of the existence of evil in the universe, they have no experimental knowledge of it, and this ignorance constitutes the blessedness of the ever-blessed God Himself. Those sons of men who, because they are, and ever have been, in perfect health, know nothing experimentally of bodily pain or weakness, find it very good to be without this knowledge, and how much more good is it to be without a knowledge of soul disease and spiritual suffering.

III. **But there is an acquired knowledge which is indispensable to a man's well-being.** Intellectual knowledge of some kind is necessary to prevent a man from being a shame to himself and a cumberer of the land. The well-being of the community depends upon one man's knowing some one thing that another man does not know; no man can know all things or even many things; no man, however great his knowledge, has enough of it to make him independent of the knowledge of others, but every man ought to have such a thorough knowledge of some facts and truths as to enable him to minister first to some of his own daily needs and to contribute something to the well-being of his fellow creatures. Some men must have theoretical knowledge, and others must know how to reduce theories to practice—the knowledge of the one is useless without the knowledge of the other. It behoves some men to investigate the history of the past, and to use the knowledge they so acquire for the good of the present generation, but while they are doing this it is indispensable that others should acquire a knowledge of things as they are at present, and should utilise their knowledge for the attainment of other ends which are quite as good. But intellectual knowledge of some kind is also necessary for the well-being of the mind itself. Man's mind can no more feed upon itself and be healthy than his body can feed upon itself and live. As the body needs to receive matter into itself to nourish and sustain it, so the mind needs to receive ideas upon which to feed and by which to grow. Without such a reception the intellectual part of a man remains undeveloped, and he is very far from the creature, intellectually considered, that God intended him to be. But there is a kind of knowledge even more needful for man to possess than that which will merely enlarge his mind or promote his temporal well-being. If his existence is to be really blest he must know things which relate to his spiritual well-being—he must be acquainted with the will of God concerning him, both in relation to the life that now is and to that which is to come. It is a calamity to be ignorant of things which fit a man to make the best of the present life, but it is a far greater calamity to be without that knowledge which fits a man for a blessed life beyond death. No man who possesses the revealed Word of God in the Scriptures need be without this most blessed and indispensable knowledge—everyone who thirsts for it may drink of this living water, and every hungry soul may eat of this bread and learn what are the thoughts of God concerning him, and what are the Divine purposes concerning his present and his future (Isa. lv. 1–7). And to be without this knowledge is indeed "not good," for it prevents the soul from recovering its lost and original dignity. A knowledge of the glorious God in the face of Jesus Christ is

the means by which we are delivered from the penalty and power of sin, and more than recover the position lost by man's fall. Ignorance here is indeed a fatal ignorance in those who have the knowledge within their reach; it is not good for any human soul to be without this knowledge, and it is most soul-destroying to those who have only to seek it in order to find it.

IV. Some of the evil consequences which flow from ignorance in general and from ignorance of God in particular. 1. *Ignorance leads to hasty action, and consequently often to wrong action.* For "he that hasteth with his feet sinneth," and "the foolishness of man perverteth his way." In common and every-day life we find that the most ignorant people are the least cautious, and act with the least reflection. Knowledge teaches men to think before they act, for it makes men more alive to the importance of their actions. A child will play with gunpowder with as little hesitation as he would with common dust, but a man would not do so, because he knows what would be the consequence if it ignited. A man who had never been in a coalmine, and who was ignorant of the dangers of fire-damp, would be very likely to descend the shaft and enter hastily into the gloomy passages without first testing the state of the air, but a miner would not do so, because he knows more about the matter. He would advance cautiously, and ascertain what was before him before he ventured far. So people who are ignorant of the mind and will of God as revealed in His word act without much thought as to the consequences of their actions—they enter upon a road at the impulse of a passing fancy, without asking themselves whither it leads—they decide upon a certain course of action without thought of the consequences. And such hasting with the feet is always a perversion of a man's way, a wandering from the right path, for a fallen man does not forsake the evil and choose the good by instinct but by effort founded upon reflection. 2. *Spiritual ignorance leads to rebellion against God.* It is only a man who does not know God, who "frets against the Lord." A child because he is ignorant of his father's motives will fret against the wise and kind restrictions which that father places around him. So men wilfully ignorant that whenever God says "Thou shalt not" He is only saying "Do thyself no harm," chafe and fret against His moral laws. They will not set themselves to obtain that knowledge of God which the gospel reveals and consequently they look at all His commands through a cloud of ignorance which makes them grievous and heavy instead of easy and light. And there are many mysteries connected with God's government that will tend to make men's hearts fretful and discontented if they remain in ignorance of His character. There are many problems in connection with man's present life which he cannot solve—many apparent contradictions, and much which looks like injustice on the part of Him who rules the world, and every soul who does not know God as He is revealed in His Son will, when he thinks on these things, is likely to be led to harbour rebellious thoughts against Him. When we consider the evil which flows from ignorance of God we can better understand how it is that "the knowledge of the Lord" is so often used in Scripture as synonymous with all that can bless and elevate mankind (see Isa. xi. 9, etc.)

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

We should desire first the enlightening of the eyes and then the strengthening of the feet. Hence "Make me to understand the way of Thy precepts," and then, "I will run the way of Thy commandments" (Psa. cxix. 27, 32). He that would sail safely must get a good pilot before good rowers. Swift horses, without a skilful waggoner, endangers more. He that labours for feet before he has eyes, takes a preposterous course; for, of the two the

lame is more likely to come to his journey's end than the blind . . . . Hence we see that there is more hope of a vicious person that hath a good understanding, than of an utterly dark and blind soul, though he walks upon zealous feet. . . . *Learn to know God.* "How shall we believe on Him we have not known?" (Rom. x. 14). Knowledge is not so much slighted here, as it will be wished hereafter. The rich man in hell desires to have his brethren taught (Luke xvi. 28). Sure if he were alive again, he would hire them a preacher. "The people are destroyed for lack of knowledge." (Hosea iv. 6). If we see a proper man cast away at the sessions for a *non legit*, with pity we conclude he might have been saved, if he could have read. At that general and last assizes, when Christ shall "come in flaming fire," woe be to them that "know not God" (2 Thess. i. 8). For "He will pour out His fury upon the heathen, that know Him not, and upon the families that call not on His name" (Jer. x. 25). . . . . In Prov. ix. 18, the new guest at the fatal banquet is described by his ignorance. "He knoweth not" what company is in the house, "that the dead are there." It is the devil's policy, when he would rob and ransack the house of our conscience, like a thief to put out the candle of our knowledge; that we might neither discern his purposes, nor decline his mischiefs. . . . Indeed ignorance may make a sin a less sin, but not no sin. "I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly, in unbelief," says the apostle (1 Tim. i. 13). The sins of them that know are more heinous than the sins of them that know not. But if thou hadst no other sin, thy ignorance is enough to condemn thee, for thou art bound to know. They that will not know the Lord, the Lord will not know them.—*T. Adams.*

The most innocent of all faults might seem ignorance. The only sin (when philosophically stated) is ignorance. The "chains" that confine the lost (2 Pet. ii. 4) are "darkness." The change that overtakes the saved is light (2 Cor. iv. 6). The graces that adorn the Christian all flow from a new intelligence. Our text is literally exact. If the man "has no knowledge," and that of a deep spiritual sort, his "life is no good;" that is, it possesses none, and is itself a horrid evil. And yet the concluding clause largely relieves the difficulty. The man, knowing there was something wrong, ought to pause, and grope about for the light, just as all would in a dark cavern. Instead of that he rushes darkly on. Here, the inspired finger is put upon the precise mistake. We are warned that we are in blindness. Why not hesitate, then, and cast about us? We push on, knowing we are in the dark. This is the photograph of the impenitent . . . And yet, the wise man says, he ignores this point of wilfulness, and in his heart is angry with the Almighty. He "perverteth," or *subverteth* "his way," that is, totally *upsets* and ruins, so that it is no way at all. Nothing could describe more truly the sinner's path, because it does not reach even the ends that he himself relied on. Death arrives, too, to wreck it totally. And though he has resisted the most winning arts to draw him unto Christ, yet, at each sad defeat, "his heart is angry against Jehovah."—*Miller.*

Ver. 2. Haste, as opposed to sloth, is the energy of Divine grace (Psa. cxix. 60, Luke xix. 6). Here, as opposed to consideration, *acting hastily* is sin. This impatience is the genuine exercise of self-will, not taking time to inquire; not "waiting for the counsel of the Lord." Godly Joshua offended here (Josh. ix. 14, 15). Saul's impatience cost him his kingdom (1 Sam. xiii. 12). David's *haste* was the occasion of gross injustice (2 Sam. xvi. 3, 4).—*Bridges.*

Religion a sentiment and a science. I know of no attack on Christianity more artfully made than that which is attempted when a distinction is attempted to be drawn between religion and theology . . . . Let us see what the value of religion is, when it

is separated from theology. We are told that religion is a sentiment, a temper, a state of mind. Theology is a science, a pursuit, a study . . . . and it is asserted or insinuated that it may be well with the soul, although it be destitute of spiritual knowledge. . . . But we, who are called Christians, by the very name we bear, imply that more than devotional sentiment is necessary to make a religious man. . . You must accept Jesus as the only Saviour if you would escape perdition, and how can you accept Him unless you know Him? Nay, further how can you accept Him unless you know yourself? . . . There are many other things which we ought to know and believe, to our soul's health and comfort; but . . . the soul that is without knowledge of this, the great Christian scheme, the Divine plan of salvation, is only nominally and by courtesy a Christian soul . . . Except as bearing upon these truths, the religious sentiment is a luxury and nothing more . . . It is not the theoretical *distinction* between the sentiment and the science that we censure, but their separation and divorce.—*Dean Hook.*

Ver. 3. Such was *the foolishness* of Adam! First he *perverted his way;* then he charged upon God its bitter fruit. "God, making him upright," made him happy. Had he been ruled by his will, he would have continued so. But, "seeking out his own inventions" (Eccles. vii. 29), he made himself miserable. As the author of his own misery, it was reasonable that he should fret against himself, but such was his pride and baseness, that *his heart fretted against the Lord*, as if he, not himself, was responsible (Gen. iii. 6-12). Thus his first-born, when his own sin had brought "punishment" on him, *fretted*, as if "it were greater than he could bear." (Ib. iv. 8-13). This has been *the foolishness* of Adam's children ever since. God has linked together moral and penal evil, sin and sorrow. The fool rushes into the sin, and most unreasonably *frets* for the sorrow; as if he could "gather grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles." (Matt. vii. 16). He charges his crosses, not on his own perverseness, but on the injustice of God. (Ezek. xviii. 25). But God is clear from all the blame (James i. 13, 14): He had shown the better; man chooses the worse. He had warned by his word and by conscience. Man, deaf to the warning, plunges into the misery; and, while "eating the fruit of his own ways," *his heart frets against the Lord.* "It is hard to have passions, and to be punished for indulging them. I could not help it. Why did he not give me grace to avoid it?" (See Jer. vii. 10). Such is the pride and blasphemy of an unhumbled spirit. The malefactor blames the judge for his righteous sentence. (Isa. viii. 21, 22, Rev. xvi. 9-11, 21).—*Bridges.*

This was the case in Greece as well as in Judea; for Homer observed that "men lay those evils upon the gods, which they have incurred through their own folly and perverseness." . . . This is often the case with regard— 1. *To men's health.* By intemperance . . . . indolence . . . . or too close application to business . . . or unruly passions, they injure their frame. . . . and then censure the providence of God. 2. *To their circumstances in life* . . . . Men complain that providence frowns on them . . . . when they have chosen a wrong profession, despising the advice of others . . . . or when they have brought themselves into straits by their own negligence. 3. *To their relations in life.* They complain of being unequally yoked. . . when they chose by the sight of the eye, or the vanity and lusts of the heart . . . . They complain that their children are undutiful . . . . when they have neglected their government. 4. *To their religious concerns.* They complain that they want inward peace when . . . . they neglect the appointed means of grace . . . . and that God giveth Satan power over them when by neglect they tempt the tempter.—*Job Orton.*

For Homiletics on the main thought of verse 4 see on chapter xiv. 20, page 370.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENT.

They are friends to the wealth, not the wealthy. They regard not *qualis sis*, but *quantus*—not how good thou art, but how great . . . . These flatter a rich man, as we feed beasts, till he be fat, and then fall on him . . . . These friends love not thy soul's good, but thy body's goods.—*T. Adams.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSES 5 and 9.

THE END OF A FALSE TONGUE.

We have before had proverbs dealing with the evil of lying (see Homiletics on chap. xii. 17-19, xiv. 25, pages 274 and 379), and the constant recurrence of the subject, together with the repetition of the verses here, shows us the vast importance which the inspired writer attached to truth, and the many and great evils which flow from a disregard of it. Again and again he holds up the liar to view as a monster of iniquity, and seeks, both by the threatening of the retribution which awaits it and by the misery which it causes to others, to deter men from yielding to this sin. If we consider what mischief a false man can do, we shall not be surprised at the prominence which the wise man gives to this subject (see page 274). But the most dangerous element of the lying tongue is the fact that in nine cases out of ten no human tribunal can bring to justice, and perhaps few human tribunals would care to do so. "The world," says Dr. David Thomas ("Practical Philosopher," page 414) "abounds in falsehood. Lies swarm in every department of life. They are in the market, on the hustings, in courts of justice, in the senate house, in the sanctuaries of religion; and they crowd the very pages of modern literature. They infest the social atmosphere. Men on all hands live in fiction and by fiction." If we allow that this picture is a true one, and, alas! we can cannot deny that it is, we can see that the evil is one with which no human hand can deal. A tiger may come down from a neighbouring forest and enter the city, and spread terror and dismay all round, and even kill a dozen of its inhabitants. But he is a tangible creature, he can be faced and attacked with weapons which can pierce his skin and make him powerless to do any further mischief. But into the same city may enter upon the summer wind impalpable particles of matter charged with a poison which may slay not ten men but ten thousand, and no weapon that has ever been forged by human hand can slay these destroyers. The plague will keep numbering its victims until the poison has spent itself or until a pure and healthful breeze scatters the deadly atmosphere. So with lying in comparison with more palpable and gross crimes. The thief can be caught and imprisoned, the murderer is generally traced and hanged; but the sin of lying so permeates the whole social atmosphere that nothing but the diffusion of heavenly truth can rid the world of the poison. But the liar, however he escapes some forms of retribution, "shall not go unpunished." 1. *He shall be self-punished.* His own conscience will be his judge and executioner in one. The fear of discovery here will generally haunt him as a shadow does the substance, but if this ghost is laid there will be times, however hardened he may be, when that witness for truth that is within him will scourge him in the present and fill him with forebodings concerning the future. 2. *Men will punish him by not believing him when he speaks the truth.* In proportion as a man's veracity is doubted will be the suspicion with which his word is received. He may tell the truth on two occasions out of three, but if his falsehood on the third is found out, his truth-telling on the first and second will not avail him much. It is a terrible thing

to live always in an atmosphere of distrust, but it is one of the punishments of a liar. 3. *God will punish him after he leaves this world.* Concerning him and some other great transgressors it is written that—"*they shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death* (Rev. xxi. 8). Whatever may be the precise meaning of these terrible words, we know that they were spoken by one whose every word was "*true and faithful*" (see verse 5 of the same chapter), and they are but an intensified form of the last clause of our texts—"He that speaketh lies shall perish."

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Falsehood is fire in stubble. It likewise turns all around it into its own substance for a moment—one crackling, blazing moment, and then dies. And all its contents are scattered in the wind without place or evidence of their existence, as viewless as the wind which scatters them.—*Coleridge.*

"He whose breath is lies shall be lost." *Breath* means the inborn and natural impulse. The root of the verb translated "*shall perish,*" *means to lose oneself by wandering about.* The cognate Arabic means to *flee away wild in the desert.* The spirit, therefore, that habitually breathes out falsities, and so acts constitutionally athwart of what is true, is best described by keeping to the original; that is, instead of perishing in the broader and vaguer way, he *wanders off and is lost* in the wilderness of his own deceptions.—*Miller.*

The thief doth only send one to the devil; the adulterer, two; the slanderer hurteth three—himself, the person of whom, the person to whom he tells the lie.—*T. Adams.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSES 6 and 7.

Two Proofs of Human Selfishness.

I. The servile regard which men pay to rank and wealth. A prince is a man in whose hand there is power to advance the material interests of other men, and this makes him a loadstone to the godless man whatever his character may be. As the magnet will attract all the steel dust within its reach, so the prince is a magnet which attracts all the self-seeking and the worldly who can by any possibility obtain any favour from him. To gain that favour they will fawn upon him and flatter him, and will stoop even to become suppliants at his feet. Let him be one of the most contemptible of human creatures, there will not be wanting those who may be in many respects his superiors who will serve him from hope of advancing their own interests. We know that this is not universally the case—that there have been noble men in all ages who would scorn to entreat the favour of any man, simply because he was a man of power; but Solomon here speaks of the rule and not of the exception, and the fact that it is so testifies to the self-seeking which is the characteristic of men in general.

II. The treatment which the poor man often receives from his more wealthy kinsfolk. The proverb implies that those who hate him and pass him by with disdain are richer than himself, and therefore not only bound to pity his poverty but able to lighten his burden. But the same selfishness which draws men to the rich causes them to shun the poor in general, and especially their poor relations, for they feel conscious that these latter have a stronger claim upon them than those who are not so related. And even if the poor man does not need the help of his richer brethren he will often find himself unrecognised by them, simply because he occupies a lower social station. He has nothing to give them in the way of material good—his favour is worth nothing in the way

of promoting their worldly interests—the very fact that he is poor and yet is more or less nearly connected by family ties is supposed to dim the lustre of their greatness, and they therefore cherish towards him a positive dislike which they manifest by avoiding his society as much as possible, and by receiving all his advances towards friendship with coolness and disdain. If we had no other proof of the depth to which man has fallen since God created him in His own image, the regard which men pay, not to what a man *is*, but to what he *has* would be one sad enough. (See also Homiletics on chap. xiv. 20, page 370).

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Princes need not pride themselves in the homage that is paid to them, for their favour is sought by men, not so much out of regard to their persons, as from a regard to their power. Kindness and liberality have a greater influence for gaining the hearts of men, than dignity of station. There are many that seek the ruler's favour, but every man loves him that is generous. When power and generosity meet in the same person, he becomes an object of universal esteem, like Marcus Antoninus, who was lamented by every man when he was dead, as if the glory of the Roman empire had died with him.

How inexcusable are we, if we do not love God with all our hearts. His gifts to us are past number, and all the gifts of men to us are the fruits of His bounty, conveyed by the ministry of those whose hearts are disposed by His providence to kindness. "I have seen thy face," said Jacob to Esau, "as the face of God." His brother's favour he knew to be a fruit of the mercy of Him with whom he spake and prevailed at Bethel.—*Lawson.*

For Homiletics on verses 8 and 9 see verses 2 and 5 of this chapter, also on chapters viii. 36 and ix. 12, pages 122 and 128.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 10

I. Where there is wealth or exalted station there ought to be correspondent qualifications. (For the real signification of the word translated delight see Critical Notes.) If a man is rich he ought to be wise, and if he is powerful he ought to have been instructed how to use his power well A fool is useless in any condition of life, but a fool who is the possessor of a fortune is a power for evil We must understand the word servant here to mean an ignorant and incapable man—one who, though able to serve, has no ability to rule. A man may be very well fitted to perform the duties of a common seaman, but if he is ignorant of the laws of navigation it would be a great misfortune for both himself and the rest of the crew if he were to be appointed to the captain's post. If he had remained before the mast he might have done good service, but when he is promoted to a higher rank he is only an instrument of mischief. Of the two incongruities dealt with in the proverb this last is the most fruitful of evil. It is a lamentable thing when great riches come into the possession of a fool who does not know how to use his wealth either for his own or his neighbour's good, and it may be productive of positive harm both to himself and others. Instances are not at all uncommon, and most men have met with them, in which a man in a very humble station, and destitute of true and spiritual wisdom, inherits suddenly a large fortune. In the majority of such cases the inheritance is a curse rather than a blessing, for the inheritor has no idea how to use it so as to promote his own real welfare. His higher nature has never been developed, consequently he has no spiritual or intellectual desires to gratify, and all he can do with his wealth is to minister to his appetites and gratify his passions, which

he often does in a most unseemly way, and to an extent which makes him a worse man when he is rich than he was when he was poor. But this misuse of wealth is not so great a misfortune as the misuse of power. The evil effects of the first will be confined within comparatively narrow limits, but those of the latter are widespread. When a man is neither a prince by birth or by nature, and yet is in a position which gives him power over men who are either or both, there is a great disproportion in the moral fitness of things which generally brings much social and national trouble. For if a man's only title to rule is that of birth, it is better for those whom he rules than if he had none at all. If he is an incapable man himself he may be the descendant of greater men, and those under him may be able to submit to him for what he represents, although they cannot reverence him for what he is. But when he has not even this small claim on their obedience, the unseemliness is so great that national anarchy, and consequently much individual suffering, is the almost certain result.

II. Either of these incongruities present a deep mystery in the Divine government When we consider what a great power for good as well as for evil is wrapped up in wealth, the providence appears to us dark which often gives it to the moral fool and leaves the wise man destitute. But when we find a weak man apparently holding in his hands the destinies of many stronger and nobler men—a "servant" ruling over "princes"—the providence seems darker still. But there are two sources whence we can draw comfort. We can look forward to that "time of restitution of all things" (Acts iii. 21) when all these manifest inconsistencies shall be done away with, and we can assure ourselves that "things are not what they seem"—that the wisdom of the wise man is a greater power for good than the wealth of the rich, and that, after all, the choice of the ruler is in the hand of those whom he rules, and that if the latter are "princes" they will not long suffer themselves to be ruled by one who is "a servant."

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

1. In its secular form this truth is obvious. 2. In its higher but intermediate form, it means that an ungodly sinner, here called "*a stupid man*," on his way to death and judgment, is so shockingly off in all interests of his being, that "*delight*" is a mockery; it is anything but suited to his state. And to have him stand, as he often does, superior to Christians, overawing Christian life, and repressing Christian eminence of character, is indeed a *servant ruling a prince;* and it is as good an instance as could be met, of something that does not *suit*, or as the original has it, does not *sit well*. 3. But Solomon would carry it a story higher. He means to continue his pursuit of the *impenitent*. He means to tell them that their *delight*, in itself considered, would not *sit well;* that to reward a fool would bring dishonour upon government; and to release the outlaw from his bonds would really be to elect the slave to a post higher than the "*princes*."—*Miller*.

With all the preference here expressed for virtuous poverty, the seemliness of rank, and the violence done by the upstart rule of the lower over the higher, are not overlooked.—*Chalmers*.

Abundance of wealth, dainty fare, and pastime or recreation, is not meet for a vain and wicked person. For, first of all, He rather deserveth correction than recreation; secondly, He abuseth all his delights and possessions to his own hurt, being drunken with his vanities; last of all, He is so puffed up and corrupted by prosperity, that he oppresseth his neighbours. . . . But if a light vanity beseem not a vain person, then authority, which carrieth with it a weight of glory, less beseemeth a vile person, who is of a servile disposition and condition, especially that

rule which is exercised over noble personages.—*Muffet.*

Judge, then, how horrible it is that men should set the devil or his two angels, the world and the flesh, on the throne, while they place God on the footstool; or that in this commonwealth of man, reason, which is the queen or princess over the better powers and graces of the soul, should stoop to so base a slave as sensual lust.—*T. Adams.*

The reason is, because a wise man is master of his delight, a fool is servant unto it. And delight never doth well but where it is commanded, never doth so ill as where it is commander. . . . The command of delight is like the ruling of a servant over princes; and as he is foolish in ruling, so it is the quality of a fool to give the ruling of his heart unto delight.—*Jermin.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSES 11 *and* 12.

TWO KINGS.

I. The man who exercises despotic power over the destinies of his fellow creatures. The similitudes by which Solomon describes the power that is sometimes lodged in a kingly hand are very strong, and were more true in his day than they are in ours. The wrath of a despot is like the roaring of a lion because it is an indication of the destructive power that lies behind it. That roar is not an empty sound, for everyone who hears it knows that the savage beast can do more than roar—that he can tear in pieces the unfortunate victim of his wrath. If he could only roar men would listen unmoved, but they tremble because they know that his anger can find an outlet in a more terrible manner. There are men whose wrath, although it is fierce, does not fill its objects with any alarm—they know that the man's anger can only find an outlet in words and that he is impotent to do them harm. But there are those whose anger can work terrible evil to its victims, and who have such forces at their command that a man may well fear to incur their wrath. There have been despots in the world to incur whose displeasure was like awaking the fury of a wild beast, and whose manner of repaying those who had offended them was more brutal than human. But men in such a position have as much power to bless as to curse. If they choose to exercise their prerogative in a kindly manner they can exercise an influence as reviving and as cheering as that of "the dew upon the grass." Such an one can elevate his subjects both socially and morally by the enactment of wise laws, and in this sense can make a wilderness rejoice and blossom as the rose. Perhaps, however, the proverb more directly refers to the power of the king to exalt and promote his favourites—those who either by chance or by devotion to his interests become objects of his especial regard. If such men are poor the king's favour can effect as great a transformation in their circumstances as the dew will upon a field scorched by the sun, and so long as that favour continues they are as continually and as liberally nourished as the grass is watered by the daily dew.

II. The man who can curb his anger and pardon an offence. Solomon was a king whose power was not inaptly described by the twelfth verse, but he had too much spiritual enlightenment to conceive that there was any true glory in it alone. He gives the palm to the man who can "rule his spirit," and who can "pass over a transgression," especially if that man has great power in his hand to visit the offender with punishment. If it is the glory of a man with limited influence to pardon an offender, it is much more glorious for a king to do so, because his wrath is able to exercise its lf without being called to an account. This thought may be applied to the King of kings, to the Omnipotent Ruler of the universe. When Moses besought Him to show him His glory "*He said, I will make all My goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee,*" and that name was, "*The Lord, the Lord God*

merciful and gracious, long suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin." (Exod. xxxiii. 19, xxxiv. 6.) For Homiletics on the same subject see on chap. xiv. 29, page 386, and on chap. xvi. 32, page 497.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

If men, as they grow more sensible, forgive easier, and it is their *honour* or *glory* to "pass over an offence," the implication is that thus it must be with the All-Wise. Complaint is foolish, for eternity will reveal that the Almighty took no pleasure in punishing us. "*The commonest man,*" literally "a man," but *a man* under the title which, all through this book, as in Isaiah ii. 9, distinguishes itself from another title, which means *a man of the better sort.* This gives two points of heightened emphasis:—First, even the commonest man thinks it well to forgive. How much more the Almighty! And, second, even the commonest man, when *intelligent*, forgives the easier: how much more the *Great Intelligence?* He who best understands His honour would not be likely to inflict punishment, unless where it was impossible that there should be a final escape (ver. 5).—*Miller.*

The monarch of the forest is a just comparison to the monarch of the land. "The lion hath roared; who will not fear?" The rocks and hills echo the terrific cry. The whole race of the animals of the forest are driven to flight, or petrified to the spot. Such is *the king's wrath* in a land of despotism; reigning without law, above law, his will his only law; an awful picture of cruelty, tyranny, and caprice! Unlimited power is too much for proud human nature to bear, except with special grace from above.—*Bridges.*

Discretion is a buckler made of a cold, hard, smooth metal, and that which giveth the true temper to the metal is *delay.* For in all the ways of discretion delay holdeth it by the hand, it judgeth not without delay, it worketh not without delay, it is not angry without delay. The fiery darts that are thrown against it kindle not this metal hastily, the strokes of wrong and injury bruise not this metal easily; the apprehensions of a moved spirit fasten not easily upon it, the fury that assaulteth it slips off by a mild smoothess from it.—*Jermin.*

The only legitimate anger is a holy emotion directed against an unholy thing. Sin, and not our neighbour, must be its object. Zeal for righteousness, and not our own pride, must be its distinguishing character. The exercise of anger, although not necessarily sinful, is exceedingly difficult and dangerous . . . . Thus it comes about, that although anger be not in its own nature and in all cases sinful, the best practical rule of life is to represss it, as if it were. The holy might use it against sin in the world, if the holy were here, but it seems too sharp a weapon for our handling . . . The best practical rule for the treatment of anger against persons is to defer it. Its nature presses for instant vengeance, and the appetite should be starved. A wise man may indeed experience the heat, but he will do nothing till he cools again. When your clothes outside are on fire you wrap yourself in a blanket, if you can, and so smother the flame; in like manner, when your heart within has caught the fire of anger, your first business is to get the flame extinguished . . . . To pass over a transgression is a man's "glory" . . . This is a note in unison with the Sermon on the Mount, and therefore at variance with most of our modern codes of honour. It has often been remarked that the Bible proves itself Divine by the knowlege of man which it displays; but perhaps its opposition to the main currents of a human heart are as clear a mark of its heavenly origin as its discovery of what these currents are.—*Arnot.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSES **13, 14,** *and* **18.**

DOMESTIC SORROW AND HOW TO AVOID IT.

I. Two fruitful sources of sorrow. There are many fountains whence flow waters which sadly embitter the lives of men, but there is none outside of personal character which can more entirely darken their days than either of those mentioned in the thirteenth verse. To be either the father of a foolish son or the husband of a contentious wife is sorrow indeed. The first clause of this proverb is nearly the same as that in chap. x. 1, for Homiletics on which see page 137. The contentious wife is here compared to a "*continual dropping*," because although the discomfort would not be great if it was only occasional, its perpetual existence makes life wretched. A drop of water falling upon a man's head is a very trifling matter, but one of the most dreaded tortures of the Spanish inquisition was that in which a man was placed in such a position that a single drop was constantly descending upon his head. Hour after hour, day after day, and night after night, the drops followed one another in regular and unbroken succession until the poor wretch first lost reason and then life. It is much harder to bear a burden which is never lifted from the shoulders than to carry one which is much heavier for a short time and for a very limited distance. So it is easier for a man to rise above trials which, although they may be almost overwhelming for a time, last but through a comparatively very short portion of his life. But the trial of a contentious wife is unceasing so long as the marriage bond continues, and it is this that makes it so greatly to be dreaded.

II. Means suggested whereby these sources of sorrow may be avoided. If so much depends upon our family relationships—if the character of wife and child have so much to do with our weal and woe—it becomes a most momentous question how to act so as to secure a prudent wife in the first place, and then to avoid the calamity of a foolish son. It must be remembered that the first is purely a matter of *choice*. A man's "house and riches" may be "the inheritance of fathers," his social position may depend upon his parents, but his wife depends upon his own choice, and as "a prudent wife is from the Lord," if he seeks the guidance of Him who is alone the infallible reader of character, instead of following the leadings of his fancy or consulting his worldly interests, he may with confidence expect to avoid the curse and secure the blessing. The other relationship is not one of choice. Our children are sent to us by the hand of God, and we have no more voice in determining their dispositions and mental constitutions than we have the colour of their hair, or any other bodily characteristic. But of two things we are certain. 1. *That they will need a training which will not be always pleasant to them.* Where there is disease in the body a cure cannot often be effected without a resort to unpleasant—often to painful—measures. It is not pleasant to a surgeon to use the knife, but it is often indispensable to his patient's recovery to health. And both experience and revelation testify to the fact that our children come into the world with a moral taint upon them—that they have a tendency to go the wrong way—that, in the words of the Psalmist (li. 5) they are "shapen in iniquity and conceived in sin." If a parent desires to avoid the calamity of a foolish son he must early recognise the truth that his child will not become morally wise unless he "*chasten*" him, unless he subject him to a system of moral training, unless he make him feel that punishment must follow sin. This will be as painful sometimes to the parent as to the child; the crying of the son will hurt the father more than the rod will hurt the child, but the end to be attained by present suffering must be borne in mind, and must nerve the heart and hand of him whose duty it is to administer chastisement. (On this subject see also Homiletics on chap. xiii. 24, page 334). 2. *That there is reason to hope that children, if rightly trained, will be a joy and not a sorrow. There is hope.* When a river has but just left its source among the hills, and

the current is feeble, its progress can be stopped with ease; but when it has flowed on for a few miles and there is depth of water enough to float a fleet, it is almost impossible to stop its onward course. So, when the power of evil in the human soul is in its infancy, it is a much more easy task to restrain it than when it has acquired strength by years of uncontrolled dominion. When the young oak is but a few inches above the ground, the hand of the woodman can bend the slender stem as he pleases; but when it has grown for half a century he is powerless to turn it from the direction which it has taken. So a child's will is pliable to the wise training of the parent, and if the education of the moral nature be begun early, there is every reason to hope that it will acquire strength to overcome both sin within and without, and that a righteous manhood will in the future more than repay both him whose duty it is to chasten, and him upon whom the chastisement must fall.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Vers. 13, 14. "A prudent wife" is not to be got by an *im*prudent mode of choice. The gift must be sought "from the Lord." But this does not mean that the Lord is supernaturally to point out the individual. Our own discretion must be put in exercise, along with prayer for the divine superintendence and direction, so as to bring about a happy result. And then the precious gift should be owned, and the all-bountiful Giver praised for his goodness in bestowing it.—*Wardlaw.*

"Every good gift is from the Lord" (James i. 17) only, some in the ordinary course, others more directly from Him. Houses and riches, though His gifts, come by descent. They are the inheritance of fathers. The heir is known, and in the course of events he takes possession of his estate. But the prudent wife is wholly unconnected with the man. There has been no previous bond of relation. She is often brought from a distance. "The Lord brought her to the man" by His special Providence, and therefore as His special gift.—*Bridges.*

Vers. 18. The great force of the rule is its timely application—*while there is hope.* For hopeless the case may be, if the remedy be delayed. The cure of the evil must be commenced in infancy. Not a moment is to be lost. "Betimes" (chap. xiii. 24; xxii. 15)—is the season when the good can be effected with the most ease, and the fewest strokes. The lesson of obedience should be learnt at the first dawn. One decided struggle and victory *in very early life*, may, under God, do much towards settling the point at once and to the end. On the other hand, *sharp chastening* may fail later to accomplish, what a slight rebuke in the early course might have wrought.—*Bridges.*

You are here taught further, that *firmness* must be in union with affection in applying the rod. The words seem to express a harsh, yet it is an important and most salutary lesson:—"*let not thy soul spare for his crying.*" The words do not mean, that you should not feel, very far from that. It was the knowledge that feeling was unavoidable, and that the strength and tenderness of it was ever apt to tempt parents to relent and desist, and leave their end unaccomplished,—that made it necessary to warn against too ready a yielding to this natural inclination. The child may cry, and cry bitterly, previously to the correction; but, when you have reason to think the crying is for the rod rather than for the fault, and that, but for the threatened chastisement, the heart would probably have been unmoved, and the eyes dry;—then you must not allow yourselves to be so unmanned by his tears, as to suspend your purpose, and decline its infliction. If a child perceives this (and soon are children sharp enough to find it out) he has discovered the way to move you next time; and will have recourse to it accordingly.—*Wardlaw.*

On the subject of verse 15 see Homiletics on chap. vi. 9, 10, page 79.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 16.

A Double Keeping.

1. A keeping of the Divine commandments. What is it to "keep the commandment?" Dr. Miller translates this verb to *guard* or *watch*. Taken in this sense therefore the proverb implies that there is need—1. *To lay up God's law in our hearts.* It is to be our constant aim to *know* the will of God—the words which He has spoken, the commands which He has given, are to be constantly kept in remembrance and made the principal subject of our thoughts. We are to tread in the footsteps of the man described in the first Psalm, whose "*delight is in the law of the Lord*" and who "*meditates*" upon it "*day and night.* But the word as it is commonly understood implies—2. *To translate God's law into life,* It is one thing to *know* the will of God, it is another thing to *do* it. Knowledge must come before obedience, but knowledge alone will not save the soul from death.

II. A keeping of the human soul. There is but one way to guard the human soul from the dangers to which it is exposed, and that is by complying with the demands of the God who can alone give spiritual life. He commands us to yield ourselves unreservedly to his guidance, to accept his method of being made right in relation to His law, to fight against the evil tendencies of our fallen nature, and to seek His help to overcome them. In doing this He has promised that we shall find that emancipation from the bondage of sin, that awakening of spiritual faculties, and that sense of His favour which alone is the life of the soul. We have before dwelt upon proverbs which embody truths similar to those contained in this verse. (See on chap. xi. 3, page 195; chap. x. 8, page 151; chap. xiii. 6, 13, 14, pages 299, 312, 313; chap. xvi. 17, page 479.)

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Keep means to retain. *Guard* means to watch. The root of the present word means *to bristle,* then to *watch close,* either from the *bristling* of spears, or from a *sharp stave.* There is a philosophy in these words, ... viz., that conscience is vagrant. We have to watch. Like the mind itself, it is hard to hold it to the point. *Attention* is our whole voluntary work. And, to a most amazing degree, the Scriptures are framed upon this idea. We are to *remember now our Creator* (Eccles. xii. 1). We are to *remember the Sabbath day* (Exod. xx. 8). We are to "*observe to do,*" etc. (this very word *guard.*) See Deut. v. 1, 32, *et passim. Wherewithal* shall a young man cleanse his way? By *taking heed* (this same word *guarding*) thereto according to Thy word" (Psa. cxix. 9). "*Guards himself*" (the same word). (See Critical Notes.) This is an iron link of sequence which no Anti-Calvinistic thought can shake. He who stands sentry over the "commandment" stands sentry over *himself;* literally "*his soul.*" There is no helplessness in man other than that *tardema,* or *deep sleep* (ver. 15) which "*sloth*" wilfully casts him into, and which a voluntary slothfulness perpetually increases and maintains." The fault is not in our stars, but in ourselves, that we are aliens." The proverb advances upon this in the second clause. What more voluntary than a man's "*way?*" It has a voluntary goal, it has a daily journeying, and it includes all that *is* voluntary. Seize a man at any moment. All that he is upon is part of his life's travel. Now, a Christian has but one *way.* So far forth as he is a Christian, he has but one end, and one path for reaching it. There is a beautiful unitariness in his journeying. It is a habit of Scripture to turn attention to the *scattered* life of the lost. They have no one

end. "If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light," says the Saviour (Matt. vi. 23). Thou "hast scattered thy ways to the strangers," says Jeremiah (iii. 13); this same expression. "Why gaddest thou about so much to change thy way" (Jer. ii. 36). *Despiseth* (English version) suits the lexicon and suits the sense, for certainly the lost man has less respect for his way and life than the pardoned believer; but "scattering" is equally legitimate and common; more strengthened by analogy, and more in keeping with the first clause, where the verb *to guard* stands more opposed to vagrant and distraught ideas. "*Dies;*" see Job v. 2. Corruption is seated in the soul, but not out of reach by any means. A man can increase it. What we do outside kills inwardly. A man's counting-house might seem to have little to do with the state of *his soul*, but it is shaping it all the time. If he *scatters* his ways he is killing his soul, and what we are to remark is, that there is an *ipso actu* condition of the effect (as in chap. xi. 19) which is expressed in the Hebrew. The vagrancy of a morning's worldliness is that much more death, as punctually administered as any of the chemistries of nature. The form is participial. It is "*in* scattering," or "*as* scattering," his ways that "*he dies.*"—*Miller.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 17.

THE BEST INVESTMENT.

I. A God-like disposition. To "pity the poor and to show that we do so by ministering to their necessities (for this is implied in the proverb) is to be like God. We have before seen how He identifies Himself with them, and how severe is the condemnation which He passes upon those who wrong them. (See Homiletics and Comments upon chap. xiv. 31, page 390, and upon chap. xvii. 5, page 504). God is a Being of compassion—the gospel of salvation is a testimony to the pitifulness of His nature. He has remembered man in his low estate and in his condition of spiritual poverty, and out of the "riches of His grace" (Ephes. i. 7) He has supplied his need. But he has not only an eye for the spiritual necessities of His creatures, but for those also which belong exclusively to their bodily nature. God manifest in flesh had compassion upon the multitude because "they had nothing to eat" (Matt. xv. 32), and the same pitiful heart is still moved with a like emotion when He looks into the haunts of poverty and sees men and women and little children without the necessaries of life, or toiling hard and long for a pittance that is only just enough to keep them from starvation. The man therefore who "has pity on the poor" manifests a disposition akin to that of his Father in heaven.

II. A most reliable debtor. God incarnate fed the hungry by miracle, but now that He has left the earth for a season He entrusts the duty to human hands. He does not now rain down bread from heaven to feed even his spiritual Israel, but He expects those of His children to whom He has given more than enough of this world's good things to do it for Him, and looks upon the act as a loan to Himself. 1. *That this investment will be a profitable one is certain, from the character of God.* When men entrust others with their money, they have especial regard to the character of those whom they make their debtor. This forms the chief and most reliable security that a man can have that he will receive it again. God's character is pre-eminently good—so good that His word is more than the bond of the most trustworthy human creature, and none in heaven or earth or hell will ever be able to say that He has not paid them what was their due. 2. *The wealth of God is a guarantee that He will repay with interest.* A man who is generous by nature, and possessed of abundant means,

will not only faithfully repay a loan but, if his debtor is a needy man, will feel a pleasure in adding to it a large interest, or will press him to accept some extra token of his esteem. God is the great and bountiful proprietor of all the resources of the universe, whether spiritual or material, and He loves to give abundantly. He has been always giving out of His fulness since there has been a creature upon whom to lavish His gifts, and He delights to see His children give, like Himself, generously and ungrudgingly. And, seeing he takes upon Himself to repay what is given to the poor, His generosity and His wealth are sureties that the interest for the loan will be very ample. His children may have to wait long for it, but the longer they wait the greater the accumulation of interest. They may receive a partial repayment in material good, but the great recompense will be at the "*resurrection of the just*" (Luke xiv. 14) on that day when the King shall say unto them, "*Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was an hungered and ye gave me meat; I was thirsty and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger and ye took me in; naked and ye clothed me*" (Matt. xxv. 34, 36).

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

When Alexander set forward upon his great exploits before he went from Macedonia, he divided among his captains and friends all that he had; for which, when one of his friends reproved him, saying that he was prodigal, for that he had reserved nothing for himself, the answer which Alexander gave was this: that he had reserved much unto himself, namely, hope of the monarchy of the world, which by the valour and help of those his captains and nobles he hoped to obtain. And thus, surely, he that giveth to the poor may seem to be prodigal, yet, in respect of the hope that he hath of profit, he is frugal-wise; neither is his hope such as Alexander's was, which depended on the uncertainty of war, but such as is grounded upon the certainty of God's word.—*Spencer.*

The Lord will not only pay for the poor man, but requite him that gave alms, with usury, returning great gifts for small. Give, then, thine house, and receive heaven; give transitory goods, and receive a durable substance; give a cup of cold water and receive God's kingdom . . . If our rich friend should say unto us, lay out so much money for me, I will repay it, we would willingly and readily do it. Seeing, then, our best friend, yea, our king, the King of kings, biddeth us give to the poor, promising that He will see us answered for that we give, shall we not bestow alms at His motion and for His sake?—*Muffet.*

The off-hand sense is no doubt correct, and, as a worldly maxim, *often* the munificent are rewarded in this world. . . . But we are not to suppose the generous to suffer, and the saint might lose by being paid in money. The saint might need the chastisement of pecuniary distress. We are not to suppose, therefore, this sense to be the grand one. But the meaning is that obedience, if it be spiritual, is a positive thing; that it involves large and generous sacrifices; that it is to "visit the fatherless" (Jas. i. 27); and to feed the hungry (Matt. xxv. 35); and that, in the grandest sense, he that does these things "*makes a borrower of Jehovah;*" and that the transaction, under the grand head of guarding his own sou (ver. 16), will pay him better than any less positive and more mystic species of obedience. . . It may be fancy, but *causing to borrow* seems to be more expressive than (as an equivalent) to *lend* (E.V.). We *can make* God borrow of us at any time among the widows and the orphans (Matt. xxv. 40; Jer. xlix. 11).—*Miller.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 18—20.

RELATIVE DUTIES.

We have before considered verse 18 in connection with verses 13 and 14. A reference to the Critical Notes will, however, show that there is an interpretation of the last clause which was not treated there. Verses 19 and 20, regarded separately, embody thoughts and precepts which we have had before. (See Homiletics on chap. xiv. 17, 29, pages 363, 386, and on chap. xii. 15, page 271.) But these verses, taken in conjunction with the other interpretation of the last clause of verse 18, may be regarded as giving valuable advice both to those who have to enforce discipline and administer chastisement, and to those who have to endure them.

I. Counsel for parents. The reasonableness and necessity of chastisement has been considered before, but the additional thought which the other rendering of verse 18 makes prominent is, *that it must be administered from a sense of duty, and dictated by love.* Parents are far too apt to punish their children, not because they have sinned against *God*, but because they have offended *them*,—and when this is the case, the anger manifested deprives the correction of its salutary effect. "When the rod is used," says Wardlaw,—and the words may be applied to any form of parental chastisement,—"the end in view should be, purely and exclusively, the *benefit of the child;* not the gratification of any resentful passion on the part of the parent. Should the latter be apparent to the child, the effect is lost, and worse than lost; for, instead of the sentiment of grief and melting tenderness, there will be engendered a feeling of sullen hostility, ... if not, even, of angry scorn, towards him who has manifested selfish passion rather than parental love." The parent must regard himself as God's representative, and must act, not as for himself, but for the Divine Master and Father of both parent and child. If this is done, there will be none of that "provocation to wrath" or "discouragement," against which Paul puts Christians on their guard (Col. iii. 21; Ephes. vi. 4), and there will be good ground to hope that the chastisement will bring profit.

II. Counsel for children. The reasoning here is akin to that used by the Apostle in the twelfth of Hebrews. It is admitted by him (verses 11, 12) that "no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous;" nevertheless, those who have to endure it are exhorted to accept it with submission because of the precious *after-yield*—they are counselled to give themselves up to the Divine pruner and suffer Him to work His will upon them now, in consideration of the "*peaceable fruits of righteousness*" which will be the result in the days of harvest. So Solomon argues here. He does not deny that "counsel" and "instruction," or rather *discipline*, may often be unpalatable and irksome, but he holds up the wisdom that may be gained by them as an incentive to induce the young to "hear" and to "receive" them—he "reaches a hand through time," and "fetches the far-off interest" of what at present seems grievous in order to give effect to his exhortations. The actions of men in the present are mainly determined by the amount of consideration they give to the future. There are men who live wholly in the present hour—who gratify the fancy or follow the passion of to-day without giving a thought of the needs of to-morrow, or of the penalty that they may then have to pay for their folly. Others look ahead a little farther—they fashion the actions of to-day with a due regard to the interests of their whole future *earthly* life, but they bestow no thought upon the infinite "*afterward*" that is to succeed it. The proverb counsels both the young and the old to bring this long to-morrow into the plans of to-day, and to let the remembrance of it open the ear to the words of Divine wisdom by whomsoever they are spoken, and bend the will to receive the "chastening of the Lord," whether it come in the form of parental discipline or in a sterner garb.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Vers. 18, 19. "*Being in great wrath. remit the punishment; but if thou let him escape, yet apply* (or add) *chastisement again.* (So Muffet renders verse 19.) When thou are in thy mood, or burnest with fiery anger and displeasure, let pass for that time the correcting of thy child, lest thou passest measure therein, or mayest chance to give him some deadly blow. Nevertheless, if for that time or for that fault thou let him go free, yet let him not always go uncorrected; but when thou art more calm, according as he offereth occasion, correct him again.—*Muffet.*

Do not venom discipline by naked animosity. This is the human aspect. But now for the fine model of Jehovah. "He does not afflict willingly" (Lam. iii. 33). He follows this maxim: "Discipline thy son, because there is now hope." But Solomon wishes plainly to declare that *to kill him He does not lift up His soul.* "He taketh no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, but that all should turn and live" (Ezek. xxxiii. 11). It is evidently these great timbers of thought that Solomon is eyeing at the bottom of his structure. He is settling them along in place. Secularly, they may have but little connection; spiritually, they are all morticed close.—*Miller.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 21.

MANY PLANS WORKING TO ONE END.

This proverb suggests—

I. The ignorance and sinfulness of man, the infinite knowledge and goodness of God. Man is a creature of many devices; he is changeable in his purposes and plans because he is so ignorant concerning their issue. He cannot foretel with any certainty whether the event will be according to his desire, or, if it should be so, whether it will bring him satisfaction. Hence the purpose of to-day is not the purpose of next year—the plans of his youth are different from those of his riper years. But God is the same in His purposes yesterday, to-day, and for ever, because He can "*declare the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done*" (Isa. xlvi. 10). A man's devices change in proportion as his feelings and desires vary; and these are changeable in proportion as he lacks perfection in his moral nature. But a Being of infinite goodness is not subject to these changing moods and desires: and His plans are like His character, always the same.

II. The attitude which men ought to take in relation to this truth. It is obvious that the counsel of God must stand, and that it deserves to stand before all the devices of men. If, therefore, men would have their devices stand they must learn to square them by the counsel of God. A child will have its own way when it has learned to conform its will to the will of its parent. And if a man would have his "*heart's desire,*" he must so "*delight in God*" (Psa. xxxvii. 4) that what pleases God pleases him also. For other Homiletics on this subject see on chap. xvi. 1 and 9, pp. 451, 468.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

The great collective whole of the "devices" of all hearts constitutes the grand complex scheme of the human race for their happiness. Respecting the object of every device, God has His design. There is in the world a want of coalescence between the designs of man and God—an estranged spirit

of design on the part of man. God's design is fixed and paramount.—*J. Foster.*

A man of the better sort. This is simply one of the names for man. We do not always translate it *one of the better sort.* But it is rarely chosen listlessly. Here it creates an emphasis. The most imposing "*schemes*" belong to the intelligent and great. The world is full of them. How foolish to build them up! Jehovah advises a whole new behaviour for His creatures. How mad to scheme away from it.—*Miller.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 22.

Poverty of Heart and Poverty of Circumstance.

If we read the first clause of this proverb as it stands in our translation it sets forth—

I. The true measure of a man's benevolence. It is not to be measured by the amount of money that he expends upon his fellow-creatures, but upon his desire to benefit them. His desire to help them may be very strong, and yet his circumstances may be such that he has little more than sympathy to give. "The heart may be full," says Wardlaw, "when the hand is empty." And many deeds of charity that earn for men the title of benevolent are not really performed from motives of goodwill to others but from selfish or vainglorious ends. If we take the reading given in the Critical Notes it teaches rather the truth—

II. That small deeds of kindness are far preferable to large professions of it. The *liar* of the second clause is evidently one who has it in his power largely to help others, and whose promises are in proportion to his power. But they are promises only. He does not hesitate by false words to raise hopes which he never intends to fulfil, and thus becomes like the deceitful mirage of the desert, which, after cheating the traveller with delusive hopes of water, disappears, and leaves him more despairing than before. On the other hand, the poor man is evidently one whose words never go beyond his deeds, and whose deeds, if not great, are up to his ability, and are so constantly performed and so evidently the outcome of real sympathy that they are like the little rill which follows the wayfarer all through his journey, and which, although it can give but a little water at a time, is always at hand with that little.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

But let it be observed and remembered—"the desires of a man are not his kindness," when he has the ability to be practically kind, and confines himself to desires. No. In that case, there is the clearest of all evidence that the desire is not sincere; mere profession, without reality—"love in word"—which is only another phrase for no love at all. While, therefore, there are cases in which we cheerfully, according to a common phrase, "take the will for the deed," knowing that there is a want of ability to do what the heart wishes; there are other cases in which we demand the deed as the only proof of the will—the gift as the only evidence of the charity.—*Wardlaw.*

The imperial standard of weights and measures has been sent by the King into the market place of human life, where men are busy cheating themselves and each other. Many of these merchantmen, guided by a false standard, have been all their days accustomed to call evil good and good evil. When the balance is set up by

royal authority, and the proclamation issued that all transactions must be tested thereby, swindlers are dismayed, and honest men are glad. Such is the word of truth when it touches the transactions of men. . . . There is a most refreshing simplicity in the language of Scripture upon these points. This word speaks with authority. It is not tainted with the usual adulation of riches. A dishonest man is called a liar, however high his position may be in the city. And the honest poor gets his patent of nobility from the Sovereign's hand. The honest rich are fully as much interested in reform in this matter as the honest poor. Make this short proverb the keynote of our commercial system, and epidemic panics will disappear. . . After each catastrophe people go about shaking their heads and wringing their hands, asking, What will become of us? What shall we do? We venture to propose an answer to the inquiry. From the Bible first engrave on your hearts, then translate in your lives, and last emblazon aloft on the pediment of your trade temple this short and simple legend: "*A poor man is better than a liar.*"

For Homiletics on the subject of verse 23 see on chapter x. 27, xiv. 26, and xviii. 10, pages 179 and 542. Verse 24 will be treated in chap. xxvi. 13-15 For the subject of verses 25 and 29 see chap. xvii. 10, page 509.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSES 26—28.

Possibilities of Human Depravity.

I. The tenderest admonitions and the most solemn warnings sometimes fail to influence for good. Sometimes the most loving parental care seems utterly wasted upon an ungrateful child, and the more constant and tender the words of admonition the farther does he depart from the way in which he ought to go. There is many a man so in love with sin that he may be said to "devour iniquity" (verse 28); and when this fatal appetite has taken possession of the soul all appeals to his better nature, and even to his own self-love, are vain.

II. When men are so hardened there is no depth of iniquity to which they may not sink. He who scoffs at all threats of retribution, both in this life and in that which is to come, has broken through all barriers of restraint, and will be capable of outraging all the tender ties of human relationship, even to the extent of bringing his parents to disgrace and shame. The most hardened sinners in the universe of God are not found in heathen lands, or among the ignorant at home, but they are those who, having heard instruction, have "erred from the words of knowledge." Each day that they resist the good influence brought to bear upon them they increase their moral insensibility, and their final condemnation (verse 29). Hence the admonition of verse 27. (See Critical Notes.)

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Ver. 26. This were an admirable text for young men entering upon life and still at the expense of their parents. It is a great enormity either to waste the property of their father while he is alive, or after they have succeeded to expel the widowed mother from the premises.—*Chalmers.*

Ver. 27. It is so proper and natural for a son to hear instruction, that the hearing instruction maketh to be a

son . . . . But if thou hear instruction, hear it not—not to be the better for it. Instruction speaketh to keep thee *from erring;* do not thou *hear it to err:* instruction putteth into thee the words of knowledge; do not thou put them out by erring from them, by not following them . . . . Cease thus to hear, but hear still. For by hearing at length thine error may be corrected; whereas, if thou hear not, thou dost not only err, but deprivest thyself of the means that reduce thee from erring.—*Jermin.*

CHAPTER XX.

Critical Notes.—**1. Strong drink.** The Hebrew word *Shekhar* includes every strong drink besides wine. Delitzsch translates it *mead.* **2. The fear of a king,** *i.e.*, the dread which he inspires. **Sinneth against his soul,** or "*forfeits his life,*" so Delitzsch and Miller. **3. To cease from strife.** Rather, "to remain far from" it. **4.** Delitzsch translates this verse, "*At the beginning of the harvest the sluggard ploweth not, and so when he cometh to reaping time there is nothing.*" **5. Counsel.** Delitzsch translates this word "*purpose,*" and understands it to refer to a secret plan. **6.** Miller reads the first clause of this verse, "*Much of the mere man one calls his goodness,*" *i.e.*, "Much that is merely human." He allows, however, that the usual rendering conveys a very striking meaning and agrees admirably with the second clause. The Hebrew word means literally *abundance of men.* Delitzsch translates, "*Almost everyone meeteth a man who is gracious unto him; but a man who standeth the test, who findeth such a one?*" **7.** This verse should be, "*He who in his innocence walks uprightly, blessed are his children,*" etc. **8. Judgment** Rather *justice.* **Scattereth** or *winnoweth.* **10. Divers weights.** Literally, "*a stone and a stone, an ephah and an ephah.*" **11.** Touching the second clause of this verse, Miller says, "It is too terse for English, and we cannot translate it. Nor can we brook the English version. *Doings* are in the same category with *work.* How can one be the test of the other? The only room for a proposition is, obviously, for this: '*A child is known by his doings;* and the question, *Is he pure?* is but the question, *Is his work right?*'" **15.** Here Miller reads, *There is gold,* etc., in *the lips of knowledge.* **16. A strange woman.** Rather, "*a stranger.*" **17. A man.** The Hebrew word here used is the one which denotes *a superior man.* **18.** The first clause may be read, *Establish thy purpose by counsel.* **19.** '**Him that flattereth.**" Rather, *him that openeth wide his lips, i.e.*, the babbler. **24. Man.** The first word, *Geber,* denoting *a superior or mighty man:* the second, *Adam, man in general, or an ordinary man.* **25.** The first clause of this verse should be, "*It is a snare to a man to cry out hastily 'holy,' i.e.*, to vow without thought and consideration." **26. The wheel,** *i.e.*, the wheel of the threshing instrument which blows away the chaff. **30. The blueness of a wound.** *Cutting wounds* (*Delitzsch*), *Wounding stripes* (*Zöckler*). Miller translates the "*welts*" (*i.e.*, the tumid and purple confines of a wound), *cleanse as though an evil,* "that is, although painful and deformed, they have a clear office, viz., to purge away the sore." Wardlaw suggests that the word, being etymologically derived from a verb denoting to *join together,* may be translated *compressions,* and says, "The compressions of a wound are necessary for cleansing out of it the prurient and peccant humour, which would prevent its healing; they are, at the same time, in many cases exceedingly painful, and would only be endured or inflicted from necessity. And as they thus clean the wound and promote its healing, so in a *moral* sense does the severity of discipline affect with salutary and cleansing influence the condition of the inner man."

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 1.

Strong Drink.

Taking the two words here used to stand for all intoxicating drinks, we remark—

I. **That they are most deceptive in their operation.** It is most certain that there is no person who is now an abject slave to strong drink, who would not once have indignantly repelled the insinuation that he or she would ever be a drunkard. It is taken probably for a long time without any evil effects being apparent, and the temporary stimulus is mistaken for a permanent increase of strength,

until one day the unhappy victim finds himself a subject of the most tyrannical habit that enslaves fallen humanity. And strong drink may truly be said to be a "*mocker*," when we see how men appear to struggle to escape from its deadly fascination, and how fruitless their efforts often are.

II. That they are powerful ministers to human passions. Wherever strong drink enters, every evil tendency is increased tenfold; the angry man becomes a monster of cruelty, and he who was before a comparatively harmless member of society, or even a useful one, becomes hurtful and dangerous. The restraints that are all powerful to govern a man when sober are all as utterly useless when he is under the power of strong drink, as silken cords would be to keep a wild beast within bounds.

III. It is utter folly to tamper with such a foe to human dignity and happiness. The deceptive influence of strong drink, and the miserable results of allowing it to gain the mastery over us, are all around men; none can now plead ignorance of its nature, or of its effects, for the world is full of homes ruined by it, and hearts which it has broken, and men whom it has changed into brutes. Experience sets her seal to Solomon's declaration, and brands as *without wisdom* those who play with such a deadly and treacherous enemy.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Solomon seldom singles out a specific vice; and when he does, it is often exemplary, or to be understood of any. He does single out drunkenness, however. Strikingly enough the Apostle does so. (1 Cor. vi. 10).—*Miller.*

If the fruit of his own vine sometimes chastised the unwary Israelite with whips, the fiery product of our distilleries chastise the nation with scorpions. The little finger of strong drink in modern times is thicker than the loins of its father and representative in Solomon's day. The deceits which our enemy practises are legion; and legion too are the unwary "who are deceived thereby." I shall enumerate a few of its lying devices. 1. A great quantity of precious food is destroyed in this country that strong drink may be extracted from the rubbish. . . . . On an average of ten years, the quantity of barley converted into malt in the United Kingdom has been nearly six millions of quarters annually. When you add to this the unmalted grain consumed in the distillation of spirits in Ireland, you have an aggregate sufficient to feed between four and five millions of people throughout the year. . . . What do we obtain in return? A large quantity of malt liquors and distilled spirits. And is the gain equivalent, or nearly equivalent to the loss? 2. The curative and strengthening properties of our strong drinks, which are so much vaunted, are in reality next to nothing. We speak of the ordinary use of these articles as beverages. . . . If they contribute at any time to the quantity of force exerted by man, it corresponds not to the corn that you give to your horse, but to the whipping. A master who has hired you only for a day, and desires to make the most of his bargain, may possibly find it his interest to bring more out of your bones and sinews, by such a stimulus, but you certainly have no interest in lashing an additional effort out of yourself to-day, and lying in lethargy to-morrow. . . . Liebig has a pleasant notion about balancing on the point of a pen-knife, like a pinch of snuff, all the nourishment that the most capacious German swallows with his beer in a day. And it is chemistry he is giving us, not poetry or wit . . . . 3. Strong drink deceives the nation, by the vast amount of revenue that it pours into the public treasury. It is a true and wise economy to tax the articles heavily for behoof of the community, so far and as long as they are sold and used; but it is a false and foolish economy to

encourage the consumption of the article, for the sake of the revenue it produces. Drink generates pauperism, and pauperism is costly. Drink generates crime, and crime is costly. . . . There is a huge living creature with as many limbs as a Hindoo idol, and these limbs intertwined with each other in equally admirable confusion. The creature having life must be fed, and being large, must have a good deal of food for its sustenance. One day, having got rather short allowance, it was rolling its heavy head among its many limbs, and found something warm and fleshy. Being hungry, it made an incision with its teeth, laid its lips to the spot, and sucked. Warm blood came freely; the creature sucked its fill, and, gorged, lay down to sleep. Next day, it supplemented its short rations in the same way. Every day the creature drank from that opening, and as this rich draught made up about one third of its whole sustenance, the wonder grew, why it was becoming weaker under the process, day by day. Some one at last bethought him of turning over the animal's intermingled limbs, and found that all this time it had been sucking its own blood! The discoverer proposed to bandage the spot, and not permit the continuance of the unnatural operation. The financiers cried out, "A third of the animal's sustenance comes from that opening; if you stop it, he will die!" Behold the wise politicians who imagine that the body politic would die of inanition, if it were deprived of the revenue which it sucks from its own veins, in the shape of taxes on the consumption of intoxicating drinks!—*Arnot.*

The thoughts in verses 2 and 3 are the same as that in chap. xix. 12, see page 571, and chaps. xiv. 29 and xvi. 32, pages 386 and 497. The thought in the fourth verse is identical with that in chap. x. 4, although the similitude is different, see page 146.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 5.

Deep Sea Dredging.

I. Much that is good, or much that is bad, may lie hidden in a man's heart without its existence being suspected by the majority of his acquaintance. The word here rendered counsel may be taken in a twofold sense. It may be used of knowledge, or of great mental ability, which is hidden either because its possessor is exceedingly modest or exceedingly reserved—either because he lacks the will or the power to make it known. Or it may refer to deeply-laid schemes or well-planned purposes which a man intends shall one day become facts, but which at present exist only in his own mind. And according to the nature of the counsel it may be compared to the wealth of beauty and riches which lie hidden in the depth of the ocean, unsuspected by the majority of those who sail above, or to the deadly torpedo which makes no ripple upon the surface of the water, and which its victims approach without dreaming of what is concealed beneath.

II. The difficulty of one man's obtaining what another wishes to conceal will depend upon the comparative wisdom of both. For many ages the deep sea seemed to defy all the efforts of man to explore its depths and to find out its secrets, but now even the ocean has to own him master in this respect, and to submit to have its treasures brought to light. There has been, as it were, a struggle between the sea and the man of science as to which should possess the treasures of the deep, and the issue has depended upon the ability of the man in comparison with the depth of the ocean. So there is sometimes a struggle between men—the one desiring to conceal his knowledge or his plans within his

own breast, and the other desiring to discover them. The issue will depend upon the comparative mental power of the two men. If both be "men of understanding," the resistance on the one side and the effort on the other will be continuous and long, and the "deep waters" may prove too deep for the bucket or the dredging net. But if the balance of wisdom is in favour of the seeker—if there is one spot where his line can reach—he will "draw out" the counsel and proclaim himself the master.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

The whole emblem finely illustrates what is true of the "inward light" as held by the "Friends." All men have light which, if they would follow, would lead them (granting that they persevere) into the light of the gospel (Rom. i. 20). What better name for this than counsel? Alas! it lies "deep." No man will follow it but by the Spirit of God. . . Nevertheless it is there! How solemn that fact at the judgment day! "The word is nigh" (Rom. x. 8). "*A man of discernment*," or "*understanding*," *i.e.*, the Christian. . . Only the illuminated man, getting his light from its great fountain, will be moved to go down into his "*heart*," where the counsel lies waiting, and "draw" the "deep waters."—*Miller.*

Every question is, as it were, a turn of the windlass.—*Plumptre.*

He is an expert fisher. . . But man can but *draw them out;* God seeth them in the heart, man can see no more than he draws out, but God seeth all; man draws and labours for the knowledge he getteth, but all things are naked and open unto God's sight. *Jermin.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 6–12.

AN UNIVERSAL CHALLENGE, A GENERAL RULE, AND A RARE VIRTUE.

I. A double challenge to all men. Who can say, I am pure from my sin? A faithful man, who can find? To the first of these questions the answer must be in the negative. 1. *God* answers No to it. The testimony of Scriptures is that in His sight "*shall no man living be justified*" (Psa. cxliii. 2): that "*all have sinned*" (Rom. iii. 23): that "*if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us*" (1 John i. 8). His ability to form a correct judgment rests upon His *omniscience*—He hath made the "*hearing ear and the seeing eye*" (verse 12), and shall He not *hear and see* and *know the thoughts of man?* (Psa. xciv. 9, 10). He is the ideal King who *winnows* the actions of men. See Miller's note on ver. 8 (Matt. iii. 12). 2. *Man's experience* answers No to it. "Even a child is known by its doings" (verse 11); the actions are like the hands of a clock, which tell to those who look upon them whether all the wheels within are in perfect working order. When we mark at all observantly the actions of even the best of men, we shall be most likely to detect here and there a flaw in their characters—some inconsistencies which tell of moral imperfection—but if not, man needs only to look *within* with some degree of impartiality to be convinced that his "*own heart condemns him*" (1 John iii. 20). But to the second challenge we need not give an universal negative. Faithful men are *rare*, but they *can be found.* Even Solomon could point to the "just man" who "walked in his integrity," leaving a blessing behind him. His father David, although he was far from being free from sin, yea, although he sinned deeply and terribly, was yet a man who could appeal to God to witness to his *integrity* (Psa. vii. 8)—to the general intent and purpose of his life being toward God and goodness—to his being in the main faithful to his convictions of the right and

true. (On this subject see on chap. xi. 3, page 196). And although *faithful* men are still rare enough to need *search*, they are more common than they were in Solomon's days. There are many men scattered throughout the world who put duty before worldly interests, and God's glory before their own, and are thus earning for themselves the *well-done* of the *faithful* though not the *perfect* servant (Matt. xxv. 21). For it is certain that if a man is faithful to himself—if he subjects his own moral condition to that scrutiny which must convince him of his own impurity before a heart-searching and Holy God, and accepts His method of being cleansed from guilt—he will be faithful both to God and man.

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

II. A general rule. Another proposition here laid down is, that although absolutely pure men are not to be found, and although faithful men are rare, yet "most men will proclaim everyone his own goodness" (verse 6). There is a natural tendency in men to shrink from a very close inspection of their own motives, and desires, and feelings—they look anywhere rather than within, and, consequently, very few have any conception of their own depravity. They have never measured even their actions, much less their thoughts, by the requirements of God's law, and consequently, while He pronounces them "*wretched, and miserable, and poor*," they are saying, "*I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing*" (Rev. iii. 17, 18). Most men are thanking God that "*they are not as other men are*" when they ought to be smiting their breasts and saying, "*God be merciful to me, a sinner*" (Luke xviii. 13). It is this wide-spread self-deception concerning their real condition that renders men so indifferent to God's method for restoring them, and thus keeps the world in its present state of soul-sickness and death.

For Homiletics on verse 10, see on chap. xi., page 1.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

This faithfulness, where it exists, develops itself in two branches; the one suppressing our neighbour's vanity, and the other our own. The last mentioned is first in order of nature and in relative importance the chief. True faithfulness, like charity, begins at home . . . . Faithful reproof of another's foibles is a virtue which some can exercise without an effort. They deal a hearty blow on the head of a luckless brother egotist who stands in the way of their own advancement, and then expect to be praised for faithfulness. But it is Jehu's driving. The zeal which impels it is not pure.—*Arnot.*

The meaning is (see Critical Notes for Miller's rendering) that a man is apt to call mere animal traits, like amiableness, or good nature, by the name of *goodness;* and the caution is, that seeking deep for piety (ver), we should be careful to take up with no such stupid counterfeit. Much of the mere *flesh,* to borrow a New Testament expression, is kind and honest. There is much of the mere man's native morality. We must take care not to take that for "*goodness.*" There is a certain true *fidelity* that embraces everything. That is religion. It embraces God. It embraces spiritual *faithfulness.* It may be easily counterfeited. It has been the snare of our race to take "*what is of the mere man,*" and confound it with it.—*Miller.*

A faithful man—as a parent—a reprover—an adviser—one "without guile"—who can find? (Mic. vii. 1, 2.) Look close. View thyself in the glass of the Word (Psa. ci. 6). Does thy neighbour, or thy friend, find thee faithful to him? What does our daily intercourse witness? Is not the

attempt to speak what is agreeable often made at the expense of truth? Are not professions of regard sometimes utterly inconsistent with our real feelings? In common life, where gross violations are restrained, a thousand petty offences are allowed, that break down the wall between sin and duty, and, judged by the Divine standard, are indeed guilty steps upon forbidden ground.—*Bridges.*

But the manner in which men make known what they account their goodness is very various. Some are open with it. They almost literally "proclaim" it upon the housetops. To every individual, and in every company, they speak of it—of what they are, of what they have said, of what they have done, of what they think, and of what they wish and intend to do. And O! if they had but the means, what would they not accomplish!

Some there are who are quite as vain, and as ambitious of commendation and praise—who, knowing that everything of the nature of ostentation is exceedingly unpopular, and lets a man down, and tempts others to pluck his feathers from him—set about their object with greater art. They devise ways of getting their merits made known so as to avoid the flaw of ostentatious self-display. In company, they commend others for the qualities which they conceive themselves specially to possess, or for the doing of deeds which they themselves are sufficiently well known to have done; and they turn the conversation dexterously that way; or they find fault with others for the want of the good they are desirous to get praise for; or they lament over their own deficiencies and failures in the very points in which they conceive their excellence to lie—to give others the opportunity of contradicting them; or, if they have done anything they deem particularly generous and praiseworthy, they introduce some similar case, and bring in, in as apparently accidental and unintentional a way as possible, the situation of the person or the family that has been the object of their bounty.—*Wardlaw.*

Ver. 7. Many are the several walks of men in this world—one walketh in his pleasure, as it were in the walks of a garden; another walketh in his profit, and he walketh as it were up and down the exchange; another walketh in troubles, and he walketh as it were in a wood; another walketh in his poverty, and he walketh as it were in a desert; another walketh in his beastly lusts of drunkenness and uncleanness, and he walks as it were in mire and dirt; the just man walketh in his integrity, and he walketh as it were in the holy temple.—*Jermin.*

Ver. 8. We must be very careful, then, how we do our sifting. God's is perfectly complete. . . He *winnows* us at a glance. It is important, therefore, that we have something more than "evil," because "all" that He shall *winnow* bodily away.—*Miller.*

Ver. 9. Behold here the king sitting upon the throne of His judgment, whereof the former verse speaketh! Who *can* say it, and say it truly? Who *will* say it, and so be untrue in saying it? Who shall say it, and be so impudent as to say it? For to make clean the heart is His work who hath made the heart, thou who hast made it unclean canst not make it clean.—*Jermin.*

This proverb is especially noteworthy because, in contrast with the style of conception which is elsewhere predominant in the Proverbs, according to which the imperfection of all human piety is but slightly emphasized, and he who is relatively pious is allowed to pass as righteous, it gives expression to the unsatisfying nature of all moral endeavours, as never conducting to the full extirpation of all sense of guilt, and a perfect feeling of peace with God: *it accordingly suggests the need of a higher revelation in which the sense of guilt and of an ever-imperfect fulfilment of duty shall finally be overcome.—Elster, in Lange's Commentary.*

Ver. 10. Originally, as in xi. 1, of dishonesty in actual trade, but here

perhaps as a companion to verse 9, with a wider application to all inequality of judgment, to all judging one man by rules which we do not apply to ourselves or to another.—*Plumptre.*

That whereby thou takest from others shall add unto the weight of thine own punishment; that whereby thou addest in measuring for thyself shall make God to take away from the measure of His mercy towards thee.—*Jermin.*

Ver. 11. There is no tree that in growing doth not bend rather to the one side or the other; there is no river which, although it have many windings and turnings, yet in the course of it doth not rather turn one way than another; and so it is in the life of man, even from the childhood of man's life. Do not judge, therefore, of any man by one work or two, so thou mayest wrong him and deceive thyself.—*Jermin.*

For Homiletics on verse 13 see on chap. vi. 10, 11, page 79.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 14.

BARGAINING.

This proverb refers—

I. **To a world-wide manifestation of human selfishness.** A custom that was prevalent in the days of Solomon, many centuries ago, and amid circumstances which differed widely from those by which we are surrounded, has held its place among men until the present day, and will doubtless continue to do so until the teachings and the spirit of Christianity rule the world. It prevails in modern England quite as extensively as it did in ancient Judea; and whether the buyer be a millionaire bargaining for an estate, or a costermonger for the worth of a shilling, he is often found knowingly, and therefore criminally, depreciating the value of the commodity. It is a trait of fallen humanity which "makes the whole world kin."

II. **A pitiful ground of boasting.** Although it does need some skill and experience to tell the real value of an article, it requires none to pronounce it good for nothing. Only a man with some knowledge and judgment can put a fair price upon it, but any fool can say, "It is naught, it is naught." And if by knowingly depreciating the purchase the buyer robs the seller, he has but a very poor transaction to boast of. He has wronged another, it is true, but he has far more grievously wronged himself, for if his neighbour is the poorer by a few pence or pounds, he is the poorer by so much injury done to his own conscience, and by so much loss of the confidence of his fellow men. He who makes a boast of such a matter must, indeed, have few grounds for boasting.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS

This victorious boasting is not like other boasting. For that delighteth to do it in the face of the conquered; but this, as justly ashamed of itself, is made when they are gone one from the other. But to make a moral application of the words, as it is in buying commodities, so it is in the getting of wisdom and godliness; while a man labours for the obtaining of it, the trouble of his pains maketh him not to think so well of it, but having made it his own, then he praiseth the worth and excellency of it.—*Jermin.*

For Homiletics on Verse 15 see on chap. iii. 14, 15; viii. 11; xii. 14; xviii. 20, 21; pages 39, 107, 275, and 555.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 16.

NECESSARY SECURITY.

I. An untrustworthy creditor. A man who under ordinary circumstances makes himself a surety for one who is a stranger to him, is chargeable with great folly, and the act may be a criminal one. He is very foolish if he pledges himself up to his ability of redeeming his pledge, and he is dishonest if he goes beyond it. The warning of the proverb is directed against entering into business relations with a man who has so slight a sense of his own responsibility as to become "surety for a stranger." It may be regarded as a certainty that a man who will enter into such an engagement without reflection and caution is not to be depended on—does not measure his actions in this particular by a very high standard of morality. He may be a man of generous impulses and good intentions, but he lacks that substratum of high principle which makes a safe creditor.

II. An extreme security. The necessity of exacting security before credit, discloses the existence of immorality in the world. In a family where every brother is known to the other, and where the interests of each are the interests of all, there is no need to take a pledge for the performance of any promise, or the payment of any debt. But in the imperfect state of society in which we find ourselves, security before credit is necessary when we enter into business transactions with our fellow men, for the world is not yet ruled by the Divine precept, "*Love thy neighbour as thyself.*"—(Matt. xix. 19). And the security may be regulated by the reliability of him whom we trust. Solomon here regards him who becomes surety for a stranger, as so unlikely to be faithful to his own liabilities, that those who trust him may exact from him even that pledge which was the last allowed in the Mosaic law, and which could not be retained beyond the day (Exodus xxii. 26, 27). The injunction is probably to be regarded rather as advice against trusting such a man at all. (On the subject of suretyship, see Comments on chap. vi. 1. page 76).

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

The moral is that securityships are so unsafe that we may treat the man as one already ruined. But in the spiritual world it means (chap. vi.) that a man who holds fast sloth (chap. v. 13), holds fast a bond of eternal vengeance; that he renews it by his wilful act (xvii. 18); that it is a bond to a friend (chap. vi. 1), but that friend forced *ex lege* to collect it; that if now at this late day he holds it on, stand clear from him! He will certainly be lost. ***Take his garment***, that is, use the last resort, as against the most hopeless bondsman.—*Miller.*

His garment is not so near unto him as thou art unto thyself; that is not more needful to keep him warm than it is to keep thee safe. And seeing that he, by his folly, hath made himself naked of understanding, it is not thou but himself that maketh him naked of his garment. Seeing he is content to give himself a pledge for a stranger, it is less than thou dost in taking his garment as a pledge of him.—*Jermin.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 17.

BAD BREAD.

I. Some gratification is to be obtained from dishonest gain. Many a swindler gets not only bread by swindling, but many other things, which not

only minister to his senses, but gratify mental appetites not in themselves unlawful. And he finds pleasure in the fruit of his dishonesty—in, it may be, his well-furnished table, his luxurious mansion, his social position. It is not the highest and the purest pleasure, but there is a sweetness in it, or men would not grasp so eagerly the "bread of deceit."

II. A time will come when it will not only cease to give pleasure, but will bring misery. The dishonest man will find that, after all, his gains are not bread for his higher nature—that his soul is still unsatisfied, and crying out for sustenance—and, more than this, that his conscience demands satisfaction for the wrong-doing of the past—that even if he is permitted to keep possession of his ill-gotten wealth, it is not only what chaff without the grain, or the husk without the kernel, is to the starving man, but as the very sand of the desert or the dust of the highway in the mouth, tormenting as well as unsatisfying.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

"Everything gotten wrongfully is here implied." Bitter was Achan's sweet, deceitfully hid in the tent, which brought ruin upon himself and his family (Josh. vii. 21–24). Look at Gehazi. What profit had he from his talents of silver and changes of garments? Bitter indeed was the bread of deceit to him (2 Kings v. 20–27). Look even at Jacob, a true servant of God; and yet chastened heavily almost to the end of his days with the bitter fruits of deceit (Gen. xxvii.; xlii. 36–38).—*Bridges.*

Men must not think to dine with the devil, and then to sup with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.—*Trapp.*

It is crusted without, as if it were bread; but within, contrary to bread, is not soft. The deceived, tasting it with the tongue of his hope and presuming confidence, findeth nothing which is not grateful unto him: the deceiver tasting it with the tongue of present profit findeth it most luscious unto him. But when the deceiver, having it in his mouth, pierceth it with the teeth of his trial, then as gravel breaketh the teeth so it breaketh his heart; and when the deceiver comes to feed upon it he findeth there is no juice of true profit.—*Jermin.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 18.

THOUGHT BEFORE ACTION.

I. The permanent success of an undertaking is generally in proportion to the thought bestowed upon it beforehand. It is an act of extreme folly to commit ourselves to any course, or to undertake any task without first weighing all the probable consequences, and providing against the most likely contingencies. Such a wise forethought by no means excludes entire dependence upon God, for while it is most true that "*Man's goings are of the Lord,*" and "*a man cannot understand his own way*" (ver. 24), both common sense and the Word of God plainly teach that man must use the powers of forethought with which he has been endowed, or he must be content to see his purposes frustrated and his plans miscarry. If he desires his "purposes" to be "established," in other words—what he does to have a lasting result in the direction desired—he must "*sit down first*" and "*count the cost*" (Luke xiv. 28, 31).

II. It is advisable to call in the wisdom of others to help us in our deliberations. Since one man is rarely, if ever, able to look at a matter from every point of view, his plans are most likely to be wisely laid, and his purposes most likely to succeed, if he looks at them with the eyes of other men as well

as with his own. They may discern a weak spot where he saw nothing to fear, or a point of vantage which had escaped his notice entirely. Or they may see good reasons for dissuading him altogether from the undertaking, or may make him so much the stronger for the task by encouragement and counsel. It is not generally those who are most able to act alone who lightly esteem the advice of others—those men who are most successful in that to which they put their hand are not as a rule given to undervalue the wisdom of other people.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

The greatest trust between man and man is the trust of giving counsel. . . . . Things will have their first or second agitation; if they be not tossed upon the waves of counsel, they will be tossed upon the waves of fortune, and be full of inconstancy, doing and undoing, like the reeling of a drunken man.—*Lord Bacon.*

Ponder Bishop Hall's description of the spiritual *war*. "It admits of no intermission. It knows no night, no winter. It abides no peace, no truce. It calls us not into garrison, where we may have ease and respite, but into pitched fields continually. We see our enemies in the face always, and are always seen and assaulted; ever resisting, ever defending, receiving and returning blows. If either we be negligent or weary, we die. What other hope is there, while one fights and the other stands still? We can never have safety and peace but in victory. Then must our resistance be courageous and constant, when both yielding is death, and all treaties of peace mortal." Does not this war bring the greatest need of deliberate *counsel*, carefully counting the cost (Luke xiv. 31, 32); cleaving to our All-wise Counsellor (Isa. ix. 6) and Almighty Helper?—*Bridges.*

Among the Romans, though a man were never so strong, never so valiant, yet, if he wanted wisdom and counsel, he was said to be *miles sine oculis*, a soldier without his eyes.—*Jermin.*

See Critical Notes for the correct rendering of the second clause of verse 19, and for Homiletics see on chap. x. 19 and xi. 13, pages 168 and 211.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 20.

An Unnatural Child and a Natural Law.

I. An unnatural child. The ungrateful son or daughter of good parents is an unnatural being. If experience did not contradict, we should say that even fallen human creatures must return love for love, and could not help feeling gratitude to those who have denied themselves for their good. And as there is no love so strong and so unselfish as that which a parent feels toward a child, it does seem almost impossible that any child can be unresponsive to it. But if to remain untouched by it is unnatural, how much more so is it to attain to the height of wickedness upon which the text passes judgment. We must suppose that the proverb refers to fathers and mothers who are, to some extent, what they ought to be—who do in some measure reflect upon their offspring the tenderness of the Great and Divine Father—and then we can conceive of no more unnatural being than he "who curseth his father or his mother." Every natural instinct tends in the opposite direction.

II. A natural law. It does not need any special Divine interposition to blight and ruin such a man. The most powerful and blessed human influences are those which flow from the home-life, and from the emotions which ought to be kindled by the relationship of a child to its parent. But if these holiest

influences are resisted and these emotions are stifled, moral darkness must overshadow the life, and it will continue to deepen while the hardness of heart continues. It is well known that even the remembrance of parental love after long years of insensibility to it is often the first step back into the light of righteousness and hope, and that many who have sunk very low in crime could trace their present condition to the unnatural sin of hardening their hearts against parental love.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

This cursing, according to our Lord's standard, includes "setting light by father or mother;" wilful disobedience —a fearful, palpable mark of the last days. How God regards it, let his own curse on Mount Ebal (Deut. xxvii. 16), and his judgment of temporal death, testify. The present degradation of Africa is a witness, on the confirming page of history, of the frown upon an undutiful son (Gen. ix. 22–25)—his lamp put out in darkness.—*Bridges.*

It must needs be an obscure darkness that is fallen upon that soul, in whom the light of nature is so far extinguished as that he curseth them from whom he had the blessing of being. It must needs be a smoky breath that shall reproach him who was the breath of his nostrils. And what can he expect but that his lamp shall be put out in darkness.—*Jermin.*

For Homiletics of verse 21, see on chap. xiii. 11, page 306; also on chap. xxi. 5–7, page 596.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 22.

The Recompenser of Evil.

I. The man who has been wronged is disqualified to punish the offender. A sense of pain and suffering is not helpful to a man's judgment. He sees neither things nor persons in the light in which he would see them under happier conditions, and would not be likely to deal impartially with the offender. Hence, both the Bible and wise human governments—while freely allowing that he who injures another ought not to go unpunished—forbids men from undertaking the punishment themselves. Every human creature labours under another disqualification also. He is himself a law-breaker in a greater or less degree, and is not himself guiltless in thought and word, and perhaps in deed, of wrong towards his neighbour. The best of men cannot claim to be guiltless in this matter, and the majority are great offenders in one form or another. Therefore on this account also it is not meet for men to avenge their personal wrongs.

II. The most effectual way to rid one's self of the desire for revenge. We do not understand this proverb to forbid the bringing of men who have wronged us to the bar of human justice, for this may be a duty which we owe to society. It would be criminal in most cases not to apprehend one who had robbed us if it lay in our power to do so, for by letting him go free we should be exposing other innocent men to danger. But there are many cases in which men are greatly wronged in ways which do not come within the cognisance of human law, and when no benefit to anyone would arise from their punishment by any human instrumentality. In such cases, the sure remedy for any vindictive feelings in our own breasts is to lay the matter before Him whose judgment must be impartial, and who will render to every man according to his works. Waiting upon the Lord, too, will remind us so forcibly of our own shortcomings and wrongdoings that we shall be more ready to forget those of our brother.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

It is to be observed that it is not said, Wait on the Lord and He will avenge thee, but, He will save thee. By this kind of speech, the Holy Ghost would warn every one that is injured, not to think of the revenge or hurt of his adversary, but of his own defence and salvation.—*Muffet.*

The question is clearly this: Is your safety and protection best lodged in God's hand or your own? By indulging your revengeful spirit, you do yourself a greater hurt than your greatest enemy can do you, for you gratify his ill-nature, when you suffer it to make a deep impression on your spirit, without which it could do you little or no hurt; but by committing your cause to God, you turn his ill will to your great advantage, making it an occasion for the exercise of the noblest graces, which are attended with the sweetest fruits, and with the rich blessing of God.—*Lawson.*

While Moses is dumb, God speaks; deaf, God sees and stirs. Make God your chancellor, in case no law will relieve, and you shall do yourself no disservice. If compelled to go a mile, rather than revenge, go two, yea, as far as the gospel of peace will carry you, and God will bring you back "with everlasting joy (Isa. xxxv. 10). This is the way to be even with him that wrongs you, nay, to be above him.—*Trapp.*

So far should the desire of revenge be from man's heart, so far the execution of revenge from man's hand, that his *tongue should not say it.* Shall any say, I will revenge, when God says, revenge is *mine.* Neither let any say, I will revenge because I have been wronged. For, as Tertullian says, what difference is there between being the provoker and the provoked; but that he is first found in wickedness, and the other afterward? Do not therefore provoke God to anger, by seeking revenge in thy anger. Let God have his right.—*Jermin.*

For Homiletics on verse 23, see on chap. **xi. 1, page 190.**

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 24.

GOD OVER ALL.

A reference to the Critical Notes will show that in this verse there is an argument from the greater to the less, for the first clause contains an affirmation of a truth, and the second an argument drawn therefrom.

I. **The truth affirmed,** viz.—That the actions of the most mighty men, and the purposes of the wisest, are directly and absolutely under the control of God. This is self-evident if we admit that God is an Eternal, Omniscient, and Almighty Being, who concerns Himself with the government of the world. Having existed throughout the Eternal past and possessing absolute knowledge of the Eternal future, and being the Author of every man's being—determining the date of his entrance into the world and the period of his continuance in it, and during all that time "*encompassing his path and his lying down,*" and even "*understanding his thought afar off*" (Psa. cxxxix. 2, 3)—how can even the mightiest of men boast of his independence of God and foretell what shall be the issue of his most sagacious counsels, or be confident that he shall be allowed to carry out even the most matured of his purposes. While he is perfectly conscious of his power to will and to do within certain limits, he must be also conscious that his ability to do both are dependent upon the will of Him in whom we all live and move and have our being.

II. The inference drawn. If God is thus above and behind the goings of the mighty of the earth, it is man's wisdom to trust the mysteries of the present and the contingencies of the future in His hands. Every night throughout the year travellers from one part of our island to the other commit their bodily life unreservedly into the hands of one or two of their fellow-creatures. They are either impelled by inclination, or compelled by necessity, to undertake a certain journey, and to do this they must take their places in a railway train, and for a time surrender their power to take care of their own lives into the hands of others. Darkness is all around them as they travel on, and darkness is before them—they cannot discern the road by which they are travelling, or be absolutely certain that they will reach the place which they desire. Yet their confidence in the skill and fidelity of a few of their fellow-creatures is strong enough to make them generally at ease. Each human life resembles such a journey. The path from the cradle to the grave must be traversed, but insoluble mysteries lie all around, and the future is entirely hidden from view. There is but One who knoweth the way that we take, to whom both past, and present, and future are alike visible and comprehensible. His infinite wisdom and love ought to make us willing to leave Him to "*direct our paths*," while a sense of our individual responsibility ought to keep us from presumptuous rashness on the one hand, and from indolent inertness on the other. The truth set forth in this proverb ought to be set beside that in verse 18.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

As the first clause attributes to the Lord exclusively *the ordering* of great men's goings, in order to attain success, so the second attributes to Him the *prescient understanding* of men's course. God directs natural actions by His ordinary providence, spiritual actions by His special providence, which fore-ordains from eternity, awakens the sinner, removes obstacles, suggests that state of life wherein He sees that the man will not fall away, but attain to glory. However a man may understand his life with respect to its beginning and aim, yet he understands not the best *means* in doubtful cases, nor can he ensure the issue.—*Fausset.*

Little did Israel *understand* the reason of their circuitous *way* to Canaan. Yet did it prove in the end to be "the right way." As little did Ahasuerus *understand* the profound reason why "on that night could not the king sleep;" a minute incident, seeming scarcely worthy to be recorded, yet a necessary link in the chain of the Lord's everlasting purposes of grace to His Church (Esth. vi. 1.) Little did Philip *understand his own way* when he was moved from the wide sphere of preaching the gospel in Samaria to go into the desert, which ultimately proved a wider extension of the gospel. As little did the great Apostle understand that his "*prosperous* journey" to see his beloved flock at Rome would be a narrow escape from shipwreck, and to be conducted a prisoner in chains. Little do we know what we pray for. "By terrible things wilt Thou answer us in righteousness, O God of our salvation" (Ps. lxv. 5). We go out in the morning *not understanding our way;* "not knowing what an hour may bring forth" (chap. xxvii. 1). Some turn connected with our happiness or misery for life meets us before night (John iv. 7). Joseph, in taking his walk to search for his brethren, never anticipated a more than twenty years' separation from his father (Gen. xxxvii. 14). And what ought those cross ways or dark ways to teach us? Not constant, trembling anxiety, but daily dependence. "I will bring the blind by a way that they know not: I will lead them in paths that they have not known." But shall they be left in the dark perplexity? "I will make dark-

ness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them" (Isa. xlii. 16).—*Bridges.*

The cross ways that thwart man's goings are of God's laying out, the short ways which some make are of His finding out, the long ways that some go about are of His leading. . . . . He doth but tumble down the hill of his own audacious rashness that thinketh to climb up unto God's way. What God hath revealed of Himself in moderating man's ways is true wisdom to observe, and happy is he who maketh use of it. But as ignorance here is an idle carelessness, so knowledge there is a prying boldness.—*Jermin.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 25.

For the correct rendering of this verse see Critical Notes.

Religious Vows.

I. A man is under no obligation to vow. While the Scriptures contain many references to vows, whereby certain persons consecrated themselves or their property to God and give laws concerning their fulfilment (Num. xxx.), there is no command which requires men to enter into such a solemn engagement. The text refers solely to *religious* vows—to an act of special consecration to God, such as that of Jacob at Bethel when he dedicated the tenth of all his gains to the service of Jehovah (Gen. xxviii. 22), or that of Hannah when she promised that, if God would give her a man-child, she would give him unto the Lord all the days of his life (1 Sam. i. 11). It is obvious that such special acknowledgements of particular and exceptional blessings must be pleasing to God, but He lays upon men no obligation to render them, seeing that their value consists in their being spontaneous—the overflow of a grateful heart, or the result of a deep conviction of the claims of God, or of the need of Divine help in extraordinary circumstances.

II. A man is bound by the most solemn considerations not to vow thoughtlessly. As an intelligent and moral being he is bound to enter upon no course and to make no engagement without first inquiring whether the motive which prompts him at the outset is strong enough to carry him to the end. It is a snare and a sin to promise to a fellow-man and afterwards, in the words of the proverb, "to make inquiry," *i.e.*, to ask ourselves whether we are prepared to abide by our promise. The inquiry must even in such a case be made beforehand, or we must be branded with unfaithfulness to our plighted word. (These remarks of course do not apply to vows and promises which are in themselves sinful or unlawful. The proverb does not deal with such). If, then, a man is bound to consider well before he promises to man, how much more so before he vows to God! What must be the harm done to conscience and to character, and how great the insult offered to the Divine Majesty, when vows are made and obligations entered into, and afterwards he who thus bound himself finds that he is not morally prepared for the sacrifice. To such an one we might say, as Peter said to Ananias—"*Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? . . . Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God*" (Acts v. 4, 5). "*Better is it that thou shouldest not vow,*" says the Preacher, "*than that thou shouldest vow and not pay*" (Eccles. v. 5).

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

It is questionable whether vows, properly so called, are consistent with the genius of the New Testament dispensation. At any rate, of such vows as were common under the Old, we have no recorded examples under the New. Resolutions to serve God we may, nay we *must* make; there is no getting on in the Divine life and in the zealous promotion of the Divine glory, without them But the binding of the soul by particular bonds and oaths, whether verbal or written—obligations superinduced upon those of the Divine law—have been "a snare" to many. Weak minds have often felt the obligation of their vow more stringent than that of the Divine authority.—*Wardlaw.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSES 26 *and* 28.

PILLARS OF GOVERNMENT.

I. A human ruler will have rebellious subjects in his kingdom. This will be the case however wise the laws, and with whatever care and discrimination they are administered. In the most cultivated and carefully kept ground some weeds are always found among the flowers—some tares among the wheat; and since the King who can do no wrong numbers among his subjects those who are lawless and disobedient, the best and wisest of human rulers must expect to do the same.

II. It is the duty and wisdom of a human ruler to make a distinction between his good and bad subjects, and to punish the latter. Even if the wheel mentioned in the proverb be regarded as simply an instrument of separation, as the threshing instrument separates the chaff from the wheat, the idea of punishment is retained. In a well-governed kingdom the laws which govern it are such a separating power between the evil and the good, so far as external conduct is concerned, and it is indispensable for the stability of peace and order that they should be strictly enforced. It would be most unjust, as well as unwise—it would be tempting men to transgression—if the lawless citizens in a community were allowed to go unpunished; and it is contrary to our innate sense of justice that in any kingdom "the righteous should be as the wicked" (Gen. xviii. 25)—that the thief should have all the privileges of an honest man, and the murderer the liberty of an innocent person. The punishment of transgressors not only defends the good man, but it may prevent the bad man from increasing his guilt by adding crime to crime. The king of Solomon's proverbs is a typical word for all who are called upon to rule, whether in the family or the State, and the very word ruler, or governor, implies a discrimination between the evil and the good and a difference in their treatment.

III. The preservation of the throne depends more upon moral than upon physical power. We take the word throne in its widest sense as signifying any place or position which raises one man to be in any sense the ruler of another, from the throne of the father in his family and the master among his servants to that of the king amidst his subjects. In each and every one of these kingdoms, although external and physical coercion and punishment are sometimes indispensable, yet there is no permanent stability unless there is mercy and truth in the ruler, and unless it is manifest in his government. Many a throne has been erected on other foundations,—physical strength has established many kingdoms, and material wealth has set many men upon thrones. But if they have raised a superstructure its foundation has been in the sand, and when the rain and wind of adversity have descended upon it it has fallen, and great has been the fall of it.

There must be some truth and mercy—some righteousness and justice, and withal some exercise of grace towards the wrongdoer—if the throne or the kingdom is to be upholden, and the wisdom of the ruler will be shown in his so mingling sternness with severity as to make both contribute to the one end. Truth must here be taken as synonymous with righteousness—as that observance of the just claims of every man which he has a right to expect and demand from those who rule him. This will include that punishment of the lawless which is the subject of verse 26, but it is here implied that even punishment is to be tempered with mercy. Pity for the offender ought always to be mingled with indignation at the offence, and if any ruler desires to sit firmly upon his seat of justice he must consider not only the greatness of the crime but the strength of the temptation—not how severely he can punish the criminal but whether he can reform him. And this is rarely if ever done by the exercise of justice merely. The frost and cold are necessary to kill the weeds and vermin and to break up the soil, but there will never be flowers or fruit without summer rain and sunshine. And mercy is that "gentle rain from heaven" without which no sinful creature will ever bring forth fruits of righteousness.

ILLUSTRATION.

The necessity of mingling mercy with justice is strikingly exemplified in the great success which attended the efforts of the late Captain Maconochie to benefit the convicts in our penal settlement in Norfolk Island. Having, in his capacity as Secretary to the Governor of Tasmania, seen most terrible and hardening effects from unmixed severity, he desired earnestly to try what could be done by combining mercy with discipline and punishment. For this purpose he was placed in command of Norfolk Island, and remained there four years, having under his care from 1500 to 2000 doubly-convicted prisoners, *i.e.*, convicts who, after being transported from England to New South Wales, had been for other crimes *again* transported to Norfolk Island. Previous to his arrival they worked in chains, and it was considered dangerous for even armed officers to approach within three yards of them. It was considered unsafe to trust them with knives, and they therefore tore their food with their hands and teeth. They were accustomed to inflict dreadful injuries upon themselves in order to evade labour, and were described at the time as a demoniacal assemblage. But under more humane treatment the entire colony became changed, and one of his colleagues testifies that he and another superintendent "resided at one of the settlements in a cottage without lock and key, with simply a latch to the door, and close to the convict barracks, where over 2000 were lodged every night, also without locks." "Not a single serious offence," says he, "was ever committed in that time by any of those men, and the only bodyguard was another free superintendent and myself, together with a few trustworthy men selected from among themselves." This gentleman (Mr. J. Simms, since Governor of Plymouth Prison) goes on to say, "I shall ever remember this year as the most remarkable of all my prison experience, because it . . . . was a fair result of what might be realised from any body of men generally, thus treated, not by force, iron force, but by moral means." One remarkable example is given. At Sydney there had been a most desperate and unmanageable convict, named Anderson. He was flogged time after time for various offences, but to no good effect. He became more outrageous than ever. At last, the authorities, in despair, put him on a little island in Sydney Harbour, where he was kept chained to a rock, and in the hollow of which rock he slept. After some weeks the Governor went to see him, and urged him to submit to authority, but he refused. He was then sent for life to Port Macquarie Convict Station, where he was again and again flogged. He made his escape, and lived among the natives for some time, but, ultimately, being recaptured, he was sent to Norfolk Island for the crime of murder. Under Maconochie's humane treatment he became a changed man, and when the Governor of New South Wales visited the settlement he particularly noticed Anderson, and inquired, "What smart fellow may that be?" (See *Leisure Hour* for October, 1878.)

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

All dynasties have been kind. If they are cruel now, it must be like the weight of a clock, running down. There *was* kindness. "Mercy and truth" must at some time or other have builded the "throne."—*Miller.*

Godly Asa removed wickedness from the high place nearest his own throne and heart. Amaziah justly punished it with death. Nehemiah—that true reformer—rebuked it even in the family of the high priest. Our own Alfred appeared to maintain this standard as a witness for God in an age of darkness. But it is the King of kings alone that can make this separation complete. Often does He sift His Church by trial, for her greater purity and complete preservation (Amos ix. 9). But what will it be, when He shall come "with His fan in His hand, and shall thoroughly purge His floor?" (Matt. iii. 12). What a scattering of chaff will there be! Not an atom will go into the garner. Not a grain of wheat will be cast away. O my soul! what wilt thou be found at this great sifting day! "Who may abide the day of His coming? And who shall stand when He appeareth?" (Mal. iii. 2).—*Bridges.*

There goes more to preserve a king than to preserve a kingdom; and though the preservation of a kingdom be a weighty matter, yet the preservation of a king is much more weighty—though much care and pains be required for the one, much more is required for the other. Half of that will serve for the one which is needful for the other. Mercy will support the throne, but mercy and truth must preserve the king.—*Jermin.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 27.

THE CANDLE OF THE LORD.

We understand by the spirit of a man the self-conscious *ego*—that which takes cognizance of the inner life, and which reasons and passes judgment upon all a man's perceptions, emotions, and volitions.

I. **Man's spirit is a candle, because it is not self-originating** When we speak of a candle, the idea of a *borrowed* light comes before us; with us there is but one source and fountain of material light, and that is the sun, which, although it is but a candle of the Lord placed in the midst of our solar system, so far transcends all our artificial lights in its glory and permanence, that in comparison with them it seems self-existent and eternal. As a matter of fact, we know that all the artificial light stored up for us in combustible materials around us had its origin in that great father of lights, the sun, and that these lesser lights require kindling before they give forth brightness. So with the spirit of man—it is not self-existent and eternal, nor did it kindle itself, it owes its existence to that God who is the intellectual and moral light of the universe, because He is the source of all knowledge and goodness. That same Divine Creator, who said "*Let there be light and there was light,*" who set the sun in the heavens to rule the day, made man in His own image by breathing into the human body that spiritual life which makes man a living soul, and distinguishes him from the animal creation around him. We can no more claim to be the author of our own spirits than the sun can claim to have called itself into existence.

II. **Man's spirit is a candle, because it is a revealing power.** All light is revealing; it first makes evident its own existence and then reveals the existence of objects outside itself. When the sun comes forth above the eastern horizon like a bridegroom from his chamber, it reveals its own glory, and it makes manifest all things upon which its rays fall, and nothing is hidden from the light thereof. So in a less degree is it with every flame of light, and so is it with the mysterious spirit of man. It is self-revealing and self-evidencing, and in and by its light we become conscious of the existence of material forms and spiritual beings, and moral and physical influences outside ourselves.

III. Man's spirit is a candle which is intended to prevent self-deception. Knowledge of any description is good and desirable, but there are two beings of whom it is moral death to remain in ignorance—ourself and God. The spirit of a man is the power by which he apprehends both, and this proverb deals exclusively with man's power to know himself, and especially with his power to take cognizance of himself as a moral and responsible being. As the sun, when it darts forth its rays upon the earth, does not leave us in twilight, and in uncertainty as to what is around us, and as the candle brought into a dark chamber shows us, maybe, the dust and the cobwebs, as well as the costly drapery on the walls, so this God-kindled light searches into the innermost thoughts, and feelings, and motives, and shows to every man who does not wilfully turn away from the sight, both the good and the evil that is in him. True it is that, as a moral light, it does not shine so brightly as it did when man came forth from his Maker's hand, and that he who "*hateth light*" because it is a reprover of his sin (John iii. 20) may to some extent obscure its brightness, yet every man possesses light enough within to show him his need of a light outside and above him—even of that "*true Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world*" (John i. 9).

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

The candle which God has kindled in man has, as the nearest sphere of illumination which goes forth from it, the condition of the man himself—the spirit comprehends all that belongs to the nature of man in the unity of self-consciousness, but yet more, it makes it the object of reflection; it penetrates, searching it through, and seeks to take it up into its knowledge, and recognises the problem proposed to it, to rule it by its power. The proverb is thus to be ethically understood.—*Delitzsch.*

The essential connection between the life of God and the life of man is the great truth of the world, and that is the truth which Solomon sets forth in the striking words of my text. The picture which the words include is one of the most simple. A candle stands upon a table in a dark room, itself unlighted. Fire is brought into the room; a blazing bit of paper holds the fire, but it is blown and flutters, and any moment may go out; but the blaze touches the candle and the candle catches fire, and at once you have a steady flame which burns bright and pure and constant. The candle gives forth its manifestation to all the neighbourhood which is illuminated by it. The candle is glorified by the fire, and the two bear witness that they are made for one another by the way in which they fulfil each other's life. That fulfilment comes by the way in which the inferior substance renders obedience to the superior. The wax acknowledges the subtle flame as its master and yields to its power, and so, like every faithful servant of a noble master, it gives itself most unreservedly up, and its own substance is clothed with a glory that does not belong to itself. The granite, if you try to burn it, gives no fire; it only opposes a sullen resistance, and as the heat increases splits and breaks but will not burn. But the candle obeys, and so in it the scattered fire finds a point of permanent and clear expression. "The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord," says Solomon. God is the fire of this world. It is a vital principle, a warm pervading presence everywhere. What thing in outward nature can so picture to us the mysterious, subtle, quick, productive, and destructive principle; that which has always elevated men's hearts and solemnized their voices when they have said the word God, as this strange thing, so heavenly, so unearthly, so terrible, and so gracious, so full of creativeness, and yet so quick and fierce to sweep whatever opposes it out of its path? The glory, the beauty,

the marvel, the mystery of fire! Men have always felt the fitness of fire as being the closest of all the elements around the throne on which their conception of Deity is sitting. Man and all other beings, if such beings there are capable of watching our humanity, see what God is in gazing at the manhood God has kindled. The universe is full of the fire of divinity; men feel it in the air as they feel an intense heat which has not yet broken out into a blaze. There is meaning in a great deal of the unexplained, mysterious awfulness of life—the sense of God felt, unseen. The atmosphere is burdened with heat that does not burst out into fire, and in the midst of this solemn burning world there stands up a man, pure and God-like. In an instant it is as if a heated room had found some sensitive inflammable point where it would kindle into a blaze, and prospects of God's felt presence become clear and definite. The fitfulness of the impression of divinity is steadied into permanence. The mystery changes its character, and is a mystery of light and not of darkness. *The fire of the Lord has found the candle of the Lord*, and burns clear and steady, guiding and cheering instead of bewildering and frightening us, just as a man obedient to God has begun to catch and manifest His nature. I hope you will find this truth comes very close to your separate lives, but let me remind you first *what essential dignity clothes the life of man in this world.* Such philosophy as belongs to our time would deprecate the importance of man in the world, and rob him of his centralness. His position in such philosophies is this: that the world was not made for man. With us the old story that the Bible told, the book of Genesis with its garden of Eden, and its obedient beasts waiting until man should tell them what they should be called, stands firmly at the beginning of the world's history. The great notion of the centralness of man in the Garden of Eden re-asserts itself in every cabin of the western forests, or the southern jungles, where a solitary settler and his wife begin as it were the human history anew. There once again the note of Genesis is struck, and man asserts his centralness, and the beasts hesitate in fear till he shall tame them to his service, or bid them depart. The earth under his feet holds its fertility at his command, and what he does upon the earth is echoed in the storms. This is the great impressive idea which over the simplest life of man is ever growing, and with which the philosophies that would make little of the sacredness and centralness of man must always have to fight. This is the impression which is taken up, and steadied, and made clear, and turned from a petty pride to a lofty dignity and a solemn responsibility, when there comes such a message as this of Solomon. He says that the true sacredness, and superiority, and centralness of man is in the likeness of his nature to God's, and that capacity of spiritual obedience to Him, in virtue of which man may be the earthly declaration and manifestation of God to all the world. So long as that truth stands, the centralness of man is sure. "The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord." This is the truth of which I wish to speak to you—the perpetual revelation of God by and through human life. I. You must ask yourself, first, *what God is.* See how at the very bottom of His existence, as you conceive of it, there lie these two thoughts—purpose and righteousness; how impossible it is to give God any personality, except as the embodiment of these two qualities, the intelligence that plans, and the righteousness that lives in duty. How could any knowledge of these qualities, of what they are, of what sort of being they will make, exist upon the earth, if there were not a human heart in which they could exist, and from which they could be shown? Only a person can truly utter a person; only from a character can character be echoed. You might write it over the skies that God was just, but it would be at best only a bit of knowledge—never a Gospel—never something which it would

gladden the hearts of men to know. That comes only when a human life is capable of a justice like God's justice, and is clothed with His justice in the eyes of men. I have just intimated one thing that we need to observe: man's utterance of God is purely the utterance of a quality; it can tell me nothing of the quantities that make up His life. That God is just, and what it is to be just, I can learn from the just lives of the just men about me; but how just God is, to what unconceived perfection, to what unexplained developments that majestic quality of justice may extend in Him—of that I can form no judgment that is worth anything from the justice I see in my fellow-men. II. This seems to me to widen at once the range of the truth I am stating. If it be a quality of God, which man is capable of uttering, then it must be the simple quality of manhood that is necessary for the utterance, and not any specific quantity, not any assignable degree of human greatness. Whoever has the spirit of man may be the candle of the Lord A larger measure of that spirit may make a brighter light; but there must be a light wherever any human being, in virtue of his essential humanness, by obedience becomes luminous with God. There are the men of manhood, spiritually the leaders of the race; how they stand out! how all men feel their power as they come into their presence, and feel that they are passing into the light of God! They are puzzled when they try to explain it. There is nothing more instructive and suggestive than the bewilderment men feel when they try to tell what inspiration is. He who goes into the presence of any powerful nature, feels sure in some way he is coming into the presence of God; but it would be melancholy if only the great men could give you this conviction. The world would be darker than it is if any human spirit, as soon as it became obedient, did not become the Lord's candle. A poor, bruised life, if only it keeps that human quality, and does not become inhuman, but is obedient to God, in its blind way becomes a light. A mere child with his pure humanity, and with his turning of his life towards God from Whom he came—how often he may burn with some suggestion of divinity, and cast illumination upon problems and mysteries so difficult that he himself has never felt them! Little lamps burning everywhere. III. We have here the key to another mystery that often puzzles us. *What shall we make of some men rich in attainments and well educated, who stand in the midst of their fellow-men dark and helpless?* . . Let us let the light of Solomon's figure upon it. Simply this: they are unlighted candles; they are the spirit of man furnished to its very finest, but lacking the last touch of God; like silver lamps all chaste and wrought with wondrous skill, all filled with choicest oil, but all untouched by fire. IV. *There are multitudes of men whose lamps are certainly not dark, and yet who certainly are not the candles of the Lord,*—with a nature richly furnished, yet profane, impure, worldly. . . Such a man is not another unlighted candle. He burns so bright and lurid that often the pure light grows dim within its glare. But if it be possible for the human candle, when the subtle components of a human nature are all mingled carefully in it; if it be possible that, instead of being lifted up to heaven, and kindled at the pure beam of Him who is eternally and absolutely good, it should be plunged down into hell, and lighted at the cruel flames that burn out of the dreadful brimstone pit, then we can understand the sight of a man who is rich in every energy of manhood cursing the world with the exhibition of the devilish instead of the Godlike in his life. . . V. There is still one other way, more subtle and sometimes more dangerous than this, in which the spirit of man may fail of its functions as the candle of the Lord. The man may be lighted, and the fire at which he is lighted may be, indeed, the fire of God, and yet it may not be God alone he shows forth upon the earth. I can picture to myself a candle which

should in some way mingle the peculiarity of its own substance with the light it sheds. So it is, I think, with the way in which a great many men manifest God. They have really kindled their lives at Him. It is His fire that burns in them. They are obedient, and so He can make them His points of exhibition, but they are always mixed with the God whom they show. They show themselves as well as Him; just as a mirror mingles its own reflection with the things that are reflected from it and gives them a curious convexity because it is itself convex. This is the secret of pious bigotry, of holy prejudices; it is the candle putting its own colour into the flame it has borrowed from the fire of God. The feeble man makes God seem feeble, the speculative man makes God look like a doubtful dream, the legal man makes God seem as hard and steel-like as law. VI. I have tried to depict some difficulties which beset the full exhibition in the world of the great truth of Solomon. . . Man is selfish and disobedient, and will not let his light burn at all; man is wilful and passionate, and kindles his light with ungodly fire; man is narrow and bigoted, and makes the light to shine in his own peculiar colour; but all these are accident—distortions of the true idea of man. How can we know that? *Here is the perfect man*, CHRIST! . . . I bring the man of my experience and the man of my imagination into the presence of Jesus, but they fall short of Him, and my human consciousness assures me they fall short of the best ideal of what it is to be a man. "I am come a light into the world," said Jesus; "he that hath seen me hath seen the Father." "In Him was light, and the life was the light of men." So wrote the man who of all men knew Him best. I think I need only bid you look at Him and you will see what it is to which our feeble lights are struggling. There is the true spiritual man who is the candle of the Lord, "the Light that lighteth every man." It is entirely a new idea of life, new to the standards of our ordinary living, which is there revealed. All ordinary appeals to men to be up and doing, and to make themselves shining lights, fade away and become insignificant before this higher message which comes in the words of Solomon in the life of Jesus. What does that higher message say to you and me? That your full relationship to God can only be realised by obedience to Him, when you will shine by His light; then you cannot be dark, for He shall kindle you; then you shall be as incapable of burning with false passion, as you shall be quick to answer the true; then the devil may hold his torch to you, as he held it to the heart of Jesus in the desert, and your heart shall be as uninflammable as His. As soon as God touches you, you shall burn with a light so truly your own that you shall reverence your own mysterious life, and yet be so truly His that pride shall be impossible. In certain lands, for the most holy ceremonies they prepare the candles with the most anxious care. The very bees that distil the wax are sacred. They range in gardens planted with sweet flowers for their use alone. The wax is gathered by consecrated hands, and the shaping of the candles is a holy task performed in holy places, with the singing of hymns, and in an atmosphere of prayer. All this is done because the candles, when they are made, are to burn in the most elevated ceremonies and on the most sacred days. With what care must the man be made whose spirit is to be the candle of the Almighty Lord! It is his spirit that the Lord is to kindle for Himself; therefore the spirit must be the precious part of him. The body must be valued only for the protection and education that the spirit may gain by it. The power by which his spirit shall become a candle is obedience; therefore obedience must be the struggle and desire of his life; obedience, not hard and forced, but ready, loving, and spontaneous; obedience in heart, the obedience of the child to the father, the obedience of the candle to the flame; the doing of duty not merely that the duty may be done, but that the soul in doing it may

become capable of receiving and uttering God; the bearing of pain not merely because the pain must be borne, but that the bearing of it may make the soul able to burn with the Divine fire that found it in the furnace; the repentance of sin and the acceptance of forgiveness not merely that the soul may be saved from the fire of hell but that it may be touched with the fire of Heaven, and shine with the light of God as the stars, for ever.—*Philips Brooks.*

This "candle of the Lord" is a *slight* and *diminutive* light. A lamp is no such dazzling object. A candle has no such goodly light as that it should pride and glory in it; it is but a brief and compendious flame, shut up and imprisoned in a narrow compass. How far distant is it from the beauty of a star! how far from the brightness of a sun! This candle of the Lord, when it was first lighted up, before there was any thief in it, even then it had but a limited and restrained light. God said unto it: "Thus far shall thy light go; hither shalt thou shine and no further." Adam, in his innocency, was not to crown himself with his own sparks. God never intended a creature should rest satisfied with his own candle-light, but that it should run to the fountain of light, and sun itself in the presence of God. What a poor happiness had it been for a man only to have enjoyed his own lamp. . . . The "candle of the Lord" is a light *discovering present*, not *future* things, for did you ever hear of such a lamp as would discover an object not yet born? Would you not smile at him that should light a candle to search for a futurity? . . . Let, then, this candle content itself with its proper object. It finds work enough, and difficulty enough, in the discovery of present things, and has not such a copious light as can search out the future. . . . The light of reason is a *certain light.* Lamplight, as it is not glorious, so it is not deceitful—though it be but limited, it will discover such things as are within its own sphere with a sufficient certainty. The letters of nature's law are so fairly printed, they are so visible and capital, that you may read them by this candlelight. . . Although there is not vigour enough in any created eye to pierce into the pith and marrow, the depth and secrecy of being . . . It is a *directive* light. The will looks upon that, as Leander in Musæus looked up to the tower for Hero's candle, and calls it, as he doth there: "Lamp which to me, on my way through this life, is a brilliant director." . . . The will doth but echo the understanding, and doth practically repeat the last syllable of the final decision; which makes the moralist well determine that "moral virtues cannot exist without intellectual powers." . . . Other creatures, indeed, are shot more violently into their ends; but man hath the skill and faculty of directing himself, and is, as you may so imagine, a rational kind of arrow, that moves knowingly and voluntarily to the mark of its own accord. . . . It is an *aspiring* light. I mean no more by this than what that known saying of Augustine imports: "Thou hast made us, O Lord, for Thyself: our heart will be restless till it return to Thee." The candle of the Lord—it came from Him and it would fain return to Him. For an intellectual lamp to aspire to be a sun is a lofty strain of that intolerable pride which was in Lucifer and Adam; but for it to desire the favour, and presence, and enjoyment of a beatifical sun, is but a just and noble desire of that end which God created it for. . . If you look but upon a candle, what an aspiring and ambitious light it is! . . . It puts on the form of a pyramid, occasionally and accidentally by reason that the air extenuates it into that form: otherwise it would ascend upward in one greatness, in a rounder and completer manner. It is just thus in "the candle of the Lord;" reason would move more fully according to the sphere of its activity, it would flame up to heaven in a more vigorous and uniform way; but that it is much quenched by sin . . . therefore it is fain to aspire and climb as well as it can. The bottom and base of it borders upon the body, and is therefore

more impure and feculent; but the *apex* and *cuspis* of it catches toward heaven. . . . Every spark of reason flies upward. This Divine flame fell down from heaven and halted with its fall—as the poets tell us of the limping of Vulcan—but it would fain ascend thither again by some steps and gradations of its own framing.—*Culverwell.*

For Homiletics on verse 28, see verse 26.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 29.

THE GLORY OF YOUTH AND AGE.

I. Each period of life has a value and a glory of its own. There is a beauty in spring to which no other season of the year can approach. The vivid green of the opening leaves, and the meadows and hedge-banks carpeted with early flowers, give to spring a glory all its own. But the other seasons also have their peculiar charms. It is no less pleasant to look upon the landscape at midsummer, when the woods are in their full dress, and the valleys are covered over with corn, or in the autumn, when the harvest is being gathered in, and flowers have given place to fruit. If spring is the time of hope and promise, autumn is the season of realisation and fulfilment, and we are well content that the one should be lost in the other. So it is with the different periods of our human life—each has its special charm and its special advantages. We love to dwell upon the loveliness of childhood, but we should not like to see our sons and daughters remain children for ever, and it is pleasant to look upon and to experience the energy and hope of youth, but there are good things which cannot be ours until we reach to mature life, and even to grey hairs. We have before considered the glory of the hoary head (see on chap. xvi. 31, page 493); we have only to consider—

II. The peculiar gift and glory of young men. It is, says Solomon, their "*strength*"—their power to do and to endure in a physical sense, what the aged cannot, by reason of the failure of their bodily powers. When men have passed middle life, they become more and more painfully conscious that if the "*inward man is renewed day by day, the outward man is perishing*" at the same rate (2 Cor. iv. 16), and although their experience is richer, and their wisdom greater, their physical ability and energy is not what it once was. Their ship is laden, it may be, with a far more precious cargo, but the tide is not so strong, and the breeze is not so powerful to waft it on its way as it was in the years that are gone. It is the glory of the young man that his strength is often more than enough for himself, he is able to bestow some upon the weak and needy. But the aged man is often painfully conscious that he has none to spare, that instead he is dependent upon the strength of others. The consideration of the special advantages of each season of human life ought to cheer the aged man and prevent him from regretting the days of youth, and at the same time it ought to make the young man respectful to the old, and willing to listen to their counsel, and so far as it is possible combine the wisdom of grey hairs with the vigour of youth. It also warns the young man against any abuse of his physical powers—against any unlawful indulgence of bodily appetites, and against the formation of unhealthy and indolent habits—which make so many of our youths prematurely old, bringing upon them the frosts of autumn, before they have brought forth its fruits.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 30.

PAIN AS A PREVENTIVE OF PAIN.

For the different renderings of this verse, see the Critical Notes. However we translate it the thoughts suggested are the same, viz. :—

I. That pain in the present may prevent greater pain in the future. When the surgeon is called in to examine a wounded man, the examination of the wound may give him more pain than he would have suffered if he had been let alone; it may bring far more present suffering to extract the ball, or to insert the probe, than it would have done simply to bandage the wound. But the pain of to-day is to ensure days of healthful rest by and by; if the present suffering was not inflicted, months and years of pain in the future might be the result. The pain of mind or body inflicted upon a child of five or ten years old, is intended by its parent to prevent greater moral or physical pain when he is fifty or seventy. There is no human creature who can afford to do without the pruning-knife at some period of its life; and if the pruning is not administered, the penalty will be paid either in this world or the next. The wise and loving parent gives pain in youth to prevent pain to his child in manhood, and the All-wise and Loving Father, God, subjects His children to pain in the present life to prevent a deeper and more lasting pain in the life to come. He pricks the conscience by His word to bring men to repentance, and so to salvation from the "wrath to come," and He sees even in His own children so much "evil" remaining that He is compelled to visit "*their transgressions with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes*" (Psa. lxxxix. 32), in order to "*cleanse*" their characters.

II. Pain of body may be beneficial to the human spirit. This is a subject to which our attention has been before directed. See on chap. xiii. 24, page 334, and on chap. xvii. 10, page 510.

CHAPTER XXI.

CRITICAL NOTES.—**1. Rivers of water.** Rather *streams*, the allusion being to the watercourses, which in hot countries intersect fields and gardens for the purpose of irrigation, in which the water is entirely under the control of the husbandman. **2. Pondereth,** rather *weigheth*, as in chap. xvi. 2. It is the same verb as that used in 1 Sam. ii. 3 and Isa. xl. 12, 13. **4. The ploughing.** This word is by most modern commentators translated, as in the marginal references, *light*. It is likewise so rendered in the Septuagint, the Vulgate, and in Luther's version. Ewald, Elster, Wordsworth, and others, translate as in the English version. The Hebrew words are very similar. Those who adopt the former rendering understand the word to stand in apposition to the *high look* and the *proud heart* of the first clause (literally "*To be lofty of eyes, and to be swollen of heart*"), and regard it as a figurative representation of the spirit of the wicked man. Ewald and others refer the *ploughing of the wicked* to the "very first-fruits of a man's activity." **5. Thoughts,** rather the *counsels*, the *calculatings*. **6. Vanity tossed to and fro.** Rather *a fleeting breath*. The Hebrew word *hebel*, here translated vanity, means *vapour*. **7. Robbery,** or *violence, rapacity*. **8.** Zöckler translates the first clause of this verse, "*Crooked is the way of the guilty man.*" Fausset remarks that the Hebrew word *ish* (man) expresses a man once *good;* froward implies his perversity, by having left the good way. **Right,** *i.e., direct, straightforward*. **9. Wide house.** Literally *a house of companionship, i.e.,* to share the house with her. **11. Instructed.** Zöckler translates this "*prospereth,*" and understands the simple to be the subject of both clauses of the verse. 12. The words *man* and *God* are both supplied by the translators. The verse should be "*The righteous considereth the house of the wicked* (and) *overthroweth*, etc. Some understand it, therefore, to mean "The righteous man gives instruction to the house of the wicked to turn them away from evil." But Stuart remarks that the verb of the second clause is a very strong word, *to precipitate, to cast down headlong*, and refers the

righteous (one) of the first clause to God. This is Zöckler's rendering also. **15. Shall be.** These words are not in the original, and destroy the sense, which is that justice is joy to the good, and destruction to the bad. Luther renders, "It is a joy to the just to do what is right; but to the wicked a terror." **24. Proud wrath**, literally "*wrath of pride*," or *overflowings of haughtiness*. **27. With a wicked mind**, literally "*for iniquity*, and may refer to a desire to cloak a sinful purpose by an outward show of piety, or an attempt to expiate a sinful act by an outward atonement. Miller reads for "**how much more**" "*because also*." **28. Constantly**, rather *for ever*. Stuart understands the verse to mean "that the sincere listener to the Divine commands will ever be at liberty to speak, and find confidence put in what he says." **29. Hardeneth his face, or "putteth on a bold countenance." Directeth, or "*considereth*," or "*establisheth*."**

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 1.

THE KING OF KINGS.

I. Kings are more entirely in the hand of God than subjects are in the hands of kings. The king of the days of Solomon was, as some Oriental rulers are now, an absolute monarch. In the case of Solomon himself, his will was law, and in his hand was the power of life and death (see 1 Kings iii. 24, 25). Of Nebuchadnezzar it is said, "*Whom he would he slew, and whom he would he kept alive; whom he would he set up, and whom he would he put down*" (Dan. v. 19). It is to such a king that the proverb refers—to one who called no man or any number of men master, but upon whose single will apparently depended the destiny of millions. Yet he was not the independent being that he appeared, neither were his subjects so dependent upon his will as they appeared to be. The most abject slave in his dominions was less under his control than he was under the control of Him by whom "*kings reign*" and "*princes rule*" (chap. viii. 15, 16). The gardener whose ground is intersected by water-channels finds it a very easy task to turn the stream in the direction he desires; the soil yields to his touch, and forthwith the water flows whithersoever he wills. But the moist earth is not so easily moulded by the hand of man, as the heart of the proudest monarch is subdued to obedience by his Maker; and the water is not more entirely subject to the will of the husbandman than is the will of the most stubborn despot to the will of Jehovah.

II. The power which God exercises over kings extends into a region where no earthly ruler can penetrate. The *heart* of the king is in the hand of Jehovah. This is more than the most absolute monarch can boast concerning his meanest subject. Nebuchadnezzar could issue his decree, that whoso did not fall down before his golden image should be cast into the fiery furnace, but he could not move the steadfast determination of the Hebrew youths to acknowledge no god but the God of Israel. His will could determine what should be done to their bodies, but all his threatenings could not reach their hearts. But God rules the spirit of a man in that He has access to his innermost thoughts and feelings, and can thus touch the spring of all his actions, and thus bring him to do His will, even when he seems to be doing only his own.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Could anything be more bold? Mark the compass—first, of *subject*, the whole *stream* as the gardener turns it; second, of object, "*whithersoever*" or anything He pleases; and third, of *sovereignty;* its pleasing Him, that being the only test. The "*king*" may be a Cæsar. His lip may make new geographies (ch. xvi. 10). His "*heart*" may change the history of all things. And yet, like a vineyard's channels diverted by a child, this Pharaoh's heart is in the fingers of the Most High. . . *Upon* whatsoever. Not toward anything. A stream may be turned in a new direction to get

rid of it. God has no such streams. It is turned on something. For God has an end to answer when He rules even the vilest of fiends.—*Miller.*

Whether, in the second line, the pleasant refreshing influence of the rivulets, dispensing blessing and increase, comes into account as a point of the comparison, is uncertain (comp. Isa. xxxii. 2); this, however, is not improbable, inasmuch as the heart of a king may in fact become in an eminent degree a fountain of blessing for many thousands, and, according to God's design, ought to be so. See chap. xvi. 15.—*Lange's Commentary.*

For Homiletics on verse 2 see on chap. xvi. 2, page 454.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 3.

THE MORE ACCEPTABLE SACRIFICE.

I. The sacrifices of the Mosaic law were acceptable to God as ceremonial signs. They were instituted by God, and therefore He expected them to be offered, and was displeased when His commands concerning them were disregarded. But they were but the means to an end, and if they did not lead to that end they were worthless in His sight. They were intended to awaken a sense of sin, and to be accompanied by observance of higher precepts and by obedience to more enduring laws. It availed nothing for a man to offer his bullock or his goat unless he laid his will upon the altar at the same time—no sin-offering could be acceptable to God unless the sin was put away, and no meat-offering could be regarded with favour if the heart of the offerer was without love to his neighbour and his life was marked by acts of injustice to him. It was of no avail to come before the Lord with "*thousands of rams, or with ten thousand rivers of oil,*" unless the higher requirement was fulfilled—*to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God* (Micah vi. 7, 8).

II. The doing of justice and judgment is more acceptable to God because it is a moral reality. To love our neighbour as ourself is in itself good,—it is a moral attribute, an element of character, a part of the man himself. It is an expression of love to God and of obedience to His commands which can be made anywhere and at all times, for to do justice and judgment is the law of the moral universe, and belongs to heaven as much as to earth. It is to do what God has been doing from all eternity, for it is written that they "*are the habitation of His throne*" (Psa. lxxxix. 14). All other offerings without these are "*vain oblations,*" and even "*an abomination*" (Isa. i. 13) unto Him who owns "*every beast of the forest and the cattle upon a thousand hills*" (Psa. l. 10). To expect a holy and spiritual Being to accept anything less than a moral reality is to expect Him to be satisfied with less than would often content a fellow-creature.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Sacrifice; literally, *slaughter.* But with slender exceptions, the slaughter is a slaughter for sacrifice. . . He did not love the slaughtering of His Son upon the cross. He did not love the slaughtering of beasts year by year continually. On the contrary, He does love righteousness, and, therefore, He does love, in the severities that men impugn, that very element of right which is the attribute that they would bring into the question. Doing righteousness Himself, He prefers the right-doing of His creatures to any form of sacrifice or possible service they can ever render.—*Miller.*

"Sacrifice" at best is only circumstantially good—rectitude is essentially so. Sacrifice, at best, is only the means and expression of good; rectitude is goodness itself. God accepts the moral without the ceremonial, but never the ceremonial without the moral. The universe can exist without the ceremonial, but not without the moral.—*David Thomas.*

This maxim of the Proverbs was a bold saying then—it is a bold saying still; but it well unites the wisdom of Solomon with that of his father in the 51st Psalm, and with the inspiration of the later prophets.—*Stanley.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 4.

The Ploughing of the Wicked.

I. The high look and the proud heart indicate a man wrong at the foundation of his character. They show that he has not yet learned the alphabet of true godliness—that he has not yet begun to know his guilt and his weakness. He is ignorant of the depravity of his moral nature—of the capabilities of wrong that lie hidden within him, undeveloped now, it may be, but ready to assert their presence when the temptation presents itself. The man who has been born blind is entirely ignorant of the outline even of his own features, but he does not form a conception which is farther removed from the reality than a spiritually unenlightened man does of the real features of his moral character. The proud man by his pride proclaims his moral blindness—his high look is a sure indication that the light within him is darkness—that he has never seen himself as he really is. Hence it follows that he is wrong at the very core and centre of his moral being; where pride holds her throne there is no room for God, there is no confession of sin, and no yielding to Divine guidance.

II. While the heart is wrong the whole life will be wrong. This truth is expressed in the proverb, however we translate the verb in the second clause (See Critical Notes). Things that are not wrong in themselves become wrong if done from a sinful motive. A man may plough a field, and in itself the action may be neither good nor bad, but if he plough in order to sow a crop of thistles the action is a criminal one. A man may be diligent and painstaking in his business, and his diligence may in itself seem commendable, but if he exercises it only to gain money for sinful ends his very buying and selling becomes sin. And if we translate the word "*light*," and understand it to signify *prosperity*, the truth taught is very much the same. While a man's pride keeps him at a moral distance from God, no matter how successful he may be, the taint and curse of unpardoned guilt is upon all his gains and possessions.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Holy intention is to the actions of a man that which the soul is to the body, or form to its matter, or the root to the tree, or the sun to the world, or the fountain to the river, or the base to a pillar. Without these the body is a dead trunk, the matter is sluggish, the tree is a block, the world is darkness, the river is quickly dry, the pillar rushes into flatness and ruin, and the action is sinful, or unprofitable and vain.—*Jeremy Taylor.*

The evil spirit called sin may be trained up to politeness, and made to be genteel sin; it may be elegant, cultivated sin; it may be very exclusive and fashionable sin; it may be industrious, thrifty sin; it may be a great political manager, a great commercial operator, a great inventor; it may be learned, scientific, eloquent, highly-poetic sin! Still it is sin, and, being that, has in fact the same radical and fundamental quality that, in its

ranker and less restrained conditions, produces all the most hideous and revolting crimes of the world.—*Bushnell.*

All thine actions while unregenerate—whether inward or outward, whether worldly or religious—are all sinful and cursed. Like the leper under the law, thou taintest whatever thou touchest, and makest it unclean. . . . Thy calling is not without its corruption. . . . nay, thy very religious exercises are sinful. . . . Thine incense stinks of the hand that offered it. . . . The vessel of thy heart is not clean, and God will not taste of the liquor which cometh out of it. Because thy person is not accepted, thy performances are all rejected. "Thou art in the flesh, and therefore canst not please God" (Rom. viii. 8).—*Swinnock.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSES 5, 7, *and* 17.

Two Roads to Wealth.

I. The most likely road to lead to wealth. 1. *Thoughtful diligence as opposed to thoughtless haste.* We have before considered the necessity of thought before action (see on chap. xx. 18), and the same idea is conveyed in the use of the first noun here (see Critical Notes). But although it is wise and necessary to think before we act, thinking must only be preparatory to action, and must not take its place. It is good for a man to make a good plan of his house before he begins to build; but a house on paper only will not shelter him from the winter storms. It is advisable for the captain to study his chart well before he embarks upon his voyage, but if he does no more he will never reach the desired port. So it is good for a man to take counsel with himself and others before he sets out upon the voyage of commercial life—before he begins to build for a competency or a fortune; but after the thought and with the thought there must be action, and there must be painstaking and persevering action. He must not be all eagerness to-day and indifference to-morrow—he must not work hard this week and neglect his business next week;—such a man may get rich by a mere chance speculation or by a dishonest act, but, apart from all higher considerations, it is not the best road, because it is not the most likely road. No doubt there are men who have made their fortunes by short cuts—by what is called luck, or by craft and robbery—but these are the exceptions, and the way of diligent perseverance is the one by which riches are generally gotten. 2. *Self-denial as opposed to self-indulgence.* "He that loveth pleasure shall be a poor man: he that loveth wine and oil shall not be rich" (ver. 17). He who spends in self-indulgence as fast as he earns will be always poor. The lover of pleasure and luxury will not be a lover of hard work, and as we have just seen, it is that alone by which most men grow rich. And the extravagant and idle man will not be very likely to keep within his means, and to confine himself to honest ways of making money. And both these roads are roads which lead in the end to ruin. It is not likely that Solomon here refers to any poverty except material poverty. But it is also true that no man whose heart is set upon the gratification of his own selfish desires—whose life is one of self-indulgent ease—can ever be rich in the only true and lasting riches. He must always be in poverty as to character, as to intellectual wealth, and as to the gratitude and respect of those whom he might bless with his riches. "*If, therefore, ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another man's* (or another's), *who shall give you that which is your own?*" (Luke xvi. 11, 12). He is a poor man who has nothing but what he must leave behind him when he leaves the world. The greatest millionaire has nothing he can call his own if he has not a godly character.

II. The only blessed road to wealth, viz., the way of truth as opposed to lying, the way of honesty as opposed to dishonesty. We need not consider these sins separately, for they are inseparable in human character and conduct. The liar is a thief, for by his tongue he cheats men of their rights, and the thief lies in action as well as in word. Solomon does not say that thieves and liars shall not grow rich. As a matter of fact they often do, and leave far behind them in their race those who are plodding slowly on in the path of honest diligence. But he looks to the end of such a way of making money, and of those who so make it. It often vanishes like a vapour (see Critical Notes), while the man who made it still lives. One falsehood leads to another, and a little dishonesty bringing success leads to another and another, each one on a larger scale, until the bubble becomes too thin, and it bursts and all is gone. But if the rogue keeps his fortune till the last—if he meets death a rich man, and is buried with all the pomp of wealth,—retribution awaits him before the tribunal of a righteous God. He sought death and destruction while he lived, and he found it even here;—destruction of character and spiritual death, and he who here "refused to do judgment" goes to meet his judge a morally self-ruined man—one whose spiritual deathblow has been dealt by his own hand. (On this subject see also Homiletics on chap. xiii. 11, page 306.)

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Ver. 5. Haste may have much of diligence in the temperament. But as indolence is its defect, this is its excess, its undisciplined impulse. The hand too often goes before, and acts without the judgment. Hence our English philosopher wisely counsels us—"not to measure dispatch by the times of sitting, but by the advancement of the business." A wise man had it for a bye-word, when he saw men hasten to a conclusion—"Stay a little that we may make an end the sooner." To choose time is to save time, and an unreasonable motion is but "beating the air." The heavenly race is not to be run by so many heats, but by a steady course. "Run," not with haste or speed, but "with patience the race set before us." (Heb. xii. 1.) The seed springing up in haste withered. (Matt. xiii. 20, 21.)—*Bridges.*

Ver. 6. They *seek* death because they not only walk in the way to it, but run and fly with post haste as if they were afraid they should come too late or that hell would be full before they got thither. Thus Balaam's ass never carries him fast enough after the wages of wickedness. Set but a wedge of gold before Achan, and Joshua that could stop the sun in his course, cannot stay him from fingering of it. Judas, in selling his Master, what he doth, doth quickly.—*Trapp.*

Treasures; literally stores; from a root to shut up. "*Tongue;*" standing for all instruments of labour (see comment on chap. xii. 6). "*Lying;*" not telling lies in the worldly sense, for, so put, decent sinners would miss the signification, but *lying* in that high sense in which the most honest worldling may fill the portrait. "*Tongue;*" just coincident with fact, is of the haste of the last verse; that untrue uttering of thought against conviction in one's self, and, therefore, hardly to be dreamed of as spared by the Most High. Stores got by this lying career of business may seem solid, because they may be whole blocks of granite in some fire proof square mile of street; and yet as to their possession the wise man employs a singularly intensive figure. They are *driven breath!* Surely he will pause at that! But no! They are driven breath as of men chasing after death! . . . The meaning is, that the hot breath of a man rushing to his doom is like the money made by the deceived impenitent. First, it is utterly

perishable; second, it betokens the speed; and third, the voluntary rush to get himself to ruin.—*Miller.*

And forget not what the "lying tongue" includes—that he is chargeable with the evil who pretends, in any way, to be what he is not, to have what he has not, not to have what he has, to have said what he has not said, or to have done what he has not done, or not to have said and done what he has said and done; who tries to gain an end by any word, or act, or look, or even by silence and concealment designed to convey a false impression—by any means whatever not in harmony with honest truth—with "simplicity and godly sincerity." This, says Solomon, "is a vanity tossed to and fro of them that seek death." It is a "vanity;" inasmuch as it involves both folly and sin—the folly being made evident in ultimate detection, exposure, shame, and loss—loss of character, loss of confidence, and many a time loss of even what the falsehood had acquired. It is "tossed to and fro." Men learn it from one another. The man who has been imposed upon retaliates—he has no satisfaction until he has succeeded in duping him by whom he has himself been taken in, in practising on him an equal or a better trick. It is practised with little thought—with the vanity of a light and inconsiderate mind—and laughed at, in many instances, when it proves successful, instead of engendering remorse. Success produces a hundred imitators: and the cheats and the dupes are successively reversed, the dupe becoming in his turn the cheat, and the cheat the dupe.—*Wardlaw.*

Ver. 17. Self-indulgence is not human happiness; it is a delirium, not a delight. It is a mere titillation of the dying nerves, not a Divine thrill of our imperishable sensibilities and powers. Its music is the notes of a maniac, not the strains of a seraph.—*David Thomas.*

He may be rich secularly. For here is a proverb that on earth has but a partial verity. But now, spiritually it is as settled as the heavens. "He that loveth his life shall lose it" (John xii. 25). A man cannot scale heaven for its "wine." Unless a man gets higher objects than himself, he cannot see the kingdom of God. And, therefore, it is literally true that the wealth that the soul attains is never made by the very most feverish desire to escape, or by the very most impassioned thirst for the mere joy of heaven. "Man;" the higher name for man. He may be ever so skilful. . . . . "Loving;" not, if it loves, but because it loves. It is no harm to love happiness; but it cannot be in loving it, or because we love it, that we can create everlasting riches.—*Miller.*

Strange as it may seem, the way to enjoy pleasure is not to love it; to live above it; to "rejoice as though we rejoiced not; to use the world, as not abusing it" (1 Cor. vii. 30, 31); never pursuing it as our portion, or as making the happiness of an immortal being. The man who gives his whole heart and time to the love of pleasure, and sacrifices to it all his prudence and foresight, is surely on the highroad to poverty. On the same road is he that loveth wine, under the power of a "mocking delusion." He that loveth oil—one of the most precious fruits of Canaan—may find, that "those who could not live without dainties came to want necessaries."—*Bridges.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 8.

Two Ways.

I. The way of fallen man. It is a froward or refractory way in relation to God. When we look at man's ways and compare them with the ways of all the creatures below him and inferior to him, we note a remarkable contrast. The sun, which was created to give him light and heat, never turns aside from its

ordained path, and the moon never forsakes her orbit, but, with the rest of the heavenly bodies, continue in the way ordained for them at the creation, and impress us with a sense of order, and regularity, and obedience. And the living creatures beneath man remain true to their instincts, and manifestly fulfil their destinies in ministering to the wants of the human race. But when we come to man we come to a law-breaking, perverse creature—to a being who resists the law of God as written in his conscience, and the commands of God as given in revelation, and the very pleadings of *self-love* which often urge him to submission. The way of the Hebrew people under special Divine tuition is a specimen of the frowardness of all men in their natural condition, which is indeed a most *unnatural* condition, seeing that it is out of harmony with all the rest of creation. Delivered from bondage by miracle and fed and guided by the same miraculous love and power for nearly half a century, and again and again after their settlement in Canaan delivered from the consequences of their disobedience by the same mighty hand, the testimony against them was, "*Ephraim is joined unto idols, let him alone*" (Hosea iv. 15). Neither appeals to their conscience or their reason, or even to their own self-interest, nor promises nor threatenings, could induce them to choose God's way in preference to their own, and when He appeared among them in flesh, and after He had risen from the grave and the full meaning of His incarnation and death was unfolded to them by His apostles, they still perversely chose to go about "*to establish their own righteousness*" rather than "*submit themselves unto the righteousness of God*" (Rom. x. 3). And man in general is as froward, as perverse, as was this froward people. Though their reason, and conscience, and self-love are all on the side of God's way they persist in walking in their own.

II. The way of renewed man. It is a *direct* or *straight* way (see Critical Notes), because it is an obedient way. No man but a godly man keeps in one undeviating course, for none but he has but one aim and goal. The unrenewed man may be swayed by passion to-day, and by worldly interest to-morrow; but with him who has been born to a new and higher life one principle lies behind all his actions; and whatever his secondary plans and purposes, they are all subordinated to the one ruling law—the will of God. His work—whatever it may be—whether that of the judge upon the bench, the minister in the pulpit, the tradesman behind the counter, or the sailor at the mast-head, has one end and aim above all others, viz., to glorify God; and this gives to it a directness and straightforwardness which is not an element in the walk and work of the ungodly. See also on chap. x. 9, 10, page 153, and on chap. xi. 3, page 196.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

No one is such a stranger in any land as man is in the land of righteousness; neither is any stranger so ignorant of his way, as man is of the way of virtue. Wherefore, man and purity are rightly opposed in our translation. For what is more froward, more impure, than man's way is? And he that is pure, how little *man* must he have in him. How must he put off *man* to put on purity. Wherefore, if in the whole way of man there be a right work, it is not the work of man, as he is man, but the grace of God.—*Jermin.*

It is too natural for us to think that, if we are no worse than the generality of our neighbours, we are safe. But Solomon and Paul teach us, that, to walk as men, is not to walk like saints (Cor. iii. 3). Whilst we are following the course of this world, we are walking in the broad road that leadeth to destruction, and not in the narrow way that leadeth unto life.—*Lawson.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSES 9 and 19.

An Angry Woman.

I. No social discomfort is to be compared to that of an ill-tempered wife. A corner of the housetop would be exposed to the rain and to the storm, both of which, in eastern countries, are generally of a violent character; and although it is not uncommon for orientals sometimes to pass the night there, it would be most undesirable to be obliged at all seasons, and under all circumstances, to have no other place of refuge. He who had to dwell there would at one time be subjected to the intense heat of the mid-day sun, and at another would be chilled by the midnight air. Neither is the wilderness a pleasant place of abode. In addition to all the drawbacks of the housetop arising from exposure to the weather, a wilderness is a place of dreary solitude, and often of danger from wild beasts and lawless men. But it is better to dwell in either of these places than with a brawling or even with an angry woman. 1. *Because one might enjoy intervals of repose.* The rain would not always descend, neither would the storm-wind be always blowing; the sun would sometimes give forth only an agreeable warmth, and the night-wind bring only a refreshing coolness. Even in the wilderness the solitude would sometimes be enjoyable, and life there would not always be in peril. But the woman pictured here is one whose ill-temper is always ruling her and casting gloom over the home, and when there is no storm of passion actually raging there is one brewing and ready to burst forth. The unhappy partner of her life can never look forward to an hour of ease, for the lulls in the storm are but momentary, and the rifts in the clouds obscured again immediately. 2. *Because, whatever may be the discomforts of a housetop or wilderness dwelling, they may leave the soul at rest.* They can but reach the body, and the mind may be so absolutely calm or absorbed in thought as to be almost unconscious of what is passing without. To some men solitude has such charms that they are willing to forego many bodily comforts in order to obtain it. There have been and are those whose own thoughts are the only company they desire, and who would gladly brave the drawbacks of the housetop or the wilderness, if by so doing they could be left undisturbed to indulge their own speculations, or pursue their meditations. But the sharp tongue of a contentious woman leaves no corner of the soul undisturbed. It is vain for the subject of it to seek refuge in reflection upon more agreeable topics, to endeavour to banish the actual present by calling up images of the future, or of unseen though distant realities. All the powers of the mind are paralyzed by such an incubus, and the soul cannot wing its flight into pleasanter regions, as it can do sometimes when the suffering only touches the outer man.

II. External good fortune is no proof against this domestic curse. The "*wide house*" or the "*house of companionship*," suggests a goodly mansion—a dwelling which might be the centre of social gatherings, and whose owner is able to indulge in hospitality on a large scale. It calls up before us not the top-story garret of the very poor, or even the narrow dwelling of a struggling man, where the fight for bread, and the effort to make both ends meet, may have something to do with spoiling the temper of the housewife. But the angry and contentious woman is not confined to these abodes—Solomon almost seems to speak here from experience, but even if he did not, we know that even palace walls cannot keep out the curse, and that there is often such a skeleton at the most sumptuous feast.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

The family is sometimes a fierce fire. It comprehends the greatest portion of our world. It is to us the most interesting, and therefore is capable of becoming the most trying portion.—*Cecil.*

Everyone has known some pair chained together by human laws where the heart's union has either never existed or been rent asunder. Two ships at sea are bound together by strong, short chains. As long as the sea remains perfectly calm all may be well with both; though they do each other no good, they may not inflict much evil. But the sea never rests long, and seldom rests at all. Woe to these two ships when the waves begin to roll. There are two conditions in which they might be safe. If they were either brought more closely together, or more widely separated, it might yet be well with them. If they were from stern to stern riveted into one, or if the chain were broken and the two left to follow independently their several courses, there would be no further cause of anxiety on their account. If they are so united that they shall move as one body, they are safe; if they move far apart, they are safe. The worst possible position is to be chained together, and yet have separate and independent motion in the waves. They will rasp each other's sides off, and tear open each other's heart, and go down together.—*Arnot.*

Better to retire into a corner of the housetop than to quit the house and go into bad company for diversion, as many who, like Adam, make their wife's sin the excuse of their own.—*Henry.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 10.

THE DESIRE OF THE WICKED.

On "the desire of the wicked" see on chap. xi. 5, 6, page 199. Concerning that desire it is here affirmed—

That it overmasters and destroys all natural feelings of compassion. The Bible teaches us that in the estimation of God he is our neighbour who, as one of the same great human family, stands upon the same level with us,—the child of the same God and heir to the same inheritance of sorrow and death. As such he has a claim upon our consideration and goodwill at all times, and sometimes he stands in need of our sympathy and help. Now there are spiritual desires and inclinations to which we are bound to subordinate some claims of human kinship. The relation of a disciple of Christ to his Master is so far above all human ties that they sink into apparent insignificance beside it, but this relationship has not the effect of lessening man's concern for the welfare of his brother, but of increasing it tenfold. But here is subjection to a principle as much below nature as the other is above it—evil instead of good is the aim of the life, and in proportion as it rules and reigns it drags a man below the level of even ordinary human nature and leads him to so earnest a pursuit of his own wicked devices that he has no time to pause to consider the claims of others.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

"*Evil.*" All kinds of it. He rejoices in iniquity (1 Cor. xiii. 6); he rejoices in calamity (chap. xvii. 5); he desires nothing but evil (chap. xvii. 11). Blessed be God, if a soul desires anything but *evil*, *i.e.*, desires it truly (see James iv. 2), that soul is saved. As to the second clause, there may be a bending over earthly distress, but real *favour* to his *neighbour*

the lost man never shows. "The tender mercies of the wicked are cruel" (chap. xii. 10).—*Miller.*

And here lies the difference between the godly and the wicked; not that the one is pure from evil, and the other commits it, but that the one does it from constraint, the other from delight. The one testifies—"What I hate"—the other—What my soul desireth—"that do I." As the fruit of this native cherished principle, self to the wicked is both his god and his object. —*Bridges.*

He views "his neighbour" in no other light than as, on the one hand, the means of thwarting, or, on the other, the instrument of promoting his own ends. Can he gain anything by him? he will flatter and cajole him, and do everything to win his favour, and secure his services. Does his "neighbour's" interest, reputation, personal and family comforts, connections, or even life itself, stand in the way of the attainment of his wishes?—he is ready to sacrifice all to his idol.—*Wardlaw.*

It is the common maxim of the schools, that, seeing the nature of the good is the nature of that which is desirable, it is impossible that evil, as it is so, should be desired. But then the schools do add also, that the will may desire anything, it is not required that it be good in the truth of the thing, but that it be apprehended as if it were good. And thus it is that the soul of the wicked desireth evil, because that he apprehendeth the good, either of some pleasure of profit, or some contentment in it.—*Jermin.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 11.

INSTRUCTION FOR THOSE WHO NEED IT.

I. An inevitable event in the history of the scorner. It is here taken for granted that he will be punished—that he who sets at nought the "*counsel,*" and will have none of the "*reproof*" of wisdom, will have his day of reckoning. The "*day of his calamity*" and "*fear*" will come (chap. i. 27). Throughout this book, as throughout all the inspired writings, sin and punishment are linked as cause and effect. There is punishment in the constantly increasing dominion of evil in the soul, and there is punishment in the stings of conscience; but there is also punishment by the direct interposition of God, and it is to this that the proverb evidently points.

II. One of the fruits of wisdom. He who is wise will be instructed. Having used what he has, he will in accordance with the Divine law receive more. To "*him that hath shall be given*" (Mark iv. 25). He who by a wise use of five talents has gained other five, shall have his store increased still more. This is likewise a foundation principle of this book, that the wise are those who are willing to be instructed, and that to those who desire instruction it will not be wanting. The special point of the verse is in the fact—

III. That the punishment of the evil man, and the soul-advancement of the good, have a work to do outside the men themselves. When the scorner receives punishment others receive instruction. This is one of its objects. A good ruler, as we have before seen (chap. xx. 26), is bound to distinguish between the righteous and the wicked for many reasons, and for this reason among others, that the punishment of one offender may prevent others from committing a like offence. Men often learn by example what they would not learn by precept—the inexperienced are often more deeply impressed by one instance of retributive justice than they would be by many admonitions in word. This is, as we know from God's Word, one end of His visitations. "*For this cause,*" said God to Pharaoh, "*have I raised thee up, for to show in thee My power, and that My name may be declared throughout all the earth*" (Exod. ix. 16). There are

vessels belonging to our navy which are past repair, and are therefore unfit for sea. Yet they are retained as light-ships along the coast, and are useful in preventing better ships from going to pieces on the rocks. Pharaoh had long scorned the commands and the judgments of Jehovah, and his own doom was fast hastening on. But he would still serve as a beacon-light to save others—by his punishment the simple would be made wise. But there is the other and brighter side of the picture. The inexperienced are allured to goodness by the advancement of the good, as well as deterred from evil by the downfall of the wicked. When the simple sees the wise man in the attitude of a learner—when he finds that the wiser he is the more he desires instruction; and when he marks the effect of his humility and earnestness in his growth in all that is calculated to win him respect and to afford him real satisfaction, he "receives knowledge" by "the instruction of the wise" as well as by the "punishment of the scorner."

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

A respectful sinner; how is he a scorner? The Holy Ghost plainly intends just the shock that such words occasion. If a man hears that he should repent, and knows the reasons, and among the reasons are facts like hell, and calls like Christ's, and scenes like death, with all the realities of an eternal judgment, is there any spoken scorn that can be thought of as more scornful than the acted scorn of not repenting? "The simple becomes wise," *i.e.*, the subject or the witness of the punishment, just as it may happen . . . Punishment never wastes. The wicked may be thrust lower by his evil (chap. xiv. 32), but some saint receives the lesson. This principle reaches through the system. The philosophy of hell is its good-doing through all the universe.—*Miller.*

It is a stroke easily taken which another feels, the receiver only fears, and it is a blow haply given which, striking one, reacheth two; the scorner to his reward, the simple to his amendment . . . Let it therefore be a sharp punishment which is inflicted; *smite a scorner,* for such it is that the scorner deserveth, and it will work upon the simple, though not by the touch of the punishment yet by the virtue of it. And when wisdom hath once subdued him by fear, then will it lead him on to hear the wise, and by attention to receive knowledge.—*Jermin.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 12.

GOD'S SURVEILLANCE OF THE WICKED.

We follow here the rendering now generally given of this verse. (See Critical Notes.)

I. We have a reference to a mystery in the government of God. It is mysterious that the wicked are permitted to live *at large*—to pursue their plans and carry on their iniquitous work. Under human governors, men who break the laws of the State and endanger life and property are not allowed to have liberty. If they are permitted to live, they live under restraint—their activities are confined within narrow limits, and so their power to do mischief is taken from them. The prisons scattered throughout our land declare that our rulers only permit those who break our laws to have a very narrow sphere of action; they live where all their freedom is taken from them, and where their rule of life is not their own will but that of others. But God allows those who break His laws a larger amount of freedom—He permits them to mingle freely with righteous

men, and to exercise their influence upon the world, and to carry out designs which are often in defiance of His commands. This has often perplexed the good in the world, and they have again and again asked the question, "*Wherefore do the wicked live—become old; yea, are mighty in power?*" (Job xxi. 7.)

II. The wicked living thus at large have God for a sentinel. There are many men living at large who are known to be dangerous characters—who, although they do not come within the reach of the law, are known to cherish feelings and intentions which are antagonistic to it. Such people need a more vigilant supervision than those in the prison cells, just because their freedom is greater. An ordinary man can watch a criminal who is secure in a prison, but much greater watchfulness and skill is needed to supervise the actions of one at liberty. Every house of the wicked contains a lawbreaker at liberty, and often one house contains many such who have a large amount of freedom in the execution of their wicked designs. God is the only Being capable of being the sentinel over such a house. They need one who knows the heart as only God knows it—one who sees all their plans before they become actions. They need a sleepless sentinel—one who can be awake at all hours, and so can never be taken by surprise. And this they have in God. None enters or departs from the house of the wicked, and no plot is concocted within it that is not marked by this ever-wakeful sentinel. The wicked have what it is indispensable they should have—an omniscient and omnipresent eye ever upon them.

III. After the watch has been kept for a given time, the house is marked for falling. We know why God gives such men freedom, for He has told us. It is that they shall have opportunities of repentance—that *they "shall turn from their way and live"* (Ezek. xxxiii. 11). He spares the house of the godless, for the same reason that the vine-dresser desired that the fruitless fig-tree should be spared (Luke xiii. 6-9). He gives men time to bring forth fruits of holiness, to their own profit and to His glory. So He considered the house of the sinners, before the flood. His *"longsuffering waited while the ark was a preparing"* (1 Pet. iii. 20) for some tokens of a change of disposition towards Himself, and consequently towards His laws. But none came, and so the day came when the flood came, and swept away both the houses and their inhabitants. So He considered the house of the Jewish nation, after the death of Christ. In the days of John the Baptist, the *"axe was laid unto the root of the tree"* (Matt. iii. 10), but the hand was not lifted to strike, until the rejection of the Messiah, and of the ministry of His apostles, had proved that there was no hope of a moral change. The wicked shall be overthrown, but God *considereth their house* long before He gives the final blow.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

(It will be seen that these read the verse as in our version.)

The punishment of the wicked reads a lesson not only of love and trembling, but of wise consideration. Yet many are the perplexing mysteries of Providence. The righteous man does not always see with his right eyes. The prosperity of the wicked staggers his faith, excites his envy, and induces hard thoughts of God. (Ps. lxxiii. 2-14.) But when he looks with the eye of faith, he sees far beyond the dazzling glory of the present moment. He wisely considereth their house; not its external splendour and appurtenances, but how it will end. He justifies God, and puts himself to shame. (*Ib.* verses 16-22.) "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Gen. xviii. 25.) Here we rest, until He shall "arise, and plead His own cause," and "with the breath of His mouth, and the brightness of His coming, destroy" the very existence of evil. Meanwhile, where the superficial eye sees nothing but confusion, let the

righteous man wisely consider lessons of deep and practical profit. The shortness of the prosperity, and the certainty of the overthrow, of the wicked; the assurance of a day of recompense; the contrast of the substance of the godly for time and for eternity—these are the apprehensions of faith. Do they not marvellously set out the perfections of God, and call to each of His children—"My son, give glory to God?"—*Bridges.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 13.

THE CRY OF THE POOR.

I. The cry of the poor may always be heard. "*The poor*," said the Saviour, "*ye have always with you*" (John xii. 8), and so long as sin is in the world it must be so. There are many whom sickness and bereavement makes poor, and many who are in need because of the sin of others, besides those who have been brought to poverty by their own wrong-doings. And from all these creatures of need there comes a cry—a direct appeal, it may be, for help, or the voice of lamentation because of their distress. This cry may be around us even when no appeal comes from the lip, and when no word of complaint is uttered. The wrongs of the oppressed and the miseries of the needy cry still when there is no speech nor language, and when no voice is heard.

II. No human creature can afford to stop his ears to this cry. Not one of the millions who walk the earth can reckon upon being always independent of the pity and help of his fellow-creatures. He may be almost certain that he will not be so. He is not sure, however rich he is now, that he may not have to cry for bread, or he may have to cry for help in sickness or for sympathy in sorrow. It is quite certain that he will at some period of his existence cry to God for mercy. If, therefore, he is deaf to the cry of those whose distress he can relieve, he is as unwise as that servant of whom our Lord speaks in His parable, who refused to have compassion on his fellow-servant to the amount of a hundred pence, while he himself stood in need of the forgiveness of a far heavier debt. (Matt. xviii. 23, 35). He who stops his own ears at the cry of the poor stops the ears of God against his own, for in the day when the favour of the King of the universe will be more precious than the wealth of ten thousand worlds, the charge will be brought against him, "*I was an hungred and ye gave Me no meat; I was thirsty and ye gave Me no drink*," etc. (Matt. xxv. 42).

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

When we have reason to complain that we cry and shout, but God shutteth our prayer, let us consider our ways; perhaps we have shut our ears on some occasions against the cries of the poor. This was one reason why God accepted not the prayers and fasts of those people whom Isaiah speaks of in the fiftieth chapter of his book.—*Lawson.*

Did a rich man know for certain, that himself should be a beggar before he died, it would make him give to the poor when they cried, that others might give to him when he cried. Now the wise man here assureth every hard churl, that although now he be never so rich, yet shall he be a beggar. . . The cries of the poor are but God's proclamation, whereby He publisheth His pleasure for the relieving of them. It is God therefore Himself that is not heard when they are denied; it is God that is not heard in His command, as well as the poor in his necessity. And, therefore, being made deaf as it were with the loudness of His own crying, He doth not hear the uncharitable when they cry unto him.—*Jermin.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 14.

THE PACIFICATION OF ANGER.

I. Human anger is an evil to be avoided. Even the anger of a righteous man exposes the object of it to danger. David had good reason to be angry with Nabal, but his anger, though it was the anger of a man just in the main, so nearly overmastered him for the time as to lead him to meditate a very bitter revenge. For even righteous indignation has a tendency to run into unrighteous action, as in the case of Esau and Jacob. The elder brother had just cause to be angry with the younger for his meanness and deceit, but lawful displeasure soon degenerated into an unlawful purpose, and Jacob had to flee for his life. If, then, even the anger of the righteous man is to be feared because it may lead him to visit the offender with justice without mercy, much more is the anger of the unrighteous man likely to lead him to extreme measures, and the anger of either is an evil to be avoided when it can be done without sin.

II. Gifts may appease human anger. This proverb does not, we think, refer to bribery but to lawful tokens of goodwill, and of a desire to be reconciled—to gifts by which we seek to make some atonement for a wrong done. Such were the presents which Jacob offered to Esau, and Abigail to David. A bribe is a gift offered to a third person who is to judge between the parties at strife, but the gift here is from the offender to the person offended.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

A gift in itself is gracious, but if it be secretly given it is yet more acceptable; for privy bestowing taketh away the blush of open receiving. When as then a present shall even so closely be conveyed unto the receiver as that it shall covertly be put into his bosom, then it will be most welcome and even forcible.—*Muffett.*

"Have gifts," says a judicious writer, "such a powerful influence to disarm resentment? Then let no man plead, in apology for the fury of his passions, that he is not able to conquer them. If money can conquer them, shall reason, and the fear of God, and the command of Christ, be too weak to bridle them? Surely the commandments of God our Saviour have too little authority with us, if they have less influence upon our spirits than gold and jewels have upon the spirits of almost all men."—*Wardlaw.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 15.

THE JOY OF RIGHTEOUSNESS.

I. The just man's own character and actions give him joy. It is a matter of experience with all the righteous beings in the universe that joy comes to them from uprightness of character. The blessedness and joy of God Himself comes from His supreme and absolute righteousness, and in proportion as His creatures are conscious of partaking of His rectitude of character they feel joy. But this righteousness of character is made manifest in righteous deeds. We know that God is a righteous God by what He has done, and by what He has promised to do, and the character of righteous men is likewise manifested in their acts. From these deeds come joy to the doer. Whenever a good man is able to redress some injury, or to make right some moral wrong—to put into exercise the love of right which is always latent within him—he feels joy.

II. The just man derives joy from the justice and righteousness of others. His great desire is to see the world freed from the rule of sin, with all its consequent miseries, and he hails every act of justice done as one more step towards that end. He sympathises with all those who struggle for right against might, whether with human or Satanic powers, and every victory gained by them gladdens his heart. As he is on the side of justice he has nothing to fear, but everything to gain, from the advance of justice in the world, and in the universe, and therefore he not only rejoices in the doings of other righteous men, but especially in the righteous acts of God. Knowing that everyone of them tends to bring in the rule of everlasting righteousness, and knowing that this rule will be the best possible for both the just and the unjust, and having a glad consciousness that to him it can bring nothing but good, the just dealings of God are the constant theme of his glad meditations. With the Psalmist he can sing, "*Seven times a day do I praise Thee, because of Thy righteous judgments*" (Psalm cxix. 164).

III. The workers of iniquity have no such source of personal joy. The name given implies their character. It is iniquitous, unequal, crooked. Their path lies quite apart from the straight road of obedience to God and justice to men, and therefore none of the flowers and fruits which grow only in the one path can be gathered upon the other. But they not only miss the joy of the just, but are active agents in creating their own misery. Sin is a destructive power. Destruction is used in two senses. A thing is destroyed when the elements which composed it cease to be, but it is also destroyed when the form which made it precious and beautiful is lost. The palace is destroyed when the earthquake lays it level with the ground, although all the stones and timbers are still there. The garment is destroyed when the fire blackens and scorches it, although the warp and woof of the fabric is still in existence. So a man's destruction is, as we understand the Word of God, not the cessation of his existence, but the loss of all that makes existence of worth to himself and others.

IV. The workers of iniquity cannot rejoice in the righteous dealings of others. The rectitude of the just man condemns them. It makes their ways look more crooked by the force of contrast, and it rebukes their consciences. It necessarily sometimes takes a more active form against them. The thief cannot joy in the law that condemns him to punishment, and is not likely to take pleasure in the character of the judge who passes sentence upon him. No godless man can rejoice in reflecting on the righteousness of God, for that righteousness fills him with terror in the present, and apprehensions concerning the future.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Not the saint's "*judgment;*" that is "joy," of course: but all "judgment," even the judgment of the lost. Sad doctrine that! and to man's feeling a very shameful one. But to man's reason there may be a glimpse of light. The highest "*joy*" is to be holiness; the highest holiness, the holiness of God. All judgment is built upon that. God's holiness, therefore, being the basis upon which He condemns the lost, in that "*judgment*" which is part of the trait may be part of the "*joy*" which springs to the glorified believer. —*Miller.*

"It is joy to the just to do right; but vexation" (distress, trouble) "to the workers of iniquity." Such is Boothroyd's rendering; and it agrees with the French. The righteous find their happiness in the ways of God,—in doing the thing that is right. So far from true religion—practical godliness—being a source to them of irksome melancholy, it is their "joy." But to the wicked it is irksome. The principle of goodness or of godliness being absent from the heart, all conformity to precept is against the grain with them. They may do what is right from com-

pulsion, from considerations of interest, or from the constraint of conscience and fear; but pleasure in it they have none—no "joy." And hence it is that amongst ungodly, worldly men, the impression and saying are so prevalent, that religion is melancholy. While the heart continues at enmity with God, all outward conformity to the will and worship of God can be nothing better than vexation,—harassing and fretting to the spirit, and drawing forth the exclamation, What a weariness is it! The joy of religious and virtuous practice can only be felt where there is the inward power of religious and virtuous principle. It is a joy that can only be known by the experience of the new heart; and by the new heart it is felt to be the only joy worthy of the name. But the heart that is still a stranger to the love must be still a stranger to the joy; and the whole life of the good man must appear a life of bondage. The man who has no ear for music would regard the ecstasies of a Handel as ridiculous; but such ecstasies are not on that account the less real.—*Wardlaw.*

Gravity is nowhere so seemly, as when it is the robe of the judgment seat; and though justice be done, yet if wantonly or lightly done, it is divested of the honour of it. Wherefore the *joy* which the wise man here commendeth is not the *vanity*, but the *alacrity* of the mind. That detracteth from the worth of it even in the sight of men, this addeth to it in the sight of God. Now, that which breedeth this joy is the habit of it. He that doth judgment now and then is not righteous, though he do that which is righteous. It is the constant doer of judgment that is made righteous by it, and findeth joy in the doing of it.—*Jermin.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 16.

LIKE TO LIKE.

I. The way of understanding. What is this way? In other parts of this book it is called the "path of the just" (chap. iv. 18. See page 58). "A way of righteousness" (chap. xii. 28, page 291), and a "way of life" (chap. xv. 24, page 430). It is a way of understanding, because it is the path or method of life which is followed by those who have well considered their way—who regard both their present and future welfare in the highest sense of the word. The way of righteousness is a way of understanding, because it leads to spiritual life and blessedness, both here and hereafter; therefore those who walk in it give a proof of their wisdom. If we count a man to have no understanding who persists in walking on a road which those who know tell him leads to a precipice over which he must fall, and if the truth of what they say is confirmed by his own knowledge, how much more shall we count those of no understanding who persist in following the path of moral ruin? And by contrast the way of present moral light and life which is ever leading on to more light and life is well named "the way of understanding."

II. The doom of the wanderer from it. He becomes one of an assembly with whom it is most undesirable to be numbered—the congregation of the dead. The graveyard is a place in which living men never take up their abode. Those who are there are there because they can no longer remain in the dwellings of the living and healthy. They would pollute the homes of those who are in life, and must therefore be separated from them. There is a spiritual graveyard—a place to which those who are destitute of moral life must be banished, because they are unfit for any other dwelling. And there they must *remain*, for it is the only place suited to their character and disposition. Judas, when he left this world, went to his "*own place*" (Acts i. 25)—to the place to

which he belonged, because it was the abode of those like minded with himself. From the parable of the rich man and Lazarus we infer that those who become numbered with that congregation will remain there until the *great gulf fixed* between them and the living is removed (Luke xvi. 26).

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

The original word here translated *remains*, signifieth to rest and be quiet. It is rest that giveth understanding, and it is understanding that giveth rest. A disquieted mind doth not readily understand things, and it is the understanding of things that quieteth the mind. In the way, therefore, of understanding, there be many resting-places. He that is wearied with the cares of the world, when he understandeth that man is born to cares, resteth himself therein. He that is toiled in getting the things of this world, when he understandeth how little sufficeth nature, and that when he dieth all shall be taken from him, resteth himself there. He that tireth his brains to search out knowledge, when he understandeth that the greatest part of men's knowledge is the least of his ignorance, and that to know Jesus Christ is life everlasting, resteth himself there. But he that wandereth from the way of understanding meeteth with no rest in all the ways he goes—his thoughts are in no quietness, his heart hath no contentment, his mind no peace. It is the grave alone that is the bed of his rest; and when he cometh to the congregation of the dead, to the general assembly of all mankind, then he shall be quiet. Or else, to consider the verse as our translation hath it: everyone that understandeth his way is not in the way of understanding. The crafty politician understands his way well enough, and goes on readily in it; the covetous worldling understandeth his way well enough, and goes and gets apace in it; the cunning cheater understandeth his way well enough, and passeth through with it. But none of these are in the way of understanding: that is but one, and is the enlightening of the understanding by the word and grace of God. That is the way of understanding, because thereby we understand ourselves to be in the right way indeed. The man, therefore, that wandereth out of this way, when he hath wandered all his ways, shall end them at last in the congregation of the dead—that is the rendezvous to which all are gathered—and being once there, he shall *remain* for ever amongst them. For when that change is come, they that have passed the way of understanding shall pass from death to life, but they that have gone out of the way shall only go from one death to another.—*Jermin.*

Verse 17 has been treated with verses 5 to 7.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 18.

The Ransom of the Righteous.

This verse must be understood to express the same truth as that in Isaiah xliii. 3, in which Jehovah, speaking to the Hebrew people, says, "*I gave Egypt for thy ransom—Ethiopia and Seba for thee,*" referring doubtless to the deliverance by the overthrow of the Egyptians and other nations. Here the Divine interposition is not on behalf of an elect nation, but on behalf of a special character; not for the deliverance of Israel according to the flesh, but of the true Israelite—the righteous and upright man wherever he is found, for "*in every nation he that feareth Him and worketh righteousness is accepted with Him*" (Acts x. 35).

I. When the wicked man stands in the way of the true advancement of the good he shall be removed out of the way. It is a law of the universe, and the end to which all God's government tends, that goodness shall finally have the ascendancy over evil—that right shall triumph over wrong. Now, although we speak of goodness and of evil in the abstract, they have no abstract existence; they can only exist in connection with free personalities; with beings who have the choice of their actions. Hence, if evil is to be put down, it must be put down in the person of evil men or devils, and if good is to rule it must rule in the person of the good. Therefore, when the transgressor in any way opposes the real and true advancement of the righteous man he opposes the advance of righteousness, and he must be sacrificed. This is not always apparent to human eyes; things often seem to tend in quite the contrary direction; but this is because we do not know what is really most conducive to the coming of the kingdom of righteousness, nor how the overthrow of evil can be best accomplished.

II. Every man must either be ransomed from sin or become a ransom for righteousness. The righteous and the upright on the earth have only become so by submission to the righteous will of God—by taking His yoke and choosing His service. This has delivered them from the power of evil—this has redeemed them from the slavery of sin. It was quite open to Pharaoh to fall in with God's will concerning Israel—to obey the demand which was made upon him. It was only after repeated refusal that he and his were made a ransom for God's people. It is in every case where God's will is made known, and it is only when men persist in transgression that they are made a ransom for the upright. But there is no neutral ground. Every man who is not upright is a transgressor, and as such will be subject to this law.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

In the time of some strange visitation for sin, the notorious offender, who is guilty of heinous crimes, by his suffering and death shall free the innocent person from the stroke of God's vengeance, who should not be spared, but plagued, if the evildoer were winked at. Moreover, some one that hath, by breaking the Lord's covenant or precept, caused trouble to fall both on himself and many others, who in like manner have not sinned as he hath done, shall, suffering alone for the sin which he hath committed, deliver by his misery the rest that are in the same adversity, but not for the same cause. The executing of Saul's sons (2 Sam. xxi.), the storming of Achan (Josh. vii. 20), and casting of Jonah into the sea (Jonah i. 12), may more plainly declare and more fully prove the truth of this matter. It may be here objected, if the Lord punish the righteous for the wicked man's offence, how is he then righteous? To answer hereunto briefly—First, though the Lord afflict the innocent with the sinners oftentimes, yet He doth not correct them for the faults of transgressors, but for their own faults, there being none so just but that he sinneth sometimes. Secondly, when the just, having authority to punish sin, wink at the known offences of the ungodly, by letting them go scot-free, they make their transgressions their own, so that in such cases no marvel if the Lord scourge the just with the unjust; for even the just do in such cases appertain to the family of the unjust.—*Muffet.*

It is the hatred of the wicked against the righteous that bringeth them into captivity, but it is the favour of God towards them that He maketh those who have made them captives to be themselves the *redemption* of them. Or else, if the condition of this world by God's permission and providence

hath cast the righteous into thraldom, it is the sport of the wicked to insult over them; but it is the compassion of God towards them that He maketh those who make sport at them to be themselves the sacrifice of their deliverance. And, seeing misery, being man's master, requireth the right of command over him, according as many are the general calamities of mankind, God maketh the wicked to serve it, and the transgressor to pay bondage unto it instead of the righteous.—*Jermin.*

The subjects of verses 19 and 20 have been already treated in this chapter. See on verses 5 to 7, and on verse 9.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 21.

A Noble Pursuit and a Rich Prize.

I. A noble pursuit. Following after righteousness and mercy. These words may be taken as referring both to a state of judicial righteousness before God and to mercy received from him, and also to the attainment of a righteous and merciful character. The teaching of the Scriptures is that the latter is the result of the former;—that all true righteousness and mercifulness among men flows from having obtained mercy from God, and having come into right relations with Him. If a pursuit of any kind is to be successful it must be conducted according to certain known laws, and must recognise certain indisputable facts. If a man sets out to seek a distant shore where he knows the land is fertile enough to afford him abundant means of living, he must regulate his pursuit of the land and of its riches in accordance with the laws which govern the natural world. During his voyage he must observe the laws of navigation—he must steer his vessel with a due regard to the winds and tides, or he will never reach the shore, and when he lands he must still seek to obtain what he desires by working in harmony with natural laws. If he ploughs in the autumn and expects to gather in the winter, or sows weeds and expects to reap corn, he will be utterly disappointed. God is willing to bless his endeavours if they are made in subjection to known and established conditions, but not otherwise. So in every pursuit, whether in the world of matter or of mind. "*If a man also strive for masteries*," says Paul, "*yet is he not crowned except he strive lawfully*" (2 Tim. ii. 5), that is, unless he conform to the rules of the course. The *Grecian runner* might reach the goal without having a regard to the conditions of the contest, but he would not even then receive the crown. But in the pursuit of many things—and especially in the following after a righteous and godly character—it is impossible to reach the desired end without observance of the conditions laid down by God Himself. There is one way only to become a truly righteous and merciful man, and that is by accepting the mercy of God and His method of justification, called in the New Testament "*the righteousness of God*" (Rom. iii. 21, etc.). The history of the Church combines with the testimony of Scripture to confirm this truth. The Jewish nation, as a nation, refused to accept it, "*going about to establish their own righteousness they have not submitted unto the righteousness of God* (Rom. x. 3). Their history since has been a moral failure, and it is the history of all who have united with them in the rejection of the way of righteousness through the atonement of the Son of God. On the contrary, the acceptance of that righteousness and mercy has been the first step in the formation of the most righteous and merciful characters that have ever lighted up our world. The apostle who was the great expounder of the doctrine of imputed righteousness through the mercy of God could appeal to his spiritual children in such words as these: "*For our exhortation was not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile; . . neither at any time*

used we flattering words, as ye know, nor a cloke of covetousness. . . but we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children; so being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us" (1 Thess. ii. 3–8). This was Paul's disposition and character after he became a partaker of Divine mercy and a justified man through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and all those who sincerely accept God's method of being made righteous bring forth the same kind of fruit in their life, although not always in such abundant measure.

II. A rich reward. He who seeks mercy and righteousness from God by faith becomes, as we have seen, a righteous and merciful man. This in itself is moral life—a quickening of the spiritual capabilities—an awakening to spiritual realities and joys which were before unknown—an entrance into the possession of all that makes existence worth having. Such a man gets honour of a real and lasting nature—the goodwill of all the good in all worlds and the favour of God Himself. He follows after righteousness for its own sake—out of pure love of holiness and purity, and not for any reward that it may bring either now or hereafter, and he finds as he follows it that many things are added unto it.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

"Follows after," chases eagerly. How absorbed the chase of some poor partridge on the hills. Even let that be our picture. *"Righteousness and mercy,* or *kindness,"* the two tables of the law; a genial picture of all holiness. Now let a man chase holiness with the absorbed forgetfulness of self that such game would imply, and all else will come in at the death. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all things else will be added thereto." (Matt. vi. 33). *"Life,"* all sorts of life. *"Righteousness,"* but one sort of righteousness in place of that personal righteousness which (in the first clause) we are still called to chase. *"Glory,"* all sorts of glory. The list is not an illogical one. "Life," all that is personally good and happy, "righteousness;" all that buys that and keeps a title to it, "glory," that which is above happiness, and is always to be counted higher—viz., the honour and excellency of absolute purity of being.—*Miller.*

There is nothing which a man hath that is not going from him; there is nothing that a man seeketh that doth not seek to keep itself from him. It is therefore *following* that bringeth a man both to finding and possessing. But they are spiritual things, not the things of this world, that are worthy either of a man's following, or finding, or possessing. They are *righteousness* and *mercy* that are worthy of our seeking, they are *life, righteousness,* and *mercy* that are worthy of our finding. . . . Gregory, comparing spiritual and temporal riches together, showeth their difference to be great, because spiritual riches do even then increase, when that they are laid out, earthly riches are either laid out and so consumed, or else are kept and are not profitable. And in the following after them there is also this difference, that he who followeth after the things of this world always findeth less than he looked for; but he that followeth after spiritual things shall be sure to find more than he did or could look for.—*Jermin.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 22.

A Wise Man and a Mighty City

I. The city of the mighty will not easily yield to conquerors. When a fortress encloses within its walls many strong arms and stout hearts, it will not

be captured by child's play. The confidence that the defenders have, not only in the strength of their position but in their own individual power and prowess, will certainly prevent them from giving up without a struggle. Such a city must be "scaled" or captured either by stratagem or by a mightier force than that which defends it. There are various ways in which this may be done. When the height and thickness of the walls prevent their overthrow from without they may be assailed from beneath, and when brave men cannot be subdued by the sword they may be by hunger.

II. In whatever way the city is taken wisdom is the mightiest force employed. Military strength—indeed physical force of any kind—is of little or no avail without wisdom to direct it. Under the guidance of a wise commander an undisciplined and almost powerless mob becomes a powerful army, and a very small amount of mere strength can be made very effective if it is wisely directed. Belshazzar had strong walls around his city, and a mighty army within it, but Cyrus possessed the wisdom which the Babylonians lacked, and therefore the "wise man" overthrew the confidence of the mighty.

III. Wisdom is a power that is needed to take other strongholds besides those built of brick or stone. Any obstruction or difficulty which a man encounters in life may be a "city of the mighty" to overthrow which *wisdom* will be an indispensable ally. *Poverty* is such a city, and it cannot be scaled by activity and industry alone—the industrious effort must be guided by wisdom. *Ignorance* may be compared to such a stronghold, and wisdom is needed to guide the pursuit after knowledge. *Sinful habits* are walls around a man, and they are so defended and strengthened by invisible powers of evil that they cannot be cast down by strength of will alone—wisdom must be sought from above to turn the struggle into a victory. But we have not only to contend with personal evils but with relative ones, with the misery and sin around us if not within us, and here again nothing can be done without wisdom. Muscular force can do a little to put down their outward manifestations, but wisdom only can do anything towards lessening their real and terrible hold upon men. The *human soul*, also, is a "city" which can be "scaled" only by "the wise man." In Eden the city of *Man-soul* was taken by the subtlety and craft of the devil, and a wisdom more than human is needed to regain it. The undertaking is especially difficult, because there are inhabitants within the city who are averse to a change of masters—there are evil tendencies within which make men unwilling to leave the yoke of Satan for the service of God. Our Lord Jesus Christ has, however, scaled this city of the mighty; all the wisdom of God has been brought to bear upon the work of reconciling men to Himself, and the Cross has accomplished what the physical force of Omnipotence itself could not have achieved.

> **What is strength without a double share**
> **Of wisdom? Vast, unwieldy, burdensome;**
> **Proudly secure, yet liable to fall**
> **By weakest subtleties; strength's not made to rule,**
> **But to subserve where wisdom bears command.—*Milton.***

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

The Israelites never crushed the Philistines. The Jebusites long dwelt in Jerusalem's stronghold (Josh. xv. 63). The sinner (at conversion) in his feeblest state enters Canaan, and "scales the city of the mighty." But when his foot has touched that eternal tramping-ground, alas for him! there is still the *citadel!* "A wise man," not only as being *a wise man*, but in *becoming a wise man*, has scaled the city of the mighty, and evermore afterwards, in becoming wiser, he is "casting down the strength of its place of confidence." . . . Not to print mistake upon his emblems, Solomon qualifies

the last by those that immediately follow. Conversion is not a warfare. It is not the glow of camps or the shout of armed men, but a drowsy and forlorn awakening. Arrayed against it may be the *strength of the mighty*, but it is a strength absurd and miserable, as against a droning and depressing inanition. "We wrestle not against flesh and blood," and when we come to understand the venture, the climb over the gates is not a bound of strength, but a torpid crawl out of mortal infirmity of feeling. Hence the patient prosing of the Preacher, as he next approaches us (in verse 23). Christian obedience is the way to triumph.—*Miller.*

The art of war has already shewn the pre-eminence of wisdom above strength. Prudent tactics, or a wise application of courage, triumphs over mere personal prowess. Joshua's stratagem in taking Ai was a proof of military wisdom. Solomon seems to have known of a wise man singly delivering his city from the power of a mighty king; a proof of wisdom quite tantamount to the strength of an aggressor scaling the walls, and thus casting down its confidence. (Eccles. ix. 13-18). Much more therefore will spiritual wisdom, the immediate gift of God, overcome difficulties as formidable as the scaling of the city of the mighty. A wise calculation of the cost is eminently serviceable in achieving most important triumphs. (Luke xiv. 31, 32). For does not conscious weakness lead to a single dependence upon God? And what difficulties are too great for an Almighty arm? "By thee"—said a valiant soldier in the army of faith—"I have run through a troop; and by my God have I leaped over a wall." "Weapons of a spiritual, not of a carnal," temper, "are mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds" (2 Cor. x. 4), impregnable to the power of man. All the promises are "to him that overcometh." Let the soldier go to the conflict "strong in the Lord," and "putting on his whole armour." (Eph. vi. 10). The triumph is sure. The heavenly city will be scaled. "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force." (Matt. xi. 12.)—*Bridges.*

For Homiletics of verse 23 see on chap. xiii. 3, page 294.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 24.

A Name of Degrees.

I. Many terms are needed to set forth the complete character of the wicked man. A complicated machine has many parts, each of which has a different action and performs a different work, and each of which has its distinctive name. But the whole make up one machine, the name of which includes all the parts. So is it with a wicked man. He is like a complicated and destructive piece of machinery—all that he does and is may be comprehended in the general term, godless, or wicked; but the various vices which go to make up his character have their distinctive name. In this proverb three degrees of wickedness seem to be set forth under different names, each one being an intensified form of the vice that has gone before. First there is *pride;* the man overrates his own worth, and by so doing underrates the worth of others. From pride of heart comes *haughtiness of conduct*—he is overbearing and insolent in his bearing towards those whom he looks upon as his inferiors. Then he becomes a *scorner*—he despises all, whether good or bad, and so fills up the measure of wickedness. For when all feelings of respect and reverence for even human worth have died out of a man he cannot fall much lower.

II. Such a man is a constant vendor of what is within him. He *dealeth* in it; he cannot keep his pride and scorn to himself, it overflows in his contemptuous

carriage, in his haughty look, in his angry words, and in his oppressive deeds. He may deny the fidelity of the portrait which Solomon here draws of him, but he whose dealings with his fellow-creatures are marked by these characteristics must submit to be called by the odious names here given.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

In the course of different proverbs this teacher will be found to have explained all his own use of terms. Piety as *wisdom*, and wickedness as *folly*—terms very characteristic of his books—he explains at the very first. *Scorner* is his favourite name for the impenitent. We were giving reasons for this under the eleventh verse. . . . The demurest sinner, who seems thoroughly respectful to the truth, would not push along so into the very jaws of death if he were not arrogantly trusting to himself, and if he felt not scornfully free from the necessities of the gospel.—*Miller.*

It is the nature of pride to show itself as losing the contentment of those things upon which it is placed, unless by showing of them it show itself in them. And yet so odious a vice is pride, and so shameful, as that it would fain hide itself also. But there is nothing that doth so manifest and make known the pride of anyone as his wrath doth; wherefore as the name of a man telleth who he is, so he who dealeth in wrath telleth his name.—*Jermin.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSES 25 and 26.

The Sword of the Sluggard.

I. A sluggard cannot help desiring the results of toil. It is natural and lawful for men to value bodily health and comfort, and all those blessings which are the ordinary fruits of industry—they are good things which God gives His creatures to enjoy, but they are not His only gifts nor His best gifts. But they are the main objects of the sluggard's desire, for an inordinate and exclusive love of them has made him a slothful man. If he had put his reputation and his duty before his love of ease—if he had listened to the voice of conscience rather than to the pleadings of self-indulgence, he would be a worker instead of a mere wisher. The text suggests that mere desire to possess is not a power strong enough to turn an indolent man into an industrious one, although it is strong enough to make him miserable and wicked. For—

II. A sluggard is an unrighteous man. This is both implied and expressed in the proverb. He is placed in contrast with the righteous man as one of an opposite character, and he is declared to be an habitual breaker of the tenth commandment. Covetousness is a sin nearly allied to envy, and both are in themselves transgressions of the moral law, and often lead to more heinous crimes. Let no man, then, say that his refusal to take his part in the work of the world is a matter which concerns himself alone, for even if a man were not responsible for a negative existence, such a course is certain to lead to positive sin.

III. He is a self-destroyer. This is a phase of sloth which has not been placed before us in former proverbs on the subject. The sluggard not only makes wretched the existence which it is his great aim to pamper, but he shortens it. His covetous and unsatisfied state of mind is as a canker-worm at the root of all that he does possess, and, deprived of the healthful influence of labour, he becomes an easy prey to disease and death. It is probable that nothing undermines the bodily constitution more surely than unsatisfied desire. Men who have been great workers, but who have not seen the desire of their hearts fulfilled, have often died in consequence. How much more likely will the

slothful man be to die under such a disappointment! If the rust eats into the sword which is in constant use, how much more certainly will it destroy that which is never drawn from the scabbard!

IV. The righteous man is a worker and a giver. He is in all respects the exact opposite of the sluggard. He works not so much because of the gain of labour as because he loves to work, and because it is wrong to be idle. This he shows by the use he makes of much that he gains—he gives with an unsparing hand. In both he is an imitator of the righteous God, who is the Greatest Worker and the Greatest Giver in the universe. The righteousness of God prompts Him to bountiful acts towards needy creatures, and the righteousness of His righteous servants prompts them to do like deeds, according to their ability. On this subject see also Homiletics on chap. xiii. 4, page 296.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

The *desire kills him.* Why? Because he will not gratify it. The way to gratify it is to get it accomplished. . . . Say not, It is the refusal that kills and not the desire. That is not altogether the case. The spark that is too weak to grow puts itself out by its attempts. The desire that is too dull to act has treasured in it the last remainders of the heart, and in its languid throbs makes itself the instrument of its own growing dissolution.—*Miller.*

In the Paris French translation the words stand thus—"All the day long he does nothing but wish." How very expressive at once of the unconquerable indolence and the fretful, envious, pining unhappiness of the sluggard! And in his wishing, he may at times, by the power of a sanguine imagination, work himself into hope; and then, disappointment only embitters the cup of his own mingling,—aggravates the misery, which he is painfully conscious is self-inflicted.—Further: he appears before us a stranger to all the positive and exquisite pleasures of charity and beneficence; but "the righteous *giveth and spareth not.*" It is not said, you will observe—"the *diligent* giveth and spareth not;" because there are not a few who are sufficiently exemplary in diligence, to whom the Bible would not give the designation of "*the righteous,*" and who are far from being distinguished for benevolence. But the antithesis, as it stands here, implies these three things: *First,* that *diligence* is one of the features in the character of the *righteous*:—*Secondly,* that the natural tendency, and ordinary result of this is, through the divine blessing, abundance to spare:—*Thirdly,* that another distinguishing feature of the character of the *righteous* man, is *readiness to part* with what his industry acquires—"giving, and *not sparing;*" that is, giving cheerfully, and giving liberally; not assenting merely to the truth of the maxim, as being the word of the Lord, but *feeling* the truth of it in their own heart's experience—"It is more blessed to give than to receive." *Wardlaw.*

It is not said by Paul, "If any man *do* not work, neither let him eat," for some would work and cannot get it, others would work and are not able, but "If any man *will* not work," if any have work to do, and will not, let him not eat. In the same manner the wise man speaketh; he doth not say, his hands *do not* labour, but his hands *refuse* to labour. . . . . But he sheweth that though a sluggard be idle himself, yet his desire be so hard a labourer, that it is a *daily* labourer, and such a daily labourer painfully worketh *all the day long.* So that although he have no hands to work, his desire hath hands to beg and crave of him; which being not satisfied, is a just punishment of his careless sluggishness. But the righteous man, being as earnest in his labour as the other in his desire, getteth enough, not only to satisfy his own desire, but to supply the wants of others.—*Jermin.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 27.

THE SACRIFICE OF THE WICKED.

I. A Divine institution may become an abomination to the Divine Being. The right use of the gifts of God makes them blessings to men, but the abuse of them turns them into curses. So with the ordinances of worship, both under the Old Testament dispensation and in the New—that which is designed to bless men may by misuse add to their guilt before God, and that which, done in a right spirit, is most acceptable to Him, will, when joined to a sinful motive, be most abhorrent to His holy nature. The sacrifice of the Levitical dispensation was an ordinance of Divine appointment, but even those who lived before the days of the prophets were not left to suppose that the merely ceremonial act was of any value in the sight of God if a correspondent state of heart was wanting. The offering of Cain was unacceptable, because he lacked the faith of his brother Abel. (Heb. xi. 4). Samuel taught the truth that "*to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams* (1 Sam. xv. 22), and the father of our preacher was deeply conscious that "*sacrifice and burnt offering*" would not be acceptable to God unless they were the outcome of a "*broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart*" (Psalm li. 16, 17). The doctrine that "*God is a spirit, and they who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth* (John iv. 24), is taught in the Old Testament as well as in the New. It is the teaching of this proverb.

II. A Divine institution may be used by men to cloak their iniquity. The absence of right motive is enough to turn the sacrifice into an abomination, as we have seen (see also on chapter xv. 9, page 408), but this comparatively negative wrong seems to lose some of its guilt beside the actual crime of the second clause of the verse, when men actually put on an outward semblance of religion, not from inadequate ideas of the requirements of God's law, or from the force of habit, or in a thoughtless spirit, but with the deliberate intention of deceiving their fellow-creatures. For it is inconceivable that any reasonable being can for a moment suppose that he can blind Him before whom all things must be "*naked and opened*" (Heb. iv. 13). If he believes in a God he cannot think that He is a Being who can be imposed upon by such a miserable deception, and, this being granted, it is most astonishing that any creature can presume to offer so great an insult to his Creator. And yet we know sacrifices have been and are even now being offered to God for no other purpose than to cloak sin.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

This is a New Testament idea:—"Ye ask and receive not," saith the Apostle James, "because ye ask amiss." How? Why, precisely in the way that the proverb points out, because ye do it for an interested purpose; as the Apostle expresses it, "that ye may consume it upon your desires." The wicked man asks for heaven that he may consume it in keeping comfortable through a long eternity. The proverb in verse 17 postulates the opposite. *In merely loving happiness a man cannot create wealth.* The mass of hypocrites, therefore, are these eternal-happiness *hypocrites.* . . . There may be other reasons, but that additional and fundamental among them all is this deepest one, that religious acts cannot be accepted if they are built upon nothing tenderer than "*a calculated purpose.*" (So Miller translates the last two words. See also Critical Notes.) "Ye seek Me," says our blessed Redeemer, "not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves and were filled" (John vi. 26).—*Miller.*

For Homiletics of verse 28, see on chap. xii. 19, page 275. "*The man that heareth*" is evidently the man who is teachable and open to conviction, and therefore qualified to bear witness of the truth.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

The last clause of the proverb seems to fix and restrict the first. *A false witness* often becomes so by the culpable habit of thoughtlessly repeating, without examination or certain knowledge. A man may thus do very serious injury to his neighbour's character or property. It proves a very loose conscience, and an utter want of that "charity which covers" instead of exposing faults. It is "rejoicing in iniquity" rather than "rejoicing in truth." This *false witness* will certainly be punished by God; and even by man he will be confounded and silenced. No one for the future will regard or receive his testimony. *But the man that heareth*—the true witness who speaketh only what *he heareth*, and is fully acquainted with—*he speaketh constantly*—to conviction. He holds to his testimony and never contradicts himself. He "speaks the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth." His word, even if it had been slighted at first, gains more and more credit and authority when *the false witness shall have perished* (chap. xii. 19).—*Bridges.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 29.

The Face and the Way.

The last verb in the text is better translated—*establisheth*, or *maketh firm.*

I. What is intended to reveal may be used to conceal. The human countenance is intended to express the feelings of the mind, and when a man is not afraid for another to read his thoughts and intentions, his face is to a great extent the index of his heart. But a bad man is unwilling that his neighbour should know what is passing within him—his thoughts and purposes will not bear the light—they are so selfish or impure that he is ashamed of them, or they are occupied with some malicious plan which must be concealed if it is to be successful. He therefore hardens his face—puts on an appearance of innocence and frankness as a cloak of the evil underneath. But this method of life is not an easy or a pleasant one—the contrast in the second clause seems to imply that such a man walks in an uneven or a miry road—it is hard to be always acting a part and to be obliged at all times to look what we do not feel, and there may come unguarded moments and unlooked-for surprises when the mask will fall and the truth come to light.

II. The godly man has no need to practise hypocrisy. His thoughts and desires, and aims, are toward the true and the good—his heart is filled with good-will towards his fellow-men, and he has, therefore, nothing to fear or to be ashamed of when his face reveals his inner self. This way of the upright is, in comparison with the way of the wicked, as a firm and level road—he who walks on it finds solid ground beneath his feet, and has no need to be ever on the look-out for bogs and pitfalls.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

A hardened heart and a hardened face—a face that has learned to brave accusation and to look innocent under conscious guilt, are the most undesirable of all attainments. The confusion of innocence, when evil is imputed,

is far preferable. Better far to be innocent and thought guilty, than to be guilty and thought innocent. Better far to have the sentence of acquittal in our own bosoms, though condemned by men, than to succeed in getting acquittal from men, and carry within us the sentence of guilt. How painful soever the former, we can still look up to God, and forward to His tribunal, as that of unerring rectitude,—where He will "bring forth our righteousness as the light, and our judgment as the noon-day." O! there will be no "hardening of the face" then. Conscience will do its duty. The eyes which are as a flame of fire will search the inmost soul. Every eye will quail, and every countenance, even the most hardened, sink, before the look of Him that sitteth upon the throne. He will then at once "wipe off the reproach of his people," and "bring to light the hidden things of darkness." And then they who, under the influence of faith, and fear, and love, have "considered their way," shall lift up their faces without dread, and meet the smiles of their gracious Judge!—*Wardlaw.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSES 30 *and* 31.

COUNSEL AGAINST THE LORD.

I. Only those plans succeed which harmonise with the will of God. This is of course true only in regard to the ultimate and final issue of men's plans and purposes. Sometimes, and indeed oftentimes, counsel against the Lord is very successful for a season, and for a very long season, but it is only for a season. 1. This is obvious if we consider *God's knowledge of the future.* It is inseparable from His Divine nature that He shall be able to "*declare the end from the beginning,*" and therefore He says "*My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure:*" "*yea, I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I will also do it*" (Isaiah xlvi. 10, 11). Imagine the general of a vast army being confronted with a handful of blind men, would there be any room to doubt who would have the victory? If a traveller whose eyesight is so dim that he can only see a step or two before him has to travel an unknown road, will he not do well to take the arm and avail himself of the guidance of a man whose sight is perfect? The plan or purpose of our life is the road we desire to walk upon, and as we "*know not what shall be on the morrow*" (James v. 14) we can only hope to attain our desire if we enlist the All-seeing God on our side, and in order to do this our counsel must be in harmony with His. 2. *God's Almighty power,* also, ensures the success of His counsel. "*The horse is prepared against the day of battle,*" but what is the united force of a world compared with the might of Him "*who hath comprehended the dust in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance?*" . . . The prophet answers the question, "*The nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of a balance*" (Isaiah xl. 12, 15). The knowledge that our guide has of a dangerous path—the fact that he is acquainted with it from the beginning to the end—may not ensure our arrival at the desired goal. He and we may together be attacked by powerful foes, and power to protect is as needful as knowledge to guide. When we commit our way to God we have omnipotence as well as omniscience on our side.

II. Yet men are ever opposing their finite wisdom and strength to the almightiness and infinite knowledge of God. The proverb embodies a truth so palpable to any who will look facts plainly in the face—it contains an inference so obvious to an unprejudiced mind that it would seem unnecessary to write it if we did not know that sin has so distorted men's mental vision—so biassed their reason—that they are ever imagining a "*vain thing*" and taking "*counsel against*

the Lord and against His anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder and cast away their cords from us" (Psa. ii. 2, 3). The world is full of confirmations of the fact, and it also contains abundant evidence of the truth of the inspired word. *"He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh, the Lord shall have them in derision."*

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

It would be a strong sentence if he declared that counsel against the Lord could never amount to anything. . . . But he does something more clear than that. *There is no* (such thing as) *wisdom*, etc., against the Most High. They could do nothing if they were; but wisdom never could be enticed to that side. The sentence embodies both ideas. There is no wisdom that could avail against God; but secondly, there is none that would ever attempt it. The expressions are peculiar. *There is nothing of wisdom.* The word is repeated: *"Nothing, nothing, nothing."* —*Miller.*

We may, perhaps, consider the wise man as pointing out *three modes* of covering and effecting evil purposes: in the twenty-seventh verse, the *mask of religion;* in the twenty-eighth, *false testimony;* in the twenty-ninth, the *assumed boldness and look of innocence.* But (verse 30) "there is no wisdom, nor understanding, nor counsel, against the Lord." There may be against *men.* In one, or other, or all of these ways they may be deceived. There may, in many cases, be "wisdom, and understanding, and counsel" more than sufficient to impose upon and outwit them. But God *knows all.* His eye cannot be eluded; His designs cannot be thwarted; neither His promises nor His threatenings can be falsified, by any artifice, or policy, or might of the children of men—no, nor of any created being.—*Wardlaw.*

Wisdom is that which is gotten by experience, understanding that which is gotten by study, counsel that which is gotten by advice . . . but let all be put in the scales against the Lord, they are but as the dust of the balance unto Him . . For if wisdom be gotten by experience, He is the Ancient of days; He was ancient when days began. If understanding come by study, He hath all understanding of Himself at once. . . . And the whole world is His common council, and that not to give at all, but to receive counsel from *Him.—Jermin.*

CHAPTER XXII.

CRITICAL NOTES.—**1. A good name.** Literally *"a name."* **Loving favour,** or *"grace," "goodwill."* **3. Are punished.** rather *"must suffer injury."* **4. By humility.** rather *"The end or reward of humility,"* etc. Delitzsch reads *"The reward of humility* IS *the fear of the Lord,"* etc. **5. Shall be,** etc., or **Let him keep,** etc. **6. Train up a child,** etc. Miller reads *"Hedge in a child upon the mouth of his way;"* Delitzsch, *"Give to a child instruction according to his way," i.e.,* conformably to the nature of youth. **8. The rod of his anger,** or, as Zöckler, the *"staff of his haughtiness."* **16.** Zöckler reads this verse *"One oppresseth the poor only to make him rich," i.e.,* "the oppression which one practises on a poor man rouses his moral energy, and thus, by means of his tireless industry and his productive labour in his vocation, he works himself out of needy circumstances into actual prosperity."

Here begins the third main division of the book of Proverbs. (See Introduction.) Its contents are styled in verse 17 "The words of wise men," and they differ from the second division in consisting for the most part of much longer sentences, comprising, as a general rule, two verses, but sometimes many more. Zöckler remarks that "there is prevalent everywhere the minutely hortatory, or, in turn, admonitory style, rather than that which is descriptive and

announces facts." Delitzsch and other modern Bible students infer from verse 17 that this portion of the book contains "no inconsiderable number of utterances of wise men of Solomon's time." (See Introduction to the Book of Proverbs, Lange's Commentary.)

21 **Them that send unto thee**, rather "*them that send thee.*" "The senders here," says Zöckler, "are naturally the parents, who have sent their son to the teacher of wisdom, that he may bring back thence to them real culture of spirit and heart." 29. **Diligent**, rather "*expert*," "*apt.*"

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 1.

BETTER THAN GOLD.

The second clause of the proverb explains the meaning of the *name* in the first clause—it is evidently a good reputation that is gained by uprightness and unselfishness—that loving esteem of others which is the fruit of "*looking not only upon our own things, but also upon the things of others*" (Phil. ii. 4). Such a name is better than wealth.

I. Because the one may come by inheritance, and the other must be the result of personal character. The man who is born to wealth deserves no credit for being rich—he may be destitute of all personal excellence—he may, indeed, be a morally bad man, and may neither possess nor deserve the good-will of his fellow creatures. But if a man does possess the confidence and love of others it is because there is that belonging to him that wins men to trust in him and to love him—if he has a "*good name*" and deserves it he is in some respects a *good man.*

II. Wealth is often a transitory possession, but "loving favour" often outlives the present life. Many mere temporal gifts belong more truly to a man than his riches—his good looks or his handsome figure may long outlive his wealth, for they are more truly his. The uncertainty of riches is the subject of many a proverb, and therefore any possession which is more certain to last is better than they. A "*good name*"—the well-deserved reputation which is the result of loving our neighbour as ourself—is quite independent of the changes and chances of mortal life—it goes with a man to his grave, and embalms his memory long after he has passed away.

III. A good name belongs to a higher region of life than wealth Even when wealth has been honestly earned, and is the reward of moral excellence, and even if its possession could be assured to its owner, a good name is a more precious gift. Much skill and industry are required to build up a fortune, but skill and industry are not qualities of so high an order as those which are needed to acquire the loving favour of our fellow-creatures. He who possesses the latter must be a more excellent man than the merely honest and skilful seeker after riches, and the possession is itself of a far more precious nature. The gold and the silver are of the earth, earthy, but love and trustful confidence are good things which belong to the soul, and which are in consequence far more truly satisfying to man's higher nature. When one man possesses both these good things he is able to compare their power to bless, and none who has experimental knowledge of the worth of both would sacrifice his good name to retain his riches. They may bring him much outward deference, but he knows full well that this would cease if he became a poor man—that there are many who love not the man but only his money. But if he is so blest as to have won men's hearts he is fully assured that adversity will not deprive him of this good gift. To possess a "good name" is to be rich with the riches which constitute the most precious wealth of God. He is rich in material riches, for "*all the beasts of the forest are his and the cattle upon a thousand hills*," yea, "*the world and the fulness thereof*" (Psa. l. 10, 12). But this wealth is inferior to the mental power which produced it. God is great in intellectual wealth. "*With whom took He counsel, and who instructed Him and taught Him in the*

path of judgment, and taught Him knowledge, and showed to Him the way of understanding?" (Isa. xl. 14). But His real wealth is His *name*—that name which He proclaimed to Moses—"*The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering and abundant in goodness and truth*" (Exod. xxxiv. 5, 6), which makes Him the object of the reverential love of all the good in the universe. And so is it with His creatures—in proportion as they have those spiritual characteristics which are possessed in perfection only by God Himself, their reputation for mercy, and goodness, and truth becomes their most precious and prized possession.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

We are not good judges of value in the public markets of life. We make grievous mistakes, both in choosing and refusing. We often throw away the pearl and carefully keep the shell. Besides the great disparity in value between the things of heaven and earth, some even of these earthly things are of greater worth than others. The valuables in both ends of the balance belong to time, and yet there is room for choice between them. There is the greater and the less where neither is the greatest. A trader at his counter has a certain set of weights which he uses every day and all day, and for all sorts of commodities. Whatever may be in the one scale, the same invariable leaden weight is always in the other. This lump of metal is his standard, and all things are tried by it. Riches practically serve nearly the same purpose in the markets of human life. . . . This is a mistake. Many things are better than gold, and one of these is a good name. A good conscience indeed is better than both, and must be kept at all hazards; but in cases where matters from a higher region do not come into competition, reputation should rank higher than riches in the practical estimation of men. . . . The shadows are not the picture, but the picture is a naked ungainly thing without them. Thus the atmosphere of a good name imparts to real worth additional body and breadth. As a substitute for a good conscience a good name is a secret torment at the time, and in the end a cheat, but as a graceful outer garment with which a good conscience is clothed it should be highly valued and carefully preserved by the children of the kingdom.—*Arnot.*

One is more valuable than the other as a means of usefulness. Riches, in themselves, can only enable a man to promote the temporal comfort and well-being of those around him. But character gives him weight of influence in matters of higher moment,—in all descriptions of salutary advice and direction,—in kindly instruction and consolation,—in counsel for eternity. It not only fits its possessor for such employments. but it imparts energy and effect to whatever he says and does. His character carries a recommendation with it,—gives authority and force to every lesson and every admonition; and affords, by the confidence it inspires, many opportunities and means of doing good, which, without it, could not be enjoyed. Riches, again, bring with them many temptations to sinful and worldly indulgences, such as are injurious to the possessor himself and to his family—both temporally and spiritually. Character, on the contrary, acts as a salutary restraint,—keeping a man back from many improprieties and follies, and even outward sins, by which it would be impaired and forfeited. And this restraint is felt, and properly felt, not for his own sake merely, but for the sake of all those objects with which his name stands associated; and especially from a regard to usefulness in connection with the truth, and cause, and church of Christ.—*Wardlaw.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 2.

LEVELLING DOWN AND LEVELLING UP.

I. The rich and the poor have much in common. They have, in fact, everything in common which is independent of silver and gold. At first sight this seems to include almost everything worth having, and it does include the best and most lasting good, and often much beside. We rejoice in the thought that many a poor man has as large a share of God's blessed air and sunshine as his richer neighbour—that his bodily frame is as healthful and his home as full of love. But, alas! we cannot forget that poverty in many cases shuts out men and women from the gladdening and healthful influences of pure air and sunlight, and consequently shuts them up to bodily disease, and tends to produce moral unhealthfulness. As civilisation advances, and countries become more populous, the gulf between poverty and wealth in this respect seems to widen, and when we consider how many advantages, not only material but intellectual and moral, the very moderately rich possess over the very poor, we do not find so much in common between them as appears upon a slight view of the case. It is indeed true that all the blessings of life that money cannot buy are as much within the reach of the poor as of the rich; but how many good things—not only for the body, but also for the mind and heart—are not to be gotten without gold and silver. There is, however, one platform upon which they all meet, even in this life—one levelling force which brings them into an absolute equality. In the plan of redemption through Jesus Christ, and in all the blessed effects which flow from it, the rich man has no advantage over the poor man—the brother of low degree is shut out from nothing that his rich brother enjoys. In this sense, as in many others, we may use the prophet's words: "*Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low*" (Isa. xl. 4). It does this: 1. *By declaring their common and universal sinfulness.* Disease of body is a levelling power—fever makes no distinction between king and subject—between master and servant; while they are under its dominion the one has no immunity from the weakness and the pain of the other. So the Gospel plan declares concerning sin what experience testifies—that "*there is no difference,*" that "*all have sinned*" (Rom. v. 12), and that its debasing and destroying power is alike in prince and peasant. 2. *By offering the same conditions of redemption to all.* A physician, when he visits his patients with the intention of doing his best to heal them, does not prescribe one kind of treatment to the rich and another to the poor. The conditions of recovery are not regulated by their rank, but by their disease. So with the Gospel remedy for the sickness of the soul. It is the same for every man. The strait road is not made wider for the man with money bags, the gate is opened as wide for the pauper as for the emperor. 3. *By providing the same inheritance for all who accept the conditions.* Every man who accepts the way of salvation has an equal right to claim God as his Father—has an equal liberty of access to Him (Ephes. iii. 12), at all times—is sealed with the same spirit of promise, and has the same hope of blessedness beyond the grave. To each and to all it is said, "*All are yours, and ye are Christ's* (1 Cor. iii. 23).

II. To God must be referred the lot to which each man is born. He, as the Creator, calls each man into being, and determines the sphere in which he finds himself when he awakens to consciousness and to a sense of responsibility. Man, as a free agent, has much to do with determining his lot in life when he arrives at mature years, but the circumstances surrounding his birth and earlier years, and the mental gifts with which he is endowed, have much also to do with it, and these are determined for him by God. So that He is not only the Maker of the man's personality, but largely also of his position in the world.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

In the distinction between the rich and the poor there is something not altogether pleasant to the human mind. We are apt to recoil from it. Without much thought, by the mere spontaneous promptings of our feelings, we are apt to have some dissatisfaction as we behold the advantages of riches so unequally distributed among men. And frequently the dissatisfaction increases, as we can discover no just *rule* of this distribution; and as we behold more and more of the contrasted advantages and disadvantages of this distinction between the rich and poor. Something like this was, in my opinion, the feeling of the writer of this text. He saw the distinction between rich and poor; he felt amazed; he had a disliking for it which set his mind at work. He thought the matter over patiently and religiously. And when he had done he gathers up the whole substance into this single aphorism and writes it down. That was his satisfaction. There he left the matter. . . . He had studied it as he studied botany: *From the cedar-tree that is in Lebanon to the hyssop that springeth out of the wall.* He had contemplated the loftiness of the rich and the lowliness of the poor, wherein they differed, and wherein they agreed, and especially *who made them to differ.* . . . His faith in God and constant recognition of Him would lead him to take along with him in all his contemplations the idea of the one Great Maker of all; and then, when he found things strange, dark, or revolting to him growing out of the distinctions between rich and poor, he leaves all that with God. But *before* he comes to this, and while he is engaged amid things which he *can* understand, he finds another side of the question which at first disquieted him. . . . Coming to examine the matter, he finds that *distinction* is not the real affair after all; that there are more *agreements* than *distinctions*—more *resemblances* than *differences*: the Maker of all has made the all more alike than unlike. . . . They meet together in their *origin and their situation* as they enter the world. They are equally dependent, helpless, miserable. . . . The two classes are very much alike in their *amount of happiness.* . . . The rich man is not necessarily happy nor the poor unhappy. . . The passions which make men miserable are exercised by both classes without any visible difference in their effects. . . There is a substantial agreement in all the organs of perception and enjoyment, and much of our felicity here depends upon the organic constitution that makes us men. . . . In intellectual faculties there is the same strong resemblance. The perception, memory, imagination, reason, which God has given, He has been pleased to give with an impartial hand. . . There is *one common end* to our humanity; . . . among dead men's bones you can find nothing to minister to human vanity. The rich and poor meet together in the tomb and at the *final bar of God.*—*Dr. Spencer.*

They *meet often;* yea, often is the rich forced to send for the poor, needing as much the help of his labour as the other doth the help of his money. But this maketh them to meet nearer yet, by causing the same who was rich to become poor, and he that was poor to become rich. . . . And they meet *everywhere*—there is no place that hath not both of them, and as there are many of the one, so there are many of the other.—*Jermin.*

For Homiletics on verse 3 see on chap. xiv. 16, page 364; on verse 4 see on chap. iii. 1–18, pages 29, 34, 39.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSES 3 and 4.

A Hedged-up Way.

I. God will hedge in the way of the froward man. As we have seen in considering former proverbs, men in a fallen condition have a tendency to break

loose from restraint—especially from Divine restraint—and to mark out a path for themselves of their own devising. (See on chap. xxi. 8). Every human creature shows more or less wilfulness in regard to th ir relations to God and His law—choosing rather to fashion his life according to his own ideas than according to the Divine idea and desire concerning him. And this wilfulness, if unchecked, grows with a man's growth and strengthens with his years, until his frowardness becomes the distinctive feature of his life. But he will not have it all his own way. He will not find the crooked path which he has chosen altogether pleasant and safe. Thorns will prick his feet and pitfalls will endanger his life. He will find himself confronted and fenced-in by laws of retribution which God has set about him to admonish him to forsake his rebellious way. For all the pain of body or mind which men suffer, and all the obstacles they meet with in the way of frowardness are intended to keep them from a deeper pain and a heavier punishment. A thorn-hedge is set by the side of the highway to admonish the traveller to keep the path, and so avoid, it may be, the precipice or the bog on the other side. If he attempts to climb the hedge he will be wounded, and if he is a wise man the thorn-pricks will lead him to abandon his intention, and so to escape more serious harm. If the hedge does this it fulfils the end for which it was planted. So with the pains and penalties with which God hedges in the present way of the wicked man—they are intended to lead him into a better and safer way.

II. It is a parent's duty to hedge in the way of his child. The father stands in the place of God to his young children in this respect, for his discipline in their early years is the best possible preparation for the discipline of God later on in life. Indeed the wiser the training of the earthly father the less are his children likely to need the corrective discipline of their heavenly parent. The child that is accustomed to bend its will to the will of a good father will not find it so hard to yield obedience to the will of God as he who has had no such training. He will grow up in the practice of sinking his will in that of a wiser will, and it will not be irksome for him so to do. Having found his father's yoke an easy one, and having in the path of filial obedience tasted pleasures unknown to the rebellious child, he will the more readily accept the yoke of God, and find in His service perfect freedom. But this blessed result will not be attained without much anxious and sometimes painful effort on the part of the parent. For the natural waywardness of man in general manifests itself in very early life. A child would like to be trained in the way it *would* go, rather than in the way that it *should* go. But this would in effect be no training at all. For the training of anything implies a crossing of the natural tendency—a repression in one direction, and an effort towards development in another. The training of the vine does not mean a letting it put forth its branches just where it wills or a twining of its tendrils around any object it chooses—it implies a free use of the pruning-knife and of the vine-dresser's other implements and methods of restraint and guidance. Every child, like every unwise man, would like to set up its own hedge, and put up its own fences, and prescribe the limits and bounds of its own conduct. But as we have already seen, God lets no man do this beyond certain limits, for He Himself sets "thorns and snares in the way of the froward." It is, therefore, cruel neglect in a parent to allow a child to do it, for thus the tendency to go in the wrong way is strengthened by indulgence, and every year the path of obedience to God becomes more difficult, and looks less inviting. If the parent does not set a hedge about his son's path, he is only making it certain that he will encounter thorns and snares further on in life. As to the promise attached to the command in this proverb, it can hardly be said to be of universal application. Solomon himself seems to have been an exception to the rule. We have every reason to believe that his father, after his birth, would train his son most carefully and

enforce his precepts by example. We must believe that David's own bitter experience of the thorns and snares in the path of sin made him very anxious to preserve his son from wandering as he had done, and led him to train him most carefully. It is also said of the sons of a man whose life was outwardly stainless—of Samuel—that his sons "walked not in his ways" (1 Sam. viii. 3). Yet we cannot suppose that Samuel, who had seen in Eli's family the miserable fruits of non-restraint, had neglected to train his sons. Yet the exceptions are doubtless very few in number compared with the rule,—that a rightly-trained child does not depart from the right way in his riper years, though, in Bishop Hall's words, "God will let us find that grace is by gift, not by inheritance."

"Lord, with what care hast Thou begirt us round!
Parents first season us: then schoolmasters
Deliver us to laws; they send us bound
To rules of reason, holy messengers.

Pulpits and Sundays, sorrow dogging sin,
Afflictions sorted, anguish of all sizes,
Fine nets and stratagems to catch us in,
Bibles laid open, millions of surprises.

Blessings beforehand, ties of gratefulness,
The sound of glory ringing in our ears;
Without our shame, within our consciences,
Angels and grace, eternal hopes and fears.

Yet all these fences and their whole array,
One cunning bosom—sin blows quite away."—*Herbert.*

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Ver. 5. A forcible image to show that nothing stands so much in a man's way as the indulgence of his own unbridled will. The man who is most perversely bent on his purposes is most likely to be thwarted in them.—*Bridges.*

The ungodly finds nothing in his path to hell but thorns and snares, and yet he presses on in it! A sign of the greatness and fearfulness of the ruin of man's sin.—*Lange.*

Ver. 6. Three different meanings have been found of the interpretation, "according to his way." (See Critical Notes.) It may be—1. His way in the sense of his own natural characteristics of style and manner,—and then his training will have reference to that for which he is naturally fitted; or—2. The way of life which he is intended by parents or guardians to pursue; or, 3. The way in which he ought to go. The last is moral, and relates to the general Divine intention concerning man's earthly course; the second is human and economical; the first is individual, and to some extent even physical. Yet although the third presents the highest standard and has been generally adopted, it has the least support from the Hebrew idiom. *Tr. of Lange's Commentary.*

He learneth best any way that knoweth no other, and he best keepeth any way that groweth in it. Two children that are bred and grow up together, are settled in affection the one to the other. Now, it can be but a childish goodness that is in a child; but if the childhood of goodness shall be bred and grow up with the childhood of man, it will settle the stronger union between them. Aristotle saith, it is a matter of chiefest moment for a man *to be accustomed* this way or that. – *Jermin.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 7.

An Analogy Affirmed and a Contrast Suggested.

I. The contrast between the poor man and the borrower. The proverb at least *suggests* that the poor man and the borrower are not necessarily convertible

terms—that a poor man may owe no man anything, and that a man may be in debt without being a poor man in the common acceptation of the word. 1. The poor man and the borrower may occupy different social relations; indeed, as a rule this is the case. The poor man may have been born to poverty, and consequently may be inured to its hardships, one of which is its subjection to the will of the rich. But the borrower may have been born to wealth, and himself accustomed to rule over the poor. The one may be so ignorant and degraded by reason of his poverty as scarcely to be conscious of the yoke he wears; whereas the servitude of the other will be galling in proportion as his education renders him sensitive to his position. 2. They may be unlike in the fact that the poor man may have had no choice but poverty—he may have been born in it, and may have had no opportunity of altering his condition; but the borrower may not have been absolutely obliged to borrow—he may have borrowed merely to speculate or to waste.

II. The point of resemblance between them. They are alike in being both dependent upon the same person—upon the rich man. This rich man may be unlike his poor brother in nothing save in his possession of gold; he may be as uneducated as he is, and, morally, far beneath him. He may be much less polished and refined than the man who borrows of him, but, whatever he is or is not does not alter the case, his money makes him the master—both the poor man and the debtor must submit to his dictation, must acknowledge their dependence on him. Both often have the painful consciousness that he holds in his hand all that makes their existence of any value to them—both often alike feel that he could at any time deprive them of their very bread.

III. The lesson of the proverb. The wise man, by thus showing how two men who are unlike in almost every other respect may be reduced to the same level in this, is probably reading a lesson against borrowing. The poor man's subjection to the rich is a matter which it is not in his power to alter, but a man goes into debt generally of his own free will. He may often be very hardly pressed by necessity to do so, or as a matter of business it may be advisable, but the proverb at least suggests that the step should not be taken without well weighing the consequences. It is doubtless mainly directed against borrowing when a man has not resources to repay, and is not likely to have them.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

1. *The responsibility of the rich.* How great the power of wealth. In this world it is a talent often more influential for good than intellect or genius . . . . 2. *The temptation of the poor* . . . . To become servile, cringing in spirit. Flunkeyism is the greatest curse of the people . . . . 3. *The wisdom of the diligent.* The industrious man is a wise man. Why? Because the more industrious he is, the more independent he becomes of wealthy men.—*Dr. D. Thomas.*

Very important is it to maintain an independence of mind, quite distinct from pride, which elevates the mind far above doing or conniving at evil, for the sake of pleasing a patron. Many have been forced to great entanglement of conscience, perhaps to vote contrary to their conscience, rather than lose the great man's smile. Often also the influence of capital is an iron rule of the rich over the poor. Many, who profess to resist conscientiously state-interference, have little regard for the consciences of their dependants. The monied master exercises a control over his workmen, which shews too plainly his purpose to make them the creatures of his own will. This gigantic tyranny should be denounced with the most solemn protest. The true Christian line is to shun that proud independence, which scorns the

kindly offer of needful help'; but at the same time to avoid all needless obligations. "Sell not your liberty to gratify your luxury." If possible, "owe no man anything but love." (Rom. xiii. 8.) "Guard against that poverty, which is the result of carelessness or extravagance. Pray earnestly, labour diligently. Should you come to poverty by the misfortune of the times, submit to your lot humbly; bear it patiently; cast yourself in child-like dependence upon your God."—*Bridges.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 8.

A Worthless Seed and a Rotten Staff.

I. The seed sown. It is iniquity. All kinds of deeds and every manner of dealing that are out of harmony with the principles of justice are acts of iniquity. The least deviation from the path of moral right is in its measure an iniquitous step. Sowing iniquity is an expression that covers very much ground, and includes many degrees of moral wrong, from the withholding of the smallest act of justice to the inflicting of the greatest act of injustice. Now, whenever a man deliberately and knowingly does either the one or the other he does it with a purpose. He has an end in view as much as the farmer has when he sows seed in the field. Men do not generally act unjustly and commit crime out of mere love of sin—they generally expect and desire to gain something by it that they think worth having. Solomon here declares that they will be disappointed. He has before dwelt upon the retribution that will follow sin, he is here speaking of its deceptive character. Men do not get from it what they expect—they are disappointed either *of* the harvest or *in* it. This has been the experience of all sowers of iniquity in the world since Eve cast in the first seed. In a certain sense she got what she was promised, but how different the crop from what she hoped for. She "*reaped vanity.*"

II. The staff depended upon. Haughtiness or pride. (See Critical Notes.) This pride of heart and haughtiness of demeanour is born of a man's imagining that he has gained for himself a position and a name that will defy the changes and vicissitudes of life. This idea bears him up; he leans upon it, as men lean upon a rod or staff. The rich man often makes a staff of his riches, and uses it to "rule over the poor," as in verse 7. The man of talent sometimes makes his talent a staff, and walks among his intellectual inferiors with a proud and haughty step. The great conqueror says in his heart, "*I will ascend unto heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God . . . I will be like the Most High*" (Isa. xiv. 13), and with the rod of his power he smites the nations and tramples upon the rights of his fellow-creatures. But all these rods of haughtiness shall be broken, and those who lean upon them shall find they have been trusting to a broken reed, and the objects of their oppression shall say unto them, "*Art thou also become weak as we? art thou become like unto us?*"

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

The proverb takes two terms for iniquity, one meaning *crookedness*, the other meaning *nothingness*. It paints one as only breeding the other. It intends a positive law. Wheat breeds wheat. So iniquity breeds only worthlessness. A man may live a thousand years and yet the harvest will be unvarying. And then to meet the fact that the dominion that his ambition gives does make him ruler over the saints themselves, he employs a verb which expresses high action, but action that *exhausts itself*. Its literal sense

is to *consume*. The idea is as of a fever which wears down the patient and itself together. . . . The impenitent seem to have the whole "*rod*," or *sceptre*, of our planet, the true solution is this, that the "*rod*" is just budding out its strength. —*Miller*.

Often may oppressors prosper for a time. God may use them as his chastening rod. But the *seed-time of iniquity* will end in the harvest of *vanity;* and when they have done their work, *the rod of their anger shall fail*. Such was Sennacherib in olden time, such was Napoleon in our own day. Never has the world seen so extensive *a sower of iniquity*, never a more abundant harvest of *vanity*. The rod of anger was he to the nations of the earth. But how utterly was the rod suffered to *fail*, when the purpose was accomplished! despoiled of empire, shorn of greatness—an exiled captive. —*Bridges*.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 9.

The Bountiful Eye.

I. The eye is an index of the soul. This is true, not only of the *expression* of the eye but of its *direction*. What is in the mind can often be read in the eye; both evil passions and divine affections reveal themselves through it, but sometimes both depend very much upon where the eye looks—upon the objects towards which its glance is directed. Perhaps the text refers both to the eye that softens at the sight of another's woe, and to the eye which makes it its business to look around and search for objects which the hand can help. For if the expression of the eye reveals the character so does the direction which it habitually takes. There is many an eye that readily moistens with sympathy at the tale or the spectacle of sorrow which can hardly be called a "*bountiful eye*," for it is only by accident that it ever encounters anything to call forth its sympathy. But the eye that is ever on the watch for opportunities of doing good, of feeding the hungry and raising the fallen, is a much surer index of a godlike disposition. For such an eye has something in common with the eye of Him who looked upon the bond slaves of Egypt and said, "*I have seen the affliction of My people and am come down to deliver them*," and who, manifest in a human body, "*was moved with compassion*" at the sight of "*people who were as sheep not having a shepherd*" (Mark vi. 34). He whose bountiful eye brings down a blessing upon him is not one who now and then meets a needy brother and relieves him; still less is he one whose sympathy is shown only by the look. His is evidently one whose glance of pity is followed by a deed of kindness and whose habit it is to look out for opportunities of succouring the needy.

II. The soul is blest by the ministry of the hand. He who gives of His bread to the needy will have the gratitude of the needy, and there is not a more exquisite joy perhaps on the earth. But the blessing of God will be his in an especial manner. Upon both kinds of blessing see Homiletics on chap. xi. 25, page 234, and on chap. xix. 17, page 576.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Perhaps the expression—"he giveth *of his bread* to the poor," may mean, that he is ready even to share his own provision with them; not merely to give a small portion of his superfluities, but to stint himself for their supply. And this is the spirit of true charity. —*Wardlaw*.

Some that have a bountiful eye have no bread to give, but they will give what will turn to as good an account to the donor, and sometimes will be as

pleasing to the receiver; tears and attention, and offices of tenderness and prayers to Him that is able to help.—*Lawson.*

This *bountifulness* is a privilege, which earth possesses above heaven. Many a rich *blessing* is sealed to it. "Beneficence is the most exquisite luxury; and the good man is the genuine epicure." He "hath a continual feast," because his objects are always before him.—*Bridges.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 10.

A Man who Ought to Dwell Alone.

I. The scorner should be dismissed from social bodies for his own sake. It is better for the man himself that his power to do evil should be as limited as possible. If we could know beforehand that a man intends to commit a great crime, and so render himself liable to heavy punishment, and bring guilt upon his conscience, the kindest thing that we could do for him would be to deprive him of the power of doing as he intends. We should thereby save him from the misery of becoming a greater transgressor. If the other disciples of Our Lord could have foreseen what was passing in the mind of Judas, and could have prevented his becoming the betrayer of his Master, how great a blessing would they have conferred upon that unhappy man! Whatever might have been his other sins, he would have not been stung with that agony of remorse at having betrayed innocent blood. But many sins are of such a nature that it is impossible to hinder men from their committal—the steps which lead to them are hidden from those around, and no one suspects that the guilty one has any such intention. The scoffer, however, is not a sinner of this kind—his transgression is not a single act, but a habit of life; it is not a secret purpose hidden in his heart until the moment of its accomplishment, but is manifested in his words. Men can therefore, to some extent, hinder him from increasing his own guilt by depriving him of the opportunities of indulging in his sin—if they "cast him out"—if they shun his society, and dismiss him from their midst, he will have fewer opportunities and temptations to indulge in scoffing, and so will be kept from going to such great lengths in sinning. A man who loves to turn into ridicule all pure and holy things, uses to his own condemnation and degradation influences which were intended to bless and elevate him, and it is better for himself that they should be placed beyond his reach than that he should so abuse them and increase his own guilt.

II. He should be cast out for the sake of his fellow-creatures. There are certain diseases of the human body which are not only most dangerous for the patient himself, but expose to a like danger all who come in contact with him. The leper is not only a great sufferer himself, but he is a centre of a deadly disease which will spread itself to those with whom he dwells. It is therefore necessary to remove him from the society of other men—so long as he is a leper he must dwell alone, must be denied the privilege of citizenship and the joys of social life. So it ought to be with the scorner—the habit of scoffing is one which is very infectious—very easily communicated by one man to another; and seeing that it is so soul-destructive, those who indulge in it ought not to have the opportunity of communicating the moral pestilence. But there is another aspect of leprosy which renders it necessary to isolate as far as possible those who are suffering from it from the abodes of other men. Even if it were not so infectious, it is most loathsome; and this alone would render some separation necessary. Now, there are societies of men in which the words of the scoffer would be quite powerless to do harm—there are those whose love of that which is true and holy is strong enough to withstand all such evil

influence. But to such men a scorner is a most repugnant character—they loathe his irreverent treatment of what is to them most sacred. It is not required that they expose themselves to the pain of his society—they are at liberty to cast him out of their midst.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

There is no cure but "*casting out.*" Such men are the Jonahs of churches, and of the coteries of social life. As long as they are there, there will be nothing but the bluster and commotion of the storm—"toiling in rowing," incessant distress, vain exertion, and no progress. The sea cannot "cease from its raging," till they are thrown overboard.—*Wardlaw.*

This *thought* occurs also in the Psalms. (Ps. lxviii. 6.) Only the rebellious, says the Psalmist, shall come to mischief. There are, it is true, great mountains of wickedness; but take away this one element of scorn—that is, make a man submissive and the causes of strife have flown. Christ manages afterwards. Take away the rebelliousness of the heart, and great monstrous sins will slowly be corrected and disappear . . . . Scorning is not itself the cause of the quarrel, and therefore ceasing to scorn does not remove it directly. Christ must remove the *cause.* Scorning expels Christ. Ceasing to scorn admits Christ. And, therefore, it is literally true—"Cast out the *scorner* (it may be thine own scornful heart), and the cause of quarrel passes away, and strife and shame cease."—*Miller.*

It is always the disposition of the scorner, that wheresoever he is, he scorneth to stay, and it is always the best usage towards a scorner to cast him out, and not suffer him to stay. For whosoever keepeth him shall be sure to keep strife and contention with him, and where they are, reproach and shame are the attendants of them. If any good be done a scorner he disdains that it is so little; if any wrong be done him he complains that it is very great. If he be used in anything, he disdains to be a servant; if he is not used he complains that he is neglected. Still he is discontented, and still his discontent breeds quarrelling and debate. But cast out the firebrand and the fire goes out; cast out Jonah and the storm shall cease. Cast out the scorner from thy house, cast out scorning from thy heart, and then thou shalt be quiet. For whence are all suits of contention. Whence is all strife, but because the heart scorns to bear this, scorns to take that, scorns to let it go?—*Jermin.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 11.

A Road to Royal Friendship.

I. The pure in heart deserve to be honoured with the friendship of the king. Where there is purity of heart, the springs of moral life are healthy—the whole man is an embodiment of truth and goodness. Such a man is worthy of the honour and confidence of those who stand in the highest positions, inasmuch as purity of heart belongs to the man himself, and is a possession that is counted precious by the best beings in the universe, whereas power and rank are often but accidents of birth, and in themselves alone are valueless in the sight of God, and in the eyes of the greatest and noblest of His creatures.

II. The king consults his own interest when he shows favour to such men. A man of pure heart is a great blessing to any community. His very life is in itself a light which scatters moral darkness—a well which makes a fertile spot wherever it springs forth. And it is in proportion to the number of such men

in a kingdom that the realm enjoys peace and prosperity. If we could find any earthly commonwealth composed entirely of such citizens, we should find a place where the kingdom of God had "come"—a heaven upon earth. But where there is purity of heart there is grace of lips—there is active effort to spread truth and righteousness. The well does not confine itself to the spot where it first issues from the earth, but sends forth health-giving streams far and near. Seeing, then, that such men are the real pillars of a state, he only is a wise king who seeks them out and delights to do them honour.

III. Some kings have recognised their obligations and interest in this matter. Pharaoh discerned the purity of Joseph's heart by the grace of his lips, and made him the second ruler in his kingdom, and Darius promoted Daniel to the highest office in his realm. David's resolution was—"*Mine eyes shall be upon the faithful of the land, that they may dwell with me; he that walketh in a perfect way, he shall serve me.*" (Psalm ci. 6.)

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Pureness of heart describes not the natural, but the renewed man. It is no external varnish, no affectation of holiness; but sincerity, humility, shrinking from sin, conformity to the image of God. He who hath fully attained this *pureness* is before the throne of God. *He who loveth it* is the child of God on earth. His perfection is desire, constant progress, pressing towards the mark. (Philip. iii. 12-15).—*Bridges.*

What Solomon says is rather an encouragement to love and cultivate "pureness of heart," than a motive to be directly regarded, and allowed to influence us to this duty. It is only one of those indirect results which may be enjoyed as a testimony of the higher approbation of God. . . . While we thank God for the favour He may give us in the sight of men,—we must see that we seek no friendships, whether among the greatest or the least, the highest or the lowest, by any other means whatever than the "pureness of heart," and the consistency of life here recommended.—*Wardlaw.*

Grace in the lips is necessary to recommend pureness of heart. We ought always to speak the words of truth, but we ought to speak it in the most pleasing manner possible, that we may not render it unacceptable by our manner of representing it. Daniel showed his integrity and politeness at once, by the manner of his address to Nebuchadnezzar, when he was called to give him very disagreeable information.—*Lawson.*

He that *hath* pureness of heart cannot choose but *love* it, such is the exceeding beauty and amiableness of it; and he that *loveth* pureness of heart cannot choose but *have* it, for that it is which purifieth and cleanseth the heart. Many there be who love a cleanness, and neatness, and pureness of apparel; many there are who love a clearness and pureness of countenance and complexion. No washing or purifying is thought to be enough to make this appear, so that often the heart is defiled by it. And with such puritans the courts of princes are much attended, wooing with this bravery the favour of the court and prince. But it is to the pure in heart that God inclineth in favour the heart of the king. And because the heart is not discernible by the king, God therefore giveth grace unto the lips, in which the purity of the heart shining, tieth the heart of the king as a friend unto him.—*Jermin.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 12.

The Preservation of Knowledge.

I. God preserves knowledge by preserving the man who possesses the knowledge. The preservation of the life of the man of science who has discovered

some secret of nature is a preservation of the knowledge that he has gained. If the discovery has been made by him alone. and he dies before he has revealed it, the knowledge is lost to the world. When a physician is acquainted with a special remedy or method of treatment for a certain disease which is known only to himself, the preservation of his life is the preservation of this special knowledge. If he leaves the world without imparting what he knows to another man, his secret dies with him—the abstract knowledge is not left behind when the man who possessed it is gone. All knowledge is preserved to us from age to age by its being communicated from one human being to another, as one generation succeeds the other, and the hand of God is to be recognised in its preservation. But this is especially true of the knowledge of God. In the days of old, God long preserved a knowledge of Himself in the world by preserving the life of Noah, of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob. They stood almost alone in the world in this respect, and were like lighthouses on a dark and stormy ocean, sheltering and preserving a moral light in the moral darkness. If the lighthouse is destroyed the light goes out; and if these men had died without transmitting to others the light which they possessed, the world would have been left in ignorance of God. As the ages have rolled on, there have been more of these spiritual lighthouses, and God has always preserved a sufficient number upon the earth to bear witness of Himself.

II. God has preserved knowledge by causing special care to be taken of His written Word. Holy men of old wrote as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, and the record of the truths which were revealed to them is with us until this day. The knowledge of the way of salvation through Jesus Christ has thus been preserved for nearly nineteen centuries, and to-day we can become as familiar with the events of the Incarnation, and with the teachings of the Apostles, as if we had lived in the first century of the Christian era. Although many efforts have been made to destroy the Scriptures of truth, they are with us still, preserved by the providence of their Divine author, in order that men may not be without the means of becoming wise unto salvation through believing the truths which they contain. There have been dark days when the living guardians of Divine truth were hardly to be found; but if they had quite died out after the Bible was written we should still have had this source of spiritual knowledge with us, like a seed-corn, preserving within its husk the living germ, ready to burst forth and grow when it found a congenial soil. God, as the preserver of the knowledge of Himself, has made its safety doubly sure by not only committing it to the living man, but by causing it to be committed to the written page.

III. The preservation of knowledge by the Lord counteracts the evil and false words of wicked men. Acquaintance with truth concerning anything overthrows all false ideas and teachings concerning it. The coming of the morning light scatters all the darkness of night, and with it many false conceptions as to what is around a traveller on an unknown road. So a knowledge of Divine truth scatters error, and overthrows false conceptions concerning God and godliness, and convicts their enemies of falsehood, thus rendering them powerless to do harm. Our Lord, by His knowledge, thus overthrew the words of a great transgressor in His temptation in the wilderness, and it is by the spread of this knowledge of God which He has Himself preserved to us that the final overthrow of evil will be accomplished.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

There is still another sense of the words,—which they *may* bear; though by some, perhaps, it may be regarded as fanciful:—"The eyes of the Lord *keep* knowledge:"—they *retain* it. What He sees, be it but for a moment,

does not, as with *our* vision, pass away. It remains. *We* see, and, having seen, what passes from the eye passes also from the memory. Not so is it with God's vision. The sight of His eye is no uncertain or forgetful glance. It is unerring and permanent. All that His eyes have ever seen is known as perfectly now as when it passed before them,—as when it existed or happened! —And in the exercise of this permanent and perfect knowledge, "He overthroweth the words of the transgressors." All their evil desert remains before Him. They can neither elude His knowledge, nor bribe His justice, nor resist His power. They shall all be made to learn by fearful experience, "whose words shall stand, *His*, or *theirs!*"—*Wardlaw.*

When *knowledge* seemed on the eve of perishing, a single copy of the Scriptures, found as it were accidentally, *preserved* it from utter extinction. (2 Chron. xxxiv. 14-18). For successive generations the Book was in the custody of faithful librarians, handed down in substantial integrity. (Rom. iii. 2.) When the church herself was on the side of the Arian heresy, the same watchful *eyes* raised up a champion (*Athanasius*) to *preserve* the testimony. Often has the infidel *transgressor* laboured with all the might of man for its destruction. Often has Rome partially suppressed it, or committed it to the flames, or circulated perverted copies and false interpretations. Yet all these *words* and deeds of *the transgressors have been overthrown.*—*Bridges.*

The eyes of the Lord are His knowledge, and it is in Him, in His knowledge that knowledge is preserved. That is the bottomless treasure of it; from thence issue out all the veins of knowledge, wherewith the world is enriched. It is He that preserveth knowledge for the seekers of it, it is He that preserveth knowledge in the teachers of it. . . . His eyes shall watch over it, and though blindness put out the eyes of many, yet in Goshen it shall shine and bring comfort to His people.—*Jermin.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 13.

AN ACTIVE IMAGINATION.

I. Inactivity of will may cause a too great activity of the imagination. Man is made for action, and if he refuses to employ his powers in doing some useful and real work, it is probable that he will put forth some morbid effort in another direction. If his limbs are not at work, his mind will probably be active, and if he does not occupy it with objects which are worthy, it will be filled with thoughts that are sinful, and imaginations that are false. It will be especially apt to invent excuses for sloth, by magnifying the difficulties which stand in the way of effort. Every obstacle will be magnified into an insurmountable hindrance, and little risks will be looked at through a medium which will make them look like dangers to be avoided at any sacrifice of duty. The wish is often father to the thought, and the slothful man welcomes and nurses the deception which is born of his own indolence. And the sluggard is an easy prey also to the suggestions of the tempter, who will not be slow to do what he can to inflame the imagination and distort the judgment.

II. The sluggard rightly apprehends danger, but mistakes the source whence it will come. There is a devouring enemy which will slay him if he do not take care, but it is not without him, but within him. He has a foe who endangers his life, but that foe is his own sloth; or, as we saw on chap. xxi. 25, his own unsatisfied desire. While his eyes are turned on the highway, and he is seeking to avoid the lion which he fancies is there, he is nursing in his bosom the indolence which will be his ruin. He has more to fear from himself than

from the most terrible manslayer that ever crossed the path of any human being. But it is with him as with slaves to other forms of sin—he is ready to lay the blame of his disobedience to God's commands anywhere, rather than upon his own unwillingness to comply with them.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

"*Saith,*" really a preterite. These proverbs have usually the future. The future is a present continuing forward. Here we have a present tracing itself backward. The impenitent have always been saying the same thing. Age has not changed. Men have stuck to it for near a century . . . . "There is a lion" at the mercy-seat. So that the minister quits answering the sluggard's cavils, and tells each man plainly—"These cries are symptomatic." There is no lion in the case. And a heart that will shape these phantoms would shape others, if these were laid. The difficulty is sloth. In truth, there is a "lion," but it is a bad heart, crouching against itself, and lurking to destroy the poor unwary sinner.—*Miller.*

This is a very odd excuse for his laziness. Lions are seldom found in the fields in the day time, and it is a very extraordinary thing if they be found in the streets. Does the sluggard himself believe there is any truth in it? If he does, why does he sleep in his house, since it is possible that it may be set on fire by some accident in the night? Why does he ever take a meal, for some have been choked by the bread which they put into their mouths? When we are employed in the duties of our calling, we need not vex ourselves with the apprehension of lions. "I will give mine angels charge over thee," says God, "and they shall keep thee in all thy ways." Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder, the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under thy feet. But let the sluggard remember that there is a lion in that bed where he dozes away his time, and in that chamber where he sits folding his arms together. The devil goes about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour, and he rejoices greatly when he lights upon a sluggard, for he looks upon him to be a sure prey. We are safe from the lions in the way of duty, and never safe when we avoid it. Lions, when they met David feeding his sheep, were torn in pieces by him like kids. A lion unexpectedly came upon that young man of the sons of prophets, who declined his duty when he was commanded to smite his neighbour, and rent him in pieces.—*Lawson.*

Here is no talk of Satan, "that roaring lion" that lies couchant in the sluggard's bed with him, and prompts him to these senseless excuses. Nor yet of the "Lion of the tribe of Judah," who will one day send out summonses for sleepers, and tearing the very caul of their hearts asunder send them packing to their place in hell. But to hell never came any as yet that had not some pretence for their coming hither. The flesh never wants excuses, and needs not to be taught to tell her own tale. Sin and shifting came into the world together; and as there is no wool so coarse but will take some colour, so no sin so gross but admits of a defence. Sin and Satan are alike in this, they cannot abide to appear in their own likeness.—*Trapp.*

The tongue is seldom slothful, even in the slothful man himself. That will bestir itself to find excuses, and to plead pretences for the defence of sloth. That will be diligent to allege reasons that the sluggard may be negligent. . . . . If the lion had been within, if the courage and nobleness of the lion had been in the sluggard's heart, he would never have talked of a lion without. No, it was the cold snail that was within; and unless the slothful man's house may be removed with him, he will not stir to go out of it. Thus he that feareth to be slain, without cause, delighteth to be slain by his own laziness.—*Jermin.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 14.

A Deep Pit.

This verse treats of two classes of character, both of which have been depicted before. (See on chaps. ii. 16-19, page 24, vi. 24, page 89, vi. 6-27, page 15).

I. **The tempter.** The *strange* woman—the woman who has been so deaf to the voice of all that is womanly as no longer to be worthy of the name, who instead of being man's helpmeet and endeavouring to win him to tread the path to heaven, is his curse and makes it her aim to drag him down to hell. Notice the main instrument of her destructive power—the *mouth*. It is by her words of flattery and deception and persuasion that she ensnares her victim and compasses his ruin. History and experience confirm Solomon's words, for, although external beauty is often a powerful ingredient in the temptation, it is not always so, and counts for very little if it is unaccompanied by that fascination of manner and of speech which have been used by so many bad women with such fatal effect. If we look at the portraits of some of those women who have exerted so mighty a power for evil in the world, we can seldom see sufficient beauty to account for the spell which they seemed to cast around their victims, and we must conclude therefore that it was rather to be found where Solomon puts it,—who may be here speaking from bitter personal experience—viz., in the tongue. This proverb adds one more testimony to the many that have gone before of the immense power for evil or for good that is exerted by that "little member" of our bodily organism.

II. **The tempted.** He is here depicted as an unwary traveller along life's highway easily deceived by the appearance of things, and, too careless or too unsuspecting to look beneath the surface, following the bent of his inclination and yielding to the voice of the charmer until he finds the ground giving way beneath his feet, and darkness and hopelessness all around him. Notice the fearful *name* here given to such an one—to one who is led away by such a tempter. He is *abhorred of the Lord.* Here is full evidence that God does not look upon human creatures with indifference as to their moral character—that merciful Father though He is, He does not extend to men that indiscriminating and therefore worthless tenderness which some would have us believe is His main attribute—that if *men* look upon sin as mere obedience to the dictates of nature, and therefore blameless, He does not so regard it. And if men will not attach any weight to the words of Scripture—not believing them to be infallible—they can read the same truth in their every-day experience. The terrible retribution which comes upon those who listen to the words of the "strange woman" is a sufficient testimony to the abhorrence in which the Creator of men holds the sin to which she allures the unwary and the licentious man.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

To what do the fearful words amount? To this: that in His righteous displeasure, there is not a heavier curse which an offended God can allow to fall upon the object of His wrath, than leaving him to be a prey to the seductive blandishments of an unprincipled woman:—that if God held any one in abhorrence, *this* would be the severest vengeance He could take on him.—*Wardlaw.*

The mouth of a strange woman is but the mouth of a far deeper pit, the pit of hell into which it openeth. The one is digged by the wickedness of men, the other by the justice of God.—*Jermin.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 15.

A FACT STATED AND A DUTY INFERRED.

I. Human nature in its most attractive form contains latent depravity. The flower of the thistle is beautiful to look upon, and its downy seed is an apparently harmless object, and one worthy of admiration, as it rears its head among the corn. But how much power of mischief is wrapped up in that ball of soft down, if it is allowed to scatter its seed unchecked. A young lion is as pretty and harmless a creature as a kitten, but what ferocious instincts lie dormant there. A child is the most attractive and innocent of human creatures. As we look upon its guileless face we can hardly connect the idea of sin with its nature, and hardly believe it possible that the most depraved man or woman in the world was once as pure and stainless. But the Book of God tells us that even that young soul is tainted with the disease that infects all our race, and what the Book says is confirmed by the experience of all who have had anything to do with training children. The foolishness of self-will very soon shows itself, and the little one early gives proof that he or she is a true child of Adam by rebelling against the restraints with which it is lovingly surrounded, and desiring at all risks to eat forbidden fruit. In the fairest child-form now living upon the globe there may be hidden seeds which, when fully developed, will fill the world with terror and misery.

II. That this depraved tendency is deeply rooted in the child's nature. It is "bound" in it or "fettered" to it by a cable of many strands, or a chain of heavy links—it is not a slight preference for the wrong which can easily be overruled—not a garment put on which the wearer can easily be persuaded to put off again, but a part of the very nature—a bent of all the faculties of the soul.

III. The disease is one which will yield to proper treatment. We do not suppose that Solomon's words teach that any corrective rod will be potent enough to drive out all tendency to go wrong, inasmuch as experience and observation contradict it, but the same experience and observation confirm the truth that wise correction in youth is mighty in its moral power, and may so bring the child round to the love of the true and the good, that its own efforts will second the efforts of the parent, and it will itself turn upon the enemies within, being fully convinced that the self-will that is bound up in its own heart is the greatest folly to which it is liable. There are many who, looking back upon the wise and loving chastisement of a tender parent, can bear testimony to the truth of this proverb. On this subject see also on chap. xiii. 24, page 334.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

The rod of correction is proper to drive away no other foolishness than that which is of a moral nature. But how comes wickedness to be so firmly bound, and strongly fixed, in the hearts of children, if it be not there naturally.—*Jonathan Edwards.*

Bound, or *fettered*. . . . *Firmly knit, closely settled; well tied in;* that is, fixed in the childish spirit; this is the sense of nearly all the commentators. Of course, there are great difficulties at once. The fact theologically is just the opposite. "Folly" is not fixed in the childish heart; but stronger and stronger in periods afterwards. Why not, *pro vero*, "bound?" In much the majority of texts it means simply "tied down," or "fettered." "*Folly is fettered in the heart of a child*"; that is, *tied down*, and, in many ways, *repressed*. This is literally

the case. It is weak, and hemmed in, and easier to grapple with and drag out of the soul in youth than at any other period.—*Miller.*

Observe—it is *foolishness*, not childishness. *That* might belong to an unfallen child. No moral guilt attaches to the recollection—"When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child." (1 Cor. xiii. 11.) "A child is to be punished"—as Mr. Scott wisely observed—"not for being a *a child*, but for being *a wicked* child." Comparative ignorance, the imperfect and gradual opening of the faculties, constitute the nature, not the sinfulness of the child. The holy "child increased in wisdom." (Luke ii. 52.) But *foolishness* is the mighty propensity to evil—imbibing wrong principles, forming bad habits, entering into an ungodly course. It means the very root and essence of sin in a fallen nature—the *folly* of being revolted from a God of love.—*Bridges.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 16.

Oppression and Servility.

I. Opposite actions proceeding from the same motive. This proverb seems to be directed against a man whose mastering passion is the unworthy one of amassing material gain and ministering exclusively to his own enjoyment. This is the commonest source of oppression. "Covetousness," says Dryden, 'is itself so monstrous that nothing else is like it except it be death and the grave, the only things I know which are always carrying off the spoils of the world and never making restitution." This is a true picture of the avaricious man who regards none of the needs and rights of his fellow-creatures, but only asks himself with regard to them how they can best be made to serve his interests. This leads him to grind down those who are poorer than himself, and use them as so many stepping-stones, by means of which he can mount higher in the social scale, forgetting that though their poverty makes them weaker than himself, they have a Friend who is far stronger than he is. But the same man who thus oppresses his needy brother will make it his business to propitiate the rich, and for the same end, viz., to advance his own interests. "Tyranny and flunkeyism," says Dr. Thomas, in his comment on this verse, "generally go together. Both are the children of avarice. He that proudly domineers over the poor will servilely bow his knee to the rich."

II. Opposite actions meeting with the same retribution. Although these actions are so different, they can both be traced to one fountain-head, and therefore one sentence is passed upon both. The man who lives for himself shall not get anything worth having; or if he do, things will be mixed with the cup of his prosperity, which will make it an unpalatable one after all. He may get wealth, and may come to want health; he may be rich and healthy, and yet suffer in his family relationships. He will certainly come to want peace of conscience, the goodwill of his fellows, and the favour of God, and no gain can balance such a loss.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Sin pays its servants very bad wages, for it gives them the very reverse of what it promised. Whilst the sin of oppression or injustice promises mountains of gold, it brings them poverty and ruin. "Shalt thou reign because thou closest thyself in cedar?" said the prophet to Jehoiakim. It could not be, for he used his neighbour's service without wages, and gave him nought for his work. . . . We are not proprietors but stewards of the gifts of

providence, and must distribute that which he has entrusted to our care according to his will. And it is his pleasure that we should make to ourselves friends by the mammon of unrighteousness, not of the rich but the poor.—*Lawson.*

The covetous wretch and the vain prodigal are of quite contrary dispositions, and take quite contrary courses, and yet they both meet at last, for both come to want. . . . He that being rich taketh a little from the poor (for how little must it needs be that is taken from them) shall surely find that he taketh a great deal from himself, even all that he hath. And he that giveth much to the rich (for it must be much, or else it is not regarded by them) will wish he had given it to the poor, when being made poor, he will give himself little thanks for it, and find as little help from them to whom he has given his riches.—*Jermin.*

A reference to the Critical Notes at the beginning of this chapter will show that we here enter on the third division of this book. One or two additional notes are subjoined.

17. Miller reads the second clause, "*And thou shalt incline thine heart,*" etc. **18. They shall withal be fitted in thy lips.** rather "*let them abide together upon thy lips.*" **20. Excellent things.** Some here render "*thrice repeated things,*" the French translation is "*things relating to rulers or governors,*" and Stuart reads "Have I not written to thee *heretofore,*" understanding Solomon to refer to the previous portions of the Book. Upon the first two Wardlaw remarks that they both contain the idea of superiority or excellence, for "why are things repeated but for their excellence? and *princely* or *royal* things"—which the French translation may yield when analysed—is but a figurative way of expressing transcendent superiority.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH. VERSES 17—21.

TRUST FROM KNOWLEDGE, AND BLESSEDNESS FROM TRUST.

I. Knowledge of God must go before faith in God. There must be a knowledge of the existence, character, and power of any person before there can be any trust in him. God is not so unreasonable as to expect men to put trust in Him unless they have some grounds for their trust. Hence the Bible especially aims to make men acquainted with the Being upon whom they are called to exercise faith, by declarations concerning His character, and by a history of His doings in the past, and reminders of what He is doing in the present. Sometimes God points to the *visible creation* as a source whence men may obtain knowledge concerning Him, and come to exercise trust in Him. This is the drift of the sublime passage in Isaiah xl., in which Jehovah seeks to bring Israel, by a consideration of His creative power and wisdom, to confide in His Almighty strength. (Verses 27-31.) Sometimes He appeals to *His dealings in the past* as a ground of faith in His character and purposes in the present. *What iniquity have your fathers found in me, that they are gone far from me?* (Jer. ii. 5.) The Son of God appeals to His Father's love as a basis of faith in Himself. (John iii. 16.) Paul speaks of the way of salvation as a "*knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ*" (2 Cor. iv. 6.), because without knowledge there can be no faith, and an enlightened knowledge will certainly lead to faith. The preacher here points to the necessity of gaining this true wisdom, the knowledge of Jehovah, as the means of begetting trust in Him.

II. Real blessedness will follow faith in God. A child can have no lasting and real joy in its life, unless it has faith in his father's love and wisdom. He feels instinctively that he is dependent upon that father, that much of his future well-being depends upon what that father is and does, and if he cannot be sure that he has his real welfare at heart, it will throw a dark shadow over his

young life, which will deepen as he becomes more and more capable of realising his position. It is a worm at the root of all our peace of mind to distrust where we must depend. All men must feel that they are dependent upon God, and yet most men live, and perhaps most die, without giving Him that trust which alone can give them peace, and which those who know Him testify that He fully deserves. The testimony of those who knew is "*Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is.*" (Jer. xvii. 8.) And it is because of its trust-begetting character that Solomon here declares that true knowledge—knowledge concerning Jehovah—is "*pleasant*" to the soul.

III. Faith in the heart will manifest itself in the lip. A perfume may be hidden in the casket, but whenever the lid is lifted it will make its presence known. The tongue will speak sometimes of that which fills the heart, and when it does not do this in a direct manner there will be a tone in the conversation which will tell men what the soul prizes most. Knowledge in the heart will bring wise words to the lips—the love of truth will result in the *answer* of truth.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Verse 17. This sounds like the opening of the earlier Proverbs, chap. v. 1; viii. 1. The repetition is significant. The life of the soul is attention. If that be persevered in, all things follow. God only can give saving light. And yet by laws like the planetary system, He will give it on the bending of the ear. Alas for us! we will not even do this much without His influence. Nevertheless He urges the promise. (See Miller's rendering in the additional notes at the beginning of this paragraph.) It is a law, though it be a law of grace. God has framed it. Hear outwardly, and thou shalt feel within. Such is our nature (chap. ii. 1–5), and it is shrewd to use it. The *inclining* is from Him; but the *advice* also is from Him! Shrink not from the advice because His strength is needed to make it His chosen instrument.—*Miller.*

We may mark that, whereas in the beginning of Proverbs the Wise Man had often called on his son to fasten attention on him, saying, "My son, my son;" now, after so much said, he supposeth that he needeth not to be called upon, and therefore speaketh unto him, without his usual compellation. And surely when much hath been said, to need still much calling on, sheweth much neglect of what hath been said, and much unworthiness to have been an hearer of it. And yet because in the best some rousing of attention is requisite, the Wise Man here lifteth up his voice, to cause a careful bowing down of the ear to his words. He would therefore have attention so to bow down the ear, as to make it as it were a bed, wherein the words of the wise might rest; because that is it which will bring true rest unto the heart. . . . . But we may further note, that whereas he would have him to *hear the words of the wise*, it is to *his knowledge* that he would have him *apply his heart*. For we may hear the words of the wise men of this world, we may hear the words of human learning and understanding, and much good is to be gotten from them; but we must apply our hearts unto the knowledge of God's word, and so far receive the other as they agree with that, or are not repugnant unto it. Or else *hear the words of the wise*, whosoever they be, if they be the words of wisdom which they deliver. But if their actions teach otherwise than their words do, apply not thine heart to follow their example. Let rather *my knowledge* instruct thee, that the heart may be as well applied to doing, as the ears to hearing.—*Jermin.*

Verse. 18. It will last when we get it. This is the wonder to others,

Here one has been trying to be a better man, and begins to be one from a sudden epoch. Others wrestle with their faults, and fall back into them again. Nothing can be more fitful than all moral reformations. But here, in spiritual life, a flash shoots up, and we never return to darkness. Why is this? Because it is *pleasant*, says the proverb. It becomes fixed because of its principle as of a second nature. . . When we *watch over right words*, which (*Orientaliter*) stands for all right actions, God rewards us by making them "*pleasant*," and so, even as in heaven itself, they become fixed as the very habit of our lips.—*Miller.*

Many there are whose lips do speak the words of wisdom, but they are not fitted upon their lips. . . . The reason whereof is, because the words of wisdom are not seated in the heart. For though the lips may give themselves motion and the head may furnish them with matter, it is the heart that fitteth the lips.—*Jermin.*

It will give thee most high satisfaction if thou dost so heartily entertain them, and thoroughly digest them, and faithfully preserve them in mind, that thou art able withal to produce any of them as there is occasion, and aptly communicate for other men's instruction.—*Bp. Patrick.*

Verse 19.—1. The *particularity of address*—"*to thee, even to thee.*" In the days of prophetic inspiration, it was no unusual thing for the servants of God to receive express commissions to individuals, in which they alone were concerned. But the whole Book of God—the entire "word of His testimony"—should be considered by *every one* as addressed *to him;* as much so as if there were no other human being besides himself, and as if it had been "given by inspiration" to himself alone. There is no room for any saying, as Jehu did of old—"*To which* of all us?" The answer would, in every case, be—To *each of you all*—to thee—to thee—to thee. Not that there is no such thing as, "rightly dividing the Word of Truth;" not that there are no portions of it that have a special appropriateness of application to the characters and circumstances of individuals. Still, the great truths of the Word are alike to *each* and to *all.* And speedily a man may be placed in one or other of the peculiar situations to which the different portions of it are adapted! I know of nothing more important than for every individual to bring divine lessons *home to himself.* Too often, alas! we forget *personal* amidst *general* application of particular truths. We think of them as intended *for men*, and forget that they are designed *for us.* Would you then profit by what you hear?—keep in mind that what is addressed to all is addressed to each —"*to thee, even to thee.*"—2. Mark the emphasis on the time—"*this day.*" We set a mark, in our minds, on days that have been rendered memorable by events of special interest. Would Noah, think you, ever forget the day of the year on which he and his family entered the ark, and when "the Lord shut him in?" or the day on which he again stepped out of it upon the green earth, to be the second father of mankind? Would the shepherds ever forget on what night of the year the angelic messengers, amidst the light of the glory of the Lord, announced to them the Divine Saviour's birth, and when "the multitude of the heavenly host," bursting on their sight, "ascended jubilant," saying "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men?" Or would Cornelius ever forget the day and the hour when the angelic visitant directed him to that instruction whereby he and all his house should be saved? *You*, it is true, have many times heard the words of truth. Let me, however, remind any of you who *have* thus often heard, and who still neglect them, of the importance to you of *each day* that you enjoy the privilege. Every time you thus hear them, your eternal all depends on the reception you give to the message of God. *This day* may be important indeed, for it may be the last on which Divine truth shall sound in your ears. O that it may be a day

to be sacredly and joyfully remembered by every sinner now present, as the day on which he first felt its inestimable preciousness to his soul! If you thus hear, and thus improve the opportunity, the day will not be obliterated from your memory by the lapse of eternity. There is one thing of which with emphasis it may be said to each individual sinner, It is "*to thee, even to thee:*"—I mean the message of the Gospel—the message of free mercy through the Divine Mediator. There is no exception; there is no difference. The law speaks to each, "to thee, even to thee"—its sentence of condemnation. The Gospel speaks to each—"to thee, even to thee"—its offer of free, full, immediate, irrevocable pardon on the ground of the universal atonement. To every fellow creature we can say—An adequate atonement has been made for all; therefore *for thee*—"for thee, even for thee;" and on the ground of that atonement does divine mercy come near to thee—"to thee, even to thee"—with the offer of forgiveness, acceptance, and life. "*This day*" is the message of life again "made known" unto thee, O sinner; and there is no obstacle to thine acceptance and enjoyment of it, but what is *in thyself;*—none in God; none in Christ; none in the atonement; none in the divine offer of its virtue to mankind. "*To thee* is the word of this salvation sent;" and "now is the accepted time, now the day of salvation."—*Wardlaw.*

Only a divine word can beget a divine faith, and herein the Scripture excels all human writings, none of which can bring our hearts to the obedience of faith. "I can speak it by experience," says Erasmus, "that there is little good to be got by the Scripture, if a man read it cursorily and carelessly; but if he exercise himself therein constantly and conscionably he shall feel such a force in it, as is not to be found in any other book whatsoever" "I know," saith Peter Martyr, "that there are many who will never believe what we say of the power of God's Word hidden in the heart; and not a few that will jeer us, and think we are mad for saying so. But oh that they would be pleased to make trial! Let it never go well with me—for I am bold to swear in so weighty a business—if they find not themselves strangely taken and transformed into the same image." The Ephesians "trusted in God" so soon as they heard the word of truth. They "believed" and were "sealed." (Ephes. i. 13.) And the Thessalonians' faith was famous all the world over, when once the Gospel "came to them in power." (1 Thess. i. 5-8.)—*Trapp.*

Verses 20 and 21. How the preacher labours! Let us begin at his most expressive terminus. We are to be *sent for!* some certain day. "*Those that send*" is but the proverbial cast. "*Him that sends*" is the more perfect meaning. As sure as the stars we shall be *sent for* one day; and one thing will be exacted from us, and one only in the creation, and that is *light.* The man without light perishes. Solomon says, his whole aim has been to press light on the sinner. . . . "Have I not done," he says, "and that under Scriptural promises, the very best things to secure my object? And is not that object, now *that I might make thee to know the verity of the words of truth!*" This Hebrew is very peculiar. "*Words of truth*" are easily uttered. "*Counsels and knowledge*" of the deepest sort may be in the minds of infidels. We may teach a child the very intricacies of faith. But there is a "*verity*" at its deepest root that the natural man cannot perceive. (1 Cor. ii. 14.) To express this, Solomon uses a very infrequent word. It means (*in radice*) to *weigh out so as to be exact.* That I might make thee to know the *exactness* of words of truth. The meaning is that *verity* which is seen by a Christian eye.—*Miller.*

Surely if anything be worthy of sending for, worthy of going for, then are the words of knowledge and truth. If they may be had for going or sending, who should not go, who should not send, whither should we not go,

whither should we not send? They are they which must bring us to heaven and to happiness. Or else to take the sense another way, and in a spiritual application of the words: Who are they that send unto us? What are the words of truth that we must answer unto them? They that send unto us are God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. God the Father sendeth His blessings, God the Son His merits, and God the Holy Ghost His graces. The words of truth that we must answer are the words of thankful obedience.—*Jermin.*

The certainty of the words of truth. The evidence of the divinity of the Bible, instead of ever being shaken by all the efforts of infidelity, has been augmenting from the beginning hitherto. Its *external* evidence has grown in the fulfilment of its predictions. Its *internal* evidence, though in one sense ever the same, has, in another, been increasing also; inasmuch as it has stood its ground amidst all the advances of human knowledge, and men have never been able to improve upon it or to get before it:—and it is the *one only book* of which this can be affirmed. And its *experimental* evidence,—the manifestation of its truth in its saving influence,—in its power to dislodge and change the evil passions and habits of the worst of men,—has multiplied by thousands and tens of thousands of dead and living witnesses. In our own days, we have but to point, not only to cases of revival in our own land, in which the gospel has proved itself "mighty through God" to the pulling down of the strongholds of worldliness and corruption, and turning hearts long alienated to God,—but to the lands of heathen idolatry and cruelty and vileness, wherever Gospel truth has found its way and has been embraced. *There*, in the marvellous changes that have been effected,—in the contrast between previous stupidity and pollution, and heartless and murderous ferocity, to intelligence, and purity and virtue, and peace, and harmony, and happiness, we have the triumphs of the Cross, and the manifestation of the "*certainty*"—the divine certainty—"of the words of truth." They have thus shown themselves to be indeed "excellent things" by the excellence of their effects. We call upon all to examine for themselves. The Bible *courts examination.* It is the unwillingness and refusal to examine, that is most to be deplored. The genuineness of its writings, the authenticity of its histories, the reality of its recorded miracles, the fulfilment of its prophecies, the sublimity and consistent harmony of its doctrines, the purity of its precepts, the origin of its commemorative ordinances, and its tendency to personal and social virtue and happiness,—*all* court examination. The testimony of the celebrated Earl of Rochester, when converted from infidelity and profligacy to Christianity and virtue, will be found the truth. Laying his hand on the Bible, he would say—"*This* is true philosophy. *This* is the wisdom that speaks to the heart. A bad life is the only grand objection to this Book."—*Wardlaw.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSES 22 and 23.

God the Spoiler of the Spoiler.

I. Robbery is of three kinds 1. *There is the open and unlegalised thief.* There are men who do not pretend to respect the rights of others and who openly live in violation of Divine and human laws. They differ somewhat in their methods and in the description of their plunder—some seeking to gain an entrance into the mansion and lay hands on the jewels of the wealthy, and others being content with what they can find in the cottage or on the wayside—but they are alike in pursuing their profession without any pretence that they fear God or regard men. But these are not the robbers against whom the

sentence is passed which is contained in this proverb. 2. *There is the legalised thief.* There are governments under which iniquity is established by law—kingdoms in which wholesale robbery is carried on in the name of justice. There were many such in the days of Solomon and there is not a few in this nineteenth century. Perhaps, however, the Preacher was not referring so much to a government as a whole as to individuals who, sitting in the seats of justice, were regardless of the rights of those over whom their position gave them authority. The "*oppressor in the gate*" is probably a judge who disregards the rights of the poor man if he conceives it will further his own interest so to do, while he all the time pretends to be an administrator of justice and does all in the name of the law of the land. Under this class may be placed those who hold in trust property which has been given for the use of the poor and who disregard the claims of the really needy and so defeat the good intention of the donor. There is an immense amount of this misappropriation of money even in England, and although those who are guilty of it distribute their favours with a pretence of impartiality, and in the name of law, they are as truly robbers in the sight of God as the burglar or the pickpocket. 3. *There is the negative robber.* A man may be a thief without taking anything from his fellow-man or without holding any official position and abusing his power and privileges. If a man or woman who is brought in contact with others poorer than himself or herself withholds from these poorer brethren anything simply because they cannot retaliate or enforce their rights, such a man or woman is a robber of the poor. And this may and is often done unconsciously—a man who would be indignant at being branded as unjust withholds from those whom poverty has placed in his power rights which belong to every rank and station but which are not always looked upon as the equal heritage of the poor and the rich. For it is quite possible to rob the poor without taking or withholding money from them. Some, who would not do this, rob them of their rest and leisure and withhold from them consideration and sympathy.

II. Defenceless though the poor may seem, Almighty power is on their side. Although the robbery may be legalised on earth, it is contrary to the law of heaven, and although the judge who oppresses can be brought before no human tribunal, he will one day stand before the bar of God. The Judge of all the earth was Himself once a poor man, and can sympathise with the oppressed poor as well as avenge their wrongs. He will spoil the oppressor of his soul's comfort, and cause him to faint, and be afflicted for want of spiritual sustenance. Many a poor man's soul is made sad by legalised injustice, and Christ as man's judge will bring legalised justice to bear upon him who offends in this matter. (Matt. xxv. 41–46.) See also Homiletics on Verse 16, and on Chap. xiv. 30, page 389.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

After so promising a preface, and such wooing of attention, we looked for some fresh matter, and that of best note, too. But, behold, here is nothing but what we had before. "It is truth," saith the wise man, and yet I must tell you that "to write the same things to me indeed is not grievous, but for you it is safe." (Phil. iii. 1.)—*Trapp.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSES 24 and 25.

An Infectious and Dangerous Disease.

I. Friendship influences habit and thus moulds character. The reason given here for avoiding the companionship of an angry man is, "*lest thou learn his*

ways." This subject has been treated at length in chap. xiii. 20, page 326. There is great need when pestilence is abroad to avoid needless contact with infected persons and things. In every man there is more or less liability to disease which sometimes only needs a slight exposure to unhealthy influences to develop into a fatal activity. We are always living and moving amidst unhealthy and infectious moral influences which are hurtful to us, because of the tendency there is within us to go wrong; and it is therefore the mark of a wise man to avoid as much as possible all intimate contact with those who are manifestly under the dominion of sin. This proverb does not of course forbid such intercourse as is sought for the purpose of benefiting the vicious man.

II. **A man's anger hurts himself more than those whom it leads him to injure.** We should have expected that Solomon would advise us to avoid the angry man because of the injury he might do us when under the dominion of his passion, but instead of that he commands us to shun him because of the injury we shall do ourselves if we become like him. The wise man loses sight of the lesser danger in looking at the greater, and counts as nothing the harm an angry man can do to the body of a fellow-creature, in comparison with the grievous hurt he inflicts upon his own soul. And this is manifestly a correct view, whether we look at the present influence of passion or its remoter consequences. The man who receives an unmerited insult or injury may sustain no loss of dignity, nor suffer in any way in his spirit. But he who inflicts the injury becomes a meaner man in the very act, and creates a tempest of unrest within his own breast. And a blow which deals even death to an innocent man does not necessarily deprive him of any real good, but it creates a very hell of remorse for him whose anger prompted the deed. While Abel exchanged a blighted home here for an Eden in a brighter world, Cain wandered a fugitive and a vagabond upon the earth.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Lest thou be infected by his example, or provoked by his passion to return the like to him. Either (1) a mischief which is often the effect of unbridled rage, or (2) an occasion of sin, either by drawing thee to an imitation or requital of his rage, or by tempting thee to unfaithfulness in performing the great office of a friend—to wit, admonition or reproof, which, by reason of his furious temper, thou either canst not or wilt not do.—*Matthew Poole.*

It may seem strange that we should be supposed in danger of learning what we feel to be so very disagreeable. And yet we may. As already hinted, a passionate man may have interesting and attractive qualities otherwise. Now, in proportion as we either admire or love him for these, will be the hazard of our thinking the less evil of his one defect, and trying to palliate and to smile at it. And there is no little truth in the saying, that we either *are* like our friends and intimates, or *will soon be.* But more than this. The sudden and often unreasonable heats of the passionate man are ever apt to fret and irritate our spirits, and thus to form a habit of resemblance by the very reaction upon ourselves of his hot and hasty temper.—*Wardlaw.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSES 26 and 27.

SURETYSHIP AND ITS DANGERS.

I. **A command to avoid a perilous habit.** We cannot, in the light of the spirit of Bible teaching—especially that of the New Testament—regard this proverb as forbidding all suretyship. It cannot mean that one honest man when

he has ample means at his command is never to become security for another man of honesty. We know that there are cases in which it is the greatest kindness that one friend can do another, and that it is often the means of giving a poor or unfortunate brother a fair start in life. We are commanded to *"bear one another's burdens"* (Gal. vi. 2), and *"to do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith"* (Gal. vi. 10), and this is sometimes the most effectual way of carrying out these precepts. But Solomon here warns men against the unwisdom of choosing for companions those men whose habit it is lightly to become a surety for another—who lend their name and credit without considering the responsibility they undertake or asking themselves whether they are doing any real good to the person they oblige. Although it may be a man's duty sometimes to become a surety for another it is perilous and wrong to make it a habit of life, and thereby encourage thriftlessness and perhaps dishonesty.

II. A warning as to the probable consequences of such a habit. Solomon regards it as certain that a man who habitually becomes a "surety for debt" will come to ruin. This is obvious if we reflect that for one honest man who asks such a favour there are twenty who have little or no moral sense in such a matter; that although a good and true man is often found in circumstances of such need, the great majority who are so found are rogues.

For an illustration and comments on this subject see on Chap. vi. 1, page 76, and page 216. Also Homiletics on Chap. xx. 16, page 589.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

We are commanded to "love our neighbour *as* ourselves;" but to do for him what might expose us to having our very bed sold from under us, is to love him *better* than ourselves which is a step beyond the Divine injunction. *Wardlaw.*

Seeing by taking suretyship upon him, he put himself under the creditor, and made himself to be, as it were, the bed on which the trust of others did rest, and seeing by not paying he hath taken away the creditor from the bed of his rest, it is but like for like if the creditor take away his bed from under him. And yet the wise man asking the question seemeth to me to imply in some sort that he should not do it. For though the other doth justly deserve it, yet in so much need let mercy spare.—*Jermin.*

For Homiletics on verse 28 see on chap. xxiii. 10, page 666.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 29.

The Destiny of the Diligent.

I. The diligent man meets with Divine approval. The repeated commendations of diligence and condemnations of slothfulness which we meet with in this book show the estimate which God sets upon rightly-directed industry. 1. *The diligent man is in harmony with God.* The Divine Father is ever working for the good of His creatures, and no being who ever trod this earth laboured so continuously and earnestly as the Divine Son. With Him during His public ministry the completion of one work was the beginning of another. He was ever about His Father's business, diligently carrying on and seeking to finish the work which His Father had given Him to do. The man who is diligent in business is in this respect a follower of his Lord and Master. 2. *He*

is in harmony with creatures both above Him and beneath Him. Angels are doing the will of their King with promptitude and despatch—Gabriel "*flies swiftly* (Dan. ix. 21) when sent on a message to the earth. Heaven is a world of activity, the cherubim around the throne "*rest not day nor night*" (Rev. iv. 8). Many of the creatures below man set him an example of industry. (See on chap. vi. 6–11, page 78.) Even inanimate nature seems to rebuke the idle man. (See a comment by Dr. Perry on page 425.) 3. *He is in harmony with the needs of humanity.* The world calls for diligent workers, and without them all civilisation would soon cease and men sink to the condition of the savage. We have around us many proofs of this. The home of the indolent husband or wife is destitute of all refining influences and is often a nursery of crime. The land where the people are thriftless is a land of degradation and poverty. We can well understand, therefore, that God's approval rests upon those who make the best use of the time and opportunities which He gives them.

II. The diligent man will reap some reward for his diligence. It is not, of course, possible to take this proverb in an absolutely literal sense, because many diligent men never saw the face of a king. But without diligence it is hardly possible for any man to obtain any position of honour, or if he do he is not likely to retain it. But there is another sense in which diligence may bring a man before kings. Caxton was a diligent man, and by his diligence came literally to stand before the King of England. But he has, by his invention of the printing-press, stood before kings and princes from that hour to this, for they have all learned to honour his name, and to acknowledge their obligations to him. Every time a royal traveller takes his seat in a locomotive James Watt stands before him, for his ability to move with such ease and speed from place to place is the result of that man's diligence, and his name is held in honour in consequence. And instances might be multiplied indefinitely, in which diligence has caused a man to stand before not only the kings of his own time, but of succeeding generations.

On this subject see also Homiletics on chap. xii. 24, page 285.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Of all the qualities which kings especially look to and require in the choice of their servants, that of despatch and energy in the transaction of business is the most acceptable. . . . There is no other virtue which does not present some shadow of offence to the minds of kings. Expedition in the execution of their commands is the only one which contains nothing that is not acceptable.—*Bacon.*

God loves nimbleness; "What thou doest, do quickly," said Christ to Judas, though it were so ill a business that he were about.—*Trapp.*

CHAPTER XXIII.

CRITICAL NOTES.—1. When thou sittest, etc. Miller here translates "*Forasmuch as thou sittest,*" and applying the word *ruler* to God gives to the proverb a meaning entirely different from that generally attached to it. See his remarks in the Suggestive Comments. **What is before thee?** Rather "*Who is before,*" etc. 2. **Put a knife,** etc. Zöckler, Ewald, and others translate "*Thou hast put,*" or "*thou puttest.*" The meaning may then be "Thou hast virtually destroyed thyself if thou art a self-indulgent man." Delitzsch, however, gives the verb the

imperative form, as in the English version. **3. Deceitful meat.** Literally "Bread of lies." Many commentators understand this to mean a deceptive meal, which is not given from motives of hospitality. **5. Wilt thou set thine eyes?** etc. Rather "*Wilt thou look eagerly after it, and it is gone?*" **6. Him that hath an evil eye**—*i.e.*, the jealous man. **11. Their Redeemer.** Their *Goel*, or Avenger. In the Hebrew law this word is applied to the nearest kinsman. (See Ruth iii. 12.) **17. Let not thine heart envy,** etc. The verb translated *envy* refers to both objects in the verse, and is better translated "*strive after.*" Miller renders it "*be zealous.*" "It is," he says, "a verb expressive of all emotion." (See Numb. xxv. 11—13.) **18. Surely there is an end.** Delitzsch here reads, "*Truly there is a future.*" "The root of the Hebrew," says Miller, signifies *afterward.* **20. Eaters of flesh.** This may be translated "*Devourers of their own flesh*"—*i.e.*, those who destroy their bodies by sensual indulgence. **23.** The word *also* should be omitted in this verse. The three nouns in the second clause stand in apposition to the one in the first. **Instruction,** rather "*discipline*" **25.** This verse should be, "*Let thy father and thy mother be glad, and her that bare thee rejoice.* **26. Observe,** rather *delight.* **28. As for a prey,** Delitzsch and Zöckler here translate "*like a robber.*" **Transgressors,** rather "*the faithless.*" **30. Mixed wine**—*i.e.*, wine mixed with strong spices. **31. When it giveth his colour,** etc., literally, "When it showeth its eye." This may refer to its *brightness*, or to the *head*, or *pearl* of the wine. "**When it moveth itself,**" **etc., rather** "*when it glideth down with ease.*" **33. Strange women, rather** "*strange things.*"

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH. Verses 1—3.

THE TEMPTATIONS OF THE TABLE.

I. The table of a wealthy man is a place of temptation to the sin of over-indulgence. At such a table there is a great variety of dishes, and the human appetite, in common with every bodily sense and mental faculty, delights in variety. The eye is best pleased with a diversified landscape, the ear with a diversity of sound, and the mind when it can vary the objects of its contemplation. So man's appetite is most gratified by a variety of food, and there is much more temptation to excess under such circumstances than when his hunger has to be satisfied from a single dish. Then, again, the food at such a repast is generally of the most tempting kind—all the countries of the world are put under contribution to supply it with dainties, and much skill and time is expended upon the preparation of the food. There is little danger of eating too much when bread is the only fare, but it begins and increases in proportion to the palatable nature of the viands. And the proverb seems to be addressed to those to whom a seat at the rich man's or ruler's table was not an every-day occurrence—to those to whom it was not given to feast so sumptuously every day—and this would increase the force of the temptation. The variety and the rarity of the dishes is much more tempting to one unaccustomed to such feasts.

II. It is most degrading and injurious to yield to such a temptation. This is implied in the strong metaphor which Solomon uses. An undue indulgence in the pleasures of the table, even when it does not amount to positive gluttony, is a most fruitful source of disease, and for this cause, if for no other, dainty food well deserves the name which is here given to it. But it is also most injurious to man's better nature; it is often the first step to habits of intemperance and licentiousness, but if it does not lead to them it is altogether incompatible with intellectual and moral excellence. A man who is not master of his appetite is below the brute and can be neither great nor good. It is well to remember that an *appeal to the appetite* was one of the elements in the first temptation. An Eastern fable runs thus: "A king once permitted the devil to kiss him on either shoulder. Immediately two serpents grew from his shoulders, which, furious with hunger, attacked his head and attempted to get at his brain. . The king tore them away. But he soon saw with horror that they had become part of himself, and that in wounding them he was lacerating his own flesh." Such is the deplorable condition of every victim of appetite and lust.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

First, thy duty is to be temperate as to the *quantity* of thy diet. . . . God gave man food to further, not to hinder him in his general and particular calling, and surely they sin who feed till, like fatted horses, they are unfit for service. . . . Christians may cheer nature, but they must not clog it. It is a great privilege in the charter granted us by the King of Kings, that we should have dominion over the creatures; but it will be a sordid bondage if we suffer them to have dominion over us. Socrates was wont to say, that evil men live that they may eat and drink, but good men eat and drink that they may live. . . . Secondly, thy duty is to be temperate as to the *quality* of thy diet. Though no certain quality of food can be set down, yet in general this must be observed, that we make not provision for the flesh. (Rom. xiii. 12.) We may preserve the flesh, but we must not provide for the flesh. Our enemy is strong enough already, we need not put more weapons into his hands. . . . The Christian may take his food, but his food must not take him. . . . It is not unlawful to eat dainties, but it is unlawful to set the mind upon them. . . . We may eat and digest dainties, but we may not crave and desire dainties. God made man not for fleshly dainties, but for spiritual delights. . . . Elijah could be content with a raven for his cook. Daniel fed and thrived upon pulse: he looked fairer by it than those that did eat the king's fare. Brown bread and the gospel are good cheer, said the martyr. John the Baptist could live upon locusts and wild honey. The apostles had some ears of corn for a Sabbath-day's dinner. Though God is pleased out of mercy to afford us better provision, yet our work must be to mind moderation.—*Swinnock.*

It is of the Lord that hunger is painful and food gives pleasure; between these two lines of defence the Creator has placed life with a view to its preservation. The due sustenance of the body is the Creator's end; the pleasantness of food is the means of obtaining it. When men prosecute and cultivate that pleasure as an end, they thwart the very purposes of Providence.—*Arnot.*

(It will be seen that the following comment is based on Miller's rendering. See Critical Notes.) Kings like to see their guests eat. At the very utmost, this part of our behaviour is a matter of indifference. But of God nothing could be more exact. We are all eating with Him; in fact, feeding upon Him; as though He were Himself bread. "*Forasmuch,*" therefore, is just in place. "*Discerning well who is before thee,*" that also, is perfectly consistent. And then our sin, what is that? Why, fleshly appetite! What is innocent at courts is idolatry in the banquet to the skies. . . . Serving the creature more than the Creator, Paul expresses it; and gives us ample analogy after a New Testament kind (Rom. i. 25, see also James iv. 3), for understanding how we *have put a knife to our throat, if we be men given to appetite.—Miller.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSES 4 and 5.

The Deceitfulness of Riches.

In order to get the true meaning of this proverb it is necessary to define what Solomon understands by labouring to be rich. We call the possessor of vast estates or a large account at the bank a rich man, and so he is, if he lives within his income, paying his way and having a surplus to bestow upon the needy. But so is the village smith, who with less than a hundredth part of the income of the nobleman or merchant prince "looks the whole world in the face

and owes not any man." Riches and poverty are but relative terms, and when we consider how indispensable it is that some men should possess more than a mere sufficiency for their personal needs, we may be sure that the wise man did not mean to discourage all effort to gain even more than enough for our daily needs. But the *labour* which is here forbidden is evidently that all-absorbing pursuit of wealth which engrosses the entire man to the exclusion of higher claims. When men make gold their god instead of their servant it is obvious that the boundary line of lawful pursuit is passed, and that deprecated in the proverb is entered upon. The text—

I. Condemns all following after wealth under the inspiration of the natural heart. Man's "*own wisdom*" is an insufficient and dangerous guide in this matter as in all others. The unrenewed heart of man is selfish and sordid, prone to think only of its own desires and to set up a false standard of happiness. Only the wisdom that cometh from above can show men what is worth striving after, what will really bless the present and afford satisfaction in the future. If a man buys and sells and gets gain with a constant reference to the will of God, and in dependence upon Him, he will not *labour* to be rich—in other words, he will, with Paul, *learn in whatsoever state he is to be content*, and will know how to fulfil the duties which come with abundance and how to exhibit the graces which can only be manifested in poverty.

II. Teaches that only those who do not trust in riches can really enjoy their possession, or escape bitter sorrow in their loss. Every rich man knows that it is possible that his wealth may leave him, and that it is certain that he must leave his wealth. The uncertainty of retaining them through life, and the certainty of losing them at death, are two thorns which must be found in the pillow of everyone who makes riches the chief good of his existence, and must surely deprive him of any heartfelt satisfaction from their possession. The soul of man is made for something higher and more lasting than any earthly good, and of all that men call good, and esteem precious, there is nothing which has less to satisfy the cravings of the soul than mere material wealth, or that is more easily and quickly lost. The only way, therefore, to get any present satisfaction in it, and to ensure oneself against future disappointment from it, is to follow the Apostolic injunction, and "*trust not in uncertain riches, but in the living God.*" (1 Tim. vi. 17.)

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Not like a tame bird, that returns; nor like a hawk, that will show where she is by her bells; but like an eagle, whose wings thou canst neither clip nor pinion. All their certainty is in their uncertainty, and they are only stable in this, that they cannot be stable . . . . Wealth is like a bird; it hops all day from man to man, as that doth from tree to tree; and none can say where it will roost or rest at night. It is like a vagrant fellow, which, because he is big-boned, and able to work, a man taketh in a-doors, and cherisheth; and perhaps for a while he takes pains; but when he spies opportunity the fugitive servant is gone, and takes away more with him than all his service came to.—*T. Adams.*

What a startling interdict this! What an immense proportion of the world's toil, and especially in such a community as our own, does it bring under condemnation and proscription! Were all the labour directed to this forbidden end to cease,—How little would be left!—what a sudden stagnation would there be of the turmoil of busy activity with which we are daily surrounded! What are the great majority of men about,—in our city and in our country? What keeps them all astir? What is the prevailing impulse of all the incessant bustle and

eager competition of our teeming population? Are not all,—with a wider or a narrower estimate of what riches mean,—"labouring to be *rich?*"—The love of fame has been called the universal passion. Is not the love of money quite as much, if not more, entitled to the designation? Yes; and many a time does the *wisdom* of the world set itself to the defence of the world's toil and the world's aim—alleging many plausible, and some more than plausible, things in its pleadings. "Riches," say they, "keep a man and his family from dependence. Riches enable a man to enjoy many comforts that are in themselves lawful and desirable. Riches procure a man distinction and influence in society. By this and other means, riches put it in a man's power to do good:—why should we *not* 'labour to be rich?'" It is all true; and the plea is in part quite legitimate. Yet Solomon, by the Spirit, with the authority, and in the kindness of God, enjoins—"labour *not* to be rich."—*Wardlaw.*

It were a most strange folly to fall passionately in love with a bird upon the wing .... How much better were it, since riches will fly, for thyself to direct their flight towards heaven, by relieving the necessitous servants and members of Jesus Christ.—*Bishop Hopkins.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 6-8.

Feigned Generosity.

I. Men's inward life and feelings are often directly opposed to their outward life and actions. A man is here pictured as manifesting a large hospitality. His board is laden with dainty meats and surrounded with guests whom he presses to eat and drink with such an appearance of goodwill that it seems ungenerous to suspect him of insincerity. But words and even deeds do not always proclaim the man. "As he thinketh in his heart, so is he;" and this man's thoughts give the lie to his actions. He gives of his good things from no desire to cheer and relieve those who are poorer than himself, or to cement the bonds of friendship with his equals, but from some unworthy, and, it may be, from some base motive. He puts on for the time the garment of benevolence, but he is a "wolf in sheep's clothing," and will not hesitate to throw off his disguise, if the selfish ends which he has in view demand it. It is painful for us to be obliged to admit the truthfulness of the portrait here sketched by the Wise Man, but we know that it is not an exaggerated one.

II. Those who encourage such hypocrisy will meet with a well-deserved punishment. It is taken for granted, and it is undoubtedly true, that there is a false gloss upon such feigned generosity which makes it easy to distinguish from the real thing. And, if we accept the hospitality of such a man knowing it to be a deception, we too practise hypocrisy, and thus become a partaker of his evil deeds. Such a man is guilty of two heinous sins, he is first a covetous and self-seeking sinner and then he is a gross hypocrite. The covetous man is according to the Inspired Book an idolator (Col. iii. 5), and our Lord when on earth could endure without anger all contradiction of sinners against Himself (Heb. xii. 3) except hypocrisy. This always set His holy nature on fire with indignation and called forth the only Woes that ever passed His lips. It was forbidden to the apostolic churches to sit at the table of any man who, "calling himself a *brother*," was yet *covetous or an idolator*" (1 Cor. v. 11). For such a man was under a far deeper condemnation than one who openly manifested his real character, seeing that he added to his other sins that of professing to be what he was not, and to *eat* with such a man was not only to countenance his covetousness and idolatry but to share his hypocrisy. The Old Testament

preacher here issues the same prohibition and obviously for the same reasons, and if men disregard them they fully deserve the negative and the positive punishment with which they are here threatened. All the friendly words which they utter to save appearances and to further selfish interests, and which convict *them* in *their* turn of hypocrisy, will be "*lost*," and bitter regret and self-condemnation will be their final portion.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

The injunction, or dissuasion, I need not surely say, is by no means intended to give any licence or encouragement to a spirit of pride or disdain. No. It is only a salutary warning to be cautious of bringing yourselves under obligation to any selfish and hypocritical dissembler of kindness, who only wishes to lay you under such obligation to serve purposes of his own. The man who has thus entertained you will boast of his hospitality; tell others of it, making the most of it for his own behoof; set it down against you, debiting you on account of it with certain expected good turns at your hand, when he comes to need them. He will throw it up *to* you, should you not do all he looks for; or rail *at* you to others for ingratitude and meanness in forgetting his kindness. He will remind you of it again and again, with vexatious importunity,—teazing you for your favour and influence in some object he has in view for himself or his family. It is amazing what an amount of expectation a man of this sordid and selfish disposition will found upon *a dinner!* Your having sat at *his* table, eaten of *his* dainties, and drunk of *his* wines, is price enough even for your conscience itself. Beware of him. Keep yourself free.—*Wardlaw.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 9.

The Morally Incurable.

I. A man may become morally incurable by human instructors. There are cases of bodily disease which it would be quite useless for the most skilful physician to attempt to cure; such an attempt would only be a throwing away of time and energy on his part which might be usefully employed upon another patient. And so there is at least one form of moral disease which is beyond the reach of human effort. It is that of the man who scoffs at everything, and upon whom, therefore, the most affectionate entreaties and the most solemn warnings are thrown away.

II. To offer to such an incurable fool the wisdom of God is to break a Divine commandment. The Redeemer Himself, under the Gospel dispensation, issued such a prohibition. Even among the beneficent utterances of the Sermon on the Mount comes the command, "*Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.*" (Matt. vii. 6.) Although Christ and His disciples were sent forth to proclaim the Gospel message among men who, on account of their bitter animosity to Him and to His teachings were compared to "*wolves*" (Luke x. 3.), there were others in a far more hopeless condition before whom they were forbidden to place the great truths of the kingdom of God, and they were such characters as the fool of this proverb, who would have "*despised the wisdom of their words.*" The deep import of the words of Solomon are fully seen when we consider the even more startling utterance of Him who loved and died for all men.

III. There is Divine compassion for the sinner in this commandment. To

offer to such a man what he would scoff at, would be to give him an occasion of increasing his own guilt by a new refusal of Divine truth. Mercy, therefore, is mingled with the stern judgment of the prohibition.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

We often speak of retribution as if it always lay beyond the grave, and the day of grace as extending through the whole life of man; but such is not the fact. Retribution begins with many men here. The day of grace terminates with many men before the day of death. There are those who reach an unconvertible state, their characters are stereotyped and fixed as eternity. The things that belong to their peace are hid from their eyes They are incorrigible. Such is the character referred to in the text.—*Dr. David Thomas.*

Those that are reproved by ministers, and Christian friends may learn from this verse that they have no reason to take it amiss, or to think that they are treated with contempt. They are considered as offenders, but at the same time as offending brethren, who are not incurably perverse. They would be treated in a very different way, and might reckon themselves with more justice to be considered in the light of scorners, and dogs, and swine if there were no means used to recover them to repentance.—*Lawson.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSES 10 and 11.

The Rights of Private Property.

I. In the community formed under Divine direction there was a possession of personal and private property. When the land of Canaan was first divided among the tribes, it is evident that each family had its respective allotment, the boundaries of which were clearly defined. (See Deut. xix. 14, etc.) Each head of a family became, therefore, a possessor of property, to which no other person, not even the king in the days of the monarchy, had any right. (See 1 Kings, xxi. 1-3.) This kingdom, therefore, formed under direct Divine supervision, was not governed on communistic principles; each man had his own inheritance, which became more or less valuable according to the industry and skill expended upon it. Social inequalities must have resulted from this arrangement, which were prevented from becoming too great by the arrangements connected with the year of jubilee, but which within certain limits were evidently not regarded by God as opposed to the welfare of His chosen people. We may infer, then, that the idea that it would be better for mankind if all things were possessed in common—if no man had anything which he could call his own—is not a Divine idea, and is a mistaken one.

II. Those who are too helpless to protect their own rights are especially under the protection of God. The depravity of human nature is seen in the almost universal tendency displayed by the strong to forget the claims of the weak; but when this tendency is carried to the length of wronging the widow and the fatherless, it seems as if a man had sunk to the lowest depths of moral degradation. Yet there were such specimens of fallen humanity in the commonwealth established and governed by God Himself, as there are in nominally Christian England. But, from the earliest days of Jewish history, God declared Himself to be the Guardian of the widow and the fatherless, and the field which was their inheritance might have been well called *God's Acre*, from which all intruders were warned off by Divine command and threatening. This is a truth which it may be well for all those to lay to heart who hold property in trust

for such dependent ones, or who have any other responsibility in relation to them. It is surely a comforting thought for the fatherless themselves that the place of the earthly parent is taken by One whose power as much exceeds all human power as His love goes beyond all human love.

ILLUSTRATION.

The state of Palestine with regard to enclosures is very much the same now as it has always been. Though gardens and vineyards are surrounded by dry stone walls or hedges of prickly pear, the boundaries of arable fields are marked by nothing but a little trench, a small cairn, or a single erect stone placed at certain intervals. It is manifest that a dishonest person could easily fill the gutter with earth, or remove these stones a few feet without much risk of detection and thus enlarge his own field by a stealthy encroachment on his neighbour's.—*Dr. Jamieson.*

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

The words in the first clause of the verse have been sometimes applied in a very different department—even to the danger and the criminality of intermeddling with old and long established articles of doctrine in religion, and principles and statutes of civil polity. . . . . It is clear, however, that there can be no period of prescription for truth,—or rather for falsehood,—no length of time, that is, by which error that has passed for truth can become anything else than error. No time can transmute wrong into right. Changes, no doubt, should be made with caution. The longer anything has been received as a truth, the improbability of its being found an error becomes ever the greater. But if any dogma in any human system of Christian doctrine is proved, from a full and careful investigation of the word of God, to have been set down and held as a truth by mistake,—it would be a most strange and mischievous attachment to antiquity for its own sake, that would resist its being expunged and the truth discovered substituted in its room. Never must we forget, that the most ancient landmarks of truth and duty are those which have been fixed *here*—in the Bible—by the hands of prophets, apostles, and evangelists, under the immediate direction of the "Spirit of the Lord." There are none so old as these. From the Bible human standards have been formed. *Their* landmarks profess to be in agreement, in the bounding lines of truth and error marked out by them, with those which are set down there. But when, on a careful survey, any of them are found to have been misplaced, and to bring any part of the region of error within the boundary of the territory of truth,—their removal becomes a duty of imperative obligation.—*Wardlaw.*

The word for *redeemer* signifies the man who was "*next of kin*," the *kinsman* on whom, by the law of Moses, it was incumbent as a matter of duty, and with whom too it was a matter of interest, to look after the concerns of his poor relations; with whom lay indeed the avenging of their blood, if in any case their life should, in cruel selfishness, be taken away. It was on the principle of that statute that Boaz called upon the next of kin to come forward and redeem the inheritance of Elimelech at the hand of Naomi, and that, upon his hearing the conditions and declining, he did it himself. Now he who happened to be the *redeeming kinsman* might himself be poor, and powerless, and without either means or influence. But they should not, on that account, be unprotected and unbefriended. Jehovah himself would take the place of their kinsman—would "*plead their cause*," would maintain their rights, would redress their wrongs, would bring His power to bear against their oppressors. *He* would fulfil for them the part of their near relation: and he is "*mighty*."

Hear his words:—"Ye shall not afflict any widow, or fatherless child. If thou afflict them in any wise, and they cry at all unto me, I will surely hear their cry; and my wrath shall wax hot, and I will kill you with the sword; and your wives shall be widows, and your children fatherless." (Exod. xxii. 22-24.) These, you may think, are Old Testament threatenings, belonging to a judicial law that has passed away; or, more properly, they belong to the special *theocracy*, being strictly no part of the judicial law, inasmuch as they do not prescribe any punishment to be inflicted by the hand of man, but announce what Jehovah himself would, by his own interposition, execute. Be it so. But think you that the character of God has changed? Such assurances and threatenings are not mere warnings of punishment; they are *expressions of character.*—*Wardlaw.*

Adored be the unsearchable pity, grace, and condescension of Emmanuel! When He could not redeem as God, He became our kinsman, that He might be our Redeemer! (Heb. ii. 14-16.)—*Bridges.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 12-28.

Parental Duties and Parental Joys.

This paragraph contains no subject upon which Solomon has not dwelt before, but their repetition shows the great importance which he attached to them.

I. **He repeats the truth that corporeal punishment is a necessary and salutary element of parental training.** (See Homiletics on chap. xiii. 24, page 234, and on chap. xix. 18, page 573.)

II. **He shows by example that appeals are also to be made to the higher and better nature of the child.** Although the rod is to have its place, it is not to be the only force employed—a child is a reasoning and loving creature, and that training will miserably fail which does not take this fact into account. And in proportion as the child grows in years will the rod become less needful and effectual, and wise warning and loving entreaty will take its place. He is here besought to "give his heart to wisdom" and to live "in the fear of Jehovah"—1. *Because of the exceeding joy that he will bring to his parents.* (See verses 15, 24, and 25.) This is a thought that cannot fail to have weight with any son or daughter of good parents who is capable of grateful emotion. The consideration of the tender love and the unwearying patience that have surrounded them from their birth, and of the power that now lies in their hand to requite that long ministry of tenderness and long suffering, ought to be a powerful motive to dissuade from the evil path and to allure into the good way. And it has been and ever will be, for many a child of godly parents has been kept in the hour of temptation by the remembrance of his father or his mother, even when he has not thought upon his God. (See also Homiletics on chap. x. 1, page 137.) 2. *Because of the temporal ruin of an opposite course.* (See verses 21, 27, and 28.) All these subjects have been considered before. (See Homiletics on chap. xxi. 17, page 609, and on chap. vi. 6–11, page 79, and on chap. vi. 24, page 89.) 3. *Because of the rewards and punishments of the life to come.* (See verse 18.) This verse (see Critical Notes) undoubtedly refers to the day of death and to the life beyond it, as do also chaps. xi. 7, and xiv. 32. (See Homiletics on pages 201 and 391.)

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Verse 13. The command is framed upon the supposition that parents often fail on the side of tenderness; the word is given to nerve them for a difficult duty. There is no ambiguity in the precept; both the need of correc-

tion, and the tremendous issues that depend on it, are expressed with thrilling precision of language.—*Arnot.*

Verse 15, 16. Now the proverb personates the father, and, instead of a roundabout speech, utters the temper that should inspire the beating. There will be no good unless the father shows the son that it will be his highest joy, if the son learns wisdom. If thou be really "*wise.*" That is the caution of the first clause. If it be no sham thing, but an affair of the "*heart;*" then "*my heart shall rejoice,*" down in the same depths. And then, as men are great actors, and may *look* virtue as they whip a child, when they do not feel it much, Solomon protests that it must be real. Each part of this sentence must be meant. Not,—Thou must be a good citizen, or a clever worker, or a moral actor, or a good gratifying son; but the boy must see, (and he surely will see it, if it is felt), that the yearning is that he become *wise in heart, i.e.*, a good earnest Christian, and then on the other hand, that down in the same depths, not with outward expressions of pleasure, but in your very heart—not in your made-up heart, which you keep to show to others, but *in your very self*—the proverb echoes your feeling, "*My heart shall rejoice, even mine.*" The reduplication intensifies the sense. And then, unwilling to shake loose from the thought, he pushes it further. "*Yea my reins shall rejoice.*" That deepest, firmest, lastingest receptacle of joy, the patient *reins* shall rejoice or "*exult*"—the very highest feeling coming from the deepest depths. "*When thy lips,*" which are the best expounders of the heart, "*speak right things.*" The doctrine therefore is that a man will save his child if he disciplines him with these witnessed tokens of his manifest affection.—*Miller.*

Verse 17. This habitual *fear of the Lord* is nothing separate from common life. It gives to it a holy character. It makes all its minute details not only consistent with, but component parts of, godliness. Acts of kindliness are "done after a godly sort." (John iii. 5, 6.) Instead of one duty thrusting out another, all are "done heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto man." (Eph. vi. 6. Col. iii. 23.) Some professors confine their religion to extraordinary occasions. But Elijah seems to have been content to await his translation in his ordinary course of work. (2 Kings, ii. 1-12.) An example that may teach us to lay the greater stress upon the daily and habitual, not the extraordinary, service. Others are satisfied with a periodical religion; as if it was rather a rapture or an occasional impulse, than a habit. But if we are to engage in morning and evening devotions, we are also to "wait upon the Lord *all the day.*" (Ps. xxv. 5.) If we are to enjoy our Sabbath privileges, we are also to "abide in our weekly calling with God." Thus the character of a servant of God is maintained—"devoted to His fear." (Ps. cxix. 38.)—*Bridges.*

Verse 18. "*Cut off,*" as the worldling's is." The worldling expects to be *cut off.* He toils with a hope, and that so vivid that he becomes aglow (see Miller's rendering, in verse 17) in worldly earnestness of purpose; and yet, *ab imo,* he knows that it will be *cut off* . . . . How can any intellect stand against such appeals? Work for something that will pay, for . . . . there is something that shall never be "*cut off.*"—*Miller.*

Verse 19. The hinging pivot of this verse is the pronoun *thou.* Friends may do ever so much, but in the end it must be *thyself.* There is an eternal "*way.*" It is a way not for the feet but for the *heart.* The *heart* has some day to rise up and enter it. Once in, it will never wander any more out. *My son,* take that critical step. A man has a certain amount of strength, a certain amount of susceptibility let us call it, in matters of conversion. . . . Now the father, in his more immediate entreaties to his child, is to remember this.—*Miller.*

Verse 20. A man grows old by the common use of his faculties; but if he pleases he can travel faster. He can make drafts upon his flesh with wine, and burn faster. . . . A man can seek death by the most moral impenitence. But he can also travel faster. He can do it by drunkenness. He can do it by trains of trespasses, of which common drunkenness may stand as chief.—*Miller.*

We are forbidden not only to be drunkards or gluttons, but to be found in the company of such persons; for bad company is the common temptation which the devil uses to draw men to these sins. Those who have been long inured to a temperate course of life must not think that they are at liberty to infringe this precept, and to mingle themselves with the sons of riot, because they are strong enough in their own eye to overcome all the temptations of sensuality. Christ charges His own disciples, who had been practised in every virtue under his own eye, and who had less temptations to this vice than any other men, to take heed to themselves that their hearts might not be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness.—*Lawson.*

Verse 23. Solomon bids us buy the truth, but does not tell us what it must cost, because we must get it though it be ever so dear. We must love it both shining and scorching. Every parcel of truth is precious as filings of gold; we must either live with it or die for it. . . . A man may lawfully sell his house, land, or jewels, but truth is a jewel that excels all prices, and must not be sold; it is our heritage: "Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage for ever" (Psa. cxix. 111). It is a legacy that our forefathers have bought with their bloods, which should make us willing to lay down anything or lay out anything to purchase it.—*Brooks.*

A merchant buys for the very purpose of selling; and he will not buy unless he has a pretty good assurance that he will sell *at a profit;* that he can *get* for his article more than he has *given.* The case here, then, is quite peculiar. It is *all buying.* The article is one which is to be *bought* but never *sold.* And why? For the best possible reason, that *it can never* be sold at a profit, there is nothing *too valuable* to be *given* for it, there is nothing *valuable enough* to be *taken* for it. . . . **1.** The buyer tests his article. He uses means to ascertain its *genuineness.* . . . The cautious purchaser makes sure of his bargain, and all the surer, the higher the price. . . . . Now, all that is presented to us as *truth* must be thus tested. In *physical science* scientific men will not take upon trust what professes to be a new discovery without examining thoroughly the experiments by which it is said to have been ascertained. . . . Thus, too, does the metaphysician in regard to every new theory in *mental* science; and the moral philosopher in the department of ethics . . . . . Now, we are as far as possible from wishing it to be otherwise in the department of *religion.* In proportion to the importance of the case,—to the height of the authority on which the claims to acceptance are rested,—the magnitude at once of the benefits promised, and of the risks incurred,—ought to be the solicitude and care with which the testing process is conducted. This then is the last department of all, in which what professes to be truth should be taken upon trust; in which inquiry should be careless, and faith easy. The obligation to examine is imperative and solemn; and marvellous, indeed, is the indisposition of men to enter on the investigation. Men who, with the utmost earnestness and perseverance, will test every alleged truth in science, in history, or in politics, cannot be persuaded to apply their powers to an inquiry more important, by infinite degrees, than any other that can engage the attention of the human mind! They either decline it altogether, or they set about it with a levity and a superficiality utterly at variance with what such a question demands, and from which no just appreciation or correct conclusion can be anticipated.

2. It is not enough for the buyer to ascertain the *genuineness* of his article. He sets about estimating its real worth; its worth *intrinsically*, and its worth *adventitiously*; its worth *in itself*, and its worth *to him*. The two may be widely different. The diamond is of incomparably more intrinsic worth than the grain of barley; but the cock in the fable spurned away the former and picked up the latter. In the present case,—having once ascertained the divine authority of the record,—there can be no hesitation about either the *intrinsic* or the *relative* value of what it makes known. *All truth* is precious; but its preciousness is, of course, endlessly varied in degree. Two things may be considered as combining to constitute its value. These are—its *subject*, and its *utility*. In natural science some truths present a union of both. The discoveries of astronomy for example, are, many of them, full of intrinsic interest from their vastness and sublimity, and the impressions they give of the transcendent majesty of God; while, in some of their practical bearings, they are of pre-eminent advantage to men. But in a peculiar sense may this be affirmed of the discoveries of divine revelation. These discoveries present views of God's moral government, in its great essential principles and in their practical application, such as have in them a weight of moral grandeur, and a consequent depth of absorbing interest surpassing all that nature can disclose. And, while they possess intrinsic preciousness above all other truths,—think of their value when estimated by the blessings which are unfolded in them, and to which the faith of them introduces the believer, in time and in eternity! The purchaser values the article he is about to purchase, by the amount of benefit the possession of it will bring him. In like manner must you estimate the value of "the truth" you are here counselled to buy. The value of it, in this view, is summed up by our Lord himself, when he says, "THIS IS LIFE ETERNAL." What then, the real worth to you, of any other compared with this? 3. The buyer, when he has estimated the value of his article, *makes proportional sacrifices* to obtain possession of it. Foolish estimates there may be; and these foolish estimates may be the occasion of foolish bargains; and these may be the grounds of regret and self-dissatisfaction. But supposing the certainty of all the benefits, for time and eternity, which in the Bible are promised and guaranteed in connection with "*the truth*," O! what is there, in the whole compass of what this world can confer, that should not, without one moment's hesitation, be sacrificed for its attainment? 4. In proportion to the buyer's estimate of his article, and the cost at which he has obtained it, will be the jealousy with which he retains and guards it. "*Sell it not.*" Selling the truth, is not simply letting slip from the mind the remembrance of mere abstractions; it is to give up the profession and faith of it for the sake of the very things which we sacrificed for it. But "*sell it not.*" Sell it not for the *pleasures of sin*. Sell it not for the *riches and honours of the world*. O part not with the pearl of great price for the husks which the swine do eat . . . . And *be prompt with your bargain*. Those who are much set upon an article will not delay their purchase, lest perchance it should pass from their hands. Blessed be God there is no danger here, so far as others coming forward before you is concerned . . . . But if not now prompt and decided you may be thwarted in another way. Death may decide the matter for you.—*Wardlaw*.

Verse 26. A supplication is come, as it were, from God to man, that man would send God his heart; penned by Solomon under the name of wisdom (chap. ix. 1), and directed to her sons . . . He which always gave, now craves; and he which craves always, now gives. Christ stands at the door like a poor man, and asks not bread, nor clothes, nor lodgings, which we should give to His members, but our heart—that is,

even the continent of all, and governor of man's house .... Should God be a suppliant unto thee and me, but that our unthankfulness condemns us, that for all the things which He hath given unto us, we never considered yet what we should give unto Him before He asketh .... Mark what God hath chosen for Himself: not that which any other should lose by, like the demands of them which care for none but themselves, but that which, being given to God, moves us to give every man his due .... Give God thy heart, that He may keep it; not a piece of thy heart, not a room in thy heart, but thy heart. The heart divided, dieth. God is not like the mother which would have the child divided, but like the natural mother which said, Rather than it should be divided, let her take it all. Let the devil have all, if He which gave it be not worthy of it. .... As a man considers what he does when he gives, so God licenseth us to consider of that which we do for Him, whether He deserves it, whether we owe it, whether He can require it, lest it come against our will; therefore *give* Me, saith God, as though He would not strain upon us, or take it from us. .... Is God so desirous of my heart? What good can my heart do to God? It is not worthy to come under His roof. I would I had a better gift to send unto my Lord; go, my heart, to thy Maker; the Bridegroom hath sent for thee, put on thy wedding garment, for the King Himself will marry thee. Who is not sorry now that he did not give his heart before? Is he not worthy to die that will take his heart from Him that made it, from Him that redeemed it, from Him which preserves it from Him that will glorify it, and gives it to him that will infect it, torment it, condemn it? Will a servant reach the cup to a stranger when his master calls for it? Or will a man sell his coat if he have no more? What dost thou reserve for God, when thou hast given Satan thine heart? Christ hath promised to come and dwell with thee (Rev. iii. 20); where shall He stay, where shall He dine, if the chamber be taken up, and the heart let forth to another? Thou art but a tenant, and yet thou takest His house over his head, and placest in it whom thou wilt, as if thou wert landlord.—*Henry Smith.*

I. Man has *nothing higher* to dispose of. His heart is given when he sets his strongest affections upon an object. Wherever he centres his strongest love his heart is, and wherever his heart is, *he* is .... II. Man *is compelled* to dispose of it. He is forced, not by any outward coercion, but by an inward pressure. It is as necessary for the soul to love as it is to the body to breathe. The deepest of all the deed hungers of humanity is the hunger of the soul to love. Sometimes so ravenous does man's animal appetite for food become, that he will devour with a kind of relish the most loathsome things; and so voracious is the heart for some object to love, that it will settle down upon the lowest and most contemptible creatures rather than not love at all. III. Man *alone can dispose* of it. No one can take it from his by force. He is the only priest who can present it.—*Dr. David Thomas.*

Verse 28. Uncleanness leads to faithlessness of manifold kinds; and it makes not only the husband unfaithful to the wife, but also the son to the parents, the scholar to the teacher and pastor, the servant to the master. The adulteress, inasmuch as she entices now one and now another into her net, increases the number of those who are faithless towards men. But are they not, above all, faithless towards God? *Delitzsch.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 29-35.

THE DRUNKARD'S PICTURE.

I. The drunkard is an entire inversion of man as God intended him to be. God made man's mind to rule his body, but the drunkard's bodily appetites rule his mind. God gave man an intellect to guide his actions; He intended the various limbs of his body to be the servants of his will, and to obey the dictates of his reason. But the drunkard not only gives up all his spiritual and intellectual power to his body, but all his other bodily powers to the rule of one sense—that of his palate. Men who are not awake to their spiritual and mental needs might be expected to have as much regard for their animal wants, and to be as careful to avoid bodily suffering as the brute creation. But it is not so with the drunkard—although nights and days of privation and suffering are often the fruits of an hour's drinking, he voluntarily undergoes the former in order to enjoy the latter. Not only is conscience and reason and heart sacrificed to his mouth, but every other bodily sense is made to serve the one sense and every other part of the body to suffer, that one part may be gratified if but for a moment.

II. He is an entire inversion of what we might expect even a fallen man to be. Looking at man as he is when he lives for this world only, he is generally alive to his own immediate temporal interests and careful to avoid in the future what has brought him suffering in the past. But it is not so with the slave to drink. If only wife and children had to lead lives of misery and his own life was a constant round of even animal enjoyment, the drunkard's career would not be such an unaccountable infatuation. Human selfishness would be sufficient to account for it. But who suffers like the drunkard himself? The wise man enumerates some of his miseries—*woe, grief, contentions and wounds without cause, the stings of remorse, the disordered brain, and entire loss of consciousness and of power to defend one's own life and property*—this is the drunkard's heritage. And in the intervals between his madness he knows it and drinks to the dregs the bitter cup of bodily and mental misery that must always follow the immoderate use of the wine cup. And yet his language is "*I will seek it yet again.*" The child that has been burnt dreads the fire, but the poor drunkard scarred from head to foot with the marks of the flames, seems with all his other losses to have lost also the natural instinct of self-preservation and the power of learning anything from the great teacher—experience.

III. A consideration of the strength and nature of the drunkard's chain should lead all to shun that which enslaved him. When we consider what havoc intoxicating drink has wrought, it is marvellous that men do not turn from it with loathing; that they are not afraid to play with so deadly, and yet so treacherous an enemy to mankind. When the sailor knows that there is a treacherous whirlpool in the ocean, which has engulfed a thousand noble vessels, he is careful to give it a wide berth, to keep far beyond the outermost ring of the current. But the habit of men in general seems to be to try how near they can come to this moral and social gulf of death, without being drawn beneath the waters. The experiment is fraught with deadly peril, and is often a fatal one. Solomon's advice is to ensure safety, by not even "*looking upon the wine when it is red.*"

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

There is mention made of a monk at Prague, who having heard at shrift the confessions of many drunkards, wondered at it, and for experiment would try his brain with this sin, and accordingly stole himself drunk. Now,

after the vexation of three sick days, to all that confessed that sin he enjoined no other penance than this: "Go and be drunk again." Surely his meaning was like that of Seneca, that drunkenness was a torment and affliction to itself.—*Spencer.*

Drunkenness is a special water at the devil's banquet. This sin is a horrible self-theft . . . Thieves cannot steal lands, unless they be Westminster Hall thieves, crafty contenders that eat out a true title with a false evidence; but the drunkard robs himself of his lands. Now he dissolves an acre, and then an acre, into the pot, till he hath ground all his ground at the malt quern, and run all his patrimony through his throat. Thus he makes himself the living tomb of his forefathers—of his posterity. He needs not trouble his sick mind with a will, or distrust the fidelity of executors.—*T. Adams.*

Verse 29. The best that can come of drunkenness is repentance—that fairest daughter of so foul a mother—and that is not without its woe, and alas! its sorrow and redness of eyes with weeping for sin.—*Trapp.*

Verse 31. He that would avoid the commission of sin must avoid the occasion of sin. If we would not fall down the hill we must beware of coming near the brow of it. Keep thee far from an evil matter. When the wine laughs in thy face then shut thine eyes lest it steal into thine heart. A guest may easily be kept out of the house at first, but if once entertained it is hard to turn him out of doors. When the governor of a fort once comes to parley with the enemy that besiegeth him there is great fear that the place will be surrendered.—*Swinnock.*

Verse 33. One remarkable peculiarity of this chapter is the junction and alternation of these two kindred sins. There they stand, like two plants of death, each growing on its own independent root, and nourished by the same soil, but cleaving close to each other by congeniality of nature, and twisted round each other for mutual support. . . The alliance, so generally formed and so firmly maintained between drunkenness and licentiousness, is a master-stroke of Satan's policy. It is when men have looked upon the deceitful cup, and received into their blood the poison of its sting, that their eyes behold "strange women;" and when they have fallen into that "narrow pit," they run back to hide their shame, at least from themselves, in the maddening draught.—*Arnot.*

Verse 34. The passage is interesting, as showing what Ps. civ. 25, 26, cvii. 23-30, also show, the increased familiarity of the Israelites with a sea life.—*Plumptre.*

It is very foul weather in which a drunkard saileth. For as St. Ambrose speaketh, the multitude of lusts in him do raise a great tempest, which toss his mind to and fro, sailing as it were in the narrow sea of his body, so that he cannot be pilot to itself. . . . But that which maketh the drunkard's case worst of all is this: it is a shipwreck of the body only which in a tempest is feared, but he maketh shipwreck of his soul if repentance be not a plank of safety to him.—*Jermin.*

CHAPTER XXIV.

CRITICAL NOTES.—**5. A man of knowledge,** rather "*a man of understanding,*" **increaseth strength,** literally "*maketh power strong.*" Miller translates the entire verse thus:—"*A strong man, if wise, is as a power indeed; and a man of knowledge makes strength really strong.*" **7. Wisdom is too high,** etc. Delitzsch here reads, *Wisdom seems to the fool to be an ornamental commodity,* and thinks "the comparison lies in the rarity, costliness, and unattainableness of wisdom." "The word," says Miller, "occurs but three times in the Bible; once in Job xxviii. 18, translated *coral;* once in Ezekiel xxvii. 16, translated *coral* and agate; and once in this passage, where it ought to be translated *coral* again." Some, from this rendering, understand the verse to signify that the fool uses wisdom like a precious stone, only for ornament. **8. Mischievous person,** literally *a master or lord of mischief.* **9. The thought,** etc., rather, "the *device* or *undertaking.*" **10. If thou faint,** etc., rather "*If thou hast been straitened in the day of straitness, strait is thy strength.*" "The principle," says Dr. Aitken, "is familiar enough, that courage and hopefulness is half a man's strength." **11.** Literally, "*Deliver them who are dragged forth* unto *death, and them that totter to the slaughter, oh, rescue them.*" **12. He that pondereth,** literally, *the Weigher of hearts.* **He that keepeth,** rather "*watcheth.*" **14. There shall be a reward,** rather, "*there is a future,*" as in chap. xxiii. 18. **16. The wicked shall fall.** Delitzsch reads, "*the wicked are overthrown when calamity falls on them, i.e.,* they do not rise again and again as the just man does. **20. Reward.** The same word used in verse 14, and in chap. xxiii. 18. Its literal meaning is "a hereafter." Zöckler translates it *end* in the first two instances, but in this case he reads *future.* Delitzsch and Miller render it *hereafter* or *future* in every verse. **21. Given to change,** literally *otherwise disposed,* or, according to Miller, *repeaters, turners back.* **22. The ruin of them both,** etc. This phrase is variously rendered, and different meanings are also attached to the same rendering. Delitzsch follows the Syriac version, and reads, "*the end of their years, who knoweth it?*" But Zöckler adopts the reading of the Authorised version, which is supported by the Vulgate, by Luther, Ewald, Elster, and others. Some understand the word *both* to refer to those who rebel against God, and those who rebel against the king (so Zöckler), while others apply it to God and the king, and the *ruin* foretold as that proceeding from them. Here begins a short appendix to the third main division of the book of Proverbs, the first clause of verse 33 being its superscription, which is almost in the same words as that which introduces the division itself. (See chap. xxii. 17.) It extends only to the end of the chapter, and consists of maxims which have no apparent connection with each other. **23. These things also belong to the wise.** Rather "*These* (the proverbs which follow) *are also from wise men.*" The word *also* connects this introduction with that in chap. xxii. 17. **25. To them that rebuke,** etc. The word *him* is not in the original, and spoils the sense. If this rendering of the verb is accepted, *iniquity* must be understood to be the subject of rebuke. Delitzsch however reads, "*To them who rightly decide,*" and Miller renders, "*To them that set the thing right.*" **26. A right answer,** *i.e.,* a *faithful, straightforward* answer. "The word comes," says Miller, "from a verb meaning *to be in front.*" "The mention of the *lips,*" Zöckler remarks, "is to be explained simply by the remembrance of the *question* to which the upright and truthful answer corresponds." **27. House.** This word may mean here as it does in Exod. i. 21, Ruth iv. 11, 2 Sam. vii. 27 etc., the family—the household interests.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1–6.

HOUSE BUILDING.

I. An undertaking founded upon wickedness lacks the first element of stability. A house built upon a sandy foundation, we all know, does not possess the first requisite of safety. It is useless to erect any building for fine weather purposes only—if it is not able to stand a storm all the labour expended upon it is lost. Those places are very few where the tempest does not come sometimes, and even if we could find so favoured a spot, a sandy foundation would not be a permanent one. The ordinary play of the elements and the changes of the seasons would be ever at work upon the loose and shifting soil, and in time the house must fall. So it is with any work undertaken with an evil purpose or from wicked motives. There are laws at work in God's universe which will forbid such a building to remain long in existence. It is very easy work to lay the stones in the sand—much more easy than to hew out a place for them in the solid rock—and the apparently rapid success of evil men and evil deeds tempts many an unwise builder to work after their method. But the experience of the Psalmist is repeated

in every age and must be to the end of time: "*I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree. Yet he passed away, and, lo, he was not; yea, I sought him, but he could not be found.*" (Psalm xxxvii. 35, 36.)

II. True wisdom consists in patient continuance in well-doing. In this passage, as throughout the entire Book of Proverbs, wisdom is set up as the rival of evil, and sin is accounted as the height of folly. The wise man accounts everything foolishness which is against the moral law of the universe, and the *good* man is in his estimation the only *wise* man. That this is a just and true estimate is apparent to all who look a little beneath the surface of things—to all who realise that it is one thing to *seem* and another thing *to be*. The mansion upon the sand-bank *appears* to be a more desirable dwelling place than the cottage upon the rock, but time will prove which is the safer of the two. But permanence or safety are not the only recommendations to the house of wisdom. There is a satisfaction and a positive joy to be found in doing the right to which the evil-doer is a stranger. To be on the side of the good is to be on the side of God and of conscience, to know from experience that all the moral powers of the soul grow stronger with use, and such experimental knowledge fills the chambers of the soul "with all precious and pleasant riches" (verse 4). These considerations ought to make it easy to obey Solomon's precept: "Be not envious against evil men, neither desire to be with them." The mariner on even a stormy sea would not envy the dweller in the lighthouse if he knew that the waves were rapidly undermining its foundation and rendering its speedy fall certain, and to envy a man a short-lived prosperity which must have a sad end is as contrary to the dictates of reason and self-love. A consideration of their "end" (Psalm lxxiii. 17) is a good preservative against such an envy, and has been tried by many men since the days of Asaph with the same success. But without bringing the future into the present, envy of the wicked may be effectually prevented if we can realise their present loss. The inhabitant of the dwelling filled with materials to satisfy his bodily and mental appetites and wants does not envy him whose house is destitute of such comforts. Yet that would be more reasonable than for him who has the opportunity of rearing for himself a well-furnished house of wisdom—of building a character which shall be in itself a source of satisfaction and joy to his better nature—to desire the empty and unsatisfying portion of evil doers.

For Homiletics on verse 6 considered by itself see on chap. xi. 14, page 214, and on chap. xx. 18, page 590.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Verse 1. Sin is like sound, and it finds the moral nature of fallen man, like the atmosphere, a good conducting medium. The word or deed of evil does not terminate where it is produced. It radiates all round; and beside the direct propagation from a centre by diverging lines, it further reduplicates itself by rebounding like an echo from every object upon which it falls. Human beings may well stand in awe when they consider the self-propagating power of sin, and the facilities which their own corruption affords it. Different persons are affected in different ways. One is shaken by the example of wickedness in its first out-go, another by its rebounding blow. One is carried away in the stream, another hurts himself by his violent efforts to resist it. Some imitate the sin. Others fret against the sinner. Both classes do evil and suffer injury. Whether you be impatiently "envious against evil men," or weakly "desirous to be with them," you have sustained damage by the contact.—*Arnot.*

To be envious against evil men is plainly

to confess ourselves to be worse than they are. For, as St. Gregory speaketh, we cannot envy except it be those whom we think to be better than ourselves. Indeed, to envy against evil men is to make wickedness to be goodness, and to show no goodness to be in his heart that is so envious. . . . Whosoever thou be that envieth evil men, I cannot tell who should envy thee, except the devil, because thou strivest to be more wicked than he is. For they are only the godly that he is envious against.—*Jermin.*

Verse 4. The last virtue here spoken of is knowledge, whereby the inward rooms of the house are filled with all precious substance; unto the providing and treasuring up of food, of money, and all things necessary and comfortable, the knowledge of times, the prices of things, and of the means whereby commodities may be obtained, is requisite. . . . It is not to be marvelled at that many young married folk and householders in these days have nothing in their families but want of necessaries and bare walls, seeing they want both wisdom and understanding, and knowledge.—*Muffett.*

Riches imply (1) plenty of that which is precious and pleasant. (2) Propriety. They must be that which is their own; and hereunto economical prudence much conduceth. God bestoweth abundance on the wicked *ex largitate*, only out of a general providence; but upon his people that are good husbands *ex promisso*, by virtue of this and the like promises.—*Trapp.*

Verse 5. *A strong man.* (See Miller's rendering in the Critical Notes.) A *common* man, a *better sort* of man, a *strong* man, a *mortal or weak* man, are the four words for man in the Bible. This is a *strong man.* It means *strong* in a worldly sense. That man, *if wise, is as a power indeed.* . . . The meaning is that a "*strong*" man, if not "*wise*," is not "*strong*" at all; that piety is itself strength; that the stronger a man without it, the weaker he is; that a strong man who is pious, not only becomes strong in that, but strong really by his worldly strength; because piety gives realness to every gift.—*Miller.*

I. Intelligence *apart from* piety is power. A man who has great intelligence, and knows how to use it, possesses a power superior to any physical force. . . . II. Piety *apart from* intelligence is a *higher kind* of power. It is the patience of love, endurance, patience, compassion; it is a power which will touch men's hearts, move the very arm of Omnipotence, "take hold upon the strength of God." III. Piety *associated with* intelligence is the *highest creature* power. What power on earth is equal to that possessed by the man of vast intelligence and consecrated affections, the man of sunny intellect and Heaven-inspired sympathies and aims?—*Dr. David Thomas.*

A wise man is not only strong in having wisdom, but in getting strength also. . . . For by wisdom knowing well the want and need of strength, he is careful and diligent to procure it; whereas many times strength, being presumptuous upon its own might, seeks not for wisdom to support it, and falls for want of having it.—*Jermin.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 7.

A False Estimate and a True One.

I. The fool's estimate of wisdom. Solomon here gives the fool's own reason for remaining in his folly, viz., that wisdom is difficult to acquire—that neither intellectual or spiritual knowledge can be gained without pains and self-denial. This is of course saying in effect that they are worthless, and this false estimate lies at the root of all ignorance, whether it be mental or moral. For if we can

make a man feel that a thing is good and will bring him good, he will not be unwilling to seek to possess it, and his search and his pursuit will be diligent, and eager, and continuous, in proportion to the good which he believes the possession will bring to him. The idle schoolboy complains of the difficulty of his tasks, and of the severity of his teacher, because he does not rightly estimate the value of knowledge, and the moral fool finds fault with the methods of becoming spiritually wise, because he has no sense of the worth of such wisdom. But it must not be forgotten that the longer the fool makes the excuse of the text, the more true it becomes. The powers of the intellect, like those of the body, are less capable of use the longer they remain idle. If a healthy man is so indolent as to refuse to walk, his legs by long disuse may become unable to perform their office, and if the mental powers are left unexercised in youth,it is more difficult to use them to purpose in middle life. And it is so, too, with the spiritual perceptions and capabilities. Although it is never too late to acquire the highest wisdom, it certainly seems more out of the reach of the man who has neglected to seek it throughout a long life, than of him who gives to its pursuit the vigour and freshness of his youth.

II. The consequent estimate which wise men form of the fool. If men undervalue wisdom, they themselves are little valued, and their words and opinions have no weight with wise men. As it is a mark of folly generally to "open the mouth," although nothing comes therefrom that is worth anything, the declaration that a fool "openeth not his mouth in the gate" must point, not to his own modesty or conscious inability to speak wisely, but to the estimation in which he is held by others.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

In bodily things, the more weighty they are, the lower they fall; the lighter they are, the higher they go. Contrariwise is it in the things of the soul, and the more weighty they are, the higher they are; the lighter they are, the lower they lie. It is therefore the lightness of a fool's brain that makes wisdom too high for him: the giddiness of his head is not able to look up unto the height of it. . . . Therefore St. Gregory saith, If thou wilt find wisdom, tread upon the waves of this world, and walk upon the waters of this life, as St. Peter did, and she will reach forth her right hand to thee, as she did to Peter.—*Jermin.*

Verses 8 and 9 treat of subjects which have occurred more than once before. See on chap. vi. 12-19, page 81.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 10.

The Day of Adversity.

I. The inevitable in human experience. The day of adversity is an ordination of God, as a necessary element in man's moral training. The human rulers of a well-ordered State make certain provisions for the education of the young, and these provisions necessarily include many things that are distasteful, and even painful, to the pupils. But if they were left to map out their own course, and to arrange for themselves the plan of their education, we well know that the result in the end would be unsatisfactory to everybody, and most of all to themselves when they were old enough to judge. Even so is it with mankind and the Ruler of the world. God has purposed that men shall be subject to such a course of instruction and discipline as shall at least give them an

opportunity of becoming wiser and better, and the day of adversity is an indispensable element in such a training. It therefore does not come to us by chance, nor is it always to be regarded in the light of a penalty for special sin, but is a token of Divine interest in our real welfare—an expression of Divine desire for our moral growth. It is wise, then, for all to recognise the fact that adversity in some form or other, at some period or other, is an inevitable event in their human life.

II. The test of human character. No man knows his moral strength until he comes face to face with trial. The chain that holds the vessel to the quay is only as strong as the weakest link, and if that one gives way the vessel is loosed from her moorings as surely as if every link was broken. So human character is only as strong as its weakest point, and if a severe strain is brought to bear upon a man, he will break down there. In the day of adversity every virtue and excellence that we possess will be subjected to a severe test, and if only one of them is found unequal to the trial, the whole character suffers, and we are in danger of losing our hold upon God, and so drifting from the right course. A man may have a high opinion of his own physical strength, and fancy that he is well able to grapple with any foe who might attack him. But it is not till he is in the grip of his antagonist that he knows how much or how little he is able to do and to bear. If he finds himself on the ground, stunned and bleeding, he rises from the struggle with a lower estimate of his own muscular strength than he had before. And so it is with the inner man when the day of adversity overtakes it—we think that our faith and moral courage are equal to any emergency, but we are sometimes stricken down to the dust and "faint" from the weight of a blow which we thought beforehand we could withstand, and for the rest of our lives have less confidence in our spiritual strength.

III. A strengthener of human character. Although men often "faint" in the day of adversity, or find their resources insufficient to meet their needs in the hour of trial, it is not necessarily the case, nor is it always so. Indeed, the intention of trial is not to take away our strength, but to *increase* it. If the day of adversity proves too much for our strength, the encounter may leave us morally weaker than we were before; but if we bear it courageously, and do not allow it to drive us to despair, or even to doubt, we come out of the ordeal stronger than when we entered into it. If a tree has too firm a hold upon the soil to be uprooted by the tempest, the shaking will but make it firmer still, and if our confidence and hope in God are not lessened by the blasts of adversity, they are rendered stronger and brighter, and more fitted to encounter the next storm. But fainting at the first blow of adversity leaves very little strength to meet the next trial, and this thought seems also to be in the proverb as it stands in the Hebrew.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

If you were to hear some men's experience you would think they grew as the white pine grows, with straight grain and easily split, for I notice that all that grow easy split easy. But there are some that grow as the mahogany grows, with veneering knots, and all quirls and contortions of grain; that is the best timber of the forest which has most knots. . . . . There are many who are content to grow straight, like weeds on a dunghill; but there are many others who want to be stalwart and strong like the monarchs of the forest, and yet when God sends the winds of adversity to sing a lullaby in their branches, they do not like to grow in that way. They dread the

culture that is really giving toughness to their soul and strength to its fibre. *Beecher.*

The time of man's distress, though it be a night of sorrow and trouble, which it bringeth to the soul, yet is it a day also, because it showeth truly to the soul what a man is.—*Jermin.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSES 11 *and* 12.

Positive Punishment for a Negative Crime.

I. The negative crime. The question "Am I my brother's keeper?" is here answered with an emphatic affirmative, for whatever may be the special reference of the words it is plain that they condemn as criminal the non-interposition of the strong on behalf of the weak and distressed. This crime may be committed from various causes. Those who are guilty of it may be entirely indifferent to the sufferings of others. There are many men and women who, if they are at ease themselves, never concern themselves about the sufferings of others—it matters not to them who is hungry so as they are well fed, and what privations others may be enduring while their needs are supplied. But the crime is oftener chargeable to moral cowardice and unwillingness to practice self-denial. A man may be sufficiently concerned for the danger of a drowning brother to throw him a rope, but he may shrink from throwing himself into the water and risking a watery grave on his behalf. So he may pity the ignorant and the erring and feel sad when he thinks of their sorrows and their sins, and yet be unwilling to sacrifice his money or his leisure or his social position in endeavours to save them. But the proverb seems to deal especially with what seems at first sight to be a less blameworthy class of persons than either of these—with those who have never considered the claims which others have upon them—who are really ignorant how many hearts are breaking around them and how many are perishing for the want of a helping hand. But this ignorance is here regarded as criminal. "Evil is wrought for want of thought, as well as want of heart," but it is as much evil in the one case as in the other, and the want of thought is a sin in itself. And so is the want of knowledge here. God will not admit the plea "I knew it not," but holds him who utters it guilty for his ignorance as well as for his neglect.

II. The positive punishment. No truth is taught more plainly in the Bible, than that men will not escape retribution of some kind because they have simply abstained from doing ill. The possessor of the one talent did not put it to a bad use, or throw it away. He kept it carefully wrapped in a napkin. But the sentence passed upon him was not merely that he should be deprived of his privilege, or that reward should be withheld, but:—"*Cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness.*" (Matt. xxv. 30). "The tree that was only barren was burned," says an old writer. The justice of this will be seen the more we consider how much actual *wrong-doing* on the part of some is chargeable to the *not-doing* of others. How much sin might be prevented if those who have it in their power sought to deliver others from bodily, or social, or moral death.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

"*He that keepeth thy soul, doth not He know it.*" This favour of God may be here mentioned partly as a strong obligation upon Him to preserve him who was made after God's image, and whom God hath commanded him to love and preserve; partly to an encouragement to the performance of his duty herein from the consideration of God's special care and watchfulness over those who do their duty; and partly to intimate to them the danger of

neglect of this duty whereby they will forfeit God's protection over themselves.—*l'oole.*

The condition of *sinners* may be regarded as here very aptly set forth. They are "drawn unto death"—*seized*, or *apprehended* for death, and "ready to be slain:"—and the death to which they are doomed,—O how unutterably fearful! But you may naturally meet me with an objection here. In *their* condition there is *no* injustice; *no* unrighteous and cruel oppression. The sentence of death under which they lie is a *divine* sentence—in perfect accordance with all the principles of equity:—the sword with which they are "ready to be slain" is the sword of divine justice itself. They deserve to die the death. To attempt to prevent it would be to arrest the hand of God. Ought not divine, and therefore unimpeachable, justice to have its course? The objection—otherwise irresistible—God has Himself removed. Justice, infinite justice, had all its claims acknowledged and fulfilled on Calvary. On the ground of the sacrifice there offered, the atonement there made, the God of justice and mercy has called on sinners to accept pardon, in the name and for the sake of His Son. His call comes with authority. It is a command. It is in virtue of the satisfaction of justice in the atonement of Christ, that *we ourselves* enjoy *our own* deliverance from the death and destruction to which, in common with all, we were devoted. And the very same authority that commanded us to believe and be saved, enjoins on us to be agents in attempting the rescue of others. O! what should we not be ready to do, to sacrifice, to suffer, for such an end!—to effect such a rescue!—*Wardlaw.*

When Samuel Romilly's Bill to abolish the punishment of death for a theft amounting to the sum of five shillings passed the English House of Commons, it was thrown out by a majority in the House of Lords. Among those who voted against the Bill were one archbishop and five bishops. Our poet here in the Proverbs is of a different mind. Even the law of Sinai appoints the punishment of death only for man-stealing. . . In expressions like the above a true Christian spirit rules the spirit which condemns all bloodthirstiness of justice, and calls forth to a crusade, not only against the inquisition, but against all unmerciful and cruel executions.—*Delitzsch.*

The Hebrew midwives, and Esther in after ages, thus delivered their own *people drawn unto death.* Reuben *delivered* Joseph from the pit. Job was the *deliverer* of the poor in the extremity. Jonathan saved his friend at imminent risk to himself. Obadiah hid the Lord's prophets. Ahikam and Ebed-melech saved Jeremiah. Johanan attempted to *deliver* the unsuspecting Gedaliah. Daniel preserved the wise men of Babylon. The Samaritan rescued his neighbour from death. Paul's nephew *delivered* the great Apostle by informing him of the murderous plot. The rule includes all oppression, which has more or less of the character of murder.—*Bridges.*

"Who is lord over us?" is the watchword of the life-long battle between an evil conscience and a righteous Judge. Here the commandment is exceeding broad. Like Divine omniscience, it compasses the transgressor before and behind. It checks his advance, and cuts off his retreat. Although a man should actually maintain in relation to every brother the neutrality he professes, it would avail him nothing . . . . What ails our brother, that he needs the compassion of a tender heart and the help of a strong hand? He is "drawn unto death," and "ready to be slain." This is the very crisis which at once needs help and admits it. If the danger were more distant, he might not be sensible of his need; if it were nearer, he might be beyond the hope of recovery. He is so low that help is necessary; yet not so low as would render help vain. He is "drawn unto death," and therefore is an object of pity; but his life is yet in him, and therefore he is a subject of hope.—*Arnot.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSES 13 *and* 14.

HONEY AND WISDOM.

I. An analogy. 1. Honey is found by man ready prepared for his use; no human skill is needed to make it fit for food—nothing that man can do can render it more palatable than it is as it flows from the comb. So the revealed wisdom of God as it is found in the Scriptures needs no intervention of man to make it suitable to human needs. 2. As honey is evidently designed by God to furnish a wholesome and pleasant food for the body, so has He designed that the revelation of His mind and will by His inspired messengers shall provide wholesome and congenial food for the soul of man. The great abundance of honey in Palestine led to its forming a more prominent part of daily food than in western countries, and its possessing these two qualities made it very fit for general and constant use, and was a perpetual testimony to the providence of God in relation to the needs and enjoyment of His creatures. So is the provision which God has made for the spiritual wants of the children of men. On this point we must take the testimony of those who have tested this soul-food. We should not ask a man whether honey was pleasant to the taste if he had never eaten it, and those are not qualified to bear witness concerning the spiritual enjoyment and benefit to be derived from the "wisdom of God" who have not tested it. All those who have done so, whatever their condition in life, in whatever age they have lived, or whatever part of the world they have called their home, have agreed with David's testimony that it is "*more to be desired than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honey-comb*" (Psa. xix. 10).

II. A contrast. 1. Honey may be eaten until it cloys the appetite and injures the eater, but not so with the word of God. Those who eat the most of this spiritual food are the most spiritually healthy, and have the keenest appetite for it. 2. Although this God-given bodily food may do much to nourish and sustain a healthy man, it cannot cure a diseased body, or prevent the inroads of sickness and decay. But there is a soul-transforming power in the spiritual food of which it is here an emblem. Those who eat of it are by it healed of spritual disease, and are continually and unceasingly growing in moral health and vigour. 3. The blessings flowing from eating the spiritual food are only fully realised in the life beyond the present. To this the wise man refers in the last clause. (For Homiletics on this thought, see on chaps. xi. 7, xiv. 32, pages 201 and 391).

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Verse 13. The wise man's feast which he makes his son is but one dish. And what need of more when that is both good and pleasant? The glutton provideth many dishes, and costly to make them luscious, but they are not *good*, not good for the health of the body. . . . . On the other side, the physician provideth divers meats, and they are *good*—good either for the preservation of health or for the recovery of it, but they are not pleasant and grateful to the palate. That is the best feeding when these are joined together. . . . Or else if they are not joined together, notice that the wise man putteth good in the first place; as teaching thee rather to take that which is good though not pleasant, than that which is pleasant but not good.—*Jermin.*

Verse 14. *When thou hast found it.* That is, when thou hast so found it that thou canst feed upon it and convert it into nourishment, then thy pains of seeking shall be rewarded. And though it be a late reward, for

wisdom is not quickly found, yet there shall be a reward, and that so full, that in nothing thine expectation shall be cut off. For though hardly yet it is well-gotten; and with pleasure will sweeten the pains, with good will satisfy the tarrying and recompense the delay. The Chaldee rendereth the middle part of the verse, "*If thou hast found, the last will come better than the first.*" As if this were a mark whereby to know whether we have found wisdom or not, because then the further we go on the more sweetness we shall find.—*Jermin.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSES 15 *and* 16.

A Social Ambush.

I. A common practice of the wicked man in relation to the good. When we think of an ambush of men lying in wait to spring upon their foes at a fitting opportunity, two hostile parties are at once brought before us, we feel that there must be deep enmity on one side at least, or men would not be at such pains to overthrow their fellow-men. And this is indeed the case in society as a whole. Men are divided into two great parties. On one side stand the lovers of righteousness, and on the other the lovers of sin; and the latter must ever be more or less actively opposed to the former. But their favourite and most common method of attack is that indicated in the text. Wrong-doers are naturally cowards, and in their endeavours to injure better men than themselves they shrink from open attack. They are fully conscious that they could not stand their ground in a fair fight in the open field, and so they try to fall upon their foe in a moment when he is off his guard and in a place where he least expects to meet them. In other words, evil men do not often openly assail either the character or the position of a good man, but by lying words spoken in his absence they try to blacken the first, and by secret schemes to overthrow the second.

II. An utterly useless attempt of the wicked man in relation to the good. It is useless to try to kill a tree by lopping off the branches. Such a process may for a time deprive it of its beauty and stop its growth, but while the root has its hold upon the soil and can draw nourishment to itself from unseen sources beneath the surface it will live, and as soon as the axe has ceased to strike it will begin again to clothe itself in greenness and beauty. So it is with a righteous man. His enemies may succeed in bringing about his temporary overthrow and in depriving his outward life of much comfort, but the springs of his existence are fed from an invisible and unfailing source, and his well-being is not dependent upon external circumstances. And so even if the malice of the wicked is permitted to strip him of some things which made his life more apparently prosperous and secure, there is an inner life which they cannot touch, and which enables him in due time to recover from the wounds which they inflict either upon his character or his circumstances. For "*This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord. No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shall condemn.*" (Isa. liv. 17.)

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Verse 15. Because it spites the wicked, that the godly dwell in safety, therefore they lay wait against their dwelling, by affliction and miseries seeking to throw it down, and . . . . because the virtues of the godly condemn the vices of the wicked, therefore they lay wait and search into their

dwelling houses to espy out their faults, because the goodness of the righteous shameth the naughtiness of the wicked, therefore they seek to break in even into their bedchambers and *places of rest*, and there to discover their errors and infirmities. Solomon forbidding them to do it, showeth it to be their manner to do it.—*Jermin.*

Verse 16. Perhaps you will say, had I fallen only once, I would not be much afraid; but I have often fallen before the enemy, and one day I must perish. But hear what God says:—The righteous man falls not once or twice, but many times, and still he rises. Your experience of former deliverances should encourage your hopes of new deliverances, for the salvations of the Lord are never exhausted. In six troubles He will deliver, and in seven there shall no evil touch you.—*Lawson.*

God's saints are bound to "rejoice when they fall into divers temptations." What though they *fall* into them? not go in step by step, but be precipitated, plunged over head and ears. Say they fall not into one, but into many crosses—as they seldom come single—yet "be exceeding glad" says the apostle, as the merchant is to see his ships come laden in.—*Trapp.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSES 17 *and* 18.

The Fall of an Enemy.

Joy at the overthrow of an enemy is a feeling which is natural to an unspiritual man, but it is one which is here declared to be displeasing to God. Three reasons suggest themselves why this should be so.

I. Such an emotion is inconsistent with a man's own well-being and happiness. The nature that can be indifferent to the calamities of another, even although that other has been an enemy in the past, is a nature destitute of all generosity and nobility. But the heart that can be *glad* at such an event is altogether possessed with the spirit of the devil—the flames of exultation that burn upon such an altar have been set on fire of hell. And as God loves the creature whom He at first created in His own image, it displeases Him to see him give place to a feeling so unworthy of his origin, and at the same time so productive of misery to himself. For the so-called joy that arises from such a cause is not only very short-lived, but is like a fire that blazes and burns brightly for a time, and then leaves nothing but a heap of ashes behind. The exultation over the fall of an enemy soon dies out, and leaves the heart scorched and dried by the heat of the unworthy passion.

II. It is inconsistent with the spirit of brotherhood that God desires to exist among men. If there has been a break in the harmony of a family, and one member has been at enmity with another, the oneness of the parentage ought to be sufficient to erase all memory of past wrongs when the offender is overtaken by misfortune. Such would be the case where there was any real family affection. God desires all His creatures to recognise a universal brotherhood in virtue of their relation to Him, their common Father. He desires men to be ever ready to seek occasions to draw together in unity, and to avoid all that deepens an opposite feeling. If a man retains his enmity against his offending brother when that brother by reason of misfortune might be reconciled to him, he ignores entirely the law of brotherly love which God desires to rule in His human family.

III. It is inconsistent with a right recognition of our need of Divine mercy. However much our offending brother may have wronged us, the amount of the debt of his trespass against us will bear no comparison to the amount of our indebtedness to God. In sinning against us he has but wronged an erring

human creature like himself, and one who has very possibly failed in his duty towards him. But when we sin against God, we sin against One whose character is altogether fitted to win us to obedience, and whose every action in relation to us has been dictated by perfect love. It is only when we fail to recognise this truth that an unforgiving spirit can possess our hearts, and it is only when such a spirit has full sway that any man can exult in the downfall of his enemy.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

For prevention hereof think thus with thyself: Either I am like mine enemy, or else I am better or worse than he. If like him, why may I not look for the like misery? If better, who made me to differ? If worse, what reason have I to insult? (See Obadiah xii.)—*Trapp.*

St. Gregory saith it is only the keeping of charity that doth prove us to be the disciples of God, and that we have charity is shewn in two ways, namely, if we love our friends in God, and if we love our enemies for God. . . . Because another is an enemy to thee, be not thou an enemy to goodness, an enemy to thyself. For he that rejoiceth when his enemy falleth, doth himself fall much worse, and hath more cause to be grieved for his own wretchedness; he that is glad in his heart when his enemy stumbleth, stumbleth more dangerously in his own heart.—*Jermin.*

For Homiletics on the subjects of verses 19 and 20 see verse 1 of this chapter, page 676, and chap. xiii. 9, page 303.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSES 21 *and* 22.

RULE AND REVERENCE.

I. The rule of some men and the subjection of others is a Divine ordination. God, by creating men with such different gifts and with powers of mind and body so unequal, evidently intends that society should not be on a dead level, but that in all communities there should be some recognised head. And the tendency of men in all ages to unite under some leader whom they deem worthy to be their head points to an instinct in human nature which we must refer to a Divine origin. The law of subjection and dominion has its place in the natural world. The entire solar system is held together by the subjection of the lesser bodies to one which is greater than all, and as the planets move in their orbits around the sun they seem like so many obedient subjects doing homage to their monarch, while their attendant satellites are in their turn subject to them. And the constant operation of this material law is productive of the most beneficial results. In like manner the observation of some such law among free and intelligent creatures is necessary to the order and consequent peace of society.

II. But the deference of the subject to his earthly ruler must be always subordinate to the will of the Divine ruler of both. There are cases in which to "*fear the king*," in the sense of obeying him, would be to dishonour God, and times when he who demands obedience refuses to comply with the Divine demands upon himself. It is obvious therefore that the fear of the earthly king can only be carried so far as is consistent with loyal obedience to the "King of all the kings of the earth." The first precept of the wise man in this verse admits of no limitation, but the second must be limited by the first. But those who have been the most faithful servants of God have ever been most ready to

render "*honour to whom honour is due*" (Rom. xiii. 7); and when duty has compelled them to disobey their commands they have done so with all due respect for their lawful authority. That fear of God which compels them to disobey unrighteous laws makes them obedient subjects to lawful rule, and constrains them, so far as is possible, to live as peaceable citizens.

III. Therefore the peace of a kingdom and the stability of a throne will be in proportion to the reverence of king and people for the Divine will. The fear of God is the great adjusting power in all relations of life. When it governs in the family the parents are loved and honoured by the children, and the children's welfare is the constant care of the parents. It is this fear of God alone that can solve the vexed problem of the relations between masters and servants, between capital and labour, and between monarchs and people. Where it is wanting there will be a weak rule on the one hand, and a niggardly service and a half-hearted obedience on the other, and both are responsible for those outbursts of disorder which involve both in a common calamity.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

The connection of the two fears in the passage before us is evidently intended to impress the one by the other:—If you fear God, fear the king. God, whom you are bound supremely to fear, and whose fear should produce obedience to His will, has enjoined the fear of earthly rulers: so that a failure in the fear due to *them* becomes a violation of the fear due to *Him.*

I need hardly say, that by *the king* we are to understand the *government of the country.* It may be monarchical, or it may not. We are by no means to look upon such expressions as this, in Scripture, as attaching the authority of inspiration to one form of government more than to another. Respecting the comparative merits of different forms, the word of God should not be regarded as giving any decision, whether for the kingly, the aristocratical, the popular, or the mixed. The respect, or fear, is due to *the legislative and executive powers,* of whichsoever description these may be. —*Wardlaw.*

Submission of heart and life to the King Eternal overrides and controls, yet does not injure a citizen's allegiance to an earthly ruler. . . . The fear of the Lord must go first, but the fear of the king may follow. The supreme does not crush, it protects the subordinate. Although the heart is full of piety, there is plenty of room for patriotism. Nay, more, patriotism nowhere gets full scope except in a heart that is already pervaded by piety. These elements are like the two chief constituent gases of the atmosphere. The space which envelopes the globe is full of one gas — it is also full of the other. To discharge the nitrogen would not make the space capable of containing more of the oxygen. The absence of the one constituent destroys the quality but does not enlarge the quantity of the other. Take away godliness, and your loyalty, without being increased in amount, is seriously deteriorated in kind. Take away loyalty, and you run great risk of spoiling the purity of the remanent godliness. God's works are all good—His combinations are all beneficial. If we attempt to mend, we shall certainly mar them. . . . Go forward in your allegiance to "the powers that be," not until you think you have gone far enough, but until you come upon the law of God, claiming the space in front for Himself, and absolutely forbidding your advance. Go forward with the fear of the king, unless and until the fear of the Lord cross your path like a wall. . . . No feasible rule can be laid down except what the Scriptures contain. Let any man try to write down a scale showing when and where private persons may lawfully resist public authority, and he

will soon be convinced that the case is hopeless. Every attempt to define the liberty of rebellion will be found to open a door to anarchy. In point of fact, very little of the liberty that now exists in the world has been achieved by violent resistance to governments because of oppression in temporal things.—*Arnot.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—VERSES 23—26.

IMPARTIALITY OF TRUTH.

I. Two blessings to society. While there is nothing that more certainly undermines the moral tone of any community than that "respect of persons" which the Bible so emphatically and constantly condemns (Lev. xix. 15; Jas. ii. 1), there is no person who more contributes to the welfare of society, and contributes more to its well-being than the man who judges all men by the same standard, viz., their character. It is especially indispensable that those who are set apart to administer the laws of the land should be men above all suspicion of partiality. For, wherever there is a code of law, it is a testimony to that inborn sense of justice which is more or less active in every human being; and although it may sometimes be but an imperfect attempt to render to every man his right, if it is administered by men of integrity it is one of the greatest bulwarks of national prosperity and security. It may well be a matter of thankfulness to every Englishman that the judicial bench of this land occupies the high position that it does in this respect as in all others, and that the days when men thought it possible to use unlawful influence with an English judge have passed away. But to what do we owe this blessing, if not to the greater hold which the principles of the Bible has upon our national life? But Solomon brings before us another character which is as necessary to a nation's moral health, which is, perhaps, rarer than the first, but which might and ought to belong to every man. Those who are called to sit in judgment are the few, but those who in various ways are called to bear witness concerning persons and things, are the many. And some who would deem it a crime to have respect of persons in judgment, do not realise how much the cause of truth and righteousness would be furthered if men, in their every-day intercourse, would give a "right or straightforward answer" (see rendering in Critical Notes) to the questions put to them. If it was the habit of merchants and statesmen, of masters and servants, in the market and in the social circle, to speak the "truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth," how much purer would be the moral atmosphere which we breathe, and how much more nearly would society on earth be like that of heaven.

II. The recognition which such characters receive from their fellow-men. In a world where the unrighteous far outnumber the righteous, and where most men are but half loyal to truth, it is remarkable that it should be so. But history in general and individual experience in particular bears witness that Solomon was right. Even unrighteous men cannot help admiring a just and truthful man, and their consciences and their experience combine to testify that they themselves have more to hope from those who are morally above them than from those who are on a level with themselves. It is probable that both moral sense and self-interest combine to bring people as a whole to bless him who rebukes the wicked and to "kiss his lips" who giveth a right answer.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Verse 26. The meaning of that ceremony of kissing him that was anointed to be king, St. Gregory giveth to be this, that it was to teach him that was so kissed that God hath brought him to that dignity, to the end that he might make peace between God and his people that were under him, whereof a kiss is a sign and pledge. For by sinning we procure the enmity of God, when therefore a ruler is set up for the correction of sinners, thereby is taken away that which made us enemies to God. If, therefore, we read this verse as the English doth, we may understand it that everyone shall acknowledge him to be a peacemaker between God and them, who by *right* judgment punisheth the wicked.—*Jermin.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 27.

Plan and Patience.

I. Here is a lesson in working with method. In all undertakings it is necessary to consider what is the most important and indispensable element of success, and to make sure of that first. In the building of a house in the literal sense, the first thing to be done is to have a well-considered plan, and to gather and prepare suitable and sufficient materials. If, when the building is half finished, it is found that some great difficulty has been overlooked, or that the materials and the means to procure them are inadequate, failure and disgrace are the result, and all the time and money hitherto spent upon the work is thrown away. So in any other undertaking. If a man desires a certain position in life for which special qualifications are needed, he must first endeavour to know exactly what the requirements are, and then make sure that he is able to fulfil them. If he makes a start without well considering these things he may waste much precious time and energy, and ruin his prospects for life. The same principle may be applied to any philanthropic enterprise. These often fail, because they are entered upon without any just conception of the difficulties to be encountered, or of the resources which will be required to carry them on to a successful issue.

II. A lesson in working with patience. The proverb seems to warn men not to be in too great a hurry to realise the fulfilment of their desires; not to be impatient to reap the harvest before the crop has had time to ripen. Men are sometimes so eager to obtain a certain good which to them appears desirable that they make a desperate and reckless attempt to gain it by some other road than that of patient perseverance. A man makes up his mind that he must live in a certain style, and keep up a certain appearance before the world, and he sets out to build a stately mansion without waiting until he has acquired the means whereby he can do it honestly. Men often desire to be at the beginning of their career where they can only be after days and years of toil, and if they act under the inspiration of this spirit of impatience they often most effectually shut themselves out entirely from the realisation of their desires.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

This wisdom the very little bees do practise and show us, who first get honey and bring it into their hives, and afterwards make their seats and honeycombs. Against this rule here set down divers sorts of people offend, yea, all that take a preposterous course, whether in the matters of this life, or in those things that are spiritual. Some enter into the state of marriage

before either they have wit, or have provided and gotten by their labour sufficient food or wealth to maintain them. Others lay out much on banquets, buildings, pastimes, or apparel, before they have a good stock or large comings in. Others meddle with hard points of controversy before they have learned the plain principles of religion. Others first and especially seek after the goods of this world, and, in the second place, at their leisure, and very slowly, they follow after the kingdom of God.—*Muffet.*

Possibly a spiritual meaning here, as elsewhere, lies beneath the prudential maxim. The "field" may be the man's outer common work, the "house" the dwelling-place of his higher life. He must do the former faithfully in order to attain the latter.—*Plumptre.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSES 28 *and* 29.

An Uncalled-for Testimony.

I. There are times and circumstances in which it is our duty to witness against our neighbour. When the interests of right and truth are at stake, it is wrong for any man to be silent when by declaring what he knows, he could establish those interests, even although by so doing he brings punishment upon a fellow-man. It is often indispensable to the safety of innocent people that the wrong-doer should be exposed and brought to justice, and every man in such a case is not only blameless when he witnesses against such a "*neighbour*," but blameworthy when he does not do so. This is not witnessing against him "without cause," for there is a good and sufficient reason for the action.

II. Such witness-bearing is of quite a different character from that which springs from malice. There are men in society who seem to live like beasts of prey. As the lion or the tiger is ever watching his opportunity to spring upon some defenceless creature at an unguarded moment, so these men seem to make it their business to watch their fellow-creatures for opportunities to injure their reputation and mangle their character. And in a world of faulty human beings, it is not difficult for such men to find food for their malicious appetites, without transgressing the limits of truth. In most men there is enough imperfection, and in many of actual sin, to render it easy to make out a case against them. But if no actual good can come to anybody by exposing their failings, much harm will come to the man who thus bears witness against them without a cause. The evil tendencies of his own evil nature will be strengthened by the act, and he will be exposing himself to the danger of having a causeless testimony borne against himself in his turn.

III. There are circumstances in which there is a strong temptation to bear a causeless testimony. It is against this temptation that the proverb is especially directed. When a man has spoken evil of us without cause, when he has made public some hidden infirmity, or some secret fall, there is a great temptation to retaliate if opportunity offers—to tell what we know about him that will lower him in the estimation of his fellow-men. But this temptation must be resisted, both for our own sake and for his, and for this reason among others, that we are in the worst possible condition for bearing a truthful testimony. A man under the influence of intoxicating drink would be altogether unfit to bear witness for or against another. But the passion of revenge is as intoxicating to the human soul as the most potent liquor is to the human brain. It distorts the judgment, and dethrones the reason, and tramples under foot all the noblest emotions of our nature. A man under its sway would be very unlikely to be just to the object to whom he sought to return evil for evil; nay, he would be unable to confine himself within the limits of strict truth and pure

justice. And, therefore, one who has wronged us is the man above all other men of whose faults we should never speak, unless there is an overwhelming moral necessity for it.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Verse 28. "*And mayhap, deceive with thy lips.*" This is expressed by a little particle before the verb. It helps in the ancillary thought, that not only is speaking evil wicked if it can do no good, but also it may prove actually unjust. All statement has a hazard of mistake. If it can do some good, we may risk something so as to *witness;* but if there can be no good, we should risk nothing.—*Miller.*

Verse 29. It is a great wickedness, when God is made a pattern for wickedness; and it is a strong temptation to wickedness, when the example of the Lord seemeth to countenance that which is proposed to be done. It is therefore against this that the wise man adviseth in this verse. For though God say, I will render to everyone according to his works, thou mayest not say, I will render to the man according to his works. God speaketh as a Judge to whom it belongeth to consider the works of everyone, and accordingly to reward them; but no man may be a judge in his own cause, no particular man may do that for himself which a judge may do for him. Wherefore it is a bad imitation thus to imitate the Lord, for we are not to do all things that the Lord doth, but all things that the Lord commandeth us to do.—*Jermin.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 30-34.

THE SLUGGARD'S VINEYARD.

I. We have here a precious possession in the hands of an unworthy proprietor. A vineyard is not a heritage of little or no value—if rightly cared for and cultivated it will yield to its owner the means of obtaining an honest living, and, it may be, put him in possession of wealth. Many a toiling, struggling man without an inch of ground on God's earth to call his own would feel as if he had nothing left to desire if he had such a barrier between himself and poverty, and would joyfully toil from dawn to sunset to make the best of that which God's providence had entrusted to him. But here is property which would be prized and cultivated by many in the hands of one who neglects and wastes it. The picture of our text is a parabolic representation of what is before our eyes every day. A vineyard of bodily strength is given to a man who by dissipation breaks down its wall and invites disease to enter. A vineyard of opportunities is inherited by a slothful youth who is too indolent and careless to improve them. The vineyard of a vast fortune or of a position of great influence is entrusted to one who is "void of understanding"—who does not realise his responsibility to God or to men.

II. We have man, by neglecting to use God's gifts, limiting God's power to bless him. It was God's purpose that this vineyard should bring forth better things than thorns and nettles. He desired to see it covered with choice vines, whose branches should be loaded with clusters of refreshing fruit. But this could not be unless man would be a co-worker with Him. God did his part. The rain watered the soil, the sun shone upon it, but man refused to dig and plant, to weed and cultivate. And by withholding his power to labour he limited God's power to bless. Men do the same in other fields of labour, and in connection with other opportunities of receiving the Divine blessing. Many

good gifts come alike to the slothful and to the industrious man—to him who diligently "keeps" his vineyard and to him who neglects it. God makes His sun to shine, and sends His rain upon the fields of both. But in the one case sun and rain find a soil prepared to receive the full benefit of the blessings they can give, and in the other they can only strengthen the hold of the weeds upon the earth, and so increase the unfruitfulness of the vineyard. So men often limit God's power to bless them by His providence. Opportunities are given to them of bringing great blessings upon themselves or upon others, but only on condition that they labour earnestly and diligently at some work which God gives them to do. They may be called only to the special cultivation of their own intellectual and spiritual powers, or they may also be in a position to transform others from weeds in the social and moral vineyard into plants of beauty and trees yielding fruit. But whether the field open to them is a wide one, or comparatively narrow, all God's willingness to give the increase will be of no avail if they refuse to till the ground and sow the seed.

III. We have a swift and sure-footed avenger advancing to awaken the slothful sleeper. That slumber, though long and deep, will not go on for ever. It would indeed be unjust to the active and industrious man if the slothful never felt the consequences of his indolence. But this would be contrary to the laws by which God governs the world. One of these laws is, that bodily want, or intellectual or spiritual beggary, will in due time overtake him who neglects to exercise the faculties and capabilities which God has given him to enrich every part of his nature.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

This is a picture of sloth. At the same time it is a picture of sloth under attacks upon our faith. The world moves on, and, in our laziness, our garden gets all choked with new dogmas against the gospel. The writer has already said that we are not to yield to "them that are given to change" (ver. 21). He has also said that we are not to answer them with deceit (ver. 23): and, now, what remains? Why, that we baffle them, that we work as hard as they do. I know no proverb more useful for the men of our times. We lie upon our lees till we think philosophy a sort of wickedness; till we think quiet under its advances a sort of Christian faith. We let science work on, till, by sap and mine, it is near our citadel. Great bodies of learned work are built up while the Church sleeps. If she fights, it is with a sort of chicane, with the gongs and bright paper, like a Chinese troop; when duty plainly is, to work up abreast of science. If the Church has more light, she must expect more contest. If she has better arms, she must expect more battles; with more mind, of course more to oppose; otherwise she has less to do than less capable believers. The world's science must be met by the Church's science, and new, sturdy brambles in her prolific fields must be ploughed under by improved implements. Otherwise, old-time arguments, and a sort of a chicane of a retort; responses like those of women, rather intended to say *No* than to be an actual reply, become indicative of a sluggard-Church, and of a garden cumbered like that before us. *Slothful*, literally *sluggard man.* Man is here the *better sort of man* (see Miller's comment of verse 5); in the last clause it is "*a common man.*" The first has a *field*, the other a *vineyard.* All classes of men are bound to read up and get rid of occasions for cavil. . . . "*The wall;*" necessary to keep a church at all. Let scientists trample in upon the vineyard with nothing but a few old clothes to scare them, and presently we will have no Church whatever. Not "*stone wall*" (E. V.), but "*the wall, as to its stones,*"

"*pulled down.*" It will not slowly crumble, but interested parties will help it when it begins to totter. "*I saw, or looked.*" Seeing such things requires an effort. Not the slothful man's business alone! but mine! I am sufficiently like him. A vineyard with brambles, like that of Geneva, or England, or that of the cis-Atlantic Socinian States, is a picture for all mankind. . . . . "*Come, etc.,*" "*sauntering along,*" Hithpael of walk. "*Armed man.*" Both these descriptions mean (1) *slowness,* and (2) *certainty;* (1) unobserved ease of gait; but, (2) doomlike certainty in coming. A Church that enjoys her ease may super-eminently prosper. Her foe may be behind the hill, and her doom may be sauntering noiselessly up, but their coming is as certain as the dawn. . . . . A "little sleep" more, and the thing has been actually achieved. —*Miller.*

Let *us* learn from the scene described: 1. How *gradual* may be the approaches of the evils of sloth, while, at the same time, they are *irresistible* in the end. This is the lesson of the thirty-fourth verse. The traveller approaches by degrees. When comparatively at a distance, he appears harmless; but, when he has advanced a certain length, he is discovered to be "*an armed man,*" —all resistance to whom is too late, and consequently vain. Famine, though gaunt, is irresistibly mighty. Who can stand before it? Not the man of habitual sloth. The very habit has the more thoroughly incapacitated him for plucking up any spirit to ward off the final ravages of the frightful enemy. He succumbs, sinks, and dies.— 2. Our souls are committed by God to our own spiritual cultivation. This is no sinecure. They will not thrive themselves. If we would have them "as a watered garden, and as a field which the Lord hath blessed," we must apply spiritual activity and labour, to stock them with the appropriate graces, affections, and virtues, and to promote the growth and productiveness of them all. We must sow the seed, and seek by prayer the showers of the Divine blessing—the promised influences of the Divine Spirit. We must watch over the germination, the springing, the growth, and the fructifying of the seed. Without this all will be stunted and sterile. The noxious and unsightly weeds of sin will spring and luxuriate, and overspread the soil; all growing that ought not to grow, and nothing growing that should. Let parents apply the principle to the spiritual instruction of their children. Your families are as vineyards committed to your care and culture. Imagine not that, when left to themselves, they will spontaneously yield good fruit. The experience of all generations reads you an opposite lesson. You must enclose; you must dig, and sow, and water, and watch, and protect the springing blade, till it comes to the ear, and the full corn in the ear. You must train from their earliest germs your tender plants, and guard, and support, and prune them, and clear and manure the soil around them. The incessant care of both parents must be bestowed upon this; and all little enough. They must look for the help and for the blessing of God. O see to it, that the verses before us be not a just description of any of your families—from your parental negligence, indifference, and sloth. Let every family be as a sacred enclosure for God; fenced in from the blasts and blights of the world, where the "plants of his right hand's planting" are reared from the seed, for future productiveness.—*Wardlaw.*

Verse 32. The owner did nothing for the farm, and the farm did nothing for the owner. But even this neglected spot did something for the passing wayfarer, who had an observant eye and a thoughtful mind. Even the sluggard's garden brought forth fruit, but not for the sluggard's benefit. The diligent man reaped, and carried off the only harvest that it bore—a warning. The owner received nothing from it; and the onlooker "received instruction" . . . . People complain that they have few opportunities and means of instruction. Here is one

school open to all. Here is a schoolmaster who charges no fee. If we are ourselves diligent, we may gather riches even in a sluggard's garden. He who knows how to turn the folly of his neighbours into wisdom for himself, cannot excuse defective attainments by alleging a scarcity of the raw material.—*Arnot.*

CHAPTER XXV.

With this chapter begins the fourth main division of this book, consisting, as its introductory words inform us, of sayings and perhaps writings of Solomon, which were placed together in their present form by men appointed to the work by King Hezekiah. Zöckler remarks that "while the first and larger section of the book purports to be essentially a book for youth, this is evidently a book for the people, a treasury of proverbial wisdom for kings and subjects—as is indicated by the first introductory proverb. . . . Whether as the source from which the transfer or compilation of the following proverbs was made, we are to think simply of one book or of several books, so that the transfer would be the purely literary labour of excerpting, a transcribing or collecting by copying; or whether we have to consider as the source simply the oral transmission of ancient proverbs of wise men by the mouth of the people, must remain doubtful. It is, perhaps, most probable that both the written and the oral tradition were alike sifted for the objects of the collection." (*Zöckler*, in Lange's Commentary.)

CRITICAL NOTES.—**1. Copied out,** rather "*collected.*" **See the remarks above. 2. Honour,** rather "*glory*," as in the first clause. **3.** The word *is* should be omitted; unsearchable applies equally to the three subjects of the sentence. **4. The finer,** rather the "*founder*," or "*goldsmith.*" **6. Put not forth,** literally "*bring not thy glory to view, do not display thyself.*" **7. Whom thine eyes have seen.** There is some difference of opinion as to the person to whom this sentence refers. Fleischer understands it as referring to the king, and to the additional humiliation felt when it comes upon one who has pressed so far forward that he can be perceived by the king. Delitzsch refers it not specially to the king, but to "any distinguished personage whose place he who has pressed forward has taken up, and from which he must now withdraw when the right possessor of it comes and lays claim to his place . . . . Thine eyes have seen him in the company, and thou canst say to thyself, this place belongs to him, according to his rank, and not to thee; the humiliation which thou endurest is thus well deserved, because, with eyes to see, thou wert so blind." (Delitzsch). **8. Lest thou know not,** etc. As will be seen from the italics in the English version, this sentence is very elliptical. Zöckler reads, "*lest* (it be said to thee) *what wilt thou do,*" etc. Delitzsch, "*That it may not be said,*" etc. Miller, "*Lest what thou doest, in its after consequence, be thy neighbour putting thee to shame.*" **9. A secret to another.** Rather "*The secret of another.*" **11. Pictures of silver.** Literally "*sculpture,*" or "*figures*" of **silver.** Delitzsch translates "*salvers,*" Zöckler "*framework.*" Stuart says, "*The idea is that of a garment of precious stuff, on which is embroidered golden apples among picture-work of silver. Costly and precious was such a garment held to be; for, besides the ornaments upon it, the material itself was of high value.*" **Fitly spoken.** Literally "*in, or upon its time.*" **12. An obedient ear.** Literally "*an ear that heareth.*" **13. The cold of snow** etc. "*The coolness of snow is not that of a fall of snow, which in the time of harvest would be a calamity, but of drink cooled with snow, which was brought from Lebanon, or elsewhere, from the clefts of the rocks; the peasants of Damascus store up the winter's snow in a cleft of the mountain, and convey it in the warm months to Damascus and the coast towns.*" (Delitzsch.) **14. A false gift.** This gift is generally understood to be one bestowed by the boaster, but which is worth nothing, or the mere promise of a gift which is never fulfilled. **15. Prince.** Rather "*Judge.*" **16. Filled.** Rather "*Surfeited.*" **17. Withhold.** Rather "*Make rare.*" **18. A maul.** An instrument or weapon shod with iron, probably a war-club. **19. Foot out of joint.** Rather "*An unsteady foot.*" **20. Nitre.** "*Not the substance we now understand by nitre—i.e., nitrate of potassa (saltpetre), but the natron or native*

carbonate of soda of modern chemistry." (Smith's Dictionary.) The combination of the acid and alkali would, of course, produce effervescence. 23. **Driveth away.** Rather "*Brings forward the rain-clouds.*" Most modern commentators adopt this rendering of the verb, and read the latter phrase to suit the metaphor—"*So a secret or slanderous tongue, a troubled countenance.*" 26. **Falling down**—*i.e.*, "*yielding*" or "*wavering.*" **Corrupt.** Rather "*Ruined.*" 27. The last phrase in this verse is variously rendered. The words *is not* are not in the Hebrew. Stuart reads, "*Searching after one's own glory is burdensome*"—*i.e.*, Honour, like honey, is good only when sought in moderation. Zöckler renders "*To search out the difficulty, brings difficulty*"—*i.e.*, "Too strenuous occupation of the mind with difficult things is injurious." Delitzsch translates:—"*But, as an inquirer, to enter on what is difficult, is honour*"—*i.e.*, To overdo oneself in eating honey is not good, but the searching into difficult things is nothing less than an eating of honey, but an honour. The word translated *glory* is literally *weight*, and is often used to mean excellence and honour. But it will bear the opposite meaning of a burden or difficulty.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH. Verses 1—3.

God's Mysteries and Man's Research.

I. There is much connected with God's nature and with His government that will never be revealed to man in his present state. This is in accordance with the greatness of God and the littleness of man in comparison with him. There are many things connected with God which man in his present state could not comprehend, and there are others which he might comprehend, but of which it is better he should remain in ignorance. The parent conceals many things from a child because the concealment is more consistent with a wise training than the revelation of them would be. Some of them the child could not understand, and others it is better that he should not know until he attains to riper years. When he has become a man he will admire the wisdom of his parent in thus withholding from him what he did. God, as the infinitely wise Parent and Trainer of human creatures, often doubtless conceals much from us from similar reasons, and we shall one day see that the concealment was to the glory of His gracious character. When a physician is called to treat a man whose life is hanging upon a thread, he is not expected to enter into an explanation of the nature of the remedies he uses or to give a reason for all the treatment he prescribes. Such an explanation would be unworthy of the dignity of his profession and hurtful to his patient. Concealment is often an essential and necessary part of his plan, and when the sick man is restored to health he acknowledges that it was to the glory of his healer that he kept him for a time in ignorance. God is the great Physician and Healer of human souls, and it would neither befit His majesty nor further His purposes of mercy to reveal the reasons of all He does to His fallen creatures. When they have attained to perfect moral health they will give glory to Him for all that He concealed as well as for all that He revealed.

II. But there is much that is hidden that will be revealed to the diligent seeker. If it is God's prerogative and a part of His divine plan to conceal much from man, it is His purpose and desire to reveal much to him if he will only seek after it. How many of God's operations in nature are full of mystery to one who only looks upon the surface of things, but how far diligent and earnest searchers have penetrated into the secret workings of the Divine wisdom in this direction. Although there is much hidden from them, still there is much that was once a mystery that is now made plain. And it is doubtless the same also in relation to God's working in higher regions—in His dealings in providence and in His plan of redemption. Although there is much here that must remain a mystery to the human mind, he who diligently and reverently seeks to know the mind and purpose of God in relation to these things will not lose his reward.

III. While then, it is God's prerogative to determine what He will reveal to

man it is man's glory and duty to be ever seeking to know more of God's ways and works. The third verse seems to institute a comparison between the Divine and human rulers. These latter have their state secrets—sometimes for arbitrary purposes and in other cases from necessity they conceal their plans until their ends are accomplished. If the government is a despotic one this secrecy is to be feared and deprecated; if, on the other hand, the ruler or rulers are merciful and just their subjects may safely trust them when their plans of action are for a time hidden. But however it may be with human kings, there is no questioning the right of the King of Kings to hide what He pleases from His creatures, and no reason for His creatures to doubt either His wisdom or His love in so doing. But man has a duty to perform in relation to this concealment. His Maker and his Ruler does not desire to see him sit down in indolent indifference, making no effort to penetrate the secrets of the world around him, or to apprehend in some degree some of the deep things of God's "unsearchable dealings." (Rom. xi. 33). The veil seems to have been cast over some of these problems for the very purpose of stimulating man to search and to test the depth of his interest in them. While, then, the pursuit of knowledge of any kind is good, there is none so elevating, none that brings so rich a reward, and none that man is so bound to follow after, as the knowledge of God in His works of creation, and providence, and redemption. Solomon, as the greatest monarch of his day, counted this his first duty and his highest glory, and there have been many uncrowned kings in all ages of the world who have set this before them as the aim and end of their life, and in so doing have set a diadem upon their own brows and have won the homage and love of multitudes of their race.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS

Verses 1 and 2. It was a good saying of a pious divine, "Lord preserve us from a comprehensible God." It is our duty to venerate and wonder, and not to pry with curious eyes into the secrets of God. The history of the fall is an everlasting warning to the sons of Adam to prefer the tree of life to the tree of knowledge.—*Lawson.*

1. Taking it in contrast with the latter part of the verse—"but the honour of kings is to *search out a matter*,"—there is implied the idea that the Divine knowledge is universal, perfect, and free from everything of the nature of inquiry, investigation, effort, in the acquisition. His acquaintance with all things is, in the strictest sense, *intuitive*, and, in the strictest sense, *complete*. He requires no "*searching out*" in order to discover anything; nor is it possible to make any addition to His knowledge. The past, the present, and the future are alike before His all-comprehensive mind. He sees all the present. He remembers all the past. He *foresees* all the future. His knowledge is "light without any darkness at all;" and it is light that is equally clear through the immensity of the universe, and through all time and all eternity! 2. The language implies God's entire *independence and supremacy*, as a part of His glory. He "giveth not account of any of his matters," further than, in sovereignty, He sees meet to do. He conceals when He pleases. He discloses when He pleases:—"Who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been His counsellor?" and who can demand the disclosure of any one of the secrets of the infinite and independent Mind? 3. The *impenetrable depth* of His counsels is a part of God's glory. His "judgments are a great deep." What line of created wisdom can fathom them?—

> "Not angels, that stand round his throne,
> Can search His secret will!"

"Canst thou, by searching, find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is high as heaven; what can'st thou do? deeper than hell·

what can'st thou know? The measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea." "O the depth of the riches, and wisdom, and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!" This is fitted to inspire us, His intelligent creatures, with "reverence and godly fear." In the sovereign secresy, the unapproachable reservation, the unfathomable mysteriousness of the Divine counsels – in the very requirement that we humbly bow, in adoring submission, where we cannot comprehend, without asking a question, or urging a further disclosure :—in all this, there is something that gives the Creator His proper place. There is in it a sacredness, an awfulness, that makes us feel, as we ought to do, our infinite distance. This is God's glory.—*Wardlaw.*

Verse 3. There is no searching the height or the depth of the King's heart, any more than the height of heaven, or the depth of the earth, (which in those unastronomic days meant blankly not at all). Give God a universe to rule; and what He must do in that great compass, as a King, is quite unsearchable.—*Miller.*

For Homiletics of verses 4 and 5 see on chap. xx. 26 and 28, page 596.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSES 6 and 7.

SELF-PROMOTION.

I. A wise man will let others judge of his qualifications for a high place or position. Men who consult their happiness and reputation are not so anxious to rise in the world as they are to qualify themselves for rising. A wise man knows well that it is not merely the position he occupies which raises him in the estimation of others, but the ability which he shows to fill the post, and the fitness which men recognise as existing between him and his high place. He has no desire to step into a position which he could not fill with some credit to himself and advantage to others, knowing well that he would then be like the jackdaw in the peacock's borrowed plumes, an object of derision to all beholders. He would rather occupy a low place with abilities to fill a higher, than be in one which was above his abilities, and he therefore gladly leaves the question of his social advancement in the hands of others.

II. Self-promotion is not likely to result in satisfaction to the only actor in the transaction. 1. *It is generally short-lived.* If a man is really fit for advancement, some one or some number of people are generally to be found to say to him, "Friend, go up higher." The interests of men in general, are concerned in having the best men in the foremost places; and such men, in the end, are generally placed in them by common consent. But when a man without this call steps into a place of honour, it is very common for others to resent his self-conceit, and to call upon him to give place to a more worthy person. And so his self-constituted triumph is soon over. 2. *It often ends in humiliation.* It is hard to be obliged to take a lower place under any circumstances, but when we are thus retracing steps which our self-esteem alone prompted us to take, the chagrin is great indeed. And as the ascent in such a case is generally made before the eyes of many onlookers, so the descent will be equally public, and this adds much to the disappointment and the shame.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Ambition is to the mind what the cap is to the falcon, it first blinds us, and then compels us to lower by reason of our blindness.—*E. Cook.*

Now, it is not a little said in praise of him to whom it is said, "Come up higher." For, first, it showeth his modest humility, which is the praise of

all other virtues. Secondly, it showeth the worth of his quality, which deserveth advancement. Thirdly, it showeth that to be due unto him which is bestowed upon him. On the other side, it is not a little reproach unto him that is put lower. For, first, his pride is objected to him; the overthrow of all that is praiseworthy. Secondly, his unworthiness is rejected with an upbraiding of it. Thirdly, the due punishment of being placed lower is justly inflicted. . . . And as if he were one unworthy for the prince to look upon, it is not said, *by whom thou art seen*, but *whom thine eyes have seen*, as noting also the proud presumption of the unworthy intruder. *Jermin.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH. Verses 8—11.

Two Ways of Treating an Enemy.

It is undoubtedly lawful, and sometimes indispensable, that a man who has been wronged by another should seek redress from the offending person. These verses seem no refer to an injury done to character and reputation, and seeing that these are a man's most precious possessions, he has certainly as much right to seek restitution from him who has sought to rob him of this wealth, as he has to try and capture the thief who has stolen his money or his plate, and make him give back his unlawful gain. Solomon does not condemn all interference with a neighbour who puts us "*to shame*," but sets before us two opposite courses of action, either of which may be taken in such a case. He gives the consequences of both.

I. There is the way of inconsiderate passion. This is a bad way, because— 1. *It may lead us to overstep the bounds of right and justice.* A man under the power of anger has no ear open to the counsels of reason and prudence, and under such an influence he will very likely become as great an offender against his neighbour as his neighbour was against him. He in his turn may become a slanderer and a betrayer of secrets (verse 9), and so lose all hold on his opponent; and even be put to shame by the very person whom he intended to bring to shame. He is like a blindfolded man who rushes hastily down a steep path without considering what will be the end of so mad an act. 2. *It is the least likely way to convince the offender of his fault.* Words of angry recrimination, or deeds which savour of the spirit of revenge, will almost certainly make an enemy tenfold more of an enemy. If he disliked us before without any reason, his dislike will now have some foundation to rest upon, and the gulf of separation will be widened instead of bridged over. The end to be aimed at when a brother man has trespassed against us is clearly defined by Christ. We are to try to "*gain our brother*" (Matt. xviii. 15), that is, we are to try and win his esteem and love. This can never be done if we "go forth hastily to strive." But—

II. There is the way of personal and wise remonstrance. 1. *The complaint of our wrongs is to be made first to the person offending.* Here the teaching of the wise man and the "greater than Solomon" are identical. "*If thy brother trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone.*" (Matt. xviii. 15.) To speak of it to a third person is to expose our neighbour unnecessarily, and, perhaps, to blacken his character far beyond his deserts. For, although we may give a plain unvarnished tale of his offence, he to whom we give it may colour it when he repeats it to another, and so what was but a molehill at the first may grow into a mountain before long. But if we go directly to the transgressor himself, we make it plain to him that we have no desire to make him suffer for his offence, and only ask him to deal with us in

the same spirit of brotherly love in which we deal with him. Our willingness to cover his fault will go a long way towards persuading him to confess and forsake it. 2. *We are to reason and persuade rather than to upbraid.* The discourse is to take the form of a calm debate. We are to ask for the grounds of his attack upon us, and not be too proud to enter into explanations of any act that he may have misconstrued. We are to try and convince him of the harm he will do to himself if he persist in trying to injure another, and we are to seek to clothe all our arguments and entreaties in language which is the least likely to offend and most calculated to win. Such words are compared by Solomon to a beautiful work of art which is precious and admirable not only for the skill displayed in the workmanship, but for the costly nature of the material out of which it is fashioned. (See Critical Notes on verse 11.) It may be a robe of costly material embroidered with gold and silver, or it may be a basket of wrought silver holding fruits of gold, but whatever the exact form of the production, it reveals skilful design on the part of the artist, and bears witness to his painstaking skill. A carefully framed appeal to lay before an offending brother is a work of art in a higher sphere—it calls forth all the tact and wisdom that we possess to fashion such a garment—to carve such a piece of work, but it is worth all the labour and pains that can be spent upon it, and will bring to its author the goodwill of others and the approval of his own conscience.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Verse 8. For the sake of illustration, to suppose two or three varieties of this result :—1. The *hasty* man meets his supposed adversary,—some word or act of whom has just reached him. He is all full of the fuming pride of offended self-consequence; very big; very wrathful. In this spirit he makes his charge; and finds it is a mere idle unfounded rumour that has come to his ears; that there is actually nothing in it; that nothing of the kind has ever been either said or done; that there is no ground whatever for all his excitement and transport! —How foolish he looks, when his imagined enemy, against whom he has been breathing out the vehemence of passion, all collected and cool, stands wondering at his agitation,—unable to divine what has come over him !— And how is he laughed at for having stirred himself up to all this heat and hurry,—all this violence of emotion— *for nothing !*—2. It turns out that in the cause between him and his neighbour, which he has so hastily taken up, *he is in the wrong*—that, after all his froth and bluster, truth and justice are clearly on the other side, with all the solid and satisfactory argument; while on his there is little or nothing beyond the noisy and vehement protestations of self-sufficiency, and he is quite unable to withstand the proofs against him—the verdict of all impartial persons being in favour of his opponent. In this case, he must either, after having his pride keenly mortified, cool down, and own himself in the wrong—which is the best thing he can do, but far from easy to a man of his temper; or the more he is overpowered by evidence of facts and by sound argument, the more must the sense of conscious defeat, and consequent feeling of inferiority, inflame him to rage; by which he will only render himself the more ridiculous, and give cause of more lasting mortification and shame. 3. The same things are true of a controversial dispute on any subject. Generally speaking, the hastiest and most self-confident is the most likely to fail. Such confidence very often accompanies partial information and superficial and one-sided views. The petulant, consequential disputant "*goes forth hastily to strive,*" in the full assurance th

his arguments are such as cannot be resisted, and in the full flush of anticipated triumph—of victory before the battle. But objections meet him, of which he had never thought. Arguments are arrayed and urged on the opposite side, such as had never occurred to his own mind, and such, therefore, as he did not at all expect, and cannot refute. . . . He is abashed, confounded, stupified.—*Wardlaw.*

It is he that liveth in peace that doth enjoy himself. It is he that is at home, and findeth the comfort of what God hath bestowed upon him. He that falleth into strife *goeth* from his rest and contentment, *goeth forth* from himself, so that he is hardly himself while the strife continues. . . . Therefore let not strife be a thing into which thou art carried of thine own accord; but either let thine adversary drive thee into it, or else let necessity or some good reason either draw thee or force thee.—*Jermin.*

Verse 11. The beauty of the texture sets off the fruit with additional charms. So does a lovely medium enhance the attractiveness of truth. "The preacher should strive to find out acceptable words"—*words fitly spoken*—giving to each their proper meat—and *that* "in due season," suited to their ages and difference of temperament. "How forcible are right words!" (Job vi. 25.) Our Lord witnessed of Himself, as "gifted with the tongue of the learned, that He might know how to speak the word in season" (Isa. l. 4)—*a word upon the wheels*—not forced or dragged, but rolling smoothly along, like the chariot-wheels. His discourses on the living water and the bread of life arose naturally out of the conversation, and therefore were full of arresting application. Paul powerfully charged superstition on the Athenians by an inscription on their own altar; and strengthened his reasoning by quoting from one of their own poets. (Acts xvii. 22-28.) To a corrupt and profligate judge he preached "righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come." (Acts xxiv. 25.)—*Bridges.*

That words may deserve this character, they must be the words of truth; for falsehood and error are on no occasion fit to be spoken. And therefore Job reproves his friends for endeavouring, by false doctrine, to comfort him, and direct his exercise in the time of his distress. But words may be true and yet unfitly spoken, for although nothing is to be spoken but truth, yet truth is not always to be spoken. Doeg the Edomite was guilty of murder before he killed the priests of the Lord, by telling the enraged tyrant that David had received bread and a sword from Ahimelech. Jonathan was a man of a very opposite spirit, and discovered it by the seasonable mention he made to his father of David's exploit in slaying Goliath. By putting Saul in mind of this noble action, he disarmed for a time his angry resentments.—*Lawson.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 12.

GIVING AND TAKING.

I. To give reproof effectually needs—1. *A character which deserves respect.* An iron pin when cold may by the exercise of much strength and the expenditure of much time be driven through a plate of iron, but if it be *red hot*, it goes through it with speed and ease. A blunt axe may fell a tree, but if it has a good edge the work is done far more quickly and effectually. So a very faulty man may obtain a hearing when he reproves, and his reproofs may do good, but the same reproof from the lips of one who possesses a high moral character will be far more likely to reach the conscience of the listener and lead him to repentance. 2. *A knowledge of the character and disposition of him whom he reproves.* It is indispensable that the physician who ministers a powerful drug

to a patient, or who subjects him to a critical operation, should first know something about his bodily constitution, should ascertain if there is tendency to disease which his treatment might strengthen, or exceptional weakness of any organ which would make it unable to bear the strain he is about to put upon it. If he do not make some preliminary investigation on these matters he may be developing an evil as great as the one he seeks to eradicate. A reprover should remember that all men are not alike in their temperament and moral development, and that consequently what would do real good to one transgressor would only harden another, and that, therefore, there must be acquaintance with the patient before the medicine is administered. 3. *A sincere desire to benefit the offender.* He who reproves without a real feeling of pity and a wish to help him whom he reproves will find that his words will do about as much good as water does to a rock when it falls upon it. It may drop day and night for years, but the rock is rock still—no moisture penetrates it and no verdure clothes it. So reproof that is not dictated by love will never reach the heart, and no fruits of repentance will result from fault-finding for its own sake. 4. *A due regard to a fitting time and place.* He must not rebuke his child when he is suffering pain, or charge home a fault upon the father of a family before his children. We are not likely to reform a drunkard by upbraiding him when he is under the influence of drink, or to convince a proud man that he is wrong by putting him to shame before others. A wise reprover will not only see to it that his medicine is suited to his patient, but will consider when it is most fitting to administer it.

II. To take reproof meekly—1. *Reveals a man under the control of reason.* It is only the delirious patient or the child who angrily resists the surgeon's knife, and looks no further than the present pain. A reasonable man may cry out under the operation, but he knows that his future health depends upon it, and he therefore submits patiently, although he suffers acutely. If a man looks at reproof in the same light, he will receive it in the same spirit, and give a convincing proof that he is not ruled by passion but by reason. 2. *Reveals a man governed by true self-love.* Love for our own true interests prompts us to welcome every hand stretched out to help us, and every means afforded us of becoming better and wiser. A wise reprover is a true friend, and he who does not recognise him as such shows that his own advancement is not the aim of his life and the object of his desire. But no greater proof of a sincere regard for our own moral and spiritual growth can be given than that of lending an obedient ear to a wise reproof.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

The wise reprover or instructor, who lovingly and seasonably telleth his neighbour of his fault or duty, may fitly be likened unto a jewel of pearl; for he lighteneth and enricheth him that is instructed with knowledge and the gifts of God's Holy Spirit. The attentive and obedient hearer who desires to increase in learning, and who receiveth the word of God with meekness, may also be aptly resembled to a golden earring; for he is transformed from glory to glory, by the ministry and instruction of the prudent and learned teacher.—*Muffett.*

When a reproof is both administered in wisdom and received in humility and in good part,—then there is a union of two equal rarities. A reproof well-administered is rare; and not less so is a reproof well taken. We may remark, however, that the rareness of the latter arises, to no small extent, out of the rareness of the former. It is because reproof is so seldom well-*given*, that it is so seldon well-*taken*.—*Wardlaw.*

An earring is fastened to the ear, and that it may be fastened, it pierceth the ear, and being so fastened, it is an

ornament to the whole face; so likewise is a reproof upon an obedient ear. First, it pierceth it, and is received willingly into it; secondly, it is fastened upon it, so that it stays with it; thirdly, it is an ornament to his whole life, which is thereby reformed.—*Jermin.*

For Homiletics on the subject of verse 13, see on chap. xiii. 17, page 321.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 14.

CLOUDS WITHOUT RAIN.

I. Those who promise and do not perform are wantonly cruel. To raise expectations without fulfilling them is one of the greatest unkindnesses of which men can be guilty. For however sorely the gift or the service desired may be needed, if the needy brother has never had any hope of possessing it, his sense of loss is not nearly so keen as it is if, depending on the word of another, he has felt as if the coveted good was almost in his grasp. The thirsty traveller in the desert feels his thirst more terribly after the deceitful mirage has led him to believe that a refreshing lake is just within his reach. He thinks he sees the sparkling water but a few paces distant, and is already in fancy drinking his fill when all his hopes are destroyed by the vanishing of the deception, and he is in a far worse condition than he was before its appearance. There are many men who are as deceitful and as disappointing as the mirage of the desert. Their large promises awaken bright hopes in the breast of some wayfarer on the journey of life, and he looks forward with confident joy to the time when he shall possess the promised gift. But his heart is gradually made sick by the deferred hope (chap. xiii. 12) until at last he becomes aware that he has been cruelly deceived, and finds himself a far more wretched man than he was before the promise was made to him.

II. As a rule he who promises most will perform the least. Those who bestow most upon others are those who do not spend much time in talking about what they will do. Sometimes a heavy cloud is seen in the heavens, which seems as if it would every moment fall in refreshing showers. But a few drops only fall on the parched earth, and while the husbandman is looking with confident expectancy it vanishes from his sight. On another day a cloud which seems to promise far less falls in abundance upon the thirsty land. This is not the rule in nature, but it is in relation to the promises and performances of men. The loud boaster is well-nigh certain to be a cloud without rain, and should therefore never be relied upon, and the greatest givers are generally those who promise least.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

This verse may be understood, either of God's gift to man, or man's gift to God, or else of man to any other man. For many there are who boast of those gifts which God never bestowed on them; and though God be infinite in His bounty, yet by their lying do make Him more bountiful than He is. Many there are who boast of their gifts to God, either in regard of the church or the poor, whereas His church or His poor have them as little as God Himself needs them. Many boast of their kind gifts to others, whereas their not performing them makes them more unkind than if they never had promised. . . . . Their false gifts are as the clouds, and their boasting as the winds. Their false gifts do lift them up, as the clouds are; their great boasting maketh a great noise as the wind doth. The winds drive the clouds

and scatter them; so doth their boasting spread abroad the fame of their false gifts; and as the clouds without rain darken the heavens without watering the earth; as the dry wind troubleth the air without refreshing the ground; so these boasters even darken the heaven with their naughtiness, and trouble the earth with their brags, but satisfy none with their deeds.—*Jermin.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 15.

FORBEARANCE AND PERSUASIVENESS.

I. Patience without speech is an overcoming power. The strongest smith will find a piece of cold iron too much for him—if he attempt to bend or break it he will be met with a resistance which he cannot overcome. But he places the apparently unconquerable bar upon the coals, and by degrees it seems to assume altogether another nature, and is ready to be fashioned to any shape or form. He gets this victory by *waiting*, and he finds it a far more effectual method than attempting to subdue the metal by physical force. Forbearance will sometimes do as much for the stubborn human will as the fire does for the iron. Many men who cannot be threatened into compliance with our wishes, may be overcome by patient kindness. A prince may be here put by Solomon as a type of all men in authority and high position, who by reason of their position are less under the power of others and consequently are less likely to yield to any other force than persuasion. With such men high-handed dealing and efforts to intimidate generally provoke a more stubborn resistance.

II. Patience seconded by gentle speech is doubly powerful. The smith's work is not done when by waiting he has given time for the iron to become soft and impressible; he must then bring his skill and activity to bear upon it and so mould it to his will. So after long forbearance there must be wise and persuasive speech to finish the work. The long-suffering patience, perhaps under trial and provocation, has softened the hard heart or the stubborn will, and now the gentle words are listened to and have their full weight. But this would not have been the case if patience without speech had not gone first to make way for them.

III. Those who conquer by forbearance in deed and gentleness in word walk in the Divine footsteps. In the dealings of God with the human race, no attribute of His character is more manifest than "*the riches of His forbearance and long suffering*" (Rom. ii. 4), and it is by this that He "*leads men to repentance.*" "Instead of coming down upon man by storm," says Dr. Bushnell, "in a manner of direct onset to carry his submission by storm, God lays gentle siege to him, waiting for his willing assent and choice. . . . To redress an injury by gentleness, and tame his adversary's will by the circuitous approach of forbearance and a siege of true suggestion is not the manner of men, only of God." It is not, alas! the manner of men in general, but all those who call Him Master try to imitate Him in this as in all other of His perfections that can be imitated by finite and imperfect creatures.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

The *soft* member *breaking the hard bone* may seem to be a paradox. But it is a fine illustration of the power of gentleness above hardness and irritation. Apply it to those who are set against the truth. Many a stout heart has been won by a *forbearing*, yet uncompromising, accommodation to prejudice. In reproof Jehovah showed what He could do in "the strong wind and the earthquake." But His effective rebuke was in the "still small voice;"

without upbraiding; sharp, yet tender. (1 Kings, xix. 11-13.) So powerful is the energy of gentleness! Indeed, "among all the graces that adorn the Christian soul, like so many jewels of various colours and lustres, against the day of her espousals to the Lamb of God, there is not one more brilliant than that of patience."

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 16.

USE AND ABUSE.

I. The good gifts of God are to be enjoyed by men. "*Every creature of God is good*," says the apostle, "*and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving*" (1 Tim. iv. 4). God has filled the world with gifts to minister pleasure to the bodily senses as well as to the spiritual aspirations, and the first are given to us "*richly to enjoy*" (1 Tim. vi. 17), as much as the last. Our Great and Beneficent Father, has not omitted to provide even for the gratification of our palate, but has furnished us with an almost infinite variety of natural productions, pleasant to the taste. His kindness in this matter is not to be overlooked, and these good gifts are not to be treated as though they were beneath our grateful appreciation. The asceticism which refuses to partake of them is not in accordance with the spirit of either the Old or New Testament.

II. There is no material and temporal good which cannot be misused by man. Honey may here stand for any or all the lower sweets of life—for every blessing which is not of a purely spiritual nature—and the greatest temptation to *misuse* of these lies in the direction of *over-use*—of indulging in them to the neglect of other and more precious good, and so to the injury of the higher nature. Honey is a delicious article of food, and wholesome and nutritious to a certain extent, but if a man attempted to live upon it to the exclusion of plainer fare he would find that his bodily health would suffer. In like manner is there danger to spiritual health from an undue indulgence of even the gifts of God, which minister only or chiefly to the senses, or which belong to this life alone.

III. The misuse of what is good in itself puts an end to all real enjoyment of it. If a man eats immoderately of honey it soon ceases to be pleasant to his taste, and the very sweetness that at first attracted him produces loathing. The same nausea of spirit follows immoderate indulgence in any merely temporal or material good—that which, used lawfully, would always afford true and real enjoyment, cloys upon the man who abuses it by over-use.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

The figure varies. In a former sentence we are commanded to eat honey because it is good (chap. xxiv. 13), and that was very carefully explained. It meant that piety was itself good, and we were to taste and see (Psa. xxxiv. 8) that before we could be Christians. But now the figure varies. There is a sweetness of eternal *hope*, even when we have not got down to the sweetness of a saving piety. We are to put on the helmet of hope. So the Apostle tells us (1 Thess. v. 8). But Solomon cautions us that we are to put on no more than is "*sufficient*." We are eating more than enough honey when we have no right to eat any, and so we may be eating too much when we ought to be getting more. There is such a thing as having more hope than evidence. And if a man has too much confident hope of heaven for the amount he has of piety, there certainly is a case of eating more than is sufficient . . . . Blessed is the man that has "*found honey*." Let him eat so much as is sufficient for him in this dismal pilgrimage. But, when he is once refreshed like Jonathan, let him sound for an advance.—*Miller*.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 17.

OBTRUSIVENESS.

I. We may by indiscretion close a door which we have ourselves opened. There are many things which are pleasant and welcome occasionally, which become not only unwelcome, but annoying, if we have too much of them. We do not desire to hear the sweetest song every day and all the day long—that which is refreshing and delightful now and then becomes wearisome if constantly repeated. We must apply this rule to ourselves in relation to our fellow-men. While we rejoice to feel that there are those who love us so well as to desire our presence upon all occasions, we must remember that most of our acquaintances will not set so high a value upon us, and that to be seen too often where we should be welcome if seen but seldom, is by our own act to shut our neighbour's door upon us.

II. Our neighbour's objection to our constant visits may arise from no unkindly feeling. Men who have work to do in the world cannot give all their time, or much of it, to the entertainment of visitors. There are those who, living to no purpose themselves, forget that others feel themselves accountable to God for the use they make of their lives, and such idle people often sorely vex and hinder their busy neighbours by their thoughtless and unseasonable visits. The man who enters a house and takes from a diamond necklace one precious stone after another until he has taken the whole, is doubtless no friend, but a thief and a robber, and is punishable by the law of the land; but the man who enters his neighbour's house and robs him of hour after hour, steals property which probably cannot be redeemed, or redeemed only by encroaching upon the hours which ought to be given to rest. So that such a thoughtless intruder steals not only his neighbour's time, but indirectly his health and power to work. Surely such pests of society ought not to have the name of *friend* bestowed upon them, but deserve to be branded with a name more befitting their character, and more in accordance with their actions.

For Homiletics of verse 18, see on chap. xii. 18, page 274.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSES 19 *and* 20.

MISPLACED CONFIDENCE AND UNSEASONABLE SONGS.

The day of adversity is, as we saw on chap. xxiv. 10, a testing time for the man who is the subject of the calamity, and it is also a season in which he tests the worth of those who have called themselves his friends in the time of his prosperity. These verses deal with two varieties among many who intensify his affliction and deepen his grief, instead of bringing him help and comfort. There is—

I. The faithless friend. This phrase is a contradictory one, but it is used for want of a better. The word friend, in its highest and best sense, denotes one who is worthy of trust and who never fails in the hour of trial. But there are many who assume the name who are unworthy of it, and whose failure when they are most needed is one of the most bitter drops in the cup of calamity. If the cable breaks in a calm sea the vessel and the crew may escape serious injury; but if it gives way amid storm and tempest, the consequences are most disastrous. It is hard to find a professed friend failing us when we are sailing in calm waters, but it may then be borne without entirely crushing the spirit. But when such a discovery is first made in the day of trouble, it is enough to break the stoutest heart.

II. **The u..discerning friend.** There are many real friends who lack the ability to discern how best to help the sorrowful and heavy hearted. They sing a song with the intention of giving cheer when tears, or at least silence, would be far more acceptable to the wounded spirit. Songs of gladness, such as are doubtless here intended, fit the spirit when it is walking in the sunlight, but they aggravate the suffering of those who are in darkness of soul. He who aspires to the name of friend must learn to rejoice with those who rejoice and to weep with those that weep.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Verse 19. The greatest disaster, in proportion to the number of men engaged, that befel our arms in the Eastern insurrection, was the direct result of confidence in an unfaithful man. At Arrah-on-the-Ganges three or four hundred soldiers were sent to attack a body of the rebels, and relieve some British residents who were in danger there. A native was employed to ascertain the position of the enemy. In consequence of his report, the men left the river and made a night march into the interior. The messenger was false. The little army fell into an ambush prepared for them in the jungle. Two-thirds of their number were shot down in the dark by unseen foes. The remnant escaped to their ship when the day dawned. As they lay in that fatal valley getting their wounds in the dark, and helplessly wishing for the day, how exquisitely bitter must have been the reflection that a too ready trust in a faithless man had wrought them all this woe.—*Arnot.*

The God of nature hath placed the teeth in two jaws, that the one may be helpful to the other; and he hath supported man with *two feet*, that the one may be a succour to the other. From hence, to teach us the help and support which one man ought to yield to another. It is by means of this mutual support in the feet that we pass over the blocks that lie in our way; for while the one foot is lifted up to step over them, the other bears up the body. It is the mutual help of the jaws, and by their meeting together, that we break hard things and make them fit nourishment for us. In like manner, therefore, when a block lies in the way of anyone, another should be ready to support him until he get over it. When a hard distress lieth upon anyone, another should be ready to help him for the better breaking through it. But in this point too many are like a broken tooth, and he that looketh to meet with them for help in his distress, findeth them not to answer his expectation . . . and too many are like a foot out of joint, and he that thinketh to rest upon them in time of need, is sure to fall by them.—*Jermin.*

Verse 20. He that taketh away a garment from another may think to ease his burden, but it being done in cold weather, it addeth to his coldness; he that putteth vinegar upon nitre may think only to break the hardness of it, but he dissolveth it. In like manner he that singeth songs to a heavy heart may think to ease the burden of sorrow, may think to break the hardness of grief, but such is the force of the sad contraposition, such is the power of the contrariety between singing and sorrow of heart, that the ease of one's heart being able to sing, increaseth the weight of the other's trouble that he cannot do so.—*Jermin.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSES 21 and 22.

A Blessed Recompense.

I. A recompense which is difficult. No one can affirm that it is an easy thing to minister help and comfort to one who has done us an injury, but it is more difficult in some cases than in others. Men are not bound to us by equal ties: some are merely related to us because they partake of the same common humanity; others are our kinsmen according to the flesh; while others stand in an even nearer relation, and are brothers in a spiritual sense, being partakers with us of what is called in Scripture language the new birth. According to Christ's teaching this is the nearest and closest bond which can unite men, and yet it cannot be denied that we sometimes have to exercise the grace of forgiveness even towards these brethren. But the motive power which prompts us to return good for evil is certainly stronger in this latter case than in the others, or at least it ought to be so. For when we reflect that the brother who has wronged us stands in the same relation to Christ as we do ourselves, it ought not to be at all difficult for us to feed him when hungry, or in any other way in our power to minister to his needs. There will also in most men be found more or less natural promptings to succour an enemy who is related to them by ties of blood—the nearer the natural relationship the more easy will it be, as a rule, to comply with the command given by the Wise Man. But the greatest difficulty will be found in obeying it when the enemy is one who is altogether unlike us in character, and who is only related to us in the broad and universal sense of being human. To be active and earnest in our endeavours to relieve the necessities of such an one needs often much Divine help, but it is demanded of us by Him who died for a world at enmity with Him.

II. A retaliation which is blessed in its results. We understand with Zöckler, the figure here used to "describe the deep pangs of repentance which one produces within his enemy by rewarding his hatred with benefits." This is a result most desirable and blessed for him who has been the offender. For it is the only road by which he can regain peace of mind and self-respect, as well as the esteem of all right-minded people. This restoration of an erring brother would in itself be a great reward to a good man, but it is not, according to Solomon, the only one which is accorded to him who thus recompenses good for evil. A special reward for the special act is promised by Jehovah. There is one which is the outcome of the laws by which He governs men. If a traveller in a cold region finds a fellow traveller lying benumbed and forsaken by the roadside, and does what he can to raise and restore him, the effort makes his own blood circulate more quickly, and his own frame glow with warmth. This is the outcome of a natural law of God, and there is a spiritual one akin to it. For whenever an effort is made to raise and restore one who has morally fallen, he who makes the effort feels a reflex glow of moral life and health in his own spirit. This is the certain effect which must follow every act of goodwill towards an enemy, as surely as the shadow follows the substance. But there are probably other rewards of an external nature—many blessings that come to a good man's life may be direct and special gifts from His Father above for deeds which, like the one now under consideration, are especially pleasing to Him.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

We may profess our goodwill towards our enemy, that we forgive and pray for him from our heart. But unless we are ready with the practical exercise of sympathy, we are only the victims of our own moral delusion.—*Bridges.*

It is action, not affection, that is here spoken of—not the disposition of the heart, but the deeds of the hand; and if it be a more practicable thing that we should compel ourselves to right bodily performances than call up right mental propensities, this may alleviate somewhat our dread of these precepts, as if they were wholly unmanageable or incompetent to humanity. Before, then, taking cognisance of what should be the inward temper of Christians towards those who maltreat or oppress them, we would bid you remark that the outward conduct towards them is that which forms the literal subject-matter of the commandments here given. The disciples are in this place told that . . . . hard as it may be under their cruel provocations to keep unruffled minds and to *feel* peaceably, they, as much as in them lies, are to *live* peaceably . . . . while it may not be the tendency of nature so to *desire*, our bidden obligation is so to *do*, for in *so doing* thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head.—*Chalmers* on Rom. xii. 20.

Now, we know that if a coal or two of fire be laid on the hearth of the chimney below, he that is cold cannot be wholly warmed, or receive much good thereby; but if one basketful be poured on the fire after another, so that the coals are heaped up to the mantel-tree, or are as high as his head that fain would warm him, then he waxeth thoroughly hot and beginneth even to burn. It seemeth then that by this borrowed speech is meant, that if a man shall be very bountiful even unto his enemy, and heap upon him one good turn after another, this will cause his affection, which before was cold, to burn within him. Thus dealt David with Saul, who spared his life when he might have slain him, and only cut off a piece of his coat when he might have cut off his head.—*Muffett.*

I take for granted, what I believe to be the truth, that the words "*for thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head,*" have reference, not to the fires of Divine vengeance, but to the influence of kindly treatment melting down the enemy to conciliation, as fuel heaped on the ore fuses it from its hardness, and sends it forth in liquid streams, to take the features and impress of the mould.—A certain prince, on leading his generals and his army against an advancing host of invaders, declared his resolution not to leave a single enemy alive. He sent an embassy to treat with them. He made proposals such as subdued and attached them, and rendered them valuable allies. On astonishment being expressed that he should have thus failed in his determination and promise, his ready reply was—"I have not failed: I have kept my word. I engaged not to leave a *living enemy;* nor have I. They are enemies no longer—they are *friends.*" He had "heaped coals of fire on their head."—*Wardlaw.*

For hunger and thirst are common enemies, both to thee and him. And therefore, as where a common enemy invadeth, particular enmity is laid aside, and all join there to help and withstand him; so here lend a hand to resist these common enemies, which though now have seized on thine enemy may quickly sieze on thee. Besides he is hungry as a man, he thirsteth as a man—not as an enemy—and therefore as a man give him bread to eat, give him water to drink. This may also quench the hunger of his enmity, and satisfy also the hunger of his hatred.—*Jermin.*

If anyone desires to try this work, he must bring to it at least these two qualifications, modesty and patience. If he proceed ostentatiously, with an air of superiority and a consciousness of his own virtue, he will never make one step of progress. The subject will day by day grow harder in his hands. But even though the successive acts of kindness should be genuine, the operator must lay his account with a tedious process and many disappointments. . . . The miner does not think that his coals of fire are wasted, although he has been throwing them on for several successive hours, and the stones show no symptoms

of dissolving. He knows that each portion of the burning fuel is contributing to the result, and that the flow will be sudden and complete at last. Let him go and do likewise who aspires to win a brother by the subduing power of self-sacrificing love.—*Arnot.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 23.

The Way to Treat a Backbiter.

It will be seen from a reference to the Critical Notes, that nearly all modern commentators render this verse quite differently from the common version, and so reverse the meaning. It will, however, bear the common rendering. "I confess," says Wardlaw, "that if the word will bear it at all, our version seems decidedly preferable. There is something tame, commonplace, and of little practical consequence—hardly worth forming the subject of a proverb—in saying that as the north wind brings rain, 'a backbiting tongue' brings anger. But the verse as it stands in our translation inculcates a most important lesson." We therefore take the proverb as we find it in our Bible, as setting forth—

I. **An unrighteous action producing a righteous emotion.** We have before had brought before us in this book the peculiar iniquity of backbiting and its evil results (see page 274). The special unrighteousness of the act lies, of course, in the fact that the person who is the subject of it, being absent and ignorant of the charge brought against him, has no opportunity of defending himself. A feeling of indignation against such an act, and an expression of it in the countenance, is therefore demanded from every lover of truth and justice. He who will calmly listen to a tale of slander and show no tokens of disapproval, makes himself a partaker of the sin. But it is impossible for a righteous man to act thus. When a putrid body is presented to our bodily senses, if we are healthy men we experience a feeling of revulsion which we cannot conceal. And so if a man is morally healthy he must experience and reveal a strong dislike to the backbiting tongue.

II. **The unrighteous action overpowered by the righteous emotion.** When the heavy rain-clouds which overspread the sky are dispersed and driven away by the wind, they show themselves to be the weaker of the two contending forces. And so when the backbiting tongue is silenced by the look of righteous indignation, it gives proof that, however strong the workings of evil are, the power of goodness is stronger. Those who set their faces against this or any other vice, may always draw encouragement from the fact that there is a reprover within the breast of the wrong-doer, which in spite of all efforts to stifle it, seconds the reprover from without—wherever the conscience is at all awake, it says Amen to a faithful rebuke, whether administered by word or look. And so it is that a countenance upon which is written righteous anger is so potent a check to a backbiting tongue.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

It is a great encouragement to tale-bearers, to observe that their wicked stories are heard with attention. If a man looks upon them with a cheerful countenance, and listens to their tales, and makes them welcome to his table, they naturally conclude that the person to whom they speak has as bad a heart as themselves, and they will not fail to bring him new stories of the like kind, as soon as they have got an opportunity to learn or to make them. But if the receiver of stolen goods is a sharer with the thief in his guilt, and if any man that encourages another in evil partakes in

his sin, then he that hears the backbiter with complacency is little better than himself, and would probably follow the same trade if he had the same talents for it. We cannot, therefore, clear ourselves from the sin of backbiting, unless we refuse to receive a bad report of our neighbour, and testify our displeasure, by all proper methods, at the base conduct of the assassins that would murder in the dark the good-name of their fellow-creatures. When the murderers of Isbosheth brought their master's head to David, judging from their own disposition that it would be an acceptable present to him, he treated them in such a manner that no man ever sent another present of the like kind to him.—*Lawson.*

There is a place for anger as well as for love. As in nature, a gloomy tempest serves some beneficial purposes for which calm sunshine has no faculty; so in morals, a frown on an honest man's brow is in its own place, as needful and useful as the sweetest smile that kindness ever kindled on the human countenance . . . We don't want a fretful passionate man; and if we did, we could find one without searching long or going far. We want neither a man of wrath nor a man of indiscriminating, unvarying softness. We want something with two sides; that is, a solid real character. Let us have a man who loves good and hates evil, and who, in place and time convenient, can make either emotion manifest upon his countenance. The frown of anger is the shade that lies under love and brings out its beauty.—*Arnot.*

For Homiletics on verse 24, see on chap. xxi. 9, page 613.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 25.

COLD WATER AND GOOD NEWS.

I. Two blessings often ardently longed for. In these days of travel, many more can enter into the spirit of this analogy than in the days of Solomon—the comparative ease by which men can reach the most distant lands, and which in one aspect brings all places and people so much nearer together than in ancient times, is on the other hand the cause of far more separation between those who are bound together by tender ties, and fills far more hearts with an anxious longing for tidings from far countries. No more apt illustration could be used to picture such a condition of spirit than that of *thirst;* for as *it,* if of long duration, prostrates the frame and renders every other blessing of life incapable of affording any comfort, so often does a long delay of tidings concerning those most dear paralyse all the energies of the soul, and render it unable to gain comfort from any other source. The wife whose husband has been long fighting for his country on the distant battle-field, or the father whose son has been for years seeking his fortune in some far-off land, turn often with distaste from all the comforts and interests which surround them, and would willingly sacrifice many near blessings in exchange for cheering news from those beyond the seas. They are like the traveller in the desert, whose gold cannot allay his consuming thirst, and who would willingly give a bag of pearls for a cup of cold water.

II. Two blessings bringing like results. Hagar and her son wandered in the desert till the water was spent in the bottle, and then mother and son gave up all for lost and lay down to die. We may take it for granted that neither the youth nor his mother were easily overcome or quickly daunted, but thirst and its attendant evils would soon have slain them as certainly as a band of desert roobers. But when God showed to Hagar the well, and they had drank of its

waters, it was as though a new life had entered into them, and hope and energy returned. This is a type of what has happened to many a heart-sick soul since those days. Jacob was going down to his grave still mourning for the son lost so many years ago, and life, we may well believe, had lost its interest for him when his sons brought the astonishing tidings, "Joseph is yet alive, and is governor over all the land of Egypt." And the old man renewed his youth, and, so to speak, began to live again, so life-restoring often to a thirsty soul are good news from a far country.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

A far-off land sends specially *good news* because we faint the more, and long the harder, for the very reason that it is so distant. They come more seldom. And our relations with far-off lands are weightier and more critical than those beside us. So much for the secular significance. But oh! the spiritual! The righteous scarcely are saved. (1 Peter iv. 18). We are in a wilderness. (Rev. xii. 6, 14). Our enemies are legion. (Ephes. vi. 12). We run the gauntlet with daily foes, (Ephes. v. 16); and that with daily changes in their attempts to trip us. (Prov. v. 6). The sinner, wherever he may be met, is faint with fatigue. Our Saviour knew this when He shaped His appeal "Come unto me, all ye that labour, etc. (Matt. xi. 28). Now, high over all other modes of comfort is the "*good news from a far-off land.*" All right there, come anything! A man's life may have been a perfect failure, *quoad* the opinion of the world; but if he have Heaven it has been the very best—there has not been an hour of it that has not been "marshalled by a Divine tactic," the best for the man and the best for his part in the war. —*Miller.*

We shall especially apply the subject —to *heaven*—good news from heaven. There are several things that make good news from a far country as grateful as "cold waters to a thirsty soul." *I. If the country reported is altogether unlike our own.* The human mind is always interested in what is novel and romantic—strangeness has a strange fascination for the soul. What charms have the reports of Captain Cook, Moffatt, Livingstone, for all minds. . . . *II. If the country reported has conferred an immense benefit on us.* Supposing that we had once been in a state of abject slavery, and that the far country reported to us had effected our emancipation and guaranteed our liberty, with what interest should we listen to everything about it—the act that served us would invest all the incidents connected with this history with a special charm. . . . *III. If the country reported contained any that are dear to us.* New Zealand, Vancouver's Island, and many other countries, are extremely interesting to many families in this land, on account of the friends they have living in them. . . . *IV. If the country reported is a scene in which we expect to live ourselves.* With what interest does the emigrant listen to everything referring to that land whither he is about wending his way, and which he is adopting as his home. Heaven as a far country pre-eminently meets all these conditions of interest. There is the *Novel*. . . How unlike that country is ours. Here is a sphere for the play of the romantic. There is the *Benefactor*. What benefits that far country has conferred on us! Thence we have received Christ the Redeemer of the World, and the Blessed Spirit of wisdom, purity, and love. There are our *Friends*. How many of those whom we have known and loved are there. How many such are going there every day. Some of us have more friends in heaven than on earth. There we *expect to live*. There we expect an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away.—*Dr. David Thomas.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 26.

THE EVIL RESULT OF MORAL COWARDICE.

I. There can never be a good reason why a good man should waver or bow down before a bad man. Many reasons often exist why one bad man should fear another bad man, they are both on the wrong side, both arrayed against the moral order of the universe, and therefore are on the *weakest* side, and cannot count upon the support of any superior and all-powerful force. Neither of them has conscience or God upon his side; each one has to fight his battle on his own charges, and can with no confidence foretell the result. But the want of firmness on the part of a righteous man in the presence of wickedness—even when that wickedness is allied with all the power that it can arrogate to itself—is contrary to reason. For as surely as light must defeat the darkness, so surely must right in the end prove itself victorious over wrong. A good man has the whole force of the moral universe upon his side, and is assured both by experience and by Divine promise that if he holds fast to the end he shall be more than conqueror.

II. The wavering of such a man pollutes the very sources of social morality. Unreasonable although it is, yet it is not out of the range of human experience. "The best men are but men at the best" says an old writer, and in times of great trial they often give evidence that it is so. Good and noble men have sometimes trembled and given way before the terrors of the stake, and far less terrible suffering has often sufficed to shake the constancy of true men who were less courageous. But whenever such a fall takes place it is a heavy blow to the cause of right and truth upon the earth. A good man is like a fountain of pure and living water. He is a source of moral life and health in the circle in which he moves; even if he does not put forth any direct or special effort for the advancement of morality, his life will as certainly have an influence for good as the lighted candle will illumine the darkness around it. But if he shows himself a coward when exposed to loss or danger for the sake of right, it will do as much harm to the moral health of the community in which he lives as would be done to its bodily health if the stream from which its members drink were polluted at the fountain head. The mischief done in each case may not show itself by any startling results. The poison in the water may not *kill*, but only lower the standard of health in those who partake of it, and so a moral fall in a good man may not lead other men to open apostacy from the right path, but it may make the walk of many unsteady. Christ tells His disciples this same truth when He calls them the "*salt of the earth*," and asks "*if the salt have lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted*" (Matt. v. 13). In other words, the good are the conservators of the moral purity of the world, and if any one among them ceases to sustain this character he is not only a loser himself but a source of loss to others.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Lord Bacon gives this proverb political application: "It teaches that an unjust and scandalous judgment in any conspicuous and weighty cause is, above all things, to be avoided in the State;" and in his Essay (lvi.) of Judicature, he says: "One foul sentence doth more hurt than many foul examples; for these do but corrupt the stream, the other corrupteth the fountain"—*Tr. of Lange's Commentary.*

Eastern *fountain and springs* (where the rains are only periodical, and at long intervals) are of no common price. The injury of *corrupting* them is proportionate. The well is therefore a blessing or a curse, according

to the purity or impurity of the waters. *A righteous man* in his proper character is "a well of life, a blessing in the midst of the land." But if *he fall down before the wicked* by his inconsistent profession, the blessing becomes a curse, *the fountain is troubled, and the spring corrupt.* What a degradation was it to Abraham to *fall down* under the rebuke of an heathen king; to Peter, to yield to a servant maid in denying his Lord! How did David's sin *trouble the fountain,* both to his family and his people! How did the idolatry of his wise son *corrupt the spring* through successive generations!

When a minister of Christ apostatises from the faith (and mournfully frequent have been such spectacles) or compromises his principles from the fear of man, the *springs and fountains* of truth are fearfully corrupted. When a servant of God, of standing and influence, crouches and *falls down under the wicked,* the transparency of his profession is grievously tarnished. Satan thus makes more effective use of God's people than of his own—*Bridges.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 27.

Too Much of a Good Thing.

For Homiletics on the first clause of this verse, see on verse xvi., page 703. A reference to the Critical Notes will show that, owing partly to its elliptical form, the rendering of the second clause has been much disputed. The reading found in our version is, however, quite admissible on the principles of Hebrew interpretation, and accords well with the first clause. The analogy teaches—

I. That a desire for the good opinion of others is right and salutary. As honey is not only a pleasant but a wholesome article of food, so the wish to stand well with our fellow-men is a God-implanted feeling which is very beneficial both to the individual man and to society as a whole. He is a churlish being who does not care what other people think about him, who sets at nought their esteem or their blame, while a right regard to their judgment of us insensibly produces a beneficial influence upon our conduct and temper.

II. But it is a desire which must not rule our life. Just as honey must not be substituted for plainer food, or made the staple article of diet, so a desire for the good opinion of others must not be put before higher motives—must not be made the ruling principle of life. This proverb may be linked with the preceding one to some extent, for the lack of firmness which good men sometimes display in the society and under the influence of worse men than themselves is often due to a desire not to lose their good opinion—not to be thought obstinate, or morose, or conceited. But when any question of right or wrong is at stake the approval or disapproval even of those whose goodwill is most precious to us must be cast aside.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

There is such a thing as *vain glory.* There is such a thing as a person's indulging an insatiable appetite for applause and honour. There is such a thing as "*searching it out,*" looking ever after it, eager to get it, and touchily jealous of every omission to bestow it and every deficiency in its amount; exploring for it in every possible direction; listening with an ear on the alert to catch every breathing of adulation; *fishing* for praise; throwing out hints to draw it forth; eulogising others, to tempt a return; saying things in disparagement of oneself, for the sake of having them contradicted—things which, said by another, would stir the hottest of his

blood. The temper of mind may be put in exercise, in regard to greater and to smaller matters. It may assume the form of a proud ambition, or of a weak-minded vanity. But in either case it may with truth be said that "*it is not glory.*" A man's honour should rather *come to him*, than be eagerly solicited and searched for. It should not be made *his object.* —*Wardlaw.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 28.

A DEFENCELESS CITY.

The other side of this picture is given in chap. xvi. 32. (See page 497.)

I. Such a city as is here described proclaims the lack of a wise and powerful governor within. The walls and buildings of a city are constantly exposed to influences which promote decay, even if no hostile military force attacks them. The everyday exposure to storm and sun and rain will have a tendency to make the mortar crumble, and the bricks or stones to become loose and fall away. Hence, if a wise man governs a city he will make it a part of his constant duty to watch for the first signs of weakness, and if he has the authority which his position ought to put into his hand, he will cause each breach to be repaired as soon as it is discovered. And when we see a city whose walls are in a perfect condition—where there are no fallen stones and no crumbling mortar—we feel at once that there is rule and authority residing there. But "*a city broken down and without walls*" tells plainly the opposite story. Now every human spirit in this fallen world is exposed daily, and sometimes hourly, to influences which tend to irritate and vex it, and so to destroy its means of defence against temptation, and lower its dignity and mar its moral beauty. And if a man yields himself up to these influences, and allows them to hold undisputed sway over his life, he proclaims himself to be without those essential elements to his welfare and happiness—wisdom to see his danger, and power to guard it.

II. Such a city gives an invitation to the invader without. If a fortress is known to be well fortified, if there is no weak or unguarded point, an enemy will not hastily try to take possession of it. Its strength will oftentimes be its security against attack. But if its fallen towers and tottering defences tell of weakness and anarchy within, its condition will tempt the foe to enter. So if a man gives evidence that he has no control over his passions, both evil men and evil spirits will mark him for their prey, and will make it their business to lead him from one sin to another—to make him not only a negative but a positive transgressor. Such an one, in the language of Paul, "*gives place to the devil*" (Eph. iv. 27.)

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

To come to particulars; if any be angry or given to wrath, will he not quickly be led captive to revile and to commit murder? If the affection of covetousness possess any, will he not easily be drawn to deceive and steal? The like is to be said of all the passions of the mind, which, if a man cannot bridle or govern, they will carry him headlong with violence into all mischief and misery, as wild and fierce horses oftentimes run away with an unguided coach or waggon—*Muffett.*

CHAPTER XXVI.

CRITICAL NOTES.—2. The first clause of the verse should be, **As the sparrow flitting, as the swallow flying,** etc. **Causeless,** *i.e.*, "*undeserved*"—*i.e.*, Such a curse is but transient—it alights for the moment, but, like a bird, does not stay long. Miller and others, however, understand the comparison to carry an entirely opposite meaning. (See Suggestive Comments on the verse.) **3.** To our English ideas, the whip and bridle are assigned respectively to the wrong animals, but it must be remembered that the Eastern ass is often quite as spirited an animal as the horse. **6. Drinketh damage,** or "*injury.*" As in Job xxi. 20, the verb "*drinketh*" seems to express suffering in a large measure. **7. Are not equal.** The Hebrew word, so rendered, is a very obscure one, and is rendered by Delitzsch, Gesenius, and others, "*hang down.*" Zöckler and Stuart give the sentence the imperative form, and read, "*Take away the legs from the lame, and the proverb in the fool's mouth.*" **Parable.** This is the common word for proverb—the word that gives the title to the book. On its real meaning, see the Introduction. **8. Sling.** Gesenius, Zöckler, and many other commentators, adopt the reading in the margin of the English version, and translate this word, which is very obscure, "*a heap of stones.*" Stuart, Ewald, Delitzsch, and others, retain the word "*sling,*" which is the reading of the Septuagint. Stuart thus explains the verse, "*It would be absurd to* bind a stone in a sling, *and then expect it to do execution. Equally so is it to* bestow honour on a fool, *and expect any good consequences from it.*" If the first rendering is adopted, the word stone must be understood to refer to *a precious stone.* **9. A thorn.** This is generally understood to mean a thorny stick or staff, which is a mischievous weapon in the hands of a drunkard. **10.** This verse is very difficult and obscure, and has many and entirely different renderings. Luther, Elster, and others, translate the subject of the first clause, "*A master, an able man, formeth all aright,—or all himself.*" Delitzsch, Umbreit, and Hitzig, read, "*Much produceth all.*" The French version is in substance the same as our English marginal rendering. Perhaps the greater number of Hebrew critics favour the rendering of Zöckler, Ewald, Stier, etc., who read, "*As an archer, who woundeth everything, so is he who hireth fools and vagrants*" (or wayfarers). Stuart and Miller translate the first word, "*arrow,*" and the former thus explains the proverb, "*He who employs fools and vagrants to do his work, will injure himself.*" **15. In his bosom.** Rather, **In the dish,** as in chap. xix. 24. **17. Meddleth,** rather, "*is excited.*" **21. Coals to burning coals**—*i.e.*, "*black coals to burning,*" etc. **22.** A repetition of chap. xviii. 8. (See on that verse.) **23. Burning lips**—*i.e.*, "lips whence come ardent expressions of friendship." **Silver dross.** Impure silver not freed from the dross. **24. Layeth up,** rather, "*prepareth,*" or "*meditateth.*" **26. Congregation**—*i.e.*, "*before the people assembled for judgment.*" **(Zöckler.)**

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 1.

A GIFT WRONGLY BESTOWED.

I. To honour some men is both seemly and right. The snow and the rain come from heaven by Divine command, and are indispensable to the beauty and fruitfulness of the earth. So to accord honour where it is due is a Divine command (Rom. xiii. 7), and is indispensable to our social well-being.

II. But honour accorded to a fool (*i.e.*, **a bad man**) **is incongruous and hurtful.** Snow in summer is an exception to the rules of nature. It would indeed be a surprise to our reapers when they were about to gather in the grain, to find the fields white with snow, and such an event would be most mischievous in its effects. And in Oriental countries rain in summer would be equally surprising, and probably as hurtful, since the rain in those lands generally descends in torrents and not in gentle showers as with us. So, although God has commanded us to "*honour all men*" (1 Peter ii. 17), the wicked man, by his wickedness, puts himself outside this rule, and to place him in a position of honour, or to give him reverence, is entirely out of place, and an act which can only produce evil consequences. 1. *It does harm to the man who gives it.* The heavy rain or snow falling upon the ripened cornfield, takes away all its beauty and lessens its worth—it may make it utterly valueless. And so it degrades a soul to bow down where it ought

to stand erect and firm, and a man who will from cowardice or any other cause cringe before a moral fool is a man who is of no use in the world from a moral point of view. (See on this subject, on verse 26 of the preceding chapter, page 711). 2. *It injures the man who receives it.* It makes him feel as if there was no difference between vice and virtue, when he finds himself receiving that which ought to be given to a good man only, and so he is confirmed in his wickedness. This will be the case especially if the person who does him honour is a better man than himself, if it is such a case as is described in the verse referred to above. 3. *It has a bad influence upon men around them.* It is an encouragement to bad men to continue in their evil courses when they see wickedness enthroned in high places, and worthless men receiving honour instead of the scorn which they deserve. Such an elevation makes all bad men more shameless and daring, and it also discourages and depresses better men. Although the truly good man's actions spring from a deeper source, and have their origin in a higher motive than the praise or blame of their fellow-men, yet there are many who are not firmly rooted in the practice of virtue, who are much influenced by the moral atmosphere in which they live. If they see their fellow-men doing as God does, and being a respecter of persons in regard to *character*, and to character *only*, their better nature will be strengthened, and their efforts to be upright and godly will be encouraged, but if they see "*the wicked walk on every side*," and "*the vilest men exalted*" (Psalm, xii. 8), they may give up the struggle after a higher and better life in despair. And thus the effect upon the moral tone of the community will be as blighting and destructive as floods upon the growing corn, or as snow upon the ripening fruits. It is, therefore, the solemn duty of every man in this respect to "*discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God, and him that serveth Him not.*" (Mal. iii. 18).

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Honour is unfit for a fool, in two respects especially; the one, for that punishment is properly due unto him; the other, for that he abuseth his authority, be it civil or ecclesiastical, unto the hurt of those that are subject unto him.—*Muffett.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 2.

The Causeless Curse.

A reference to the Critical Notes and the Suggestive Comments will show that different meanings are attached to this proverb.

Men often utter causeless curses. In whatever country of the world we travel, and among whatever society, we are liable to hear men pouring forth maledictions against their fellow-creatures. There are places and circles where such imprecations are never uttered, because a better spirit rules those who belong to them, but these are, alas! exceptions to a rule. Curses without cause are uttered by masters against servants, and by parents against children, and by men in every condition and relation in life—curses prompted by passion and falling from the lips of men who answer to the description of the Psalmist—whose "*inward part is very wickedness*," and, as a consequence, whose "*throat is an open sepulchre*" spreading unhealthy and loathsome influences around. (Psa. v. 9.)

II. Such a curse is harmless to its victims. A curse which is undeserved has no sting; it is as powerless to injure as the bird that flits over the traveller's head and soon disappears. Even if the creature attempted to harm the man

it is too weak, but not weaker than the *curse without cause.* It may cast a passing shadow in its passage, but there is no substance in it—it consists of words without weight, and wishes that have no power to fulfil themselves.

III. But such a curse will fall upon him who uttered it. We know that every bird who casts a shadow over our path will presently settle down again—it will find its nest whence it started, and there take up its abode. And so every curse uttered without a cause will return upon the head of him who uttered it—upon him will come the same, or worse, ills than those he has called down upon another. "Cursing men," says Trapp, "are cursed men."

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

(This comment, it will be seen, rests on another interpretation of the verse.) The type is graceful. The "*bird*" is so little, and his flight and roaming about so graceful, that we never think of him as having an aim. And yet, the wildest sport upon the wing is continually directed, and obeys the mind of the humblest voyager in the heavens." "*Curses;*" of all other things not aimless. "He doth not afflict willingly" (Lam. iii. 33). And so whether large or trivial; the one great curse, or its numerous army of descendants; none are without a *purpose.* In each gentle pulse upon the wind the twittering "*swallow*" has no more clear a meaning than these flying griefs, as they float fitfully toward them who are to bear them. This Hebrew has two meanings. . . . We have selected "*to no purpose*" here, because the preposition is ל, and not ב. Had we selected "for no cause," there would have emerged a beautiful sense. The meaning then, as birds do not make their appearance in the spring as apparitions, starting up ghost-like in the fields as they seem to, but have come long journeys, many of them in the night, and have reached us by honest flying, so the curse *does not come* without a *cause.* The meanings, as will be seen, are very different. One is, that the curse has a *cause* on our part; the other, that it has a reason on the part of our Creator. Now, both are true. Both are very expressive. Both have a fitness in the passage. . . . "*To no purpose*" yields the wider truth, and, moreover, is the bolder mystery. The curse had a subsistence earlier than we, and a "*cause*" later than it had a *reason.* It was pre-determined from the very beginning. And, therefore, ours is the bolder grasping of the cavil, and replies to the sinner more deeply.—*Miller.*

Powerless was Moab's curse, though attempted to be strengthened with the divination of the wicked prophet. Goliath's curse against David was scattered to the winds. What was David the worse for Shimei's curse; or Jeremiah for the curse of his persecutors? Under this harmless shower of stones we turn from men to God, and are at peace. "Let them curse; but bless thou; when they arise, let them be ashamed; but let thy servant rejoice." (Ps. cix. 28.)—*Bridges.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 3-11.

A Low Level.

I. A moral fool puts himself on a level with the brute by turning a deaf ear to the voices of reason and conscience. That which above all other characteristics distinguishes man from the lower animals is the possession of a moral sense and a reasoning faculty; these are the great lights which God has given him for his guidance, by the use of which he may ever be rising to a higher moral and intellectual level. But the moral fool does not listen to them, and even after

he has tasted the bitterness of disregarding them, and even while he is suffering from the evil effects of his folly, he gives evidence of his moral stupidity by *returning to it* (ver. 11). This is a plain proof that he is "*as the horse or the mule, which have no understanding.*" (Psa. xxxii. 9).

II. Having chosen his position he must be treated accordingly. When men act like men—when their conduct is such as befits responsible and rational creatures—they are open to reason and persuasion, and their fellow-men are bound to use such means in their intercourse with them. They are bound to listen to what they have to say, and to reply to their questions and consider their objections. But to do this with such a person as is here called a *fool* would be to disobey our Saviour's injunction, and to "*cast our pearls before swine.*" It would be letting ourselves down to his level and encouraging him in his self-conceit. This, we think, is the meaning of verse 4. But, on the other hand, we are not always to be silent when the fool is talking. This also might lead him to think that his foolish arguments were unanswerable—that we thought him as wise as he thinks himself to be. He is to receive sometimes the stern rebuke that his folly deserves; the manifestation of our displeasure is to be in proportion to his manifestation of weakness and wickedness. This will also be "*answering a fool according to his folly,*" as in verse 5. But a fool must be checked by means that will perhaps make more impression upon him than mere words. The *rod* must be applied—coercion and punishment must come into use where reason and moral persuasion are useless. Having placed himself on a level with the brute, he must be ruled sometimes by brute force—by the whip of compulsion, and by the bridle of restraint. Men have the power of doing this to a certain extent, and it is their duty to use it. But whether they do or do not, God will certainly visit such an offender with the rod of punishment. Whether this is the truth contained in verse 10 or not, revelation and experience affirm it, and we have met with it repeatedly in this book. It is a great offence against Him who called us into being, and who desires His creatures to be worthy of their Creator, when men thus in practice count themselves unworthy of their destiny. The Hebrew nation, in the bygone ages, was called by God to occupy a higher moral level than the surrounding nations, but by its own stubbornness and self-conceit it made the purpose of God of none effect, and was therefore necessarily made to feel the bitterness of being treated like a wild and refractory animal (Jer. xxxi. 18). And so is it with men in general. God would treat them as His sons, but their moral foolishness compels Him to make them feel the whip, the bridle, and the rod. One other thought is suggested in verses 7 and 8—

III. That even the fool will sometimes adopt the speech of the wise. A *parable*, or wise saying, will sometimes be found on his lips, he will be sometimes heard to utter words of wisdom and give good advice. But precept is of little avail if not backed by a good example; the words and the deeds of such a man are as ill-matched as those of a cripple who has one sound and useful limb, but whose other is shrunken and useless. The gait of such a man is awkward and uncertain, the malformed and the healthy limb do not well balance his body. This is an apt illustration of the incongruity which often exists between the words and actions of a moral fool.

(For Homiletics on verses 6 and 8 considered separately see on verse 1, page 714, and on chap. x. 26, page 179.)

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Verse 3. The rod is needful for the fool's back. Are you the unhappy fathers of foolish children? you must make use of the rod and reproof to give them wisdom. Are you authorised to bear rule in the

church? the rod of church discipline must be applied to offenders, that they may be reclaimed, and others warned. Are you magistrates; the rod which God has put into your hands may be a means of preserving young malefactors from the gibbet at a more advanced period of life. Are you wise? beware of turning aside unto folly, that you may never need the rod. Are you fools? learn wisdom, or do not blame those whom duty and charity will oblige to use the rod for your correction.—*Lawson.*

Verses 4 and 5. *Answer a fool*, not with any dream that you thoroughly answer him, *lest you be like him*, and a fool yourself. And yet, by all means *answer* him. *Answer* wherever you can, lest he think you can't; exploding all baseless heresies and mistakes; lest, hardening himself where he might be convinced, and defrauding himself where there is everything to be said, he erect himself against facts where he has not been taught, and *become wise in his own eyes. . . . Answer not a fool*, because much mystery does not admit of answer, and you will be a fool yourself. But more. The natural man does not discern the things of the spirit of God. If you answer a natural man with the idea that mere answers can turn him, you must "*be like him*," as having no sense yourself of what is purely spiritual. Notice here a grand rebuke of reason in all attempts to convince the sinner. Nevertheless *answer a fool*, and bow to just as great a rebuke to reason. We use reason far too gingerly. Reason is a Divine creation. It is an instrument. There is a thought as though it were wicked to go too deep. On the contrary, we are to out-think the fool. If we leave science to work her way, she will grow *wise in her own conceit. Answer* her. Rationalistic infidelity is by no means an infidelity in reason. And the church should make that to be seen. Scripture has been belied in the direction of Paul to the Corinthians (1 Cor. ii.) Nothing is more irrational than rationalism. And one of the first *answers to the fool* which he shall receive in the judgment will be, that he had all the *reason* for believing Christ which he had for anything beside, and a host of greater ones peculiar to the gospel.—*Miller.*

These two sentences may seem at the first blush to be contrary . . . but this knot will be easily untied if it be observed that there are two sorts of answers, the one in folly, the other unto folly. A fool is not to be answered in his folly, or according unto his folly, that is to say, in such vanity as he useth, or after such a raging manner as he speaketh . . . A fool is to be answered unto his folly; that is, by reasons to be confuted, and by reproofs that are wise to be bridled.—*Muffett.*

Generally speaking, it would be better to follow Hezekiah's command concerning Rabshakeh's blasphemy—"*Answer him not.*" Jeremiah thus turned away in silence from the folly of the false prophets. (Jer. xxviii. 11.) If however we are constrained to reply —*Answer him not according to his folly;* not in his own foolish manner; "not rendering railing for railing." (1 Pet. iii. 9.) Moses offended here. He *answered* the rebels *according to their folly*—passion for passion, and thus *he became like unto them.* David's answer to Nabal was in the same humiliating spirit. The *answerer* in this case *is like* the fool. He appears at the time to be cast in the same mould.—*Bridges.*

Verse 7. Uniformity and ubiquity of obedience are sure signs of sincerity; but as an unequal pulse argues a distempered body, so doth uneven walking a diseased soul. A wise man's life is all of one colour, like itself, and godliness runs through it, as the woof runs through the warp. But if all the parts of the line of thy life be not straight before God, it is a crooked life. If thy tongue speak by the talent, but thine hands scarce work by the ounce, thou shalt pass for a Pharisee (Matt. xxiii. 3). They spake like angels, lived like devils; had heaven commonly at their tongue ends, but the earth

continually at their finger ends.—*Trapp.*

Verse 9. When a drunkard carries and brandishes in his hand a sweet briar, he scratches more with it than he allows the roses to be smelled; so a fool with the Scriptures or a judicial maxim oft causes more harm than profit.—*Luther.*

Proverbs have sometimes been hurtful even in the mouths of wise men, through the imperfection of their wisdom. Job's friends dealt much in parables, which they had learned by tradition from their wise ancestors, but they misapplied them to the case of Job; and although they meant to plead the cause of God, yet they displeased Him so much by their uncharitable speeches against Job, which they drew by unjust inference from undoubted truths, that He told them they had not spoken the thing that was right concerning Him as His servant Job had done. If Job had not been a strong believer, their management of truth must have sunk him into despondency.—*Lawson.*

Verse 11. The emblem is a loathsome and sickening one. It is meant to be so. It would not have been appropriate, had it been anything else. There are *two* ideas conveyed by the comparison. The *disposition* or *tendency*, on the part of the fool or vicious man, to return to his folly; and the loathsomeness—the vileness—of the thing itself, when it does take place. There are persons of great pretensions to refinement, who affect great disgust at the comparison. They wonder how anybody of ordinary delicacy can utter it. They would think their lips polluted by the very words. It were well for such persons to remember, that there is no comparison *so* odious as the thing itself which is represented by it. It were well if such persons would transfer their disgust and loathing at the figure to that which the figure represents:—if they would cherish a proper loathing of *sin.* That is what *God* holds in abhorrence:—that is what should be abhorred by *us.* Persons may affect to sicken at the comparison here used, and yet be themselves exemplifying the very conduct it so aptly represents. Folly and sin are incomparably more polluting and debasing to the nature of man, than the vilest and most disgusting practices in the inferior animals."—*Wardlaw.*

And is this the picture of man—"made a little lower than the angels" (Ps. viii. 5)—yea—"made in the likeness of God?" (Gen. i. 26.) Who that saw Adam in his universal dominion, sitting as the monarch of creation; summoning all before him; giving to each his name, and receiving in turn his homage (Ib. ii. 20)—who would have conceived of his children sunk into such brutish degradation? The tempter's promise was—"Ye shall be as gods" (Ib. iii. 5). The result of this promise was—"Ye shall be as beasts." . . . Thus greedily did Pharaoh *return* from his momentary conviction; Ahab from his feigned repentance; Herod from his partial amendment; the drunkard from his brutish insensibility—all to take a more determinate course of sin; to take their final plunge into ruin.—*Bridges.*

According to the usual method of the Scriptures, a known thing is here employed to teach an unknown. The taste which inheres in nature is used as an instrument to implant the corresponding spiritual sensibility. The revulsion of the senses from a loathsome object is used as a lever power to press into the soul a dislike of sin. . . . The lines are strongly drawn, that the lesson may be clear and cutting. There must be a rude hearty blow, for there is a hard searing to be penetrated. Those who go back to suck at sins, which they once repudiated, may see in this terse proverb a picture of their pollution; only the Omniscient perfectly knows and loathes the vile original—*Arnot.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 12—16.

SELF-CONCEIT AND INDOLENCE.

I. The ruinous effects of self-satisfaction.—In the preceding verses Solomon has drawn a picture of the moral fool—of the man who seems to have no moral sensibility, and who is a slave to evil habits and degrading vices. At first sight it would seem that no one could be in a more hopeless condition, but a little consideration will convince us that the wise man is right when he declares that it is easier to convince a fool of his folly, than a self-conceited man of his ignorance and weakness. For there are many men who know that they are not what they ought to be, although they have not the moral courage to quit their sinful courses; and sometimes the very depth of degradation in which such men find themselves, and the strong contrast which exists in their outward life between themselves and more respectable citizens, startle them into a vigorous and successful effort to break their chains. But a man who is wise in his own eyes is generally outwardly decorous in his behaviour—is what has been called a *respectable sinner*—and it is this very outward propriety which lulls his conscience to sleep. Like the Pharisee in the temple, he thanks God that he is not as other men (Luke xviii. 11) who are outwardly immoral, and forgets that if he is not *sensual* he may be *devilish* (James iii. 15), may be under the dominion of the sin that made the first and greatest sinner in the universe. It was men of this class, and not the openly profane and sensual, whom Christ declared to be in danger of committing the *sin which should not be forgiven* (Matt. xii. 31), and on another occasion he shows that their hopeless condition arose from the fact that they did not realise that they were in any spiritual need. "*If ye were blind ye should have no sin, but now ye say, we see; therefore your sin remaineth*" (John ix. 41). This moral blindness is so hopeless because it is self-originated and self-sustained—because the subjects of it love darkness rather than light, and even call their darkness *light*, and their evil, *good*.

II. Self-conceit is both the child and the parent of indolence. If a man feels certain that he is far in advance of his competitors for any prize or position, his efforts to gain it will be very feeble and intermittent. And on the other hand, if he is indolent he will be content with very low intellectual and spiritual attainments, and inclined to place a very high estimate upon the very little mental or moral wealth that he possesses. Being unwilling to labour after more, he makes the most of what he has, and so his sloth keeps him ignorant, and his ignorance confirms him in his slothful habits.

III. The indolent man has spasmodic and fruitless seasons of activity. He turns upon his bed of sloth as though he were going to rise, and he puts his hand in the dish (see Critical Notes) of human enterprise and activity as though he intended to take a prize, and to taste the sweets of honest and earnest toil. But his resolutions are broken almost before they are formed, and his moral courage is not strong enough to carry him through the first difficulty, or make him willing to undergo the least self-denial. And so he ever remains a stranger to the sweetness of repose honestly earned, and to the relish of good things gained by industry and perseverance. On this subject see also on chap. xii. 27, page 289, and on verse 13. (See Homiletics on chap. xxii. 13, page 647.)

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Verse 12. The publicans and sinners went faster to heaven than the Pharisees; yea, there may be a greater nighness between the things when there is a greater distance between the working of them and the bringing them to-

gether. Thus, brother and sister are nigher in blood yet farther off marrying each other than two strangers; and thus two men upon the tops of two houses opposite to each other in one of your narrow streets—they are nearer each other in distance than those below are, yet in regard of coming each to other they may be said to be farther off, for the one must come down and then climb up again. Thus now a moral man, though he seems nearer to a state of grace, yet is really farther off; for he must be convinced of his false righteousness, and then climb up to the state of grace.—*Goodwin.*

Verse 16. There is no refuting a man who says nothing. Nonsense is unanswerable if there only be enough of it. Who would dispute against a pair of bagpipes, or against a company of boys that hoot at him? If you will make a match at barking or biting, a cur will be too hard for you. And if you will contend with multitudes of words, or by rage or confidence, a fool will be too hard for you.—*Baxter.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 17.

NEEDLESS INTERFERENCE.

The wise man may here be regarded as passing from one extreme of character to the other—from the man who is too indolent to mind his own affairs, to one whose activity is so great that it leads him to unnecessary interference with his neighbour's business. Or he may intend to suggest that indolence and meddling are very closely allied—that he who is not usefully occupied in doing his own work will be very apt to interfere impertinently with the concerns of others.

I. Such a meddler brings trouble upon himself. It is a dangerous thing to take a strange dog by the ears, and he who does it will be very likely to suffer for it in his own person, for the creature will probably wound him. But he who meddles impertinently with those who are at strife has to deal, not with *one* angry *brute*, but with *two* angry *men or women*, and will very likely bring down the wrath of both upon his own head. For it is to be noted that the strife with which it is mischievous to intermeddle is that "which belongeth not to" a man—a quarrel in which an outsider has no right to take a part.

II. He may do harm to others. To take a dog by the ears is at least a foolish and useless act, and will certainly not increase the comfort or peace of anybody. But it may so enrage the beast as to make him a general disturber of the public peace and safety. And the same holds good in relation to meddlers; the mischief that they do may extend far beyond themselves, and their action may form a centre of a wide circle of mental disquietude and moral mischief.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

A wide difference is made between "suffering as a busy-body, and suffering as a Christian." It is alarming to those who have no adequate sense of the criminality to find the apostle classify the one with "murderers, and thieves, and evil-doers."—*Bridges.*

For Homiletics on verses 18–22, see on chap. xvii. 14, page 513, and on chap. xviii. 6–8, page 539.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 23–28.

COUNTERFEIT FRIENDSHIP.

I. Because there are true friends in the world false men sometimes put on the garb of friendship. Because there is an abundance of genuine coin in the

country men take the trouble to make counterfeit imitations of it; the existence of the good money is the cause of the existence of the bad, and the great preponderance of the good over the bad is the reason why men sometimes get imposed upon and take the bad for the good. So there is much real and true friendship in human life, and there is therefore an opportunity given to wicked men to imitate its outward expression—there are many "burning words" uttered from the depths of a sincere heart, and therefore a wicked man will sometimes utter such words for the purposes of deception. The vessel of clay covered with silver may be taken for silver, because its shape and external appearance are close imitations of the genuine article, and the fair words of the false man may effectually deceive the listener, but it is because some things *are what they seem*, that other things are made *to seem what they are not*.

II. The words of true friendship are used to reveal, and those of the false friend are employed only for concealment. There were many silver vessels in Solomon's palace, and their bright splendour was a true revelation of their intrinsic worth and genuineness; the shining surface reflecting the light was an indication of the preciousness of the entire article. But when a clay vessel is covered with silver, the external coating is used only to cover what is beneath, and perhaps to deceive those who look on it. So when the friendship is real the ardent expressions of affection which are uttered are only a revelation of the emotions which are experienced, but when it is only a counterfeit the words are like the silver which hides instead of revealing what is beneath it. Solomon's father thus records his experience of the language of a counterfeit friend: "*His words were softer than oil, yet were they drawn swords*" (Psalm lv. 21).

III. Because counterfeit friendship is opposed to human happiness it shall be publicly arrested and condemned. Every counterfeit has arrayed against it the force of human interest. It is to the interest of the general community that the forger should be brought to justice, and that the coiner of bad money should be severely punished. It is only by rigidly enforcing the law against such criminals that they are kept in check, and the safety of the public made tolerably secure. When such offenders are discovered their wickedness is condemned by the united voice of the commercial world. But the man who betrays another by false words is quite as great an enemy to his brother man, and ought to be as severely dealt with and as publicly and universally condemned. But it can hardly be affirmed that such is the case. If every such betrayer were dealt with by human laws we should need a large increase of judges and gaolers and prison-cells, and should find within the walls of the latter many men who are now living in mansions. And if they were only punished by being shut out from the favourable notice of their fellow-men, many would be missed from their present positions in commercial and fashionable circles. Although they are shunned, and their wickedness is abhorred by all lovers of truth and honesty, they are far from meeting at the hands of man with the contempt and condemnation which they deserve. But the forces arrayed against such men are nevertheless in operation, and though they often work secretly and slowly they are most certain to find their object, and to make him conscious of their existence. There are other agencies at work in the universe beside human agencies, and a Divine lawgiver as well as human lawgivers. And although the latter may fail to discover those who break their laws, no offender against the law of God will be able to escape public arrest and condemnation, if not before a human congregation, before a higher and more august assembly.

IV. A special form of punishment which will be the special portion of such offenders. The great principle proclaimed by Christ, "*With what measure ye mete it shall be measured to you again*" (Matt. vii. 2), is here uttered by Solomon. Every deceiver will be deceived, and one false man will become the

prey of another false man. This is a law which is always and now in operation, although the punishment may not always be discernible to onlookers. But it is a work which the Almighty Judge has taken into His own hands, and many a one who is now suffering from a pitfall laid by another, knows very well in his secret soul that he is only passing through the same experience which he once prepared for another—that if what he took for a silver vessel is only clay, he has himself palmed off the counterfeit article for a genuine one.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Verse 28. It is not easy for us to forgive the injuries we receive; but it is far more difficult to forgive the injuries we do.—*Lawson.*

1. There is the inward self-reproach, arising from the workings of conscience, from which arises a secret irritability and fretfulness and unhappiness; and this produces dislike of the innocent occasion of it, instead of terminating (as it always ought to do) on *self.* This of course is only *more injustice.* True; but it is in human nature to hate with a bitter hatred the object of our own crime; as if it were a fault in that object to exist, and so to be the object on which our sin terminates. 2. The evil passions, like the good, are strengthened and increased by their exercise. If the utterance of the feelings of love serves further to inflame love, the utterance, in like manner, of the feelings of hatred tend to inflame hatred. The passion gives birth to the word and the action; and, reciprocally, the word and the action strengthen the passion. 3. The fretful uneasiness produced by the unceasing apprehension of detection and exposure, already alluded to, and of the weight of *his* vengeance who is the object of the lying tongue's assaults, gives rise also to the same feeling of rankling dislike to him who is the source of it. Thus the slanderer, instead of feeling pity for the man whom his slander wounds, hates him still the more. This appears to have had a very striking exemplification in the case of our blessed Lord and His Jewish unbelieving adversaries. They "hated Him without a cause."—*Wardlaw.*

CHAPTER XXVII.

CRITICAL NOTES.—**4.** Delitzsch reads this verse "*The madness of anger and the overflowing of wrath, and before jealousy who keeps his place?*" **5. Secret love.** Zöckler and Hitzig understand this love to be that "*which from false consideration dissembles, and does not tell his friend of his faults when it should do so.*" Delitzsch thinks it refers to "*love which is confined to the heart alone, like a fire which, when it burns secretly, neither lightens nor warms.*" **8. Place,** rather "*home.*" **9.** This verse is obscurely rendered in the English version. Delitzsch translates "*Oil and frankincense rejoice the heart, and the sweet discourse of a friend from counselling of soul.*" Ewald, Elster, Luther, etc., render "*The sweetness of the friend springeth from faithful counsel of soul.*" Zöckler, "*The sweetness of a friend is better than one's own counsel.*" **10. Neighbour that is near,** etc. "*The near neighbour is he who keeps himself near as one dispensing counsel and help to the distressed, just as the far-off brother is he who, on account of his unloving disposition, keeps at a distance from the same.*" (Zöckler.) Most commentators substantially agree with this view of the text. **14. As a curse,** etc. It is no better than a curse, or it may be regarded as veiling an evil intention. **16. And the ointment of his right hand.** Zöckler and Delitzsch translate "*And his right hand graspeth, or meeteth oil,*" that is, he cannot hold her. Other commentators, retaining the English translation, understand it to refer to the hopelessness of concealing her vexatious disposition. **17.** Stuart and Noyes find here the idea of provocation. But most critics take the ordinary view. Miller translates "*Iron is welded*

by iron; so, for a man, the tie is the face of a friend." 20. Hell and destruction, rather "*the world of the dead.*" Eyes. Some understand the reference to be to the insatiableness of human passion. 21. A man to his praise. Delitzsch understands the meaning to be that a man is valued according to the measure of public opinion. Ewald, Hitzig, and others, coincide with Zöckler's rendering, "*A man according to his glorying,*" *i.e.*, "One is judged according to the standard of that which he makes his boast."

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 1.

Divine Property.

I. A possession exclusively Divine. Both the distant and the immediate future belong to God alone; not only does He possess the exclusive control of what shall be in a hundred years to come, but to-morrow, and even the next hour and minute, are exclusively His. There is, doubtless, an existence beyond time where God's creatures can look forward to the future with more certainty than can man in his present condition, but it does not belong to even the highest archangel to say what shall be in the far-off or even the near time to come. This is the prerogative of Him alone with whom all is one eternal present.

II. A possession to which men often lay claim. If we were to hear a man making definite plans as to how he would spend a fortune which it was only probable he would possess, we should wonder at his tone of certainty, and perhaps attribute it to weakness or presumption. But we all dispose of our days, and sometimes of our months and years, long before they are ours, and while our own past experience and that of others around us admonish us of the great uncertainties that surround our future, we are prone to lay our plans as if to-morrow and many years to come were ours. It is doubtless necessary and right to forecast to a certain extent—we must look forward to what will probably or may be on the morrow, or be guilty of another form of presumption. But we are not forbidden by the wise man to do this—all that the proverb warns us against is that boastful certainty in relation to the future which so ill becomes creatures so limited in their knowledge and so straitened in their resources—that definite laying of our plans which leaves God entirely outside of them, and that confident disposal of ourselves which forgets to say, "*If the Lord will we shall live, and do this, or that*" (James iv. 15). It would be foolish for a raw recruit to pretend to map out the plan of his general's campaign, or for an unlettered peasant to prophecy what line of policy would be adopted by the prime minister of the land; but he who boasts himself of to-morrow is more foolish, and is also wicked.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

The day is said to bring forth because time travaileth with the Lord's decrees, and in their season bringeth them forth, even as a woman with child doth her little babes. Indeed, time properly worketh not, but, because God's works are done in time, it is said to do those things which are done therein.—*Muffett.*

I. *This ignorance of the morrow is necessary to the prosecution of our duties on earth.* Could we draw aside the veil of the future and look at the things which are coming to us, our energies would be so paralysed as to incapacitate us for the ordinary avocations of life; mercy has woven the web of concealment. II. *This ignorance of to-morrow is our incentive to the preparation for the future.* Christ used this argument: "*Be ye, therefore, ready,* for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of Man cometh."—*Dr. David Thomas.*

The same reason that should check our boasting of to-morrow may pre-

serve us from desponding fears. It may be stormy weather to-day; but storms do not last all the year. We are filled and tormented with fears of some impending evil, but we often give ourselves real pain by the prospect of calamities that never were appointed to us by the providence of God.—*Lawson.*

How awfully has this *boasting* been put to shame! In the days of Noah "they married wives, and were given in marriage, until the very day when the flood came and destroyed them all." Abner promised a kingdom, but could not ensure his life for an hour. Haman plumed himself upon the prospect of the queen's banquet, but was hanged like a dog before night. The fool's soul was required of him "on the very night" of his worldly projects "for many years" to come. "Serious affairs to-morrow," was the laughing reply of Archias, warned of a conspiracy which hurried him into eternity the next hour. The infidel Gibbon calculated upon fifteen years of life, and died within a few months, at a day's warning.—*Bridges.*

To count on to-morrow so as to neglect the duty of to-day is in many respects the greatest practical error among men. None have a wider range, and none are charged with more dreadful consequences. Whether the work in hand pertain to small matters or great—to the sowing of a field or the redemption of a soul—for every one who resolves deliberately not to do it, a hundred tread the same path, and suffer the same loss at last, who only postpone the work of to-day with the intention of performing it to-morrow. The proverb contains only the negative side of the precept, but it is made hollow for the very purpose of holding the positive promise in its bosom. The Old Testament sweeps away the wide-spread indurated error; the New Testament then deposits its saving truth upon the spot. . . . Solomon warns us to distrust the future, and Paul persuades us to accept the present hour. "Behold now is the accepted time; behold now is the day of salvation." "To-morrow," is the devil's great ally, the very Goliath in whom he trusts for victory. "Now," is the stripling whom God sends forth against him. A great significance lies in that little word. It marks the points on which life's battle turns. That spot is the Hougomont of Waterloo. There the victory is lost or won. . . . An artist solicited permission to paint a portrait of the Queen. The favour was granted—and the favour was great, for probably it would make the fortune of the man. A place was fixed, and a time. At the fixed place and time the Queen appeared; but the artist was not there—he was not ready yet. When he did arrive, a message was communicated to him that her Majesty had departed, and would not return. Such is the tale. We have no means of verifying its history, but its moral is not dependent on its truth. If it is not a history, let it serve as a parable. Translate it from the temporal into the eternal. Employ the earthly type to print a heavenly lesson.—*Arnot.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 2.

SELF PRAISE.

I. Merit will win the praise of others. The light of the sun makes its existence felt by every man who is possessed of vision, and there are but few men who do not acknowledge that it is a good and pleasant thing. The perfume of the flowers cannot be hidden while there are creatures endowed with the sense of smell, and their fragrance is so grateful and refreshing to us, that it is sure to win from us an acknowledgment of its existence and expressions of delight. And as men are endowed with senses which recognise light and fragrance and every

form of physical beauty, so there is a moral sense in man which compels him to discern moral excellence or mental superiority. The conscience and the reason stand in the same relation to spiritual worth and intelligence as the sense of sight does to the sunlight, or that of smell to a pleasant odour. It is true that there are men who will refuse to acknowledge the presence of moral worth, but there are also some who will not acknowledge the existence of good in anything. But they know it is there notwithstanding. And although man as fallen may be more ready to praise that which appeals to his senses than that which commands the admiration of his better nature, there will always be found some in every community who will give to real worth its due proportion of praise.

II. Self-praise generally implies a lack of merit. A man of intellectual or moral worth loves knowledge or excellence of any kind for its own sake, and not for the height to which it may raise him in the estimation of his fellows. Although he is or ought to be grateful for the esteem of others, he does not make that the end of his existence; his satisfaction arises not from what people think of him, but from what he is in himself. And just in proportion as a man attains to mental or moral heights, so does he apprehend more truly how little after all he has and is, and so the higher he goes the less value he commonly sets upon his present attainments. It is therefore an inference most commonly drawn that he who praises himself is but little deserving the praise of others, and is not likely to get it. And this conclusion is generally a correct one.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

It must never be forgotten that all such passages imply the sincere and earnest cultivation of a real and divinely approved *principle*. The principle called for in this verse is that of true, self-diffident modesty. Considerations entirely different, and even opposite, may induce the suppression of *self-praise*:—even the very desire of praise from others. From this arises the danger of holding out—to the young especially—the motive or inducement of *getting a character for modesty*. This may produce artifice, affectation, simulation, hypocrisy. That which is wanted,—that which God approves and requires,—is *honest simplicity*, which neither, on the one hand, courts praise, nor, on the other, affects to disdain and undervalue it,—which neither blusters out its own commendation, nor whines and simpers, and depreciates, and makes light of what it is or of what it has done, merely for the purpose of making others say more. The affectation of despising the commendation of others is worse than the self-commendation that is reprehended. It is, in truth, the very same spirit showing itself under another aspect.—*Wardlaw.*

Praise is a comely garment, but though thyself do wear it, another must put it on, or it will never fit well about thee. Praise is sweet music, but it is never tuneable in thine own mouth, if it come from the mouth of another, it soundeth most tuneably in the ears of all that hear it. Praise is a rich treasure, but it never makes thee rich, unless another tell the sum.—*Jermin.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSES 3 and 4.

WRATH AND ENVY.

I. A most unhappy combination. A fool and wrath. Wrath or displeasure is possible to every being capable of emotion. The power to love implies the

power to hate, and he who can be pleased can also be displeased. The most tender mother can be angry, and righteously angry, with her child, and we read in Scripture of the "*wrath of the Lamb*" (Rev. vi. 16.) But there is an infinite distance between the wrath of the Holy God, and even between that of a good man or woman, and that of a moral fool. Divine displeasure is an emotion, and never a passion. God is never passive in the hands of His anger. And in proportion as men are like God they always have their displeasure under the control of their will. It is as amenable to their conscience and their reason as an obedient horse to his rider. But a fool is a man who is without power of self-government—who is himself governed first by one passion or desire and then by another—like a ship without a rudder, at the mercy of the winds and waves. When such an one is in the hands of his wrath, a most mischievous and destructive force is at work. For whether we consider its effects on the man himself, or upon the objects of his anger, we may truthfully brand it as *burdensome, and cruel, and outrageous.* 1. *It is a cruel burden to the subject of it.* A more wretched creature can hardly be found in the universe than a man passive in the hands of his own anger; it is like a heavy weight crushing out of him all power to stand morally erect and self-possessed, and like a knotted scourge inflicting wounds not on the body but on the spirit. 2. *The objects of it also find it a painful yoke.* In proportion as the fool is in a position to exert his influence over others, in the same proportion is the amount of misery which he can create by his unbridled wrath. Perhaps its effects are nowhere so painfully felt as in the domestic circle. As a master the wrathful fool may make his servants miserable, but they may be able to quit his service and so get beyond his influence. But there is no escape for wife and children from the wrath of a morally foolish husband and father; for such there is a millstone ever about the neck, and tormenting goads always pricking the feet.

II. **The most pitiless foe.** Terrible as is the unbridled wrath of a fool, there is a passion more to be dreaded. The open battle-field in broad daylight is a place to be shunned, but an ambush at midnight is more certain death. Men fear to meet the lion upon the highroad, but the scorpion concealed among the grass is more dangerous. For some resistance can be offered to an open and avowed enemy, but no defence can be prepared against an unseen foe. And if wrath is like the angry lion, envy is like the deadly scorpion. The first gives some warning of his design, but the latter none. The man of unbridled passion often misses his aim by reason of his unsteady hand—the very excess of his wrath sometimes takes away his power to execute his intention. And he generally deals his blows at his enemy's face—speaks out his hatred in his hearing, and publicly and openly tries to do him a mischief. But the envious man acts in a different manner. The natures that are most prone to envy have generally some power of self-control—they are more cold-blooded than passionate men. Though they are moral fools, they have generally enough intellectual wisdom to see the best method of bringing to pass their malicious purposes; and they consequently prefer an ambush to an open fight, and choose rather to stab a man in the back than to meet him face to face. In other words, they do not upbraid him openly and give him an opportunity to defend himself, but blacken his character by insinuations when he is absent. And as it is the nature of envy to brood over its grievances in secret, and that of unbridled wrath to manifest its displeasure immediately and openly, the first gathers strength by repression and the other loses it by the very force of its expression.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

As an earthquake ariseth from a tumultuous vapour shut up in the caverns and bowels of the earth, where it tosseth and tumbleth until it break out and overturn all that standeth in the way of it, so envy is a pestilent vapour which lieth in the heart of a man, where it boileth and fretteth until it find occasion to vent itself, and then it tumbleth and throweth down all that standeth in the malicious eye of it. Houses and trees stand firm against a tempest of lightning or a flood of rain, and men stand out against the cruelty of sudden wrath and rage of a man's lasting anger, but what house or tree standeth against the force of an earthquake, and who is able to stand against the force of envy?—*Jermin.*

I do not ask for men passionless; this is *hominem de homine tollere.* Give them leave to be men, not madmen. Anger in the best sense is the gift of God, and it is no small art to express anger with premeditated terms, and on seasonable occasions. God placed anger among the affections engrafted in nature, gave it a seat, fitted it with instruments, ministered it matter whence it might proceed, provided humours whereby it is nourished. It is to the soul as a nerve to the body. The philosopher calls it the whetstone to fortitude, a spur intended to set forward virtue. But there is a vicious, impetuous, frantic anger, earnest for private and personal grudges; not like a medicine to clear the eye, but to put it out. . . . . To cure this bedlam passion. . . let him take some herb of grace, an ounce of patience, as much of consideration how often he gives God cause to be angry with him, and no less of consideration how God hath a hand in Shimei's railing—mix all these together with a faithful confidence that God will dispose all wrongs to thy good; hereof be made a pill to purge choler. . . . Anger is a frantic fit, but envy is a consumption. . . . . Among all mischiefs it is furnished with one profitable quality—the owner of it takes most hurt. . . . It were well for him that he should dwell alone. It is a pity that he should come into heaven, for to see "one star excel another in glory" would put him again out of his wits. . . . His cure is hard. . . . Two simples may do him good if he could be won to take them—a scruple of content and a dram of charity.—*T. Adams.*

Well then might it be asked: *Who is able to stand before envy?* Even the perfect innocence of paradise fell *before it.* Satan lost his own happiness. Then he *envied* man, and ceased not to work his destruction. (See Wis. ii. 23, 24). It shed the first human blood that ever stained the ground. (1 John iii. 12). It quenched the yearnings of natural affection, and brought bitter sorrow to the patriarch's bosom. Even the premier of the greatest empire in the world was its temporary victim. Nay more—the Saviour in His most benevolent acts was sorely harassed, and ultimately sunk under its power. "His servants therefore must not expect to be above their Master." —*Bridges.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses **5** *and* **6, 9** *to* **11,** *and* **14.**

TESTS OF FRIENDSHIP.

We group these verses together because they all treat of the same subject, viz., friendship in reality and friendship in profession only. The same subject occurred in the preceding chapter (see on verses 23-28, and in chap. xvii. 17, 18, page 519.)

I. **He does not love us truly who does not love us well enough to tell us of our faults.** The true friend must desire to see the object of his affection as

free from faults as it is possible for him to be; the truest and the purest love seeks by every means within its reach to bless the beloved one. And as we should not consider him a friend who would make no effort to free us from any bodily disease or physical deformity, we ought not to call him an enemy who will strive to rid us of moral and spiritual blemishes. For such an one gives proof that he cares more for our ultimate good than for our present smile—he shows that he is even willing to risk our displeasure in the hope of doing us real kindness. He who gives us kisses when he ought to give us reproof, or who holds back deserved rebuke from cowardice, is more cruel than if he withheld from us an indispensable medicine simply because it had a bitter taste. For if we will not take the unpleasant draught from the hand that we have clasped in friendship, we are not likely to find it more pleasant when administered by a stranger, much less by an enemy. And if a wound is to be probed it is surely better for the patient that it should be done by a skilful and tender hand than by one who has no sympathy with us and no acquaintance with our inner life. And as it is certain that those who do not love us will either rebuke us for our faults or despise us on account of them, the real friend is he who, by a loving faithfulness, strives to rid us of them. What would have become of David if Nathan had lacked the courage to say to him, "Thou art the man."

II. Such a true friend is the most refreshing and invigorating influence that can bless our life. Setting aside the blessing and strength which come to man direct from his Father in heaven, there is no source whence he can derive so much help and comfort as from the hearty sympathy and sound advice of a real friend. They are like the anointing oil and perfume which refresh the weary Eastern traveller at the end of his day's journey, removing the traces of toil and the sense of fatigue, and putting new life into every limb. Life is a dusty, toilsome highway for most men, and they sorely stand in need of some soothing and renewing influence as they pursue the journey. And this, Solomon assures us—and experience confirms his assurance—is to be found in hearty friendship.

III. The cultivation and retention of such friends should be one of the aims of life. Seeing that there is no other means by which we are so likely to get a true acquaintance with ourselves, and no other earthly influence which is so likely at once to elevate and console us, we ought to try and make real friends and be faithful to our friendships after they are formed. And especially we ought ever gratefully to remember the friends of our youth—those who gave us help and counsel when we most needed them, and to whose faithfulness and forbearance we probably owe far more than we can ever rightly estimate. There is a proneness in the youth as he rises into manhood, and is probably removed from early associations and lifted into a higher social sphere, to forget his earliest and truest friend, but the truly wise and honourable man will count fidelity to such a sacred duty.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Ver. 6. Many indeed profess their value for a true friend; and yet in the most valuable discharge of friendship, they "count him their enemy." The apostle had some just apprehension on this account, though so wise and affectionate, and speaking from the mouth of God. (Gal. iv. 12-16). As if the rule of friendship was, that we should absolutely "please," without reference to the Divine restriction—"for good to edification." (Rom. xv. 2). Christian faithfulness is the only way of acting up to our profession. And much guilt lies upon the conscience in the neglect. But this *open rebuke* must not contravene the express rule of love—"telling the fault between thee and him alone." Too often, instead of pouring it secretly into our brother's ear, it is

proclaimed through the wide medium of the world's ear, and thus it passes through a multitude of channels before it reaches its one proper destination. The *openness of the rebuke* describes the free and unreserved sincerity of the heart, not necessarily the public exposure of the offender; save when the character of the offence, or the interests of others, may appear to demand it (1 Tim. v. 20).—*Bridges.*

This is that false love which really injures its object; and which, on this account,—that is, from its injurious *tendency*, how little soever designed, gets in the Scriptures the designation of *hatred:* "Thou shalt not *hate* thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him." (Lev. xix. 17). —*Wardlaw.*

Ver. 9. The best physic for man is man. For friendship is a kind of life to man, without which there is no comfort of a man's life. Friendship is in men a kind of step to God, and by means of love man draweth near to God, when, as from being the friend of man, he is made the friend of God. But as among the Jews there was no oil that did so rejoice the heart as that wherewith the kings were anointed; no perfume that did so delight the soul as that which the priest offered; in like manner as there is no friend so sweet as God, so there is no counsel that doth so glad the soul, so cheer the heart, as that which He giveth in His word, whereby we are made even kings and priests unto him.—*Jermin.*

The *heartiness of a friend's counsel* constitutes its excellence. It is not official, or merely intelligent. It is *the counsel of his soul.—Bridges.*

Ver. 10. "*Neither go into thy brother's house in the day of thy calamity.*" This has certainly the appearance of a very strange advice. Whither, in the day of our calamity, should we go, if not to the house of a brother? Where are we to expect a kind reception, and the comfort we require, if not there? But the proverb, like all others, must be understood generally, and applied in the circumstances and the sense obviously and mainly designed. The meaning seems to be either—1. Do not choose "the day of thy calamity" for making thy visit, if thou hast not shown the same inclination to court and cultivate intimacy before, in the day of thy success and prosperity. This unavoidably looks not like the impulse of affection, but of felt necessity, or convenience and self-interest: "Ay, ay," your brother will be naturally apt to say, "I saw little of you before: you are fain to come to me *now*, when you feel your need of me, and fancy I may be of some service to you." Or, 2. Let not sympathy be forced and extorted. "In the day of thy calamity," if thy brother has the heart of a brother, and really feels for thee, *he will come to thee;* he will *seek and find thee.* If he does not, then do not press yourself upon his notice, as if you would constrain and oblige him to be kind. This may, and probably will, have the effect of disgusting and alienating him, rather than gaining his love. Love and sympathy must be unconstrained as well as unbought. When they are either got by a bribe, or got by dint of urgent solicitation, they are alike heartless, and alike worthless. The reason is—"*For better is a neighbour that is near, than a brother far off.* The antithetical phrases "*at hand*" and "*far off*," have evident reference here, not to *locality*, but to *disposition.* A friendly and kindly-disposed neighbour, who bears no relation to us save that of neighbourhood, is greatly preferable to a brother—to any near relation whatever that is cold, distant, and alienated.—*Wardlaw.*

The proverbial sense is, that better is a lesser comfort which is ready at hand, than a greater solace which we must go to seek after.—*Jermin.*

Ver. 14. It is an excellent description of a notorious flatterer, and a just denunciation of his due reward. First,

he blesseth with a loud voice, as if he wanted breath and sides to set out the praises of his friend, and as if he would not only awaken him with the news of it but many others also with the loudness of it. Secondly, he doth it *rising early*, as if it were some main and principal business which he had to do, and wherein he would show himself more forward than any others. Thirdly, he doth it *in the morning*, as if he would bless his friend before he blessed God, or rather would make him his God by offering his sacrifice of praise unto him.—*Jermin.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 7.

WANT OF APPETITE.

I. The value which men set upon things depends upon their condition and circumstances. When we look around upon our fellow-creatures, we can but remark the widely different estimates which different men place upon the same things, and also the different value which the same man attaches to the same object at different times. To begin as Solomon does, with our lower nature—there are hundreds of well-fed citizens in every community who look with indifference at the most tempting dainties that are set before them, and perhaps close to their mansions are to be found as many to whom one good meal would give the keenest physical enjoyment. And if a traveller were passing through England he would probably turn away with disdain from a dinner of bread and water; but if he were in some far-off desert land he would hail such plain fare with delight. If we apply the proverb to man's intellectual nature, we find the same law in operation. Some men are surrounded with opportunities of mental culture and growth, and they despise and neglect them because they have no intellectual appetites, while others who are shut out from such advantages are longing eagerly for them. And it is no less true in spiritual things. The longings and aspirations of those whose spiritual appetites have been awakened are entirely unknown to those who have not felt their soul need, and the language which they use to express their desires is an unknown tongue to those who say, "I am rich and have need of nothing" (Rev. iii. 17). There was a time in the life of Saul of Tarsus, when the language of Paul the apostle would have been utterly unintelligible to him. It would have been hard to convince the young man who consented to the death of Stephen, that he would one day "*count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus*" (Phil. iii. 8), but the different estimate which he set upon the Gospel of the Son of God depended entirely upon the difference in his own spiritual condition at those different periods in his life. Even the gift of a Saviour is lightly esteemed, when men are full of pride and worldliness; it is true in this sense as in others that "*the full soul loatheth an honeycomb.*"

II. A sense of need will not only teach men to value luxuries and comforts, but will make what was unpalatable welcome and acceptable. The young man who had lightly esteemed the good things on his father's table, came not only to remember with a longing desire the bread that fed his father's servants, but would "*fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat*" (Luke xv. 16). And when a youth has known the misery of homelessness, the restraints of his father's house, and the daily toil which once he felt to be so irksome, are light and easy in comparison. And so it is when a soul begins to hunger and thirst after righteousness. The conditions of reconciliation with God and the yoke of Christ, which before were so distasteful, are joyfully and eagerly accepted, and that which was bitter becomes sweet to the soul.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 8.

A Man and His Place.

I. It is good for every man to have a place in the world which he can call his home, and work which he feels espec ally belongs to him. A man should have some spot on earth which is dearer to him than all the world beside, and some calling or profession which he can recognise as his own. It is not by any means desirable that he should always be in that place, or that he should never employ his time in other work. The bird often leaves the nest and flies hither and thither for many hours, and men must and ought not to confine themselves always to one place and to the same employment. Change of scene and occupation is always desirable within certain limits, and is often a necessity with men. But however far the bird flies she returns to her nest, and however much men may be obliged or may choose to wander, they should always have one place to call home; and however many things may occupy their hours of leisure, they should have one kind of work which especially fills up their life.

II. It is not good hastily and often to quit one sphere of work and one mode of life for another. Every honest calling has some advantages connected with it, and almost every sphere in life has something to recommend it; and steady perseverance in one employment, and continuance in one position, is often far more conducive to our material prosperity, and more beneficial to our character and reputation, than constant changes, even although they promise more speedy promotion and a smoother path to some desired end. This much is certain, that change merely for the sake of change is foolish, and change without good and sufficient reason is not wise.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

By *place*, the Holy Ghost understandeth particular callings. Now God had taken care that none should molest a bird in her nest, there she was safe (Deut. xxii. 6, 7); but when she begins to wander then she is in danger, either to be shot by the fowler or caught in the snare, or made a prey to other ravenous birds. So a man that is diligent in his calling whilst he is employed therein, is in God's precincts, and so under God's protection; but when he wandereth abroad from his calling, going out of his bounds to sit and talk, he is a waif and a stray, and so falleth to the lord of the manor, "the god of this world." Reader, thou mayest expect to be preserved whilst thou art a-working, but not when thou art wandering. Those soldiers who leave their place in a march and straggle to pilfer, are many times snapt and slain by their enemies, when they who keep their places are safe and secure.—*Swinnock.*

Change of place is thought of as an evil. The sense of security is lost and cannot be regained. The maxim, it may be noted, is characteristic of the earlier stages of Hebrew history, before exile and travel had made change of country a more familiar thing. We seem to hear an echo of the feeling which made the thought of being "a fugitive and a vagabond" (Gen. iv. 12, 13) the most terrible of all punishments. —*Plumptre.*

In such a comparison as this, we cannot but suppose there is a reference to the *purposes* for which the nest is constructed. The allusion is doubtless to the period of *incubation*—to the hatching of the eggs, and the rearing of the young. If the bird "wanders from her nest" during that period, what is the consequence? Why, that the process is frustrated—the eggs lose their vital warmth; they become cold, addled, and unproductive. Absence, even for a very short time, will produce this effect; and produce it to such a degree, that no subsequent sitting,

however constant and prolonged, can ever vivify again the extinct principle of vitality. And then, during the period of *early training*, when the young are dependent on the brooding breast and wing of the parent bird for their warmth, and on the active quickness of the parent bird, as their purveyor, for their sustenance,—desertion is death. If the mother *then* "wanders from her nest," forsaking for any length of time her callow brood—they perish, the hapless victims of a mother's neglect. They are starved of cold, or they are starved of hunger; or, it may be, their secret retreat is found out by some devouring foe. Such appears to be the apt allusion. Let us now consider *to what cases it may with truth and profit be applied.* 1. In the first place then, I apply it to a man's HOME. *Home* may surely be regarded as most appropriately designated "*his place.*" It is there he ought to be; not merely *enjoying* comfort, but *imparting* it;—not the place of selfish ease and indulgence, but of dutiful and useful occupation. He has a charge there,—committed to him, not by the instincts of nature merely, but by the law of God. His family demand his first interest and his first attention. 2. I apply the proverb to the SITUATION IN LIFE which has been assigned to a man by Providence. As the brooding bird should be found upon her eggs, or with her young, so should every servant, in every department, be found in his own place, and at his own occupation. It should be the aim of every man to have it said of him with truth—*Tell me where he ought to be, and I will tell you where he is.* 3. I wish to apply the words to the SANCTUARY OF GOD. I think they may be so applied with perfect appropriateness. Every Christian must delight in God's sanctuary. It is to him, as a worshipper of God, "*his place;*"—the place where, at stated times, he ought to be, and where he chooses, and desires, and loves to be. How frequently, how strongly, how beautifully, does the Psalmist express this feeling!—and on one occasion with an exquisitely touching allusion to those birds of the air, that built their nests in the vicinity of the temple; and which, when banished from Jerusalem, and kept at a distance from the sacred precincts, he represents himself as envying—coveting their proximity to the altars of Jehovah (Psa. lxxxiv. 3.)—*Wardlaw.*

The 9th, 10th, 11th, and 14th verses have been considered with the 6th and 7th. For Homiletics on the subject of verse 12 see on chap. xiv. 15, page 364. Verses 13, 15, and 16 are almost a verbal repetition of chaps. xx. 16, and xix. 13. For Homiletics see pages 589 and 573.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 17.

A SOCIAL WHETSTONE.

I. This proverb may be applied to men's general intercourse with each other. It is needful for a man to mingle with his fellow-creatures in order to have his faculties and capacities developed and fitted for action. Social intercourse is stimulating to the mind and refreshing to the spiritual nature, and is indeed indispensable to our happiness and usefulness. "A man by himself," says Muffet, "is no man—he is dull, he is very blunt; but if his fellow come and quicken him by his presence, speech, and example, he is so whetted on by this means that he is much more skilful, comfortable, and better than when he was alone." The human countenance, as the organ by which the soul of one man makes its presence felt by another, has a quickening influence even when no words are uttered, and this general friction of soul with soul preserves men from intellectual dulness and spiritual apathy.

II. It is especially applicable to intercourse with those whom we know and love. Above and beyond the general need of man to have constant

intercourse with man, there are times and seasons when the face of a *friend* is especially helpful. The sword that has seen much hard service must come in contact with another steel instrument to restore its edge. The ploughshare that has pushed its way through hard and stony ground must be fitted for more work by friction with a whetstone, and the axe, after it has felled many trees, must be subjected to a similar process. So the intellectual and spiritual nature of man becomes at times in need of a stimulus from without which may fitly be compared with this sharpening of iron by iron. Hard mental toil, contact with uncongenial persons and things, disappointments, and even great spiritual emotions, have a tendency to exhaust our energies and depress our spirits, and render us for a time indisposed to exertion, and perhaps incapable of it. In such a condition a look of sympathy and encouragement from one who understands us is very serviceable indeed, and has power to arouse within us fresh hope, and therefore new life for renewed action.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

As you can only sharpen iron by iron, you can *only sharpen souls by souls.* Neither dead matter, however majestic in aspect or thunderous in melody, nor irrational life, however graceful in form or mighty in force, can sharpen a blunted soul. Mind alone can quicken mind; it is in all cases the spirit that quickeneth.—*Dr. David Thomas.*

Iron is welded by iron. (This is Miller's rendering.) That is, we must bring a "*face*" of "*iron*" (not of tin, or brass, or wood, but, by the very necessities of its nature, of *iron*), and strictly a face of it, so that face may meet face (as of the water in the 19th verse), or they cannot run or mould themselves together. Fit a face of iron, red hot, to a face of iron, also hot, and force them hard upon each other, and thus you weld them. Bring a man face to face with his neighbour, and let them be warmed by a common taste, and, though one of them be God Himself, this will weld them.—*Miller.*

We owe some of the most valuable discoveries of science to this active reciprocity. Useful hints were thrown out, which have issued in the opening of large fields of hitherto unexplored knowledge. The commanding word in the field of battle puts a keen edge upon *the iron.* (2 Sam. x. 11-13). The mutual excitation for evil is a solemn warning against "evil communications." But most refreshing is it, when, as in the dark ages of the Church, "they that feared the Lord spake often one to another." *Sharpening* indeed must have been the intercourse at Emmaus, when "the hearts of the disciples burned within them." The apostle was often so invigorated by *the countenance of his friends*, that he longed to be "somewhat filled with their company." Upon this principle —"Two are better than one"—our Lord sent His first preachers to their work. And the first Divine ordination in the Christian Church was after this precedent. (Acts xiii. 2-4.)—*Bridges.*

The countenance of a friend is a wonderful work of God. It is a work as great and good as a sun in the heavens; and verily, He who spread it out and bade it shine did not intend that it should be covered by a pall. . . . . He intends that it should shine upon hearts that have grown dark and cold. . . . The human countenance—oh, thou possessor of the treasure, never prostitute that gift of God! If you could, and should pluck down these greater and lesser lights that shine in purity from heaven, and trail them through the mire, you would be ashamed as one who had put out the eyes and marred the beauty of creation. Equal shame and sin are his who takes this terrestrial sun — blithe, bright, sparkling countenance—and with it fascinates his fellow into the old serpent's filthy folds.—*Arnot.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 18.

The Reward of Service.

I. The reward of the servant of nature. The fig-tree may here be taken as typical of all that the earth produces for the sustenance of man. God has ordained that man shall be a co-worker with Himself in making the earth fruitful. If He gives the life to the herb or the tree, and sends the sun and the rain to quicken and nourish it, man must give his service too. It is his business to prepare the soil, to tend the God-given life, and to protect it as far as possible from all adverse influences. And this being done, some reward is certain. There will be cases of individual and occasional failure, but *fruit for service* is the rule in the kingdom of nature.

II. The reward of service rendered to man. Although the word *servant* is now obnoxious to many ears, we do well to remember the estimate which God puts upon faithful service and the important place which it holds in the world. He who served us unto death left this command on record, "*Whosoever will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all*" (Mark x. 44), and a little consideration will convince us that the whole of human society is knit together by service. In one sense, all true men and women, however high their position, are servants to others. The good monarch and the faithful statesman are servants to their nation as truly as men and women in more lowly stations are servants to individual masters. It is, however, doubtless to these latter that the wise man here refers, and faithful service rendered by them in their small sphere is as much esteemed by God as the service of the greater and more gifted. Those who serve "*as to the Lord, and not unto men*," shall "*of the Lord receive the reward of the inheritance*," says Paul (Col. iii. 22-24). Honour shall be awarded by God, not in proportion to the kind of service rendered, but in proportion to the spirit in which it is performed, and this fruit of faithful service will never fail. And, as a rule, esteem and gratitude from the earthly master will also be rendered.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

All sorts of inferiors, then, as both servants and subjects, must make this reckoning and account of their superiors and rulers, that they are unto them their peculiar charge, whereon they must attend, and the special hope of their honour and preferment. They must therefore think and say thus with themselves: Surely this is the fig-tree that I must watch and keep; this is that same olive-tree that I must look unto. I must not suffer this to be spoiled or destroyed. I must not suffer my ruler's goods to be wasted, nor his name to be discredited, nor the gifts of God in him to decay; I must keep his favour, and I must seek his welfare, as much as in me lieth.—*Muffet.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 19.

A Correct Likeness.

I. A mirror in which we may see the reflection of the hearts of others. All the knowledge that we have of our own personal appearance is gained by means of some reflecting surface. We can only look upon ourselves indirectly, and it is quite possible that every person who looks upon us has a juster conception of our appearance than we ourselves have. If there were no substances which

could serve as mirrors, a man must always remain ignorant as to those peculiarities of feature which distinguish him from every other person on the face of the earth. But none are destitute of nature's looking-glass—the stream or lake, or even a smaller quantity of water, will show a man what he is like as to his exterior. And by means of a medium we can gain much knowledge concerning the inner life of our human brothers and sisters. As we may gain a good idea of our own face by seeing its reflection in water, so we may form a fairly correct estimate of the feelings and hopes and desires of others by studying our own. After making allowance for many differences upon the surface dependent upon differences of temperament, and education, and circumstances, we shall be safe in concluding that in the depths of the human soul there are spots which form a common meeting-ground for all mankind.

II. **A means by which we may gain the hearts of others.** We cannot plead ignorance of the way to our brother's heart. We must not conclude, because in outward expression he differs from us, we have therefore nothing in common, no clue to what is passing within his breast. If we call to mind how we felt in like circumstances, or try to imagine how we should feel if we were in his place, we shall hardly fail to form some idea of his feelings, and shall therefore be able so to regulate our behaviour towards him as in some measure to supply his soul needs.

(There are other interpretations of this verse, for which we refer to the Comments.)

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Here is one of the foundations on which that rule is built of doing to others as we would be done by (Exod. xxiii. 9.) . . . One corrupt heart is like another, and so is one sanctified heart, for the former bears the same image of the earthy, the latter the same image of the heavenly.—*Henry.*

The proverb *may* be regarded as expressing *reciprocity of soul.* It may mean this: that just as the water will give back to you the exact expression which you gave to it—the frown or the smile, the hideous or the pleasing—so human hearts will treat you as you treat them. "With what measure you mete it shall be measured to you again." This is true—manifestly true; kindness begets kindness, anger anger, justice justice, fraud fraud, the world through.—*Dr. David Thomas.*

In the world we see our own hearts embowelled; and there we can learn what ourselves are at the cost of other men's sins.—*Bp. Hopkins.*

As in the outline water trembles, and is uncertain, so also are hearts. The lesson is: Trust not!—*Luther.*

No man knoweth or showeth the spirit of a man, but the spirit of a man that is in him. The water, as a certain glass, somewhat dim indeed, but very true, representeth the countenance therein imprinted unto the countenance that beholdeth the same; even so the heart sheweth man to man; that is to say, the mind and the conscience of every man telleth him justly, though not perfectly, what he is, as whether he be good or evil, in God's favour or out of the same; for the conscience will not lie, but accuse or excuse a man, being instead of a thousand witnesses. . . . As water that is troubled representeth the visage amiss, so a troubled or polluted mind may sometimes wrongly shew to a man the estate wherein he standeth. But if the soul be not wholly corrupt and the conscience seared as with a hot iron, it will declare to a man his condition rightly, though not peradventure fully in all respects.—*Muffet.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 20.

INSATIABILITY.

I. A destructive force always in operation. Ever since the earth closed over the first dead body, it has been constantly opening to receive those whom death has made ready for the grave, and to-day this terrible and remorseless destroyer is as busy in our midst as ever. And we know that it will be so to the end of time; while the present dispensation lasts, men will never be able to say that death has ceased to claim the mortal part of man, or that the last grave has been dug in the vast graveyard of the world. This is a most melancholy stand-point from which to view man and his destiny. If all the human race lived to a good old age, and went down to their last earthly resting-place like a shock of corn fully ripe, death would still be a dark and dreary thing, looked at by itself, but it becomes much more appalling when it strikes men and women in the prime of life, and carries them off, often without warning, from the place where they seemed so much needed, and to which they were bound by so many ties.

II. A faculty of man always at work. The eye of man is simply an organ by which knowledge is conveyed to his mind. And his appetite for fresh mental food is not lessened by that which he has received in the past—on the contrary, it is quickened and whetted in proportion to the supply, for while an ignorant man is often content in his ignorance, the man who has learned most is generally the most eager to learn more. And this passion in man for knowledge is not quenched by the certain consciousness he possesses that one day he *must*, that to-morrow he *may*, quit the scene of his investigations, and end his search after truth under his present conditions. Surely if men did not instinctively feel that this life is not the only one, their desire after constant intellectual growth would not be so ardent. If there was not that within them that told them that death would not end their opportunities of growing in knowledge, the contemplation of the shortness of life would paralyze the acquisitive faculty of men. But we take the strength and universality of this undying desire of man as an argument for his existence after death and the grave have taken possession of the material house in which he lived and laboured on the earth.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

The *eye* is the avenue of growth. That growth will be eternal. . . . It will take in more and more and raise or sink us through eternal ages. . . . The terms here used are used elsewhere for anything insatiate (chap. xxx. 16). Solomon describes a great psychological law, that the mind by its very nature sees, and by all its seeings will grow, either in one way or the other.—*Miller.*

The *eyes*, by a very natural figure, are put for the *desires*. Upon that which is the object of our desire, we *fix our eyes;* and that with an intensity of settled eagerness proportioned to the degree of the desire (chap. xxiii. 5). The meaning, then, is not merely that the sense of *sight* never has enough of its own peculiar enjoyments, but that the *desire that is by the eye expressed* is never satisfied by any amount of present gratification. The desires of men are insatiable. They set their hearts on some particular object, and long for its attainment. They fix in their mind some point of advancement in the acquisition of the world,—some measure of wealth, or of power which they think, if once realised, would satisfy them to the full. They get what they want; but they still long as before. There is ever something unattained. Having gained the summit

of one eminence, they see another above it; and as they mount, their views widen and their conceptions and wishes amplify, and still more is required to fill them.—*Wardlaw.*

The meaning of the second clause as indicated by this parallel cannot be doubtful. It relates to the really demoniacal insatiableness of human passion, especially "the lust of the eyes." (Comp. 1 John ii. 16, James iii. 6; and in particular Prov. xxx. 16; Eccles. i. 8.)—*Zöckler.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 21.

A Crucible for Character.

Although the second interpretation of this proverb given in the Critical Notes is very generally adopted, it will very well bear the other construction given below, which is indeed adopted by many expositors.

I. Praise received is a test of character. Many moralists think that it is more difficult to pass uninjured through "good report" than through "evil report." Dr. Payson reckons "well meant but injudicious commendations" a source of temptation to him, and we do certainly often meet men possessing many good qualities whom popularity seems to have injured. But all men who have any striking intellectual gifts or moral excellencies will be subject to this refiner's fire, and if they pass through it uninjured they will prove that they are made of very pure metal. As we remarked on page 725, merit will win praise, and therefore every deserving man will be more or less subject to this test, and his conduct and bearing under it will reveal the real character of his motives and the strength of his principles. In proportion as his actions have been disinterested and his aims pure and unselfish, in the same proportion will he be able to bear praise. If he is a truly humble man—if he has a right sense of his dependence on God and a consciousness of his own shortcomings—the praise of his fellow-creatures will only make him strive to be more deserving of it; but if there is any alloy of baser metal mixed with the gold and silver of his character, such an ordeal will be very likely to reveal it.

II. Praise given is a test of character. That upon which a man bestows praise reveals the standard by which he rules his life. Men praise that which they value, and there cannot therefore be a better revelation of their moral condition. A man who praises the action of another, irrespective of its moral character, shows that he attaches little value to goodness, while he who praises a bad action proclaims himself a lover of sin. On the other hand, commendation bestowed upon good deeds and godly men at least indicates a preference for what is good, which one may hope will be manifested not only in word but also in deed.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

1. It may express what every man, with reference to the praise bestowed upon him, *ought to do*:—that is, he ought to do with it what the "fining-pot" does to the "silver," and the "furnace to the gold." He should *try it well.* There is a deal of dross frequently in it; and men are apt to be fonder of the dross, in some of its appearances, than of the sterling metal. The process of refining should in this case be very cautiously pursued: just as a chemist, if anxious for the correct result of an experiment with the crucible, will be the more careful in making it, in proportion as he is conscious of any leaning towards a particular theory,—lest this should bias his mind and put him off his guard. 2. "A man is to his praise what the fining pot is to

silver, and the furnace is to gold," because a man's conduct *actually does put to the test* the commendation bestowed upon him. That conduct is like "the fining-pot" and "the furnace" to it, in regard to the estimate formed of it *by others*. His behaviour detects whether it be or be not just and merited. Commendation naturally excites notice. All eyes are on the man who elicits applause, to ascertain if the applause be well-founded. In this way the commendation is *put to the test;* and the man himself is the *tester;*—proving or disproving the justice of the character given him.—*Wardlaw.*

As praise is due to worth, so it is the tryer and refiner of worth. For as silver is melted in the fining pot, and gold in the furnace; so is the heart of man even melted with joy in the furnace of praise. And as those metals which have least solidity are soonest melted, so where there is least of the solidity of worth, there the heart is soonest melted with praise. And as in the furnace the light matter is blown away into smoke and vapour; so by praise a light heart is quickly blown up, and vainly transported and carried away with it. But as the silver and the gold are made the finer and the purer by the furnace, so true worth is ennobled and made the richer by just praise ascribed to it. For he that hath worth in him, the more he is praised the more will he endeavour to deserve it, and by praise seeing what is dross in himself, will by his care purge it out, and cast it away.—*Jermin.*

The thought in verse 22 is but a repetition of a thought which has often occurred before, as for instance in chaps. xvii. 10 and xix. 29. See pages 509 and 510, also page 581.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 23—27.

MODEL FARMING.

These words were especially applicable to the Israelitish people in their early history, when every family lived upon its own domain and found all its simple wants supplied by the produce of the land and the cattle which fed upon it. This paragraph deals—

I. **With the duties of such a life.** Solomon has several times before given exhortations to diligence in labour, but here he seems rather to enforce the necessity of diligent and constant supervision on the part of the master and owner of the land. He is not addressing a hired servant, but one who is a landed proprietor and has flocks and herds of his own. If a man in so highly favoured a position desires to reap all its benefits he must diligently superintend all whom he employs and set them a good example of industry and perseverance. He must not be content to leave these things to hirelings, but must give such close attention to all that is going on in his domain as to be able intelligently to guide all the varied engagements which follow one another as one season succeeds the other. No man ought to consider this an unworthy employment of his mental powers, and he who does so would do well to remember that the cultivation of the soil was the employment which God gave to man when He first created him in His own image. As an incentive to industry in this direction the proverb contains a reminder of the uncertainty of riches—it is unwise of any man to be wholly dependent upon a fortune made in the past and to have no resource in case of its loss.

II. **It sets forth the rewards attached to the performance of such duties.** There is first the supply of the necessaries of life. Luxuries are not promised, but it is implied that simple food and clothing will not be wanting; and a sufficiency of these is all that is really needful to man's comfort. But there is

a pleasure in obtaining them in this way which is surely not found in any other calling. The cultivator of the ground escapes much of the monotony found in most other professions, and has pleasures and advantages to which dwellers in the city are strangers. If he is more exposed to the hardships of the winter, the joy of spring—"when the tender grass sheweth itself"—is surely enough to repay him for it, and then follow the varied occupations of summer, one affording relief to the other, until the year is crowned with the "joy of harvest." Surely no mode of life is more favourable to bodily and spiritual health than the one here sketched by the Wise Man.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Solomon tells us, in another place, that the instability and uncertainty of earthly things, after all our care, is a motive to draw off our hearts from them, and to fix our eyes upon nobler objects; but he tells us, in this place, that the perishing nature of earthly things is likewise a reason for bestowing a moderate and lawful share of our attention upon our temporal interests. *Lawson.*

Ver. 25. The frail condition of fading worldly things is here well expressed, it appeareth only and is cut down. *The tender grass sheweth itself,* and it is but a shewing, for that being done, it is eaten up presently, being at once, as it were, both seen and devoured. The herbs of the mountain are gathered; their growing is not mentioned as being no sooner grown than gathered, and as being grown for the gathering only. . . . Wherefore as the careful husbandman looketh to the hay and grass and herbs, and takes them in their time, so is the good spiritual husbandman to consider the short time of worldly contentments, and in their time to use them, at no time to trust in them. As hay and grass and herbs are taken in their season, so it is the season in all things that is to be taken. And, therefore, when the season appeareth, let not thy negligence appear in omitting it; when occasion shows itself, show not thyself careless in apprehending of it; when the fruit of opportunity is to be gathered, climb the mountain speedily.—*Jermin.*

Vers. 26 and 27. In these two verses the wise man dehorteth from wastefulness of apparel, and from excess in diet. . . . The proverbial sense is, that plainness of apparel keepeth a man's estate warmest; and that a homespun thread in clothing is a strong and lasting thread in the web of a man's worldly fortune, and that a sober and temperate feeding both in himself and family doth best feed the estate of any man, and that the flock of a man thriveth best when he is contented with the nourishment and sustenance that cometh from the flock.—*Jermin.*

CHAPTER XXVIII.

CRITICAL NOTES.—1. For the transgression, etc. Or, "*In the rebellion.*" "For this use of the word transgression in the sense of *revolt,* compare the verb employed in this sense in 2 Kings i. 1; also Exod. xxiii. 21, etc." *(Zöckler).* Zöckler translates the last clause, "*through wise, prudent men, he* (the prince) *continueth long.*" Delitzsch reads, "*Through a man of wisdom, of knowledge, authority continues.*" **5. Judgment,** or, "what is right" *(Delitzsch).* **6. Perverse,** etc., literally, "he who is crooked in two ways." Delitzsch translates, "*a double-going deceiver.*" **8. Usury and unjust gain.** Literally, "*Interest and usury.*" "These are so distinguished according to Lev. xxv. 36, that the former denotes the annual revenue of a sum of money loaned out, the

latter an exaction in other things, especially in natural products" *(Zöckler).* **12. Hidden.** Or "*sought for.*" Delitzsch understands this to mean "plundered," or "*subjected to espionage.*" **16.** Ewald, Zöckler, Delitzsch, and others read this verse, "*O prince devoid of understanding, he that hateth unjust gain continueth long.*" **17.** First clause. "*A man laden with the blood of a soul.*" **18. Perverse ways.** Rather "*double ways.*" **21.** Zöckler reads the last clause, "*And* (yet) *even for a piece of bread* (many) *a man will transgress.*" **22.** Rather "*The man of an evil eye hasteth,* etc. **23.** Delitzsch reads this verse, "*He that reproveth a man that is going backwards,*" etc.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 1.

COWARDICE AND COURAGE.

I. This act of a wicked man reveals an unnatural condition. The sparrow flees to her nest when the hawk is on the wing, and the stag flees before the hunter or the hounds that are on his track. But neither bird nor beast is ever found fleeing in terror when it is not pursued. But bad men flee when they are not chased, and when there is nothing following them more substantial than their own shadow.

II. The cause of this unnatural action. There must be some influence at work somewhere which strikes this terror into the human spirit. There must be some hidden power which thus unnerves a man when he is out of the reach of any visible avenger, and causes him to tremble at the sound of his own footstep, or to see the reflection of the face of the man he has wronged in every human countenance that he meets. In the absence of all causes without we must look within, and there we find the pursuer. It is conscience that thus makes every wicked man a coward—that voice within him which thus bears witness to the existence of a Divine law which he has broken, and to a Divine Lawgiver to whom he must render an account whether he escape human justice or not.

III. The hopeless nature of the act. The man who flees when none are pursuing reveals that he is engaged in an attempt to flee from himself, and this is an endeavour that will ever be fruitless. A man may quit the scene of his crime and go into a country where all around him is entirely different, but he will be painfully conscious that he is himself the same being—that although he has changed everything outside himself he has preserved his identity. He can free his soul from his body and so flee from the world, but he cannot free himself from the consciousness of guilt and so break the tie that binds him and his sin together. For this flight from self is but another name for flight from God—from Him to whom alone the Psalmist's words apply:—"*Whither shall I go from Thy Spirit? or whither shall I flee from Thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven thou art there; if I make my bed in hell, behold Thou art there; if I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall Thy hand lead me, and Thy right hand shall uphold me.*" (Psa. cxxxix. 7, 10.)

IV. The entirely contrary attitude of a righteous man reveals an entirely opposite relation to conscience and to God. The natural position of any creature in relation to the Creator is the position which he held when he was originally created. Man was then on such good terms with himself and in such conscious favour with God that he had no sense of fear and no desire to flee from the Divine presence. It was not until the first sin had been committed that Adam and his wife hid themselves, and fled when no man pursued. But there are descendants of Adam who, although they cannot pretend to sinlessness, have no guilty fear of God, and consequently are not afraid of man. The original and natural relation between them and their Father in heaven has been re-established by their acceptance of His conditions of reconciliation, and being

now on the side of righteousness they have no reason to flee even when many pursue them, much less when they are alone with themselves and God. They can sing with the Psalmist, "*The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life, of whom shall I be afraid? . . . Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident.*" (Psa. xxvii. 1, 3.)

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Moses "feared not the wrath of the king." Caleb and Joshua stood firm against the current of rebellion. Elijah dared Ahab's anger to his face. Nehemiah, in a time of peril, exclaimed—"Should such a man as I flee?" The three confessors stood undaunted before the furious autocrat of Babylon. The Apostles' *boldness* astonished their enemies. Paul before the Roman governor, and even before Nero himself, witnessed a good confession. Athanasius before the Imperial Council of Heresy; Luther at the Diet of Worms, finely exemplified this lion-like boldness.—*Bridges.*

The *wicked* is a very coward, and is afraid of everything; of God, because He is his enemy; of Satan, because he is his tormentor; of God's creatures, because they, joining with their Maker, fight against him; of himself, because he bears about with him his own accuser and executioner. The godly man contrarily is afraid of nothing; not of God, because he knows Him his best friend, and will not hurt him; not of Satan, because he cannot hurt him; not of afflictions, because he knows they come from a loving God, and end in his good; not of the creatures, since "the very stones in the field are in league with Him;" not of himself, since his conscience is at peace.—*Bp. Hall.*

Conscience within a man is one extremity of an electric wire, whose other extremity is fastened to the judgment-seat . . . . A man may be saved from death by seeing the reflection of his danger in a mirror, when the danger itself could not be directly seen. The executioner, with his weapon, is stealthily approaching through a corridor of the castle to the spot where the devoted invalid reclines. In his musings the captive has turned his vacant eye towards a mirror on the wall, and the faithful witness reveals the impending stroke in time to secure the escape of the victim. It is thus that the mirror in a man's breast has become in a sense the man's saviour, by revealing the wrath to come before its coming.—*Arnot.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 2.

The Penalty of Revolt.

As will be seen by a reference to the Critical Notes, the word *transgression* would be better translated *rebellion.* The proverb then sets forth,

I. The disadvantages attendant on revolt against the existing government. Whether the rebellion be a lawful one or not—whether the ruler that is dethroned be a tyrant or a wise and just monarch, the result is very much the same. There will be many claimants to the vacant place, and many to support the claims of each aspirant. This is an effect which is almost certain to follow any uprooting of the existing order of things, whether the order be good or bad. If the crew of a vessel put their officers in irons, the difficulty will immediately arise as to who is to guide the vessel. If this is not speedily settled, the ship will be in danger of running upon the rocks while she is drifting on without a guide. It is the same with the vessel of the State. Many

justifiable efforts to better the government of a country have broken down at this point—although there has been entire unity of feeling in favour of a change, there has been a great diversity of opinion as to who should inaugurate it and succeed those who have been deprived of authority. The confusion and insecurity which such a division has caused, has often made way for a return to the old condition of things, and the last state of the land has been worse than the first. But this can hardly be used as an argument against all revolt against existing abuses, but only as a strong incentive to try every other means before resorting to this last extremity.

II. That which makes revolt unnecessary, and consequently conduces to the peace of the commonwealth. Wisdom and prudence on the part of the monarch and his ministers (for the words may be referred to either) will avert such a calamity. That kingdom is highly blest in which the throne is filled with a worthy occupant, and surrounded by men of intellectual ability and moral worth, and therein lies its only real security. For every reasonable man knows that the reins of government must be held by some one, and there is generally a sufficient number of reasonable citizens in a nation to uphold an enlightened administrator of righteous laws, and to keep in check those turbulent spirits to be found everywhere, who, under the name of patriots, only advocate change to serve their own selfish ends.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

"Let the children of Zion be joyful in *their* King." The kingdom to which they belong has *one* King; and a king whose reign is permanent as well as unparticipated. There are no *rival powers* there. If the princes of this world, in the plentitude of their presumption, take upon them to intrude themselves within the precints of His sole jurisdiction, and to intermeddle with what does not belong to them, the subjects of the King of Zion must stand by His prerogative, resist the encroachment, and, at all risks as to this world, refuse obedience. In the spiritual kingdom of which they are subjects, Christ is the only Head; and His word the only authoritative rule.

And there is *no succession* here. He reigns over the house of Jacob for ever; "and of His kingdom there is no end." Blessed be God for this! The sceptre of our King can never, even to the end, be wrested out of his hands; and He *never dies*. He must reign, till all His people are saved with an everlasting salvation, and all His enemies are put under His feet.—*Wardlaw.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 3.

The Most Inexcusable Oppression.

I. Oppression from an unexpected quarter. Although poverty sometimes has a very hardening influence upon men, we do not often find it takes the form of oppression of their fellow-sufferers in poverty. On the contrary, the sympathy of one poor man for another is often the brightest spot in his character. But the ability to oppress implies some elevation of the oppressor over the oppressed, and therefore leads us rather to look for the heartless tyrant among those who have known poverty, but who are now in some degree raised above it. And even here we should hardly expect to find an oppressor of the poor. Such a man cannot plead ignorance of the miseries of poverty. We might expect that he would be full of sympathy for those into whose trials his own experience has so fitted him to enter. If we wanted a tender nurse for a wounded man we should expect to find one in him who has himself been wounded, and who knows

what bodily pain is, and in a man who has himself been poor we ought to find the most patient and generous ruler and judge of the poor. Oppression from such a quarter is a painful surprise.

II. **Oppression to an extreme degree.** The oppressor of the proverb is one who has sinned against the knowledge furnished by his own experience, and is therefore a greater transgressor than one who sins without such experimental knowledge. If this barrier is not strong enough to restrain him, he is not likely to be hindered by any less powerful ones, and will therefore allow his cruel and unnatural passions to have full dominion over his conduct. And so it will come to pass that a man, who has been poor if he become an oppressor, will be a more terrible one than he who has been always rich and powerful. It may be regarded as a rule with few exceptions, that he who breaks through the most restraints in order to sin will go to the greatest lengths in it.

ILLUSTRATION.

This illustrative comparison is here most impressive. It is founded upon a phenomenon which I have frequently seen, and sometimes felt. A small black cloud traverses the sky in the latter part of summer or beginning of autumn, and pours down a flood of rain that sweeps all before it. The Arabs call it *sale; we*, a water-spout, or the bursting of a cloud. In the neighbourhood of Hermon I have witnessed it repeatedly, and was caught in one last year, which in five minutes flooded the whole mountain side, washed away the fallen olives—the food of the poor—overthrew stone walls, etc. Every summer threshing-floor along the line of its march was swept bare of all precious food. . . . And such is the oppression of a poor man that oppresseth the poor. These landlords, and sheiks, and emirs are generally poor, hungry, greedy, remorseless, and they come in successive swarms, each more ravenous than his predecessor. On a gigantic scale, every hungry pasha from the capital is such a *sale*, sweeping over the distant provinces of the empire. Vast regions, formerly covered with golden harvests in their season, and swarming with people full of food and gladness, are now reduced to frightful deserts by their rapacity.—*Thomson's "The Land and the Book."*

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Woeful is the condition when necessity and imbecility meet together and encounter. For necessity hath no mercy, imbecility hath no help. When poverty oppresseth anyone, there is no measure in his oppressing another that is poor. He spares not to strip him naked who hath already no clothes on. He fears not to be a spoiler whom spoiling hath left nothing. For there is nothing that doth so harden the heart of man as his own need; and he hath little or no feeling of another's misery, who feels the biting of his own. As the rain falls, so the earth bears it; and as oppression dealeth, so must the poor suffer it; for as the earth lieth under all, so doth he. The rich man is a *dashing* rain upon him, and when he pleaseth, washeth away his means and succour from him. . . . but there is no such *sweeping* rain unto him as when the oppressor is oppressed by poverty. . . . For he having nothing, takes all that he can get, and the hunger of his own distress so devoureth all, as that he leaveth no food.—*Jermin.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSES 4 and 5.

LAWKEEPERS AND LAWBREAKERS.

I. **A quick understanding in Divine things springs only from sympathy with Divine precepts.** Spiritual truth can only be apprehended by a soul in love with what is good and true. A mere intellectual assent to certain moral propositions will not bring men to a real and intimate acquaintance with Divine

realities, for the revelation of God is not a mathematical problem which appeals only to the intellect, but a message to the consciences and affections of men. "*The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him.*" (Psa. xxv. 14.) There must be spiritual sympathy before there can be spiritual perception, for sin puts out the eyes of the soul, and renders a man incapable of apprehending spiritual realities, as physical blindness makes him unable of seeing material objects. Hence our Lord made *willingness to do His will the one essential condition to knowledge concerning His teaching.* (John vii. 17.)

II. Those who love and obey the Divine precepts contend with the wicked by their obedience. Love to God and obedience to Him are inseparable. The one is the necessary outcome of the other, so that the "seekers after God" described in verse 5, and the "keepers of the law" mentioned in verse 4, are the same persons. The lives of such people are a more powerful reproof to the godless and wicked than any words which they can utter. The feathers of the arrow have their place and value in helping the arrow to find its destination, but it is the steel point that penetrates the breast. So words of admonition fitly spoken have their worth, and are of some weight in contending with the wicked, but a constant life of obedience to God is more convincing and penetrating. So that every true servant of God is fighting against the servants of sin by simply seeking to bring his life into conformity with His Master's will.

III. All neglect of God's law is a commendation of sin. There are many men who would be ashamed openly to praise a wicked action who yet by their disregard of the Divine requirements encourage open transgressors. For there is no middle way here. Every man is on one side or the other, and all who are not contending with the wicked by obedience are countenancing their evil courses by their own forsaking of the law of God.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Ver. 4. "Forsaking;" simply evading or avoiding it, no matter on what pretence. Solomon strikes for the result. He scoffs at all apology. Do you, or do you not, obey direction? If you do not, the fact that you do not is all that is needed to mislead the looker-on, for, seizing upon that most villainous of all things, *praising the wicked*—a thing that scarce ruffians do, a thing that obscene seducers scarcely venture—he says, All disobedience does it. . . But the lonely widow, going quietly to heaven, who has asked carefully the road, and has moved on as she was directed, the text suddenly arms with a sword and spear! She is a warrior! In her quiet walk she is smiting down the rivals of her King. And Solomon literally means it. The most effective army of the saints is the quiet group that dream of nothing but obedience. —*Miller.*

Ver. 5. The natural man perceiveth not the things that belong to God, but the spiritual man discerneth all things. Albeit there is some light in the wicked man which is sufficient to make him inexcusable, yet he is always so blinded by natural ignorance and malice that both Christ and the Law to him is a mystery. Hence it cometh to pass that he neither fully seeth what is to be believed nor yet what is to be done, either generally in all sorts of actions, or particularly in the course of his calling or office.—*Muffett.*

Origen saith, "Of them who do not see, some are blind, and do not see because of their blindness; others are in darkness, and therefore do not see; but others do not see because they shut their eyes." And this it is which many times makes the evil man not understand judgment—he will not do judgment, and therefore will not understand it. But true also it is that wickedness is a great blinding of the understanding. For it turns away the eyes from

the Son of Righteousness, and casteth also a black shadow before it. . . But what do they not understand, that understand Him that understandeth all things? In all things that are required of them, they understand what is to be done by them; in all things that are taught them, they understand the truth of them. . . . They understand the judgment that shall be upon the wicked; they understand the reward that shall be to themselves; they understand in all things to do judgment to others; they are general scholars in their duties both to God and man.—*Jermin.*

He who makes wickedness his element, falls into the confusion of the moral conception; but he whose end is the one living God gains from that, in every situation of life, even amid the greatest difficulties, the sense of what is morally right. Similarly the apostle John (1 John ii. 20): "*Ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things;*" *i.e.*, ye need to seek that knowledge which ye require, and which ye long after not without yourselves, but in the new Divine foundation of your personal life; from thence all that ye need for the growth of your spiritual life, and for the turning away from you of hostile influences, will come into your consciences.—*Delitzsch.*

For Homiletics on verse 6, see on chap. xix. 1, page 561; on verse 7, chap. x. 1, page 137; on verse 8, see the last remarks on chap. xiii. 22, page 332. On the subject of verse 9, see on chap. xv. 8 and 9, pages 407 and 408, and on verse 10, see on chap. xxvi. 27, page 722, etc.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 11.

Wisdom in Wealth and Poverty.

I. Riches tend to produce self-deception. The power of riches to give external position and influence is almost unlimited. Wealth can bring its owners into the palaces of princes, and place them on an equal footing with men of talent and rank. It can surround a man with servants who will obey his nod, and with friends who will flatter him to his heart's content. By means of riches a man can make his name famous in both hemispheres while he lives, and cause it to be remembered after he is dead. It is not therefore surprising that many men who possess this potent means of influence should be so dazzled by it as to be unable to see themselves apart from it, and should credit themselves with *being* more than ordinary men, while the only difference is that they *have* more. A rich man is always in danger of mistaking his wealth, which is but an appendage to his personality, for the wealth of wisdom, which is a part of oneself, and so of being the subject of the worst of all deception, viz., *self*-deception.

II. But the possessor of riches does not often deceive other people as to his real worth. Men around him may flatter him and treat him as if they thought him very wise and clever, but they are often despising him all the time, and oftentimes there are those about him who, although they are beneath him in rank and wealth, are far above him in sagacity and penetration, and can read his character and motives far better than he can himself. Wealth can do much for a man, but it cannot purchase for him the respect and esteem of even the poor man who "hath understanding," and poverty has many drawbacks, but it is free from this one—it does not minister to human vanity.

III. A poor man who has moral and mental wealth is a greater blessing to the world than even a rich man who is wise and good. He can show the world that there are some things better than wealth, and that these better things are in no sense connected with it or dependent upon it. He can convince men that gold is but a shadow and that riches of heart and mind are the substance, and he can demonstrate how much more lasting and satisfying is the influence gained by wisdom than that which is born of wealth.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

The phrase, "*searcheth him out,*" may be variously understood. He discerns his true character. He sees that wisdom and wealth do not always go together; that a full purse is quite compatible with an empty head. He sees, too, that a man's wisdom is not to be estimated by his opinion of himself. He sees shallowness where the man himself fancies depth, and folly in what elates him with a vain consciousness of his own wisdom. He sees abundant reason for not making the rich man his oracle, or setting him up as his idol, or making his example the pattern for his imitation, merely for the number of his acres, or for the gold and silver in his coffers. He sees how prone men in general are to allow weight to counsel in proportion to the wealth of the counsellor. But the "understanding" which God has given him shows him the absurdity of this. He "searches out" the fallacy, and detects and exposes the imprudence and folly of sentiments and proposals, that are propounded and recommended by the wealthiest of the wealthy. And still further, taking "understanding" in its higher sense, as it is used in this Book, as including a mind divinely enlightened and under the influence of the fear of God and all the principles of true religion:—the poor man who has this, sees and knows that "a little with the fear of the Lord is better than the riches of many wicked;"—that "a good understanding have all they who do his commandments;"—that no folly can be more palpable and flagrant than the folly of "trusting in uncertain riches,"—"setting the eyes upon that which is not," and neglecting provision for the soul and for eternity,—forfeiting the "unsearchable riches" provided by the mercy of God for sinners,—all the blessings, unspeakably precious, summed up in "life everlasting;"—spurning away the counsel that would put these in possession;—greedily coveting the treasures of the world that perish in the using, and rejecting the Divine offer of the treasures of immortality. The poor man who hath understanding—I can hardly say "*searches out*" the folly of this,—he discerns it by a kind of spiritual intuition.—*Wardlaw.*

The thought in verse 12 is the same as in chap. xi. 10. See Homiletics on page 206.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE **13.**

CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS.

I. Sin tends to produce shame. Even a child often tries to hide an act of disobedience to a good mother's law, and this not from fear of punishment merely, but from an undefined sense of shame. And this feeling clings to all men through life who are not entirely hardened in iniquity. So long as the conscience is not entirely stifled, men try to hide their wrong actions from their fellow-men even when no human punishment would follow the discovery, and they even try to cover them from themselves by inventing excuses for them. They often endeavour to cloak their sin before their fellow-creatures by putting on the garb of special sanctity, and so add hypocrisy to their other transgressions, and they will try to palliate their guilt at the bar of their own conscience by lowering the standard of morality which God has set up within them, or by persuading themselves that He is a hard taskmaster, requiring them to render Him an unreasonable and a burdensome service. There are other motives which induce men to cover their sins beside this one of shame, and other methods by which they try to do it, but whatever impels them, and whatever means they

use, the truth taught in the proverb is always verified, viz., that all such make-shifts are worse than useless.

II. The only prosperous method of dealing with sin. This method consists of two acts which God has joined together, and which man may not put asunder, because neither of the two by itself would give evidence that the sinner was fit to receive full absolution. If a man *confesses* his sin without *forsaking* it, he seems almost to aggravate his transgression, for he acknowledges that he sins knowing that it is sin, and that it is useless to pardon him to-day, because he will do the same thing to-morrow. And if he *forsakes* sin without *confessing* his guilt he shows that he does it from some other motive than abhorrence of evil. Certain sins are sometimes forsaken from expediency, or from self-righteous motives, but in such cases there is no guarantee that there will not be a return to them. Our Lord describes such when he speaks of the unclean spirit going out of a man, but returning to find an empty house—a soul with none of the newborn hopes and desires and aims which always come with true repentance—and of such He says that "*the last state of that man is worse than the first.*" (Luke xi. 26.) But when hearty and sincere acknowledgment of sin is joined with earnest endeavour to forsake it, God sees a soul which will know how to value His pardon, and will find strength in it to fight against evil and finally to overcome it. And to such a soul it is given to know the *blessedness of the man whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered, unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.* (Psa. xxxii. 1, 2.)

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

There are various ways of endeavouring to cover sins. By *denying* them. A lie is a cover which men put over their sins to conceal them from others They sin and deny the fact, they wrap up their crimes in falsehood. Thus Cain, Rachel, Joseph's brethren, Peter, Ananias and Sapphira, endeavoured to hide their sins. By *extenuating* them. Men plead excuses. The influence of others, the power of circumstances, the moral weakness of the constitution. Extenuation is a common cover. By *forgetting* them. They endeavour to sweep them from the memory by revelry and mirth, by sensuality, worldliness, and intemperance.—*Dr. David Thomas.*

A child of God will confess sin in particular; an unsound Christian will confess sin by wholesale; he will acknowledge he is a sinner in general, whereas David doth, as it were, point with his finger to the sore: "*I have done this evil*" (Psa. li. 4); he doth not say I have done evil, but *this evil.* He points at his blood-guiltiness.—*Watson.*

Confession of sin will work a holy contrition and a godly sorrow in the heart. (Psalm xxxviii. 18.) Declaration doth breed compunction. Confession of sin is but the causing of sin to recoil on the conscience, which causeth blushing, and shame of face, and grief of heart. . . . . Secret confession gives a great deal of glory to God. It gives glory to God's justice. I do confess sin, and do confess God in justice may damn me for my sin. It gives glory to God's mercy. I confess sin, yet mercy may save me. It gives glory to God's omnisciency. In confessing sin I do confess that God knoweth my sin.—*Christopher Love.*

It is fearful for a man to bind two sins together when he is not able to bear the load of one. To act wickedness and then to cloak it, is for a man to wound himself and then go to the devil for a plaster. What man doth conceal God will not cancel. Iniquities strangled in silence will strangle the soul in heaviness. There are three degrees of felicity:—the first is, not to sin; the second, to know; the third, to acknowledge our offences. Let us, then, honour Him by confession whom

we have dishonoured by presumption. . . . Sinfulness is a sleep, confession a sign that we are waked. Men dream in their sleeps, but tell their dreams waking. In our sleep of security we lead a dreaming life, full of vile imaginations; but if we confess and speak our sins to God's glory, and our own shame, it is a token that God's spirit hath wakened us. . . . . This is true, though to some a paradox; the way to cover our sins is to uncover them.—*T. Adams.*

Sin is in a man at once the most familiar inmate and the greatest stranger. . . . Although he lives in it, because he lives in it, he is ignorant of it. Nothing is more widely diffused or more constantly near us than atmospheric air; yet few ever notice its existence and fewer consider its nature. Dust, and chaff, and feathers, that sometimes float up and down in it, attract our regard more than the air in which they float; yet these are trifles that scarcely concern us, and in this we live, and move, and have our being. . . . Such, in this respect, is sin. It pervades humanity, but, in proportion to its profusion, men are blind to its presence. Because it is everywhere, we do not notice it anywhere. . . . But the chief effort of the alienated must ever be to cover his sins from the eye of God. . . . All the wiles of the tempter, and all the faculties of his slave, are devoted to the work of weaving a curtain thick enough to cover an unclean conscience from the eye of God. Anything and everything may go as a thread to the web; houses and lands, business and pleasure, family and friends, virtues and vices, blessings and cursings—a hideous miscellany of good and evil—constitute the material of the curtain; and the woven web is waulked over and over again with love and hatred, joys and sorrows, hopes and fears, to thicken the wall without, and to deepen the darkness within, that the fool may be able, with some measure of comfort, to say "in his heart, No God."—*Arnot.*

Sin and shifting came into this world together. Sin and Satan are alike in this, they cannot abide to appear in their own colour. . . . We must see our sin to confession, or we shall see it to our confusion. . . No man was ever kept out of heaven for his confessed badness; many are for their supposed goodness.—*Trapp.*

St. Gregory speaketh, "He that covereth his sin, doth not hide himself from the Lord, but hideth the Lord from himself, and that which he doth, is that himself may not see God, who seeth all things, not that he be not seen."—*Jermin.*

For Homiletics on verse 14 see on chaps. xii. 15, and xiv. 16, pages 271 and 365.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 15-17.

Vice and Virtue in High Places.

I. A cruel ruler is on a level with the most cruel of the brute creation. The more power a man holds in his hand over the destinies of his fellow-creatures the greater is his responsibility, and the blacker is his crime if he abuses his opportunities of blessing them. In proportion to the unlimited character of his authority ought to be his care not to overstep the limits of the strictest justice, and he is bound to lean rather to the side of mercy than to severity. The less reason he has to fear any retaliation from those whom he rules, the more is he bound to mingle much gentleness and forbearance with his government, for it is the act of a coward to act towards the weak and defenceless as we should fear to act towards one who is our equal in strength. The man who can be capable of such cowardice no longer deserves the name of a man, but puts himself on a

level with those beasts of prey from whom we shrink in terror, knowing that in them there is no reason, or conscience, or pity to which we can appeal.

II. Incapacity in a ruler may work almost as much misery as cruelty. A mother may not be guilty of positive acts of cruelty towards her children, and yet they may suffer very keenly and very seriously from her unfitness to train their souls and her ignorance as to how to take care of their bodies Her neglect may in the end bring consequences as fatal as the greatest severity would have done. This rule holds good wherever one human creature has others dependent upon him, and the more entire the dependence the more miserable will be the results of his or her incapacity. In countries where rulers do not bear absolute sway, a "*prince who wanteth understanding*" is not so great a curse as where his will is the only or the supreme law, but the history of our own country contains instances of monarchs who, although they would have been harmless in private life, were, from lack of capacity to rule, very great oppressors of the people.

III. The curse which rests upon all such oppressors of their kind. Like Jehoram of old, they depart undesired. (2 Chron. xxi. 20). The blood of their brothers crieth out for vengeance upon their heads, and no man puts forth a hand to arrest their doom. Even those who pity as well as blame, if they wish well to the body politic, feel it is a blessing when such tyrants are removed from the earth—when their power of doing violence to the rights of their fellow-creatures is at an end. "*Let no man stay him*" for the sake of those whom he leaves behind, and let no man hinder his departure for his own sake, for his continuance in his place upon the earth would but give him opportunity to add to his crimes, and thus increase the weight of his punishment. (For illustrations of this subject and additional Homiletics see on chap. xi. 17, page 220—also page 208.)

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS

Verse 15. But these emblems were insufficient to represent the monstrous barbarities that have been often exercised by those that were at the head of the Roman empire in its pagan or antichristian state ; and, therefore, Daniel and John represent them under the figure of monsters more dreadful than any that were ever beheld by the eyes of man. (Jer. xxxi. 18, Daniel vii. 10, Rev. xiii.) The language of inspiration could not furnish out more terrible images for the devil himself, than those which have been used to represent the wickedness of tyrannical and persecuting powers. We ought to be thankful for the wounds that have been given to the beast with seven heads and ten horns, and for the civil and religious liberties which we enjoy.—*Lawson.*

Verse 16. As want of understanding maketh a man an oppressor, so to be an oppressor sheweth a want of understanding in him. But the special want at which the verse seems to aim is the greedy want of covetousness. For as a covetous man wanteth understanding, because he seeketh that so eagerly which he cannot keep, so a covetous prince wanteth understanding, because he seeketh that so earnestly which he hath already.—*Jermin.*

Verse 17. God's jealous regard for the life of man was strongly expressed at the second outset of our world's history ; and expressed in terms of evident allusion to the early and awful violation of its sacredness in the antediluvian period :—"And surely your blood of your lives will I require ; at the hand of every beast will I require it, and at the hand of man ; at the hand of every man's brother will I require the life of man. Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his

blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man" (Gen. ix. 5, 6). For my own part, having examined the various principles of interpretation by which those who are for doing away *all* capital punishments have explained these words, I have not been able to satisfy myself with any one of them. They seem to be all forced and unnatural, and, on different critical grounds, inadmissible. I cannot but regard the language as bearing no fair and natural interpretation, but that which makes it a Divine requisition, on the part of man, of *blood for blood* —that is, of *life for life*; and as thus affording more than a *sanction*, as laying down a *requirement*. Though I am far from conceiving that we are bound by Jewish criminal law, yet in the law regarding murder there is so evident an allusion to this original and universal injunction, and the language withal is so very pointed and emphatically reiterated, that I cannot go the length of those who would include *murder* among crimes to be punished with infliction short of death. When set beside the original and universal law it serves, by its very emphasis and peremptoriness, to confirm the ordinary interpretation of that charge to the second progenitors of our race as the just one, and to show, therefore, the universality of its obligation.—*Wardlaw.*

Even the heathen judged this awful transgressor to be under the Divine vengeance. (Acts xxviii. 4.) The death therefore of the murderer is an imperative obligation. It is miscalled philanthropy that protests against all capital punishments. Shall man pretend to be more merciful than God? Pity is misplaced here. The murderer therefore of his brother is his own murderer.—*Bridges.*

This is not directly an admonition against that which is immoral; it may also be a declaration of that which is impossible.—*Delitzsch.*

The subjects of the next six verses have all been treated before. For Homiletics on verse 18, see on chaps. x. 9 and xi. 3, pages 153 and 195. Verse 19 is almost a verbal repetition of chap. xii. 11, see page 266. On the main subject of verses 20 and 22, see on chaps. xiii. 11 and xxi. 5, pages 306 and 609. On verse 21 see on chap. xvii. 23, page 524, and on verse 23 chap. xxvii. 5 and 6, page 728.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 24.

Robbing Parents.

I. A parent's sacred rights. A father and mother, if they are worthy of the name, have a very strong claim upon their children's consideration. Their children owe them obedience in their childhood, and reverent and loving regard when they have reached manhood. If their parents are *rich*, their possessions are to be held as peculiarly sacred. "A feeling," says Wardlaw, "should attach to it somewhat like that which attaches to *holy things*—things pertaining to God and His service. The violation of *their* property should be felt to be a description of *sacrilege*." On the other hand, if the parents are *poor*, their children are certainly bound to help to support them, and so in some measure to repay to them the expenses of their own bringing up. Christ puts this duty to parents before that of giving even to the support of Church ordinances, and severely condemns the Pharisees and Scribes for inculcating opposite teaching (Mark vii. 11).

II. The character of the child who violates these rights. There are, alas, many sons and daughters who, instead of rendering more honour to their parents than to other people give them *less*, and instead of showing more regard

to their parents' rights than to those of a stranger, seem to ignore the fact that they owe anything to them. In the matter of money, those who would not touch the possession of any other person will sometimes appropriate what belongs to their parents, and say, "It is no transgression;" or if they do not go quite so far as this, do not hesitate to live upon them when they ought to be earning their own living, or to incur debts which they know their parents will discharge. He who is guilty of any of these negative or positive transgressions "robs," his father and mother, and his character is given here Although he may not be openly a vicious man—although he may seem to be much less blameworthy than the man who openly violates the law of the land, he is here put on a level with him. The sin in the sight of God is as great, and there is in such a man the capability of developing into an open transgressor, for he who can violate such holy demands of duty, and trample upon the rights of such a sacred relationship, only wants the motive and opportunity to commit actions which would at once class him among the criminals of society.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

"But if any widow have children or nephews, let them first learn to shew piety at home, and to requite their parents." (1 Tim. v. 4.) It is observable, children's kindness to their parents is termed *piety* or *godliness*, because it is a part thereof, and very acceptable to God. Besides, it is called a *requiting* them, intimating that it is not an act of *grace*, but of *justice*.—*Swinnock.*

To say that we did not look upon a thing to be a transgression will be no just excuse for any piece of conduct that we might have known to be criminal. It will only shew us to be so depraved that even our minds and our consciences are defiled.—***Lawson,***

For Homiletics on the first clause of verse 25, see on chap. xiii. 10, page 305.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 26, AND LAST CLAUSE OF VERSE 25.

SELF-CONFIDENCE.

I. He that trusts in his own heart is a fool, because he refuses to profit by the experience of others. If a man who has made a perilous voyage declares at the end of it that he has found his compass utterly untrustworthy, we should count him a madman who would set out upon a similar expedition with the same faulty guide; and if he went down in mid-ocean to rise no more, we should certainly say that it was his own fault. To trust to a guide which another man had proved to be unworthy of confidence when so much was at stake, would be universally condemned as obstinate foolhardiness. Yet this is what men do in the voyage of life. The testimony of most men who, rejecting the guidance of a higher wisdom, have shaped their lives according to their own ideas and inclinations, has been at the end that they have trusted a guide that had misled them. Solomon himself steered a good deal of his life by this deceiving compasss, and at the end confessed that he had acted foolishly in so doing (Eccles. i. 2). It may be that the words of our text were the expression of his own bitter experience on the subject, and that he is here counselling others to avoid the error into which he had fallen.

II. He is a wise man who seeks guidance from God because he trusts in One who has proved Himself worthy of confidence. He who has declared that the human heart "*is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked*" (Jer. xvii. 9) has offered Himself as the object of man's trust and as His infallible guide. Millions of the human family have assented to the truth of

the Divine statement, and have testified to the blessedness of submission to Divine guidance, and have been manifestly delivered by their submission from the bondage of evil, and elevated into a region of moral purity and freedom to which other men are strangers. They are living proofs that He who exhorts men to trust in Him is not a deceiver, but can justify the demands He makes upon our confidence and submission. Human experience has set its seal to the inspired word :—"*Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is. For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit*" (Jer. xvii. 8). Surely, then, he is a wise man who makes the trial for himself.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

The *heart*, indeed, has instrumentality to save us. We must *trust* everything to that. But it is the *heart* dwelt in by Christ. He that takes his heart and confides it to the Son of Man, receives for it an altered life, and will be able to *trust* that *heart* thus *trusted* to Christ as the instrument in the battle of deliverance.—*Miller.*

Though the mariner sees not the pole-star, yet the needle of his compass, which points to it, tells him which way he sails. Thus the heart that is touched with the loadstone of Divine love, trembling with godly fear, and yet still looking towards God with fixed believing, interprets the fear by the love in the fear, and tells the soul that its course is heavenward towards the haven of eternal rest.—*Leighton.*

Whoever trusts another for his guide must do it upon account of two qualifications to be found in him :—1. That he is *able* to direct and lead him. 2. That he also *faithfully will* give the best directions. . . . There are two things which may make a trust *foolish* :—1. The *value* of the thing which we commit to a trust. 2. The *undue qualifications* of the person to *whose trust* we commit it. In both respects the confidence reposed by men in their own hearts is exceeding *foolish*. 1. The *honour of God is entrusted*. So far as the manifestation of God's honour depends upon the homage of His obedient creatures, so far is it at the mercy of our actions, which are at the command of the *heart*, as the motion of the wheels follows the disposition of the spring. God is never disobeyed but He is also dishonoured. II. *Man trusts his heart with his happiness in this world, and this is twofold—spiritual and temporal.* III. *He entrusts his heart with the eternal concernment of his soul hereafter.* . . . The heart of man will also be found to have eminently these two ill qualities utterly unfitted for such a trust. I. *It is weak, and so cannot make good a trust.* Its weakness is twofold. 1. In point of *apprehension* it cannot perceive and understand certainly what is good. 2. In point of *election*, it cannot *choose* and *embrace* it. II. *The heart is deceitful, and so will not make good its trust.* . . . The delusions of the heart may be reduced to three sorts. 1. Such as relate to the *commission of sin*. 2. Such as relate to the *performance of duty*. 3. Such as relate to a man's *conversion*, or *change of his spiritual estate*. . . . The heart if it does not find *sins small*, has this notable faculty, that it can make them so. . . . and in duty is willing to take up with the outside and superficies of things, and . . . it will persuade him that he is converted from a state of sin, when perhaps he is only converted from *one sin to another*; and that he has changed his *heart* when he has only changed his *vice*.—*South.*

On the subject of verse 27, see on chap. xi. 24–26, page 234, and chap. xiv. 31, page 389. The subject of verse 28 has been treated in chap. xi. 10, page 20

CHAPTER XXIX.

CRITICAL NOTES.—**4. He that receiveth gifts** Zöckler translates this, "*a man of taxes.*" **7. Considereth.** Literally *knoweth.* Zöckler and Delitzsch translate the latter clause, "*the godless discern, or understand not, knowledge.*" **8. Bring a city,** etc., literally, "*set a city on fire.*" **9.** The second clause should rather be "*he rageth and laugheth* (*i.e.*, the fool), *and there is no rest.*" **10.** Delitzsch translates this verse:—"*Men of blood hate the guiltless and the upright; they seek his soul.*" **11. His mind.** Rather *his wrath.* **Keepeth it till afterward.** Rather *restraineth it, keeps it in the background.* **13. The deceitful.** Rather "*the usurer.*" *A man of usury is only a more concrete expression for a rich man, and this is the corresponding term* in chap. xxii. 2 (Zöckler). **18. Vision.** Rather "*Revelation.*" "The word denotes prophetic prediction, the revelation of God by His seers (1 Sam. ix. 9); the chief function of these consisted in their watching over the vigorous fulfilling of the law, or in the enforcement of the claims of the law (Zöckler). **19. Doth not answer.** Rather "*there is not an answer,*" that is in action, by obedience. Delitzsch translates "*does not conform thereto.*" **21. A son,** etc. There are many different translations of this verse, but the general verdict of scholars seems to favour the English rendering. Luther translates the verse, "*If a servant is tenderly treated from youth up, he will accordingly become a squire.*" **24. He heareth cursing.** Rather *the curse, i.e.*, according to Zöckler, "the curse which according to the law (Lev. v. i. sq.) marks a theft as an offence demanding a heavy penalty." Delitzsch translates "*he heareth the oath,*" and explains it "as that of the judge who adjures the partner of the thief by God to tell the truth." **(See also Lev. v. 1).**

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 1.

REPROOF AND DESTRUCTION.

I. An act of benevolence which is often resented. When a child is reproved, and if need be chastised, for playing with the fire or neglecting its lessons, all reasonable people see that it is a kind act, and the child itself, when it has grown wiser, acknowledges that the reproof, even if it took the form of punishment, was an act of true benevolence, for it has saved him from bodily suffering or from intellectual loss. But it is probable that at the time the reproof was administered it was received with resentment, and the parent or friend who administered it was looked upon as an enemy. And it is so generally with men in relation to the reproofs of God, whether they come direct in the shape of providential chastisements or indirectly in the rebukes of His servants. God can have but one aim in reproving His creatures, and that is to save them from the pain which follows sin, and to increase their capabilities of happiness by bringing them under His Divine training. But this effort of God is often resisted, and man in the act of resistance is here and elsewhere likened to the ox which refuses to obey his master. He "hardens his neck" against the yoke of Divine reproof. Repentant Ephraim acknowledges that under Divine chastisement he was "*as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke*" (Jer. xxxi. 18); he resisted the efforts of his God to bring him into subjection to His wise rule, and into harmony with His benevolent purposes concerning him. The ox who does nothing but browse is living the lowest form of life which a brute can live—he eats, and sleeps, and fattens for the knife. But if his master leads him from his pasture, and harnesses him to the plough, he thereby makes him a co-worker with himself; the beast now helps to raise the corn which not only feeds himself, but feeds men also, and thus, by coming under the yoke, he becomes a more useful and valuable creature. But as he is only a brute, he is not to be blamed if he prefers the lower life to the higher. As it is with the ox and his master, so it is with the sinner and God. The godless man is content to live upon a level with the lowest level of brute life—to satisfy his bodily appetites, to eat and drink, and die and leave undeveloped all his capacities for spiritual growth and blessedness. But God would make him a co-worker with Himself in lifting him to a higher level and in making him a more useful and blessed creature. But men often resist this benevolent intention, and resent this check upon their self-will.

II. The resistance to many acts of benevolence bringing one act of judgment. It must at last be decided whose will is to be the law of the universe—that of rebellious men or that of the Holy God; and though the Divine longsuffering is so exceedingly great, He must, in the interests of His creatures, assert His right to their obedience. This He did in the case of His chosen people—after centuries of resisted reproof sudden and irremediable destruction came upon the nation, and those who, like the Jews, will not come under the yoke of God, must sooner or later feel His rod. If they will not be His children they must be treated as rebellious subjects. On this subject see also on chap. vi. 15, page 82.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Such was the *destruction* of the old world, and of the cities of the plain, long *hardened* against the forbearance of God. Pharaoh grew more stubborn under the rod, and rushed madly upon his *sudden* ruin. Eli's sons "hearkened not unto the voice of their father, and in one day died both of them." Ahab, *often reproved* by the godly prophet, *hardened his neck*, and "the bow, drawn at a venture," received its commission. How must Judas have steeled his heart against his Master's *reproof!* Onward he rushed, "that he might go to his own place."—*Bridges.*

Sins repeated and reiterated are much greater than sins once committed. . . As in numbers, one in the first place stands but for a single one, in the second place ten, in the third place for a hundred, so here, each repetition is a great aggravation. It is one thing to fall into the water, another thing to lie there; it is the latter that drowns men.—*Swinnock.*

On the subject of verse 2, see on chap. xi. 10, page 206. On verse 3, see on chap. x. 1, page 137, and chap. v. 1-20, page 68. The subject of verse 4 has been treated on page 472, in the homiletics on chap. xvi. 10-15, and that of verse 5 in the homiletics on chap. xxvi. 23-28, page 721.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 6.

A Snare and a Song.

I. Sin deceives men. If a man digs a pit for the purpose of entrapping a victim, his great aim is to make the path over it as inviting as possible, and entirely to hide from sight the snare which he has laid, for, as Solomon tells us elsewhere, "*Surely in vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird.*" (Chap. i. 17.) So when the great deceiver of men tries to lead them into sin, he makes the way of transgression look very inviting, and persuades his victim that some great gain is to be gotten by the sin. He hides from view the pit of misery which lies at the end of every path of disobedience to God. He did not let Adam and Eve see beforehand the bitter consequences of breaking the Divine command or he would not have succeeded in accomplishing their downfall. And he does not let the young man whom he persuades to rob his master see the felon's cell beyond, or his persuasions would be ineffectual. His great aim is to make men believe there is security where there is danger—a solid rock where there is a yawning pit—probable gain where there is certain loss. Seeing that sin is against the sinner's own interests, and that there is in every man an instinct of self-preservation, we must conclude that if transgressors were not *ensnared*, Satan could take the captive in no other way.

II. Righteousness gladdens men. God, who is the Fountain and Source of

all the joy in the universe, made man for happiness. This is the portion which He intended all His creatures to possess, and which they forfeit by their own act and deed. Before sin entered our world, song was man's natural employment—it was as natural for him to rejoice in God's love as it was to breathe God's air. And in proportion as sin is banished from the human soul, and the right relation between it and God is re-established, joy and gladness re-enter the heart. The indissoluble connection which is found everywhere between righteousness of life and peace of mind is a revelation of the character of the Being who sits upon the throne of the universe, and although the song of the righteous in this world is not an unbroken one, and they have sorrow as well as joy, they are hastening to a world where "*God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away.*" (Rev. xxi. 4.)

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Or, a cord, viz., to strangle his joy with—to check and choke all his comforts. In the midst of his mirth he hath many a secret gripe, and little knows the world where the shoe pinches him. Every fowl that hath a seemly feather hath not the sweetest flesh, nor doth every tree that bringeth a goodly leaf bear good fruit. Glass giveth a clearer sound than silver, and many things glitter besides gold. The wicked man's jollity may wet the mouth, but not warm the heart—smooth the brow, but not fill the breast. . . But though Saul could not be merry without a fiddler, Ahab without Naboth's vineyard, Haman without Mordecai's courtesy, yet a righteous man can be merry without all these.—*Trapp.*

For Homiletics of verse 7 see on chap. xiv. 31, page 389, and chap. xxiv. 12, page 680.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 8.

The Citizen's Enemy and the Citizen's Friend.

I. A scornful man is a social calamity. A scorner is a man who has a great opinion of his own wisdom and ability, and a very low one of all who oppose him. From his self-constructed elevation he looks down upon those who refuse to obey him, and counts them his inferiors simply because they do so. This is a perilous course to pursue even when only individual interests are at stake, but when the scornful man holds the welfare of others in his hand, the disastrous effects of his conduct are more widely spread. When he is the only person who suffers from over estimating himself and underrating the strength of his opponents the issue is hardly to be regretted, but Solomon here has in his mind a public man who brings ruin upon many besides himself by his proud disdain of their foes, and by his refusal to recognise a common danger. Goliath was such a man. As the representative and champion of the Philistines he over-estimated the value of his physical strength, and set too low an estimate upon the unseen power arrayed against him, and his scorn of his enemies brought a great calamity upon his nation. A scornful man brings the heaviest calamity upon a people when he scoffs at the power of God and persuades his followers to set at nought His demands and threatenings. This was the great crime of many of Solomon's successors to the throne, and of the false prophets of Judah and Israel, and hence the sentence passed upon them and upon those who listened to them:

"*Wherefore hear the word of the Lord, ye scornful men, that rule this people which is in Jerusalem. Because ye have said, we have made a covenant with death, and with hell are we in agreement; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come unto us; for we have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood have we hid ourselves: Therefore thus saith the Lord God . . . Judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet: and the hail shall sweep away the refuges of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding place,*" etc. (Isa. xxviii. 14-22.)

II. A wise man is a social blessing. We have before seen (see on chap. xiv. 16, page 364) that it is one of the characteristics of a wise man that he recognises the presence of moral danger in relation to himself, and the same may be said concerning danger of every kind, not only as regards himself, but others also. The *recognition* of danger is quite distinct from the *fear* of it; indeed those who are most quick to discern it have generally the most courage to meet it and the most wisdom to avert it. Scornful men generally have nothing but scorn wherewith to meet a foe, but the man who is truly wise can afford to acknowledge the strength of his enemies because he is fully prepared to meet them. If he seek to turn away the wrath of man by persuasion, he will be able to back his persuasion by wise reasoning, and if he strive to avert the wrath of God he will endeavour to bring those for whom he intercedes to such a state of mind as will render them fit to appreciate Divine pardon. But if he cannot do this his own character will give effect to his prayers, and as in the case of Moses and the children of Israel, God will spare many sinners for the sake of one righteous man.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Surely it was *wisdom* in the king and people of Nineveh, instead of *bringing their city into a snare by scornful* rebellion, to avert by timely humiliation the impending destruction. (Jonah iii. 5-10.) Let the people be gathered; let the ministers of the Lord gird themselves to their work of weeping and accepted pleaders for the land. (Joel ii. 17.) Surely "except the Lord of Hosts had left us a very small remnant" of these powerful intercessors, "we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah." (Isa. i. 9.) Praised be God! The voice is yet heard—"Destroy it not, for a blessing is in it." (*Ib.* lxv. 8.) The salt of the earth preserves it from corruption. (Matt. v. 13.) Shall not we, then, honour these *wise men* with reverential gratitude—"My father—my father! the chariots of Israel, and the horsemen thereof?" . . . . Moses—Exod. xxxii. 10-14; Deut. ix. 8-20; Ps. cvi. 23; Aaron—Num. xvi. 48; Phinehas xxv. 11; Ps. cvi. 30. Elijah—1 Kings xviii. 42-45; James v. 16, 18; Jer. xviii. 20; Dan. ix. 3-20; Amos vii. 1-6. The righteous remnant—Isa. i. 9, vi. 13. Comp. Gen. xviii. 32; Job xxii. 30; Jer. v. 1; Ezek. xxii. 30, 31 Contrast xiii. 5.—*Bridges.*

For Homiletics on the subject ot verse 9, see on chaps. xxiii. 9, and xxvi. 3-11, pages 665 and 716.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 10.

SOUL-SEEKERS AND SOUL-HATERS.

I. A proof of the unnatural condition of the human family. When we look at a human body we see that every limb and organism belonging to it ministers to the well-being of the whole frame, and thus to the comfort of the

living soul that inhabits it. This we recognise to be a natural and fitting state of things—just what we should have expected to find before experience. If in any human body we at any time see the hand inflicting injury upon the head, or any one member causing discomfort to another, we conclude, and with reason, that some disturbance of the natural condition has taken place—that there is physical disease in some bodily organism, or moral disease in the spirit that animates the body. So our human instincts and our reason force us to the conclusion that the natural relation of the members of the great body of humanity is one in which "each for all and all for each" should be the rule of action. That it is not so, can but strike all thinking men and women as a terrible incongruity. That most men not merely regard their human brethren with indifference, but that many actually hate and seek to injure their fellow-creatures is surely an evidence that some fatal moral distemper has laid hold of the race. And the evidence becomes stronger when we consider the truth of the first assertion in the proverb—that not only do bloodthirsty men seek to injure other men in general, but that the objects of their especial malignity are the upright—those who have given them no provocation, but whose desire and aim is to bless their human brothers and sisters.

II. An example in renewed men of what human brotherhood ought to be. Notwithstanding the great amount of self-seeking and enmity that is found in the world, there always has been found a small minority who have been seekers of the good of others, and in whom love to their human brethren has been the keynote of existence. And this love has been felt, and this seeking has been active, in behalf of those who hated them, and sought to do them ill. All such members of the human family are doing their part towards restoring men to the condition of peace and goodwill in which their Creator intended them to live, and help us to form some idea of what earth would have been if sin had never entered it. It is true they would then have had no opportunity of loving their enemies, and of doing good to those who hate them, but the love which "seeketh not her own" would have found free scope for her activities in going out towards those animated by the same spirit of love and would never have had to sorrow over efforts to seek and save that have been apparently fruitless. All just men who are seekers of the well-being of others, and especially those who seek the good of their enemies, are followers of that Just One who was hated by the bloodthirsty of His day, and who sought their souls while they sought His life. The history of the martyr Church in all ages has been the history of the "bloodthirsty hating the upright," and of the just treading in the footsteps of their Divine Master, and "seeking the souls" of their persecutors.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

These words may mean—and probably *do* mean—that the upright, in opposition to the blood-thirsty by whom the just is hated, "seek his soul,"—that is, the soul or life of the object of the hatred—of the just or the upright. Of the Lord Himself it is said—"He loveth the righteous." And in this all His people resemble Him. It is one of their characteristic distinctions. They pray for the upright, and endeavour, by all means in their power, to preserve them from the deadly machinations of their persecutors. The amount of love required *of* God's people *towards* God's people is that they be ready to "lay down their lives for the brethren." And if "for *the brethren*" —how much more for THE JUST ONE. *Wardlaw.*

The just seek his soul. As Paul did of his countrymen the Jews, of whom five times he received forty stripes save one (2 Cor. xi. 24); as the disciples

did of those spiteful Pharisees that had causelessly accused them (Matt. xv. 2–12); as that martyr Master Saunders did: "My lord," said he to Bishop Bonner, "you seek my blood, and you shall have it. I pray God you may be so baptized in it as hereafter you may loathe blood-sucking, and so become a better man."—*Trapp.*

On the subject of verse 11 see on chap. x. 19–21, page 168.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 12.

A Moral Cancer in a King's Court.

I. A man in authority should be a discerner of character. The man whose bodily sight is defective is not fit to be entrusted with the destinies of others in any case in which clear vision is needed. A purblind seaman would not be the man to stand upon the bridge of a vessel and direct its movements, nor would a general unable to distinguish friends from foes be a safe person to whom to entrust the guidance of an army in the field. And a man is manifestly in the wrong place if he is a ruler over others and is not a discerner of character.

II. A man in authority should be the possessor of a character. A ruler may be a good man himself and yet be imposed upon by others, but as a rule a lover of truth is a discerner of truth, and an honest man will detect the false ring of the liar's words. But if a man is himself a liar, he will instinctively shrink from contact with true men, and true men will not care to hold intercourse with him, or to serve him, and so he must necessarily gather round him servants who are like himself. Such processes of attraction and repulsion are always going on in the world, in all departments of government, in the family, in the factory, and in the court. The servants are generally what the master is, and the courtiers reflect the character of the monarch.

III. It is therefore indispensable to the moral purity of any community that its head be first a good man and then an able man. Moral excellence is before all other things needful, but it is not the only thing needful. A good man is not always a keen discerner of character, although his goodness will strengthen his power of discernment, but he who *rules* men should possess in an uncommon degree the power of *reading* them as well as that of setting them a good example in his own life.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

He that carrieth Satan in his ear is no less blameworthy than he which carrieth him in his tongue. Untruths are cherished and fostered, as it were, by those who are too light of belief. But this credulity is especially to be shunned by rulers in church, commonwealth, or private families; for all the inferiors commonly follow the example of the superiors. . . . It may indeed sometimes fall out that an Obadiah may lurk in Ahab's court, but this is rare, and commonly the sway goeth another way. Who were Saul's courtiers but Doeg and such backbiters?—*Muffett.*

How wise was David's determination—both as the sovereign of his people and the *ruler* of his house—to discountenance lies, and uphold the cause of faithful men! (Ps. ci. 2–7.)—*Bridges.*

It is natural, when we think of Solomon's own situation as king of Israel, to expect to find some of his maxims of proverbial wisdom bearing special reference to the character and conduct of men in power. And so it is. When, moreover, we think of the wisdom with

which, at the outset of his reign, and at his own earnest request, he was divinely endowed, we as naturally anticipate a correspondence between the maxims and the character. Nor are we disappointed. The maxims are not those of the selfishness of power,—not those of arbitrary despotism or the sovereignty of royal will; nor are they those of an artful, intriguing, Machiavelian policy. They are sound and liberal, and based on the great principle of the public good being the end of all government—the principle that kings reign, not for themselves, but for their people; while, in all their administration, they ought to be swayed and regulated by the laws of an authority higher than their own, by a regard to the will of God as their rule, and the glory of God, to which all else must ever be subordinate, as their supreme aim. But we must not forget, that the Book of Proverbs forms part of the canon of inspired Scripture; that it does not contain, therefore, the mere dictates of human wisdom, how extraordinary soever that wisdom was; that "a greater than Solomon is here."—*Wardlaw.*

The reigns of those princes who gave an easy belief to accusations, are stained with the most atrocious crimes. Tiberius Cæsar put to death the greater number of his own privy councillors, by giving ear to lies, and encouraging his servants to be wicked; and it is probable that the worst action that ever was committed since the fall of Adam, the murder of the Prince of Life, was occasioned by Pilate's wicked and cowardly regard to the temper of that tyrant, and his fear of being accused as an encourager of treason, if he had suffered our Lord to escape.—*Lawson.*

Rulers are the looking-glasses according to which most men dress themselves. Their sins do much hurt, as by imputation (2 Sam. xxiv.)—the prince sinned, the people suffered—so by imitation; for man is a creature apt to imitate, and is more led by his eyes than his ears. . . . Height of place ever adds two wings to sin, *example*, and *scandal*, whereby it soars higher and flies much further.—*Trapp.*

The subject of verse 13 is the same as that of chap. xxii. 22, page 636. The *deceitful* man should be "the man of usury, money-lender," meaning simply the "rich man." (Zöckler.) For subjects of verses 14 and 15, see on chapter xvi. 10-15, page 472, and xiii. 24, page 335, also on chap. xix. 13-18, page 573.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 16.

Victory not with the Majority.

I. There is no necessary connection between numbers and righteousness. Weeds grow faster than wheat, and are much more abundant than the grain. But the simple fact that there are more weeds than there is corn does not alter the character of either. In the same field it may happen that there is more to bind for fuel than for food—that the tares far outnumber the ears of wheat—and in this case the worth is on the side of the smaller quantity. So is it in the moral field of the world. It is a startling fact that under the government of God the wicked are permitted to multiply—that when a man sets himself in opposition to his Maker, he is not at once removed from the earth, but is permitted to live and use his life to make other men wicked like himself. We may sometimes be inclined to ask with the patriarch, "*Wherefore do the wicked live, become old, yea, are mighty in power*" (Job xxi. 7), and the question may be difficult for us to answer; but this we must never forget, that neither with man nor with God is there any necessary connection between quantity and quality, between worth and abundance.

II. Neither are numbers any guarantee of victory. The greatness of a

tree and the number of its branches do not make it certain that it will outlive the storm—on the contrary, its great bulk and height are often the causes of its fall. When the wicked multiply, and so increase transgression, they sometimes lose sight of their personal sin and danger in the sin and danger of the multitude, and persuade themselves that there is safety in numbers. But the very opposite is the case. Men grow more bold in transgression in proportion as they are surrounded with other transgressors, and venture to do deeds of wickedness when in company with others that they would fear to commit alone. And so the multiplication of the wicked, as it increases transgression, is the means of hastening their fall instead of retarding it. It was "*when men began to multiply upon the face of the earth*" (Gen. vi. 1) that their wickedness became so great as to compel God to destroy them by a flood. It was the combination of the entire Jewish nation that enabled them to commit the crime of crucifying the Lord of Glory, but it was this "increase of transgression" that led to their final fall.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Combination emboldens in sin. (Isa. xli. 7.) Each particle of the mass is corrupt. The mass therefore of itself ferments with evil. Hence the prevalence of infidelity in our densely crowded districts above the more thinly populated villages. There is the same evil in individual hearts, but not the same fermentation of evil.—*Bridges.*

The reference is, in all probability, to the influence of wicked rulers in promoting the increase of wickedness in the community, which requires not either illustration or proof.—"But *the righteous shall see their fall.*"—Their fall, that is, *from power and authority.* It is not the *final fall*—the *perdition* of the wicked, that is intended. In that the righteous have *no pleasure.* Herein they resemble God; are of one mind and heart with Him. He says, and confirms it by His oath—"As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked." In the execution of the sentence against them, God glorifies Himself; and the righteous solemnly acquiesce, acknowledging and celebrating the justice of the divine administration:—"Even so, Lord God, Almighty, for true and righteous are Thy judgments!" But pleasure in witnessing the execution of the sentence, we cannot, we must not, for a moment, imagine them to have.—*Wardlaw.*

Cyrillus Alexandrinus tells us, when man was alone upon the earth there was then no such matter as sinning. . . . Much company in sin ever makes more, it being the weakness of man's understanding to fear little hurt and danger, where many run into it, and it being the nature of wickedness to take strength from a multitude, as not fearing then to be opposed or resisted.—*Jermin.*

For Homiletics on the subject of verse 17, see on chap. xix. 18, page 573.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 18.

Divine Revelation and Human Obedience.

I. The human soul needs what it cannot produce. If the flower is to attain to its development of beauty and colour it must have the sunlight and the rain from without itself—it needs what it has no power to produce. The husbandman and all mankind need a harvest, but they have no power within themselves to supply their need; although they can plough, and plant, and sow,

they cannot give the quickening rays of light and heat which alone can make the seed to live and grow. The entire human race has spiritual needs which it cannot supply, and capabilities which must be developed by influences outside and above itself. It needs a knowledge of God's nature, and will, and purposes, if it is to grow in moral stature, and blossom and ripen into moral beauty and fruitfulness, but no human intellect or heart can acquire this knowledge by its own unaided efforts. If the human soul is to grow in goodness it must know God, and if it is to know Him, God must reveal Himself.

II. God by revelation has supplied man's need. This supply man had a right to look for and expect. He had a right to look to the Creator of his bodily appetites and needs for the supplies that are necessary to his physical life and well-being, and he does not look in vain. God has given the "*earth to the children of men*" (Psa. cxv. 16), and every year He causes it to bring forth and bud, not only giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, but an abundance of luxuries for his enjoyment. It is most natural and reasonable to look to the Giver of all these good things for the body, and expect from Him the supply of the deeper needs of the soul. We do not think a human parent does his duty to his child if he only feeds and clothes him and makes no effort to enlighten his mind and satisfy his heart. And surely the Great Father of the universe would not be worthy of His name if He dealt so with the children of whose bodies and souls He is the Author. But He has not left us thus unprovided for, but "*at sundry times and in divers manners* He has spoken unto men" (Heb. i. 1), telling them enough of Himself and of themselves to satisfy their spiritual cravings, and to elevate their spiritual nature.

III. It follows that gratitude and self-love should prompt men to listen to God, and to obey Him. If the foregoing assertions are true, it follows that man must give heed to the revelation of God, or sustain permanent and irretrievable loss. As he cannot reject the Divine provision for the body without bodily death, so he cannot refuse attention to God's provision for his soul without spiritual ruin—without causing to perish all those powers and faculties of his highest nature the exercise of which make existence worth having. Self-love, therefore, should prompt a man to "*keep the law*," and if he do not listen to its voice he has only himself to blame for missing real happiness. If a man is starving, his best friend can do no more than supply his need, he must eat the food set before him; and when God has offered to the children of men that wine and milk which will satisfy the soul, and cause it to grow, He has done all that even a God can do. (Isa. lv. 1, 2.) Man is a self-murderer if he refuse it.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

He doth not say they may perish, but they do perish; or they are in danger of perishing, but they do certainly perish where there is no serious, conscientious, faithful, powerful preaching . . . There men perish *temporarily;* when vision, when preaching ceased among the Jews, oh, the dreadful calamities and miseries that came upon the people! . . . There men perish *totally:* both the bodies and the souls of men perish where serious conscientious preaching fails (Hosea iv. 6); "*My people are destroyed for want of knowledge.*" . . . The Papists say that ignorance is the mother of devotion; but this text tells us that it is the mother of destruction.—*Brooks.*

This is only a hypothetical case, for there are no such "*people.*" Nevertheless there is such a principle. Just in proportion as men do not know they will not be punished. Paul and Solomon are in full accord. "They that sin without law shall also perish without law; but they that sin in the law shall be judged by the law." (Rom.

ii. 12.) These Proverbs elsewhere have taught the same doctrine (chap. viii. 36). Men might all perish, but some less terribly, from a difference of light. All men have some light (Rom. i. 20); and that which they actually have is all that they shall answer for in the day of final account. Still there is a form of ignorance that will exactly proportion our guilt. It is ghostly ignorance, or the absence of spiritual knowledge. Perhaps I may still say that a man is punished for what he has, and not for what he has not. A man who knows of this ignorance, and has light enough to know his need of light, has enough to give account for in that without being supposed to suffer for a profound negation. Be this as it may, there is such an ignorance. It exactly grades our sins. It is the measure of our depravity. The profounder it sinks we sink. No man need sink or perish. There is a remedy. "The word is nigh" (us.)—*Miller.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSES 19 *and* 21.

MASTERS AND SERVANTS.

I. Human servants generally need correction. The relation of master and servant is generally, though not always, founded upon some superiority on the one side and inferiority on the other. Where there is any right adjustment of social relations, those who serve are those who lack knowledge of some kind which those who rule are able to impart, and hence arises the necessity of correction on the part of the master and of submission on that of the servant. It is undeniable that there are many inversions of this ideal moral order, but the proverb can only refer to what ought to be, and what *often*, though not *always*, is the case.

II. The means of correction ought to be moral means. A servant is a moral and intelligent agent, and not a machine or a brute, and he can and ought to appreciate appeals to his reason and conscience. A wise and humane rider will use his voice to his steed in preference to the whip or the spur, and generally finds it effectual. And words of reproof and encouragement are probably the only successful means of dealing with human nature in this relationship. If these fail, no others will avail, and all benefit from the connection will cease.

III. Therefore human masters need much wisdom. If they are over-indulgent the servant may take undue advantage and claim privileges to which he has no right (ver. 21). In the present constitution of things in this world, and probably throughout the universe, there are inequalities of position and rank which no wise man can ignore, and it is kind and wise to those beneath us to maintain these differences and distinctions. But to maintain them without haughtiness, and with that consideration and sympathy which ought to mark all our intercourse with our fellow-creatures, needs much wisdom on the part of superiors. Dr. David Thomas suggests another, and perhaps a pleasanter application of this proverb. "There is another side," he says, "to the kindness of a master towards his servant, that is, the making of the servant feel towards him all the sympathy and interest of a son. . . . He who can make his servant feel towards him as a loving, faithful, and dutiful child, will reap the greatest comfort and advantage from his service." But this happy result can only be brought about where the master is truly wise as well as kind.

For Homiletics on verses 20 and 22, see on chap. xiv. 17 and 29, pages 363 and 386. On verse 23, see on chap. xi. 2, page 192, and xvi. 18, page 482.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 24.

CRIMINAL PARTNERSHIP.

I. Partnerships are self-revealing. That proverb is an old and true one—

"Tell me what company you keep, and I will tell you what you are." A man seeks the society and shares the pursuits of those who are likeminded with himself; if he chooses the fellowship of the good it shows that there is something in his character that has an affinity to theirs, and if he willingly associates himself with bad men, he proclaims himself to be a bad man. Good men do not "walk in the counsel of the ungodly," or "sit in the seat of the scornful"—men who are found in such places must be counted among the ungodly and scornful, although they may be negative rather than positive sinners.

II. Criminal partnerships are self-destroying. As we have seen, partners with criminals are criminals themselves in spirit if not in actual deed, and must therefore meet with the doom of the transgressor. Probably the proverb is directed against those who shelter themselves under the idea that those who do not commit the crime themselves, but only consent to it beforehand, or conceal it afterwards, are not so very guilty; but this is nowhere the teaching of Scripture, nor is it the verdict of the human conscience.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

A partnership life is becoming more and more common and necessary in our commercial England. Great undertakings can only be carried out by companies. Modern legislation has greatly encouraged these combinations, by limiting the monetary liability of its members. Hence, joint-stock companies are multitudinous and multiplying. Such companies are often, perhaps generally, projected and managed by selfish, needy, and unprincipled speculators; and honest men are often tempted by the glowing promises of their lying programmes to become their adherents, and they soon find themselves in the unfortunate position referred to in the text.—*Dr. David Thomas.*

The *receiver* and *resetter* is at least as guilty as the thief. I say *at least;* for in one obvious respect he is worse. His is a general trade, which gives encouragement to many thieves, by holding out to them the means of disposing of their stolen property and evading the law. He is thus, in fact, a partaker in the guilt of all. One thief cannot set up and maintain a resetter; but one resetter may keep at their nefarious trade many thieves.—*Wardlaw.*

This is a warning under the eighth commandment. Do we realise the same solemnity of obligation as under the first? Many professors attach a degree of secularity to a detailed application of the duties of the second table. But both stand on the same authority. The transgressions of both are registered in the same book. The place in the decalogue cannot be of moment, if it be but there with the imprimatur—"I am the Lord thy God."—*Bridges.*

It is the cursed policy of Satan, that he strives to join men in wickedness. In drunkenness there must be a good fellow; in wantonness there must be a corrival; in bloody duels there must be a second; in theft there must be a partner, yoking men together to draw upon themselves the heavy burden of God's displeasure . . . . Wherefore, although it may be a love unto the things stolen, or else a love unto the stealer, which maketh others to join with him, certainly he showeth little love to God's law, certainly he proveth great hatred, which he has to his own soul. For while he joineth with another in stealing some worldly goods, he joineth with Satan in stealing his own soul from himself. And whatsoever fear he may have of some *curse* which the other hath laid upon him, if that he doth reveal it, he hath much more cause to feel the *curse of God's wrath,* if he doth conceal it. He hath but *heard* the one, he shall *feel* the other. —*Jermin.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSES 25 *and* 26.

SAFETY FROM A SNARE.

I. Men fear and hope too much from their fellow men. This fear and this hope are very active agents in this world, influencing men often to abstain from what they know to be right, and inducing them to do deeds of evil. Good men have often staggered and sometimes fallen before this fear and have been misled by this false hope, and both the hope and the fear are intensified when the object of them belongs to the ranks of the conventually great—when the man whom they desire to propitiate is a "*ruler*" among his fellows. Such a man sometimes has the power to injure those who displease him, and has also much that he can bestow upon those who seek his favour; but the weight of his displeasure and the worth of his gifts are generally estimated far too highly by his inferiors in rank, and when this is the case they are snares which lead to sin.

II. Trust in God is the only escape from the fear that will mislead, and the hope that will disappoint. The many and great contrasts, not only between the favour of God and the favour of man, but between all that is connected with the seeking and the bestowal, will lead every wise man to forsake the pursuit of the less for the greater. 1. *The favour of an earthly ruler is often obtained only by the exercise of great skill on the part of the seeker.* When the woman of Tekoa desired to obtain from David the forgiveness of Absalom, what ingenuity on her part was necessary in order to gain the monarch's ear and goodwill. She had to study how to put the case before him in the best light, and to enact a little drama before his eyes in order to enlist his attention and soften his heart. And yet she was pleading with a tender-hearted father for his own son. How different is it when we plead for the mercy of God either for ourselves or others. The simplest statement of the case is sufficient; no schemes or plans of any kind are necessary to win the ear of Him who is always waiting to be gracious. 2. *Success with an earthly ruler is often quite unconnected with the merit or demerit of the pleader.* It often happens that the most worthless characters obtain the greatest favours, even if the ruler himself be a fairly impartial man, because they have more friends at court than a deserving man. In the case just mentioned, Absalom, a thoroughly bad man, was able to command the services of a person who was probably more fitted to gain the desired end than any person in the kingdom. If there had been a banished subject who really merited a free pardon from the king, he would probably not have been able to command the services of so successful a pleader as the woman of Tekoa. But the case is altogether different with Him who doth not "*judge after the sight of His eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of His ears.*" (Isa. xi. 3.) The "judgment which cometh from the Lord" is founded on the strictest impartiality, and depends upon nothing but the character and needs of the suitor. If we add to these drawbacks the uncertain good which may be contained in the "favour of a ruler" even after it is obtained, we may well wonder that it is as true now as in Solomon's days that the "many" seek it, and only the few trust their earthly and their spiritual interests with their God. How many of the few who are not disappointed *of* the favour of great men are disappointed *in* it, and find it a poor and unsatisfying portion after all; but the testimony of all those who seek the higher good is "*In Thy favour is life, and Thy loving-kindness is better than life.*" (Psa. lxiii. 3.)

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

To those who look out upon society from the standpoint of trust in God, the greatest magnates of the world will appear only as grasshoppers. . . . He who can say, "Surely my judgment is with the Lord," will stand before his

race with undaunted heroism, and before his God with devotion. Conscious dependence on the Almighty is the spirit of independence towards men.—*Dr. David Thomas.*

The fear of man leads you into a snare, and will the fear of God make you safe? No; if the character of the affection remain the same, you will gain nothing by a change of object. If you simply turn round and fear God as you feared man you have not thereby escaped. The fear of the greater Being is the greater fear. The weight presses in the same direction, and it is heavier by all the difference between the finite and the infinite. . . . . It is not a transference of fear from man to God that can make the sinner safe. The kind of affection must be changed, as well as its object. Safety lies not in terror, but in trust. Hope leads to holiness. He who is made nigh to God by the death of His Son stands high above the wretched snares that entangled his feet when he feared men. The sovereign's son is safe from the temptation to commit petty theft. . . . . When you know in whom you have believed, and feel that any step in life's journey hereafter may be the step into heaven, the fear of this man and the favour of that will exert no sensible influence in leading you to the right hand or to the left.—*Arnot.*

Albeit faith, when it is in the heart, quelleth and killeth distrustful fear, and is therefore fitly opposed to it in this sacred sentence; yet in the very best sense it fights sore against faith when it is upon its own dunghill. I mean in a sensible danger. Nature's retraction of itself from a visible fear, may cause the pulse of a Christian that beats truly and strongly in the main point—the state of the soul—to intermit and falter at such a time, as we see in the examples of Abraham, Isaac, David, Peter, and others. . . . The chameleon is said to be the most fearful of all creatures, and doth therefore turn himself into so many colours to avoid danger, which yet will not be. God equally hateth the timorous and the treacherous. "Fearful" men are the first in that black roll. (Rev. xxi. 8.) —*Trapp.*

There is a higher step to be taken before we can well step so high; there is the favour of God to be procured before that the favour of the ruler can well be obtained. For kings are but God's kingdoms; as they reign over their people, so He reigneth over them; as they sit on the throne of their kingdom, so He sitteth on the throne of their hearts, and by a distributive justice dispenseth the *judgment* of his and their favours according as it seemeth good to His eternal wisdom. The favour therefore of thy ruler is worth thy seeking for; but first seek and get God's favour, if thou wilt get and enjoy the other to thy happiness. And when thou hast gotten it, remember that it was God's hand which directed the king's hand to reach it forth unto thee. For it is too commonly seen, as one speaketh, "Then doth God especially slip out of the minds of men, when they enjoy His benefits and favours."—*Jermin.*

For Homiletics on verse 27, see on chap. xxviii. 4.

CHAPTER XXX.

CRITICAL NOTES.—**1. Agur.** There have been many conjectures about this person. Many consider that it is a figurative name, and some have adopted the old Jewish tradition that it is an allegorical designation of Solomon. "The name," says Delitzsch, "means '*the gathered*'" (see chap. vi. 8, x. 5), also "*the collector*," or the word might mean, perhaps, "industrious in collecting." **The son of Jakeh**, etc. Stuart and Zöckler adopt here the reading of Hitzig and others, and read "*The son of her who was obeyed in Massa (or the princess of Mass): I have toiled for, or wearied myself about, God, and have ceased.*" For their reasons the student is referred to their commentaries, where the subject is discussed at great length. Ithiel and Ucal signify respectively "*God with me*," and "*the son of the mighty*," and the common opinion is that they were Agur's disciples. From the great differences between the language and style of the last two chapters of the book, and those which have preceded them, most scholars believe that they were written outside the land of Palestine. Zöckler thinks that "Agur and Lemuel might very properly be regarded as Arabian-Israelitish shepherd-princes or kings of a colony of Israelites of the tribe of Simeon that had emigrated to northern Arabia." (See 1 Chron. iv. 38-43; Micah i. 15, ii. 8, 10.) Delitzsch suggests that they were "Ishmaelites who had raised themselves above the religion of Abraham, and recognised the religion of Israel as its completion." **2. Brutish**, *i.e.*, without reason. **10.** Stuart and Zöckler here read "Cause not a servant to slander his master." Delitzsch agrees with the English version. **15. Horseleech**, or "*vampire*, an imaginary spectre or ghost, supposed to suck the blood of children." *(Stuart.)* **15** and **16.** On these verses, Dr. Aiken, the American translator of the Proverbs for Lange's Commentary, remarks, "As compared with the numerical proverbs which follow, the complexity and the more artificial character of the one before us at once arrests attention. They all have this in common, that whatever moral lesson they have to convey is less obvious, being hinted rather than stated. . . . . In the one now under consideration, insatiable desire and the importance of its regulation seem to be the remote object. In the development, instead of the "three things" and "four things" which repeatedly appear afterwards, we have the "leach," its two daughters, the three, and the four. Some have regarded the two daughters as representing physical characteristics of the bloodsucker, others as expressing by an Orientalism a doubly intense craving. Parallelism suggests making the first two of the four the two daughters; other allusions of the Scripture to the greediness of the world of the dead justify the first, while the second alone belong to human nature." **23. Odious**, or *unloved*. **26. Conies.** A gregarious animal of the class Pachydermata, which is found in Palestine living in the caves or clefts of the rocks. Its scientific name is *Hyrax Syriacus*. . . . It is like the Alpine marmot, scarcely the size of a domestic cat, having long hair, a very short tail, and round ears *(Smith's Biblical Dictionary)*. **28. Spider.** Most commentators translate "*lizard.*" Delitzsch reads, "*The lizard thou canst catch with the hands, and yet it is in the king's palaces.*" **29. Go well**, rather, "are of stately walk." **31.** Delitzsch renders the last clause of this verse:—"*A king with whom is the calling out of the host.*"

NOTE.—The following is Miller's unique translation of the first four verses of this chapter with his reasons for the same, and the teaching which he sees in the passage. "It struck us that we would take the simple Hebrew and inquire its meaning. We would accept nothing as a proper name till we found it destitute of sense; and, following no intricate conceits, we would fail of a directer meaning before we went off into anything more difficult. It is astonishing how facile the result. We believe that all was the work of Solomon. We believe that there was no such man as *Agur*, except the great man Jesus Christ. We believe there was no such king as *Lemuel*. We believe everything is the work of Solomon as much as any other proverb. If it appear Arabic or extra-Hebraic no matter. Solomon gathered his materials over a wide surface. We believe it is distinctly what it says, *The prophecy*. We count it as all finished in the four first verses, and *Jakeh* and *Ithiel*, and *Ucal* and *Muel* in the next chapter (verse i. 4). We would be quite willing to read that way, if, like *Lo-ammi* in the prophet, or *Lo-ruhamah*, words confessedly significant (Hosea i. 8, 9), it were thought euphonious or wise to give them without a translation. But what the Hebrews saw why not our people see? Certain it is that the words to a Hebrew were about as follow:—

"1. Words of I-fear, Son of the Godly: The Prophecy:—
"The Strong Man speaks to God-with-me, to God-with-me and to I-am-able.
"2. Forasmuch as I am more brutish as to myself, than a man of the better sort,
"and have not the intelligence of a common man.
"3. and have not been taught wisdom and yet know the knowledge of holy things.
"4. who has gone up to heaven and come down?
"who has gathered the winds in his fists?
"who has bound the waters in a garment?
"who has set firm all the extremities of the earth?
"what is his name, and what is his son's name? Because, Thou knowest.

"Let us examine, first, the language, and then the result as to the sense. *I-fear.* This is the very simplest Hebrew. It actually occurs in Deuteronomy (chap. xxxii. 27). The verb is the

familiar one נוּר, which means primarily to *turn out of the way.* And this *turning out of the way* for danger is a prudent and innocent character of *fear.* *Agur* therefore, or *I-fear*, with the light we get afterward, marks himself as the *Strong Man* of the next clause; the *Son of the Godly*, because descended out of the loins of the Church (see Rev. xii. 5); and the *Man*—just as *Muel* (chap. xxxi. 1) is God and man—contemplating the low humanity of Christ, which is about to express its wonder at its amazing knowledge. *Godly;* from a root meaning to venerate: *Jakeh* is in the singular, and means the *pious one;* which keeps in view what is too often forgotten, that Christ was not the son of the abandoned, but, as His mother expresses it (chap. xxxi. 2), the *son of my vows.* *The Prophecy;* not needfully *prediction*, as in the present case, but an *oracle, vision*, or *inspired elation* of any kind. The words that follow constitute *the prophecy* for though the speech of the *Man*-Christ does not begin till the second verse, the very names in the next clause are predictive; and the most vitally so of the whole of the vision. *The Strong Man;* strong, though weak; strong because he sees in himself such wonderful conditions. The word *strong* is implied in the noun that is selected. *Speaks;* oracularly. It is the solemn, poetic, and in fact, rare expression. *To-God-with-me.* That the Man-Christ should address the Deity has innumerable precedents. If it were necessary, we could imagine the Human Nature as addressing the Divine Nature; for that really occurs in high Eastern vision, in the Book of Zechariah (chap. iii. 4, 6, 7, 8). In lofty texts, like this, it is perfectly admissible. Christ speaks of His Divine Nature (John iii. 13); and speaks of it as being where the Man Christ Jesus was not, viz., in Heaven. But the fourth verse of this chapter mentions both Father and Son; and therefore in this, which is so near it, it is not necessary to distinguish. *The Strong Man* speaks to the *God* which was *with* (Him), and calls Him *Ucal*, which means *I-am-able.* There was a powerful Divinity in Christ, and that He was wondering about. His mother repeats the wonder in the after case (chap. xxxi. 2). The whole is a grand *Prophecy* of Christ in the form of a grand inquiry. *Agur* makes it of *Ithiel.* That is, the *Man, I-fear*, goes searching into the *God-with-me.* There is an *I-fear* part and an *I-am-able* part, of His one Grand Person; and these parts speak even in the New Testament with the humility (John v. 19) and with the splendour (John viii. 58) that belong to each. *Forasmuch as;* the simple particle *because.* *I am more brutish, i.e.* more the mere untaught animal. *As to Myself, i.e.* as to my human self; for it is the *Strong Man* that speaks. The emphasis is laid by the mere expression of the pronoun. *Than a man of the better sort;* than an educated, refined man, which Christ was not. *And have not the intelligence of a common man.* That is, he had not the education usually given to the more lowly. The *commonness* of the humanity is expressed again by the noun. *And have not been taught wisdom.* Here the emphasis is on *taught.* *And yet know the knowledge of holy things.* The meaning of the whole is, that he has singular light. He confronted the doctors in the temple, and, as a little child, was a miracle. Whence came this? This is what the prophecy represents as a surprise. *Who has gone up to Heaven and come down?* Somebody has. The *Strong Man* addresses this appeal to the *God-with-me;* and ends it significantly;—Who is it? *Because Thou knowest.* One word back in the third verse:—*know the knowledge.* We have not altered this, nor said *have the knowledge*, which would be better English, because this seems the intentional form. The words that Christ gave to His disciples, God gave to Him; and Christ, in saying so, would include all senses; the outer word; the inner word; the outward blessed revelation, and the inner teaching. *He knew the knowledge; i.e.*, He discerned in perfect ways what the Spirit without measure was there to impart. *Going up to heaven, gathering the wind, binding the waters, and setting firm the extremities of the earth*, were the work of a Divinity. Some Divinity had been at work upon Him. He applies to the *Able One*, to the *God with Him*, to explain a low man's wonderful knowledge, and then adds, as significant of the reply, *Because Thou knowest.*"

This extract is given here, not because we agree with Miller's view of the passage, but as affording a specimen of the mode of interpretation which he adopts throughout the book.

MAIN HOMILETIC OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1-9.

The Source of True Humility.

I. In proportion as men know God they confess they know Him not. A child looks above his head at the midnight sky and he concludes that the stars that he sees are only so many shining points which have no use beyond that of beautifying the heavens and giving a little light to our world. He does not think that there is any more to know about the stars, but this conclusion of his is based

upon complete ignorance. How different is the attitude of the astronomer in relation to the stars. He has good reason to believe that each one is a sun like unto that which makes the centre of our own system of planets, and this enlarged knowledge enables him to form some idea of how much he has to learn about them, and so draws from him such a confession of ignorance as a child would never utter. He realises that what he knows is nothing in comparison with what there is to know, and it is his increased knowledge which makes him feel thus. So men who never reflect upon the nature or character of God have no conception of the height and depth of the knowledge of the Infinite, and hence have no conception of their ignorance concerning Him. It is only the man who has in some degree apprehended the greatness of his Maker that has any idea of how far he is from comprehending Him, and his consciousness of ignorance increases with his growth in the knowledge of God. Agur, who here declares that he has no "knowledge of the Holy," and is "without understanding" on the highest and deepest subjects, was evidently a man who had endeavoured by searching to find out God, and his confession is the result of his knowledge and not of his ignorance. But what he knew only served to show him how much remained unknown.

II. **Therefore humility is the great sign of high attainments in Divine knowledge, and those who know most will be the most able and willing to be taught more.** Humility is the effect of the most thorough acquaintance with any subject, and of the most profound meditation upon it. When men utter their opinions in the spirit of self-conceit, and are lifted up by their acquirements, we must ascribe it to their ignorance and not to their knowledge. Those who have learned most are the most teachable scholars and the first to welcome instruction from whatever source it may come. If we were to tell a savage of the wonderful capabilities of electricity he would most likely look upon us with contempt, and refuse to believe our statements; but if we were to speak to an experienced electrician about some new theory or discovery in relation to it he would not turn from us in disdain simply because he was unacquainted with it, but would gladly welcome any new light upon the subject. This is pre-eminently the case in the knowledge of all that relates to the Divine Being. When He becomes the object and subject of study and contemplation—when a creature who had no existence a few years ago seeks to know Him who is God *from everlasting to everlasting* he finds himself embarked upon an ocean without a shore, and is compelled to exclaim: "*Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, it is high, I cannot attain unto it.*" (Psa. cxxxix. 6.) His humble reverence will always be in proportion to the progress that he has made. He who knew as much about God and His dealings as any man who has ever lived, gave, as the result of his researches, that "*His ways are past finding out,*" and was led by it to ascribe to Him "*glory for ever*" (Rom. xi. 33-36); and all who have trodden the same path, either before or after him, have arrived at the same conclusion, and have acquired the same spirit of humility. And this is the spirit which makes a man willing and therefore able to receive a higher and deeper revelation. Because he knows that he has not "already attained"—that there is no comparison between what he knows and what there is to know—his mind is ever open to receive new instruction, and he welcomes any means by which he can advance a step nearer to that "*light which no man can approach unto,*" and catch a fresh glimpse of Him "*whom no man hath seen or can see.*" (1 Tim. vi. 16.)

III. **The unsearchableness of God is no hindrance to practical godliness.** If Agur could not know all that he desired about God, he knew enough to trust Him, and enough to make him desire to serve Him. He could from experience testify that God had spoken to men, and that His word was to be depended on, and that there was a reward to those who kept it. If God is unknowable in some aspects of His nature, godly men in all ages have found him a shield in

danger, and a rock of certainty, upon which it is safe to rest. Although Agur could not ascend into heaven and read the secrets of the other world, he felt that he could strive to walk with God in this world, and the effect of a real conviction of the greatness and majesty of God is not to drive men from Him but to draw them near in holy living as well as in humble adoration.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Verse 2. This was true humility, that like true balm ever sinks to the bottom, when hypocritical, as oil, swims on the top. . . He that looks intently on the sun hath his eyes dazzled; so he that beholds the infinite excellencies of God, considers the distance, cannot but be sensible of his own naughtiness, nothingness. It is fit the foundation should be laid deep, where the building is so high! Agur's humility was not more low than his aims lofty: "Who hath ascended up to heaven?" It is a high pitch that he flies, for he knew well that godliness, as it begins in a right knowledge of ourselves, so it ends in a right knowledge of God.—*Trapp.*

Verse 4. The discourse is philosophically accurate, as well as religiously devout. It is through the mutual relations of air, earth, and water, that the Supreme Ruler gives or withholds the food of man (verse 8). These three, each in its own place and proportion, are alike necessary to the growth of grain, and consequently to the sustenance of life. . . . The earth is the basis of the whole operation. . . Alike in its creation and its arrangement, its material and its form, the final cause of the earth has obviously been the growth of vegetation and the support of life. But the earth could not bear fruit at any portion of its surface without the concurrence of water; and how shall the supply of this necessary element be obtained? "Who hath bound the waters in a garment?" Again the clouds and showers, the springs and streams, with one voice answer, God. So wide is the dry land, and so low lies the water in its ocean storehouse, that we could not even conceive how the two could be made to meet, unless we had seen the cosmical hydraulics in actual operation from day to day and from year to year. Here lies the earth, rising into mountains and stretching away in valleys, but absolutely incapable, by itself, of producing food for any living thing. There lies the sea, held by its own gravity helpless in its place, heaving and beating on the walls of its prison-house, but unable to rise and go to the help of a barren land. . . . In this strait—when the land could not come to the water and the water could not come to the land—a Mediator was found, perfectly qualified for the task. "Who hath gathered the wind in His fists?" The air goes between the two, and brings them together for beneficent ends. The atmosphere softly leans on the bosom of the deep, and silently sucks itself full. The portion so charged then moves away with its precious burden, and pours it out partly on the plains but chiefly on vertebral mountain ranges. Thus the continents are watered from their centres to the sea.—*Arnot.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSES 5 and 6.

The Word of God.

I. God has given man a knowledge of His character and will. Although, as we have just seen from the preceding verses, God is so great and incomprehensible in His nature, there is a knowledge of Him which is possible to man

and which he possesses. This seems reasonable before experience. If a man built a vessel which he intended to send his son to navigate across an unknown sea, we should conclude beforehand that he would put a compass in the vessel. And we should likewise conclude before experience that a just God would not build a world, and call into existence a creature like man to dwell in it, without furnishing him with a compass by which to guide his life—a revelation and a law by obedience to which he can be blest and saved. And what might have been expected has come to pass. God has spoken, and has thus met human expectation and human need. Agur recognised this fact in the days of old, and we, to whom in these last days God has spoken by His Son (Heb. i. 1), have a clearer revelation. In answer to Agur's question, "*Who hath ascended up into heaven, or descended,*" we can bring the words of Christ, "*No man hath ascended up to heaven but He that came down from heaven, even the Son of Man which is in heaven*" (John iii. 13), and in the record of His life and death obtain the fullest and clearest revelation of God that it is possible for Him to give and for us to receive.

II. The word of God is what of necessity it must be. The sun is in its nature light, and therefore rays of light must proceed from it. That which flows from it must of necessity be of the same nature as the sun whence it comes, and the fountain of natural light being pure the streams which flow from it must be pure also. When human words are a reflection of the human soul, and "*out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh*" (Matt. xii. 34), the spoken word must be of the same nature and character as the inward feelings. The purity of the outward word will be in proportion to the purity of the inner life. God is moral light—"*In Him is no darkness at all*" (1 John i. 5)—therefore, rays of moral light must flow from Him; all that proceeds from Him must be, like Himself, perfectly free from all shadow of moral imperfection.

III. Because the word of God is what it is, it must be carefully preserved from human additions. It is manifest that nothing that man can add to what God has said can make His word more fitted to a man's needs, any more than any intervention of man can make the sun more perfectly adapted to human vision. It is therefore a criminal act for any creature to add to the Divine Word by putting his own ideas on an equality with the revealed thoughts of God, and most foolish for him to expect them to have the same power on the heart and conscience as Divine words have. "*The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul*" (Psa. xix. 7), and man must not tamper with its perfection. "*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works*" (2 Tim. iii. 16, 17). The fact that it comes from God is a guarantee that blessing will come from seeking to understand and obey it, and condemnation by seeking to improve it by human addition.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

It is the saying of Tertullian, "This is the first thing which we believe, that there is nothing beside God's word to be believed." . . . . At least it must not be taught or received, *as added to His words*, either as of equal authority with them, or as supposing any defect in them. . . . . He therefore that addeth to God's words, shall add unto his own words the just and sharp reproof of God upon them; and whatsoever any may think to find by the doing of it, he shall himself therefore be found a liar. Search them thou mayest to find the depth of them, explain them thou mayest that others may be able to find the meaning of them: but in searching, in explaining,

let nothing be added that is contrary to them. . . . . For what can he be but a liar that opposeth truth itself?—*Jermin.*

The learner is far in advance of his starting-point now. He set out in quest of knowledge to gratify a curious intellect; he ends it by finding rest for a troubled soul. He addressed himself successively to the air, and the water, and the earth; but they were all dumb. They sent back to him only the echo of his own cry. Turning next to the Scriptures, he finds what he sought and more. His darkness vanishes, and his danger too. No sooner has he learned that the word is pure than he learns that the speaker is gracious.—*Arnot.*

There is, perhaps, in the expression here a more immediate reference to the *unmingled truth* of God's word. This suits the connection with what follows: —"He is *a shield* unto them that put their trust in him." *Scepticism* and *infidelity* unsettle the mind. They leave it without confidence and without security. The mind under their influence is like a vessel that has drifted from its moorings, and has been left to drive out to sea, without rudder and without anchor,—unmanned, and at the mercy of the winds and waves and currents:—or, to keep nearer to the allusion in the verse under comment, it is like a soldier in the thick and peril of the battle *without a shield*, in danger from every arrow that flies, and every sword that is raised against him. They make their unhappy subject the sport and the victim of every delusive theory and every temptation of Satan. Hence such expressions as that of Paul to the Ephesians:— "Over all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked." God is the "SHIELD" of all who trust in Him. And it is the *trust*,—it is the firm *faith in God*,—that imparts the feeling of security. So, what is here said of God himself is said of His *truth* or *faithfulness*:—"His *truth* shall be thy *shield* and *buckler*." God could not be "a shield," though His power be almighty, unless He were *faithful*. It is His faithfulness that renders Him the object of *trust*. And when this view of God's faithfulness is such as to impart *perfect trust*—the spirit, calm and tranquil, feels as if it were under the protection of an all-covering shield.—*Wardlaw.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSES 7-9.

THE MIDDLE WAY.

I. A desire that our circumstances should be favourable to our godliness reveals a soul alive to the meaning of existence. The man who values his health more than his raiment, and is more anxious to keep his body in a fit condition to work than to clothe it in purple and fine linen, reveals that he rightly estimates the comparative value of the two, and values most that which is worth most. But no man attains to a right estimate of the comparative worth of all that belongs to him until he values his character more than all things else, and is willing to suffer the loss of all his other possessions in order to preserve that. He is a wise man who, in the choice of clothes, considers first what will conduce to health; but the highest wisdom is that which leads a man in choosing—so far as he is able—his position in life, to consider first of all what will be favourable to his soul's welfare. Such a man reveals that he has made the all-important discovery that the chief end of man is to glorify God, and that he can do this only by a holy life. He therefore makes it the aim of his life to say in deed as well as in word "Hallowed be thy name;" for he has learned the lesson of the text, that anything less than perfect dependence upon God is a denial of Him, and any act of doubtful integrity is "taking His name in vain."

II. A prayer that our circumstances may be thus favourable, reveals a soul

conscious of its own weakness. There can be no doubt that a man's confidence in God ought to be so strong as to remain unshaken in the most adverse circumstances, and his spirituality ought to be deep enough to remain uninjured in the greatest temporal prosperity, but this is but seldom the case. All sincere and humble servants of God acknowledge their proneness to yield to temptation, and the more vital their godliness, the more earnestly do they put up the petition, "*Lead me not into temptation.*" Paul could say without boastfulness, "*I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound. I can do all things through Christ that strengtheneth me*" (Phil. iv. 12, 13), but there have been but few men who could say this with truth, and those who have been most like him in spirit have been the most ready to acknowledge the danger of being exposed to either extreme. A very robust man can keep in perfect health either in the arctic regions or in the torrid zone, but there is most safety in living in a region between these two extremes, and the wisest men acknowledge this, and unless duty calls them, prefer the latter to either of the former. So a man of God, although he hopes that he might be found faithful in any circumstances, reveals a right spirit of humility when he puts up the prayer of Agur. For he knows that the tempter of man is most skilful in using our circumstances against our godliness, and that both great wealth and extreme poverty are weapons which he can use with great skill.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Verse 7. Agur re-enforces his request. It was honest, else he would never have begun it; but being so, he is resolved to follow it. So Jacob would have a blessing, and therefore wrestles with might and slight; and this he doth in the night and alone, and when God was leaving Him, and upon one leg. . . . When poor men ask us two things we think we deal well if we grant them one. Few are Naamans that when you beg one talent will force you to take two. But God heaps mercies on his suppliants, and blames them for their modesty in asking.—*Trapp.*

Verse 8. We are not only to pray for the removal of sin, but for the removal of it at a great distance from us. As God removes it far away in pardon, the soul that abhors sin desires to have it far removed from the heart and life. Our Lord teaches us not only to pray against sin, but against temptation; for there is a strong inclination in the hearts of men to comply with temptations when they are presented to the soul. If a man has a bag of powder in his hands, he will certainly wish to keep at a distance from the fire.—*Lawson.*

Food convenient is obviously not a fixed measure. It implies, not a bare sufficiency for natural life, but a provision varying according to the calling in which God has placed us. "If Agur be the master of a family, then that is his competency, which is sufficient to maintain his wife, children, and household. If Agur be a public person, a prince or a ruler of the people; then that is Agur's sufficiency, which will conveniently maintain him in that condition." Jacob when "he had become two bands," evidently required more than when in his earlier life "with his staff he had passed over Jordan." (Gen. xxxii. 10.) What was sufficient for himself alone, would not have been sufficient for the many that were then dependent upon him. The immense provisions for Solomon's table, considering the vast multitude of his dependants, might be only a competency for the demand (1 Kings, iv. 22.) The distribution of the manna was *food convenient*—nothing too much, but no deficiency—"He that gathered much had nothing over; and he that gathered little had no lack." (Exod. xvi. 18.) And thus, in the daily dispensation of Providence, a little may be a sufficiency

to one, while an overflowing plenty is no superfluity to another. Only let Christian self-denial, not depraved appetite, be the standard of competency. —*Bridges.*

Verse 9. Many in their low estate could serve God, but now resemble the moon, which never suffers eclipse but at her full, and that is by the earth's interposition between the sun and herself.—*Trapp.*

For Homiletics on the subject of verse 10 see on chap. xxiv. 28, 29, page 689.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 11-17.

FOUR MANIFESTATIONS OF UNGODLINESS.

I. Children without natural affection. Parents that have the disposition and character which God intends them to possess are the best reflection of God that a child can look upon in a fallen world. A son or daughter can by no other means so well come to understand the fatherhood of God as by considering the tenderness and self-sacrifice of good human parents, and hence the Saviour in His most beautiful parable (Luke xv.) uses this relationship to set forth the depth and strength of Divine love to sinful men. He who treats such love lightly, therefore, despises the love of Him who instituted the relationship of parent and child to minister to human happiness and to elevate human character. The man or woman who is guilty of this crime reveals a heart incapable of worthy emotion, and a conscience dead to all the claims of duty. Such an unnatural being must fail in all his other relationships—he cannot be a good husband or faithful friend, or worthily fulfil any of the more public duties of life. A man who was found wanting here, was, in the Hebrew commonwealth, regarded as rotten at the very core of his moral nature, and condemned to suffer the extreme penalty of the law (Deut. xxi. 18-21.) Thus God puts the rebellious child on a level with the murderer and blasphemer, and the terrible threatening passed here upon one who disregards the fifth commandment is another proof of the greatness of the sin in the eyes of God. In verse 17 such a sentence is passed upon an undutiful child as is scarcely paralleled in Scripture. Even the body which was the home of so unnatural a soul shall be exposed to ignominy and contempt.

II. Self-deceivers. This is a manifestation of ungodliness, which is in some degree common to all men whose inner vision has not been set right by Divine grace. All unrenewed men are more or less like the ancient Laodiceans, who thought they had need of nothing, but who were in reality so spiritually blind that they could not see their spiritual nakedness (Rev. iii. 15). It is those who are "not washed from their filthiness" that are "pure in their own eyes," for they are in the condition of spirit described by the apostle John—they "*walk in darkness,*" and "*that darkness hath blinded their eyes*" (1 John ii. 11). But it is their own fault if they remain in this condition of blindness. A man may be born into this world with weak or impaired vision, but there may be means within his reach whereby the defect may be remedied and he become capable of seeing things as they are. By coming under the influence of those who can see well themselves and who can help him to sight also, he may be brought from a state of comparative darkness to one of light, and if with these opportunities within his reach he become worse instead of better, and at last totally blind, his blindness is a crime and not a misfortune. So, although it is true that we all come into this world with our spiritual perceptions defective and impaired, we are blameworthy in the highest degree if we do not put ourselves in contact with the moral light which God has placed within our reach, and we shall in time come to the condition of the Jewish nation in the days of

the prophet and in the time of Christ (Isa. vi. 9; Matt. xiii. 14), "*seeing, we shall see, and shall not perceive.*" For "*the light which lighteneth every man*" (John i. 9) has come into the world; and when His word is allowed free access to man's heart and conscience it opens his spiritual eyes as the morning sun playing upon the bodily eyes of the sleeper arouses him to life and consciousness. Self-deception, therefore, is a *sin*, and a sin inseparable from ungodliness.

III. The proud. This sin is the natural outcome of the one just mentioned. If a man has no sense of his state before God, he will have no right conception of his position in relation to his fellow-creatures. The eyes that cannot discern their own moral defilement will certainly look disdainfully upon others. He who thus dishonours his God will certainly despise his brother, and the less a man has to be prond of, the prouder he will be. (On this subject of pride see on chap. xi. 2, and xiii. 10, pages 192 and 305.)

IV. The cruel and covetous. Man's rapacity and selfishness are set forth in verses 15 to 17 in very strong terms. His greediness and cruelty are compared to that of a creature the sole end of whose existence is to gorge itself with blood; to the ever open grave; to swords and knives, etc. We know too well that this picture is not overdrawn. Nothing that man can imagine in the form of cruelty can surpass what man has been guilty of, and such ingenuity has he sometimes displayed in this direction that one is constrained to believe that he has been inspired by a supernatural power of evil, for his deeds of darkness have seemed too black for man of himself to conceive. Some of the cruelty of man towards man may not be the offspring of covetousness, but doubtless much of it is. Men often care not who suffers, or how much they suffer, so that they satisfy their own selfish desires, and all this unnatural conduct is an evidence that there is a schism in the human race which calls for some remedy such as that of the gospel, whereby such savage natures may be transformed, and "*The wolf also dwell with the lamb, and the leopard lie down with the kid,*" etc. (Isa. xi. 6.)

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

In Scripture, the word "*generations*" is repeatedly used to signify particular *classes* or *descriptions* of men; for two reasons, or points of analogy:—*first*, that as generation follows generation, so surely, in every generation, a *succession* of such characters is to be found; —and *secondly*, that they very often communicate the character to one another, and thus keep up their respective kinds,—are successive propagators of their species.—*Wardlaw.*

Verse 11. Here a new thought begins, but probably one from the same teacher. As he had uttered what he most desired, so now he tells us what he most abhorred, and in true harmony with the teaching of the Ten Commandments places in the foremost rank those who rise against the Fifth.—*Plumptre.*

Solon, when asked why he had made no law against parricides, replied, that he could not conceive of anyone so impious and cruel. The divine lawgiver knew His creature better, that His heart was capable of wickedness beyond conception (Jer. xvii. 9).—*Bridges.*

Verse 14. Yet withal, these cruel oppressors are marked by pitiful cowardice. They vent their wantonness only where there is little or no power of resistance. It is not the wolf with the wolf, but with the defenceless lamb; *devouring the poor and needy from off the earth*, —"eating up my people"—not like an occasional indulgence, but "as they eat bread" their daily meal, without intermission. (Ps. xiv. 4.)—*Bridges.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 18-20.

Depths of Wickedness.

I. There are deeds of iniquity which leave no outward immediate trace. The path which the eagle opens by her wings when she soars aloft cannot be traced by the human eye. The air closes behind her as she moves, and she leaves nothing to show that she has passed that way. The vessel ploughs its way through the deep, and leaves a wake behind her for a short time. But the sea, like the air, soon resumes its former condition, and the keel leaves no lasting indication upon the water whereby the course of the mariner can be seen. So the serpent glides over the rock, and for a moment its shining scales are reflected in the sun, and then it is hidden from sight and the rock bears no footprint upon its surface. No human skill could, in any of these instances, find any evidence by which to establish the fact that either the thing without life or the living creatures had been there. So the sin to which all these comparisons are linked is one which may be concealed from the eyes of all except those concerned in it, not only at the time of its committal, but also in the immediate future. Those who come in contact with the guilty parties may see no more trace of the sin than they would do of an eagle's course, or, to use the other metaphor, of bread that had been eaten by one who has wiped his mouth after the meal.

II. Sin is so in opposition to the voice of the human conscience that even those who love it most seek to hide it. The adulteress has sunk as low in the moral scale as it is possible for a human creature to sink, and yet she seeks to hide her shame. Men of evil deeds love darkness rather than light, and so give evidence that there is that within them that condemns their unholy deeds. The very denial of the crime is a condemnation of it. There are many crimes which are not amenable to human law which men, notwithstanding, try to hide from human eyes, and their efforts to do this are witnesses against them and in favour of the law which they have broken.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 21-23.

Burdens Grievous to be Borne.

I. It is sometimes dangerous to the peace of a community to raise a person from a low to a high position. To place a man who has never before crossed a horse, upon a high-spirited charger, is to create a source of danger both to himself and others. There is a strong probability that the unskilful rider will be thrown from his unaccustomed elevation, and so injure himself. And it is also probable that he will be the means of mischief to other travellers upon the road, whom he will overthrow in his unskilful efforts to keep his seat. It is generally as dangerous an experiment to lift a man at once from the position of a servant to that of a ruler. Although faithfulness "over a few things" is, according to the highest authority, the best qualification for rulership "over many things" (Matt. xxv. 21), it is not always hands used only to service are fit to hold the reins of government, either in a small or a large society. On this subject see also on chap. xix. 10, page 569.

II. Some human creatures cannot safely be trusted with even a sufficiency of this world's goods. They are not only unfit to rule others, but so unfit to rule themselves that they cannot be "filled with meat" without becoming a centre of disturbance. Even enough of the necessaries of life suffices to make them injurious to themselves and insolent to their betters. This is especially true of men who are slaves to their bodily appetites. There are men in the world who,

although peaceable and even useful citizens when they are kept in a state of comparative want and hardship, indulge in excess and immorality as soon as the restraint is removed. They will sometimes know this to be true, and yet they are so wanting in moral courage and strength as not to struggle after a higher condition of being. Such men are fools indeed.

III. The change of disposition which change of circumstance sometimes seems to work may be the result of deliberate purpose. When a servant becomes a ruler he may be the occasion of trouble simply from intellectual inability, and the fool who cannot safely be filled with meat may be only morally weak; but the woman here represented as developing into a curse after marriage suggests a person who has deliberately hidden her real character for a time in order to gain a position in which she can have more opportunities of indulging her evil propensities. This is a step farther in wickedness, and this domestic burden is often the most grievous of all burdens. On this subject see on chap. xxi. 9 and 19, page 613.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Judge, then, how horrible it is that men should set the devil, or his two angels the world and the flesh, in the throne, whiles they place God in the footstool; or that in this commonwealth of man, reason, which is the queen or princess over the better powers and graces of the soul, should stoop to so base a slave as sensual lust.—*T. Adams.*

And now, just notice the comprehensiveness, in regard to the happiness of human life, of the *four things* thus enumerated. They begin, observe, at *the throne*, and come down to the *domestic servant.* They embrace four great sources of the social unhappiness of mankind. These are—*incompetent rule, prosperous and besotted folly, conjugal alienation and strife with its domestic miseries*, and the *unnatural inversion of social order.*—*Wardlaw.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 24-28.

LOWLY TEACHERS.

I. Man can learn from creatures far beneath him. Herein he gives evidence both of his greatness and of his imperfection. He is often so faulty in many respects that some of the most insignificant creatures around him read him lessons of wisdom, and yet his capability of receiving instruction from them shows how superior he is to them. For creatures below man, although their actions are often marked by something that seems very nearly akin to reason, are not capable of receiving moral instruction, either from those above or beneath them, and so give proof that they lack a capacity which man possesses.

II. The lessons taught him by each of these creatures. 1. *From the ant industry and forethought.* On this subject see on chap. vi. 6, page 79. 2. *From the coney* (see Critical Notes) *a prudent acknowledgment of weakness.* It is one of the marks of a wise man that he knows his weakness as well as his strength, and this seems to be the lesson conveyed by the feeble folk who, conscious of their feebleness, make their abodes in the rocks. Foolhardiness may ruin a man as surely as cowardice, and it is quite a different thing from courage, though it is sometimes mistaken for it. 3. *From the locust the need of unity and co-operation.* The locust is in itself a small and weak insect, yet it is well known what mighty and terrible work can be accomplished by them when they unite. They stand as an example of the wonderful effect of perfect combination and unanimity in action. (See Joel ii. 2–11.) They seem animated by a single purpose, and the myriads

of individuals seem to become one great and irresistible monster, and thus show us what great things can be accomplished in any community when men are of one heart and mind on any subject, and are willing to lay aside personal preferences and individual interests in order to achieve a common purpose. 4. *From the lizard* (see Critical Notes) *the results of perseverance.* This little creature is constantly found in Eastern houses, and doubtless in the palace as well as in more lowly dwellings. Although hardly so good an example of perseverance as the spider, yet it owes its presence in the house to its own energy in overcoming obstacles, and its pertinacity in seeking out some means of entrance, and may therefore be regarded as worthy of man's imitation when some task is set before him which calls for continuous and watchful effort.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

It has been remarked by some, that the four emblems express all that is requisite for the conservation and well-being of *a* STATE or KINGDOM. There is *supply of food;—commodious and secure dwelling places;—subordination, concord, and united exertion;*—and the *prevalence and encouragement of the ingenious and useful arts.* These are things that governors and kings should look to. And we may apply the emblematic lessons to *domestic* life. Before a man can prudently marry, and have a family, he should have some suitable provision made, and something like a fair prospect of being able to support them. Next is to be found a suitable dwelling, adapted to his circumstances and convenience, Then, when settled, there must be harmony, union, co-operation, in all departments of the household. And lastly, there must be the diligent, constant, persevering application of his skill and labour to his worldly calling.—*Wardlaw.*

The ants prepare their meat in the summer, that they may not starve in the rigours of the winter months. How despicable, compared with these insects, are the rational creatures, who suffer the thoughts of an endless duration to be pushed out of their minds by threescore and ten years? The high hills are a refuge for the wild goats, and the rocks for the conies; and has God provided no refuge for our souls? God himself is our refuge and our strength, and those that make him their habitation shall be secured from the fear of evil.—*Lawson.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 29-31.

KINGLY QUALITIES.

These words seem to set forth animal qualifications needed by human leaders.

I. **They must be men of courage.** A cowardly man in any position in society will, at some time or other, be found wanting, but what is needed in everyday life and by men in ordinary positions, is indispensable in him who has to lead others. A king in the days of Solomon was expected to be at the head of his army in the day of battle, and if he was not then an example to all beneath him in this respect, he brought disgrace and ruin upon himself and them. A king in all ages, and under all circumstances should be to his subjects what the lion is to the other beasts of the forest—a pattern of dignity and courage.

II. **They must be active and watchful.** Both the greyhound and the war-horse—whichever may be here meant—are characterised by swiftness of foot and great sagacity. They are ready at any moment to set forth on any errand, and are always on the alert when danger is near. The goat, also, is agile in its

movements, and as sure-footed as it is fleet. All these animal qualities are symbolic of mental qualifications which must be possessed by those who aspire to lead and rule their fellow-men successfully. They must not be behindhand when called to action, but they must at the same time take heed to the dangers which may lie in wait for them. They must be ever ready at the call of duty, but they must not be rash and hasty, and so endanger much more than their own personal safety.

On the subject of verses 32 and 33, see on chap. xvii. 14, page 513.

REMARKS ON THE CHAPTER AS A WHOLE.

While it appears at the first view that the flowers and fruits from the cornucopia of Agur's wisdom, original and in part so rarely fashioned, are heaped up wholly without order, yet they all agree in this, that they depict the glory and all sufficiency of the Word of God, dissuade from adding to it by any human supplement, and most urgently commend the fulfilling and following it by a pious life. There is hardly a single commandment of the Decalogue that is not directly or indirectly repeated and emphasised in these maxims. Observe the relation of the prayer for the hallowing of God's name (verse 7-9) to the first and third commandments; the references contained in verse 11, and again in verse 17 to the fifth commandment; the warnings against the transgression of the sixth commandment in verse 14 as well as in verses 32-33; the reproving and warning aim of verses 18-20, and 23, in their bearing upon the seventh; the allusion to the eighth in verse 9, and to the ninth in verse 10; and finally the reference, reminding us of the tenth in verses 15 and 16. . . . No one of these proverbs is wholly without an ethical value; not even the two numerical proverbs (verses 24-28, and 29-31), which at the first view stand apart as incidental reflections on merely natural truths, but in reality hide under their ingenious physical drapery decided moral aims. For in verses 24-28 four chief virtues of one's social and political avocation are specified through an allusion to a like number of examples from the animal world, and verses 29-31 run into a delineation of the high dignity and glory of a king by the grace of God in contrast with the insufferable tyranny of base upstarts (verses 21-23.)—***Lange's Commentary.***

CHAPTER XXXI.

CRITICAL NOTES.—**Lemuel.** This Hebrew word signifies "*For God,*" or "*belonging to God,*" and is regarded by most commentators as a proper name. **The prophecy.** Delitzsch, Stuart, and many other Hebrew scholars render this word as a proper name, and read "*The words of Lemuel, king of* MASSA, *which his mother taught him.*" Miller reads the verse, "*Words in respect to the Seed-of-God, a king; a prophecy in agreement with which his mother disciplined him,*" and, as in the preceding chapter, applies it to Christ. **2. What,** etc. "An impassioned exclamation expressing inward emotion." (*Zöckler.*) "The question," says Delitzsch, "which is at the same time a call, is like a deep sigh from the heart of a mother concerned for the welfare of a son." **3.** The second clause reads literally "*nor thy ways to destroy kings,*" and hence some understand it as a warning against warlike rapacity and lust of conquest, but, as Delitzsch remarks, this does not stand well as the parallel to the warning in the first clause. **4. Strong drink.** (See on chap. xx. 1.) **5. Any of the afflicted.** Literally "*The sons of want.*" **8. Such as are appointed to destruction.** Literally "*Children of leaving,*" generally understood to mean orphans. The twenty-two verses following form an alphabetical song, each verse beginning with the several letters of the Hebrew alphabet arranged in consecutive order. **10. Virtuous.** Literally

"*a woman of power.*" Rubies, rather "*pearls.*" **11. He shall have no need**, etc. Rather, "*He shall not fail of spoil.*" "Strictly, 'the spoils of war,' a strong expression to denote his rich profit." (*Zöckler.*) **15.** This probably signifies the appointed task for the day. **21. Scarlet.** Delitzsch and Zöckler retain this reading; the former remarks that, "as high-coloured, it appears dignified as well as preserves warmth." **22. Coverings**, rather "*coverlets*," as in chap. vii. 16, "a part of the furniture of the bed." **25. She shall rejoice.** Rather, "*She laugheth at the future*," *i.e.*, she is not afraid of it, being fully prepared for all emergencies. **26. Law of kindness.** Delitzsch reads "Amiable instruction." **30. Favour**, *i.e.*, "*outward grace.*" **Vain**, or "*a breath.*"

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1-9.

DIVINE COMMANDS FROM A MOTHER'S LIPS.

I. Two considerations made it obligatory upon Lemuel to attend to this counsel of his mother. 1. *She was inspired to utter it.* However we may translate the word here rendered prophecy (see Critical Notes), its place in the Holy Scriptures gives to it the authority of a message from God. The words are not merely the results of a tender and wise mother's own observation and experience, but they are the utterances of a spirit under the special influence of the Holy Ghost. Although, therefore, his mother's love, and, doubtless, her holy example, ought to have been very powerful incentives to attention and obedience, his obligation was increased tenfold by the conviction he must have had that God spoke to him through her lips. 2. *He was a king.* If men in every station of life are bound to keep the paths of purity and charity, much more is it the duty of one in a high place—the influence of whose actions stretch so far beyond his immediate surroundings, and who holds in his hand the destinies of so many beside his own. Because Lemuel had been called by God to a throne, what he was and what he did concerned not a few people only, but a nation, and this reflection ought to have added great weight to his mother's words.

II. The first and indispensable duty of a ruler is to rule himself. Every man is a little kingdom made up of many different and sometimes opposing forces—of inclinations towards the earthly, the sensual, and even the devilish, and of aspirations towards the heavenly, the spiritual, and the godlike. There are lawful desires which, satisfied in a lawful manner, may lead to much enjoyment and blessing, but which, if allowed to rule the man, or even to have any share in the government of the life, will degrade and may almost brutalise him. Bodily appetites have their place in the constitution of man, but it was never intended that they should be satisfied by breaking the moral law; and when they lead to this, moral anarchy has set in, and moral ruin is not far off. The two great sins of the body against which Lemuel is here warned have in all ages shown how man can turn blessings into curses by abusing and mis-using them, and the Word of God and human history unite in proclaiming the truth that the Divine intention is perverted when the body rules the man and not the man the body. Every man is bound to be king of himself, and one who aspires to be a king over others and is yet a slave to his own unlawful passions will bring upon himself the curse of man and the judgment of God. On this subject see also on chap. vi. 24–35, page 89, and chap. xxiii. 29–35, page 673.

III. The obligation next in order is succour of the needy. In former chapters we have considered the obligation which God lays upon every man to consider the cause of the poor and afflicted. (See on chaps. xiv. 20, page 370, and chap. xxiv. 11, page 180.) As we remarked at the outset, duties which men owe to their fellow-men multiply and become binding in proportion to opportunities. The king of ancient times was but another name for one whose direct influence over his subjects was greater than that of monarchs in our day. His word was law,

and the power of life and death was often in his hand alone, and if he exercised self-denial and gave of his substance to those in want, he might often by his individual action entirely change the condition of half his subjects. The relations of society have changed since then, and kings have no longer so exclusively the power for good or ill, but their influence is still very great, and if it is all exerted in favour of benevolence and justice, and they live lives of self-denial and active compassion on behalf of others, they will come up to the ideal picture here drawn for their imitation.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Verse 2. There was a threefold cord of maternal love which this parent was wont to employ, and which remained in its form as well as its power in the memory of her son. "My son" is the outmost and uppermost aspect of the relation. This is a bond set in nature, felt by the parties, and obvious to all. On this she leans first when she makes an appeal to his heart. But at the next step she goes deeper in. She recalls the day of his birth. She goes back to that hour when nature's greatest sorrow is dispelled by nature's gladdest news, "A man-child is born into the world." By the pains and joys of that hour she knits the heart of her son to her own, and thereby increases her purchase upon the direction of his life. But still one step farther back can this mother go. He is the "son of her vows." Before his birth she held converse, not with him for God, but with God for him.—*Arnot.*

Verse 4. *It is not for kings* to admit within their dominions anyone that is stronger than themselves, and able to overthrow them. *It is not for kings* to harbour anyone within their dominions that is false unto them, and ready to betray them: much more it is not for kings to admit within themselves any immoderate quantity of wine, which soon proveth too strong for them, and quickly with shame overthroweth them.—*Jermin.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 10-31.

A Model Matron.

This picture of a faithful and kindly wife, mother, and mistress is here placed before the youthful monarch as the ideal woman whom he is to seek with all *diligence,* because she is well worth any pains to secure, and with much *discrimination,* because she is a rarity, and because there are many imitations of the real gem which look very much like it before they are tested. This beautiful picture is held to his view as the master holds some grand conception on canvas before his pupil, in order that he may acquire a distaste for all that comes short of it. This portrait may have been drawn by the mother of Lemuel; in any case we may safely conclude that she was such a woman herself, and if it came from another hand it is, probably, her likeness drawn from life. We notice—

I. The prominent features of her character. 1. *Her energy.* There seems to be within her a spring of unfailing activity, and the completion of one task is immediately followed by the beginning of another. In her home she is astir before the dawn, and when her domestic duties are completed she gives her mind to the transaction of business without—to the best market in which to sell her goods, and to buy all that she needs for the supply of her household. We cannot conceive of this energetic spirit in a frail and sickly body—she must have been physically healthy and strong, and we may give her credit for having been observant of the laws of God in this respect as in higher

matters, and be sure that she avoided whatever might weaken her body or deaden her intellect. This being the case, her constant activity would be a pleasure, and would in itself contribute to the maintenance of her bodily strength. 2. *Her capability.* She was not only a great worker, but there was wisdom behind the work—a brain directing the hands. There are many people always busy, who yet accomplish but little, because their activity is not wisely directed—indeed, energetic action without wisdom to guide it, may be most disastrous in its effects. There is an abundance of power in the locomotive, but if it is set in motion and left free from wise control, it works ill instead of good. But this woman's intellectual capacity equalled her active energy. She was a good judge of the merchandise that she had to sell, and knew the value of the land that she bought. She was methodical, and so able to arrange the employments of all the household so that no confusion should arise, and she could also show them with her own hands how to perform their work, for "she *layeth her hands to the spindle,*" and so follows up her precept by example. Her capacity also manifested itself in her *forethought*—in keeping her supply well ahead of her demand. 3. *Her loving tenderness.* She might have been all that we have thus far painted her, and yet not have made a happy home. If she had been nothing more she might have been feared, and in some measure respected, but she would not have been *loved.* Just as energy may be dangerous without wisdom to guide it, so such capable energy may be repellent without love to soften it. But her uncommon endowments and attainments did not make her impatient with her inferiors, and she was not so absorbed in providing for those at home as to forget the poor outside. Her commands were given in a winning tone, and her corrections in a loving spirit. She was more apt to instruct than to reprove, and doubtless acted upon the principle that the "way to make people better is to make the best of them."

II. **The root of all these excellencies.** Although it is not absolutely stated, it is implied that godliness was the source of this symmetrical character—that it was the fear of the Lord which enabled her to keep so even a balance of virtues as to stand forth a perfect pattern to the women of every age and nation. The fear of God had given her a right conception of her duties towards all mankind, and especially of the sacred nature of her relationships as wife and mother. She fully entered into the Divine idea of marriage, and this made her the true helpmeet of her husband, and in regard to each son and daughter she heard the voice of her God saying, "Take this child and nurse it for me." She knew that faithfulness in all things was expected of a servant of God, and that true godliness consists not so much in the things done as in the spirit in which they are performed. In the spirit of George Herbert she could say—

"Teach me, my God and King,
In all things Thee to see;
And what I do in anything
To do it as for Thee.

"All may of Thee partake;
Nothing can be so mean
Which with this tincture (for Thy sake)
Will not grow bright and clean.

"This is the famous stone
That turneth all to gold;
For that which God doth touch and own
Cannot for less be told."

And thus living every day and always in conscious fellowship with the Unseen, she would be too conscious of her own shortcomings to be anything but tender towards the failings of others, and would not forget that she owed all her success in life to the blessing of the Lord, and held all her material good in stewardship for His service.

III. The blessed results of all. She had an abundant and lasting reward. Her husband's trust in her was undimmed by a single shadow; whatever position she was called upon to sustain he felt fully confident that she was equal to it, and that everything that he possessed—from his reputation to his purse—was not only safe in her hands, but had increased in worth through his connection with her. Her words of loving counsel, and her useful and benevolent life, were not lost upon her children, but as good seed sown in good ground brought forth an abundant harvest in their filial reverence and noble deeds. And this family blessedness was not a thing that could be hid, but, like a candle of the Lord in a world of much moral darkness, it shed its light all around, and blessed and stimulated others to fear God, and so to serve their generation.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Verse 12. The manner of some is to do good with the one hand, and with the evil of the other to spoil it: whereby they still remain to be evil wives. Others will do good while the fit lasteth, but they are weary of well-doing; whereas a good wife indeed will do good to her husband all the days of her life. It is not said of *his* life, but of *hers*. For though he be dead, she will do him good while she liveth, by doing good to his children, to his friends, to his memory.—*Jermin.*

Verse 16. Some *consider* but they buy not; some *buy* but they consider not; some consider and buy, but they *plant* not; some consider and buy and plant; but it is with the *rapine* of their hands, not *the fruit* of their hands. That field is well bought, where wisdom considereth what is bought, where ability buyeth that which hath been considered, where care planteth that which hath been bought, and where honesty giveth a blessing to that which hath been planted.—*Jermin.*

Verse 20. She doth not only open her hand, but stretcheth it (if I may so make use of the word), as if she would hold more to give the poor if she could. . . . And as if one hand were not enough for her it is said she reacheth forth her *hands*; and if she had more than two no doubt she would reach them all forth to the poor.—*Jermin.*

Verse 22. It is precisely such a woman who should wear such garments. The silk hangs all the more gracefully on her person that it was wound and spun by her own hands. . . This matron is not limited to silk and purple; strength and honour are her clothing too. She may safely wear elegant garments, who in character and bearing is elegant without their aid. If honour be your clothing, the suit will last a life-time, but if clothing be your honour, it will soon be worn threadbare.—*Arnot.*

Verse 26. There be many false keys which open the mouths of many, as rashness, and choler, and pride, and folly, and the like. But there is one right key, and that is wisdom. That it is which makes a virtuous woman courteous to all, a flatterer to none, a tale-bearer to none: that it is which maketh her to be familiar with a few, to be just and true with every one: that it is which maketh her respectful to her husband, lovingly grave to her children, awfully grave to her servants; dutiful to her superiors, affable with her equals, friendly to her neighbours, and not disdainful to her inferiors: that it is which maketh her slow to speak, quiet in speaking, profitable by speaking.—*Jermin.*

Verse 29. By the benefit of a better nature, or civil education, or for the praise of men, or for a quiet life, sure it is that all unsanctified women, though never so well qualified, have failed, both *quoad fontem, et quoad finem*, for want of faith for the principle, and God's glory for the aim of their

virtuous actions. And, therefore, though they may be praiseworthy, yet they are far short of this gracious matron. . . . "Better is pale gold than glittering copper." (Bernard.) Say the world what it will, a drachm of holiness is worth a pound of good nature.—*Trapp.*

Verses 30 and 31. The lessons end where they began. Obedience is traced up to faith. . . . As we traverse the various phases of her character, we seem to be making our way over a well-watered and fruitful region, until we reach at last the fountain of its fertility. . . . Near the base of a mountain range, early in the morning of the day and the spring of the year, you may have seen, in your solitary walk, a pillar of cloud, pure and white, rising from the earth to heaven. In the calm air its slender stem rises straight like a tree, and like a tree spreads out its lofty summit. Like an angel tree in white, and not like an earthly thing, it stands before you. You approach the spot and discover the cause of the vision. A well of water from warm depths bursts through the surface there, and this is the morning incense which it sends right upward to the throne. But the water is not all thus exhaled. A pure stream flows over the well's rocky edge, and trickles along the surface, a river in miniature, marked on both sides by verdure, while the barrenness of winter lies on the other portions of the field. . . . Such are the two outgoings of a believer's life. Upward rises the soul in direct devotion; but not the less on that account does the life flow out along the surface of the world, leaving its mark in blessings behind it wherever it goes. You caught the spring by surprise at dawn, and saw incense ascending. At mid-day, when the sun was up, it rose unseen. . . . Thus is it in the experience of living Christians in the world. . . . The upright pillar is seldom visible, but the horizontal stream is seen and felt to be a refreshment to all within its reach.—*Arnot.*