

**Ecclesiastes : a study / by W.J. Erdman.**

Erdman, W. J. (William Jacob), 1834-1903.

Philadelphia, Pa. : The Author, c1895.

<https://hdl.handle.net/2027/yale.39002050942524>

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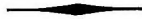
# ECCLESIASTES

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# ECCLESIASTES.



# ECCLESIASTES.

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A STUDY.

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BY

W. J. ERDMAN, D. D.

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“For who knoweth what is good for man in his life?”—*Eccles. 6 : 12.*

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Philadelphia :

AVIL PRINTING COMPANY,  
Market and Fortieth Sts.

1895.



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**BY**


**W. J. ERDMAN.**

**“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter; Fear God and keep His commandments; for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.”—*Eccles. 12 : 13, 14.***



# THE BOOK OF THE NATURAL MAN.

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HE book of ECCLESIASTES is read by Christians with doubt and perplexity. They find it hard to extract from it anything spiritual and heavenly, and so try to read into it what is consciously contrary to its spirit and letter. To others its sayings and conclusions are most agreeable; and being a book of the Bible, it seems to sanction a conduct of life at variance with the holiness and grace of Christianity. Scholars also have made it on the one hand a book of piety, and again on the other of infidelity; now it teaches only pessimism, then

(7)



altogether cheerful industry and enjoyment of the things of life; and lastly, some would reject it wholly as unworthy of the Spirit of God.

It is however in the Bible; it belongs to the organism of Sacred Scripture; it was given by inspiration of God; it is there for the purpose common to all the books of Scripture, and like all the books of the Old Testament, can be fully understood only in the light of the New. Like all of them, it looks to the Messianic future; it faces Jesus Christ; it leads to Him; it is answered in Him. ✎

Whatever may have been the understanding of this book by those of olden time, whatever meaning may have been given to it by righteous men and women, or good derived from it for their edification, to us who have the New Testament in hand it must reveal its full significance and intended use. If "by the law is the knowledge of sin," through this book may be the knowledge of "man under the sun."

Herein he is seen left to himself to know himself and to look beyond himself for an enduring good. The lines of his sadly varied search are not limited by earth and time; they tend to the eternal and heavenly. Also, to one who believes that this Scripture, though so peculiar, was given by inspiration of God, it should be no surprise to find its meaning and use not fully comprehended by either the writer or the people for whom it was originally written.

In the following study of Ecclesiastes the attempt is made to prove that its tentative experiences, its reflections, conclusions and all, are of the Natural Man; that even its "Fear God" is still of "man under the sun"; but that all is intended to lead to God and to Christ as man's everlasting righteousness and portion. It is a preparation for redemption.

Discussions touching its specific teaching may all be harmonized when the book is seen to be the mirror of all men in many moods and

of every man in some mood ; a book not of one age, but of all time ; a shew of the world and its fleeting vanities, and of the life of its dwellers which is “even a vapor that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.”

***— ECCLESIASTES IS THE BOOK OF THE NATURAL MAN; it is the mirror of man under the sun held up by the Wisest of men; and its last and best Conclusion is still that of the Natural Man.***

## I.

## THE ADAM.



*Proof* is found in the more literal reading of the **Conclusion**: “The end of the matter, the whole, let us hear; fear God, and keep His commandments, for this is the whole of **man**,” or “*this is the whole man.*”

The word for man is “the Adam,” the generic name of the race. This “whole duty” is truly the ideal man, but the expectation of judgment of things evil as well as of good implies the failure and imperfection of this very Adam; and so for him law and duty can be no ground of acceptance before God. It is, then, the book of man. The word Adam is found more than two score times, while the name of man as an individual but six times, and, as of a mortal, twice.

Already midway in the book we are told plainly it is all about man, Adam, the race:



“Whatsoever hath been the name thereof was given long ago, and it is known that it is Adam.” But the experiences are not those of Adam, wise and unfallen and at home with God, but of one who knows not “what is good for man in his life all the days of his vain life, which he spendeth as a shadow.”

## II.

## THE DIVINE NAME.



**ANOTHER Proof** that this book and its noblest saying is of man not born again, lies in the fact that the only **Name of God** in it, except *Creator* (and that is also a proof), is what may be called His natural name, **Elohim**.

Not once is spoken the name Jehovah, the name of the everlasting covenant of redemption; "I am the LORD." God seems distant, far away, up in heaven, a judge, and sinful man on earth, whose words should be few. And so man, from the first sigh over all vanities, to the last conclusion, is seen and heard as unredeemed, unrenewed, out of covenant relations, seeking what is best under the sun, but not seeking God Himself; and at the end of all his weary searchings, speaking not in believing Hebrew phrase of "the fear of the LORD," but of the fear of God, and not even then of "thy God." In

the book of Proverbs, Wisdom is speaking to those who fear Jehovah ; in Ecclesiastes, it is not so.

It is never denied that there is one living and true God, holy and righteous, and that man is fallen and sinful ; but in this book, no redeeming mercy is seen in God, nor saving faith in man. Herein "the Preacher" differs wholly from the Psalmist. Men are told to fear God, but never to trust Him ; it is not Jehovah Who is in mind.

Man is in a mysterious relation to God and His purpose and work. This unintelligible mystery affects all the labor and travail of man under the sun, so that man's perplexities and ignorance continually tend to a fatalistic view of life ; but this view is not actually held, as is proved by the fear of God and the belief in a day of divine judgment.

God has to do with every step in the strange and serious investigation that is going on. The search is before God ; He gives it, but He assigns the task to exercise and humble man ; He gives the days of life ; He gives good, and bestows the power of enjoyment or withholds it ; He made man upright and will judge him ;

but throughout all, it is not Jehovah, the covenant-keeping God of an everlasting redemption, but Elohim the Creator, the Allotter, the Mysterious Worker, the Far-off Righteous One, the Final Judge.



## III.

## "UNDER THE SUN."



*HE oft repeated, significant "Under the Sun," is a proof that the Preacher has in his eye man as man; even fallen, ignorant sons of Adam, unredeemed and unrenewed.*

The whole action and movement is thoroughly horizontal.

The There are serious glances towards  
 Dread of the heavens, and melancholy looks tow-  
 Death. ards the underworld, but the main  
 thought has to do with the present earthly life.  
 The word "grave" is not even mentioned. It  
 is found in the English Version but once, and  
 there it stands for Sheol. Somehow the natural  
 man would speak of all the unseen with bated  
 breath, and then in moods of brooding melan-  
 choly. So thoroughly absorbing is this  
 thought of life under the sun, that the reason  
 for quarreling with death is that it not only  
 ends the present labor and enjoyment, but it

also prevents one from knowing what is going on in the busy scheming world after one is gone ; “ who shall bring him back to see what shall be after him ? ” He is not curious to know what may be after death in the under world, but what shall be after him in this world. All “ under the sun,” and only that, interests him ; the sigh of vain regret is thoroughly of the natural man ; the other world is far away and the thought of it unwelcome and troubling. His consciousness is of the world “ under heaven ; ” he would none of the other ; human affairs, not divine, alone engross him.

The unwillingness to meet death is not because of a judgment after death, but because death cuts off all joys of earth and time, and shortens life far too much, especially for the “ wise man.” He, at least, would like to enjoy long life, but it is no more for him than for the fool. Fame after death might satisfy, but alas! there is no remembrance forever ; he will never know whether men speak of him after he is gone.

The thought of future judgment does at times cloud the prospect, but only for a moment. Its fear is all negative. And, of all

things, the Preacher is *not* debating the question of "annihilation" or "conditional immortality." Such question is an intrusion of modern thought and theory into the passages concerning death as an event coming alike to all; and surely, the Preacher's words would thereby involve also the good and righteous in the common fate of annihilation. On the contrary, it is the continuity of life "under the sun," he has always in mind and heart; and the deprivation of all "under the sun" by death, is what he so sadly deplures. He bewails the fact that there is no "profit" under the sun; no "portion," except in the present; no remembrance after death. He would lay up goods for his soul to enjoy here many years; and he would fain go far to find "the fountain of immortal youth." He longs to live on and on, and not pass as a shadow.

**The** While all this longing seems to be  
**Long** the same as the desire of the people  
**Life.** of God who delighted in the promise of long life, it is, when narrowly examined, something altogether different.

The well-known desire of patriarch and

psalmist "to see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living," and to abide on earth many years, is found, indeed, in Ecclesiastes, but in a perverted form. They prayed for it in order "to walk before Jehovah," and to have Jehovah for their "portion in the land of the living;" but the natural man would live under the sun and find his "portion" in the good things of his labor and toil, and thinks of God, even in his moments of thankful enjoyment, with foreboding fear.

The hesitance and dread to go down to Sheol and its gloom and oblivion, confessed by a Job, and a Hezekiah, and a Heman the Ezrahite, is verily echoed in the melancholy complaints of the Preacher so vainly-wise under the sun; but great is the difference of the motive.

They knew that in Sheol no songs of redemption could be sung, no cheerful praise of Jehovah would be heard, as in the land of the living; a time of waiting for the great Redeemer would have begun; but in this book of men under the heavens, the contention with death is that it cuts off all pleasures and pursuit of riches forever. If men could only keep on living here, there might possibly be

some "profit" at last in living, for Jehovah is not their portion here or hereafter.

A Job went down to the grave knowing he would live again and see his Redeemer in the latter day; and the Ezrahite in the very pit of darkness still called upon Jehovah as the "God of his *salvation*," and an Asaph could sing:

"Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel,  
And afterwards receive me to glory.  
Whom have I in heaven but Thee?  
And there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee.  
My flesh and my heart faileth,  
But God is the strength of my heart and my portion  
forever."

But this seeker after the unknown good guides his heart only with natural wisdom; and when flesh and heart fail, sighs out, "Vanity of vanities, the Whole is Vanity." He knows nothing of meeting a Redeemer and Saviour in God at last; but looks for a Judge, righteous and wrathful, whose fear made life often darksome and sad, except in transient moods of complacent enjoyment.

In brief, this strange transcript of what man is and does and thinks under the sun, seems to be held forth to men to show how near the

natural man may come to high and holy realities and not see them, how limited his vision when looking before and after, and how, having compassed sea and land for an answer to his great perplexing questions, he only knows that all must die and meet God in judgment and give account of their days and works of vanity. Over and over again the preacher speaks of evil and only evil; he sees it which ever way he looks, but he never hints of deliverance from it through the Redeemer.

**The** His very Proverbs are but the naturalistic echoes of the parables and sayings of the divine wisdom in the Book of Proverbs; they are not related to Jehovah as the God of revelation and redemption, they are not environed and permeated by the sense and fact of a blessed fellowship with God on the ground of redemption, and the forgiveness of sins; and though at times exactly like the proverbs of the wise man who loves the Lord, they are used by the worldly-wise man as by one who dislikes to think of God. And most noteworthy is it that while the "fool" (kesil) of

the Book of Proverbs is generally the impious, ungodly man, the fool of Ecclesiastes under the same name is only the ignorant, improvident, wordy, loud-mouthed, self-conceited man. In Proverbs his folly is viewed in its final relations to the divine and holy, in Ecclesiastes with but one and that hardly an exception, to the earthly and worldly. The dislike of the fool—that is his kind of a fool—is carried so far by “the Preacher” that he uses also another name (sakal) for him, one found only in this book, and designating the thick-headed fellow, ignorant of worldly affairs, who would not know how to manage a fortune that might be left him, and who tells every one walking in the way that he is a fool, and does things which the man of the world knows enough to avoid as not being “in good form.” The kindred word “thickheadedness” is the only one used in this book for “folly” or “foolishness,” except one, while in Proverbs other words are used, this never; all proving the conceit and contempt of the wise man of the world, who cannot abide the dull and the stupid. Though the use of this word is not confined to this meaning, it gives the flavor and

tone of all its uses as essentially of the world "under the sun." But the Preacher, when he has arrived at his later and more composed state of mind, seems to forget that what he at one time had himself said, he now blames the wordy blockhead for saying, "A man cannot tell what shall be, and what shall be after him, who can tell him?" Still, in the prologue he retains it.

In brief, in all these proverbs of prudence there is a flavor and hint of the world of men, busy and self-seeking, distracted and disappointed. God is but rarely related to His wisdom; and as to fools, God is likely to be angry with shallow-pates who bow and do not pay; "He hath no pleasure in fools."

On many matters familiar to Israel, there seems to be an *intentional withholding* of all reference or mention.

The great over-arching mystery of the work and purpose of God, so perplexing to this "Preacher" in his natural wisdom, is not altogether concealed in the earliest writings of inspiration. Such mystery had already been in part revealed, in promise and prophecy, in history and triumphal song, and in many



psalms of David, the father of the wisest of men ; but in this book of man under the sun, it seems to be understood that all to be known on this question must be what natural reason can discover. It is, however, to be pondered in an environment of the knowledge and worship of the one living and true God. It is man "under the heaven" who is put to the test. He expresses admiration and delight on beholding the orderly course of the "times," each beautiful in its season, but he is perplexed and wearied by his ignorance of the purpose and goal of all, whereas every Hebrew did know, even from earliest times, that all things, all times and events, were related to the promise and the preparation and final fulfillment of a divine redemption and a universal, eternal Kingdom of God.

There is also lack of allusion to the rites and ceremonies of Israel. The book must be wholly written as of the natural man ; and especially as of man no longer a worshipper of idols, but of a day as modern as our own.

## IV.

## THE THEME.



**T**HE *Theme* of the book is a **Proof** that the great "conclusion" is but the best and final word of the natural man. All its experiences, confessions, observations and exhortations are bound together by the one great question of wise men of olden time among other nations and peoples : **What is the chief good ?** *What should man labor for as the true gain ? What is the noblest thing under the sun ? Is life worth living ? Is there any profit ; any surplus, substantial, enduring, that remains from all his labor and toil ?*

The Good is first sought in the goods of life, and then in some true Rule for the Conduct of Life ; so dividing the Book into two equal parts.

**The Preacher.** Before following *the Preacher* in his great quest it should be noted that he is to be viewed as a man who himself *belongs under the sun*. Whether the word Koheleth is rendered "Preacher," "Debater" or "Assembler" or "One of an Assembly," the whole tenor of the teaching proves it is Wisdom from under the sun, Natural Wisdom, that is speaking. The wisest of men undertakes to observe and experiment with life under the sun, in order to find out for all men the outcome of all his searchings, and then rehearses all to an assembly of his fellows. He is not supposed, as already mentioned, to know any divinely-revealed wisdom, or to have heard of a righteousness of faith or of divine mercy or of forgiveness of sins. He is to make answer as a natural man to whom are given the resources and helps common to natural men, only he is wiser and richer than they, and so must bring the final answer for all. And also he is a Hebrew and knows of the one living and true God. When he says "thou," in advice or warning, it is not so much to some disciple or "son" he is speaking as to himself, or he is then assuming a high ground, far above "the



He repeatedly says, "I have seen all the works that are done," "all the oppressions," and "all the labor I labored at." And so he is to speak for the world, for the race, for man, high and low, wise and foolish, rich and poor, in hut and hall, living and dying. And he speaks as before God. He, of all men, feels a strange fear, seeing that somehow man's imperfect vain life under the sun is mysteriously related to and controlled by the unalterable purpose and work of God.

**The Method.** *The Method* also of the Search is *peculiar*. It is a speculative question, to be settled not by a process of reasoning, but by personal experience, wise experimentation and wide observation. It is asked and answered, not in classic form, but with Hebrew cast and coloring, uttering the heart of man, and in such manner that the book becomes a universal book, true for men in all nations and times.

That "all is Vanity of Vanities and Vexation of Spirit,"—"Vapor of Vapors, all Vapor, a Feeding on the Wind," is not the thing to

be proved, but the thing that was found. It is not taken for granted at the start. It is "by wisdom" the answer shall be given. The "Preacher" says that in every experience and experimentation his wisdom remained with him; he never lets any experience so overcome him as to blind him to its "vain" significance. All is serious, solemn work. The answer to the great question is sought in thoughtful earnestness, in spite of pathetic failures and melancholy conclusions. This is man out of Christ, face to face with nature and her riddle, with man and his enigma, with God and His mystery; and the answer to each is full of temporary contradictions and half truths, for so is man without God. He asserts and recants, to assert again; he renews the quest from various points; he sees the final far-off truth at long intervals from height to height, while the valleys of man's vain life and depths of dark despair lie between.

Make what we will of the book when trying to extract anything "evangelical" or "spiritual" out of it; it remains the book of "men," not of "saints;" and yet it is

religious, for the natural man is religious, feeling after God, confessing Him in conscience and dreading death for fear of what shall be after death.

**The Con-** Finally, it should be noted before fol-  
**clusions.** lowing the Seeker, that in the course of the investigation *two Chief Conclusions* are reached which serve as a *Resort* from the vain experiences, profitless labors, and unsolvable problems of life; the first, *Enjoy the good things of life and its works, and be thankful to God for the "chance" and the power of enjoyment; this is the good and the comely;* and the second, *Fear God and keep His commandments, for His judgment is coming.*

To the first the Seeker often resorts; a present joy in present labor he sees early, but it is found at last to be confessedly a comfortless and uncertain conclusion.

The earlier restful confidence disappears, a tremor of fear is felt throughout its utterance; for death is the end of all, not only cutting off further enjoyment, but also opening the way to the judgment that is coming.

And the very good things themselves are seen to become a source of evil and vexation of spirit. The rich man may be without the power of enjoyment; days of darkness will be many; and to the poor man and to the oppressed, who have no comfort or good, such conclusion but vexes, making life more hateful and its mystery more unintelligible. "This also is vanity."

Yet again, man will rouse himself to his fruitless toil and endeavor; he is more than the beast he drives or the clod he treads upon; and once more he seeks to attain the height of his great argument, and only to fail again.

To the second Conclusion, the final and abiding one, the whole vacillating course of the search for the Chief Good under the sun steadily moves. It is found at last, that among all the vanities and contradictions, perplexities and philosophies under the sun, this is "the good" for man wherewith to exercise himself, this is the final all-explaining event in the great future; this, the rule of the conduct of life, in obedience to which will be found also the highest good and real joy.



An earlier, though less abiding, so-called conclusion, and to which resort was had only at the first experience of disappointment and despair, may also be noted, that *Life under the sun is hateful in view of the one event of death common to all; for death cuts off all work, and its fruit and enjoyment.*

Later on, however, even life, with its fleeting insubstantial mirage, is deemed preferable to the gloom and oblivion of the under world. But from the beginning to the end, in view of the sure event of death, a sigh is often heard, as in a more modern day, "Why cannot we always be young!" or of an older, "Life is the dream of a shadow." The natural man wants life to go on; he seeks some solid surplus, "profit" that will remain after all his toil and moil, some residuum of joy after the enjoyment.

### THE PROGRESS OF THE QUEST.

**The** Before the Preacher begins the nar-  
**Symbol.** ration of the order of his investigation  
 I: I-II. he gives, in the very opening of the  
 Book, not only the result of all, which is vanity,

but a symbol of the unprogressive, monotonous character of life under the sun, in the phenomena of the natural world around him. He sees in nature the reflex and mirror of man's endless toil and endeavor.

It is the life of man on earth, bound by natural law, beholding, in the monotonous turning of the wheel of nature, himself and his vain and unchanging, ever-recurring experiences; his prospects but retrospects; the world ceaselessly spinning in its round, its new things but old things, an out-lived worn-out thing; his soul like the sea never full, like the wind never at rest; and to whom the possession of wisdom, in such a world of unsolvable problems, is the saddest and most grievous possession of all. Yea, the very abiding of the earth and the returning seasons, while man once gone is gone forever, makes human life more sad and vain.

But this opening confession of the book, concerning the vanity of life and its monotonous unchangeableness, and of the sorrows of wisdom, is the result of the search and not an anticipation.

## I.

**The Vanities of the Wise Experimenter.**  
2: 1-26.

When the Seeker does start, it is as if he were all unexperienced in the life under the sun. He begins where life begins, in youthful pleasure and mirth, trying to find "the good" in them; and he ends with old age and its burdens and ills. But note, as he proceeds from vanity to vanity, he is ever "guiding his heart with wisdom." In trying wild revelry, he "reins in" his flesh with wine; he does not throw the bridle on the neck of passion and appetite, when he would find what "good" there is in the intoxicating cup; he "keeps his head level." But "the good" is not found in mirth and its madness; "this, also, is Vanity."

And what a confirmation, of this verdict of the wise man, that poet gave, who feared not God and even denied His existence!

" We look before and after,  
And pine for what is not;  
Our sincerest laughter  
With some pain is fraught;  
Our sweetest songs are those that tell  
Of saddest thought."

From this madness of the fleeting hour, the Seeker turns to the enjoyment of what, as royal possessions, may be more satisfying and enduring, but the verdict on all is "Vanity of Vanities;" and his very wisdom, because to the wise and to the fool the one event of death comes alike, makes life and all its labor more hateful to him than to other men.

In this the opening scene of this varied and all-touching experience, it is man, richest, highest, wisest, at his best, that is portrayed; and if life and all its wisdom and works is vanity with him, then it is for all under the sun. It is man who looks up indeed to the heavens, but knows not what is beyond except judgment; man with his mad follies and his blank despair; with his worn-out delights and his hate of life; with his lofty speculations and his profound ignorance; with his "sad sincerity" and his paralyzing skepticism; with his strange recoveries to a calmer mind and his resort to a dull or self-complacent contentment with his lot, which in turn becomes itself but vanity; and it is man, who, having discovered the vanity of all enjoyments, gross and sensual, refined and artistic, and feeling

the sore vexation of all earthly possessions, declares, at last, wisdom to be the most vexatious and sorrowful possession of all, because it can only discover the worthlessness of all the rest.

In fact, to this wise man, the actions of men under the sun are seemingly sheer madness; it would seem at times as if all had gone insane. But wise and pre-eminent as he may be, and having, but a moment before, pronounced life to be hateful, he resorts, from his disappointing works and vanities, after all, to the conclusion he commends to all, "to eat and drink and make his soul enjoy good in his labor." He does it as before God; though, at times, in rather self-complacent, pharisaic mood; but this very conclusion is soon disturbed by the fact of a "vanity," inseparable from it, alas! somebody else, even a sinner, once labored and heaped up the goods which God's favorite now enjoys. "The Good," free from all vanity, has not been found.

Job once spoke of the same disposal of the goods of the rich oppressor, but with far different spirit; he took sides with God as just in all this; but this wise man puts himself in

the sinner's place, and says of such laborious, vain, vicarious heaping up of goods, "This also is vanity and vexation of spirit."

## 2.

**The Times of the World.**  
3: 1-22.

A melancholy silent questioning follows: "The good, the good, where is it?" Anon, abruptly, he turns from his self-centered life to the great world around him; he turns from experience to observation; and his silence is broken by the utterance of the most unique and briefest possible statement of the "times" of human life, both of the individual and of the race.

The "times" enumerated are just twenty-eight; the world number, four, multiplied by the number of completeness, seven. Surveying the whole extent, the Preacher is again confounded, not only by the profitless labor of man, but also by his ignorance of the relation of the piecemeal "times," into which human life and history are broken, to the one eternal purpose of God, moving, moulding,

controlling and uniting all. God has set the world in man's heart; man has "thoughts that wander through eternity," but, their all-uniting divine Thought, who can find?

The "times" of man are seen coming and going in orderly, seasonable sequence, but not only is there no permanent outcome or profit from them all, but no one knows what God is at in regard to them; no wisdom under the sun can tell; all is inscrutable; all one can say is, that the mystery of the world and the expectation of a judgment, when He will summon all the past into His presence again, should make men fear before Him. Man under the sun knows not how to fit, or how his work fits, into the great plan of God.

And so the Preacher concludes the best thing he can do is to let God see to it all, and thankfully resign himself to eating and drinking and the enjoyment of the good of all his labor under the sun. And truly, in view of the many scientific theories of the "problem of existence," that come and go like other vanities, mere misty, baseless things, it must be said that man under the sun, left to his own knowledge and surmisings concerning nature

and history and God, lives in an ellipse of "the unknowable;" the "unknown God" above it, the oblivion of the grave beneath it, and what was before, and what shall be after, hidden in impenetrable darkness.

And man himself, to such theorists, seems

"Like the bubble on the midnight sea, which reflects for a moment the starry heavens above, and then disappears forever."

**Human  
and  
Divine  
Judgment.** But this wise man is reminded, by the judgment-day of God, of the unjust judges on earth, and declares their judgments will be rejudged, and that God's Day will be long, "a time *there* for every purpose and work." He also says that the non-righting now, of human wrongs, is intended to test men whether they really believe, as men often say, there is no difference between man and the beast, and so no future life or judgment. Because one event of death and dust is to both, and seemingly to sense and sight the end of all, it is true, men, in that respect, are like beasts; but the



fact of future judgment proves that man has pre-eminence above the beast ; he should know his "spirit" does go upward, and is *not* the same "spirit" as that of the beast, and men at last will be shown to themselves how like beasts they were in living as they did.

However, all is "vanity," so far as the unprofitlessness of life and labor under the sun is concerned. Man has no more substantial surplus of life and labor left, at death, than the beast ; at least no one shall bring him back to see what shall be after him ; he would like to live on, or at least to know what is going on in the world after he has left it ; but, as he cannot, he concludes again, "wherefore I saw that there is nothing better than that a man should rejoice in his works ; for that is his portion." The enjoyment of this present life and its goods is, at least, something.

## 3.

**Vanities**            But this Seeker after all that is done  
**Social and**        under the sun, cannot remain in the  
**Political.**        self-complacent enjoyment to which  
**4 : 1-16.**        he resorts. He must, like wind and

wave, move and turn in ever restless mood. He turns, he looks, and lo! another vanity! He beholds all the oppressions done under the sun, and declares, for the comfortless oppressed, it were better to be dead; yea, for both living and dead, it were better never to have been at all! Here is another descent into hopelessness; just as at the beginning, in regard to his own experiences and labors, he revolved his thoughts until he made his heart despair, so now he thinks it better never to have been, on seeing the sad experiences of his fellows.

And then he beholds vanity after vanity, social and political; how the successful rich man is envied of his neighbor; how the lazy fool derides the rich man's striving after wind; how the lone miser toils in vain, never knowing the good of companionship; and how the wise youth, in place of an old and foolish king, will be the idol of the fickle multitude for a season, only to be neglected and forgotten in his turn. It is humbling, but very true in every age and all lands, that each generation is self-centered and cares naught for what was before or what will be after it. Not to be always popular and "daily swallowed by

men's eyes,<sup>v</sup> proves life and royalty to be but vapor, and all effort and "bold emprise" a striving after wind.

"Die two months ago and not forgotten yet? Then there's hope a great man's memory may outlive his life half a year!"

## 4.

**Vain** The Seeker, in the presence of all  
**Worship.** these vanities and "windy efforts,"  
**5: 1-20.** comes to *another and solemn pause*.  
 He seems to muse on the relation of the Unseen Being to the professedly divinest act of men, the worship of God. He seems to turn to himself again and commune with his heart on the loftier heights of what proves to be, after all, but natural religiousness, and which cannot save him from the depths of unbelief, ignorance and despair, in which he is soon seen hopelessly floundering.

Mindful of man's jaunty liberalism and enslaving superstitions, rash vows and wordy prayers, shallow reverence and dreamy wor-

ship—dreamy and unreal because full of intruding vanities and worldly businesses, the Speaker earnestly exhorts the multitude going to the house of God to have few words and slow and solemn steps in their worship and vows; but even then he does so like a natural man himself, knowing only of a God far away, Who is looking upon sinful man on earth with cold judicial eye, ready to destroy the work of man in wrath.

This God, so far away from men, is even now in Christendom itself, wherever honest conscience has not been superseded by mawkish sentiment, the God of the religion and worship of the natural man; and particularly the God of "Brotherhoods" and social "orders," which ignore or falsify Christ as the Redeemer, and are held together by naturalistic beliefs in the Divine, common to all men, the world over. The very titles and terms, with which they speak of God, in mortuary address and obituary resolution, are all of a Being Who is far off, mysterious, veiled away in the solitude of His own eternity.

**The Vanities of Wealth and the Conclusion.** From this view of God and His fear, the Preacher turns to behold the tyrannous extortions of the high among men, who forget they are kin to all men, and that their common mother is the earth; and he points to their future judgment by One higher than they; and then, briefly discussing, as if it were something that did not specially concern him, the vanity of both the gain and loss of riches, he settles down solidly into the *conclusion* that to enjoy life in a serene, thankful, God-acknowledging spirit, is the Good and the Beautiful thing under the sun; and the Good because the Comely; "the fine thing." And he gladly adds that when the remembrance of past enjoyments has become dim, the thought, that "God gave it," is also "the Good." Or possibly, and more in accord with previous conclusions of "vanity," as in the Greek version, "he will not much remember the days of his life, for God distracts him in the mirth of his heart."

## 5.

**The Great Contradiction and Failure.** What now follows would confirm this ; for out of this serene, self-satisfied mood, from this supposedly final answer as to "the Good," he is startled by a sore and common evil among men, which, he says, he has often seen ; and this contradiction confounds his Conclusion ; even this : there are rich and honorable men, from whom God has withheld the power of enjoyment, and they go dyspeptics all their days. Where, now, is "the Good?" And "the Good" the Preacher would commend to all men? "This is vanity, and it is an evil disease."

Having begun his descent from the high and sunny slopes of a life of natural piety and social enjoyment, he, at sight of still another most vexatious "vanity and striving after wind," sinks at last into the deepest melancholy ; even this—to be rich and honored and blessed with a hundred sons and live two thousand years ! and yet have the "soul not filled with good," even "the good" he fondly once claimed he had found, and more than

all, have at last no pompous funeral and monumental marble, why! it is better never to have been.

From such extravagant mouthings and extraordinary fancies he subsides into disconnected mutterings of former sayings, how "all go to one place;" how "all labor of man is for his mouth and yet the appetite is not filled;" how "the wise has no advantage over the fool;" and how the poor man with something to eat in sight, the result of honest labor, is better off than the ever-discontented, unsatisfied rich man, whose "desire" is wandering to the ends of the earth in vain for something new and better, always seeking an ever-receding good; *wherefore* "all is vanity and a striving after wind."

And then the Preacher, glancing back over all the way by which he has come, height and depth, sums up all these experiences under the sun to be truly those of the natural man, of the race of Adam: "Whatsoever hath been, the name thereof was given long ago; and it is known that it is Adam;" but in view of the unalterable fateful purpose of God, he adds, it is an Adam, weak, ignorant and wholly

unable to cope with Him that is mightier than man. He confesses now to an utter nonplus and failure of natural wisdom; he knows not what is "the good" for man—this unwise weakling—, in all the days of his shadow-life of numberless vanities. Before the mystery and riddle of existence, he is dumb, and sits on the ground clothed in the ashes and sackcloth of hopeless melancholy.

6.

A third pause, deep and solemn, ensues; but is broken abruptly as before. Yet for a while, all is darkness and despair; his favorite conclusion has utterly failed him. He has reached his crisis. "The Good which is comely for men" has not been found. *He will set out on a New Quest for "the Good," and look for it in some true and high law for the conduct of life under the sun.* What it may be is not necessarily clear to him at the start. Possibly, as attested by passing hints in the former part

**The New  
Quest and  
Law of  
Life.**  
7: 1-29.



of the search, it will be found in the fear of God; and possibly, too, as in preceding recognitions of God's relation to human affairs and earthly enjoyment, the Chief Good may at last be found in this very fear of God and the two "conclusions" become one. Once he had asked, "Is this vain life worth living?" now, "How can life, in spite of its confessed vanities, be made worth living?" Once, "What is the Good for which men should labor?" Now, "Is the Good in some high law of life?" Once,

"Is the Good in having goods?" Now, "Is the Good in some form of being or doing good?"

*To discover this law of right living, he uses a peculiar method.* He is going to be wise again, indeed, but, convinced by his former investigations that vanity is inseparable from human life, he will not seek "the Good" in haphazard things and uncentered "times" of life. His wisdom heretofore had guided him in all his search, and wisdom shall still be the principal thing either as a good and end in itself, or as the means and method of finding the Chief Good. This too is noteworthy, he turns his

face now to the immediate future. Formerly, he had complained of death and Sheol for ending, so soon, his life and enjoyment under the sun, just when he was ready to have a long time of it, and for making it forever impossible to know what would be after him on the earth; but now, knowing the grave is inevitable, he would rather know and live for what is just at hand. He would rather know what is before him, on earth, before death, than know what is after him after death.

And so, in philosophic mood, he balances the "better" things of life over against the worse and in view of God's unalterable work, which leads the wise man to make the best of everything both good and evil, he strikes an average of human experience, and in that average finds *the law of "the golden mean."* An ideal perfection is unattainable; the crooked and incomplete will forever remain so.

A third time he thus breaks a long silence, and rousing himself from his deep depression, abruptly begins to discourse, as to himself, in rhythmic, high and philosophic speech. He does not say "he turned again and saw this

or that." He hath seen it all. "The whole have I considered in the days of my vanity." To himself, again calm and serene, he says, "thou;" he is talking to his better self. And yet see how natural wisdom is justified by her wise child under the sun; he tries at first this practical average, this vaunted mean—not a high, but as he soon finds it, a lower law of life. But he will be very serious-minded indeed, and no longer test mirth and laughter and the song of fools and the pursuit of wealth to find in them the Good sought for so long; but, keenly conscious he is more than the beast he drives or the clod he treads upon, he will seek in religious observances and mournful funerals and charitable deeds and self-restraint, the unknown blessing his soul desires. He will not now have it even questioned whether former days, in the world's long ago, were better than the present; his face is turned to the future; he is going to live in the busy world; and as to money it is good, but wisdom is far better, for it is life giving.

Possessed of this idea of a wise behavior and this potent principle of a prudent mean, so avoiding all extremes, he starts out anew to

apply his heart to know wisdom and to apply his law to the affairs of men. At first he tried by experience to find "the Good," then by observation, but now he will apply rule, and law, and "wise saws and modern instances." He knows it is still a vain world and full of anomalies and contradictions; but being now neither optimist nor pessimist, he will exhort and caution against extremes, even in righteousness, for now prudence and moderation are everything.

**The Contradictory Extremes.** At the very start he meets a certain contradiction in the contrarious treatment, even by God, of the righteous and the wicked; and at once he applies his law of a prudent mean, and seeks to dissuade men from puzzling themselves too much with hard questions, and from thinking they could be more righteous than God, and manage the world better, if they had a chance. He emphatically says, "Be not righteous overmuch, neither make thyself over-wise; why shouldst thou destroy (confound) thyself?"

This is human; but still more is it like the

natural man trying to strike a religious average, a smug medium, like many men to-day and even professed Christians, to make these words mean, "Be not so self-righteous, so fanatical; avoid excitement; worry not over the 'doctrines;' take religion calmly."

Still another like word, this "prudent man" addresses to sinners, running to excess of riot and in danger of speedy judgment: "Be not over-much wicked, neither be thou foolish; why shouldst thou die before thy time?" This word, sounding so plausible to young men, and seemingly such a maxim of that prudence the world admires so much and practices so little, is quite human, when it is made to mean by men who belong under the sun, "Sin a little; sow a few wild oats; know the world; see life; stop in time." In brief, avoid bold wickedness and count not on over-much righteousness; escape is found in the safe mean, and is also compatible with the fear of God.

Then the Preacher, evidently trying to make himself believe all this, seems to halt in such "lame and impotent conclusion" and say there was not anyhow a perfectly righteous

man on earth. Telling himself he knew it was so in his own case, and that wisdom was after all the thing to be desired, he suddenly falls into a confession of despair over his futile endeavor to find "the far off, the soundless deep of the work God worketh from the beginning to the end." He cries out, "All this have I tried by wisdom ; I said I will be wise ; but it was far from me. That which is far off and exceeding deep, who can find it out?"

"He and his heart," however, keep on considering things and revolving thoughts, laying one thing over against the other, to find out the reason ; and he finally concludes that, while men worthy the name are very scarce, the extremest evil he has found under the sun is a bad woman, and he who escapes from her must have been good indeed in God's sight. He also adds that God made "man ('the Adam') upright, but they have sought out many inventions." One is, that Adam "fell up!" and has been going up ever since he started under the sun. However, this natural man thought differently, and knows all life is somehow "out of joint," and wonders what can "set it right."

## 7.

**The  
Prudence  
and the  
Conclu-  
sion.**

8: 1-15.

But "the Preacher," cheering himself up again, and making his face shine with "sweetness and light," and interjecting further praises of prudence and seasonable conduct touching "the powers that be," however oppressive their rule, speaks sympathetically of the misery of men because of the lack of foresight, yet confesses also that neither foresight nor prudence of common men, nor wickedness of mighty kings can deliver high or low from the hand of the grave. He notes also the utter vanity of the evil life of a wicked ruler who, too, must not only die, but also will soon be forgotten when dead. "Out of sight out of mind;" a vanity indeed!

From this the wise man, as if he *must* solve the problem, turns to consider again the contradictory treatment of righteous and wicked, the deepest, most perplexing problem, so tantalizing in its ever-vanishing solution. His "golden mean" will, somehow, not fit in or explain at all. He thinks human life should not be so full of these appalling contradictions

and frightful extremes. He affirms and recants, and is soon involved in hopeless perplexity. He had once said, "Be not overmuch righteous," and now he says, "I know it shall be well" (on earth he means) "with them that fear God." In brief, in this world of the righteous and the wicked, he sees the righteous fares ill and dies early, the sinner fares well and lives long; and then, thinking if one fear God it will be just the other way, and finding out to-morrow it is, after all, not the other way, he sighs, "this also is vanity," and again commends mirth and the having a good and thankful time anyhow.

In view of this strange inscrutable allotment, and as if he had gotten to the end of his wits, he most emphatically, says, "*Then* I commended mirth, because a man hath no better thing under the sun than to eat and to drink, and to be merry, and that this should abide with him in all his labors all the days of his life which God hath given him under the sun." He has gotten back to his old resort again, "And the tossed bark in moorings swings."



## 8.

**The Final Attempt and Failure.** 8:161-9:12. Once more, and for the last time, the Seeker attempts to solve the problem of life under the sun. Extremes there will be, and contrarities many, but might not clear foresight forestall some of them and shape life and direct its course?

So he applies his heart to find out how the various and multitudinous works and destinies of men under the sun are related to the purpose and work of God. He would, as it were, find it now, as a wise man who could tell others; but all he can say, after thorough exploration, is, that though a wise man *say* he knows, he really does not; what he does know is, that all the allotments of all men of good and of evil, of love and of hate, are in the hand of God. All is before them, and none can tell beforehand what his lot or "chance" shall be; each moves blindly to his fate; God's purpose concerning each and all is inscrutable; and especially no foresight can forestall the inevitable "event," the common doom of death, which will close the experi-

ence of each allotment. In the grave is the end of all their human toil and endeavor, and toward it moves "the innumerable caravan."

Note, again, that when first he started he was saddened by the thought how the future on earth after death was all unknown, but now he discovers that no man can tell or find out the future of his present time "under the sun." Note, too, how, in the earlier stages of the Search, it was repeatedly said that the dead were better off than the living, and that life was vanity, because no one knew what would be after him on the earth; but now, in this later more philosophic mood, life seems preferable to death and the inactivity and silence of the grave, for a man in fellowship with living men feels confident, and can still be devising and doing, and have his portion under the sun and enjoy the rush and roar of the busy world. "A living dog is better than a dead lion." Besides this, many men might have lived more moderately and not gone prematurely to the grave in the evil madness of their heart. They would not obey this law of a golden mean. However this may be, his philosophy fails him again, and altogether.

With this preference of life and its busy scenes the Resort is again to the conclusion to eat his bread and drink his wine with a merry heart; even to enjoy the fragrant delights of domestic and social life; to live while he lives his life of inevitable vanity, and to work with all his might to secure the means of such enjoyment. It is in a sadly baffled spirit, in a pathetic irony, the Seeker so talks to himself; he again says, "thou." And, as once before such conclusion was confuted with a contradiction and sore evil, and all his knowledge met with an utter breakdown, even after his pious words concerning worship; so now, after all this complacent prudential advice and this exhortation to strenuous exertion to make the most of life, he sees, turning his thoughts to race and battle, and toil and endeavor under the sun, how many laborious lives never meet with any success, and how indiscriminating chance overrules all and suddenly ensnares men in an evil time. Again, doubt and despair darken over the weary melancholy scene. The law of a "golden mean" is invalid; there are extremes and will be; "a wise man's heart discerneth both

time and judgment," but even for him a sudden "chance" of unexpected extreme evil may fall.

## 9.

**The Phil-  
osophy and  
Prudential  
Maxims.**

9: 13—11: 16.

Another and final pause ensues, but the lover of wisdom waits in calmer mood. The climacteric of maturer life and thought has been reached. The silent query seems to be, what answer can next be given to the great question. For the last time, and as the shadows lengthen towards the "long home," this wise investigator of all things done under heaven, recovers himself, from his failure, to a permanent serenity and composure of mind. He is still wise and loves wisdom and prudence, and will not utterly forsake the law of life already found; but the height of the greater and better conclusion to fear God and keep His commandments looms in the distance.

He begins, but very cautiously, to praise wisdom again, as illustrated in the case of a poor wise man who delivered a city besieged, but who also was soon forgotten. True again to

nature, he cannot overlook this familiar “vanity”—to be forgotten, forgotten!

This serves him as an introduction to the “proverbial philosophy” which follows. In it, in his meditative, soliloquizing way, he sets forth sundry observations and worldly-wise maxims. All of them belong to the law of life chosen, the law requiring prudence and “due proportion” at all times and places, and especially in relation to rulers. At last, however, as if he had gained some solid footing for himself and for his fellow men in their work and walk with each other, he finishes these wise sayings with one very wise for man under the sun, the maturest product of his experience, that man’s ignorance of God’s mysterious purpose and work should not keep man from doing his own work.

## 10.

**The Sum  
and Fore-  
cast and  
Great Con-  
clusion.**

Finally forecasting the future  
from the knowledge of the past, for  
“old experience doth attain  
To something like prophetic strain;”

11:17—12: 14. he sums up all that life under the

sun is, at its best ; and with mournful irony forewarns man and especially youth that “all that cometh is vanity.” He is casting up the account ; the sum of all is now set down ; and at the same time the transition takes place to the highest and best conclusion, to fear God and keep His commandments and in view of judgment to come.

The summing up of life under the sun is this: “Truly the light is sweet and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun.” Note how here the love of this earthly life is shown in all that ; “oh ! to live on and not die, to be ever young, never old ; pain and evil and death far away.” “Yea, if a man live many years, let him rejoice in them all ; but let him remember the days of darkness, for they shall be many. All that cometh is vanity.”

In this mingled strain of tender sadness and solemn warning, of vain regrets and miserable anticipations of the old age of a vainly-spent life, the Preacher closes the strange eventful Quest ; lingering over the scenes in which the joys of youth, with which he began his search, and the sorrows and

infirmities of old age, appear in melancholy contrast. Then, adding the supplement, he begins with the sadly familiar refrain, as if he had just heard the dying sigh of sorrowful old age : “Vanity of Vanities, all is Vanity.”

That the fear of God is the final and best conclusion of man under the sun, is shown a moment later when the whole search is swept over with rapid review in the mind of the Preacher. The Vanity of life is distinctly revealed throughout the whole Book, before the Epilogue is spoken, and then, in this supplement, the law is seen, that should rule life under the sun and make it real and earnest ;—the law in obedience to which, “the Good that is Comely ” would be found.

Thus in abrupt endings and sudden returns to the one great question of the book, the Preacher keeps showing man to himself ; so debating between the vanities of life and the gloom of the grave ; between the contentment of ignorance and the worth of wisdom ; between the vexations of riches and the miseries of poverty ; between the orderly “times ” of man and the “eternity ” of God ; between the wrongs which are not righted and the dead

that can no longer be oppressed ; between a distant God and a becoming worship ; between the wonder that women worth the name are so scarce and the reason that things are as they are ; between the pride and fragrant joys of family life and the event of death that comes to all ; between the life-long possession of all manner of earthly good and the final lack of imposing obsequies and an honorable grave ; between the problem of the proper conduct of life and the deeper mystery of the divine purpose and plan ; between such, and manifold more earthly things like these, and things too high for mortal men, the Preacher keeps moving on to the high conclusion, ever revealing man as the creature of fitful moods, as “all things by turns,” as “out of centre,” as setting sail around his strange world, and coming back at last to the place he started from, too often but little wiser and no better.

All this varied experience and search can be no other than that of the natural man ; of man under the heavens, who, having boxed the compass of all human speculations and vanities, and not knowing God as a Saviour,



exclaims at last, "All is vanity." In his best and final conclusion, to fear God, it is seen that man and God are still far apart; what man is, under the sun, and what he ought to be, as one from above the sun, are two vastly different things. Through the whole book, nowhere under the sun is he seen to meet God, and even at the close, when standing on the topmost height of human thought, a vast heaven of separation and silence still cleaves between him and God, the Judge of all.

## V.

THE LITERATURES OF THE  
NATURAL MAN.

*THE different Literatures of the world are a **Proof** that Ecclesiastes is the book of the Natural Man.*

It hears its echoes or finds its fullest expressions in the poetry and ethics and philosophies of Greece and Germany, Persia and France, India and England, China and America. The book of this Preacher and the books of sages, moralists and poets, match each other at every part and point, but there is no more redemptive power in the one than in the others. The wise questions and doubtful answers put forth by the soul of man in its pressing needs are common to both; likewise the reviews of fitful experience and the monotonous verdict "All is Vanity." The king and Preacher finds his counterparts in other nations and ages; his ancient sermon discloses the seeds and germs of many modern reasonings on man

and his destiny his "be-all and end-all," and on the unknowable, all-molding idea, of "the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end." "The world"—man, nature, history, time—"is set in man's heart" now as then, and the natural man comes to the "Unknowable," feeling after God, and in his vain wisdom finding him not.

Here, too, are the sad musings of poets and sentimentalists, who clothe nature in the sack-cloth of their own melancholy; here the idealizing, the vacillation, the despair, the fatalism, which are but enlarged in the soliloquies of a Hamlet or uttered in the disgust and mad resolve of a learned Faust. The very collections of confessions and sentiments, similar to these of Ecclesiastes, gathered by certain writers from the works of sages and moralists and poets of other ages and peoples, strongly confirm the statement, that this Hebrew Scripture is the Book of the Natural Man.

## VI.

THE NATURAL MAN AND CON-  
SCIENCE.

*THE most positive Proof that to fear God and keep His commandments, and in view of a judgment to come, is the Conclusion of man under the sun, is found in the **New Testament.***

Did the Hebrew sage conclude to fear God and keep His law as the best and noblest thing for man to do; so also did the Persian; the Greek, the Roman wise men, for they, with all Gentiles, "shew the work of the law written in their hearts; their conscience also bearing witness." It is charged upon the Gentiles, by Paul, that they knew God's eternal power and Godhead; that they did not like to retain God in knowledge; that they suppressed the truth; that they knew of the judgment of God and despised His

goodness, and so were without excuse. His conclusion is, "For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these having not the law are a law unto themselves, their conscience also bearing witness and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing, or else excusing, one another." The same apostle, whether preaching to the philosophers of Athens or to the rustics of Lycaonia, reiterates the same charge of inexcusable ignorance of God, and warns them of future judgment. To fear God is, then, not heard for the first time, among men, in this old Hebrew sermon, but is there with the seal of inspiration, that the book may become the book for the race, its mirror and its spokesman; and that its final sentence may be the link to the Gospel of Christ.

That sentence, that "conclusion," is the truth underlying all natural religions; the utterance of the universal conscience; the highest teaching of Greek wisdom; the grand motive of heroic deeds; the central principle and illuminating idea of the histories of a Carlyle, and a Froude, who, with an enlarged application of its truth, call to an unrighteous

nation—"Fear God ; do right ; thy judgment day is coming." It is verily nobler in the blood to do right than to mope in melancholy, or to eat and drink.

"What is man  
If his chief good and market of his time  
Be but to sleep and feed? a beast, no more."

It is some relief, amidst the wrongs and perplexities of the world, to look for a day of divine judgment to righten and clear up all, but there is no personal salvation in it. And should one believe that many do fear God in every nation, it will still remain a question whether such fear has led them to look, in confessed failure, like a Cornelius, beyond themselves for salvation ; or whether, like the unbelieving proselytes who despised the gospel, they rest in pharisaic obedience to justify them before God. Over such men of his own nation, boasting in this very conclusion of Ecclesiastes, and going about to establish their own righteousness, the apostle's heart yearned ; and for such he prayed as for men unsaved, natural men, needing forgiveness and the righteousness of God.

It was true in Paul's day, in Solomon's, in Abel's, and is now and always will be: "The just shall live by faith." "By the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified in the sight of God." The very testimony certain commentators adduce out of all countries and centuries to make this Book a "pious" God-fearing treatise, but proves it is all of the natural man; duty is not redemptive; the wise of Greece and Rome counted the Gospel "foolishness." A scholar (Max Müller) most competent to speak on this great question has affirmed, as follows:

"I have devoted as much time as any man living to the study of the sacred books of the East, and I have found the one keynote—the one diapason, so to speak—of all these so-called sacred books—whether it be the Veda of the Brahmins, the Puranas of Siva and Vishnu, the Koran of the Mohammedans, the Zend-Avesta of the Parsees, the Tripitaka of the Buddhists—the one diapason, the one refrain through all, to be *salvation by works*. They all say that salvation must be purchased, must be bought with a price, and that the sole

price, the sole purchase money, must be our own works and deservings. Our own Holy Bible, our sacred book of the East, is, from beginning to end, a protest against this doctrine."



## VII.

## THE LAW AND THE GOSPEL.



**A** *final Proof* that even this highest and best Conclusion is still of the natural man, lies in the fact that **no preacher of the gospel** would select this text as one containing the gospel. Did he do so, he would contradict the high truth of the Old Testament itself, "the just shall live by faith," and would wrench this book out of its proper place in the organic structure of the Old Testament, as throughout a preparation for Christ and his redemption. This "Conclusion," and obedience to it, are not Christianity, with its cross and its grace; nor does it contain the wonderful things God has revealed to the spiritual man.

Or should a "Preacher" read, to an unsaved assembly, the book of Ecclesiastes instead of preaching an ordinary sermon, he would never, if he knew the gospel of the grace of God, on reaching the conclusion of

the whole matter, "Fear God and keep His commandments," dismiss the congregation with the benediction, as if their assent to that final word had now set them right with God, and "its practice would issue in their salvation!" Would he not, at that very point, begin to preach to them justification by faith in Christ alone, and to testify that whosoever believes in the Son of God receives eternal life, and will never, *as a sinner*, come into judgment?

The use of either the Text or Book, or both, would be to convince of vanity and convict of sin, and to lead to Christ, the Righteousness of God and the Bread from heaven, the Chief Good and Real Portion of men under the sun;—Whose words and example are His changeless law for the conduct of life.

This Hebrew Preacher to natural men, can only tell them what they ought to be, and there he leaves them. The very suddenness of the Conclusion is suggestive of subsequent failure and despair. It has been so with all who knew what law means. The great height attained in the final conclusion, proves to be but a Sinai, with its fire, and blackness, and

tempest, and tremblings. Who has so feared God and kept His commandments as to be able to meet Him in judgment? But just here the grace of God in Christ Jesus meets the sinner, perplexed, weary, unsatisfied, condemned, on his way to the darkness of the grave and eternal judgment.

*When man ends then God begins.* When all the world had become guilty before God ; when the Hebrew in his self-righteousness had utterly failed to fear God and keep His commandments ; when the Persian loved darkness rather than light ; when the Greek by his wisdom knew not God ; when the Roman had stupefied his conscience and liked not to retain God in his knowledge even though there was still taught by Hebrew Scripture and by Pagan creed, by seer and sybil, the coming of a day of wrath, and the impending judgment of Gehenna ; *then* God, in His love, wisdom and power made Himself manifest, a just God and a Saviour.

*Where man ends there God begins.* The Book of the Natural Man comes to its close so that the Gospel of the Son of God may open ; the all of man, under the sun, of the first and

fallen Adam, only convicts him of failure and guilt, to lead him to the All of the last Adam, the Lord from heaven. Over the highest Thought of Man "under the sun," touching the Good, over this loftiest Conclusion concerning Ideal Righteousness and future Judgment," God's heaven of gracious Thoughts toward man as vain and sinful, bends out of infinite depths. The Book of the Natural Man is the Preparation for the Gospel of the Son of God, the Redeemer.



# ANALYSIS OF ECCLESIASTES.

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PART I., Chapters 1-6.

DIVISION I., Chapters 1-2.

DIVISION II., Chapters 3-4.

DIVISION III., Chapters 5-6.

PART II., Chapters 7-12.

DIVISION I., Chapters 7-9:12.

DIVISION II., Chapters 9:13-12:14.

**The Theme:** THE CHIEF GOOD SOUGHT  
BY THE NATURAL MAN THROUGH EXPERI-  
ENCE AND OBSERVATION OF ALL THINGS  
DONE "UNDER THE SUN."

## PART I.

DIVISION I., Chapters 1-2.

*The Prologue; the Wise Search; the Vanities;  
the Resort.*

SECTION I. I: 1-II. *The Reflex; the Con-  
clusion of all.*

(77)

- a. The Result of the consideration of all Labor under the sun. 1: 2-3.
- b. In Nature is seen the symbol of the monotonous round of Man's endless toil and endeavor. 1: 4-7.
- c. There is no progress under the sun; prospects are but retrospects; the present things and generations and those to come will be forgotten like the generations gone; the earth alone abides; its abiding a vexation to short lived man. 1:8-11.

SECTION 2. 1: 12-18. *Introduction: the Seeker, the Search, the Method, the Result.*

- a. *The Seeker*; a King, the wisest and richest of men. 1: 12, 16. (2: 9, 12, 25; 7: 15, 23-25; 11: 9-10.)
- b. *The Search*; the Chief Good for the sons of men under heaven. Such search is given of God to humble and discipline. 1:13,17. (2:3, 7:25, 1:13, 3:10.)
- c. *The Method*: a philosophic, wise experimentation and careful observation. 1:13, 14; 1:16,17. (2:3,9; 7:23-25, 12:9-11.)
- d. <sup>^</sup> *All is Vanity and Vexation of Spirit*, and this without remedy, for all under the sun, perverse, "crooked" and defective, "wanting," remains unalterably so. 1:14-15.
- e. *The Result in particular*; wisdom itself is but a sorrowful possession, a "Vexation

of Spirit." 1:16-18. (1:2-3, 2:11, 6:12, 11:8, 1:15, 3:14, 7:13).

SECTION 3. 2:1-11. *The Result of all of the Seeker's own personal Experience in search of the Chief Good*; "the whole vanity and vexation of spirit;" or "all is vapour and feeding on wind," or "choice or seeking of wind." LXX.

- a. The Vanity of the lust of the flesh. 2:1-3.
- b. The Vanity of the lust of the eyes. 2:4-6.
- c. The Vanity of the pride of life. 2:7-8.
- d. The Result thus far, "Vanity, a striving after wind;" no "profit," surplus, advantage. 2: 9-11.

SECTION 4. 2:12-26. *Various Vanities and the Final Resort.*

- a. The Vanity of even Wisdom itself, though more excellent than folly, in view of death and oblivion to wise and foolish alike. 2:12-15.
- b. The conclusion, therefore, that life is hateful, not worth living, for "The whole is vapour and a chasing of the wind." 2:16-17.
- c. The hateful Vanity of work done wisely, in view of a foolish, thick-headed heir. 2: 18-19.
- d. The Vanity and Despair of work done wisely, in view of a recipient who never



did a stroke for the portion received. 2:20-21.

- e. The Vanity of all self-denying labor under the sun. 2:22-23.
- f. The Resort to the Conclusion: to enjoy the good things of life and labor, and to thank God for the "chance" and the power of enjoyment.

The Conclusion weakened by a contradiction inseparable from such self-complacent enjoyment; and the refrain of "Vanity and Vexation of Spirit," again heard. 2:24-26.

## DIVISION II., Chapters 3-4.

*The Result of the Observation of all Done under the Sun, in Search of the Chief Good.*

SECTION I. 3:1-22. *The "Times" of Man; the Purpose of God; the Judgment.*

- a. The "times" of man under the sun, are in orderly, seasonable sequence; but not only is there no permanent outcome or profit from all their toil and trouble, but man is perplexingly ignorant of the one great unalterable purpose and work of God. He does not know how to fit, or how his little knowledge and work under the sun fit into the eternal purpose of God. 3:1-11.

- b. The Resort, because of such ignorance and of the necessity of submission to the inevitable of the divine order, to the Conclusion of a joyous, serene and thankful enjoyment of good in one's labor, and to fear before God in view of the divine judgment of all the past. 3:12-15.
- c. The Day of God will be long: "a time *there* for every purpose and work;" and for all unjust judges under the sun; unrighted wrongs test men; and yet one "chance" of death is alike to men and beasts; in that respect there is no pre-eminence of man above the beast, for "all is vanity." Still, in view of all, one may calmly rejoice in the present, for there is no long future for man on earth; and when he is gone he cannot know any more what is done under the sun. 3:16-22.

SECTION 2. 4:1-16. *Observation of various wrongs and vanities under the sun.*

- a. Oppressions make death and oblivion preferable to life. 4:1-3.
- b. The envy of lazy fools, of the successful rich, makes success a vanity and vexation of spirit. 4:4-6.
- c. The Vanity and sore travail of the labor of the lone miser, in contrast with the Benefit of Companionship. 4:7-12.

- d. The Vanities of political life: its sudden reversals; its passing popularity. 4: 13-16, 8:10.

DIVISION III., Chapters 5-6.

*Exhortations concerning Vanities in Religion and the Extortions of the High. The Vanities of Riches. The Height and the Depths of the Preacher's Mood. The Conclusion as to the Chief Good; its Contradiction and utter Failure.*

SECTION 1. 5:1-9. *Divine worship; human injustice.*

- a. The worship of God: the rebuke of the irreverent, rash and wordy. Foolish fancies make worship Vanity. The Seeker, in his mood of piousness, says "thou" to himself. 5:1-7.
- b. Exhortations ("thou") concerning the extortions of the high and the relations of the Highest thereto. 5:8-9.

SECTION 2. 5:10-20. *The Vanities of Wealth; the Complacent Conclusion.*

- a. The Vanity of the Gain and increase of Riches. 5:10-12.
- b. The Vanity and sore evil of the loss of hoarded riches in an unwise venture. 5: 13-17.

- c. *The Result of Experience and Observation*, thus far, is the *Conclusion* that “*the Good that is comely*,” or *the Good and the Beautiful*, is, to enjoy the good things of life and to thank God for the power of enjoyment. And when all enjoyment is forgotten, it is still “the Good” that God gave it. 5:18–20.

SECTION 3. 6:1–12. *The sore Contradiction and utter breakdown of the foregoing Conclusion; despair of finding the Chief Good.*

- a. The sore evil and vanity, common among men, contradicting and disturbing the complacent conclusion, not to be able to eat and enjoy the good things of life. 6:1–2.
- b. But the exceeding vanity and worst feeding on wind is, in being rich, and having a hundred sons and a long life, and yet in life no fill of the soul, and at death no honorable burial; better never to have lived at all. 6:3–9.
- c. It is seen and acknowledged that all these experiences under the sun are of man as man, of Adam, the race, utterly weak and unable to cope with the unalterable purpose and work of Him Who is mightier than man. 6:10.

The Seeker comes to an utter breakdown of all knowledge of what is the

Good for man in all his shadow-like life  
of numberless vanities. 6:11-12.

PART II., Chapters 7-12.

THE CHIEF GOOD SOUGHT FOR IN WISE  
CONDUCT. THE LAW OF THE GOLDEN MEAN.  
ITS APPLICATION. THE PROBLEM OF LIFE  
UNSOLVED. WISDOM THE MOST DESIRABLE  
RESORT. THE FINAL RETROSPECT. THE  
WARNING. THE GREAT CONCLUSION, OR  
THE CHIEF GOOD UNDER THE SUN.

DIVISION I., 7:1-9:12.

*The law of Prudence; the Anomalies; the  
Resort; the fresh attempt; the final failure.*

SECTION I. 7:1-29. *The Recovery from  
depths of despairful ignorance to a Philosophic  
Mood.*

- a. The balancing and the better things ; the  
average struck. 7:1-14.
- b. Things seen in days of vanity and not  
ended ; anomalies among men ; the ex-  
tremes to be avoided. 7:15-18.
- c. Wisdom a strength ; no one perfectly right-  
eous, not even the Preacher. 7: 19-22.
- d. In all the Search in the deeps of the past,  
in the far off and soundless, the worst

thing found was the evil woman ; and the final confession follows that man, the race, once created upright, is indeed fallen. 7: 23-29.

SECTION 2. 8:1-15. *Prudence and caution before wicked rulers.* High and low, good and evil, go to *the same doom of death*; no golden mean, no prudence avails. The vanity of an unloved ruler. The great problem concerning righteous and wicked unsolved.

- a. Be prudent before kings. From lack of this seasonable prudence great misery comes on common men. They cannot save themselves from the common, inevitable doom of death, neither can rich rulers; and a vanity belongs to their very death; their memory is soon forgotten. "Out of sight, out of mind." 8:1-10.
- b. The assertions and recantings touching the contrarious treatment of righteous and wicked. 8:11-13.
- c. In utter discomfiture the prudent man resorts to the favorite conclusion to enjoy himself anyhow. 8: 14-15.

SECTION 3. 8:16, 9:12. *The discomfiture temporary. The final attempt to solve the problem of God's work and human allotments. The failure and resort to enjoyment; a new contradiction.*

- a. "All move to a common fate;" but any kind of life is better than oblivion; all allotments of joy and grief, love and hatred, in the hand of God, but no one knows what is before him in a world of seeming chance. "A living dog is better than a dead lion." 8:16-9:6.
- b. "See life" (9: 9) in the fragrant delights of the family; eat, drink and be merry; it is the portion left; work hard for it. 9:7-10.
- c. And yet the indiscriminate allotments and unaccountable failures of life, check all expectations of sure success. The evil chance may happen to one any moment. 7:11-12.

## DIVISION II., 9:13-12:14.

*Recovery to the placid philosophic mood; the cautious praise of wisdom; the proverbial philosophy; the final wise admonition as to human work. The summing up; the forecast; the warning to youth; the old age and its sorrows; the great Conclusion.*

SECTION I. 9:13; 11:6. *The philosophic mind; the wise maxims; the work of man and God.*

- a. The narrative of the wisdom once seen in

a city, leads to the rhythmical statements that follow. 9:13-16.

- b. The Proverbs of natural wisdom and prudence. 9:17; 10:20.
- c. Man should do his work, though all ignorant of the work. God worketh from the beginning to the end, and this the Preacher had failed to find out. 11:1-6.

SECTION 2. 11:7; 12:8. *The final sum and forecast; the exhortation; the warning.*

- a. The final sum and forecast: that however pleasant at times, life under the sun may be, all to come, like all past, will have many days of darkness, for "the whole," from childhood to old age, "is Vanity." 11:7-8.
- b. Special exhortation to childhood and youth as being themselves only vanity. A pathos of irony; a melancholy approval of enjoyment mingled with fear of coming judgment. 11: 9-10.
- c. Warnings against the evils and miseries of the old age of a vainly spent life. The Creator and Judgment to come.  
The vanity of the old age of a vain life. 12:1-8.

SECTION 3. 12:9-14. *The Epilogue or Supplement.*

The last and mournful repetition of the



monotonous Refrain, "Vanity of Vanities, all is Vanity," with which the book began and the old age closes, leads to the conclusion of the whole matter.

- a. Praise for the Preacher. 12:9-11.
- b. The Weariness of the foregoing Search and Study, and of the endless observations or books that might still be made. 12:12.
- c. The Great Conclusion of *man under the sun*; the *material* for the Conclusion found during the search.
  - (1.) As to the relation of God to the Search, 1:13; 3:10.
  - (2.) As to life, 5:18; 8:15; 9:9; 12:7.
  - (3.) As to earthly good and enjoyment, 2:26; 5:19; 2:24; 3:13-14; 5:19-20; 9:7-10; 6:2; 11:9.
  - (4.) As to future judgment, 3:15-17; 5:1-7; 7:29; 11:9; 12:13-14.

But the Chief Good seen by the Natural Man is still in the future; all is still facing a Fulfillment and a Righteousness in the Man to come from above the sun.

The Failure of man implied in the abrupt ending; preparation for salvation through it all.

*Germantown, Pa.,*  
*January, 1896.*







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