

consciously excellent soul; if he had enlarged his phylactery, lengthened his robe, and extended his prayers at the corners of the streets and in the temple; if he had gone daily to the house of his friend, the chief Rabbi, and been often in good fellowship with his honoured and dignified neighbour, the high priest; if he had lived in the exercise of his religion, died in the odour of respectability, and been buried amid the regrets and eulogies of his sect and city—would he not have been a man of lower nature and baser spirit than he seems now as, seeking to escape his sin and his conscience, he flees out of time into eternity? Judas despairful is a better man than Judas respectable had been; and if his remorse has touched the heart of man into pity, who shall say that it found or made severe and pitiless the heart of God?

A. M. FAIRBAIRN.

ECCLESIASTES.

CHAPTER II. VERSES 12—26.

12. *Then I turned myself to behold wisdom and madness and folly. For what can the man do that cometh after the king? Even that which hath been already done.* 13. *And I saw that wisdom excelleth folly even as light excelleth darkness.* 14. *The wise man's eyes are in his head, and the fool walketh in darkness, yet I know that one fate happeneth to them all.* 15. *And I said in my heart, As is the fate of the fool, such will be my fate also; to what purpose is it then that I have had more wisdom? So I said in my heart that this also is vanity.*

16. *For there is no remembrance of the wise man more than of the fool for ever; seeing that in the days to come all will long have been forgotten. Alas, the wise man dieth even as the fool!* 17. *Then I hated life; because the work which is wrought under the sun was grievous unto me; for all is vanity and a chasing of the wind.*

18. *Moreover I hated all my labour wherein I had laboured under the sun; seeing that I must leave (lit., give) it to the man who should be after me.* 19. *And who knoweth whether he shall be a wise man or a fool? yet¹ shall he have rule over all my labour wherein I have laboured, and wherein I have been wise under the sun. This also is vanity.*

20. *So I turned about to despair in my heart concerning all the labour wherewith I had laboured under the sun.* 21. *For there is a man who laboureth with wisdom, and with knowledge, and with success; yet to a man that hath not laboured therein must he leave (lit., give) it as his portion. This also is vanity and a great evil.*

22. *For what hath man of all his labour, and of the struggle of his heart, wherein he laboureth under the sun?* 23. *For all his days are sufferings, and his business is vexation; even in the night his heart taketh no rest. This also is vanity.*

24. *There is nothing better for a man than that he should eat and drink and let his soul enjoy (lit., look upon) good in his labour. This also I saw that it was from the hand of God.* 25. *For who can eat, and who can enjoy himself without His permission (lit., apart from Him)?* 26. *For to the man that is good in his sight He giveth wisdom and knowledge and joy; but to a sinner He giveth the travail to gather and to heap up, that he may leave (lit., give it) to him that is good in the sight of God. This also is vanity and a chasing of the wind.*

IN the previous section of this Book Qoheleth has described the various experiments by which he had tried to find satisfaction in earthly things. He has insisted, too, upon the fact that, whether engaged in the pursuit of pleasure or in more serious occupations, he had not acted from blind impulse or passionate caprice, but that his "wisdom remained with him." Yet after all, when he "turns" to reflect upon his wisdom and his labours, is there any real advantage in wisdom, or is labour of any lasting benefit? These two things, which might have seemed to ensure some permanence,—the wisdom which devises and the labour which executes grand schemes—have the same end as the

¹ Or, "That he should have rule over all my travail," &c.

heedless folly which pursues pleasure, and the pleasure which is itself so fleeting and so poor.

These are the two principal reflections of the section on which we are now entering. The first is, What is the worth of human wisdom? (Verses 12-17.) The second is, What is the worth of human labour? (Verses 18-23.) (1) Is that wisdom, he asks, of which I have been boasting, after all so precious? What does it do for its possessor? Is he the happier or the better for it? No doubt there is a difference between wisdom and folly great as the difference between light and darkness. He who possesses wisdom would be the last to deny it; but test it by the practical result. In the first place, wisdom does not save a man from "the changes and chances of this mortal life." He is swept from the scene, his purposes unmatured, his hopes never fulfilled, his whole life passed under the shadow of disappointment. What satisfaction will it *then* be, when he comes to the end of life, that his wisdom has been greater than that of other men? Is not rather the mockery more bitter? "So I said in my heart that this also is vanity." In the next place (Verse 16) he cannot have even the poor satisfaction of thinking that his memory will be cherished when he is gone. Here too he has no advantage over the fool. In the days to come all will be forgotten. Alas, the wise man and the fool must both die, and their memory will perish with them. This thought made life hateful to him.

(2) The other reflection was one suggested by the great works in which Qoheleth tells us he had been engaged. What was the use of all that outlay and all that effort? His splendid palaces, his parks and

gardens, the works of art with which they were embellished, the treasures he had accumulated, must pass into other hands. He must leave them to a successor who had not toiled for them, and who might be "a fool," and squander in a few days what it had cost him years of thought and labour to acquire. Therefore he hated all his labour (Verse 18), looked upon it with disgust, turned himself about (Verse 20) with a sense of despair, came to the conclusion that life was only a series of vexations and of restlessness leading to nothing (Verse 23): "This also is vanity." This is the end of his reflections. He hated life because there seemed to be no difference in the long run between the wise man and the fool; he hated all that magnificence with which he had surrounded himself, and in which, whilst he was employed in creating it, he had found so much satisfaction (Verse 10), because he could not tell what would become of it after he was gone.

How does he escape from this bitter mood? Verses 24-26 tell us. The best thing, seeing the impotency of all human effort, is to cease useless toil, to take the enjoyments that God gives us, remembering that they are *his gifts*. After all, God's providence orders all things wisely and righteously: men have according to their deserts; the good man receives at the hand of God not only wisdom and knowledge, but joy and happiness; and the sinner, even if prosperous for a time, leaves his wealth to the good man. This is the old faith, and, for a time at least, the Preacher can fall back upon it.

Such is a general view of the verses before us. I come now to examine the passage more in detail.

Verse 12.—The first clause of this verse is a repetition of Chapter i. Verse 17. Qoheleth had made this comparison before he began the experiments upon life recorded in the early verses of Chapter ii. He had found then that in much wisdom there was much grief (Chap. i. 18); he found now that, with all its excellence, wisdom was not more permanent than folly. How can any man in time to come have larger opportunities or better means of forming a judgment than I have on the relative worth of wisdom and folly? This is merely added parenthetically to give weight to the judgment which Qoheleth expresses. The first clause of Verse 12 is closely connected with Verse 13: "Then I turned to behold wisdom and folly, and I saw that wisdom excelleth folly," &c. ; literally, "hath the advantage of folly." (It is the word rendered "profit" in Chap. i. 3.)

I turned. The phrase occurs frequently, and indicates a new reflection, a new point of view. The parenthetic clause is capable of a different rendering, viz., "For what is the man (what kind of a man is he) who shall come after the king whom they made so long ago?" This is the rendering of Delitzsch, who says, "The king whom they made so long ago is Solomon, who has a richer experience, a more comprehensive knowledge the longer the time (viz., from the present time backwards) that he occupied the throne." But this addition, "whom they made so long ago," adds nothing to the force or point of the question, and it is far better to take the former clause as containing the question, and the latter as supplying the answer: "Even that which men have done long ago," and intimating that the course of the world is not

likely to furnish any new materials for a judgment on this question.

Verse 15.—"To what purpose is it, *then?*" *i.e.*, when death comes, and the grave closes upon us. This interpretation preserves the usual temporal meaning of the particle *אם*. On the other hand, Elster gives a logical force to it: "Then, *sc.* if notwithstanding the same event happeneth to the wise man and the fool." But the position of the particle in the sentence is against this view, as well as the fact that the logical conclusion is already introduced by the copula prefixed to the interrogative.

Verse 16.—As in Verse 12 there is a repetition of the thought in the first section (Chap. i. 17) respecting the comparative worth of wisdom and folly, so here there is a repetition of the complaint (Chap. i. 11) that the remembrance of men perishes with them, with this new circumstance of bitterness however, that wisdom is here as powerless as folly. Of course this is exaggeration. But a man in the mood of Qoheleth does not avoid exaggeration. The sentiment of the moment dominates him, and finds its expression accordingly. With a sigh he exclaims that the wise and the fool die alike, and are alike forgotten. The words are not a question and answer, as in the Authorized Version: "How dieth the wise man? Even as the fool." But rather, "How is it, how can it possibly be, that the wise man shall die as well as the fool," that the one no more than the other can escape the doom, the fate, "the inevitable hour"? It is a cry of sorrow, of expostulation wrung from him by a sense of the intolerable mystery of the world. If this is all, life is not worth living (Verse 17).

Verse 19.—*Wherein I have laboured and wherein I*

have been wise. This is not merely equivalent to "wherein I have laboured with wisdom" (as Elster). The repetition of the relative before the second verb shews that this is not one of those cases in which the two verbs are employed where we should employ one with the adverb. There lies an emphasis in the second. It is the fact of the "wisdom" which gives so much point to the miserable failure of the "labour."

Verse 20:—I turned about. This is a different verb from that in Verse 12, but it is doubtful whether they were used by the writer with any essential difference of meaning. The verb in that verse perhaps denotes rather the turning *to look at* an object, and hence it is frequently used in the sense of *looking* only. The verb in this verse expresses more generally the turning round, or the turning about, here, as is evident from what follows, with a sense of restlessness and dissatisfaction.

*Verse 21.—*It is no longer a question with Qoheleth whether his heir shall be a wise man or a fool: the mere fact that, with all his labour and all his wisdom and success, he must leave what it has cost him so much to acquire for another to enjoy, is "vanity and a great evil." It is the sense of the incompleteness of human life that weighs upon him. The word I have rendered "success" may mean either (1) diligence, activity; or (2) success as the result of these.

*Verses 22, 23.—*And then there is the old feeling how profitless it all is. Suffering and vexation are the sum of human existence; man knows no peace nor rest; "even in the night his heart taketh no rest;" and all for what?

Why are we weighed upon with heaviness
 And utterly consumed with sharp distress ;

* * * *

And make perpetual moan ;
 Still from one sorrow to another thrown :
 Nor ever fold our wings
 And cease from wanderings,
 Nor steep our brows in slumber's holy balm ?

The change of feeling in Verse 24 is remarkable. The old simple faith for a brief space reasserts its power. The conviction forces itself upon the dissatisfied *blasé* man of the world that the effort to shape and hew one's own destiny is futile ; that a cheerful resignation, a willingness to take what God gives and to conform to the rule of his Providence, which does in the main manifest itself in blessing the righteous and punishing the sinner, is after all the surest wisdom. This is the first indication in the Book of any belief in a moral government ; a belief, however, which from this point onward reasserts itself in the Book at various stages in the Writer's experience (*e.g.*, Chap. iii. 12, 13), till it finally vanquishes his doubts. In the earlier part of the Book we have a view of the world very much like that with which modern speculation is familiar—a world of laws and sequences, but with no direct recognition of a moral Governor. Here, on the contrary, a scheme of retribution according to human desert is acknowledged. It may be crude and imperfect, but it is at least more healthy than the pessimism which looks upon the world as a system of necessary evil, or the blind sensual resignation of men like Goethe and Heine, who say in effect, The scheme of things is a mystery that can neither be explained nor altered ; let us submit to the inevitable, and snatch all the enjoyment within our reach.

As this passage stands in the present Hebrew text, it is almost impossible to extract from it any consistent sense. Two alterations are necessary.

In *Verse 24*, according to the present text, we should have to render, "It is not good for a man that he should eat and drink," &c. [or, "It is not good among men that they should eat," &c.] This clearly is not what the writer intends to say. Hence the Vulgate reads the passage interrogatively, "Nonne melius est," &c., and this is defended by Hengstenberg, who refers to the use of the cognate form of the negative פֶּן in 1 Samuel xxi. 9. But a question is very awkward here, especially in connection with the last clause of the Verse, "This also I saw, that it was from the hand of God." Another explanation of the existing text is, "It is no good (or, the good is not) *in the power of man* that he should eat and drink," &c. "Moreover this I saw was the gift of God." ¹

But both the Syriac and the Chaldee ² Versions insert "unless" before the verb, "unless that he should eat," &c.; and so Jerome: "Non est bonum homini *nisi quod* comedat," &c.; and this certainly gives the simplest and most satisfactory sense.

The other alteration, which is even more certainly necessary, is in *Verse 25*. Here the present text has :

¹ This is the rendering of Junius, M. Geier, Rosenmüller, Herzfeld, Phiſipp-ſohn, &c.

² Prof. Taylor Lewis, indeed (in a Note to the American translation of Zöckler's Commentary), remarks that "this Version is of no authority, on account of its later date, and the paraphrastic absurdity of its Midrashin." This last circumstance, however, does not affect its testimony to a matter of fact like the reading of the text. The reading is referred to by Ibn Ezra and Rashi, though their own explanations are based on the existing text: it is also mentioned by Abul Walid, and involves only the dropping out of the letter ב , the previous word ending with the same letter.

“Who can eat, and who can enjoy himself *besides me*,” or, “*apart from me?*” The sense which is sometimes given—as, for instance, in the Authorized Version, “Who can eat . . . *more than I?*”—cannot be extracted from the Hebrew,¹ nor, if it could be justified, would it cohere very well with the context. The words must then be connected with the former half of Verse 24 : “There is nothing better than to eat and to drink . . . for who can thus enjoy himself more than I have done?” the appeal being thus made to his own experience as evidence that the power of enjoyment is God’s gift. But it is more natural surely to connect this question, introduced as it is by the particle “for,” with the latter clause of the verse which immediately precedes. Qoheleth had just said that the power to enjoy life comes from the hands of God. He now emphasizes that statement by asking, Who can enjoy life *apart from Him?* And then he goes on in the next verse to remark that God in his providence assigns to men their lot in accordance with their conduct, this being the received traditional theodicy which he does not now venture to question. Falling back on the old faith, he accepts it implicitly. The change involved here is the very slightest conceivable, being the substitution of a *;* for a *,* such as is found in other cases, and which a few MSS. have here. This reading has the support of the LXX. (*παρὲξ αὐτοῦ*), the Syriac, and

¹ Ginsburg avoids this error. He keeps to the rendering “Except me,” and follows Ibn Ezra, Rashi, and Rushbaur in explaining the passage thus : “Nothing is better for man than to enjoy his labours, for who except the labourer (lit., except me) has the first claim to do so?” This however, whilst it does no violence to Hebrew idiom, introduces a thought alien from the context.

The preposition *לְ* *יָגוּ* occurs only here in Biblical Hebrew, but is very common in Rabbinical writers. It is one of the missing links in this book connecting the earlier with the later Hebrew.

Jerome, and there can be little doubt that it is to be preferred. The verb which I have rendered "enjoy himself" means elsewhere "to hasten," and we might render here, "who can eat and who can hasten (there-to)?" But this the common sense of the verb is transferred to very eager violent emotion, as in Job xx. 2, "because of my eagerness," &c., the impulse that hurries me along. So here it is used of the animal passions, pleasures, &c. So Gesenius (*Thes.* s. v.): "Quis epulatus est, et quis *genio indulsit?*" The Vulgate, "quis *deliciis affluit,*" gives the same interpretation.

Verse 26.—Qoheleth had complained bitterly of that scheme of things which ensured no permanence to human wisdom or human effort. Not only did the wise man and the fool perish together and leave their riches to others, but the chances were that the labours of the wise man would pass into the hands of the fool, who would squander all his treasures. Now he recognizes a principle of moral government. Wisdom and knowledge and joy are God's gifts to the good man. Might he not hope that he himself was acceptable to God, who had bestowed these gifts upon him? More than this, the treasures of the wicked were, in the order of God's providence, given to the righteous, and this at least was some consolation. But why does he still close his reflections, which have just taken a more cheerful cast, with the same melancholy refrain, "This also is vanity and a chasing after the wind?" *What* is vanity? Is it the order of things which he has just described (Verse 26)? Does he turn away even from the thought of a moral government as unsatisfactory? That is not perhaps an impossible application of the

refrain ; for the old difficulties return in the next chapter. Still, the belief in God's government is never wholly discarded ; and therefore it is more probable that vanity and a chasing after the wind are predicated even of that tranquil cheerful enjoyment of which he had spoken in Verse 24, as the best to which a rational creature could hope to attain. It was the *best* ; it was a comfort to feel that it was God's gift ; and yet even this best was, like everything else, unsatisfactory.

It is interesting to compare the tone of thought in the above passage with the tone of two other passages of the Old Testament, where the writers are dealing with the same facts of human experience. In the 49th Psalm the writer accepts the fact that wise men die as well as the fools and the brutish, and leave their riches to others ; but it does not weigh upon him as a thought of trouble or perplexity. He escapes from the sadness of such a spectacle into the joyful atmosphere of a personal hope : "God shall redeem my soul from the power of Sheol, for he shall take me to himself."

In the 127th Psalm the vanity of effort and toil to secure prosperity is as distinctly acknowledged as it is here, but in how different a spirit ! It is in the glad sense of a Divine protection resting upon and blessing those who dwell under its shadow. This Psalm, too, is ascribed to Solomon. Its moral, like the moral of the last verses of this chapter, is that human happiness does not depend on human efforts, but is God's gift ; but there is no dash of querulous humour, no complaint that the world is out of joint, no reaching resignation through conflict and weariness, no wail over

“the vanity” of human life, nothing but the serene expression of faith :—

It is vain for you, ye that rise up early, ye that late take rest,
That ye eat the bread of toil :
So He giveth his beloved sleep.

J. J. STEWART PEROWNE.

BEFORE THE FEAST OF THE PASSOVER:
A REPLY.

A WRITER in the June number of this Magazine proposes to reconcile John xiii. 1 ff. with the opinion that the Lord's Supper was instituted on the night following the 14th Nisan, *i.e.*, at the time when the Jews ate the Paschal Lamb, by supposing that “‘*before the feast of the Passover*’ means ‘before the seven days’ feast’ which succeeds to the Paschal sacrifice and supper.”

This supposition requires us to believe that the Paschal Supper was no part of the *Feast of the Passover*. For “*Before the feast of the passover*” in John xiii. 1 certainly means, Before the feast began. But is any one prepared to believe this? Certainly not until proof is given that the seven days’ feast is called, even in distinction from the Paschal Supper, *the feast of the passover*. But of this no shadow of proof is given in the paper before us. Indeed, in one passage quoted there from Josephus (*Ant.* iii. 10. 5), “The feast of unleavened bread succeeds that of the Passover,” we find the very words of John xiii. 1 used to distinguish the Paschal Supper from the days following.

On page 476 the writer admits that the night of the Supper “belonged to the 15th Nisan, the first day of the feast.” But immediately afterwards he writes as though the Supper belonged to the preceding day, the