



SOLOMON, WISDOM,
LEMUEL.

Veiled Prophetic Outlines in Proverbs.

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INTRODUCTORY REMARKS.

THE three names under which the king of Israel wrote the Book of Proverbs pointed forward to Christ; and they are suggestively connected with three stages of soul-experience in the people of God. These may be summarised as follows, namely: *Instruction* under SOLOMON to the stage of perfection—full growth; *association* with WISDOM for God's pleasure, and the building of the house of God. Lastly, preparation with LEMUEL* for *manifestation* in the day of glory.

The book is divisible into three sections, terminating with chapters ix., xix. and xxix., with two supplementary chapters at the close. All are prophetic in certain respects of Israel and the assembly of God. In the first section, chapters i. to ix., sons are led to glory. In the second section, chapters x. to xix., decline, confusion and darkness ensue. In the third section, chapters xx. to xxix., recovery is vouchsafed in three stages. In chapter xxx. light shines in gross darkness, and chapter xxxi. gives the conditions for manifestation. This being conceded, the book seems to claim more attention than perhaps it usually receives, being not merely an enlightening compendium of pious and profitable sayings, set down, as might be thought, somewhat promiscuously, but a divinely arranged treatise, inspired in every particular, verbally, in substance, and in form.

* Generally believed to be a name of Solomon, though that of an Arabian has without adequate reason been suggested.

SECTION I.

SOLOMON (PEACE).

(CHAPS. I.—IX.)

Peace had been established in Israel through the victories of David—there was “neither adversary nor evil occurrent”—and Solomon was named accordingly. Coming to the throne, he was desirous that his subjects should be in accord with the peaceful conditions and with the import of his name—“peace.” The kingdom was thus a foreshadowing of what we know in Christianity. The Lord Jesus in His death has overcome all enemies, has wrought reconciliation and redemption for His people, and is now “our peace” on high. His name is salvation to us.

It will be noticed how frequently the term “son” or “sons” occurs in Proverbs; and the original term occurs more frequently still, being sometimes translated “children.” It occurs twenty-one times in all in the first section. The manner in which the king addressed his subjects, whether each as son or collectively as sons or children, evinces the feelings of one brought up under pious and affectionate home influences; as he says, “I was a son unto my father, tender and an only one in the sight of my mother.”

SONSHIP.

In Christianity this blessed relationship involves much more than the subjects of Solomon could justly lay claim to, yet we have in Proverbs, when read in the light of New Testament teaching, much to recall what Christians enjoy.

Not only did Solomon address each Israelite in the relationship, but we may go so far as to think of each, particularly of those who appreciated their privileges, as "sons of . . . God" (Deut. xiv. 1), a relationship to be renewed in Israel in the coming day in a fuller, deeper and more real way (Hosea i. 10); so that sonship in their case may well be taken as typical of that in ours. When we see how solicitous Solomon was that sons should realise their relationship, and be adorned with the moral qualities proper to sons, as dwelt upon in this book, we may gather how becoming to us it is to aspire to the same kind of adornment. Christian workers, too, might well be admonished by the example shewn in Solomon. Though king, he took the lowly place of father and teacher to his subjects.

MORAL TRAITS OF SONS.

The purpose of Proverbs is given in the opening verses of chapter i. To know *wisdom, instruction, discernment, righteousness*, judgment, equity, and other qualities which may be regarded as flowing from these. Together with them, the *commandments* and instruction of a father are enforced, side by side, severally, with an injunction emphasised by repetition: "Forsake not the law of thy mother." (Prov. i. 8; vi. 20.) Deferring* for the present the consideration of wisdom, "the principal thing," we may briefly review the other subjects, especially those indicated with italics, namely:

Instruction. The original term includes also correction, warning, rebuke and chastening. (Comp. Heb. xii. 5.) Instruction is commonly given in Proverbs individually,

* Consideration of *righteousness* is here also deferred. It forms the basis of peace and adoption (sonship), as in Romans v. 1 and viii., and is a leading subject in section iii.

though sometimes collectively, to children or to sons. The original term is the same in both cases; but the distinction, as in the New Translation, indicates that childhood is in view in chapters iv. and v., while sons (that is, of full growth) are seen in chapter viii.

Discernment. Sound wisdom is inculcated, every good path advised to be followed, and the way of evil is to be perceived and shunned. There are strong warnings against the alluring influences of the strange woman—the world, probably, in its religious, idolatrous guise—also against the evil woman, the more corrupt and corrupting form of the Satanic system around us.

Commandments. Souls disciplined and discerning see the commandments of God in a new light. “His commandments are not grievous.” In Proverbs, as in the Gospel of John (chap. xiv. 21, for instance), commandments are regarded somewhat in the light of privileges—coming, however, with the authority of a father in Proverbs, and with that of the Lord to us. They are on the plane of exercised affections rather than on that of legal obligation.

The law of the mother. Jerusalem above is our mother; and in the type of the assembly in Proverbs xxxi. it is interesting to notice that one of her traits is: “In her tongue is the law of kindness [*lit.*, lovingkindness].”

If these injunctions could have been fulfilled under Solomon's rules all would have been well; but, alas! all failed—king and subjects, father and sons, teacher and students—all yielded to inward tendencies and outward fascinations, the guilt of which was intensified by the greatness of the opportunity and the privileges tasted.

WISDOM'S KINDRED.

The crowning feature of the position in which Solomon placed each son is given in chapter vii., together with a group of affectionate admonitions which we read in verses 1-5: "My son . . . lay up my commandments with thee. Keep my commandments, and live; and my teaching. . . . Say unto wisdom, Thou art my *sister*, and call intelligence thy *kinswoman*." These admonitions breathe genuine affection calculated to fortify souls against the world. But more, wisdom is not a mere abstract quality here, but becomes personified in receptive hearts, and is a preparation for the incoming of WISDOM in chapter viii. Meantime we reach an interesting point towards the end of chapter vii.

SONS ADDRESSED COLLECTIVELY.

In chapter vii. 24, sons are addressed as a company for the first time in the book. It is the pleasure of God to view His people "together in unity." It was indeed a definite purpose before the Lord in His death. (John xi. 52.) So important is the condition, that when the spirit of discord entered at Corinth, the apostle was unable to minister wisdom amongst the saints there, saying, "I could not speak unto you as unto spiritual"—"We speak wisdom among them that are perfect." One of the elements of perfection amongst believers is that they recognise the law of mutuality, in lovingkindness. (Col. ii. 2, 3.) It is in the assembly, the temple of God, that the Lord delights to make divine communications, as we shall see in chapter viii.; and it is significant that when sons are addressed together in chapter vii. it is but to warn them against the influence of the strange woman. Young men who are

strong seem peculiarly liable to be influenced by the world (1 John ii.); and the same is implied in Proverbs. (See chap. vii. 26.) For such, indeed for all, the house of the corruptress is in "the way to Sheol [hades], going down to the chambers of death."

PERFECTION (ONLY "IN CHRIST").

Sons in the most privileged circumstances in Old Testament times, as already noted, failed to come up to the standard. Even the king, the wisest of men and one of the most highly favoured, also failed notwithstanding his earnest warnings to others; and led the way*—he himself—into the house of the strange woman; thus involving the nation in moral ruin. (1 Kings xi.) We have to turn away from all, including ourselves, to Christ, the only perfect One, who in grace entered this scene of ruin and death that He might lead His own out. This He did triumphantly, clearing them from every charge, investing them as risen with Him with His own preciousness before God, and thus entitling them to fellow-heirship with Himself for ever. Believers of the present time—kindred to Christ, He in them and they in Him—are characteristically invested and imbued with every element of moral perfection, and may be in the precious sense of this, in the power of the Spirit of sonship, for the Father's pleasure, their own joy, and for testimony here. To such Proverbs viii. is a heavenly psalm.

* From the time at which God called attention to this ruinous defection by raising up adversaries against Solomon (B.C. 984); to Ezekiel's prophesying the destruction of Jerusalem (B.C. 594; Ezek. iv.–vii.) was exactly 390 years, the number of years of Israel's iniquity. It has been suggested that the period terminated at the destruction of the city; but this did not take place until some five or six years later than the prophecy. (Ezek. iv. 5.)

WISDOM.

Wisdom, personified in Christ Himself, appearing amongst men was appropriately the herald of all blessedness. So full was the heart of God of all His great intentions, that they were divinely epitomised for us, and presented in a hidden way prophetically some ten centuries before they could be made good! They were brought to pass under New Testament conditions established through the death and resurrection of the Lord, and announced consequent upon His ascension to glory through the Apostle Paul.

He came here, as we know, "reconciling the world unto himself," *crying* to men, *calling* to them—to the "sons of men"—with effectual voice; * speaking to them of "excellent things," of "right things" (chap. viii. 4-7); assuring them that He was conversant with all their feelings, thoughts, † ways and doings, yet loving those who love Him; ready to bestow riches and honour, leading in the way of righteousness; causing those who love Him to inherit substance, waiting to fill their treasuries. (Vers. 12-20.) But there is more, and better still; He makes *Himself* known as the eternally existing and anointed One (ver 23, footnote, New Trans.), dwelling in the bosom of divine affections, the Nursling of Jehovah's love. Pro-

* For voice, compare John v. 26-28, x. 22-27, etc., and for "sons of men," see page 9.

† It is interesting to compare "inventions" of verse 12 (orig. and LXX.) with "intents" of Hebrews iv. 12 (orig.); and the original for "prudence" of Proverbs viii. 12 (the same verse) with that for "naked" in Genesis iii. 10, 11 (and Heb. iv. 13)—both words having the same root. The comparison seems to suggest that Hebrews iv. 12, 13 may be looked upon as amplification of Proverbs viii. 12.

verbs viii. is the first chapter of John's gospel of the Old Testament. In each we see the eternal One, the Revealer of God, privy to the exercises of men (John i. 48) and the Gatherer of those whom He can regard as His companions—the sons.

He speaks to sons as intimates (chap. viii. 32), not now to warn, as in chapter vii., but confidently, exhorting and encouraging. They had been called into association (fellowship, comp. 1 Cor. i. 9) and are now seen as responsive to the call. They are "holy temple in the Lord," so to speak, and He can dwell among them. It is to such a company He could open out His heart of infinite love, telling them of His own joy in Jehovah (the Father), of the Father's delight in Him, and of His delights with the sons of men. (Chap. viii. 29-31.) God expressed His appreciation of Jesus as lowly Man by the anointing at baptism, afterwards as High Priest above with the holy anointing oil; and this became to Him "the oil of gladness" (Heb. i. 9), which flowed down to the uttermost limits of His redeemed people, to the "hem of his garment." (Psa. cxxxiii.) It is the expression of God's delight in them too, as those who through grace bear the moral features of His blessed Son, however feebly developed in them.

It may be well to reflect upon what the anointing involves, in some measure at least; first, in the Son Himself as Priest; secondly, as regards His people. Is there not something of it suggested in the components of the anointing oil of Exodus xxx. 22-25, mingled according to the divinely estimated proportions?

Myrrh (meaning bitterness): what the Lord endured at the hand of God in making *peace* for His people. (See page 2.)

Sweet Cinnamon (perfume derived from the *inner bark* of the plant of this name), indicative of what the Lord passed through in being *instructed (disciplined)*—learning “obedience, by the things which he suffered.”

Sweet Calamus (or Myrtle). The name in the original means to buy; costliness therefore is the prominent thought. How much it cost Him to acquire *discernment* as Man (Isa. l. 4)—“know how to succour by a word him that is weary.”

Cassia (sweet-smelling drug). The name is derived from the Hebrew word to cut, “split or divide,” suggesting the laying open of what is within—the motives, as morally applied. Love was ever the governing *motive* with the Lord. (John xiv. 21.)

Oil Olive—the grace of the Spirit—*lovingkindness*—that of which Christ is the full expression—that with which through grace His saints are imbued, and in which all other virtues are intermingled.

SONS OF MEN, AND SONS.—EARTHLY AND HEAVENLY.

The title “sons of men” in Proverbs viii. refers to men in general, the blessing implied being available to all the redeemed. It would seem, however, that when “sons” are distinguished from “sons of men,” the latter epithet applies to those blest upon earth during the millennium *subordinately* to Israel. Israelites, as we have already seen, are by calling “sons of . . . God” (Deut. xiv. 1), and will be so in the coming day. (Hos. i. 10.) They will not only be before God for His pleasure, but will act on His behalf towards all on earth besides. And this thought carries with it that of priestly nearness to Him. (Isa. lxi. 6.) The Spirit of prophecy will be poured out upon them; to know and minister the mind of God (Joel ii. 28, 29); but

the Spirit of God's Son in human hearts, crying, Abba, Father, is the peculiar privilege of a higher circle of sons.

The assembly is constituted of this higher order—sons of the heavenly calling, before God for His eternal pleasure (Eph. i. 3-5), and to be the administrators of all the bounty of heaven to the “sons” and “sons of men” on earth in the coming day. They are typified in the sons seen in Proverbs, as has been mentioned; they are conscious even now of being Wisdom's delight; know the intimacy of which His earthly associates will in measure partake (Cant. v. 1), but they will occupy a nearer place—a higher position (Rev. iv. 4)—and drink into deeper joys than the favoured earthly people will ever know. We may well ask, “What manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness?”

To such a company He could unfold through the Apostle and intimate in a veiled way in Proverbs the purpose of God, the “hidden wisdom, which God had predetermined before the ages *for our glory*”; and He looks for response: “Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors.” Of such material, and with such (prayerful) co-workers, it is said at the opening of Proverbs ix., “Wisdom hath builded her house.”

GLORY AND HIDDEN WISDOM.

THE MYSTERY FORESHADOWED—FOR FAITH.

The Old Testament word was prophetic: “I will dwell in them and walk in them.” Yet even the earthly order was introduced in glory (Exo. xl. 34, 35); Solomon's house was filled with glory (1 Kings viii. 11); and “every whit [of it] uttered glory.” (Psa. xxix. 9.) It was but a

passing system; and it is said of new covenant conditions: "Much rather that which abides subsists in glory"—a glory that excelleth.

Christ, the Wisdom of God, the Antitype of Solomon, builds the house, which abides—His people being the materials: "Ye also are built together for a habitation of God in the Spirit." The saints, too, as sons, concerned in the Father's interests, are builders—"workers together"—Wisdom being God's great Artificer.*

The term for wisdom in Proverbs viii. is feminine, and is suggestive of the maternal grace of the Lord in all His dealings with His people, as already noted. The term in chapter ix. 1† is somewhat different, only occurring in three other places in this book, and once elsewhere in the Old Testament. Here it is plural, used in the singular, as well as being feminine, and in other places mentioned in the footnote. It would therefore read literally, "Wisdoms hath builded her house." Here then we have plurality in unity—Christ in His people, they in Him—engaged in the building. It is more than suggestive, we might almost say prophetic (in so far as the great secret of God could then be known), of the assembly of God on earth in the present period—a company of people

* Proverbs viii. 30 footnote to New Translation. That the same word should be rendered "Nursling" and "Artificer" may have a voice for our hearts, as to the spirit in which the Lord Jesus wrought for the glory of God.

† The plural for wisdom, used in the singular (Prov. i. 20; ix. 1; xiv. 1; xxiv. 7; and Psa. xlix. 3), may mean the quality, wisdom, in a general or diffused sense, as subjectively in the saints, in which case the thought of plurality in unity is preserved—Christ in them. (Col. iii. 11; Eph. iii. 10. See also Prov. xiv. 1., New Trans.) It is difficult to see an application of the term—as "plural of excellence"—to Christ, personally. What wisdom could be more excellent than that in Proverbs viii. ?

labouring together as one, with mutual sympathies and interests, building themselves up in their holy faith—the house of God, who said : “ I will dwell in them and walk in them.”

The first place in which wisdoms is used in the singular in Proverbs is in chapter i. 20, applied in what may be termed an evangelical connection—warning sinners, with a view to their blessing ; and offering this, to the extent of saying, “ Behold, I will pour out my spirit unto you.” This is at least suggestive of the great work at Pentecost, when the Lord poured out of His Holy Spirit upon His gathered disciples, they in turn becoming channels (according to John vii. 38) for the outflow of the Spirit to many others—the Apostle Peter being the mouthpiece for all.

While the work of consolidating the structure proceeded, according to the first part of Proverbs ix., evangelical work continued (vers. 3–8), followed by teaching. (Vers. 9–11.) The building of Wisdom’s house involves soul exercise on the part of the saints, as may be implied in the energy necessary for the *hewing out* of the seven pillars. Faithfulness in attachment to the Lord in overcoming He will reward by constituting them pillars (Rev. iii. 12) ; while on the other hand His sovereignty is shewn in the call of special servants—“ gifts”—such as James, Cephas and John.

The danger side of their responsibility* is accentuated towards the end of our chapter (ix.), reminding us of the apostle’s words in Acts xx. 26–30. Warnings are given against the devices of the “ foolish woman,” who would trade with “ stolen waters”—unrighteous means of refreshment and stimulation ; and “ bread of secrecy”—

* “ Let every man take heed how he buildeth,” etc. (1 Cor. iii.)

not the living Bread that came down from heaven, nor bread spiritually appropriated—"thy bread," cast upon the waters. Even the "oracles of God" used deceitfully serve the "foolish woman's" ends. The sad results come before us in the next section.

SECTION II.

DECLINE AND DEPARTURE.

HISTORICAL PARENTHESIS—FORESHADOWED.

(THE PROVERBS OF SOLOMON, CHAP. X. ONWARD.)

Note the heading of this portion of the book, following so much of and from Wisdom. "The Proverbs of Solomon"! Not now the glowing words addressed by Wisdom to sons—very different, indeed. The relationship thus expressed is much less frequently referred to and is usually *spoken of* in an abstract way, for instance, "A wise son maketh a glad father," in the opening verse. The word wisdom is similarly used, largely in contrast to folly, as if to suggest that this, in the new circumstances, is the principal, if not the only way, in which it was then known. It is particularly noticeable that not once do we find an appeal to "My son," "sons," or even to "children," though the appeal occurs some twenty-one times in Section I., as we have seen, and seven times in Section III. It seems to indicate that the *sense* of sonship had vanished. The deadening influence of the "foolish woman" had done its malign work; and have we not illustrations of

this in both the Old and New Testaments? Israel, largely through Solomon's own evil course, became submerged in idolatry, from which they were recalled from time to time under the kings; and later on from Babylon. Thus was it also with the professed assembly of God, through partaking of what corresponds to the foolish woman's dainties.

Another noticeable feature of this section is the connection in which the plural word for wisdom stands here. "The wisdom(s) of women buildeth *their* house, but folly pulleth it down with her hands." (Chap. xiv. 1.) Their efforts were in vain, because God was not with them; evil triumphed, there was no stability in the structure. Plurality is seen, but without unity, contrasting thus with what is seen in chapter ix. There could scarcely be a figure more suggestive of the divided state of Christendom—"a great house." (2 Tim. ii.) Sectarianism is the universally accepted, even approved, compromise with evil, upon the ground of which servants of God have wrought for many centuries—a grief and dishonour to the one Head, our Lord Jesus Christ. It is the house of Matthew vii. 26, 27, built upon the sand.

Perhaps the most notable feature of all in this section is the place given to the thought of righteousness—"righteous," "just," "upright," etc. It holds by far the most important place in the section, occurring some seventy-five times, that is, about five times more frequently than in the first section; mostly referred to in an abstract way (thus, "Righteousness delivereth from death")—as is usual with commendable thoughts throughout the section. It is plainly admonitory, and in contrast to evil of many kinds, from which we may justly infer the great prevalence of the latter.

A MINISTRY OF YEARNING LOVE.

The prevalence of evil emphasised the necessity for pressing the claims of God in righteousness—ever faithful, patient, gracious—pressing His claims, not in any harshly legal way, but in a ministry of yearning love, fully seen in our blessed Lord. (Luke xiii. 34 ; xix. 41, 42.) It is all Godward towards men, when there was little if anything from men towards God—that is, in this section of Proverbs, in which men were drifting towards darkness and moral destitution. Yet there is no part of the book from which so many familiar quotations—sweet, admonitory and encouraging—have been drawn as from this. It is suggestive, and, in this way, premonitory of God's providential ways with His people, when they would have dropped from the summit of their calling, under the kings, and later still ; and when the assembly of God on earth left its first love.

While the light of divine goodness burned dimly, the enemy was active, opposing movements in God's interests, and endeavouring to stamp out His name from the earth. That wily foe has many and highly efficient agencies, through whom *his* "great house" utterly obscures the house of God ; the "great tree" of abnormal growth rivals the body of Christ ; and the "mystery of iniquity" works side by side with the great mystery—Christ and the church.

THE MYSTERY OF INIQUITY.

Twelve kinds of women are spoken of in Proverbs, representing the subjective and administrative side of human life. *Five* of these were on the side of good, and

seven on that of evil. Looking briefly at the former, we read of the "wise" woman, the "gracious," "fair," "virtuous" and God-fearing woman. If we take all to represent different phases of the same personage, she is seen in *weakness*, realising her dependence, knowing therefore the necessity for prayer; and is ultimately seen coming up out of the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved, as in Canticles viii. 5.

In contrast to her, the woman who is the embodiment of the *seven*—perfect in spiritual wickedness, and through dependence upon the great enemy of God and man—affects to "sit a queen and no widow, and see no sorrow." She is Babylon the great, mother of harlots, and abominations of the earth, and reaches her end in the scene described in Revelation xviii.

Five of the seven are offensive even to natural feelings. The other two are in Proverbs chiefly accountable instrumentally for the wholesale ruin of the people of God, in so far as they have been allowed to affect the widespread profession of the name of Christ. One of the two is "strange," perhaps because while professing to own God she denies Him, accepting patronage and support from the enemy, and is "unto every good work reprobate." The other is foolish, because while professing the truth in terms she walks in darkness—is darkness.

"The depths of Satan" have been reached in this sad world. Israel reached that climax under Jezebel's regime in Ahab's day; and Christendom, alas! did so under Jezebel's counterpart in the Thyatira stage of church history. All have become involved in the ruin, unable and unwilling to extricate themselves; but God in mercy intervenes, and when He does, whether on a small scale,

as at Ziklag* of old, or on a large scale in the coming day, then what was done by David will be achieved by David's Son and Lord in a still more complete way so that it may be said of Him, "He recovered all"—wives, people, sons, daughters, possessions. Through sovereign mercy, recovery will be wrought in a manner worthy of God. (Rom. xi. 22, 23.) The restitution of all things, spoken of by the prophets will be brought to pass; earth's great jubilee will be reached; deliverance from the bondage of corruption will be realised in a scene which still groans under the pernicious sway of the deadly usurper.

SECTION III.

REVIVAL AND RECOVERY.

HISTORICAL PARENTHESIS—CONTINUED.

(CHAPS. XIX. 27—XXVII.)

It is significant that Section II. should conclude with the appeal, "My son." It was calculated to awaken as from spiritual death the slumbering people of God. For the long period corresponding to Proverbs x. to xix. they seem to have been insensible to the appeal, but it is so no longer, as we read, "Cease, my son, to hear the instruc-

* According to Simonis (see Lexicon by Gesenius) Ziklag means "the outflowing of a fountain"! Sovereign mercy in David and Solomon, and "grace upon grace," in the Spirit, at and after Pentecost, established positions for Israel and the church, respectively; from which both, alas! apostatised, through the flesh, energised by Satan and his hosts (the Amalekites).

tion that causeth to err from the words of knowledge" (chap. xix. 27), from which we may infer the cause of the grievous departure. The appeal, "My son," is the first of seven continued throughout Section III., and the true purpose of sonship is reached at its close (chap. xxix. 27); a chastened son yields rest and delight to the father, reminding us of Ephesians i. : "holy and without blame before him in love."

It is remarkable that, though "my son" occurs so frequently here, sons are not collectively addressed anywhere in Proverbs after Section I. The assembly as a whole—intact, so to speak—is not again openly regarded in this way on earth, that is, after the great defection. Whole-assembly testimony (as thus suggested in Proverbs) ceased and would not be restored. Individuals are addressed and encouraged (chap. xxii. 17, 18) : "Bow down thine ear, and hear the words of the wise, and apply thine heart unto my knowledge. For it is a pleasant thing if thou keep them within thee." Sons are not only delivered from folly, but are encouraged in good, and in connection with God; He says, "My knowledge." Abundant response is seen later in the history suggested in Proverbs, as we shall see presently.

Meantime we must also observe that the building is not now by "wisdom(s)," but "through wisdom" (sing.), as we see in chapter xxiv. 3, "Through wisdom is a house built, and by understanding is it established; and filled with all pleasant and precious substance." The plural term "wisdoms" is again seen (ver. 7), but in a contrary sense: "Jewels are esteemed wisdoms by a fool." The taste is sordid; and the descent, according to scripture, rapid; "earthly, sensual, devilish"—the end being destruction. (Phil. iii. 19.)

RECOVERY—STAGE I.

(CHAPS. XIX. 27—XXIV.)

Pursuing the thought of sonship, we find evidence that king Hezekiah appreciated these divine records; he studied them aright (chap. xxii. 17, 18), and to some purpose. As a consequence, he was God's instrument through whom an important section of the book was handed down to future generations. We read: "These are the proverbs of Solomon, which the men of Hezekiah the king of Judah transcribed." (Chap. xxv. 1.)

We have seen how sonship was again recognised as a revived link with God before Hezekiah was mentioned in Proverbs, and this we ventured to suggest implied a *sense* of the relationship. It may further be remarked that we must regard it as more than a mere coincidence that a revival also historically occurred prior to Hezekiah's reign. It commenced with the restoration of the hidden son, young king Joash, through Jehoiada the priest, after a full period of obscurity—seven years. This, with the judgment of the subverter, Athaliah, the repairing of the temple, the restoration of the worship of Jehovah, various Levitical services, and the recognition of other "sons," their brethren among the tribes—all indicated the extent of a movement, which was manifestly of God, prior to Hezekiah's reign. And the circumstances warrant our taking it as foreshadowed in the Book of Proverbs xix. to xxiv.

RECOVERY—STAGE II.

(CHAPS. XXV.—XXVIII.)

Accompanying Hezekiah's appreciation of the proverbs, with a probable effect produced upon him by the awakening

to the sense of sonship, as well as what he would have learned of the revival under Joash, there seems to have been great enlargement of heart wrought in the king, such as led him, in purpose of heart, to embrace "all Israel" in the preparations which he ordered for the passover.

All the tribes did not respond to his overtures; some even "laughed him to scorn." Neither in this, nor in his personal life, was perfection found, reminding us of what the Lord said of Sardis. Yet in both cases there was much for God, such, indeed, as had been foreshadowed in Proverbs. Thus we read in chapter xxviii. 1 of "the righteous" holding an attitude before men such as the reformers shewed; and in confidence before God such as Psalm cxviii. 19 indicates. Then, "they that seek the Lord understand all things" (Prov. xxviii. 5); "the perfect shall inherit good" (ver. 10); great glory accrues from the righteous triumphing (ver. 12); "A faithful man shall abound with blessing" (ver. 20); and, in God's time, "When the wicked perish, the righteous increase." (Ver. 28.)

RECOVERY—STAGE III.

(CHAP. XXIX.)

In the next revival in Israel's history, and in the professing church, there seems to have been more for God, and things wore a brighter aspect before men—those on God's side. All Israel were represented at Josiah's passover; more lavish offerings were presented than in Hezekiah's time; a greater feast was held; deeper contrition was wrought; separation from evil was maintained by Jeremiah and commended by God (Jer. xv.); Huldah exercised maternal influence; and the king represented

“the dew of youth [young men].” (Psa. cx.) The corresponding stage of church history was also bright, represented in the assembly at Philadelphia. (Rev. iii.) In Proverbs xxix. we discover a foreshadowing of this brightness.

Increase was anticipated in the last verse of chapter xxviii. consequent upon the removal of the wicked by judgment, and we find it (increase) in the first verse of chapter xxix., probably individual enlargements as well as increase in numbers, of those who desired to live for the Lord, repudiating evil, like Jeremiah—judging it, by separating from it.

Reviewing the substance and tone of chapter xxix. it will be perceived in the opening verses, “When the righteous increase, the people rejoice”: beginning with this second verse, and reading onward, we perceive a seven-fold series, which may be taken as the moral traits of the recovered position: namely, increase, in sympathetic surroundings; Wisdom loved; the Father rejoicing (ver. 3); “The righteous sing [shout] and rejoice” (ver. 6); “The poor and the oppressor meet together; Jehovah enlighteneth the eyes of them both” (ver. 13); sons may give rest and delight to the Father (ver. 17); and “Whoso putteth his confidence in Jehovah is protected [set on high].” (Ver. 25, New Trans.)

PROPHETIC AND HISTORICAL ANALOGIES.

There is no question that the Book of Proverbs contains prophecies. Chapter xxx. claims to be such; and it will be readily conceded that chapters viii. and xxxi. are equally so. We have just seen that chapter xxix., though written three thousand years ago, gives much of what we experience in christian meetings to-day. The One to

whom there is no past, present or future has wonderful things in His heart for His people, and makes them known according as He sees us able to take them in. It was He who foreshadowed church history in seven divinely selected and arranged assemblies in Asia, in giving descriptions of their moral conditions in John's time. It was He, too, who inspired the proverbs, for the admonition of Solomon's people and for interested souls since their time; and it was He also who occasioned the arrangement of the substance of the book, so that in a veiled prophetic way it might give what proves to be sublime historical outlines to those "upon whom the ends of the ages are come." Analogies, such as have been alluded to in the foregoing pages, are here presented in a tabulated résumé.

TABULATED VIEW OF ANALOGIES.

- | | |
|-----------------------|--|
| A. Chap. i. to ix. | Solomon's sons led to glory.
Assembly conditions in the
apostolic period. |
| B. Chap. x. to xix. | Sonship obscured, confusion
and evil prevalent.
Darkness and idolatry under
the kings in Israel. |
| C. Chap. xx. to xxiv. | Christendom's "Dark Ages."
Restored sense of sonship in
Proverbs.
Revival (stage 1) under Joash :
the son restored, evil judged,
temple repaired, worship re-
sumed.
Revival (stage 1) Thyatira
remnant encouraged.
Revival in England and Bo-
hemia, Wicliffe and Huss. |

- D. Chap. xxv. to xxviii. Importance and authority of the scriptures.
 Revival (stage 2) through Hezekiah in Judah.
 Revival (stage 2) Sardis stage of church history.
 Revival (stage 2) Protestant Reformation, Luther, etc.
- E. Chap. xxix. Separation and gathering, suggested in Proverbs.
 Revival (stage 3) in Israel through Josiah, etc.
 Revival (stage 3) Philadelphian phase of church history.
 Revival (stage 3) Recovery of assembly truth, our hope and New and Old Testament unfoldings.
- F. Chap. xxx. Three faithful men before God apart from the world of darkness and evil.
 Return of the Jews from captivity. Building of the temple and the wall.
 The Lord at the door of Laodicean indifference.
 The day of Philadelphian overcomers—in Laodicean surroundings.
- G. Chap. xxxi. The approaching consummation.

The last two members of the foregoing series are given in anticipation of the section to which we next come.

SECTION IV.

AGUR, ITHIEL, UCAL.

(CHAP. XXX.)

The name of Solomon appears at the beginning of Sections I. and II. and of stage 2 (Section III.); so that it seems a little remarkable he is not mentioned in this chapter: Instead, we have the names of three pious men, who, judging from the place they occupy in the Book of Proverbs, may be regarded as a remnant—overcomers—in testimony for God, when king and people alike were becoming untrue to the position, perhaps about to apostatise, if they had not already given way to idolatry. These three men were obviously apart from the world, which Agur describes in uncompromising terms.

“The man spake,” we are told, “unto . . . Ithiel and Ucal”; doubtless they “spake often one to another,” as did God-fearing ones in Malachi’s time. God was their Sanctuary (Psa. lxxiii. 17), their *Temple* (Psa. xxvii. 4; Rev. xxi. 22); and in Agur’s sense of the evil around, we perceive *the wall* which severed them from it. Outside abounded that which was “common” and “worketh abomination.” (Rev. xxi. 27.) It was a wall of jasper, pure gold and clear glass—namely, holiness, righteousness and sincerity respectively.

They had the fear and light of God in their hearts and saw everything from the true standpoint—were “sons of light,” Wisdom’s children—and repudiated the first order of man, as may be inferred from Agur’s unsparing self-judgment. (Vers. 2, 3.) He was spokesman for the little company, for they were in agreement—else how could

two (or three) walk together, or be grouped together by unerring wisdom "for our instruction"? And how much there is suggested to us in Agur's simple prayer! He eschewed "vanity"—vanity of mind (? Eph. iv. 17)—he would not be a Rationalist (or Sadducee), would rather learn of Christ (Matt. xi. 28, 29); he eschewed "lies," too—he would not be a Pharisee, nor Ritualist—would accept the rest which Christ offered; riches also he eschewed—would not be a Herodian. (Comp. 1. Cor. iv. 4.)

Agur was son of Jakeh (pious or piety), which speaks well for the circumstances of his home, and perhaps of his upbringing. His own name means "gatherer"*—he would have moved with the Lord (Luke xi. 23), and with the Holy Spirit, in such as His work of our days. It is not unlikely that he was used of God to Ithiel and Ucal, not only for blessing in a general way, but in associating them with himself for testimony, as Paul did Timothy.

The name Ithiel means "God is," or "God is with me," from which it may be inferred that he was a man of faith. Ucal means "devourer,"† and suggests that he was one who, like Jeremiah, appreciated the words of God more than aught else. In a moral sense they represent devoted men of God to-day.

* The name according to several authorities corresponds to the verb "to gather" or "to collect."

† Young and Gesenius give "devourer" for Ucal. It is the same word which as a verb is rendered "eat" in Jeremiah xv. 16, shewing the ardour with which the prophet appropriated the newly found scriptures in the reign of Josiah; and in Ucal's name, there seems to be a suggestion of the appetite with which he received and used the teachings of Agur.

AGUR'S PROPHECY.

Agur, with vision divinely clarified, saw things with God; and as we study his words we must feel that he foresaw and tells us of things in a remarkable way. He prophesied in every sense of the term. He had a just perception of the universal outlook: "The spiritual man discerneth all things" was realised in him; and gives ample evidence that he was divinely instructed. He saw seven groups of four things in each, beginning with (1) scathing self-judgment—in himself he saw "no good thing." (Vers. 2, 3.) Then around him he saw (2) moral corruption, descending to violence (vers. 11-14)—"as it was in the days of Noah." (3) Covetousness and lust of the human heart. (Vers. 15, 16.) Passing over group (4), for the present, we come to (5), where sin and truculence were found intolerable. (Vers. 21-28.) These *four* give a universal picture of what we know only too well. The remaining *three* groups form a brighter picture; (4) presents the Saviour and occupies the central place of all *seven*. He came into the midst of sinners, blessed be His name! and was to be the Hope of all mankind. The *three*, conjointly, give adequate testimony to the grace of God for ruined sinners and children of wisdom alike.

In group (4), consistently with the ministry of the Apostle John, the Saviour is shewn as the heavenly Visitor—the Eagle. Then He is the One who, typified in Noah, provided for the salvation of His house—the ship suggesting the ark amidst the waters of judgment. The serpent upon the rock, as a figure of Christ, may present a difficulty to some. We must, however, remember that the serpent upon a pole lifted up was a means of life to the bitten Israelite; and was used by the Lord Himself as

typical of the Son of man lifted up. The figure in Proverbs xxx. 19 was equally expressive of the defeat of our great enemy. If we take the serpent conjointly with the Rock (Christ), we can have little question that the Victor Himself is in view, as well as the victory. In a material view of the scene, the serpent is no longer sitting "in the lurking places" (Psa. x. 8) but "in the open" as a manifest adversary. In military terms, he "fell upon" Christ (at Calvary) and was "broken." (Matt. xxi. 44.) Later, he will be ground to powder. Perceiving the Lord Jesus in the fourth member of the middle group (chap. xxx. 19) preserves our souls in holiness, in which alone the subject may with profit be considered. We have the type, say, in Isaac and Rebekah; the Antitype, in Christ and the church. "He loved the church, and gave himself for it."

Group (6) presents children of Wisdom: (a) as "ants"—small indeed, but acting with a view to the future, with all the earnestness, zeal and ability, of which they are capable; (b) like "rock-badgers," they recognise their weakness in hostile surroundings, and seek and find protection in the Rock; (c) like "locusts" they move straight on in orderly fashion, they "keep rank" without any apparent guide; and (d) like the "lizard," they seize upon available royal place, with a purpose of heart which will not be turned aside. (Matt. xi. 12.)

Dignity and stateliness of bearing are suggested in group (7), verses 29-31—a bearing which alone becomes sons. Royalty is twice referred to in this group, the significance of which may be perceived in its application to the people of God, in remembering that we are a royal priesthood, and in comparing it with Numbers xxiv. 8, 9 and 1 Corinthians xv. 55-57.

LEMUEL.

(CHAP. XXXI.)

In this chapter we see the perfect Man—and His consort. We see *Him* in lowliest guise, and *her* arrayed in fine linen—the righteousnesses of saints. Such habiliments tell of her faithfulness in the house of God, during the long period of His absence and rejection. It will be our privilege to dwell upon her perfections presently; meanwhile seeking grace becomingly to “consider him.”

It can scarcely be doubted that what is before us in the type Lemuel is the Lord Jesus as the “mystery of piety.” It would be easier to apply the type to an ordinary truly humble man than to Him. Yet we can better follow the teaching of the chapter in applying it to the Lamb of God than to Solomon—because the lowliness which the verses breathe could only be seen in Jesus—blessed be His name! Though infinitely “greater than Solomon”—the One from whom Solomon derived, by reflection his greatest glory—King of kings and Lord of lords, HE is about to appear *as the Lamb* (*lit.*, diminutive Lamb, Rev. xix.). But the prime factor in “the mystery of piety” is the fact that the blessed God walked in manhood here!

His name, Lemuel, is expressive of this. As many know, it consists of two parts, Lemu, and El—one of the names of God. The first part is acknowledged to mean “to” or “for”; so that the name in full would mean “sacred to” or “devoted to” God, or “for God”—the Man of God’s pleasure. Parkhurst, a high authority on Hebrew, gives an additional meaning for Lemu. He insists, on purely etymological grounds, that Lemu has a second meaning, namely, “the very”; so that, according to this

second rendering, the name Lemuel would mean the very God, which may be considered in the light of 1 Timothy iii. 16.

The mother, of the first few verses (2-9), is doubtless Israel. (Isa. ix. 6, and Rev. xii.) When a child, the Lord Jesus asked questions of the doctors of Israel in the temple; and, in the course of His ministry, He upheld the claims of Moses' seat, though then occupied by Scribes and Pharisees—thus recognising the mother as teacher.

THE ROYAL CONSORT.

A WOMAN OF WORTH.

The word "virtue" in the ordinary version, is somewhat ambiguous. Its true meaning here is to be gathered from the Lord's word to the healed woman in Luke viii.: "Virtue [power] has gone out of me." The original term in Proverbs xxxi. may be rendered strong (either in mind or body), valiant, wealthy, as well as "of worth." From all these possible meanings we may infer how competent the "woman of worth" is, her ability being wholly derived from her Lord; and fitting her to be expressive of His power and grace. If she shines in *resourcefulness*, it is but as the reflection of Him who is the *Resource* of God.

We recognise that Israel has its claims upon our Lord, because of His faithfulness to the promises made to the fathers; and that the description of Lemuel's consort has a primary application to the nation, especially to the remnant of the Jews, as in Canticles; yet we may see the chapter has, figuratively at least, an application to the assembly of the present period. We have not in this chapter exactly "the great mystery . . . Christ and the

church," but what closely corresponds to the heavenly scene in Revelation xix., in which the Lamb and His bride are manifested, as about to take to Himself His great power and reign.

Proverbs xxxi. 10-31 is a precious acrostic-psalm—Lemuel's own appreciation of His beloved; given in words and verses dictated by the Spirit of God, and descriptive of the fruits resulting from His work in the saints throughout many centuries. Through grace she will be seen to have wrought for the good of the household (individual believers), drawing supplies from afar (heaven)—affording comfort and warmth to the children, thus enabling them to meet the chilling atmosphere outside—seeing to it that everything shall redound to the credit of Him whose she is—that He shall be known in the gates—opening her mouth with testimony to Wisdom's worth—and having in her tongue "the law of lovingkindness." We perceive in all this vital movement and activities consistent with her position and relationship—"the righteousnesses of the saints." As for the *contrary*—sins, failures and shortcomings—in perfect grace He died to put them all out of sight for ever.

The universe will see the assembly in these robes—twenty-one elements of practical, manifested perfection. There are in all twenty-two, according to the alphabetically arranged verses in the song; but exception is here made in respect of the first (ver. 10), because this is an element of the appreciation which is peculiarly the Lord's own. It is He who says: "Her price is above rubies." Only He could ever know the price: "Christ loved the church, and *gave himself for it.*" The beloved company will be the triumph of divine grace. It is taken out of a scene where the enemy had wrought ruin (she too having been

involved) to the dishonour of God—where all had failed but One. An important feature of the triumph will be that at the end there will be *some* representing Him who will shine in Pentecostal brightness, waiting for God's Son from heaven, representing those who will have come through all the trials, testings and vicissitudes of time, maintained by divine power and grace, in spite of all the efforts of the enemy to overthrow their goings, throughout the long period of two thousand years.

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