

A
COMMENTARY
ON
ECCLESIASTES.

BY
MOSES STUART,
LATE PROFESSOR OF SACRED LITERATURE IN THE THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY AT ANDOVER.

Edited and Revised

BY
R. D. C. ROBBINS,
PROFESSOR IN MIDDLEBURY COLLEGE.

Wipf & Stock
PUBLISHERS
Eugene, Oregon

Wipf and Stock Publishers
199 W 8th Ave, Suite 3
Eugene, OR 97401

A Commentary on Ecclesiastes
By Stuart, Moses
ISBN: 1-59752-220-1
Publication date 5/25/2005
Previously published by Warren F. Draper, 1864

P R E F A C E.

THE Book of Ecclesiastes presents many apparent problems which have long been the subject of wonder and dispute among the Jewish Rabbies as well as in the Christian Church. Had not the evidence been strong and decisive of its rightful place in the Canon of the Hebrew sacred writings, it would undoubtedly have been rejected long ago by many, as not being a book of divine authority. Not a few passages seem to speak, at first view, the language of skepticism, *i. e.*, of unbelief or doubt as to a future state, and also of devotedness to sensual enjoyment. It was on this ground that some of the Jewish Rabbies, at the time when the Talmud was written, made an effort, as it would seem, to eject it from the sacred Canon, as we are told in the Talmud, Tract. Shabb. fol. 30, col. 2. Some of the Christian Fathers have intimated the like feelings as existing among some Christians in their times; and since the revival of criticism in its late,

and specially in its most recent form, the book has been treated as indeed a clever performance of the kind, but after all as the work of a *skeptical Epicurean*. Even De Wette, with his sober aspect and seeming impartiality, does not hesitate to bestow such an epithet on the author of the book. No wonder that he has had many imitators or followers in Germany.

The evidence that Ecclesiastes was a portion of the sacred Canon sanctioned by Christ and his apostles, is plain, and as certain as anything so remotely historical can be made out to be. This is shown in its proper place, in the Introduction to the Commentary. This admitted, it follows that a serious obligation devolves on us to read the book, and at least to do what we can to understand it. Thousands of sermons have been preached on portions of the book, and a multitude of Commentaries have been written, most of which are merely ethical and hortatory. There is indeed no want of material in the book for a basis to such sermons and homiletic commentary. Much of it is so plain and so forcible, in respect to the pursuits and the destiny of man, as to be both intelligible and unmistakable. To preach and exhort, in accordance with such portions of the book, is commendable, and may, if well done, be very profitable. But what is to be done with such passages as 2 : 24 ; 3 : 18—21 ; 6 : 12 ; 7 : 15—

17; 25—28; 8:15; 9:2—10? The preacher, for the most part, avoids them in the pulpit; and the commentators (at least most commentators) set themselves seriously to work, in order to soften, to file away, and to change the hue or alter the shape of these obnoxious passages, so that they may be judged to teach neither skepticism nor Epicureanism. The goodness of the intention, in all this, I should cheerfully concede. In itself, the motive may be praiseworthy. But after all, real prudence, a straightforward course, the sound and well-established laws of exegesis to which critical honesty should inflexibly adhere — all this, I am unable to find in such a course. I cannot bring myself to believe that the true interests of religion demand of us to deal unfairly and forcibly with any portion of the Scriptures, in order to make it conform to our views of propriety. If we may do this honestly on any one occasion, we may of course do it on every and all occasions, whenever we may deem it expedient either for the sake of morals and piety or of doctrine. I know of no boundary line, in such a case, but a man's own persuasion or fancy. Once break away from sober grammatico-historical exegesis, and all is afloat without compass or rudder. It is not our business to force a meaning upon Scripture, against which it reluctates; it belongs to us *to deduce one from Scripture*, if we are

able, by the use of fair and honest principles of interpretation.

This rule I have endeavored to comply with, in the following little work now presented to the public. With what success, must be referred to competent judges. I can only say, that in honestly endeavoring to follow it, I have found no serious occasion for stumbling or offence at the book. Here, as in every work of this nature, the *animus auctoris* must be sought after, and if possible discovered. That is, or should be, our guide. If the writer did not design to give us a mere preceptive and ethical treatise, but to *philosophize* on the vanity of human life, and to consider the many objections against a wise and holy Providence, which arise from the miseries of men, and the unequal distribution of prosperity and adversity among them — if such was his design, how can it be strange that he has brought to view many of these objections, in order that the reader may see them, and see the manner in which they are answered? The objections should, in such a case, be taken for what they are, viz., for objections or doubts that naturally arise in a mind on which gospel light has not shined; and the answers to them are to be thoroughly investigated. Paul has pursued a similar course in some of his epistles; and this, not unfrequently, without giving any express intimation

that he is going to introduce an objector. He leaves it to the intelligent reader to discover what belongs to his opponent, and what to himself. Why should we concede such a liberty to him, and not to the author of Ecclesiastes ?

This conceded, the exegesis of the book (a few passages only excepted) becomes comparatively easy and plain. The objections remain objections, and are considered and treated as such ; and the answers to them show us the real mind of the writer. With all the alleged and seeming skepticism of the book, it becomes clear as the sun that the writer, after revolving all the difficulties in his mind, comes out from them with a lofty tone of morality, with an unshaken confidence in future judgment and retribution, and with high, adoring, submissive confidence in God, and in his wisdom, goodness, and power. FEAR GOD, AND KEEP HIS COMMANDMENTS, is the final, the grand result of all.

The book has very generally been regarded and treated as little more than a succession of unconnected apothegms, having little or no connection with each other, or dependence on each other. I hope to show the reader that it is one *continuous whole*, having one grand and fundamental theme running through the whole, and spreading its fibres, like a kind of fine and impalpable network,

over every minute portion of it. It has a beginning, a middle, and an end; a main proposition to be illustrated, and confirmed; and finally, some very important practical deductions are made from the matter of the book, in the way of command and exhortation. But the logic of Aristotle, of the Schoolmen, and of modern times, it ignores. The Hebrews never wrote in a manner fettered by this. They reasoned; they drew deductions; they proved; but they did neither in the way of the Grecian, or English, or German schools. Paul was a master-reasoner; but to *school logic* he seems an utter stranger. No one should expect this in Coheleth. At all events, he will not find it. But still the book philosophizes, and proves, and disproves, and makes deductions, and strenuously urges morality and piety.

I have done what I could to develop the *plan* of the book, and the execution of this plan by the writer, *more suo*. This has cost me more laborious study than all the philological remarks. Others must judge whether my labor has been bestowed in vain.

The Hebrew student—the aspirant to sacred knowledge—has been in my eye throughout. I have endeavored to leave not a single grammatical difficulty, either as to the *forms of words* or the *syntax*, untouched. In every case of difficulty, or where such student might be

in doubt as to the principles admitted, I have referred him to the Grammar and the Lexicon, with indications of the places where he will find illustration or confirmation of that concerning which he doubts. I would hope that the book, now made easily accessible to learners, unless I very much misjudge, may hereafter constitute a part of the course of Hebrew study. It is well deserving of it. The idiom is so unlike most other Hebrew, in certain respects, that a knowledge of it must give any one a much freer scope in the language. The Hebrew in itself is rather easy than otherwise ; for great simplicity, generally, reigns in the structure of sentences. Seldom need the student be left in doubt as to a satisfactory meaning, when all investigation is conducted on principles purely philological. Any other method of conducting it, is in the main useless.

In the earlier part of my professional labors here, I undertook to lecture on Ecclesiastes. But at that time I could not satisfy myself, for I could not then obtain either competent or satisfactory aid. I therefore soon abandoned the attempt, telling my pupils, as my reason for so doing, that I could not lecture on a book which I felt that I did not understand. Lately, I have resumed and repeated the study of it, after more widely extended and protracted discipline in Hebrew. Difficulties have now

seemed to vanish apace. I no longer continue to doubt, except as to some individual expressions; and even in regard to these, I have at last succeeded in satisfying myself. When we attain to such a state of feeling, it naturally inspires a hope that we may do something to help or to satisfy others. I would fain hope that not a few of the apparent enigmas of the book will be made to disappear, or else meet with a solution, in the following pages. Many a mind has been, and is still, perplexed with these. If I can afford any aid to anxious and candid seekers after the meaning of the author, I shall regard it as a high reward.

M. STUART.

ANDOVER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY, 1851.

CONTENTS.

INTRODUCTION.

SECT.	PAGE
1. General Nature of the Book,	17
2. Special Design and Method of the Book,	21
3. Unity of the Book,	68
4. Diction of the Book,	70
5. Who was the Author?	84
6. Credit and General History of the Book,	105
7. Ancient Versions of Coheleth,	105
Septuagint,	105
Vulgate,	111
Syriac,	112
Targum,	114
8. Modern Versions,	123
9. Commentators,	124

COMMENTARY.

1. Title and Theme of the Book, Chap. I. 1—11,	127
2. Efforts to obtain Happiness by the Acquisition of Wisdom, I. 12—18, 141	
3. Efforts to obtain Happiness by the Pursuit of Pleasure, II. 1—11, 147	
4. Limited Advantages of Wisdom; it exempts not from the common Lot of Suffering and Sorrow, II. 12—26,	157
5. All depends on Providence. Man cannot change the Course of Things, III. 1—15,	170

SECT.	PAGE
6. Objections against the Idea, that God has made Everything goodly, III. 16—22,	180
7. Obstacles to Enjoyment; Toil and frustrated Hopes of those who seek to be Rich and Powerful, IV. 1—16,	194
8. How one should demean himself in Present Circumstances, IV. 17—V. 1—6,	207
9. Various Supplementary Reflections, V. 7—19,	215
10. Disappointments frequent, both of the Wise and Foolish; Provi- dential Arrangements cannot be Controlled, VI. 1—12,	228
11. Alleviations of Evil; Caution as to one's Behavior toward Ru- lers; many Miseries come from our own Perversion, VII. 1—29,	240
12. Men Sin from a variety of Causes; Punishment will come, sooner or later, VIII. 1—17,	267
13. Suffering is the Common Lot; we should look at the brighter Side of Things, IX. 1—10,	284
14. Wisdom sometimes fails to profit; Folly will be duly rewarded, IX. 11—X. 20,	295
15. Counsel in regard to unavoidable Evils; especially Old Age and Death, XI. 1—XII. 8,	313
16. Conclusion of the Book; Summary of Results, XII. 9—14,	335

EXCURSUS:

(1) On the empty Pursuit of Knowledge,	167
(2) Is Future Retribution taught in Coheleth?	182
(3) Why does Coheleth say no more about a Future State?	236
(4) Discursiveness of Coheleth in some Cases,	240
(5) His peculiar Views of Women,	264
(6) Remarks on Coheleth's Method of Argument and State of Feel- ing,	332

INTRODUCTION.

§ 1. *General Nature of the Book.*

IN many respects the book of *Ecclesiastes* has no parallel in the Hebrew Scriptures. It alone, of all the sacred writings, undertakes to *philosophize*. But this word, as applied to *Ecclesiastes*, must not be understood in the Grecian or Roman sense, nor even in that of modern European nations. *Ontological* speculations are utterly foreign to *Cohleth*. That he was in some degree versed in them, might not be improbable, provided we should concede to him the latest period in which the writings of the Old Testament were composed. Grecian philosophy made a conspicuous figure after the time of Socrates and Plato, so that all the nations around the Mediterranean, who had any acquaintance with the Greek language, would be likely, through the medium of their learned men, to have some knowledge of it, or at least some information in respect to it. A mind so strongly bent on inquiry as that of the author of the book before us, could hardly have failed to know something of it, in case he lived as late as the time of Malachi, when Plato was winning renown among all who visited Attica, and especially among all who frequented the groves of *Academos*. It is quite certain that the *Jews* of Alexandria, at a subsequent period, busied themselves much with the works of Plato, for Philo Judaeus was so engrossed by the later Platonism, that it has been said of him, as exhibited in his works, that "it is difficult to tell whether Philo *platonizes*, or Plato *philonizes*." From *Egyptian* Jews, or

other Jews living in Grecian cities, some knowledge of Grecian philosophy might, and probably would, have been attained by Coheleth, had he lived at a period sufficiently late. But of any such knowledge there is not the least trace in the book before us. In my own apprehension, this fact seems to favor two positions in regard to the book: (1) That the author was not an *Egyptian* Jew of a very late period, for in this case some reference would appear in his work to the learning of the age (*i. e.*, the age of the first two Ptolemies, 323—246 B. C.), and also to the country. (2) That he lived at a period before the Jews in Palestine became acquainted, in any good measure, with the Greek language or philosophy, *i. e.*, before the periods when the chieftains of Alexander's divided empire established themselves in all the countries around the eastern shores of the Mediterranean. These considerations make against the position, that Ecclesiastes was composed long after the time of Malachi, and more still against the supposition that it was written after the Persian rule in Palestine had ceased.

But, however all this may be, the fact is certain, that Coheleth exhibits no acquaintance with Grecian philosophy. He is, through and through, a *Palestine-Hebrew*, and most probably an inhabitant either of Jerusalem, or of its near neighborhood. The manner in which he speaks of frequenting religious worship (4: 17—5: 1 seq.), shows that he speaks of it in a way which would be familiar to those who frequented the temple-service.

We have, then, a work before us, not of ontological and metaphysical speculation, but a work of *practical philosophy*. All the reasonings are built on the results of experience; and all the precepts which accompany them, are such as have regard, not to mere *abstract* truth, but to wary, considerate, and sober demeanor. The book begins and ends with one and the same theme; and this theme itself is the result of observation and experience.

The general truth, however, which constitutes this theme, is easily divisible into many particulars, and these require illus-

tration and confirmation. It was the effort to accomplish this object, which gave rise to the apparently variegated and subordinate parts of the work. The general subject is turned round and round; and as often as a new aspect presents itself, the writer stops to describe, to make comments, to show what objections can be made to such a view, and what can be said to confirm and establish it. Nor is it the general theme only which is thus turned round in order to get a view of its different aspects, but the minor particulars, in their turn, are often dealt with in the same way; so that the mere cursory reader is apt to cherish the apprehension, that Coheleth is full of repetitions. A more thorough examination, however, by the aid of competent critical and philological knowledge, will show him, that what he regards as mere repetitions of the same thing, is nothing more nor less than the presentation of the same subject in different attitudes and in different relations. Whatever there is, which strictly speaking is really repeated, is some *general result*, some *ultimate truth* — as it were the focus, toward which all the seemingly divergent rays, when traced back, will be found to converge. It needs much and attentive study to attain to a full perception of this; but with this study, nothing is more certain than that this book, apparently a book of *miscellanies*, assumes the form of a *general unity*; and while all its subordinate parts are interwoven by fine threads, that escape the notice of the more cursory observer, these are the very things which attract and highly excite the attention of inquiring and discerning minds. But of this, more will be said in the sequel.

As a specimen of ancient philosophy, the oldest and the only one among the ancient Hebrews which has come down to us, Ecclesiastes would seem to deserve the notice and attention of modern philosophers, and specially of those who undertake to write the *history* of ancient philosophy. Have the Hebrews, — the only nation on earth, before the Christian era, who had enlightened views of God and of duty, — have they no claim to be

heard on the subject of *practical moral philosophy*? If the book of Coheleth were a Chinese production, or Mantchou-Tartar, or Japanese, the literati of Germany and France, if not of England, would break through all the barriers thrown in their way by remoteness of time and strangeness of language, and with glowing zeal bring before the world the important results of their protracted and laborious examination of it. Every year now bears witness to some feat of this kind, which attracts notice and confers celebrity. But Coheleth — alas! who are the *philosophers* that are investigating his work? Neology has indeed furnished some philologists, who have bestowed on this work, quite recently, much and attentive study, and some of it to quite an important purpose. But even here, the chief attraction seems to be the alleged *scepticism* of the writer. These facts indicate, that there is something very attractive to them, in the hope of finding the ancient Hebrews to have been destitute of any belief in a future state. And as not a few things are said in Ecclesiastes, which appear at first view to support such an allegation in respect to Hebrew opinion, the book has lately become a subject, not unfrequently, of discussion and interpretation. But beyond this class of persons, the matter of critical interpretation sleeps in the same quiet nook, where it laid itself down more than a thousand years ago.

After all, however, it is a just subject of reproof to the *historians of philosophy*, that a specimen of it from a writer of the most truly enlightened and religious nation of all antiquity, should have attracted no more of their attention and regard. But it is easier to follow in the footsteps of the thousands, who have written upon Plato, Aristotle, and Plotinus, than it is to become a sufficient master of the Hebrew to make a radical investigation of the book before us. It is quite plain that the attractions of speculative, metaphysical, and ontological philosophy are far greater, in the view of most philosophical inquirers, than anything which a practical and ethical philosophy can present.

The sayings of the earliest Greek sages, in respect to the nature of things or of men, rouse up more curiosity and excite more interest than any philosopher's sayings among the Hebrews, because the Greek nation elevated the literary standard of the world, while the Hebrews remained without any schools of philosophy, or any considerable cultivation of the arts and sciences. It is to be hoped, that after the *literary* race shall come to a pause, for want of farther ground to move upon, that the *moral* and *practical* philosophy of the Hebrews will begin to attract more attention.

§ 2. *Special Design and Method of the Book.*

I couple these together, because it is difficult, if not impossible, to separate them without incurring the danger of frequent repetition.

The general *nature* of the book, as being of the *ethico-philosophical* cast, has already been described. We come, next in order, to the theme, or themes, which are discussed.

The great and appropriate theme of the whole book, is THE VANITY AND NOTHINGNESS OF ALL EARTHLY EFFORTS, PURSUITS, AND OBJECTS. The book commences with this, and employs an intensity of expression in stating it, that can hardly be exceeded: *Vanity of vanities — vanity of vanities, all is vanity.* The repetition of the word *vanity* in the plur. Gen. that follows in the first case, then the repetition of the whole of the same phrase, and lastly the universality or extent of the proposition (*all is vanity*), conspire to render the expression of the main theme the most intense of which language is capable. Thus commences the book before us; and after passing in review a multitude of particular things which belong to this general category, the discussional part of the book ends with the same declaration: VANITY OF VANITIES; ALL IS VANITY! 12:8.

All the intermediate portions of the book bear a more or less

intimate connection with this main theme. Not less than some twenty-three times is the general proposition repeated, in the same or in equivalent words, at the close of different illustrations and discussions.¹ Like a net of fine threads, this great theme of *vanity* pervades or spreads over the whole work. A minute and close examination will enable any one to see, that the main *thread of discourse* is never lost sight of, however the writer may seem to make temporary excursions. He always returns, as true as the needle to the pole, to the same stand-point from which he started. His "right hand would as soon forget its cunning," as he forsake, or even lose sight of, the main object that he has in view. It is only a few years since this trait of the book before us was discovered and fully announced. But it can hardly hereafter be forgotten.

But when thus much is said for the *unity* of the book, it must not be too rigidly interpreted. It is true, that there are *subordinate themes* in the book, which do not very directly, but only more remotely, contribute to the confirmation of the main theme. The author of the book before us is far enough from being a dull proser. Life and animation reign throughout. He has, indeed, nothing of the technical and formal method of the schoolmen and mere logicians; for his book is anything rather than an enumeration of particulars in regular logical sequency. He comes upon us unexpectedly at times, with a theme apparently incongruous and irrelative, and we feel for the moment that we are thrown off from our track. But he soon shows us that he is only temporarily diverging from the main line, thus giving a striking variety in his particulars, and avoiding the dulness of a slow and uniform movement. He casts a look at everything, in passing; and sometimes he stops a moment, in order to take observation of a new occurrence or a new object, and then resumes his course.

¹ E. g. 1 : 14, 17. 2 : 1, 11, 15, 17, 19, 21, 23, 26. 3 : 19. 4 : 4, 8, 16. 5 : 9. 6 : 2, 9, 11. 7 : 6. 8 : 10, 14. 11 : 8, 10.

Hence it comes, that the reader who does not thoroughly investigate and understand his plan, may be disposed to complain of his apparently discursive and miscellaneous method of composition; but a closer examination will bring him to see that the author has not forgotten what he set out to do, nor turned aside from it, except in cases where additional interest could be given to the whole by special notice of some particular and interesting objects which lie near to the way where he is passing.

The number of things which he specifically presents to our view as *vanities*, is not indeed very great. But he evidently designs that those which he presents should be regarded as specimens of all the rest, which are of a kindred nature and are not mentioned. This is apparent from the declaration at the beginning and end of the book, viz., that *all* is vanity. But those objects which are presented, are seldom dismissed without showing them in their various aspects and relations. For example; *avarice*, or the greedy pursuit of gain, is *repeatedly* brought to view. First, we have it illustrated in the experiments which Coheleth made in his kingly state, in order to find some stable and enduring good, 2:7, 8. The heaping up of treasures in its highest extent he found to be *vanity*. It would not — it could not — confer the happiness desired. Then, again, we are presented with some of the positive evils which attend greediness for gain, 2:18—23. After much toil and vexation, a man must leave all which he has acquired to some one who never contributed in the least to acquire it. He next brings to view severe and dexterous toil for riches, which attracts the envy of others around the successful man, 4:4. He then presents a solitary man, without child or brother, laboring ceaselessly to acquire that which he can bestow on no one whom he cares for, or who cares for him, 4:8. The evils of such a state of seclusion and lonely toil, he illustrates by several proverbial apothegms, 4:9—12. After this, he presents a case, in which there is excessive toil to provide for *children*, and yet all is lost by casualty, or misfortune,

or mismanagement, 5 : 13—17. Another view of the subject is, the case where riches fall into the hands of *strangers*, instead of being inherited by children, 6 : 2. It is easy, with a little attention, to see that each of these developments is attended with its own peculiarities and grievances, while all, when traced back, are found to be united in one central point, viz. the utter insufficiency of riches to procure solid and lasting happiness.

Several subjects are dealt with in like manner, and although they are repeatedly brought before us, yet they are placed each time in a different attitude and in new relations ; and it soon becomes evident that they are insisted on so frequently, not because the author is in want of something to say, but because of their relative importance to his main object.

But one source of evil to man seems to bear upon his mind with more galling, if not heavier, weight than any other, viz., *civil oppression*. If there be any one thing which urges him, beyond all the rest, to be dissatisfied with, or to doubt, the doctrine that wickedness speedily brings punishment, it is the permission and toleration of oppressive and wicked rulers. The first glance he takes of the subject, is directed toward the *bench of justice*, or at least toward the place where justice is looked for, and with right expected. There he finds wickedness to be seated, and iniquity to take the place of righteousness, 3 : 16. His first emotion, called forth by pious feelings, bids him to hope that God will bring oppressors to judgment, 3 : 17. But still farther contemplation of the spectacle makes him almost to despair of the destinies of man, and to feel that Heaven designs men to know that they are little if any better than the beasts, 3 : 18—21. In the midst of this, however, he essays to comfort himself with the thought, that man, although perishable, can after all have some enjoyment at least in the fruit of his labors. But then a renewed look at the effects of oppression, at “the tears of the oppressed who had no comforter,” and the consideration that “on the side of the oppressors was power,” bring him again to a state of des-

pair, even so as to count death more desirable than life, and to wish that he had never been born, 4:1—3. Grievous indeed must have been the oppression under which he groaned, when it forced from him such outbursts of feeling as these. After descanting on the vanity of a greedy desire for riches—and with this the oppression of rulers in their exactions naturally connects itself—his mind again recurs to the ruler of his land, of whom he speaks in terms of great severity: “Better is a poor and a wise child, than an old and foolish king, who will no more be admonished,” 4:13. He next brings the subject of religious duties into view, and seems to return from the consideration of these, with his excitement somewhat abated, and in a state of more calm reflection. He says, that if one “sees the oppression of the poor and violent perverting of judgment and justice,” he must repress his wonder by the reflection, that there is One higher than the highest earthly magistrate, who will take cognizance of the matter, 5:8. In ch. 7:7, he touches again on the subject, and seems to set forth more fully the bitter consequences of oppression, by declaring that “it renders those madmen who practise it, and that bribes destroy their understanding.” But here a caution is introduced against being hastily provoked by oppression, and against comparing the present oppressive times with former and better days, from which no good can come, 7:8—10. Again he sees “the just perishing by his righteousness, and the wicked prolonging his days by wickedness,” 7:15. That is, the one falls a victim to the anger or the avarice of the ruler, and the other buys himself off from the retributions of justice when it threatens to overtake him. Yet even here, he prudently cautions against believing every report that is whispered about respecting rulers, 7:21, 22. He well knew that such matters are wont to be exaggerated. But caution of this nature, as he thinks, may be carried too far. To illustrate this, he introduces one counselling to yield universal and implicit obedience to the ruler, and this as the only means of safety, because the power is in his hands and he

can punish at pleasure, 8:2—4. But to this he answers, that such undistinguishing obedience, rendered through selfish fear of consequences, must lead one to do that which is evil; and that it is better to call to mind that there is a time when all the actions of men will be judged, and both the wicked ruler, and his obedient subject, who was willing to do wrong at his bidding, will be tried and rewarded, because that none can escape the dread season of reckoning, 8:5—8. He sees, indeed, that one rules over another to his great injury; but in looking farther on, he sees the wicked carried out from the city to the tomb, and anticipates that the memory of him will soon perish, 8:9, 10. The passionate and overbearing demeanor of rulers is next alluded to (10:4), and caution given against manifesting offence at it in their presence. That arbitrary power, which sets folly on the seat of dignity, which puts servants upon horses and makes princes to walk on foot as their waiters, is next brought under view, 10:5—7. By various proverbial sayings, he illustrates the importance of a wise and discreet demeanor, on occasions when such things are presented to view; specially does he recommend discretion in regard to what one *says* on such occasions, for his words, if they be severe, may be fatal in their consequences, 10:12—14. Still, his own heart is deeply grieved at the evil; and he breaks out into the pathetic exclamation: “Woe to thee, O land, when thy king is a child, and thy princes feast in the morning!” 10:16, *i. e.*, when thy king is incapable of governing with discretion, and thy princes are luxurious and profligate. It would seem that the *old and foolish king*, mentioned in 4:13, as then reigning had now deccased, and had been succeeded by a mere *child*. Matters, as it appears, had grown no better—the king was now an imbecile, the nobles profligate. In fact, the whole of Chapter X. is occupied with the subject of bad and incompetent rulers, who are represented (vs. 18, 19) as slothful, and as being gluttons and drunkards. This is the last expression of his views and feelings in regard to this “sore evil;” and here, although his

heart is beating high with scorn and indignation, he still protests against "cursing the king," even in the most retired and secret places; for, in some way unexpected, that king may come to the knowledge of the curses uttered, and this will bring additional evil upon the malcontent.

This now, with the preceding case of *avarice*, may serve fully to illustrate my remarks on the alleged discursive method of Coheleth, and the repetitions which are charged upon him. Here, half a score of times and more, the subject of *civil oppression* and *wicked rulers* is brought to view. Yet, no two of these representations are alike. Each time something is added to the strength of the impression already made by the writer. This, then, can hardly be deemed mere *repetition*. On the contrary, since the subject is not presented as a *whole* at any one time and place, it behooved the writer, since he laid the matter so much to heart, *gradually* to fill out the entire picture.

The examples now produced will illustrate the *method* of Coheleth sufficiently for our present purpose. We may deduce from them conclusions, in regard to the manner in which some other topics, particularly that of *wisdom*, are treated in this book. In one sense, the composition is *fragmentary*, *i. e.*, different portions or attitudes of a subject are introduced here and there with various interruptions, and never continuously so as to exhaust the subject in any one passage. In another sense, it is far from being fragmentary. It is no *compound* of scraps, one here and another there, just as the writer might happen to light upon them, or to devise them. It is far remote from being a mere *Collectaneum*, like Robert Southey's memorandum-book, or like the great mass of scrap-books. The seeming fragments are, after all, only portions or particulars of one great whole, and more or less remotely stand related to it, or have a bearing upon it. Those who have not thoroughly examined the book will be slow, perhaps, to believe this. Before they get through the Commentary that follows, however, I would fain hope that they will be ready to admit it.

No impression is more common, than that *Cohleth* is like to the book of Proverbs, in its *manner and method*; and yet this is far, very far, from the truth. Even De Wette says, that "this book attaches itself, in every respect, to the *gnomological and didactic poetry* of the Hebrews," Einl. § 282. Instead of saying (with him) *in every respect*, I should be nearer the truth if I said: *In no respect*. This, indeed, would be going too far; but let us examine and see how much is, or is not, true. As to *poetry*, if *parallelism* be a necessary ingredient of this, then there is little or none of it here. In a few solitary cases, where *apothegms* are quoted, and applied to the subject in hand, we find the usual form of Hebrew proverbs, i. e., *parallelism*. But they belong, not to the writer of the book, but to the maxims which he quotes. In one description, viz., that of old age, in chap. xii., the writer does indeed border very closely on Hebrew poetry; or rather, it is altogether poetry in the spirit of the composition, and it is nearly so in the form of the sentences. But this comprises only seven verses, 12:1—7. Elsewhere there is, now and then, a kind of *couplet*, in which contrast is presented, or some special analogy; and this of course assumes nearly the form of poetry in respect to parallelism. But so it would do, in a writing merely prosaic. With these exceptions, all is *prose*, mere prose, without any attempt to soar on the wings of the Muse.

That the book is *didactic*, I freely admit. But this does not necessarily make it poetic. Some of the later prophets are didactic; the evangelists are didactic; Paul is didactic; but none of these writers are *poets*.

There is some foundation for asserting that the book has a *gnomological cast*; and yet very much less than De Wette seems to suppose. *Gnomes* are *sententiae*, *proverbs*, *maxims*, *apothegms*, i. e., short and pithy sayings. The book of Proverbs, for example, is made up of these, from chap. x. on to the end of the book. The distinguishing trait of them all is, that they are *isolated*, and are without any unity or bond of alliance, excepting

that all are of a proverbial nature. Rarely can more than two verses be found, where the same subject is continued; generally it is dispatched in one verse, which for the most part consists of parallelism, and therefore takes the form of poetry. How different is the case in *Cohemoth*! Here an under-current never fails. The whole is pervaded by that solemn and monitory truth: *ALL IS VANITY*. Discursive, in a measure, are some of the remarks that are made; yet seldom do they go beyond quite narrow bounds. But what all-pervading *unity* is there in the book of Proverbs? Certainly none. Nearly every verse is unlike its nearest neighbor. There are, indeed, *apothegms* in *Cohemoth*. But they are pearls strung upon one and the same string. When they assume a poetic form (parallelism), they are evidently *quotations* and not matters of the writer's own device.

In illustration of what has just been said, I would refer to chap. 10: 8—11. Here are four verses in succession, which at first view seem to be not only independent of each other, but also of the context. They run thus:

(8) He who diggeth a ditch may fall into it; he who breaketh down a wall, a serpent may bite him. (9) He who plucketh up stones may be annoyed by them; he who cleaveth wood will be endangered thereby. (10) If one has dulled the iron, and there is no edge, he swings it so that he may increase the force; an advantage is the dexterous use of wisdom. (11) If the serpent bite without enchantment, then is there no advantage to him that hath a tongue.

In the context it is said that a little folly is ruinous to wisdom; that wisdom or sagacity will be dexterous in the application of proper means to guard against evil. It adduces as a signal example of folly, the conduct of kings who put high personages in low places, and low personages in high places. All this and the like, as the writer means to intimate, wisdom would teach a considerate man to void. Still farther to illustrate the principle in question, he quotes the various apothegms above exhibited, in

which it is shown that, even in the most common affairs of life, the want of wise precaution will occasion mischief. They all differ, indeed, specifically from each other, but all have a unity of object in view. This object is developed in the final clause of v. 10, which declares, that "*the dexterous use of wisdom is an advantage.*" This is doubtless intended as a key to the whole of the seemingly unconnected passage which sounds as if one were reading merely in a book of proverbs. Yet even v. 11, at the close of the apothegms, is clearly of the same tenor as the rest. The meaning plainly is, that he who has a tongue that can enchant, should be wise enough to employ it to purpose, at a time when he is in danger from serpents; otherwise his tongue of enchantment is of no use to him, because he lacks wisdom to know when to use it. After all this, the author goes on to show how often and how easily the words of a fool injure him, for want of discretion or wisdom.

In all this, now, the most prominent of all the apothegmatic passages in Coheleth, there is not a single instance in which the proverb is quoted for its own sake, but merely to illustrate the sentiment of the writer, that, even in the most common concerns and transactions of life, discretion and foresight are needed, in order to avoid danger, and to make undertakings successful.

Let us now adduce another example, that will show the manner in which a *single* apothegm is quoted, merely for the purpose of illustrating a sentiment of the text. In 7 : 1, we find the declaration: "A good name is better than precious ointment." But why say this? The writer had been saying nothing about the desirableness or importance of a *good name*. The sentiment in itself seems wholly foreign to his purpose. It is so, in fact, as it regards what he has already said, but not so in regard to what he is going to say; for he immediately subjoins to the declaration: "The day of death [is better] than the day of one's birth." The two parts of the verse are members of a comparison. What is meant, is simply this: "The day of one's death is as much

better than that of his birth, as a good name is better than precious ointment." Yet between the members of this comparison, there is no *particle* of similitude inserted (e. g. כִּי *as*, or $\text{מִן$ *better than*). But here is a fair specimen of the peculiar idiom of the Hebrew. In scores of cases, perhaps even in the greater number, where *comparison* is made, there is no other particle employed but וְ , which, in such cases, should be rendered *and so*. Our translators seem to have been in a great measure unacquainted with this peculiar idiom of the language; and consequently, they have often given an appearance of incongruity to expressions in English, where mere *comparison* is aimed at in the Hebrew. Almost everywhere, in the book of Proverbs, have they seemed to overlook this distinctive idiom, in regard to the particle in question. The Hebrews said: "Such a thing is so or so; *and* such another thing is so or so," when the meaning is simply: "*As* such a thing is, *so* is such another thing." How many apparent difficulties of the sacred text would be easily solved, by a correct view of this principle, the attentive and critical reader may easily discern. In the case above, it is no part of the writer's object to teach us simply that fame is better than perfumed oil; for although it be true, yet by itself it is not apposite here, and in itself it would hardly need inspiration to teach it, nor would it add much to the didactics of the book. But this common and well-known proverb is cited for the purpose of illustrating a much graver sentiment, to which all readers would not so readily accede. When this purpose is answered, the design of quoting the proverb is fully accomplished.

Again; in chap. 10 : 1, we have a declaration, that seems more remote still from the context, and which almost startles one, at first, by its apparent incongruity. It runs thus: "Dead flies make the ointment of the apothecary to stink; to ferment, — a little folly is more weighty than wisdom, and also than what is costly." Plainly, the first clause is not cited for the sake of disclosing the physical fact or truth in question; for this was of

small moment, and wholly foreign to the writer's object. But this acknowledged physical truth is adduced because it affords a striking ground of comparison. The plain sentiment of the whole is: "As dead flies — those little insignificant animals — will corrupt and destroy the most precious ointment, so a little of folly will mar all the plans of wisdom, and prevent any advantage from them." The sequel brings to view many cases, where the want of wisdom, or rather a little of positive folly, ruins undertakings of many different kinds.

The examples produced are sufficient for our present purpose. They are a fair specimen of all the proverbs contained in Coheleth. How then can we concede to De Wette, that, on the ground of such apothegms — which after all are not very numerous — this book — Ecclesiastes — must *in every respect* be classed with the *gnomological* writings of the Hebrews? When Solomon writes *proverbs*, or selects them, he does so for their own sake, *i. e.*, because of the instruction which they are designed to convey of and in themselves. But this Coheleth never does. The primary meaning of them is not what he designs to inculcate; but, taking this as a conceded truth, he builds on it a comparison or illustration.

Had De Wette said merely, that the style of Coheleth in many respects resembles that of the gnomological books of the Hebrews, he would have said what is evident on the very first opening of the book. Everywhere this presents itself. For example:

(Chap. 7: 4.) The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of the fool is in the house of mirth. (5) It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise, than for a man to hear the song of fools. (7) Surely oppression maketh mad a wise man, and a gift destroyeth the heart. (8) Better is the end of a thing, than the beginning thereof; the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit. (9) Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry, for anger resteth in the bosom of fools.

(Chap. 10 : 13). The beginning of the words of his [the fool's] mouth is folly, and the ending of his mouth is grievous madness. (14) The fool multiplieth words, when no man can know what shall be ; for what shall be after him, who can tell ? (Chap. 11 : 1.) Cast thy bread upon the waters, for after many days thou shalt find it. (2) Make a portion into seven, and even into eight, for thou knowest not evil which shall be on earth. (4) He who watcheth the wind will not sow, and he who observeth the clouds will not reap. (7) Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the light of the sun. (9) Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and let thine heart cheer thee in the days of thine early life ; and walk thou in the way of thy desire, and by the sight of thine eyes. (10) Put away vexation from thy heart, and remove evil from thy flesh.

These are striking specimens of the sententious. But these might be increased by many more, from almost all parts of the book. Their first appearance is that of mere *gnomes*. A closer examination, however, shows that beneath them all there is an under-current. Unlike the Book of Proverbs, they all refer to some position which is designed to be illustrated or confirmed.

It should be remembered, in a *critique* on the style of Coheleth or his method of writing, that the book is not one of *narration* or *history*. The only part which approaches narration is a portion of chap. ii., which relates Coheleth's experience. But even here, the style approaches the sententious. The rest is *philosophizing*. Not a treatise on moral philosophy ; not a digest of practical and ethical science, orderly and consecutively laid down ; nor yet, on the other hand, a mere mass of *miscellany*. There is a *plan* — an evident plan or design — running through the whole. But one must not look for a chapter of Dr. Paley's moral philosophy here, or of Reinhardt's science of ethics. The Aristotelian logic was not in fashion among the Hebrews, and probably would not have been, had our author lived five hundred years earlier than he did. Successive syllogisms, in logical succession and continuity, are not to be found in the Hebrew writings.

Even the discourses of Christ himself do not exhibit them ; and Paul, the greatest logician of all the sacred writers, even in the epistles to the Romans, Galatians, and Hebrews, has nothing that even approaches the *school-logic*. Nothing can be more diverse from such methods of argument as Paley, Locke, Bentley, and Whewell employ, than the whole mass of the Hebrew writings, earlier and later. The Hebrews address the understanding and the heart directly with the declarations of truth, and never rely on any syllogistic concatenations of reasoning. And what all others do, Coheleth does. He brings one matter and another before us ; says something important and to be remembered concerning it ; and then passes on to other kindred subjects. When occasion prompts, he calls up again the same subject, and says something else about it, equally to be remembered. And it is thus that Coheleth moralizes and philosophizes, through his whole book.

It is evident from the nature of the book — a book of practical ethical philosophy — that there must be, in some respects, a *diction* peculiar to itself ; I mean, that language adapted to *philosophy* must be employed. Hence many words in the book, which are not elsewhere found in the Hebrew. To this account, I can hardly doubt, not a few of the words may be put, which are classed by Knobel and others among the later or the latest Hebrew. We shall see, on another occasion, that there are serious difficulties in the way of a part of this classification, inasmuch as the Phœnician monuments exhibit many such words, which must of course have belonged to the *older* Hebrew.

I have stated, at the beginning of this section, the great and leading design of the book before us. *The vanity and utter insufficiency of all earthly pursuits and objects to confer solid and lasting happiness*, is the theme with which the book begins and ends ; and which, as we have seen, spreads as a network over all its intermediate and subordinate parts. But there are other objects also in view, besides the illustration and confirmation of this

great proposition. The writer not only presents us with the pictures of many of the trials and disappointments of life, but also *instructs his readers how to demean themselves when these occur*. Doubtless this is second only to the main object of the work. It would have been of little avail to convince men in what a vain and perishing world they live—for their own experience and observation would teach them this;—he felt it incumbent on him to tell them also what they should do, when placed in this danger or that, in this trial and state of suffering or in that, amid these disappointments and those. Salutory in a high degree are many of his precepts. They are instinct with life, and clothed with energy of language; and springing, as they usually do, from the occasion of the moment, are destitute of all the formality, the stiffness, and the tameness of a string of ordinary moral and practical precepts.

That the writer was a nice observer of human life and actions, as well as of the nature and course of things, no one will deny. That he had moral and practical ends in view, subservient to sober, cautious, and prudent demeanor; that he was penetrated with the deepest reverence for God, and inculcates the most unqualified confidence in him and submission to him, lies in open day and on the very face of his work. That he was no Epicurean, no Fatalist (in the heathen sense), and on the great points of morality and of religion no sceptic, will appear quite clear, as it seems to me, to every attentive and candid reader. To the numerous charges preferred against him in these respects, the result of hasty one-sided views of his book, the Commentary will, as I hope and trust, be a sufficient refutation.

That a great variety of precept—moral, prudential, and religious—should be the result of his plan, is evident. Instead of embodying in one series the directions which he gives, as results of his various investigations and reflection,—which is what most writers of our day would do,—he everywhere intermingles his advice or commands with the occasions that prompted them.