

BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES.

Dr. Hamilton, in his volume of Lectures, recently published by the Carters, under the title of the "Royal Preacher," gives the following outline of the contents of the Book of Ecclesiastes:—

"This is the sentence with which Ecclesiastes closes: "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." This is the conclusion of the matter, and a wise and wholesome conclusion, worthy of Him who said, "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and these things shall be added unto you?—But what is the 'matter' of which this is the 'conclusion?' To ascertain this we must go back to the beginning. There you read, 'I the preacher was king in Jerusalem, and I gave my heart to search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven. Then I said in my heart, Go to now, I will prove thee with mirth; therefore enjoy pleasures,' &c. In other words you find that this 'matter' was a long experiment which the narrator made in search of the Supreme Felicity, and of which Ecclesiastes records successive stages. But how does it record them? By virtually repeating them. In the exercise of his poetic power the historian conveys himself and his reader back into those days of vanity, and feels anew all that he felt then: so that, in the course of his rapid monologue, he stands before us, by turns the man of science and the man of pleasure, the fatalist, the materialist, the skeptic, the epicurean, and the stoic, with a few earnest and enlightened interludes; till, in the conclusion of the whole matter, he sloughs the last of all these 'lying vanities' and emerges to our view, the noblest style of man, the believer and the penitent.

"This we believe to be the true idea of the book. We should describe it as a dramatic biography, in which Solomon not only records but re-enacts the successive scenes of his search after happiness; a descriptive memoir, in which he not only recites his past experience, but in his improvising fervor, becomes the various of his former self once more. He is a restored backslider, and for the benefit of his son and his subjects, and under the guidance of God's Spirit, for the benefit of the Church, he writes this prodigal's progress.—He is a returned pilgrim from the land of Nod, and as he opens the portfolio of sketches which he took before his eyes were turned away from viewing vanity, he accompanies them with lively and realizing repetitions of what he felt and thought during those wild and joyless days. Our great Edmund Burke once said that his own life might best be divided into 'fyttes,' or 'manias': that his life began with a fit poetical, followed by a fit metaphysical, and that again by a rhetorical, that he once had a mania for statesmanship, and that this again had subsided into the mania of philosophical seclusion. And so on in his days of apostasy; the soul intense of Solomon launched out into a fit of study, succeeded by a fit of luxury. He had fits of grossness and refinement, a mania of conviviality, a mania of misanthropy. He had a fit of building, a fit of science, a fit of book-making; and they all passed off in collapses of disappointment and paroxysms of downright misery. And here, as he exhibits these successive tableaux, these fac similes of his former self, like a modern lyrist on St. Cecilia's day, he runs the diapason of departed passion, and, in the successive strophes and anti-strophes, he feels his former phrenzies over again, in order that, by the very vividness of the representation, we may be all the better admonished."

"The preacher was king over Israel, and because he was wise taught the people knowledge. He sought to find acceptable words, and that which was written upright, a true story, a real statement of the case. "And by these, my son, be admonished." Do you, my son, accept this father's legacy, and do you, my people, receive at your monarch's hand this 'Basilicon Doron,' this autobiography of your penitent prince. These chapters are 'words of truth,' revivals of my former self—reproductions of my reasonings and regrets—my fantastic hopes and blank failures during that sad voyage round the coast of vanity. By these be admonished." Without repeating the guilty experiment, learn the painful result—listen to the moans of a melancholy worldling; for I shall sing again some of those doleful ditties for which I exchanged the songs of Zion. Look at these portraits—they are not

fancy sketches—they are my former self, or rather, my former selves: that lay figure in royal robes, surmounted first by the lantern-jaws of the book-worm, now exchanged for the jolly visage of the gay gourmand, and presently refining into the glossy locks and languid smile of the Hebrew exquisite: now chuckling with the merriment of the laughing philosopher, curling anon into the bitter sneer of the cynic, and in each succession exploding in smoke, not a masque, not a mummery, not a series of make-believes; but each a genuine evolution of the various Solomon—look at these pictures, ye worldlings, and as in water face answers to face, so in one or the other of these recognize your present likeness and foresee your destiny."

Beautiful Extract from Bailie.

The assertion of the apostle Paul respecting the afflictions of the faithful, that they "work together for good to them that love God," (Rom. viii. 28.) is verified by constant experience. Besides the excellent fruit which the afflicted themselves receive from them, sooner or later acknowledging, with the Psalmist, that it was good for them to have been afflicted, (Psalm cxix. 71.) they are also serviceable to the edification of others. For as roses, the fairest and sweetest of flowers, grow on a rough and thorny stock; so from the afflictions of the believer, rugged and piercing to the flesh, spring examples of their virtue and instances of their piety, the sweetest and most salutary of all productions. See what a rich store of benefits the trials of Job and David have yielded us! To them we owe that admirable book of the patience of the former, and a great part of the divine hymns of the latter. Had it not been for their afflictions, we should not now enjoy, after so many ages, those inestimable treasures of instruction and consolation. What shall I say of the sufferings of St. Paul, which spread the gospel all abroad, and converted the world to the knowledge of the true God? His imprisonment at Rome alone, under the government of Nero, has done the Church more good than the peace and prosperity of all the rest of the faithful of that age. It gave reputation to the gospel, and made it gloriously enter into the steepest court in the world. It inspired preachers of the truth with heroic courage. It awakened the curiosity of some, and inflamed the love of others, and filled all that great city with the name and odor of Jesus Christ. Nor was it of use to the Romans only. It imparted its celestial fruit to the remotest regions and generations. For it was in this very confinement that this holy man wrote several of his divine Epistles, which we read with so much edification to this present day; as those to Philemon, to Timothy, to the Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians. Paul's prison was a common reservoir, whence have issued those living springs which water and gladden the city of God, and will furnish it, even to the end of the world, with the streams it needs for its refreshment.

Access to God.

However early in the morning you seek the gate of access, you find it already open; and however deep the midnight moment when you find yourself in the sudden arms of death, the winged prayer can bring an instant Saviour near. And this wherever you are. It needs not that you ascend some special Pisgah or Moriah. It needs not that you should enter some awful shrine, or pull off your shoes on some holy ground. Could a memento be reared on every spot from which an acceptable prayer has passed away, and on which a prompt answer has come down, we should find Jehovah-shannah, 'the Lord hath been here,' inscribed on many a cottage-hearth, and many a dungeon floor. We should find it not only in Jerusalem's proud temple and David's cedar galleries, but in the fisherman's cottage by the brink of Gennesaret, and in the upper chamber where Pentecost began. And whether it be the field where Isaac went to meditate, or the rocky knoll where Jacob lay down to sleep, or the brook where Israel wrestled, or the den where Daniel gazed on the hungry lions and the lions gazed on him, or the hill sides where the man of sorrows prayed all night, we should still discern the prints of the ladder's feet let down from heaven—the landing-place of mercies, because the starting-point of prayer. And all this whatsoever you are. It needs no saint, no proficient in piety, no adept in eloquent language, no dignity of earthly rank. It needs but a blind beggar, or a loathsome leazar. It needs but a penitent

publican, or a dying thief. And it needs no sharp ordeal, no costly passport, no painful expiation, to bring you to the mercy seat; or rather, I should say, it needs the costliest of all; but the blood of the atonement—the Saviour's merit—the name of Jesus, priceless as they are, cost the sinner nothing. They are freely put at his disposal, and instantly and constantly he may use them. This access to God in every place, at every moment, without any price or personal merit, is it not a privilege?—Rev. James Hamilton.

The Church Thermometer.

Well, what is that? Ask any veteran pastor who has weathered the storms, and rejoiced in the sunshines of a long ministerial life, and he will tell you that it is the social-prayer-meeting. The true thermometer of a church, to indicate its spiritual temperature, is the weekly gathering round the mercy seat. A cold prayer-meeting marks a cold church. It is at once the cause, and the effect of a spiritual declension.

If the place of prayer is well nigh deserted; if the few who are present bodily seem absent in spirit; if the prayers offered are languid, formal, meaningless, without point, and without unction, then the pastor has abundant cause for heart-heaviness and tears. Sermons preached to such a people, are like discourses delivered in one of the ruined temples of Luxor, with the shrivelled dead embalmed around him, and grim heads of stone looking down from every capital. His hands hang down, and his spirits faint.

And as a church has no surer symptom of decay than a decaying prayer-meeting, so nothing feels the approach of a revival so palpably as the place of prayer. A revival commonly begins there. The deserted seats are filled. Those who "could not leave their business," now find but little difficulty in closing the doors of their shops and counting-rooms. The absent Thomases are once more with the deserted flock of disciples, and wonder to find the risen Saviour there too, with His benedictions. Those who seldom prayed are now ready to pour out their souls in supplication.—The "gift of tongues" has descended. The slow of speech have become eloquent. The timid have grown bold. The sluggish are mounting up, with wings as eagles. A latent power is developed in the church, which astounds both pastor and people. The prayer-meeting, too, becomes a place for communion with each other, as well as for communion with God. Old differences are forgotten.—Old wounds are healed. Church members will grasp each others' hands, and inquire about a neighbor's spiritual health, with more solicitude than they manifest in asking about a sick friend. They will linger together about the hallowed spot, talking of the mercies of God to their souls, and they will be loath to go away. They are one in heart; the church is a living unity.

The experienced mariner constantly consults the glass." Brethren! if we are wise, we, too, will keep a lookout upon the thermometer of the church. A prayer-meeting "below freezing point" is a fatal indication.—Stray Arrows.

A Kingdom Lost.

We have seldom seen a more impressive picture than that of Napoleon at St. Helena, standing with folded arms upon a lofty crag of his rocky prison isle, and gazing out upon the ocean, fit emblem of his restless, vast, all-embracing ambition. How gloomy the thoughts of that mighty mind, how bitter his reflections. But a few days ago an emperor, his word was law over nobles and armies, his nod made nations tremble. Now he is alone, an exile, with "none so poor to do him reverence."—His life then shone with all the brilliance of the diadem and throne; now its lustre is totally eclipsed, his sceptre has departed, his throne is vacant, his crown placed on another brow, and his kingdom, with all its wealth, power and grandeur, is lost forever. A prisoner, chained to the rock, he has no hope but the grave, which will soon enclose conqueror and conquered in its narrow portals.

But more agonizing yet will be the reflections of every lost spirit. There is a nobler crown than Napoleon's. "The mines of the earth have not furnished its metal, and the depths of the sea hide nothing so radiant as the jewels with which it is wreathed." It is a "crown of life," a diadem of "glory" and of "righteousness," the brilliance and beauty of which mortal eye hath never seen, nor mortal imagination conceived. There is a king-

dom to be inherited, a throne to be obtained far richer and grander than was ever possessed by earthly monarchs. That kingdom is prepared by the power and love of the Almighty hand that filled the universe with suns and stars; that throne is occupied by the "King of Kings and Lord of Lords." It is an everlasting kingdom, an incorruptible crown, and those who are counted worthy to obtain it, shall "reign in life" as "kings and priests unto God, forever and ever." To all who are willing to receive this priceless crown as the free, blood-bought gift of the Redeemer, it is now held out by his love. But all who neglect or spurn it, will be "cast into outer darkness," where in hopeless captivity and utter despair, they will have eternity to deplore their folly and to think of heaven lost.

Reader, this kingdom may now be yours, but if you scorn it, how dreadful your fate.

What shall soothe thy bursting heart  
When the saints and thou must part?  
When the good with joy are crowned  
Sinner, where wilt thou be found?

[True Union.

The Soul.

Men are not what they seem to the outward eye—mere machines, moving about in customary occupations; productive laborers of food and wearing apparel; slaves from morn to night, at task work set them by the wealth of nations. They are the children of God. The soul never sleeps. All the souls now in this world are forever awake; and this life, though in moral sadness it has often been rightly called so, is no dream. In a dream we have no will of our own, no power over ourselves; our familiar friends seem strangers from some far-off country; the dead are alive, yet we wonder not, the laws of the physical world are suspended, or changed, or confused by our phantasy, intellect, imagination, the moral sense, affection, passion, are not possessed by us in the same way we possess them out of that mystery. Were life a dream, or like a dream, it would never lead to Heaven.

An Anchor to the Soul.

Eternity is another thing than we ordinarily take it to be in a healthful state. O, how vast and boundless! O, how fixed and unalterable! O, of what infinite importance is it that we be prepared for eternity! I have been just a dying now for more than a week; and all around have thought me so. I had clear views of eternity; have seen the blessedness of the godly in some measure; and have longed to share their happy state, as well as been comfortably satisfied that through grace I shall do so; but O, what anguish is raised in my mind for those who are mistaken, and who bring with them false hopes to the grave!—The sight was so dreadful, that I could by no means bear it; and I said under a more affecting sense than ever before, "Who can dwell with everlasting burnings?" O! methought could I now see my friends, that I might warn them to see that they lay their foundation for eternity sure.—Brainerd.

Nothing is Lost.

The drop that mingles with the flood, the sand dropped on the sea shore, the word you have spoken, will not be lost. Each will have its influence, and be felt till time shall be no more. Have you ever thought of the effect that might be produced by a single word?—Drop it pleasantly among a group, and it will make a dozen happy, to return to their homes and produce the same effect on a hundred, perhaps. A bad word may arouse the indignation of a whole neighborhood; it may spread like wildfire, to produce disastrous effects. As no word is lost, be careful how you speak. Speak right, speak kindly.

The Pillow for the Night.

To sleep well, lay these things under your head:

1. A precious promise out of Scripture.
2. A sweet verse of some evangelical hymn.
3. A hearty prayer to God.
4. A good conscience, purified with Christ's blood.
5. A feeling of forgiveness and charity to all mankind.
6. A resolution to serve God on the morrow.
7. A glance of faith at the cross.

Duty faithfully performed opens the mind to truth.

Unchaste language is the sure index of an impure heart.