

treat; I would desire to close this part of the sacred word, with referring all that hath been offered, by way of comment, to the goodness and forbearance of the Lord; beseeching him to pardon the whole, and to let his strength be perfected in human weakness. If Jesus be the wisdom here intended to be set forth (as in many parts of this book, what is said concerning wisdom can be applicable to none but him) it will be our happiest improvement of this delightful scripture, to seek after Christ in, and through all. In Jesus we behold the constellation of wisdom, all the properties of it, concentered in his one Person. The divine, and human nature, forming one glorious Mediator, the power of God, and the wisdom of God, for salvation to a lost world. In all his offices also, all his characters, as well as in the constitution of his person, wisdom shines out in full splendor. *Here mercy and truth meet together: righteousness and peace have kissed each other.* Blessed Jesus! thou art wisdom itself; even the wisdom of God in a mystery! And in thee are hid *all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.* Vouchsafe, dear Lord, both to him that writes, and to him that reads, such suited proportions, as may make us wise unto salvation, through the faith that is in thyself. And let our souls be living under the gracious illuminations of thy holy Spirit here below, until we come to the everlasting enjoyment of thee in glory for evermore.

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## ECCLESIASTES,

OR, THE PREACHER.

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### GENERAL OBSERVATIONS.

WE have here another of the Books of Solomon, and written, as the one that precedes it, and as the one that follows, under the Spirit of inspiration.

The title of the book, *Ecclesiastes*, implies a Preachment. And, indeed, the whole scope of it, is to this end. And Solomon the Preacher of it (which is the title he hath assumed upon the occasion) carries with it the idea of *gathering together*, confirms the same. I hesitate not to ascribe this little volume to Solomon, because the first verse proves as much. For though he doth not call himself by name; yet as no son of David was king of Jerusalem but Solomon, it follows by undeniable consequence, that it could be no other than he.

The great design which the Holy Ghost seems to have intended from the use of it in the church, was, to teach the emptiness and vanity of all things here below, to satisfy the desires of immortal souls. And nothing could have been more happily chosen, than in the example of the wisest and greatest of all the kings of the earth, to set forth this leading, and important truth. And, as the conviction of this doctrine must, under the blessed Spirit's teaching, be made instrumental to lead the heart to Christ, here we discover in this book of God, one gracious method more, *to make men wise unto salvation through the faith that is in Christ Jesus.*

In respect to the *time*, in which Solomon committed these golden sayings to paper, writers are rather divided in opinion concerning it. But the most part have concluded, that it was towards the close of his life; inasmuch as the whole seems to be practical and experimental conclusions, which a soul taught by grace, would make from serious reflections on human life. Every thing void of Jesus, being, as this Preacher's constant text expresses it, *Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.*

I shall not think it necessary to detain the Reader any longer with *General Observations*, from immediately entering on the perusal of this book of God. But while I look up for grace, and the teachings of the Spirit, to guide me through it, I pray the Reader to have his eyes directed to the same Almighty Guide; that either by immediate declaration, or by direct allusion, we may both be led to see, that to Christ and his one-finished salvation, the whole refers; in Him the whole is beautifully explained; and He, and He alone, is the Centre to which Jehovah all along intended every thing should be gathered, in the dispensation of time, when Christ should be presented as *the Head of the Church, which is his body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all.*

## CHAP. I.

### CONTENTS.

*Under a great variety of evidences, taken from the circumstances of human life, and every thing around, the Preacher fully proves the total inability of all the outward circumstances of nature to constitute happiness.*

**T**HE words of the Preacher, the son of David, king of Jerusalem.

The book opens very properly with the name, or rather the office and connection of the Author, and the purport of his sermon. Where the name of Solomon is, there is sure to be found wisdom. How much more with that of Jesus, in whom are hid *all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge?* Coloss. ii. 3.

2 Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all *is* vanity.

This may be considered as the one text of Solomon's whole discourse. He takes this for his subject; and all that follows is in confirmation of it. And Reader! I beseech you, as you pass along, to mark with me the opposite to this vanity, which is found in Christ. You will discover, in exact proportion, that as all Solomon advanceth in his subject, so the proof of the vanity of every thing *out of Christ*, tends in confirmation of it, and the contrast will be of the durable riches and righteousness found *in Christ*.

3 What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun?

4 ¶ One generation passeth away, and *another* generation cometh: but the earth abideth for ever.

5 The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to his place where he arose.

6 The wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about unto the north; it whirleth about continually, and the wind returneth again according to his circuits.

7 All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full; unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again.

8 All things *are* full of labour; man cannot utter *it*: the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing.

9 ¶ The thing that hath been, it *is that* which shall be; and that which is done *is that* which shall be done: and *there is* no new thing under the sun.

10 Is there *any* thing whereof it may be said, See, this *is* new? it hath been already of old time, which was before us.

11 *There is* no remembrance of former things: neither shall there be *any* remembrance of things that are to come, with *those* that shall come after.

Nothing can be more beautiful, by way of illustrating the Preacher's text and doctrine, than the representation of the things here chosen. What is the labour of one man, or the indolence of another? To what purpose are the ills of the poor, or the pleasures of the rich? Let the

different objects of their different pursuits, be looked into, and the ultimate end of all is one and the same; namely, all are directed to *make provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof*, Rom. xiii. 14. But while the fashions of the world, with all its different pursuits, end in vanity; let the subject be considered as it relates to Christ, and here all things become certain, solid, and substantial. Everlasting profit here will be found in that pursuit, which is directed in labouring for *the bread that perisheth not*. And let what will of worldly generations pass away, and others of the same kind succeed them; yet *the children of Christ shall continue, and their seed shall be established before the Lord*. Psm. cii. 28.

12 ¶ I the Preacher was king over Israel in Jerusalem.

13 And I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all *things* that are done under heaven: this sore travail hath God given to the sons of man to be exercised therewith.

14 I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all *is* vanity and vexation of spirit.

15 *That which is* crooked cannot be made straight: and that which is wanting cannot be numbered.

16 I communed with mine own heart, saying, Lo, I am come to great estate, and have gotten more wisdom than all *they* that have been before me in Jerusalem: yea, my heart had great experience of wisdom and knowledge.

17 And I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly: I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit.

18 For in much wisdom *is* much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow.

In these verses are contained what must ever be considered as the grand part of a sermon, where the doctrine is brought to proof, and where the subject doth not rest upon mere saying a thing is so, but the most undeniable evidences are given of it: Solomon brings forward his witness in proof. Here is a man produced, who lived it all over himself, and proved it to be very vanity. He surely was well qualified to make trial: for he possessed more than any man before him ever did, to make trial of. He had riches, wealth, strength, opulence, servants, and every requisite to make life happy, if happiness could consist in the abundance of the things which a man possessed. And Solomon super-added to all these, an extent of knowledge and wisdom, far superior to

every other, to seek and contrive that which might best promise success in the attainment. But what was the result? The Preacher still abides by his text, and in the conclusion declares, that he perceived that this also became  *vexation of spirit* . Reader! do not fail to make your own observations as you go, and if the Spirit of wisdom be your Teacher, the conclusion of Solomon will correspond with your own: and his sentiment will be echoed in your heart, in relation to all earthly pursuits: *Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher; all is vanity!*

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### REFLECTIONS.

PAUSE, my soul, over this Chapter; and when thou hast gathered together, into one point of view, the several weighty truths contained in it, sit down and sum up the very solemn lessons which it reads to thee. Vanity of vanities, indeed, are all the pursuits of human life, however diversified they may be: for where Christ is not, there can be nothing solid, nothing substantial. And could the world, amidst its numberless avocations and amusements, hear but the voice which speaks loudly and unceasingly in each, they would hear an echo to Solomon's words in every instance. Though all are in pursuit of happiness; all err in that pursuit. And whether it be the rich, or the great, or the vain, or the noble, the close is the same to all. *The deep saith it is not in me: and the sea saith it is not with me. It cannot be gotten for gold; neither shall silver be weighed for the price thereof.*

From all the vanities, and follies, and pursuits of life, do thou, my soul, turn to Jesus. He saith, and the truth is unquestionable, *I will cause those that love me to inherit substance, and I will fill their measures.* Precious, precious Jesus! be thou my portion; for in thee I shall enjoy all things. And whether men speak well, or speak ill; whether creatures smile, or frown: whether my frames are bright, or dark; lively, or dull; yet Jesus, and his salvation, is a portion to live upon for ever. And on thee, Lord, therefore, may my soul fix, and dwell and rejoice in thee, as my only good here, and my everlasting happiness to all eternity hereafter. Amen.

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## CHAP. II.

### CONTENTS.

*In this Chapter the Preacher prosecutes still further the doctrine of the emptiness of creatures, to give happiness. Having in the former Chapter stated the subject in general, he here enters into particulars, in proof that all is vanity.*

**I** SAID in mine heart, Go to now, I will prove thee with mirth, therefore enjoy pleasure: and, behold, this also is vanity.

2 I said of laughter, *It is mad*: and of mirth, What doeth it?

3 I sought in mine heart to give myself unto wine, yet acquainting mine heart with wisdom; and to lay hold on folly, till I might see what *was* that good for the sons of men, which they should do under the heaven all the days of their life.

4 I made me great works; I builded me houses; I planted me vineyards:

5 I made me gardens and orchards, and I planted trees in them of all *kind of* fruits:

6 I made me pools of water, to water therewith the wood that bringeth forth trees:

7 I got *me* servants and maidens, and had servants born in my house; also I had great possessions of great and small cattle, above all that were in Jerusalem before me:

8 I gathered me also silver and gold, and the peculiar treasure of kings and of the provinces: I gat me men singers and women singers, and the delights of the sons of men, *as* musical instruments, and that of all sorts.

9 So I was great, and increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem: also my wisdom remained with me.

10 And whatsoever mine eyes desired, I kept not from them, I withheld not my heart from any joy; for my heart rejoiced in all my labour; and this was my portion of all my labour.

11 Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do: and, behold, all *was* vanity and vexation of spirit, and *there was* no profit under the sun.

Here is a very faithful account of those things in which carnal men place their chief good. Mirth, and wine; and houses of vermillion and cedar; silver and gold; men servants, and maid servants; horses, and equipage; music, and no doubt dancing, also; with, in short, every

thing that might gratify the flesh with its affections and lusts. Reader! pause, I beseech you, over this account; and then take a look, if it be but a short one, of the present state of things around; and say, if Solomon had drawn this representation not for himself, but for the world, in this nineteenth century of Christianity, could the picture have been more accurate? Would it not excite the pity of an angel could he be supposed to be looking on, to see the multitude of those who call themselves the followers of the humble Redeemer, so deeply engaged in the reverse of what his blessed gospel teacheth. The man of *Uz* hath drawn a similar picture of the carnal in his day. Job xxi. 7—15. And *Asaph* hath taught us, what effect such characters have in the exercises of the faithful. Psm. lxxiii. 3—13.

12 ¶ And 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 Then I saw that wisdom excelleth folly, as far as light excelleth darkness.

What a striking conclusion doth the Preacher make of the whole in those verses? And how much the experience of men in all ages comes to the same termination. Reader! depend upon it, nothing out of Christ, nothing but Christ himself, can satisfy the desires of an immortal soul. The rich fool in the gospel, was a fool indeed, who said to his soul, *Eat, drink, and be merry*. For the soul can truly relish nothing that is carnal. Luke xii. 19, 20. It was a blessed thing that Solomon was taught to make after all his pursuits this conclusion. And it is our mercy that he was commissioned to leave his testimony of it upon record!

14 The wise man's eyes *are* in his head; but the fool walketh in darkness: and I myself perceived also that one event happeneth to them all.

15 Then said I in my heart, As it happeneth to the fool, so it happeneth even to me; and why was I then more wise? Then I said in my heart, that this also *is* vanity.

It is worth the Reader's close observation, that Solomon, having in the foregoing verses ascertained the little pretensions that arise from *sen-sual* gratifications to happiness; in these verses he sets himself to make a similar estimate of those pleasures which arise from *mental* enjoyments. And he proves that those, like the former, are alike vain and unsatisfying. Reader! follow the Preacher's observations with your own. Wherein is happiness to be found? among the book-worms, and the studious of the earth? If Christ be not the object of pursuit; what less than vanity marks all? The termination to the worldly wise and the fool, is one and the same. All is vanity.

16 For *there is* no remembrance of the wise more than of the fool for ever; seeing that which *now is* in the days to come shall all be forgotten. And how dieth the wise *man?* as the fool.

17 Therefore I hated life; because the work that is wrought under the sun *is* grievous unto me: for all *is* vanity and vexation of spirit.

18 ¶ Yea, I hated all my labour which I had taken under the sun: because I should leave it unto the man that shall be after me.

19 And who knoweth whether he shall be a wise *man* or a fool? yet shall he have rule over all my labour wherein I have laboured, and wherein I have shewed myself wise under the sun. This *is* also vanity.

20 Therefore I went about to cause my heart to despair of all the labour which I took under the sun.

21 For there is a man whose labour *is* in wisdom, and in knowledge, and in equity; yet to a man that hath not laboured therein shall he leave it *for* his portion. This also *is* vanity, and a great evil.

22 For what hath man of all his labour, and of the vexation of his heart, wherein he hath laboured under the sun?

23 For all his days *are* sorrows, and his travail grief; yea, his heart taketh not rest in the night. This is also vanity.

24 ¶ *There is* nothing better for a man, *than* that he should eat and drink, and *that* he should make his soul enjoy good in his labour. This also I saw, that it *was* from the hand of God.

25 For who can eat, or who else can hasten *hereunto*, more than I?

26 For *God* giveth to a man that *is* good in his sight wisdom, and knowledge, and joy: but to the sinner he giveth travail, to gather and to

heap up, that he may give to *him that is good* before God. This *also is vanity and vexation of spirit.*

The Preacher, having fully and clearly ascertained, that both sensual pleasures and mental pursuits after human learning, void of divine knowledge, are alike full of disappointment, proceeds now to shew the entire vanity and emptiness of human life, in its present fallen state, to give comfort. And if the Reader is brought, under the divine teaching, to learn therefrom the total insufficiency of all things here below, to afford solid and substantial happiness to the soul; the great object intended from this scripture is answered. The picture here drawn of human life, is made exactly to correspond to what it really is. Somewhat is wanting after our review, or even our enjoyment of the whole, to constitute happiness. So that let a man eat, or drink; let him study to excel his neighbour in all human science; vanity of vanities marks all; for *all is vanity and vexation of spirit.*

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### REFLECTIONS.

READER! I charge it upon you to take with you the evidences which arise out of this Chapter, in favour of Jesus and his salvation. Surely the Preacher intended, by this way of preaching, in shewing negatively what human pleasures and human learning are not, to proclaim most loudly what Christ and his graces are. For if all short of Christ be vanity; and Christ himself be the chief, the only, the substantial good; what happier method could the wise man have adopted, in thus appealing to the experience of mankind, under the different characters of it, that it is Jesus only who can cause them that love him *to inherit substance, and to fill their measures.*

My soul! pause thou over the account. Look at the world as it now is, as well as in Solomon's days what it then was. What is the generality, nay, the vast majority of the world, pursuing? How are men every where around thee engaged. Be their case what it may; yet are not all, under whatever form their different pursuits are directed, engaged *in making provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof?* Mark them leisurely. Behold each and every one. And figure to thyself, what indeed is no figure, but a reality. Behold what is continually going forth in awful fulfilment; one here, and another there, by whom that voice is heard, *Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee!*

Precious Jesus! from such views, oh grant my soul to turn to thee! Give me betimes to see, and know, thy value; and day by day to be leaving all these hollow, and deceitful pleasures, for the enjoyment of the Supreme Good. Oh! let me so know thee, as to live upon thee, to live to thee, and to rejoice in thee, as my portion. And do thou, dearest Lord, so manifest thyself to my soul, in all the fulness, sweetness, and suitableness, of thy love and favour, that the love of all creature excellencies may die away in my esteem. Let the language of

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my soul be, *Whom have I in heaven but thee: and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee. My flesh and my heart faileth: but thou art the strength of my heart, and thou art my portion for ever.*

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## CHAP. III.

### CONTENTS.

*Under several very interesting representations, the Preacher continues in this Chapter to follow up the same subject, as in the former. The mutability of all things here below, is strikingly set forth; and the unchangeableness of God's purposes clearly established.*

**T**O every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven:

2 A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up *that which is planted*;

3 A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up;

4 A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance;

5 A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;

6 A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away;

7 A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;

8 A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace.

I cannot but be led to suppose, that the Holy Ghost had some special design in what is here said respecting times and seasons; and especially, as it is set forth under so great a variety of terms. If we consider what the Preacher here saith, spiritually, there is indeed to every thing *in grace* a season, and a blessed season it forms, when the sinner is born of God, and to God; and dead to sin, and delivered both from the guilt and dominion of sin. Blessed Jesus! what a sweet thought is it, that *my times are in thy hands.* Psalm xxxi. 15.

9 What profit hath he that worketh in that wherein he laboureth?

10 I have seen the travail, which God hath given to the sons of men to be exercised in it.

11 ¶ He hath made every *thing* beautiful in his time: also he hath set the world in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end.

12 I know that *there is* no good in them, but for a *man* to rejoice, and to do good in his life.

13 And also that every man should eat and drink, and enjoy the good of all his labour, it *is* the gift of God.

14 I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever; nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it; and God doeth *it*, that *men* should fear before him.

15 That which hath been is now; and that which is to be hath already been; and God requireth that which is past.

From the fluctuating state of things, as they refer to men, the Preacher makes a beautiful transition in those verses, to the permanent and settled things of God, and his purposes. Here, indeed, as the Preacher saith, every thing is beautiful in its time and order. In things of nature, providence, and grace, we may well cry out, as we contemplate them; *in wisdom hast thou made them all.* Psalm civ. 24.

16 ¶ And moreover I saw under the sun the place of judgment, *that* wickedness *was* there; and the place of righteousness, *that* iniquity *was* there.

17 I said in mine heart, God shall judge the righteous and the wicked: for *there is* a time there for every purpose and for every work.

18 I said in mine heart concerning the estate of the sons of men, that God might manifest them, and that they might see that they themselves are beasts.

19 For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have

all one breath; so that a man hath no preeminence above a beast: for all is vanity.

20 All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again.

21 Who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth?

22 Wherefore I perceive that *there is* nothing better, than that a man should rejoice in his own works; for that is his portion; for who shall bring him to see what shall be after him?

We have here a very solemn but just description of the state of man upon earth: and a suitable reflection made upon it, from the common event, which takes place on the mere animal life, both of man and beast. And hence, the preacher draws a fine picture, in proof of the corrupt, and frequently mistaken judgment, among men, to confirm the certainty of the divine administration. Here, indeed, opens a large scope for meditation, amidst all the various sorrows which spring out of oppression, and unjust judgment, to take comfort in the righteous government of God. What Solomon said, the breast of every enlightened mind loudly bears testimony to; *God shall judge the righteous and the wicked.* And oh! Reader, how additionally blessed is the thought, that He, who is the appointed judge of quick and dead, is Jesus. John, v. 22, 27. Acts, xvii. 31.

### REFLECTIONS.

MY soul! learn from the solemn observations of the Preacher to enquire, whether in the times and seasons which he saith there are to every purpose under heaven, thou hast found the time of the new birth, and the time of a real death unto sin and a life unto righteousness? Hast thou known the time of the Lord's planting thee in grace, and thy reaping in mercy? Hast thou marked the season, when the Holy Ghost killed in thee the lusts of the flesh, and taught thee to crucify the affections of it by his power? Are the strong holds of sin broken down, and is the spiritual life of grace in Jesus built up? Hath the Lord given to thee holy seasons of mourning for sin, and refreshing recoveries, by the blood and righteousness of Christ, to make thine heart leap for joy? See, my soul, whether these things are in thy evidences of the new life, and thou hast truly found those changes in the times, and seasons, of a dying world, which is hastening away, and which mark not the life of the ungodly, in their purposes under heaven.

And oh! blessed Jesus! teach me when I see the place of judgment among men, and behold the oppression of thy people often there; teach me to look beyond this state of things, and contemplate thy righteous administration. The time is hastening, when thou wilt come to *judge the world in righteousness, and minister true judgment unto the people.*

At thy tribunal, every cause will be reheard. By thine unerring sentence, true judgment will be administered. And while the unpardoned transgressors may meditate terror in the prospect of this great day, do thou, my soul, hail the Lord's approach with joy. Yes! righteous Lord, thou wilt come to plead the cause of thine injured people, and to deliver them that are oppressed with wrong. Lift up thine head, O my soul, and frequently meditate thy Lord's coming. Jesus will assuredly manifest himself in that day to all his people as their brother, while he is their judge; and he who is now their Redeemer, will be their portion and glory for ever. Amen.

## CHAP. IV.

### CONTENTS.

*The Preacher is still prosecuting the same subject, of the insufficiency of all things here below to give comfort. And the whole chapter is but one and the same train of reasoning on this important point.*

**S**O I returned, and considered all the oppressions that are done under the sun: and behold the tears of *such as were* oppressed, and they had no comforter; and on the side of their oppressors *there was* power; but they had no comforter.

It is impossible not to be struck with the strength of argument which the Preacher makes use of, in order to enforce the doctrine of human vanity. In whatever way he directs his attention, and whatever object meets his eye, he seems to raise sermons from every thing to lead to the same conclusion. And it is yet more remarkable, that what Solomon saw and observed in his day, every reflecting mind may equally behold, and draw the same conclusions now in our day: human life is not changed, but vanity is still marked upon all. Oh! how blessed it is, in confirmation of the vast and infinite importance of the gospel of Christ! Where shall we look for happiness, but to Jesus? We may well say, as the Apostle did, *Lord, to whom shall we go, thou hast the words of eternal life*, John vi. 68.

2 Wherefore I praised the dead which were already dead, more than the living which are yet alive.

Solomon was not singular in this opinion: a voice from heaven proclaimed the same, Rev. xiv. 13. But, Reader! it is blessed to live, or die; provided we live, or die, in the Lord. Paul's situation was the desirable one: Philip. i. 21.

3 Yea, better is *he* than both they, which hath not yet been, who hath not seen the evil work that is done under the sun.

4 ¶ Again, I considered all travail, and every right work, that for this a man is envied of his neighbour. This is also vanity and vexation of spirit.

5 ¶ The fool foldeth his hands together, and eateth his own flesh.

6 Better is an handful *with* quietness, than both the hands full *with* travail and vexation of spirit.

If we read these verses, as they refer to the carnal, graceless, and ungodly, how striking they are. What is life, in all its highest attainments out of Christ? But if we read them in reference to a soul in grace, the handful only with Jesus, yea, the cup of cold water which Jesus gives, is blessed. This is what the apostle calls, *having nothing, and yet possessing all things.* 2 Cor. vi. 10.

7 ¶ Then I returned, and I saw vanity under the sun.

8 There is one *alone*, and *there is* not a second: yea, he hath neither child nor brother: yet *is there* no end of all his labour; neither is his eye satisfied with riches; neither *saith he*, For whom do I labour, and bereave my soul of good? This is also vanity, yea, it is a sore travail.

By vanity under the sun, surely the Holy Ghost meant to teach his people, that all above it is satisfying. So that here indirectly, the Holy Spirit is following up his gracious office in glorifying Christ. And in the instance which the Preacher hath given of a worldling, whose carnal eye is never satisfied, and whose carnal heart can never say, It is enough! he hath finely represented, though it is a mournful sight, the general character of fallen men. Reader! look round in every direction: survey the various instances in human life, and say, whether the world at large, in the endless pursuits of things of the world, is not thus employed. Oh! what a decided proof of man's ruin by the fall! Blessed Jesus! what but thy glorious undertaking, in redemption, could have gathered thy people out of it?

9 ¶ Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour.

10 For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him *that is* alone when he falleth; for *he hath* not another to help him up.

11 Again, if two lie together, then they have heat: but how can one be warm *alone*?

12 And if one prevail against him, two shal

withstand him ; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

If we spiritualize these verses, they will be beautiful and instructive. For if Jesus and my soul be the two here spoken of, sure I am, that I shall be lifted up whensoever I fall. In every place, and upon every occasion, my advantages will be great indeed. I shall find warmth, and life, and light, and love. But without Jesus, there is a woe indeed, and a fatal fall : for who but Jesus, can raise a fallen sinner ? In his strength I shall be strong, and if thus joined to the Lord Jesus by one Spirit, even God the Holy Ghost, here is a three-fold cord, which cannot be broken.

13 ¶ Better is a poor and a wise child than an old and foolish king, who will no more be admonished.

14 For out of prison he cometh to reign ; whereas also *he that is* born in his kingdom becometh poor.

The sense of these verses is very plain. The folly spoken of in scripture, means a state void of Christ, who is himself wisdom. Poverty with Jesus is blessed. Any state, and every state, without Jesus, is wretched. If we read this, or any other part of scripture, when speaking of folly in this point of view, those two scriptures will beautifully illustrate and explain it. The first is, Isaiah xxvii. 11 ; and the second Job, xxviii. 28.

15 I considered all the living which walk under the sun, with the second child that shall stand up in his stead.

16 *There is* no end of all the people, *even* of all that have been before them : they also that come after shall not rejoice in him. Surely this also is vanity and vexation of spirit.

If we read those aphorisms of the Preacher without looking for the explanations of them in the gospel, we shall be led to consider them rather as the melancholy effusions of a mind soured with life, than as the reflections of a wise and prosperous king, who, from the experience of carnal vanities, had formed those just conclusions, in order to lead the heart to the pursuit of better things. Nothing can be more evident, than that the Holy Ghost designed from the public confession of Solomon, on these interesting points, in which all men by nature are so eagerly engaged, to teach, that the whole is vanity. And from a full conviction, that all is vanity out of Christ, to make this a means in his Almighty hand, to lead the church to Christ. And these divine truths, when blessed to this end, become blessed indeed ! We have a beautiful and comprehensive conclusion to this effect, in a verse of the Psalms. Psalm cxix. 96.

## REFLECTIONS.

MY soul! hast thou learnt to form similar conclusions to the Preacher from the same causes; and in a right estimate of human life, made calculations what the close will be? Hast thou beheld the tinge of vanity which is given to all, and from hence directed thy views to all precious Jesus, the complete, the soul-satisfying, the supreme, the only good? Oh! thou the pearl of great price! in thee I find every thing that is substantial and satisfying: yea, durable riches and righteousness. Possessing thee, thy church must possess all things: for thou art all in all to thy people. And what endears thee, oh! thou lovely One, to the heart of all that know thee, and enjoy thee, is, that thou art freely given, freely bestowed by God our Father, without our deserts, without our conscious want of thee, without our desire, nay, without our first wishes, and even against all our natural dislike to thee. Yes! blessed Jesus! never should we have sought thee, hadst thou not sought us: never should we have loved thee, hadst thou not first loved us. But in the endless pursuit of any, and every vanity rather than Jesus, would our poor, blind, and deluded nature, have gone on, turning from one creature comfort to another, until death had finished all, and we had lain down in the silent grave, with sorrow and disappointment!

Oh! ye that are now entering life, full of high prospects of health and youth and the many gilded objects before you, inviting you by their syren songs to ruin; oh! that the Lord may give you to seek grace, to avoid being lost amidst the deceitful pursuits of what the world calls pleasure. Look to Solomon. Hear what the Preacher saith. And before you have run the mad round of vanity and folly, which can terminate in nothing short of disappointment and vexation of spirit, make now a right calculation. Look unto Jesus. Behold how glorious in his person: how blessed in his grace and mercy! How suited to the circumstances of poor, fallen, dying creatures! Think, from what misery he can save—Think to what happiness he can bring—How delightful his fellowship! How sweet his society. And while he becomes all that the soul can need now; how fully will he satisfy the soul to all eternity? Hear, ye young; and the Lord direct your choice. It is Jesus that calls at the entering in of the gates: and his promise is like himself, unalterable and sure. He saith, *I love them that love me: and those that seek me early shall find me.*

## CHAP. V.

## CONTENTS.

*The Preacher here enters upon a view of sacred worship in the house of God. He shews that all service void of spiritual worship is vanity. This is followed with similar observations, tending to prove that whatever men place their confidence in the world, terminates in disappointment.*

**K**EEP thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to

give the sacrifice of fools : for they consider not that they do evil.

2 Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter *any* thing before God : for God *is* in heaven, and thou upon earth : therefore let thy words be few.

Perhaps Solomon had in view the situation of Moses at the bush, and of Joshua, before the captain of the Lord's host, by Jericho. Exod. iii. 5. Joshua, v. 13—15. But *keeping the foot*, on entering the house of God, certainly carries with it a reference to all the corresponding affections suited to a true spiritual worshipper. Under the gospel dispensation, we may suppose it implies what our Lord Jesus taught of worshipping God, who is a Spirit, *in spirit, and in truth*. John, iv. 23, 24.

3 For a dream cometh through the multitude of business ; and a fool's voice *is known* by a multitude of words.

4 When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it ; for *he hath* no pleasure in fools : pay that which thou hast vowed.

5 Better *is it* that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay.

6 Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin ; neither say thou before the angel, that it *was* an error : wherefore should God be angry at thy voice, and destroy the work of thine hands ?

7 For in the multitude of dreams and many words *there are* also *divers* vanities : but fear thou God.

The divers vanities in dreams are what the Preacher is particularly marking in what is here said, and which he speaks lightly of : but not those in which the fear of God is. The scripture account of dreams, and visions of the night, are not what Solomon is speaking of. We know that the Lord was graciously pleased to make use of them upon many and various occasions of good : and when realized, they cease to be dreams ; for the divine testimony is upon them. And here they cannot deceive. Elihu saith, that God speaketh in them : Job, xxxiii. 15, 16. And we have some blessed events said to have been first given in dreams. The dream of Pharaoh made way for great events not only in the family of Israel, but the church itself. Gen. xli. 1—16. The great promise of the Spirit is said to be poured out in dreams, Joel, ii. 28. Yea, the name of Jesus was first given to Joseph in a dream. Matt. i. 20, 21. If the Reader wishes to see more in confirmation of this doctrine, I refer him to several scriptures : Gen. xx. 3.

xxx. 11. xxviii. xxxvii. Joshua, vii. 13. 1 Sam. xxviii. 6. 1 Kings, iii. 5. Dan. ii. 4. iv. 5, &c. Respecting the subject of vows, we find it formed a part of the divine directions in this particular, with Israel in the wilderness, Numb. xxx. Among the followers of Jesus, the solemn dedication of the soul to God in Christ, is the only vow which we are authorized to make. The purchase of Christ's blood is Christ's property; and as such, every vow truly such, is to glorify God in our body, and in our spirit, which are his. 1 Cor. vi. 20. It is not very easy to determine what the Preacher meant by the charge: *Say not before the angel, that it was an error.* An angel, in scripture, means a messenger: and hence Christ himself as such, is called *the Messenger of the Covenant.* Mal. iii. 1. But whether Solomon had an eye to Christ, when thus speaking, is not clear. However, his caution is good. And if every idle word is to be accounted for in the day of judgment, rash and inconsiderate expressions of the mouth cause the soul to sin. Matt. xii. 36.

8 ¶ If thou seest the oppression of the poor, and violent perverting of judgment and justice in a province, marvel not at the matter: for *he that is higher than the highest* regardeth; and *there be higher than they.*

9 ¶ Moreover the profit of the earth is for all: the king *himself* is served by the field.

10 He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase: *this is also vanity.*

11 When goods increase, they are increased that eat them: and what good *is there* to the owners thereof, saving the beholding of *them* with their eyes?

12 The sleep of a labouring man *is* sweet, whether he eat little or much: but the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep.

13 There is a sore evil *which* I have seen under the sun, *namely*, riches kept for the owners thereof to their hurt.

14 But those riches perish by evil travail: and he begetteth a son, and *there is* nothing in his hand.

15 As he came forth of his mother's womb, naked shall he return to go as he came, and shall

take nothing of his labour, which he may carry away in his hand.

16 And this also *is* a sore evil, *that* in all points as he came, so shall he go: and what profit hath he that hath laboured for the wind?

17 All his days also he eateth in darkness, and *he hath* much sorrow and wrath with his sickness.

18 ¶ Behold *that* which I have seen: *it is* good and comely *for one* to eat and to drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labour that he taketh under the sun all the days of his life, which God giveth him: for it *is* his portion.

19 Every man also to whom God hath given riches and wealth, and hath given him power to eat thereof, and to take his portion, and to rejoice in his labour; this *is* the gift of God.

20 For he shall not much remember the days of his life; because God answereth *him* in the joy of his heart.

I make no interruption in the reading of these verses, for one general observation belongs to all; and the Preacher's whole design from them is to impress yet stronger upon the mind, the great subject he hath in view. In every thing short of Christ, Solomon finds vanity. And whether the Reader hath discovered his design in these sermons contained in Ecclesiastes we have already gone through, or not; certain it is, that the main object intended from the whole, is to lead to somewhat higher than this world can bestow; and that somewhat is Christ. Happy will it be for both Writer and Reader, if from the perusal, like Solomon himself, we form the same conclusion, and in Jesus behold where God the Father hath centered all things that pertain to life and godliness. 2 Pet. i. 1—4.

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### REFLECTIONS.

MY soul! are all things here below empty and unsatisfying: and is there a rest that remaineth for the people of God? And wilt thou not, then, after such repeated convictions as these scriptures afford of human vanity and human disappointment, be prompted, like the Patriarchs, to seek a *City that hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God*. Enquire, my soul, in the history of these holy men gone before, from what cause it was that their lives were so peaceful, and honourable; and their deaths so triumphant and glorious. And the reason is assigned, in all that is said of them, *They walked by faith, and not by sight*. They did, as Abraham the great father of the faithful did, *they believed*

*God, and it was accounted to them for righteousness.* They went out, when called upon to go forth into a place which they should afterwards receive for an inheritance, not knowing whither they went. God had promised, and that was enough. They took God at his word. And they were not afraid, but depended upon his faithfulness.

Do thou, my soul, the same. God's promise in Christ is the same now as it was then: or rather, it is now confirmed beyond the possibility of failure in that all the promised undertaking of Christ hath been accomplished. Look forward, look upward then, my soul, and contemplate the glories which shortly shall be revealed. And when, at any time, some renewed instance of vanity, arising from the things here below, shall occur, turn away thine eyes, and behold with faith that upper brighter world. There neither sin, nor Satan; care, nor anxiety; fightings without, nor fears within; can arise to break in upon thy everlasting enjoyments. There dwells Jehovah, manifesting himself in Christ to all his redeemed. There the Lamb, that is in the midst of the throne, is leading the church to fountains of living waters, and all tears are for ever wiped away from off all faces. Say, my soul! art thou indeed to dwell there—to go out no more. Are these vanities here below no longer to distress; neither these eyes of thine to behold sin? And shall not even the prospect of such felicity, fill thee with a joy unspeakable, and full of glory? Oh! for the holy longing of the church; *Make haste, my beloved, and be thou like to a roe, or to a young hart, upon the mountains of spices.*

## CHAP. VI.

### CONTENTS.

*The Preacher openeth this Chapter with a strong proof of vanity in one man laying up for another; and the fruit of all his labours enjoyed by a stranger. He shews that the longest life spent in vanity, is spent but in vexation of spirit. And he arrives, at the close of the Chapter, to the same conclusion as before.*

**T**HERE is an evil which I have seen under the sun, and it is common amongmen:

2 A man to whom God hath given riches, wealth, and honour, so that he wanteth nothing for his soul of all that he desireth, yet God giveth him not power to eat thereof, but a stranger eateth it: *this is vanity, and it is an evil disease.*

I beg the Reader to observe with me, that in the gifts here spoken of, no mention is made of grace. Riches, wealth, and honour; that is, the world's honour, may be given to the most worthless of men; but these are left-hand gifts in the common providences of God. It is grace which is of the upper-spring blessings. Never would the Lord have marked the path of his children in the suffering way, if his glory, and their happiness, had not been highly interested thereby.

Reader! I take this occasion to remark to you, what can never be too frequently, nor too strongly impressed upon the mind, that among the mistakes of the carnal, the misinterpreting God's providences is a very principal one, to quiet and still their consciences. Thousands conclude, that if they prosper in their worldly concerns, this is a proof of divine love towards them; and that therefore they are high in his favour. May the Lord deliver the Reader from this delusion, if he should be at this time under it. And though the reverse of this is not always the case, for sometimes God's dear children may be blessed in their honourable and honest callings, yet so much to the contrary is the case, that prosperity is always to be suspected. Who so poor, so wretched, so great a man of sorrows as Christ? What servant, what apostle of his, eminent for labours, but hath been eminent for suffering also? Let the serious Reader consult those two scriptures only upon the subject, without adding more, and I will then leave him to his own comment upon them: Job xxi. and Psalm lxxiii.

3 ¶ If a man beget an hundred *children*; and live many years, so that the days of his years be many, and his soul be not filled with good, and also *that* he have no burial; I say, *that* an untimely birth *is* better than he.

4 For he cometh in with vanity, and departeth in darkness, and his name shall be covered with darkness.

5 Moreover he hath not seen the sun, nor known *any thing*: this hath more rest than the other.

6 ¶ Yea, though he live a thousand years twice *told*, yet hath he seen no good? do not all go to one place?

The Preacher here proves, that prosperity, without grace, though lengthened to the greatest period, still only tends to swell the vanity and vexation of it, as the years are lengthened. And what a melancholy thought is it, that the continuance of those carnal powers, for the gratification of the flesh, only serve to lead the heart further *from* God, rather than bring the heart *to* God. Reader! nothing short of grace can accomplish this; and therefore, it must undeniably follow, that without grace, nothing can constitute happiness.

7 All the labour of man *is* for his mouth, and yet the appetite is not filled.

8 For what hath the wise more than the fool; what hath the poor, that knoweth to walk before the living?

9 ¶ Better *is* the sight of the eyes, than the

wandering of the desire: this *is* also vanity and vexation of spirit.

10 That which hath been is named already, and it is known that it *is* man: neither may he contend with him that is mightier than he.

11 ¶ Seeing there be many things that increase vanity, what *is* man the better?

12 For who knoweth what *is* good for man in *this* life, all the days of his vain life which he spendeth as a shadow? for who can tell a man what shall be after him under the sun?

What a solemn consideration it is, that such and so clamorous are the demands of the body, that the whole of men's labours is directed to satisfy them. Though the whole world appear to be directed in different pursuits, yet in reality the object proposed is but one and the same; all is swallowed up in this one, how to please the flesh! And so insatiable, and imperious are its demands, that the appetite is never filled. Solomon's question, therefore, in the close, is truly striking; who knoweth what is good for man in such a life of vanity and fleeting as a shadow? Reader! pause over the thought! Is life so truly vain? Is it no better than a shadow? And is there nothing to discover of certain good, whereby to counteract the evils of our fallen state? Precious Jesus! it is thou alone, who by thy great redemption, hast opened a source of real, solid, and substantial good: and taught thy people that happy lesson, how to improve the vanities of the present life in the pursuits of a better. Lord! impress all thy saving truths, both upon the Writer's and the Reader's heart, that in thee we may find that supreme good, which is liable neither to disappoint, nor to pass away. Be thou thyself our happiness, and our portion for ever!

### REFLECTIONS.

READER! let us not turn hastily away from this chapter. There are many important improvements to be gathered from it under grace. What Solomon saw as a sore evil in his days, you and I may behold the same in our day. The instances are not a few, and in almost every rank of men, where possessions bring no comfort, no sanctification, but are kept by the owners of them to their hurt. The carnal mind indeed, is never to be satisfied in its attainments. Nothing can come up to the expectation: for where the divine blessing is not upon a man's fulness, it matters not what the surrounding circumstances then are, for there can be no enjoyment of any. It is a melancholy fact, but the experience of all ages leave no room to dispute it. What scripture hath said, all find to be true: *man walketh in a vain shadow, and disquieteth himself in vain: he heapeth up riches, and knoweth not who shall gather them.*

Reader! shall we not from the conviction of this undoubted truth look up for grace, and the teachings of the Holy Spirit, that we may

learn how to convert such evils into good; and since life, in all earthly pursuits is vain; seek in Jesus what cannot disappoint. Oh! for grace, to walk through a world of sin, and sorrow, and vanity, and vexation, with such wise indifference, as those who seek a better country. Is the Son of God indeed calling his people to the present and everlasting enjoyment of himself? Doth he say, come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest? Doth he graciously propose himself for our portion, our happiness, and joy? And shall we be so low minded and earthly in our affections, as to prefer those shadows; to be in love with our chains; to pursue phantoms; and reject everlasting realities! Blessed, gracious, condescending Lord! do thou not only invite, but allure us with thy grace. And since thou hast begotten us to such a lively hope by thy glorious resurrection from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away; do thou lead us by the restraining influences of thy Holy Spirit, that we may set our affections on things above, not on things of the earth.

## CHAP. VII.

### CONTENTS.

*In this Chapter the Preacher is proposing several good things, as means in the divine hand, for a remedy against the vanities of life. He sheweth the blessedness of gracious sorrow, and the superiority it hath to carnal mirth. In these, and the like observations, this Chapter abounds.*

**A** GOOD name is better than precious ointment; and the day of death than the day of one's birth.

The name of Jesus is as ointment poured forth, Solomon hath said elsewhere, Song i. 3. And to be called by that honourable name in Jesus, which the mouth of the Lord hath promised to name, is fragrancy indeed, Isaiah lxii. 2. That the day of a man's death is better than the day of his birth, is a very unaccountable saying in the estimation of worldly men: but to a gracious soul the day of death unto sin, and of being born to God, is, of all days, the most blessed. And how can the day of his death in the body be otherwise than blessed, when, from being in union with Christ, he dies here, his soul becomes alive for ever in Christ. So the voice from heaven told John. And so all true believers in Christ most assuredly know. Rev. xiv. 13.

2 ¶ *It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart.*

3 *Sorrow is better than laughter: for by the*

sadness of the countenance the heart is made better.

4 The heart of the wise *is* in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools *is* in the house of mirth.

5 *It is* better to hear the rebuke of the wise, than for a man to hear the song of fools.

6 For as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so *is* the laughter of the fool: this also *is* vanity.

These are solemn truths, and thousands have borne, and still can bear testimony to them. He that would desire to be conformed to the lovely pattern of Jesus, who, by way of eminent distinction, the Holy Ghost himself calls *the Man of sorrows*, will find the best means under grace, for so blessed an accomplishment. It is truly remarked of our dear Lord Jesus, that it is never once said of him, when upon earth, that he laughed. He rejoiced, indeed, but it was in spirit. Luke x. 21. Reader! I know not what your sentiments may be; but depend upon it, all that unmeaning joy and mirth, which is in the house of the carnal, is highly unsuitable to our present fallen state. If to redeem our nature from this state, nothing short of the Son of God becoming man, and in that assumption of our nature dying in our stead, could bring us from it; every degree of laughter which carries with it a forgetfulness of the agonies and pains of Jesus, must be unbecoming. Let my soul go to the garden of Gethsemane, or to Mount Calvary, and while by the eye of faith I behold the soul-travail of Jesus, let me hear also by faith that earnest question of God by the Prophet: *Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? behold and see, if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger.* Lament. i. 12.

7 ¶ Surely oppression maketh a wise man mad; and a gift destroyeth the heart.

8 Better is the end of a thing\*than the beginning thereof: *and* the patient in spirit *is* better than the proud in spirit.

9 Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry: for anger resteth in the bosom of fools.

10 Say not thou, What is *the cause* that the former days were better than these? for thou dost not enquire wisely concerning this.

If we read these verses by the gospel standard, their beauty will then appear to be full. The Apostle James gives the sweetest comment to them, when speaking of the oppressions which the faithful suffer from the ungodly, when he saith, *Do not they oppress you, and draw you be-*

*fore the judgment seats? Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by which ye are called? James ii. 6, 7. And what doth the Apostle say by way of consolation? Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord: behold, the Judge standeth before the door. James v. 7—11.*

11 ¶ Wisdom is good with an inheritance: and by it there is profit to them that see the sun.

12 For wisdom is a defence, and money is a defence: but the excellency of knowledge is, that wisdom giveth life to them that have it.

13 Consider the work of God: for who can make *that* strait, which he hath made crooked?

14 In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider: God also hath set the one over against the other, to the end that man should find nothing after him.

15 All things have I seen in the days of my vanity: there is a just *man* that perisheth in his righteousness, and there is a wicked *man* that prolongeth *his life* in his wickedness.

If I mistake not, the Preacher is stating, in what is here said, the difference of security which men find in their different objects of defence. Carnal men make riches their defence. The gracious soul takes wisdom, that is Jesus, for his. And Solomon then demands that the subject be considered. He then puts a close question: *Who can make that strait which God hath made crooked?* In other words, who would put confidence in that which must deceive: *for riches make to themselves wings and flee away.* Prov. xxiii. 5. Reader! in what is *your* confidence?

16 Be not righteous overmuch; neither make thyself overwise: why shouldest thou destroy thyself?

Various have been the opinions concerning the Preacher's meaning in this verse. Common sense, however, cannot but conclude, that if Solomon meant the righteousness of man, there would have been no cause for the caution of avoiding an overmuch righteousness among creatures, sinful and fallen as the best of men are. But if the wise Preacher meant to guard against that ill-founded and unbecoming confidence, which too often springs out of a supposed righteousness, the precept is beautiful and just. Faithfulness itself in God's rich promises in Christ, when it is made, by our improper use of it, to beget presumption in ourselves, instead of looking wholly to that arm, which first wrought it in our heart to keep it there, will lead to the confines of danger. This is strongly and fully read to us in the instance of Peter. Had the Apostle confided

more in Jesus, to preserve him, and less in his own strength, Satan would not have had such advantage over him. Luke xxii. 31—34. But a man's fall, or as the phrase of Solomon is, his own self-confidence, ministers to destroy himself, when he is overmuch righteous in any thing of his own, instead of living wholly out of himself, upon the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

17 Be not overmuch wicked, neither be thou foolish: why shouldst thou die before thy time?

Here the wise man takes the reverse of the proposition, and cautions against overmuch wickedness. But here again, common sense must see that, as all wickedness is prohibited, the smallest transgression is overmuch, if in the general acceptation of the word wickedness, the wise man directed this precept to guard from. But if by the *former*, self-righteousness was aimed at, by which souls too often presume, and in that presumption sometimes fall; so in this latter, by overmuch wickedness, if the Preacher meant to preserve a soul, distressed by the view of his own unworthiness, from despair, great beauty appears in both precepts, and both are agreeable to the analogy of faith. It is as if he had said, Ye whom grace hath restrained from evil, take no confidence therefrom, as if your own arm had wrought it. And ye, who have fallen by sin, let not the greatness of it make you despond: And let the Reader judge how corresponding to the grace of the gospel of Christ are both these precepts.

18 *It is good that thou shouldst take hold of this; yea, also from this withdraw not thine hand: for he that feareth God shall come forth of them all.*

19 Wisdom strengtheneth the wise, more than ten mighty *men* which are in the city.

20 *For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not.*

By a just man, we may suppose is meant a justified believer in Christ. And of such John the Apostle speaks, when declaring God's faithfulness and justice, to forgive them their sins, 1 John i. 9. Even those are yet exposed to infirmities. It is only among the spirits of just men made perfect, that we are to expect sinless perfection. How endeared in this point of view is Christ, and his atoning blood! 1 John ii. 1, 2.

21 Also take no heed unto all words that are spoken; lest thou hear thy servant curse thee.

22 For oftentimes also thine own heart knoweth that thou thyself likewise hast cursed others.

23 ¶ All this have I proved by wisdom: I said, I will be wise; but it *was* far from me.

24 That which is far off, and exceeding deep, who can find it out?

25 I applied mine heart to know, and to search, and to seek out wisdom, and the reason of *things*, and to know the wickedness of folly, even of foolishness *and* madness:

26 And I find more bitter than death the woman, whose heart *is* snares and nets, *and* her hands *as* bands: whoso pleaseth God shall escape from her; but the sinner shall be taken by her.

27 Behold, this have I found, saith the preacher, *counting* one by one, to find out the account.

28 Which yet my soul seeketh, but I find not: one man among a thousand have I found; but a woman among all those have I not found.

29 Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions.

Solomon in his own life, had learnt much of the experience here recorded; and he was well calculated to be a Preacher upon such subjects. But when the Reader hath finished all his observations to this effect on Solomon's history, I would call upon him to remark with me, the concluding observation of the wise men. He sets his seal to the divine record of man's fall, and God's holiness in creation; and as such, gives the finishing sentence in confirmation of the gospel. Reader! it is truly blessed to observe, as we go along, how all the several parts of the Bible harmonize in this one grand doctrine, and which in fact, is the sum and substance of all: *Though the law was given by Moses, yet grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.* John i. 17.

#### REFLECTIONS.

MY soul! ponder well the many blessed truths contained in this Chapter, that thou mayest understand aright the words of the wise, and their dark sayings. Suspect thyself, and thine own heart, whenever the scriptures appear, at the first reading, with an aspect thou canst not immediately unfold. And do not forget to look up to God the Holy Ghost, the Author of his own most blessed word, who if any man lack wisdom, and will ask of God, giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not. Yes! thou Almighty Teacher! under thy gracious instruction do I pray continually to come. Taught by thee, I shall find it profitable to go to the house of mourning rather than to the house of feasting. Taught of thee, I shall never find confidence in any supposed overmuch righteousness. And taught of Thee, my soul will not despond in the otherwise overwhelming view of the multitude of my transgressions.

But looking unto Jesus, whom thou art for ever glorifying to my view in him, and his complete all-justifying righteousness, shall all my poor services be forgotten; and in his all-cleansing blood, shall all my sins be done away; and, like the iniquity of Judah, and of Israel, *when sought for, shall not be found.*

Precious Lord Jesus! increasingly precious be thou to my poor soul! Where, or to whom, should I look, but to thee, under the daily infirmities of a fallen nature, which even in justified souls, are breaking out continually. Oh! Lord! keep, I beseech thee, my eyes stedfastly fixed on thee. Cause me to look within the veil, whither as the forerunner of thy people, thou art entered! And let me never forget the infinite and eternal worth and excellency that there is in thy blood, though there be new defilements in my poor heart from day to day! Oh! cause me to remember thy never-failing Priesthood, and to take comfort from the assurance that thou, blessed Jesus, hast more to plead for thy redeemed before God and the Father, than their transgressions have to plead against them. And let me never lose the blessed sound in my ears of the gracious voice of God, in confirmation of the merits of thy blood and righteousness, in which he hath said, *Deliver him from going down into the pit, I have found a ransom.*

## CHAP. VIII.

### CONTENTS.

*The Preacher is still following up his favourite discourse of the vanity of human life, through this Chapter. Under various images he sheweth the disappointments of men, by ways of directing the heart to wisdom.*

**W**HO is as the wise man? and who knoweth the interpretation of a thing? a man's wisdom maketh his face to shine, and the boldness of his face shall be changed.

The question with which this Chapter opens, cannot fail, I should think, to bring to the gracious Reader's recollection, Him who is indeed Wisdom itself, and in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Precious Jesus! thy face did shine with a lustre infinitely surpassing that of Moses, when in the mount of transfiguration, and before Pilate thou didst witness a good confession. And who shall say what glory beamed from thy countenance, when those who came to apprehend thee, in the garden, fell backward on the ground before thee? Oh! Lord! grant me, like thy disciples, amidst all the darkness concerning thee around, to behold thy glory, which thou dost manifest in grace, that I may be of the happy number that believe in thee to the saving of the soul, Exod. xxxiv. 29. Matt. xvii. 2. 1 Tim. vi. 13. John xviii. 5, 6. John ii. 11.

2 I counsel thee to keep the king's commandment, and that in regard of the oath of God.

3 Be not hasty to go out of his sight: stand

not in an evil thing; for he doeth whatsoever pleaseth him.

4 Where the word of a king *is*, *there is* power: and who may say unto him, What doest thou?

5 Whoso keepeth the commandment shall feel no evil thing: and a wise man's heart discerneth both time and judgment.

6 ¶ Because to every purpose there is time and judgment, therefore the misery of man *is* great upon him.

7 For he knoweth not that which shall be; for who can tell him when it shall be?

I am inclined to believe, that by the King here spoken of, the preacher (who was himself the greatest king among men), meant somewhat more than any earthly king; even Jesus who is King of kings, and Lord of lords. For the word of an earthly monarch is frequently without power. But He, of whom Solomon spake, hath all power in heaven and in earth. Oh! grant, blessed Jesus, that thy word may be always accompanied with power to my heart. Matt. xxviii. 18. Luke iv. 32.

8 *There is* no man that hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit; neither *hath* he power in the day of death: and *there is* no discharge in *that* war; neither shall wickedness deliver those that are given to it.

It were devoutly to be prayed for, that the very solemn truth contained in this verse, was so solemnly considered by an unthinking world. As no man dies by proxy, but each for himself, as it is appointed unto men once to die; oh! that the sure judgment that follows, were duly thought of, and as earnestly provided for! Reader! have you solemnly, seriously, deliberately considered this? How are you provided? To die Christless, is to die hopeless. Have you pondered over the awful state of unpardoned sin? Have you considered the preciousness of Christ, and his blood? Think, my brother, solemnly think, of these things. Remember what the wise man here saith, *That there is no discharge in that war*. Oh! for grace to live Christ, that we may die in Christ. *Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord*. Rev. xiv. 13.

9 All this have I seen, and applied my heart unto every work that is done under the sun: *there is* a time wherein one man ruleth over another to his own hurt.

10 And so I saw the wicked buried, who had come and gone from the place of the holy, and

they were forgotten in the city where they had so done: this is also vanity.

Reader, have you never seen what Solomon here saith he saw? If not, I have. How many indeed have mine eyes beheld of such men. They lived, they triumphed, they came and went amidst the throng of worshippers; they had their day of sensual enjoyments: and oh! what a day it was! And now, where are they? They are as much forgotten as though they had never been: their very memorial is perished with them. Oh! for grace so to live to Jesus, that in his book of life our names may be had in everlasting remembrance! Reader, pray read that solemn passage, Rev. xix. 11—15.

11 Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.

12 ¶ Though a sinner do evil an hundred times, and his *days* be prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before him:

13 But it shall not be well with the wicked, neither shall he prolong *his* days, *which are* as a shadow; because he feareth not before God.

14 There is a vanity which is done upon the earth; that there be just *men*, unto whom it happeneth according to the work of the wicked; again, there be wicked *men*, to whom it happeneth according to the work of the righteous: I said that this also is vanity.

15 Then I commended mirth, because a man hath no better thing under the sun, than to eat, and to drink, and to be merry: for that shall abide with him of his labour the days of his life, which God giveth him under the sun.

16 ¶ When I applied mine heart to know wisdom, and to see the business that is done upon the earth: (for also *there is that* neither day nor *night* seeth sleep with his eyes:

17 Then I beheld all the work of God, that a man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun: because though a man labour to seek it

out, yet he shall not find *it*: yea farther; though a wise *man* think to know *it*, yet shall he not be able to find *it*.

It is blessed to observe what a beautiful correspondence there is through all the parts of scripture. As here, so every where, the children of God are distinguished from the children of the wicked one. The prophet was commanded to tell the righteous, that it should be well with him. And the wicked, that it should be ill with him. Isaiah iii. 10, 11. And agreeably to this in the general state of things, so should they be marked in particular tokens of each. *Behold, saith the Lord God, my servants shall eat, but ye shall be hungry: behold, my servants shall drink, but ye shall be thirsty: behold, my servants shall rejoice, but ye shall be ashamed.* Isaiah lxxv. 13, 14, 15. And as the wise man here declares, that though a sinner's days be prolonged, yet the end is ruin: so the Prophet was commissioned to say, that the infancy of days, if in grace, was old age before God; while the old age of the sinner, out of grace, was still accursed. Isaiah lxxv. 20. After such decisive testimonies as these, which the preacher here gives of the difference of nature and grace, it will not be difficult to apprehend, what mirth he means to recommend; and what the eating and drinking, which he here speaks of, as the best thing a man hath to do. Not surely the mirth of the profane, nor the gluttony and drunkenness of the sinner; but the sacred joy of gracious souls, and the spiritual feasting of the heart, which is found in the kingdom of God. Not, saith the Apostle, in meat and drink, but *righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.* Rom. xiv. 17. Reader! think, what a rich feast, in-gospel times, the people of God are called to, who have the bread of God, even the living bread which came down from heaven for their food; who find the flesh of Christ to be meat indeed, and his blood to be drink indeed. Lord, I would say for myself and every gracious Reader, evermore give us this bread; and it shall put more gladness in our hearts, than sinners feel in the time that their corn and their wine are increased. John vi. 5—48. Psm. iv. 7.

### REFLECTIONS.

READER! while the preacher is demanding, *who is as the wise man?* let us be looking unto Jesus, until that our eyes are enlightened in beholding him as wisdom itself, the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person. And so let our souls look and gaze upon that first fair, first beautiful, first and only Holy One, until that from beholding, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, we are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.

And Reader! while thus looking unto Jesus, until brought into some degree of conformity to him in all things; contemplate at the same time the dark, wretched, and deplorable state of those who are ignorant of him. Behold the end of these men. Though sentence against them is not executed speedily; yea, though their days be prolonged to even the dregs of old age; yet, how in the end will the voice of murdered years and days be lifted up against them? Oh! the soul agony of lying down at last in eternal sorrow!

My brother ! think of the felicity of souls redeemed by Jesus, and beg of God the Holy Ghost for grace, that you may cast your lot in among them, and with them have one portion. This will be to sit down to a perpetual feast, and never to be cloyed : but the grace of Jesus, yea, Jesus himself shall abide with him, as the wise man speaks, *All the days of his life, which God giveth him under the sun.*

## CHAP. IX.

### CONTENTS.

*In prosecuting the same subject, the Preacher in this Chapter lays down several very weighty observations for lessening the general and unavoidable vanities of life. Under the similitude of a poor man, that by wisdom saved a city, he sets forth the great blessedness of divine knowledge.*

**F**OR all this I considered in my heart even to declare all this, that the righteous, and the wise, and their works, *are* in the hand of God : no man knoweth either love or hatred *by all that is* before them.

2 All *things* come alike to all : *there is* one event to the righteous, and to the wicked ; to the good and to the clean, and to the unclean ; to him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not : as *is* the good, so *is* the sinner ; *and* he that sweareth, as *he* that feareth an oath.

The preacher is here making a similar conclusion, to what holy men of old, in all ages, have done, that let what will appear of worthlessness in some, or merit in others, and the common events which take place in all ; yet the Lord is neither an inattentive, nor an inactive observer of either : or, to use Solomon's own words, *Their works are in the hand of God.* Reader ! it is one of the most profitable of all studies, to have right conceptions of our gracious God in his providences. If we look at the state of things going on around us, we do indeed see, what Solomon saith, that *there is one event to the righteous, and to the sinner.* But if we, as the prophet did, look beyond the mere surface of the wheels in God's government, we shall see as he did, One like the son of man, regulating, appointing, ordering all. Ezek. i. 4—26. And although, as far as outward circumstances appear, *all things come alike to all* ; yet a mighty distinction takes place, even in the events themselves, and in the effects induced by them. The sickness of the sinner, and the sickness of a child of God, differ in their operation and consequences as wide as any circumstances in life can differ. And, as in their effect, so in their design ; in the instances of God's children, they are the marks of a fatherly love. They are messengers of sanctification and wisdom. They are angels in disguise. In the instances of the ungodly, they are tokens of

displeasure, messengers of wrath, and the consequences of sin. Reader, it is blessed to be enabled to mark the difference; to *hear the rod*, (as the prophet speaks) *and who hath appointed it*. Micah-vi. 9.

3 This *is* an evil among all *things* that are done under the sun, that *there is* one event unto all: yea, also the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness *is* in their heart while they live, and after that *they go* to the dead.

4 ¶ For to him that is joined to all the living there is hope: for a living dog is better than a dead lion.

5 For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten.

6 Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished; neither have they any more a portion for ever in any *thing* that is done under the sun.

Scripture is strikingly solemn upon the state of the unregenerate when they die. They go to the dead, Solomon says. And a similar expression is made of Judas, that *he went unto his own place*. Acts i. 25. Then that awful conclusion becomes final: *He that is filthy, let him be filthy still!* Rev. xxii. 11. Reader, think of these things, and Solomon's observations will have their just effect, and be found true.

7 ¶ Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works.

There is a great beauty in this verse, if explained upon gospel principles. If a soul be accepted in Jesus, he may well eat the bread both of body and soul, with a cheerful heart. In Jesus, every thing is blessed: and Jesus blesses every thing.

8 Let thy garments be always white; and let thy head lack no ointment.

9 Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity, which he hath given thee under the sun, all the days of thy vanity: for that *is* thy portion in *this* life, and in thy labour which thou takest under the sun.

10 Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do *it* with thy might; for *there is* no work, nor device,

nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.

How striking and conclusive are these reasonings of the preacher. And if construed with an eye to Christ, then are they doubly so. Oh! that souls convinced, that they are in Christ, would live up to their high privileges. Surely the soul that hath Jesus to live upon, hath a Benjamin's portion, and enough to live upon. Christ is his portion; and in him he hath all. Therefore, whatsoever he findeth to do in Christ, there should be no halving. In living *upon* him, in living *to* him, in proclaiming his praise, do all with your whole strength. *The grave cannot praise thee*, (said Hezekiah, when he thought his end approaching), *death cannot celebrate thee: they that go down into the pit cannot hope for thy truth.* Isaiah xxxviii. 18.

11 ¶ I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race *is* not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all.

12 For man also knoweth not his time: as the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare: so *are* the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them.

13 ¶ This wisdom have I seen also under the sun, and it *seemed* great unto me:

The world is full of evidences to these truths, and the Church manifests the same. *Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord.* Oh! how blessed is it to eye the hand of Jesus in the world, both of providence and of grace. Zech. iv. 6.

14 *There was* a little city, and few men within it; and there came a great king against it, and besieged it, and built great bulwarks against it:

15 Now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city; yet no man remembered that same poor man.

I am inclined to think that what the preacher here delivers as a parable; and if so, the spiritual sense of it is not far to fetch. If the city here besieged means the church of Christ, it may well be called a *little* city. Fear not, little flock, said Jesus, when comforting his church. It is small, comparatively considered, to the world's wide wilderness, Luke, xii. 32. How this city was besieged, needs not be told. Enemies without and within. The poor man can be no other than Jesus; for

though he is in himself rich, yet, for our sakes he became poor. 2 Cor. viii. 9. How Jesus manifested his wisdom, is also equally plain. Indeed grace, wisdom, love, mercy, favour, all, all were displayed by our Jesus, in his unequalled work of delivering us from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us. And what the preacher saith of the ingratitude of the whole city delivered by him, is a most apt representation of the universal unworthiness and ingratitude of God's Israel. *No man remembered that same poor man.* Blessed Jesus! I take shame to myself in the recollection of my own personal forgetfulness, of thee, and of thine unequalled love to me this day! Oh! how have I forgotten thee times without number! And not only I, Lord, but all have forgotten thee. Precious Lord! hath thy love to us been so great? And are there none, no, not one of all our nature to love thee, as thou hast loved us? Oh! what a state must our nature have been in to all eternity, hadst thou not interposed to deliver us from it. Hail! thou wise Poor Man! thou hast by thy wisdom delivered the city, thy Church!

16 Then said I, Wisdom is better than strength: nevertheless the poor man's wisdom is despised, and his words are not heard.

17 The words of wise *men* are heard in quiet, more than the cry of him that ruleth among fools.

18 Wisdom is better than weapons of war: but one sinner destroyeth much good.

Oh! how true are the words of the preacher. Though all must confess Jesus to be the wisdom of God, for salvation to every one that believeth; yet, how are we constrained to take up the prophet's lamentation, and cry out, *Who hath believed our report, and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?* Isaiah, liii. 1. Blessed Lord! give me to know thee, to love thee, to remember thee; nor let the baseness of forgetfulness of Jesus be added to all my numberless transgressions.

### REFLECTIONS.

READER! amidst many blessed meditations, which this chapter leads to, let us seek for grace from God the Spirit to derive improvements from the sweet view here opened to our souls concerning the Person, worth, wisdom, love, and salvation of the Lord Jesus.

The church of God is, indeed, like the *little* city here spoken of; for though beautiful, like Mount Zion, and the joy of the whole earth, yet compared to the world's wide wilderness it is but little, and as this scripture saith, hath few men in it. Oh! how may the people of God in the present hour mourn over the languishing state of Zion! Oh! how doth the enemy now scoff, saying, *Is this Zion whom no man looketh after!* And this is not all: for even Zion, though small, and her citizens few in number, yet a great king is come up against her. Jehovah, King of kings, and Lord of lords, hath a controversy with Zion, by reason of her

rebellion and sin. And He hath besieged Zion with his law and justice. He hath thrown up bulwarks against Zion, so that she is dreadfully beset with the arrows of his broken law, and the curses which must ultimately fall upon every one that sinneth. And, as if this was not sufficiently alarming, the great enemy of souls, as the accuser of the brethren, throws in his fiery darts, and threatens instant destruction.

Reader! in this representation, (for it ceaseth to be a parable being really and literally the case) whither shall we look, or to whom shall we come, for help? Who can deliver the sinners in Zion from the wrath to come? There is one, indeed, mighty to save; but he is a poor man, though a wise one. Shall we look to him? Yes, precious Jesus! let every eye be directed to thee. Thou wert rich, indeed, Lord, yet we know, for our sakes thou becamest poor, that we through thy poverty might be made rich. And thou art wise, also; for in thee are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Here, Lord, I behold thee in this two-fold character. Poor thou art, indeed, for poverty suited thee when the Godhead condescended to become man. And wise thou must be, for in the moment thou didst assume the manhood, thou wert and still art the only wise God. Such a Redeemer became suited, and thou wert found altogether formed for the purpose. Hence, blessed Jesus, it is thou, and thou alone, who wert equal, by thy wisdom, to deliver the city—And thou hast delivered it, and redeemed us to God by thy blood. Hail! holy, glorious, triumphant Lord! *let every knee bow before thee, and every tongue confess that thou art Christ, to the glory of God the Father.*

One humble boon I present before thee, Lord, this day! Oh! grant that both he that writes, and he that reads, may rejoice in the blessing granted for ever! Grant, Lord, that we may not be among the ungrateful number of them that forget thee! Lord Jesus, forbid it. Shall we ever forget thee? Shall not the remembrance of thee be the first, and last, and everlasting object of remembrance, in our whole souls? Forget thee! Let every thought be done away in eternal oblivion, before that Jesus be forgotten. As long as memory can hold a place in our poor mind, let the name of Jesus, never, never be worn out. Let us, gracious Lord, at thy board, and table, continually celebrate, in the memorials of bread and wine, thy blessed memory. And, when at the last, the heart-strings of these dying bodies give way, still may the name and blessedness of Jesus remain, and the last words of our trembling lips be in concord with the first of our eternal song; to Jesus, the Lamb slain, as the Redeemer of his people, his beloved city, be praise, love, and thanksgiving for evermore.

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## CHAP. X.

### CONTENTS.

*The Preacher is still prosecuting his sermon through this Chapter; but folding up many important sayings within short sentences.*

**D**EAD flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savour:

*so doth* a little folly him that is in reputation for wisdom and honour.

This verse may serve to shew us how frequently some of the most precious things are veiled under an unpromising cover. If we take this expression in its literal sense, no doubt it is very true. Folly will give a tinge to much reputation of wisdom, as dead flies will give an unsavory cast to the ointment of the apothecary. But if this were all to be learnt from this scripture, it required not the wisdom of Solomon, much less the teaching of the Holy Ghost, to give such information. But if by the dead flies here spoken of, the blessed Spirit intended to teach the Church, that our corrupt things (nay, our best things, which from sinners by nature dead in trespasses and sin, can be no otherwise than dead,) be mingled with the righteousness of Jesus, whose name for fragrantcy is as ointment poured forth; wil it not cause all that is blessed in Jesus to lose in our spiritual senses, its sweetness from our ill savor? Reader! why is it that what is precious in Jesus, is not at all times alike precious to us, but from our mingling up with it what is our own?

2 A wise man's heart *is* at his right hand; but a fool's heart at his left.

3 Yea also, when he that is a fool walketh by the way, his wisdom faileth *him*, and he saith to every one *that* he *is* a fool.

4 If the spirit of the ruler rise up against thee, leave not thy place; for yielding pacifieth great offences.

5 There is an evil *which* I have seen under the sun, as an error *which* proceedeth from the ruler:

6 Folly is set in great dignity, and the rich sit in low places.

Who that reads of the wise man's heart and the fool's, differing so widely from each other, but must be led therefrom to consider the blessedness of being guided by Him, whose distinguishing character is, *that length of days is in his right hand, and in his left riches and honour.* Prov. iii. 16.

7 I have seen servants upon horses, and princes walking as servants upon the earth.

There is no doubt great inequality in common life: and not unfrequently, men that are princes in understanding, may be constrained to walk in menial offices, while others weak in intellect, ride in high places. But the beauty of this scripture is in the spiritual sense of it. Here we find in the general, that those whom Jesus hath made kings and priests to God and the Father, are among the offscouring of the earth; while not many mighty, not many noble are called. Oh! how

different are the Lord's views from our views, and his thoughts from our thoughts. James ii. 5. Rev. i. 6. 1 Cor. i. 26. 1 Sam. xvi. 7.

8 He that diggeth a pit shall fall into it; and whoso breaketh an hedge, a serpent shall bite him.

9 Whoso removeth stones shall be hurt therewith; and he that cleaveth wood shall be endangered thereby.

10 If the iron be blunt, and he do not whet the edge, then must he put to more strength: but wisdom is profitable to direct.

11 Surely the serpent will bite without enchantment; and a babbler is no better.

12 The words of a wise man's mouth are gracious: but the lips of a fool will swallow up himself.

13 The beginning of the words of his mouth is foolishness; and the end of his talk is mischievous madness.

14 A fool also is full of words: a man cannot tell what shall be; and what shall be after him, who can tell him?

15 The labour of the foolish wearieth every one of them, because he knoweth not how to go to the city.

We shall have a much clearer apprehension of the Preacher's meaning in those several expressions concerning both wisdom and folly, if we always keep in remembrance that by wisdom is implied, *That wisdom which maketh wise unto salvation*: and by folly, the ignorance of the heart concerning Christ. This doctrine the Holy Ghost graciously explained by Job ages before, when by the mouth of his servant he said, *Behold the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil, is understanding.* Job xxviii. 28.

16 ¶ Woe to thee, O land, when thy king is a child, and thy princes eat in the morning!

17 Blessed art thou, O land, when thy king is the son of nobles, and thy princes eat in due season, for strength, and not for drunkenness!

Similar observations to what were made in the preceding verses, will be found applicable here. As in a moral sense, temperance and moderation will tend to keep the faculties clear, and in vigour for

national government and rule: so in a spiritual sense, there must be blessedness, when the inability of grace, and a ripeness in wisdom, in things pertaining to Jesus, bring a train of covenant mercies, like the land of Judea, upon the Zion of God.

18 ¶ By much slothfulness the building decayeth; and through idleness of the hands the house droppeth through.

19 ¶ A feast is made for laughter, and wine maketh merry: but money answereth all *things*.

20 ¶ Curse not the king, no not in thy thought; and curse not the rich in thy bedchamber: for a bird of the air shall carry the voice, and that which hath wings shall tell the matter.

Here again, as in things of nature, so in grace, the spiritual building will not advance, when inattention to our foundation Christ Jesus, makes the soul go out of the perpendicular. And when coldness, neglect of ordinances, and of secret prayer, beget distance between Jesus and the soul; how shall it be otherwise than that spiritual decays are induced? *Money*, saith the Preacher, *answereth all things*, that is, it becomes the universal means of procuring supply to all our earthly wants. And what money is to the carnal, such, and infinitely more, is Jesus to the spiritual. He is meat to the hungry, and water to the thirsty; a garment to the naked, medicine to the sick, warmth to the cold, in short, all things for life, for light, for peace, for joy, and comfort. *I am Alpha* (saith Jesus) *and Omega, the beginning and the end. He that overcometh shall inherit all things, and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.* Rev. xxi. 6, 7. If Solomon's precept, with which he closeth this chapter, be important, in respect to earthly government; how infinitely more so, in relation to that which is divine. Precious Jesus! I would say for myself and reader, give us grace to rejoice that thou art the universal Governor, and thy kingdom ruleth over all. Dan. ii. 44.

### REFLECTIONS.

READER! the whole of this Chapter leads to very many important reflections, and if followed up to the source from whence all blessings flow, and in which all terminate; we shall find that the Preacher, from the emptiness of creatures, is here setting forth the fulness of the Creator; and in the unsatisfying nature of every thing out of Christ, is proclaiming the necessity of Christ to give real comfort to the soul. Doth he say that flies of death are in the richest ointments of creature-making? And what is this, but to shew that all fragrantcy is in Jesus? Doth he assert that our comforts, and our wisdom, are like the heart of the fool, at the left side? And what doth this imply, but that in Jesus only right-handed blessings are found! Till we find Christ, who alone can cause us to inherit substance, it matters not what else, beside we inherit, for all alike are hollow and unsubstantial. Precious Lord

Jesus! cause our souls thus to inherit thee, for like a golden chain, if thus united to thee, in thee we shall inherit all things. So saith thine Apostle, and the experience of thy people in all ages confirm it. *All are ours, whether life or death; or things present, or things to come; all are ours, if we are Christ's, for Christ's is God's.*

## CHAP. XI.

### CONTENTS.

*The Preacher, now drawing nigh to the close of his sermon, is here laying down certain rules for the regulation of the conduct, which under grace, may tend to lessen human vanity, and soften the evils of life.*

**C**AST thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days.

2 Give a portion to seven, and also to eight; for thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth.

The opening of this Chapter, in the precept given, seems to be figurative. Casting bread upon the waters, is perhaps intended to imply an act of grace, or of charity, given in a way, as our Lord hath marked, so secret that the left hand knoweth not what the right hand doeth: Matt. vi. 3. Like seed sown in the field, it lays hid for awhile. Its product is in future, not now. Preachers of the gospel of Christ, may find great beauty, as well as great encouragement, in these precepts blended with promises. How often, indeed, after many days and years do they find the fruit of their labours. Precious Jesus! how blessed is it to have an eye to thee in all things—to make thy glory our sole aim—and thy salvation of sinners the one design of all our poor services!

3 If the clouds be full of rain, they empty *themselves* upon the earth: and if the tree fall toward the south, or toward the north, in the place where the tree falleth, there it shall be.

4 He that observeth the wind shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap.

5 As thou knowest not what *is* the way of the spirit, *nor* how the bones *do grow* in the womb of her that is with child: even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all.

6 In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand: for thou knowest

not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both *shall be* alike good.

Nothing can be more beautiful than these verses; and both in a natural and spiritual sense, they open a large scope for the most improving meditation. The chief tendency of the whole passage, however, is to teach the inability of man in his highest attainments, to cater for himself; and how much the wisest ought to look up in every concern, both of this world, and of that which is to come, for divine direction. Under the similitude of the husbandman's unconsciousness, whether the morning seed, or the evening seed, be most prosperous, the attention to winds or clouds, for the regulation of his conduct and the like, the Preacher most strikingly sets forth the blessedness of waiting upon the Lord for direction. If the farmer sows his seed in ever so promising a soil, yet unless the dew and the rain from heaven, and the sun's heat, and cloud's fatness, be graciously dispensed in their season, there will be no harvest. Reader! can you need a more striking subject of instruction, respecting the spiritual seed of the gospel? Is it not the Lord that gives us fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness? Is not Jesus the bread of life to his people? And is he not the Father's gift to his people? And as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, is it not Jesus that by his coming from heaven, hath visited the earth, and blessed it, and made it very plenteous? It is true, indeed, that the kingdom of God cometh not by observation. And so the Lord Jesus himself observes in that beautiful parable, Mark iv. 26. 26—But this is similar to what the wise man here saith in this chapter. We know not even in natural things, how the bones of the child grow in the womb: and is it wonderful that in spiritual things, the seed of grace cast into the heart, should spring we know not how? But is it not blessed to refer all, and to depend for all, and seek a blessing for all, from Him who is excellent in counsel, and faithful in his promises? Isaiah lv. 10, 11. Deut. xxxii. 2. Acts xiv. 17. Perhaps there is not a portion in the whole Bible more pointed, to set forth the nothingness of man, and the necessity of referring all things to the divine agency, than these verses of Solomon.

7 ¶ Truly the light *is* sweet, and a pleasant *thing it is* for the eyes to behold the sun:

8 But if a man live many years, *and* rejoice in them all; yet let him remember the days of darkness; for they shall be many. All that cometh is vanity.

If to the eye of the body, as most evidently it is, this truth holds good, what must it be to the eye of the soul? Oh! thou Sun of righteousness, what blessedness is there in thee who art the fountain, and source of all light, and life, and joy, in thy church, to angels and men! Let what will of clouds and darkness intervene below, thou shinest with unceasing, undiminished lustre; neither can sin, nor sorrow, nor all the unworthiness of creatures, induce a momentary darkness in thy sphere! Shine, blessed Lord; in my heart, in a fulness of grace here, until that day when the moon shall be confounded, and the sun of this

lower world ashamed, when thou shalt shine and reign as the Lord of Hosts in Mount Zion, and in Jerusalem above, before thine ancients gloriously, Isaiah xxiv. 23.

9 ¶ Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth : and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes : but know thou, that for all these *things* God will bring thee into judgment.

10 Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh, for childhood and youth *are* vanity.

Some have thought that the Preacher, in these verses, is adopting an ironical language to the younger part of his audience, by way of deterring them from evil; as if he had said, Pursue the ways of thine own heart, and the desire of thine eyes, and then mark the consequence. And they that adopt this opinion of Solomon's irony, suppose that it is similar to the case of Elijah, mocking the priests of Baal. 1 Kings xviii. 27, or Micaiah Ahab, 1 Kings xxii. 15, or the Prophet Isaiah l. 11. But I confess that the scripture doth not strike me in this point of view. Solomon's address all along is too serious to admit any trifling. And it should be observed, that in all the passages, where mockery is used by the servants of the Lord, it is invariably to the enemies of God, and not to the church. This book of Ecclesiastes is one continued sermon to the church. Solomon is now closing up his discourse on the subject of all things out of Christ being vanity. In addressing the young man; therefore, on the subject, he admonisheth him to dedicate the first strength of his youth, and the prime of his days to the Lord; that in the after stages of life, he may find cause of joy in that Lord, whom he had loved in his strength. Solomon had before declared, that there could be no real joy in any creature-comfort, and therefore he adviseth the young man to put away evil from him. And if we accept the words of Solomon in this gracious point of view, the whole passage is beautiful and corresponding to the general tenor of the gospel. How lovely on this account is Timothy's example, who from a child had known the Holy Scriptures, and whose faith the Apostle so delightfully commends. 2 Tim. iii. 15. and 1 Chap. 5.

### REFLECTIONS.

My soul! pause over the perusal of this very interesting Chapter. And while thou art studious to obey the wise man's precept, and to cast thy bread upon the waters, let thine eye, like the prophet's upon the watch tower, be upon the look out for the Lord's direction, and the Lord's blessing upon thy labors. But, my soul, what are the portions which thou canst give to seven, or to eight! Alas! what hast thou which thou didst not receive? Surely it is all the Lord's, and of his own must thou give him. Oh! how blessed to be the Lord's almoner, when the Lord condescends thus to employ his creatures.

And, my soul ! while like the husbandman in the morning, thou sowest thy seed, and in the evening withholdest not thine hand ; look to it, that the seed sown is pure and uncorrupt, and that he that ministereth seed to the sower, may both minister bread for thine own food, and multiply the seed sown, and increase the fruits of righteousness. Blessed Jesus ! thou art the Almighty Sower, that hath both produced, and sown the good seed in every age of thy Church. Oh ! do thou thyself dwell in the hearts of thy people. Let no tares spring up to choak the good seed. But do thou water it with the dew of heaven from above, and let the sun shine with all its loveliness and fruitfulness upon it, that it may bring forth a glorious harvest, some an hundred fold, some sixty-fold, some thirty-fold.

My aged fathers ! do not forget what the wise man here saith : *If a man live many years, and rejoice in them all, yet let him remember the days of darkness, for they shall be many.* Oh ! for grace, when walking upon the confines of the eternal shore, to have done with this world, and all its dying concerns. Oh ! for grace to see, like the Patriarch, the evil days of our pilgrimage, and like him to be waiting for dismissal, from all the objects around, that the hoary saint may gather up his feet into the bed, and from long acquaintance with a covenant God in Christ, as he had, the dying triumph may be, *I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord !* And you no less, young men ! see that your rejoicing is in Jesus. Oh ! for grace to give the strength of your days to Christ, that in the weakness of years, Jesus may be the support : and *when both heart and strength shall fail, Jesus may be the strength of your heart and your portion for ever.* Amen.

## CHAP. XII.

### CONTENTS.

*In this Chapter the Preacher finisheth his discourse, and a beautiful close he makes of it, running up all into the love and fear of God, as the great object of man's creation, and the ultimate end of man.*

**R**EMEMBER now thy creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them ;

A beautiful and most affectionate address the Chapter opens with to the youthful part, in recommending and enforcing an earnest regard to God, as the Creator. No doubt the Preacher meant it, under both views of the Creator, in nature and in grace : and having closed the former Chapter with an address to the young, he begins this in the same strain. We may consider this as one of the inferences from the whole sermon. Having fully proved the vanity of human life, the younger part of those who attended to his discourse, are here called upon to make the proper conclusion from it. There is a beauty in this verse, which a mere English Reader, unacquainted with the original Hebrew, could not possibly know, unless pointed out to him. I mean, that the word *Creator*, is in the original plural *Creators* ; and ought by our trans-

lators to have been so rendered. And the importance of it is much greater than at first view some may imagine. For it implies the grand fundamental truth of the Bible, namely, that the one glorious and eternal Jehovah, hath his existence and self-being totally distinct from all his creatures, and doth exist in a three-fold character of persons; Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Hereby confirming the same glorious truth as was revealed at the opening of the Bible; Jehovah Alehim, in each person of the Godhead, concurred and co-operated in the creation of man. *Let us make man in our own image, after our likeness:* Gen. i. 26. And as a still further confirmation of this glorious doctrine, we find the same word in that passage plural; Job xxxv. 10, where is God my makers, who giveth songs in the night?

2 While the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars, be not darkened, nor the clouds return after the rain :

3 In the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble, and the strong men shall bow themselves, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those that look out of the windows be darkened,

4 And the doors shall be shut in the streets, when the sound of the grinding is low, and he shall rise up at the voice of the bird, and all the daughters of music shall be brought low ;

5 Also when they shall be afraid of that which is high, and fears shall be in the way, and the almond tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail : because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets :

I detain the Reader to admire the wonderful beauty, as well as the great elegance in stile and figure, of those several expressions in the description of the desolated winter of old age. The sun, and moon, and stars of heaven, how bright soever they shine, have no lustre to the blind eyes of the aged. The clouds returning after the rain, is uncommonly striking to denote that unceasing infirmity of the aged, where, when one disease somewhat abates, there is a return, and the recurrence of another. The trembling of the head, the weakness of the limbs, and the tottering state of decrepit nature, through all, are strikingly represented under these several images. It would be to hold a faint taper of the night to aid the light of the sun, the attempt to heighten the beauties by description. What I beg the Reader to observe with me in the perusal, and which the Preacher seems particularly to have had in view, is, that if age be thus necessarily oppressed from the common and unavoidable infirmities incident to such seasons, what must it be to have the pressure

of unpardoned sin, an unawakened state of unrenewed nature added to the load. Oh! what a wretched old age is that which is full of transgression, without God and without Christ: ignorant of Jesus and his salvation, unregenerated, unwashed in Christ's blood, and, as to any saving knowledge, of his grace and power, unconscious whether there be any Holy Ghost. Isaiah lxxv. 20.

6 Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern.

7 Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.

8 ¶ Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher; all is vanity.

In what elegance of language the Preacher hath here described death. But, Reader! it is not the elegance of words that can soften the stroke of death. What Solomon saith so often concerning life, may be equally applied to the folly of life. *Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, all is vanity.* And it is the greatest of all vanities, to overlook the awfulness of a subject in the pomp of words in which it is represented. It may be summed up in a more comprehensive manner: death is blessed in Christ. It is cursed out of Christ. Hence Christ told the Jews, *If ye believe not that I am He, ye shall die in your sins.* John viii. 24. Oh! to hear that voice, and to know our own personal interest in what it proclaims: *Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord!* Rev. xiv. 13.

9 And moreover, because the preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge; yea, he gave good heed, and sought out, and set in order many proverbs.

10 The preacher sought to find out acceptable words: and *that which was written was upright, even words of truth.*

11 The words of the wise are as goads, and as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies, which are given from one shepherd.

12 And further, by these, my son, be admonished: of making many books *there is no end*; and much study is a weariness of the flesh.

It is a part which requires much grace from God, to have a choice of pure words in preaching, as well as pure doctrine. *Sound speech*, (one calls it) *that cannot be condemned.* Titus ii. 8. But the plainest language is most scriptural. And the word of God, in its own pure, simple, unadulterated form, is most likely to take effect. The polished

handle of a sword will give no additional keenness to its edge. And the word of God, when naked, will be most cutting, and quick, and powerful. Heb. iv. 12. But after all, it is the master of assemblies, who can alone fasten his own word as goads upon the minds of the people. And who, but Jesus, is that Master, that one Shepherd, which can do this? Ezek. xxxiv. 23. Zech. xiv. 9. Blessed Master! do thou cause thy word to have an abiding influence in my heart; and there let it be fastened by thine own almighty arm as a nail in a sure place. Isa. xxii. 23. Ezra ix. 8.

13 ¶ Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole *duty* of man.

14 For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether *it be* good, or whether *it be* evil.

Here is the finishing sentence of this whole sermon of Solomon. And in it we have the epitome of the Bible. The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom. And this fear is sometimes put for the whole of vital godliness. *I will put my fear in their hearts*, saith God (respecting the everlasting covenant), *that they shall not depart from me*. Jer. xxxii. 40. And that this fear, which is a child-like filial fear, includes the whole of our gracious habits, in relation to our interest in the covenant, is evident from what our Lord told the Jews in answer to their question of obedience. *What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?* said they. *Jesus answered, and said unto him, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent*. John vi. 29. Hence Solomon's conclusion corresponds to the gospel. The fear of God in the belief of him whom God hath sent, is the whole of man. And the judgment by the Son of man, is to determine it. *For all judgment is committed unto the Son, that all men should honor the Son even as they honor the Father. He that honoreth not the Son, honoreth not the Father which hath sent him*. John v. 22, 23.

#### REFLECTIONS.

READER! may we not, after the perusal of this Chapter, and indeed from the whole of the Preacher's sermon, as contained in this book of the Ecclesiastes, take up both the wise man's direction to the young, and the Psalmist's direction to the old, and in his form of words, cry out and say, *Both young men and maidens, old men and children, praise the name of the Lord; for his name only is excellent, and his glory above the earth and heaven*. This, indeed, is the conclusion of the whole matter, and this is the whole of man!

See, my soul, from the perusal of Solomon's whole discourse, and as the sum and close of Solomon's whole experience, the emptiness and vanity of all besides. *I have seen* (saith he) *all the works that are done under the sun; and behold all is vanity and vexation of spirit*. And

wilt thou not, my soul, learn from so notable a proof, how utterly insufficient all earthly things must be to give comfort? Shall Solomon complain at the head of a kingdom, that emptiness, vanity, and disappointment attended all; and wilt thou expect a different issue from earthly attainments? Say! Canst thou acquire possessions like his? or, even if acquired, couldst thou be sure to keep them? or if keeping, would a different close mark thine from Solomon's?

Turn, my soul, turn from all these things to Jesus. His grace, his love, his good-will, his favor, which is better than life itself, will give the finishing enjoyment to every other blessing, or make up the want of it, if denied thee. It is Jesus which must put a sweetness and a relish into all the comforts which are found in creatures of any kind. And if Jesus be not in it, there can be no sweetness in it at all. Come, then, thou dear Lord, come and bless the young man in his youth, and the old man in his grey years. And then, when *the grasshopper shall be a burden*, and even *desire* of all nature's enjoyments shall fail; thou wilt be the strength of the heart, and the portion to satisfy for ever. Oh! grant Lord, both to him that writes, and him that reads, that ere *the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bow be broken; the dust return to the earth as it was, and the spirit return unto God that gave it*; Jesus may be the all in all to our souls, the conclusion of the whole matter, and the sum and substance of all our joy. May we have the full interest of Jesus, and all that is his, by faith in this life, and in the life to come, then we shall be satisfied with the everlasting enjoyment of him by sight, *when we awake up after his likeness*. Amen.

THE

SONG OF SOLOMON.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS.

I ENTER upon my Commentary in this part of the sacred writings with more than ordinary diffidence, from a consciousness how very sublime and mysterious this book of God is in itself, and with what veneration it ought to be approached. And both at the door, and before that I venture to step over the threshold of perusal, I would not only put off the shoe of preparation but bend the knee of prayer, that the divine light may go before me, and guide me through every apartment of the sacred inclosure.