

making known, for the very first time, the success, the completeness, the glory of His salvation. It is HE who stands literally there, speaking to Mary, but now much more speaking to us, to you, to me, as we, too, "turn" to Him to hear His words about Himself. He points us to His own open grave; that is, to His accomplished victory for us, His finished atonement for our sins. He points us to His living Self, living immortally, eternally, living at this moment, and present with us, even when "we perceive Him not." He points us to the heavens above, and tells us that He is going thither, and that we, for whom He has died, and who have come to Him, and whose sins—including doubts and fears—He has wonderfully cancelled in His own blood, may be sure that that heaven is for us home. It is home for Peter, who denied Him; for the Eleven, who forsook Him; for Magdalene, who thought that His death was the end. It is home for us, unworthy; for He is there. Henceforth, the earth and the heavens are filled for us with light—the light of the redemption, the love, and the presence, of the sacrificed and risen Son of God.

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#### ART. V.—SOME PROVERBS OF SOLOMON.

##### No. I.

*A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.*—PROVERBS xvii. 17.

IT has been well observed that the recognised ideals of a nation are a trustworthy index of its moral condition. If the public sentiment of a country demands, and its literature supplies, a high standard in the delineation of character, if its people expect and require nobility and generosity, purity and chivalry, uprightness and unselfishness in the objects of their honour and regard, if to be a hero in their estimation is to be a good man, we may safely conclude that the moral condition of that country is sound and healthy. If, on the contrary, splendid vices are admired, and a low moral type is tolerated, the taint of corruption has undoubtedly entered into the body politic.

Now, the presence of high ideals is a conspicuous trait in the sacred literature of the Hebrew people; and it serves in their case a double purpose. It is at once preservative and prophetic. Even in the darkest times of their chequered national life, the Jews were never suffered to lose sight of high and inspiring ideals of character and achievement. The heroes of their past history, the king, or priest, or prophet, who from time to time stood forth, a form of light in a scene

of darkness, to rebuke and correct the prevailing evils of his times, were supplemented and surpassed by the grand figures which peopled the glowing future of the prophets, in their work of saving the nation from utter degeneracy, and preserving in it at least a remnant for the accomplishment of its high destiny. But that which was working silently to preserve, and, in common with all the moral teaching of the Old Testament, preparing the way of Christ by keeping alive and healthy "the stem of Jesse," out of which He was one day to "come forth," was at the same time prophesying of Him. It is not only (as in our own day we have come better to understand) in those bright spots in which the golden thread of prophecy rises to the surface, those clear predictions which the New Testament claims and interprets, but in its whole woof and texture that the Old Testament is prophetic. And in no way is it more so than in regard of those high ideals in which it abounds. By them it raised and kept alive expectation. Those ideals were never then fully realized. Oftentimes their nearest approach to realization ended in the most bitter disappointment. But "God who cannot lie," was their Author, and therefore they could not be illusory. In "the last days," and in the person of the promised Messiah, the heaven-born expectation—so the faithful assured themselves—would be abundantly fulfilled.

Considerations like these have an important bearing upon our estimate of such a book of the Old Testament as the Book of Proverbs. They serve to remind us that, as a whole, by its ethical teaching, it is *preservative* for Christ. They set us on inquiring whether, by its ideals, if in no other way (and of that we may have something to say in a future paper), it is not *prophetic* of Him also.

The proverb which stands at the head of this paper seems to show us clearly that it is. However strikingly this beautiful ideal of human friendship may have been realized, in the noble examples which are found both in sacred and in secular history, it seems to admit of, if not to crave, a yet more complete fulfilment. It lends itself readily—may we not say designedly?—to that in which alone it reaches its full realization, the perfect friendship of the Perfect Man. We may well believe that the typical friendship of his father's history was present to the mind of Solomon when he wrote this proverb, if it did not suggest it to him. Yet who can doubt that a mind like his was sadly conscious of the imperfection of even that realization, as he pondered thoughtfully his own aphorism? In the sympathy and self-abnegation which come of love his father's friend had left nothing to be desired. But in the succour and protection which are the offspring of

power, how entirely had he failed! And then, too, like all things human, that friendship in its frailty, no less than in its beauty, had "come up and was cut down like a flower." Its exceeding sweetness did but add poignancy to the bitter lament over its untimely extinction:

I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan,  
Very pleasant hast thou been unto me:  
Thy love to me was wonderful,  
Passing the love of women.

The proverb looked higher. And for those to whom it is given to retain the simple faith of their childhood, strengthened by the experience of life, and confirmed, if enlightened, by reverent and patient study; for those who from the Babel of controversy and the strife of tongues can retire into that garden in which the Lord God hath made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the eyes and good for food, and hear His voice speaking to them in the refreshing calm and coolness of its sacred precincts; for those who recognise the presence of the prescient, inspiring Spirit throughout these "oracles of God," there will be no difficulty in discovering the ultimate scope and true realization of the proverb.

It is interesting to observe how this character of indirect prophecy, which we are claiming for it, is made more clear by a rendering of the Hebrew, which finds place in the margin, though not (unfortunately, as we think) in the text of the Revised Version:

A friend loveth at all times,  
And is born as a brother for adversity.

How briefly and yet how fully the words describe the motive and the cause of the Incarnation of our Saviour Christ! "A friend loveth at all times": and that Friend "loveth us"<sup>1</sup> with the love that knows no past and no future of His own unchanging Godhead. Before our "adversity" befell us His "delights were with the sons of men."<sup>2</sup> But when it came upon us, then was He "a brother born for" it. Then, taking our nature upon Him, did He set Himself to feel for us with a brother's heart, to speak to us with a brother's voice, to succour us with a brother's hand. And giving Himself to us in that highest, unapproachable friendship, He gave us to one another in a new friendship purified and intensified by it,<sup>3</sup> and partaking of its eternity.<sup>4</sup> In Him, then, Who has "called us friends,"<sup>5</sup> and Who "is not ashamed to call us brethren,"<sup>6</sup> the high ideal of the proverb has found at length its perfect realization.

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<sup>1</sup> Rev. i. 5, according to the reading now generally accepted.

<sup>2</sup> Prov. viii. 31.

<sup>3</sup> St. John xiii. 34.

<sup>4</sup> 1 Peter i. 22-25.

<sup>5</sup> St. John xv. 15.

<sup>6</sup> Heb. ii. 11.