



Pondering  
the  
Proverbs

# **PONDERING THE PROVERBS**

## **INTRODUCING**

*The Author — Solomon*

*The Plan Of His Book*

*An Analysis Of Its Contents*

## **AND**

*Meditations On*

*The Proverbs By*

*Brother R. Roberts*

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*The cover of this book has been specifically chosen for the symbolic significance of its colour. Brass, or copper, in the Bible is used to symbolise flesh purified. As such it found its place in the Tabernacle of witness, in the appearance of the mystical man of Daniel 10:6, and in the composite metals of the "one like unto the Son of Man" of Revelation 1:15. It was the brass of the censers of sinners, having been purified by divine fire, that provided a Memorial covering before Yahweh for the altar of burnt offering (Numbers 16:37-40). The Memorial taught that flesh must not presume in its approach in worship to Yahweh; but needs to bear in mind the reverence that such worship requires, and the obedience it demands.*

*The Book of Proverbs provides practical guidance for acceptable living in the sight of Yahweh. It teaches that the Truth is not a matter of mere academic understanding, but must find its outworking in the normal business of life: in the home, the office, and the meeting place. It sets forth a way of life, and standards of living that are being abandoned by modern society, but which followers of the Lord must respect and live by if they desire to attain unto life eternal. Because of the importance of this theme, it was thought desirable to select the subject of Proverbs for the End of the Year Studies by the Adelaide Suburban Young People's Group for 1983, and we were set the task of expounding the words of Solomon the wise. In addition to the spoken exposition some written record was thought helpful as a basis for further study of The Book of Proverbs. This book is the result. It provides an outline of the character of Solomon, an epitome of the book he wrote, and a skeleton analysis of its various sections.*

*In addition, we have also added comments from the pen of Brother Robert Roberts (not available elsewhere) on a number of Proverbs. This section will illustrate how the Proverbs can be interpreted and applied. If time permits at a later date, we may add to the book, in a more detailed exposition of it.*

*However, such projects are subject to the will of the Lord. The signs show that Christ is at the door; Wisdom dictates that preparation be made for his coming; a study of The Book of Proverbs will help. It will reveal principles that if applied will stand believers in good stead when at last the Lord returns to reward all according as their works have been. So Wisdom therein is represented as proclaiming: "Whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil" (Proverbs 1:33).*

*H. P. Mansfield  
December, 1983*

# Foreword

## The Book of Proverbs

The Bible does for us what no other book can do; it shows us the mind and purpose of our Maker, and tells us how we can give Him pleasure. It sets out for us the fundamental principles which should guide our lives; they are summarised for us by the Lord Jesus in two great commandments, love of God and love of neighbour. Then it depicts for us in glowing pen pictures the glories which God has prepared for those who love Him, and serve Him with zeal and faithfulness. But the general principles, though all important and necessary as a foundation have to be applied to all the details of our lives, and there comes the rub. It is easy to recognise as an abstract principle that we must love one another; but it is not easy when it comes to the application, in some cases at any rate. It is easy to recognise that we must love God, but not so easy to give up the pleasures of this world to devote ourselves to His service. God has laid down the general principles which should guide our lives, but He has done much more in giving us a rich fund of practical advice for our guidance in the special circumstances in which we may find ourselves. This is found here and there in the rest of the scriptures, but the Book of Proverbs is full of it. The book begins with a description of the wisdom which is "profitable to direct;" with the general principles without which nothing can be done with any satisfaction. It also contains very many practical maxims which will be of the greatest service in difficult situations, provided we can remember them and apply them at the right time. But a man might have his mind chock-full of maxims, and might apply them justly and with due discrimination, and still have a mind far from godly. Solomon recognises this in the introduction to his collection of proverbs when he praises divine wisdom and describes it as the most precious of earthly possessions. The love of which the Apostle Paul writes in his letter to the Corinthians is very much the same thing. A man may bestow all his goods

to feed the poor, may give his body to be burned, and do many other great things and be profited nothing, unless he have the real root of the matter in him. In another place the apostle tells us that we must cultivate the mind of the spirit if we are to please God. The same lesson is taught by the Lord Jesus himself when he tells us we cannot bring forth good fruit unless we abide in him, that is unless we have learned of him the lesson of full submission and obedience to God. But provided we do not neglect this necessary preliminary of the transformation of our minds we shall find very much profitable advice in the words of Solomon, or rather of God through him. What shall we do when we have to deal with an angry man? "A soft answer turneth away wrath." What of when we are inclined to let our tongues run away with us? "Even a fool when he holdeth his peace is counted wise." Have we riches or are we busily engaged in making them? Let us remember that "riches profit not in the day of wrath; but righteousness delivereth from death". Are we tempted to be miserly and withhold what should be devoted to God, our brother or our neighbour? Then let us call to mind this proverb, "There is that scattereth and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty". Are we inclined to neglect our work, the work given us by God, and live idle days? Solomon tells us that "the hand of the diligent shall bear rule; but the slothful shall be under tribute." Are we tempted to go our own way rejecting all help from others? Then we have forgotten that "two are better than one," and that "in the multitude of counsellors is wisdom". But here we must exercise discretion. "The simple believeth every word; but the prudent man looketh well to his going." We must seek good counsellors and carefully weigh their advice before acting on it. Are we tempted to despise the poor and toady to the rich, as James tells us some did in his day? We read in the Proverbs, "Whoso mocketh the poor reproacheth his Maker." Do we rejoice in the troubles of another? "He that is glad at calamities shall not be unpunished." Are we by nature hard and unforgiving? Solomon tells us it is the glory of a man to pass over a transgression, and in another place warns us not to fret ourselves because of evil men nor be envious of the

wicked. Remembering that we shall find ourselves all the more ready to forgive an injury or insult. What an exhortation to diligent industry we have in Solomon's exhortation to consider the ant! What a warning against an undue conceit of ourselves when we read that pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall! What a warning against inconsiderate speech in the proverb. "He that keepeth his mouth keepeth his life," and what encouragement to sound speech in that which describes a word fitly spoken as being like "apples of gold in pictures of silver!" What warning against seeking excuses for and condoning sin when we read this proverb, "He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, even they both are an abomination to the Lord!" And finally what comfort when we read that the Lord will direct the paths of those who trust in Him and lean upon Him! There is help and guidance in this wonderful book for all the circumstances in which we may find ourselves, whether at home or out at business, whether in prosperity or in adversity, whether in joy or in sorrow. There is a warning of the pitfalls that beset our way, and comfort and encouragement to stimulate us to overcome all the obstacles in our path. Let us study these proverbs carefully, or they will not be at our beck and call when we need them.

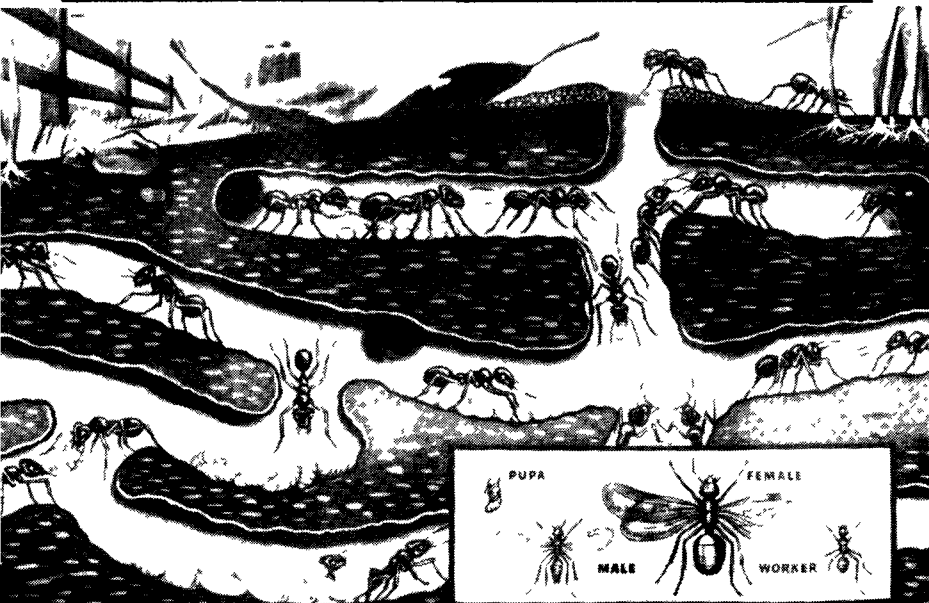
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### Proper Decorum

The Proverbs set forth principles of good manners. In public or in private let a sensible decorum govern and prevail. The follower of Christ is not a sloven. He washes his hands before meat, not as a Pharisee, but a man sensible of true refinement. He orders his words, his gestures, his attitude in prayer, in reading, in address, by a quickened reason and an instructed feeling. He uses forms but does not abuse them, follows rules, though is not enslaved by them, remembers times and does not scorn punctuality. In manner he is neither slipshod, trifling nor rude, but careful, sincere, and earnest. Whether he is alone before God, or in company before others, he considers what is meet and seemly, seeking to be guided by the Word, and constantly remembering what he is doing.

**"GO TO THE ANT THOU SLUGGARD..."**

As a scientist, Solomon was a myrmecologist; that is, he made a study of ants, and applied the lessons learned to the practical issues of life: "Go to the ant thou sluggard," he wrote, "consider her ways and be wise" (Prov. 6:6-8). A colony of ants is like a hive of bees: it revolves around the queen, and the rest of the community is separated into workers, foragers, nurses, and skilled nest-builders. With total disregard of their own convenience, they will combine to work for the good of the colony, or to fight and repel an enemy, no matter how powerful he may be. The ant is an exceedingly useful little insect, waging war on termites and so protecting plant life. It has been claimed that Australia would soon be reduced to a waste desert but for this protective war of the ants. The ant is a skilful architect and builder. The illustration above, from *The Wonderbook of Knowledge* (A Colorgravure Publication) depicts an underground ant-nest with its well-planned egg chambers, nurseries and numerous passageways, a monument to the traditional industry and intelligence of the ant. And, above all, to the co-operative labour of these small, and oft-despised insects. Solomon declared: "Which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest". The industry, skill and co-operative genius of ants are attributes that Solomon called upon his readers to emulate. No strike occurs in an ant colony; no attempt on the part of one worker to lord it over another, or for a forager ant to usurp the position of the queen. Each is busily engaged in its own work in the general community, content to labour for the good of all. Where does the ant get the wisdom to do this? From God. Naturalists call it instinct; but it is a God-given, in-built characteristic. We can develop a God-given motivation by exercising our minds according to the instruction of Wisdom as outlined in *The Book of Proverbs*. Without its God-given instinct the ant would not function properly, nor will we in the community of Christ, unless we, through the strength of God obtained from the Word, learn thereby to subordinate our will to the common good. Many powerful lessons, drawn from nature, are recorded in the writings of Solomon the scientist.



# Introduction

## The Setting of Proverbs In The Bible

### The Divine Arrangement Of The Bible

Paul taught that "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

In the Greek, the words "is given by inspiration of God" are translated from only one word: *Theopneustos*, signifying "God-breathed". The Bible is the Inspired word of God because it was "God-breathed". It is impossible to speak without breathing forth, hence the idea behind the Greek word for *Inspiration*.

Paul's use of the term seems to be based on Genesis 2:7: "Yahweh Elohim formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and man became a living soul". Before this God-breathed action, man had form but no life; and as such was of little use to his Creator. But the breathing forth of God caused him to live and move, as well as have being, and in doing so, to glorify his Maker. God's breathing forth resulted in natural life and activity. That, however, is but the basis for greater activity before Him in spiritual life in which He particularly delights. To live in the fullest extent before Him, mankind again needs that which is "God-breathed" "All Scripture" is provided to that end. It is *God-breathed* with the purpose of developing fulness of Life: or spiritual life.

But the work of Inspiration is not limited to the words of Scripture but also in the arrangement of the books of the Bible. So effectively has this been done, as to give added point to the plan of Redemption. Hence the Old Testament concludes with the cryptic words: *a curse* (Mal. 4:6), whilst the New Testament opens by describing the birth of the one who would take away the curse! There is similar orderly development in all books of the Bible. They set forth the purpose of God in proper sequence: First *Law* (Genesis to Deuteronomy); then its application or otherwise in *History* (from Conquest, to Kingdom, to Dispersion — Joshua to Esther); then *Poetry* (Job to Song of Solomon); finally *Prophecy* (Isaiah to Malachi). The first sets forth what Yahweh requires; the second shows how flesh fails; the third provides for grace; the last sets forth hope.

## The Five Poetical Books of Grace

There are five poetical books placed together in order. Both the number and sequence are significant. As regards the number, five represents grace in Bible numerology; and these five poetical books sing the song of Divine grace. In doing so they set forth five progressive stages towards true happiness, from sorrowful sadness to joyful communion. Thus:

*Job* — Blessing through Suffering;  
*Psalms* — Rejoicing in Hope;  
*Proverbs* — Discipline through Precepts;  
*Ecclesiastes* — Profiting from Experience;  
*Song of Solomon* — Final Consolation: Communion with Christ.

Note the five clear developments leading to the final consummation. The sufferings of Job gave way to great blessings in the end, of benefit to him and his friends. So it is in life. Job teaches the lesson that it is “through much tribulation that we enter the kingdom of god” (Acts 14:22). Hence the exhortation to consider “the patience of Job” (James 5:11).

Suffering is humbling in its effect; but the goodness of God is elevating, and when both are fused there is established the basis of true worship in prayer and praise, for one leads to the other. Prayer and praise join to provide the theme of Psalms, as David and others like him, were enabled to rejoice in hope. So Psalms is placed after *The Book of Job* in the Bible.

However, hope is not an abstract quality but one that must motivate action (Rom. 8:24-25). If disciples are to hope with confidence, they must build into their characters the divine attributes incorporated in the Name of Yahweh (Exod. 34:6-7), and revealed in His Son. So *The Book of Proverbs* records the instruction of a father to his son, and the practical discipline of wisdom in life as it is lived today. The application of Wisdom is illustrated in the parables, prophecies and precepts of this most interesting and intriguing book of the Bible. Being a book of practical instruction, it is appropriate that *Proverbs* be placed in the centre of these five poetical books. It links the praise of Psalms with the solemn warning of Ecclesiastes. Whereas the emotion of love is expressed in the prayers and praises of the Psalms, the fear of Yahweh is emphasised in *Proverbs* (Prov. 1:7). Both love and fear are necessary for true acceptable worship in Christ. The former prevents the latter degenerating into mere servility; the latter prevents the former from becoming too familiar. A blend of both draws us closer to Yahweh whilst elevating the respect and filial love that is due to Him. In consequence, those so motivated, honour Him as a Father, and obey Him as a Master (see Malachi 1:6).

The next step towards the final consummation is set forth in *The Book of Ecclesiastes*. It records the experiences of Solomon in daily living. It describes him as searching for the greatest good in life. The reader is conducted through the maze of life's experiences to learn that nothing is of permanent satisfaction, or of real value, except one thing: “Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole man” (*duty* should be eliminated — Ecc. 12:13). Solomon learned that lesson, not through the revelation of Inspiration, but by applying the wisdom granted him in a quest for the greatest, lasting good. He set himself the task of finding this, and learned that nothing “under the sun” satisfied the innate craving of the heart. He had to reach up beyond created things, and that, of course, drew him to God. All other avenues of research failed to provide lasting satisfaction or unending pleasure. In each case, the early excitement palled, and success or attainment proved empty in the end. At first, the very novelty of something new captivated the interest, but it was not maintained. He found that worldly wisdom only increased sorrow as it made more obvious the hopelessness of man's problems (Ecc. 1:18); he tried mirth, and for a time it seemed to offer satisfying relaxation, but soon the laughter became hollow, and excess brought only headache to match the heartache that worldly wisdom brought (ch. 2:1-3). Culture, both of music and of the arts were tried by Solomon, and he rejoiced in them for a time, but then they began to stale (Ecc. 2:10-11). Wealth and honour became his, but they were not lasting (Ecc. 2:16); the fact of mortality limits their present use, and who knows to what purpose others shall apply the things acquired and left behind when this life ceases (Ch. 2:18-19)?

Solomon's search, aided by his wisdom, revealed that worldly attainments fail to satisfy, and led him to consider the only avenue remaining: that which is above the sun. This led him to the final conclusion: God and His eternal purpose. Consideration of that theme never palls nor stales; and by applying his outstanding wisdom to the normal experiences of life he discovered the greatest and eternally lasting good: “Fear God, and keep His commandments: for this is the whole man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil” (Ecc. 12:14). Inspired revelation and the application of wisdom to the normal circumstances of life combine to teach that lesson. The Truth has promise “of the life that now is, and of that which is to come” (1 Tim. 4:8).

In the Bible, Ecclesiastes provides a bridge between *Proverbs* and the final poetic book: the *Song of Solomon*. This Song is a wonderful, thought-provoking, spiritually stimulating parable of the love of Christ for his Bride; her love for him; and the glorious, ultimate consummation: the sweet intimacy of communion in the age to come, when it will

be proclaimed: "The marriage of the Lamb is come, for his wife hath made herself ready" (Rev. 19:7).

These five poetical books provide the steps of grace leading to the great and satisfying conclusion: Life with Christ in the Kingdom of God.

## The Author of the Book

### The Significance of His Birth

The name Solomon is derived from the Hebrew word *Shalom* signifying "peace". But the basic root word, *shalam* means more than mere cessation of war; it signifies "peace" in the sense of oneness, unity, fellowship. It was a name that David and Bathsheba gave their child because of a most important development in their relationship with Yahweh.

The unfortunate sin of David had caused a breach between him and God. It gave occasion for the enemies of Yahweh to blaspheme, and therefore the divine displeasure had to be clearly revealed; as it was in the tragic events that afflicted David and his family following that sad incident.

But the birth of Solomon signalled the restoration of David to divine favour. According to the order of names in 1 Chron. 3:5, he was the *youngest* of five sons born to David and Bathsheba. The eldest — the child of the adultery — died in infancy. The other three were Shimea, Shobab, and Nathan, of whom the latter became the ancestor of Christ after the extinction of Solomon's line in the person of Jeconiah (Jer. 22:30; Luke 3:31). The account in 2 Sam. 12:24 passes over the births of Solomon's brothers, and links the death of the first son with the birth of Solomon because of the significance of the latter. A special name was given by Yahweh to the newly born child. Through the prophet Nathan He proclaimed that his name was to be Jedidiah, or *Beloved of Yahweh* (2 Sam. 12:25). The reason being, we are told, that "Yahweh loved him". This suggests two things: Solomon was granted unusual gifts by God; and the message received by David through Nathan implied David's full restoration to divine favour.

In grateful recognition of this, David named the little boy, Solomon. He was at *peace* with God; Yahweh had fully forgiven his indiscretion. In that regard, it is probably significant that Solomon was the *fifth* son of David and Bathsheba, for in Bible numerology, five is the number of *Grace*.

It is also obvious from *The Book of Proverbs* that Solomon was greatly influenced by his mother (see also 1 Kings 1:11-12). Indeed, her character shines through the book in a very good light. She is de-

scribed as joining with David in carefully instructing her young son in the principles of righteousness, and in grooming him for Kingship. Through Solomon's reminiscences, the reader is taken into the palace of David, and told of the careful instruction that the young boy received from both parents. They supported each other in their admonitions to the one "born to be king". Listen to Solomon's own words:

"Hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother" (Prov. 1:8).

"For I was my father's son, tender and only beloved in the sight of my mother. He taught me also, and said unto me, Let thine heart retain my words: keep my commandments, and live . . ." (Prov. 4:3-4).

References to the obligations of sons towards their mothers is frequent throughout the book, and were doubtless influenced by what Solomon heard in early youth, as he experienced the discipline (instruction) of his father, supplemented by the commandments of his mother.

Bathsheba personally and anxiously warned and advised Solomon of things to avoid and attributes to encourage. Her words are recorded in the last chapter of Proverbs. The chapter is divided into two parts: first the discipline that Solomon, as King, should observe in his own conduct; and secondly (vv. 10-31), the woman he should select as his bride. Though directly applied to Solomon, these verses also have a typical import as relating to the greater than Solomon, and to his multitudinous Bride, the perfected Ecclesia.

The chapter is prefaced by the statement:

"The words of king Lemuel, the prophecy that his mother taught him" (Prov. 31:1).

Lemuel signifies *Devoted to God (El)*, and perhaps relates to Solomon's own response to the extraordinary circumstances of his birth and upbringing. Yahweh named him Jedidiah, or *Beloved of Yahweh*; David responded by calling him Solomon *I have found Peace*; Solomon accepted the responsibility by assuming the name Lemuel: *I am devoted to El*.

### Solomon In Marriage

Solomon is known for his wisdom, his multiplicity of wives, and for worship in the glorious Temple that graced Jerusalem he was permitted to build. Generally, a wrong conception is held regarding him in connection with his wives. They were not wives in the normal usage of the word, but more in the nature of hostages. They were the daughters or female relations of foreign kings or nobles taken by Solomon into his harem in order to secure or consolidate alliances with those nations. Solomon apparently did not have a numerous progeny, and does not appear to have been of libidinous disposition as is sometimes imagined. His main wife was the Egyptian princess whom he brought out

of Egypt, and who, evidently, embraced the covenant of truth.

In contrast to Solomon's other "wives" who were given dwellings outside Jerusalem on the Mount of Olives, and which subsequently became known as the Mount of Corruption because of the shrines he permitted them to build there, Solomon's Egyptian bride dwelt in the City of David where the ark rested (1 Kings 9:24; 2 Chron. 8:11), though later the king built a special palace for her exclusive use, in which she dwelt in regal splendour. Its "beams were of cedar and rafters of fir" (Song 1:17); and in design it was similar to the royal palace where Solomon sat to judge the people. The record states:

"Solomon made also an house for Pharaoh's daughter whom he had taken to wife . . . all were of costly stones . . . and the foundation was of costly stones" (1 Kings 7:8-10).

There is remarkable similarity between this description, and that of the New Jerusalem, likened to the Lamb's Bride. John wrote:

"And I, John, saw the Holy City, New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven . . . and the foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones" (Rev. 21:2,19).

The multitudinous Bride of Christ, like Solomon's chief wife, is taken out of spiritual Egypt, and is invited to inhabit the "house" that the Bridegroom is preparing. He declared:

"In my Father's house are many abiding places; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you" (John 14:2).

Unlike Solomon's other wives (1 Kings 11:1 — mg.), nothing derogative is recorded of this Bride out of Egypt. He married her whilst he was still in favor with Yahweh, and evidently she accepted the hope of Israel, for there is no reference to him ever building a shrine to any Egyptian gods. Some have thought that 2 Chronicles 8:11 reflects adversely upon her, but a closer consideration of it reveals that this is not so. The passage states:

"Solomon brought up the daughter of Pharaoh out of the city of David unto the house that he had built for her: for he said, My wife shall not dwell in the house of David king of Israel, because the places are holy, whereunto the ark of Yahweh hath come."

Apparently she was permitted to dwell in the city of David whilst her own house was being built in the western portion of the city of Jerusalem. Afterwards, however, she removed to her own palace adjacent to that of Solomon. Probably, her original place of abode in the city of David was later required for the Temple worship. Hence the words of Solomon above. They are not directed against Pharaoh's daughter specifically, but against any wife of Solomon, and can be rendered: "No wife of mine shall dwell in the house of David" (see Cambridge Bible, Rotherham, etc.).

It was inappropriate for any wife of Solomon to dwell permanently in the house of David for two reasons: (1) — she should be in Sol-

omon's establishment: (2) — the site of David's house was holy (a) because it was in the area to where the ark had been taken; and (b) it was required for general worship.

The sojourn of Pharaoh's daughter in the house of David adjacent to where the ark rested, was but a temporary arrangement, until her own house was built. In a figure it was comparable to the Ecclesia awaiting the establishment of the Kingdom in glory.

Another passage of Scripture, having bearing upon the Song of Solomon, is Proverbs 31. It records instruction that King Lemuel received from his mother concerning the choice of a bride. Lemuel, whose name means *Devoted to El*, is identified with Solomon, whose second name means *Beloved of Yah* (2 Sam. 12:25). He was recommended to seek for "a virtuous woman," as a bride, whose qualities would measure up to those listed in the closing verses of the chapter.

Earlier in the book, warnings are issued against the seductive influence of "strange women" who would draw their dupes away from the truth (Prov. 6:24; 20:16; 23:27; 27:13). The same word is used in 1 Kings 11:1 to describe Solomon's other wives. Evidently he spoke from personal experience. The Hebrew word used to describe these "strange women" is *nokkee*, signifying "foreign." The word relates to foreign women who would introduce their foreign ideas into the nation, as did Solomon's wives.

Proverbs also refers to another "strange woman" (see Prov. 2:16; 5:3,20; 7:5; 22:14; 23:33) who would incite to adultery. The context of these chapters reveals that the adultery is religious more than moral. The Hebrew word is *zuwr* and signifies "to turn aside." It therefore relates to an apostate Israelitish woman "who forsaketh the guide of her youth, and forgetteth the covenant of her God" (Prov. 2:17).

These "strange women" type apostates within the Ecclesia who turn aside from the things of God.

Proverbs urges us to be on our guard against both:

- (1) Outside foreign friendships which can lure away from the Truth.
- (2) Apostate brethren within the Ecclesia who would turn others aside from the Truth.

Both must be avoided.

Among the characteristics admired in the virtuous woman of Proverbs 31 are her integrity (vv. 11-12), industry (vv. 13-15), prudence (vv. 16-18), skill (v. 19), charity (v. 20), wisdom (v. 21), clothing (v. 22), repute (v. 23), self-reliance (v. 24), and kindness (v. 26).

These are qualities that should be developed by both male and female members of Christ's bride.

The Bride of the Song of Solomon has the qualities of that virtuous woman. Her whole character is summed up in the statement: "Favor



(Heb. *chen*, grace of manner, or deportment, which can be assumed in order to hide real feelings) is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth Yahweh, she shall be praised" (Prov. 31:30).

Assuming that Proverbs 31 comprises advice originally given to Solomon regarding the selection of a bride, and that Pharaoh's daughter became his choice, surely we can conclude that Psalm 45 comprises the hymn composed to celebrate the marriage.

It is, of course, a prophetic Psalm pointing forward to the union of Christ and his Bride in the age to come: but as with so many similar Psalms, it has an historical background, which appears to be the marriage of Solomon.

The superscription describes it as "*A Song of loves.*" The word "loves" is from the Hebrew *yediyd*, Beloved, which is portion of Solomon's second name as given in 2 Sam. 12:25: Yedidiah.

The Psalm describes the glory and beauty of the King and his Consort, and addressing the latter, exhorts her in the following words:

"Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear; forget also thine own people, and thy father's house; so shall the king greatly desire thy beauty; for he is thy Lord; and worship thou him!"

These words well fit the idea of the Queen having come out of Egypt. Moreover, she is also described as a "daughter of a king" (v. 13 — see Moffatt), which, likewise, agrees with the status of Pharaoh's daughter in the land of her nativity, whilst in the land of her adoption, she was the wife of a king.

The expressions of this Psalm are remarkably related to those of the Song of Solomon, and suggest that it is virtually an epitome of the larger book.

The characters described therein are also alike, for besides the King and his Bride, there are the onlookers who praise the glory of the King and the beauty of his Consort (see also Song 3:11); there are the virgin companions of the Bride who comprise part of the multitudinous Bridal train (cp. Song 1:3), and there are the nations who submit to the authority and military prowess of the king (cp. Song 3:8).

But, of greatest significance is the fact that the Psalm is undeniably prophetic of Christ.

This is established by the fact that the statement addressed to the King: "Thy throne, O God (Elohim) is for ever and ever; the sceptre of thy kingdom is a right sceptre" (Psa. 45:6), is said by Paul to be addressed to the Son (Heb. 1:8-9): "Unto the Son He saith . . ."

The King is praised for his regal glory (v. 2), speech (v. 2), valour (v. 3), prosperity of his reign (v. 4), conquests (v. 5), stability of his rule (v. 6), moral attributes (v. 7), splendor (v. 7), universal approbation (v. 8).

The Bride is praised for her inward virtues (v. 13), outward beauty (v. 13), attire and retinue (v. 14), position and status (vv. 9,15), her

fruitfulness in prosperity (v. 16).

The powerful exhortation delivered to her (v. 10 quoted above), epitomises that which the King Messiah desires to see in all members of his multitudinous bride, which, like Solomon's numerous "wives" will be drawn from all nations.

Note the gradation:

"**Hearken**" — attend to the Word:

"**Consider**" — apply its principles;

"**Incline**" — render obedience;

"**Forget**" — separate yourself.

It is obvious, therefore, that the theme of Christ as the Bridegroom, and the Ecclesia as the Bride, is not unique to the Song of Solomon, but is frequently used throughout Scripture. It is reflected in the advice of Bathsheba to Solomon her son (Prov. 31), it is revealed in the type of Solomon's marriage to his Egyptian Bride (1 Kings 3:1), and it is predicted in the Psalm composed for the occasion of the king's marriage (Psalm 45).

### Solomon Seeks Wisdom

The parental training of Solomon produced its fruits when Yahweh first put him to the test. In Gibeon, which Solomon visited at the beginning of his reign to sacrifice before Yahweh, he received a divine message: "Ask what I shall give thee" (1 Kings 3:5). It presented a great temptation. He could have asked for wealth, or power, or personal prestige. But he had before him the example of his great father (1 Kings 3:6), and retained in his memory the instruction he received as a young boy in the palace of the king. David had made family instruction a familiar feature of the home: "Come, ye children, hearken unto me: I will teach you the fear of Yahweh" (Psa. 34:11). So, in the *Book of Proverbs*, Solomon recalled:

"He taught me also, and said unto me, Let thine heart retain my words: keep my commandments and live. Get wisdom, get understanding; forget it not; neither decline from the words of my mouth. Forsake her not, and she shall preserve thee; love her, and she shall keep thee. Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom, and with all thy getting get understanding" (Prov. 4:4-7).

Now, in response to the invitation of God, Solomon's early upbringing asserted itself to request: "an understanding heart to judge Thy people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this Thy so great a people?" (1 Kings 3:9).

Solomon was granted his request, and received additional unasked-for blessings, including wealth and glory; for unsought-for blessings always come in the wake of wisdom and understanding.

As a wise man, Solomon sought the company of other wise men. He gathered them around him, and delighted to listen to their wisdom. But he excelled them all in their mutual discussions.

“And God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding exceeding much, and largeness of heart, even as the sand that is on the sea shore. And Solomon’s wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east country, and all the wisdom of Egypt. For he was wiser than all men; than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman and Chalcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol; and his fame was in all nations round about” (1 Kings 4:29-31).

Seeking the company of wise men instead of that of fools, Solomon increased in wisdom. He applied himself to the development of the blessing God had granted him; which is a need in regard to all divine blessings in life. God gives talents to all, but the responsibility of those receiving them is to develop the latent ability granted, and to increase them as Christ taught in his parable (Matt. 25:20-21).

By encouraging the company of wise men, Solomon increased in wisdom. He did not arrogantly ignore the reasoning of others, but carefully listened to their wisdom; analysing it, applying it, and adding it to his own store of knowledge if he considered it worth while.

And some of what those wise men told him is included among the proverbs in the Book before us. There are two groups of proverbs that “belong to the wise” (Prov. 22:17; 24:23). These were utterances of his wise companions that Solomon carefully retained, and in the compilation before us, he included for the benefit of posterity.

### Solomon: The Scientist

Solomon had an insatiable interest in the beauty and wonder of divine revelation. He delighted in searching out the amazing wisdom of God in all avenues of His realm. He saw it in the revelation of Yahweh’s purpose; but he also discovered it in the facts of life and of creation about him. He was not only King, Prophet, Priest (for he presided over the sacrifices at the inauguration of the Temple), he was also an author of distinction, a composer of song and music, a philosopher of wise sayings, and a scientist of note.

His reputation as author, is witnessed to by the books of the Bible attributed to him; and through which Inspiration directed his natural talent of wisdom:

*“He spake three thousand proverbs; and his songs were a thousand and five” (1 Kings 4:32).*

From strange and distant lands he imported animals and birds unknown to the people, including “apes and peacocks” (1 Kings 10:22). He planted gardens and graced them with both fruit and ornamental trees (Ecc. 2:4-5).

He was the first great naturalist, and recorded some of the wonders and beauties of creation:

*“He spake of trees, from the cedar tree that is in Lebanon even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall; he spake also of beasts, and of fowl, and of creeping things, and of fishes. And there came of all people to hear the wisdom of Solomon” (1 Kings 4:32-34).*

From this we learn that whilst God gave him an understanding heart, Solomon had to apply himself to the study of life, and of the revelation of Yahweh, in order to capitalise upon the God-given talent granted him. All must do that to develop their services to God and humanity.

Solomon’s interest in creation was not merely academic. He learned some of the lessons of God from his observations. As a naturalist he saw an inbuilt wisdom in some of the “little creatures” of nature. As he saw that they obeyed laws of God, he incorporated their habits into his exhortations: “Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise” (Prov. 6:6). The conies, the locusts, the lion (Prov. 30:26-31), and other beasts and birds are used by him for that purpose.

### Profiting From Parental Training

The impact of Solomon’s early life, up-bringing and training under David and Bathsheba; the discussions he had with the wise men whom he drew around him, and with whom he discussed the issues and problems of life; his observation of, and delight in the marvels of creation as he developed towards adulthood; and his shrewd assessment of the motives and characters of men and women about him, all played their part in the compilation of *The Book of Proverbs*.

For example, the first nine chapters are proverbs for Solomon, the instruction that he received from his father and mother (see Prov. 4:3-6).

The teaching of those chapters was derived from the instruction received in the home. They have a continuous theme running through them: they show the benefits of wisdom, illustrating them by precepts, parables and prophecies. In his parables, Solomon depicts that both Wisdom and Folly as two women who have built their respective “houses”, and are seeking lodgers. They are described as inviting those passing by to accept their hospitality. This section is brought to a conclusion in Chapter nine which describes the House and the Appeal of the woman named *Wisdom*, in contrast to that of the shameless woman called *Folly* who “sitteth at the door of her house” in the most public easily-accessible places proclaiming her seductive invitation (Ch. 9:13-18).

The *Book of Proverbs* comes alive when these parables and prophecies are searched out and related to the precepts that are scattered through this section of the book.

**Profiting From Experience**

The transition between the Proverbs for Solomon and those of Solomon is found at the commencement of Chapter Ten which is headed *The Proverbs of Solomon*. This section consists of formal proverbs, each verse containing a complete proverb with two parts, each of which in Hebrew consists of only three or four words. Sometimes the two parts form a comparison:

*As vinegar to the teeth, and as smoke to the eyes;  
So is the sluggard to them that send him. (Ch. 10:26).*

Sometimes the two parts form a contrast:

*A righteous man regardeth the life of his beast;  
But the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel. (Ch. 12:10).*

Invariably these *Proverbs of Solomon* are pithy, witty and wise. This section of the Book contains 375 such proverbs which is appropriate, for 375 is the numerical value of the name Solomon (in Hebrew *SLMH*): S (300) L (30) M (40) H (5). These couplet proverbs are, in general, the condensed expressions of strong common-sense arrived at through the teachings of experience moulded by a reverential awe of God:

*In the fear of Yahweh is strong confidence;  
And His children shall have a place of refuge (Ch. 14:26).*

*The fear of Yahweh is a fountain of life,  
To depart from the snares of death (Ch. 14:27).*

The rules of conduct listed, therefore, are the result, not merely of human shrewdness as to what is best based only on experience, but those that arise from careful consideration of the laws of God applied to the practical issues of life; and so owe their validity to their harmony with God's expressed will. They comprise the practical outworking of divine commands.

**Profiting From The Wisdom of Others**

At Ch. 22:17 there is a further break indicating a further division in the book:

*"Bow down thine ear, and hear the words of the wise" (Prov. 22:17).*

Who are "the wise" here referred to? Obviously those wise men with whom Solomon surrounded himself as described in 1 Kings 4:31. He discussed with them the facts of life, and under Inspiration selected from their sayings those maxims of prudence he recorded in his book for the edification of others. There appear to be two appendices of these, for a further sub-heading is found in Prov. 24:23: "These things also *belong to the wise*. . ."

The construction of those "words of the wise" differ from the two-lined proverbs of Solomon, in that they are longer and generally comprise several lines: four, six, or eight lines as in Ch. 23:12-14.

**Profiting From The Exercise of Authority**

In Chapter 25:1 a further break occurs introducing a new section. It is described as *The Proverbs of Solomon, which the men of Hezekiah king of Judah copied out*.

These are maxims of prudence that were retained in the records of Israel, but not included in the original edition of the Book. They were copied out by "the men of Hezekiah" under divine inspiration, and added to the other proverbs.

In this section, additional emphasis is given to the status and duties of the King (cp. Ch. 25:5,6; 29:4,14) and ruler of the people (Ch. 28:15; 29:12). It commences with the comparison:

*It is the glory of God to conceal a thing;  
But the honour of kings is to search out a matter (Ch. 25:2).*

Commencing and concluding with instructions and advice for kings (Ch. 29:26), the whole section can provide excellent advice for practical living on the part of those who hope to be kings in the Age to come (Rev. 20:6). It therefore is significant that Hezekiah, that great king in Israel who set his heart upon the future, should have arranged for this section to be carefully copied out, and placed with the other wise maxims of Solomon.

**Profiting From Life**

Chapter Thirty and Thirty-One completes *The Book of Proverbs*. They present the lessons of life as learned by Agur the son of Jakeh (Ch. 30); the advice of the mother of King Lemuel on the behaviour of a King (Ch. 31:1-9); and, finally, her description of a suitable bride for such. Agur the son of Jakeh seems to be a *non-de-plume* hiding the identity of the actual writer. It could relate to Solomon himself, as he sums up the experiences of his life. Whoever it is, the *non-de-plume* seems to express the purpose of the chapter. The verse has been rendered (supplying the meaning of the proper names there expressed).

*"The words of the Gatherer, the son of piety, the vision of the man who has God with him, who is strong by God dwelling with him".*

Some wonderful lessons of life are provided in this remarkable chapter.

Finally, the mother of king Lemuel, who, we believe, was Bathsheba, sums up instructions for her son in regard to the kingly conduct he should exhibit; and brings this wonderful book to a fitting climax by describing the bride fit for such a king: a figurative description of the bride of Christ.

**Solomon's Weakness**

Solomon had his weaknesses, unfortunately. This illustrates Paul's comment: "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). But it comes as a shock to find that in spite of all his wisdom, Solomon failed to always put into practice the things he preached. It humbles us to recognise this, and warns us to keep check on our own conduct.

Solomon's failure arose out of his policy of expediency in relation to his wives. As they were merely members of his harem, and doubtless there to consolidate his realm in alliance with other powers, he permitted them to retain their native worship. They did not embrace the hope of Israel as did his Egyptian bride; and were granted independent accommodation in dwellings on the Mount of Olives where they were permitted their pagan shrines. In this he made a bad mistake. In trying to serve the world, he failed to give Yahweh the wholehearted dedication His worship demands. In this Solomon failed to apply the principles his wisdom so clearly advocated, and the fact is recorded for our admonition and warning. We need more than wisdom: "The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding" or wisdom in manifestation (Job 28:28). We need to exercise careful discrimination and obedience. A policy of expediency and compromise can result in a fall from grace.

We believe, however, that Solomon's experiences led him through the labyrinth of trouble and failure to be sufficiently humbled to reach his final conclusion with which his probation ended. After reviewing the whole of his life's experiences, he was able to say:

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

The *Book of Ecclesiastes* reveals that these words were penned at the close of Solomon's life and provide the sum total of its lesson and exhortation.

**Theme of the Book**

The English word *proverb* is compounded of *pro* meaning "for" and *verba* signifying words. It therefore signifies any pithy, wise saying or terse maxim that hides a profound truth whilst expressing it in few words.

The Hebrew word, however, is *mishle* from *mashal*, and has a much wider meaning. It is used of many discourses, sentences, and expressions which would not be classed as proverbs in English today. The *Book of Proverbs* contains prophecies, parables and precepts, some of which are quite extended, in addition to the short maxims of wisdom

that qualify for the title of proverbs.

The Hebrew word is from a root signifying *To rule, or to liken*. The Proverbs comprise practical teaching designed to rule one's life, and at the same time they are like parables in that they often are expressed in language that hides their true meaning.

In fact, the same Hebrew word has been rendered *parable*; and in a prophetic utterance pointing forward to Christ. Hence: "I will open my mouth in a *parable* (*mashal*); I will utter dark sayings of old" (Psa. 78:2), is quoted by Matthew and applied to the Lord as predictive of his method of teaching. In Psalm 49:4, the same word again has been rendered *parable*. Hence Solomon and the "greater than Solomon" have this in common, that both taught by parables.

Like the English word *proverb*, a *parable* expresses much in little, setting out truth in a condensed form. This forms the genius of inspired teaching. Whereas the books of human philosophy can be numbered in their thousands, and are often heavy tomes of dry, involved teaching, Yahweh has reduced the most profound teaching in a short book, and has charged every word with power. The force of a proverb lies in its clever concentration of a truth, or of some wise advice, setting it forth in a terse and striking manner, so that it catches on, and becomes easier to remember. A proverb does not argue; it dictates; it does not elaborate, but points to the lesson.

A little knowledge of Hebrew poetry will help to more greatly appreciate the *Book of Proverbs*. Hebrew poetry is based on a parallelism of ideas rather than of rhyme. Therefore, it can be translated into any language without great loss of force. There are various forms of Hebrew poetry: completive, contrastive, and constructive. Mostly, the contrastive form is used in *The Book of Proverbs*. This form gives added emphasis to the thought presented, by some striking contrast; and proverbs of this kind may be noted at once by the almost invariable *but* with which the second line commences:

*A merry heart doeth good like a medicine;  
But a broken spirit drieth the bones.*

Some are *completive* proverbs, in which the original thought or statement depends on the following line to complete it:

*Commit thy works unto Yahweh;  
And thy thoughts shall be established.*

Some are *comparative* in their structure. Often the second line in such forms commence with such a word as *than*:

*Better is a little with righteousness,  
Than great revenues without right.*

There are both humour and power in the Proverbs. Some of the analogies are apt and "knowing" to a degree. How descriptive is the

humour of the Proverb which likens a “fair woman without discretion” to a “jewel of gold in a swine’s snout”! How true, if hardly tactful, is the Proverb which likens the tongue of a nagging woman to “a continual dropping in a very rainy day”! How delightfully illustrative is the simile: “As cold water to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country”!

The illustrations and comparisons of the Proverbs are amazingly appropriate. The sluggard who is like vinegar to the teeth (putting them on edge) and smoke to the eyes (causing them to sting and cry) of his employer; the offended brother who is harder to win than a strong city; the coming of poverty like “an armed man” (ready to grasp his possessions) to the slothful; the likening of empty boastfulness to wind and clouds without rain; the picture of riches flying away on eagle’s wings; the contrasting of the faithful wounds given by a true friend with the profuse kisses of an hypocritical enemy. The wit and imagery of the Proverbs sharpens the mind as the student gives himself to them.

Some of the cameo pictures of social types found in the Proverbs are observable in our everyday walk of life. They are vivid in their characterisation of actual living persons. The following quotation selects a few of them for us: “There is the prating fool, winking with his eye; the practical joker, as dangerous as a madman casting firebrands about; the talebearer, and the man who ‘harps upon a matter,’ separating chief friends; the whisperer whose words are like dainty morsels going down to the innermost parts of the belly; the backbiting tongue, drawing gloomy looks all around as surely as the north wind brings rain; the covetous man hastening to be rich; the liberal man that scattereth and yet increaseth; the parsimonious man withholding only to come to want; the speculator holding back his corn amid the curses of the people; the man of wandering life, like a restless bird; the unsociable man that separateth himself, foregoing wisdom for the sake of his own private desires,” and so on.

The wisdom of Solomon was expressed with a humour that is sometimes extremely witty, but always pointed so as to give added power to the message, rebuke or exhortation intended, without causing undue offence. Indeed, so clever are his words, that the reader is induced to measure himself by their penetrating lessons.

In studying *The Book of Proverbs* it is necessary to look for these. However, it is best first to try and simplify the book, seeking to analyse it as a whole, and then turning back to consider the parables, maxims, prophecies and precepts of which it is full.

# Analysis

Solomon spoke 3000 proverbs (1 Kings 4:32), many of which were “put in order” (Ecc. 12:9) and recorded for posterity. The Book of Proverbs comprises mainly Solomon’s selection for that purpose.

## DISCIPLINE THROUGH PRECEPTS

### Part One: In Praise of Wisdom:

#### Proverbs for Solomon — Ch. 1:1-9:18

Introduction .....	Ch. 1:1-6
General Summary .....	Ch. 1:7-9
The Enticement of Sinners .....	Ch. 1:10-19
The Appeal of Wisdom .....	Ch. 1:20-33
The Protection of Wisdom .....	Ch. 2:1-22
The Rewards of Wisdom .....	Ch. 3:1-10
The Search for Wisdom .....	Ch. 3:11-20
The Security of Wisdom .....	Ch. 3:21-26
The Application of Wisdom .....	Ch. 3:27-35
The Value of Wisdom .....	Ch. 4:1-9
The Path of Wisdom .....	Ch. 4:10-19
The Benefits of Wisdom .....	Ch. 4:20-27
Wisdom’s Protection from Unfaithfulness .....	Ch. 5:1-23
Wisdom’s Protection from Suretyship .....	Ch. 6:1-5
Wisdom’s Warning against Sloth .....	Ch. 6:6-11
Wisdom’s Warning against Discord .....	Ch. 6:12-19
Wisdom’s Defence against Adultery .....	Ch. 6:20-35
Wisdom’s Defence against Indiscretion .....	Ch. 7:1-23
Wisdom’s Description of the House of Folly ....	Ch. 7:24-27
Wisdom’s Appeal .....	Ch. 8:1-36
Wisdom’s House .....	Ch. 9:1-12
Folly’s Invitation .....	Ch. 9:13-18

### Part Two: Proverbs of Solomon — Ch. 10:1-22:16

375 Proverbs in the form of contrastive, complete or comparative couplets.

Proverbs by Solomon for all .....	Ch. 10:1-9:19
Proverbs by Solomon for a Ruler .....	Ch. 9:20-22:16
(Note 19:20; 20:18,26,28 etc.).	

**Part Three: The Words of the Wise — Ch. 22:17-24:22**

Introduction .....	Ch. 22:17-21
Basic social conduct .....	Ch. 22:22-29
Awe before appetite .....	Ch. 23:1-3
Fleetness of Riches .....	Ch. 23:4-5
Evil hospitality .....	Ch. 23:6-8
Mixed Epigrams .....	Ch. 23:9-18
Gluttony .....	Ch. 23:19-21
Three Sayings .....	Ch. 23:22-25
Whoredom .....	Ch. 23:26-28
Wine and Woe .....	Ch. 23:29-35
Mixed Epigrams .....	Ch. 24:1-9
Duty of Rescue .....	Ch. 24:10-12
Wisdom and Honey .....	Ch. 24:13-14
Four Epigrams .....	Ch. 24:15-22

**Part Four: Additional Words of the Wise — Ch. 24:23-34**

Respect of Persons .....	Ch. 24:23-25
Three sayings .....	Ch. 24:26-29
The field of the faithful .....	Ch. 24:30-34

**Part Five: Proverbs of Solomon Collated by Hezekiah — Ch. 25:1-29:27**

The King .....	Ch. 25:1-7
Various Maxims on Prudence .....	Ch. 25:8-28:8
On Fools .....	Ch. 26:8-12
The Sluggard .....	Ch. 26:13-16
Social Pests .....	Ch. 26:17-26
Various Maxims .....	Ch. 26:27-27:22
Good Husbandry .....	Ch. 27:23-27
Proverbs — Contrastive, Completive, or Comparative couplets .....	Ch. 28:1-29:27

**Part Six: The Words of Agur — Ch. 30**

**Part Seven: The Oracles of Lemuel's Mother — Ch. 31:1-9**

**Part Eight: An Acrostic on the Virtuous Woman — Ch. 31:10-31**

Eight is the number of perfection, and this eighth sub-section brings to completion *The Book of Proverbs*.

# Pondering The Proverbs With Bro. Robert Roberts

**ERRATA**

Please note the following changes in the Analysis, p. 26.  
The field of the faithful should be:

The field of the slothful .....	Ch. 24:30-34
Various Maxims on Prudence .....	Ch. 25:8-28
On Fools .....	Ch. 26:1-12

## THE POWER OF THE PROVERBS

*“Solomon’s wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east country, and all the wisdom of Egypt. . . . He spake three thousand proverbs” (1 Kings 4:30,32).*

Brief and pithy statements of practical truth — known as proverbs — are powerful. They are more or less current everywhere. They are easily understood, and easily remembered: and they influence action where formal disquisition would be powerless. No civilised community is without them. The Scriptures, which lack no good feature, has this as well. A whole section of them is devoted to “proverbs”. But there is a difference between the proverbs of the Bible and the proverbs current among men. Bible proverbs have God in them; merely human proverbs have not. Bible proverbs recognize God as the ruling factor in human action, which human proverbs leave out of account. Besides this, Bible proverbs have God in them in the sense of owing their origin to the Inspiration of God. “God gave Solomon wisdom exceeding much.” Paul tells us that the voice speaking in the proverbs is the voice of God “speaking to us as children” (Heb. 12:5). Because Bible proverbs have God in them, they are as far superior to human proverbs as long-sightedness and accuracy are superior to shortsightedness and error.

## 1. The Value Of Wise Parental Instruction

*“My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother” (Proverbs 1:8).*

This presupposes that the paternal instruction is wise, and that the mother’s law is according to the truth. It is unfortunately the case, in the present evil age, that fathers and mothers do not always afford to their offspring a guidance that is wholesome to follow. In a sense not very important, it is doubtless safe as a general rule for children to follow the counsel of their parents, who by experience know the workings and issues of things better than children can. But in the higher sense, it rarely happens that this proverb can be applied to one’s immediate family circle. What is to be done? The remedy is obvious. Solomon, in these spirit-dictated maxims, stands well in the place of a wise father and mother, and therefore supplies any natural lack there may be. Let children young or old, adhere to the instruction afforded by the law laid down in these proverbs, and they will, at the last, experience the sweetness of wisdom and the profitableness incalculable of walking in her ways.

## 2. The Beauty Of Wisdom

*“Wisdom and instruction shall be an ornament of grace unto thy head, and chains about thy neck” (Proverbs 1:9).*

True, true. Men can see the excellence of wisdom, even now. Universal experience endorses the declaration of Ecc. 2:13: “Wisdom excelleth folly as far as light excelleth darkness.” What is unlovely, what is hideous in human character, what is destructive of human well-being, like the things condemned by wisdom? When does human nature appear at its best but when wisdom reigns in the human heart, shaping its utterances and guiding its ways? It is one of the numberless proofs of the divinity of the Bible that a man, entirely subject to its precepts, would be the loveliest specimen of manhood upon earth: a fearer of God, a lover of man, a speaker of truth, a doer of justice, a performer of kindness, a hater of evil, yet free of resentments, a for-giver of injury, a sufferer of evil, a rewarder of good, a sympathiser with sorrow, a man of patience, wise in counsel, magnanimous in view, prompt in action, industrious in life, hearty in action, true in friendship, consistent in life, persevering in goodness, noble in every-thing.

### 3. When “No” Is Necessary

*“My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not” (Proverbs 1:10).*

Learn to say “No,” especially to act on it. Life depends upon it. The want of decision will land us in ruin, especially when “enticement” is resorted to — a drawing of a man from his integrity, by plausible considerations and inducements. This is the time when firmness is most wanted. Few men are in danger of consenting to open glaring sin: it is the things that lead to sin that have to be guarded against. It is the small beginnings that are dangerous. The safe rule is to make no compromise with sin. Say to sinners, especially when they profess to be saints (it is then they are most formidable): “I am obliged to say ‘No’. You must go without me.” The momentary embarrassment of having to refuse, will be rewarded a thousand times over by the sweetness of finding yourself on the safe road that leads to life, when the enticing sinners are plunging headlong in a path of destruction, whose insidious beginnings they were not able to discern.

### 4. The Test Of Good Companionship

*“My son, walk not thou in the way of sinners; refrain thy foot from their path” (Proverbs 1:15).*

It is often inconvenient, but always wholesome, to refuse partnership or companionship with evil men. It takes a little courage — sometimes much courage — to refuse; but the courage is well repaid by the sweetness and safety that come of it. It is often difficult, in the complicated ways of modern life to know just where to draw the line; but, as a rule, a just man will instinctively put his foot down at the right place, refusing companionship in the voluntary occupation of mere pleasure-followers, and standing off from the ways and customs that are dear to sinners. Where there is doubt it is better to be on the safe side. No evil can come from abstaining from the very appearance of evil; while, on the other hand, you can never be sure you are safe when consorting with ungodly men, especially in ungodly ways. As Jesus expresses it: “it is better to enter life halt or maimed, than having preserved all to be devoured at the last”.

### 5. The Blindness Of Sinners

*“Sinners lay wait for their own blood; they lurk privily for their own lives” (Proverbs 1:18).*

They don’t think so, and other people are liable to not think so. They see the schemes of unrighteous craft succeed, and the lurking schemers

elevated on the pedestal of their success, to prosperity and sunshine, while the meek and unresisting servants of righteousness are prevailed against and trampled in the dust. This is the picture of the moment. But there is another picture, the contemplating of which will evoke the exclamation: “Verily there is a reward for the righteous; verily, there is a God that judgeth in the earth”. This other picture shows that the success of sinners is truly a success against themselves: “God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil.” Responsible sinners will find themselves alive again at a day appointed to face the issues of their own actions in the light of the stern tribunal of divine justice, at which sinners will not be justified and the righteous condemned as now.

### 6. The Voice Of Wisdom

*“Wisdom crieth without; she uttereth her voice in the streets” (Proverbs 1:20).*

It might seem as if the reverse of this were true; as if folly alone made the streets resound with its “maniac mirth.” And truly the appearance is the reality as regards the doings of the fools. But there is another reality underlying both the appearances and the realities of folly. This other reality is wisdom. Creation, both astral and sublunary, is wisdom concrete — not folly. This is not abstract folly. Folly is the aberration of unwise persons — not the working out of the constitution of things. The constitution of things is divine. There is only one God, and “in wisdom hath He made all things,” and these things cry to men. If they would but consider they would be guided aright. “Doth not nature itself teach you?” (Paul’s question) is of very wide application. Even in a natural sense, pondering the uses and tendencies of things and actions would lead men to see, as Solomon expresses it, that wisdom excels folly as far as light excels darkness. But wisdom teaches in a higher sense than in the passive exhibition of her excellence. Wisdom dwelt in the midst of Israel, and spoke to God’s nation as it has spoken to no other — which doubled their privileges and responsibilities.

### 7. Wisdom Will Ultimately Conquer Folly

*“How long ye simple ones will ye love simplicity? and the scorers delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge” (Proverbs 1:22).*

How long, indeed? Very long it would seem. By all appearances, the world would go on for ever in the way it went on in Solomon’s day, and has been going on ever since. One cause of this, doubtless, lies in the fact that every age sees a new generation which comes on the scene in ignorance and inexperience, and is only just beginning to learn the



superiority of wisdom when it disappears in the grave. A melancholy situation — due to the advent of sin which has brought death. The bright spot in the situation is the advent of wisdom with a mission. It is not without an object she cries to “the simple ones,” “the scorers,” and “the fools.” There is a “good time coming,” for which her mission is a preparation. In the good time coming there will be no death. But to make this tolerable, there must be no folly; and so wisdom has gone out. She calls to them to leave their simplicity (want of discernment), which bring disappointment; their scornfulness, which scorches and blights the heart; their folly, which only ends in death. Some among them respond to the call, and will be found at last among the joyous guests of the King’s table.

### 8. Profiting From Reproof

*“Turn you at my reproof: behold I will pour out my spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you” (Proverbs 1:23).*

This is wisdom’s appeal. It is not a vain appeal. It does not call upon men for impossibilities. It ignores Calvinism, and the practical fatalism that would make God responsible for every imperfection and failure. It assumes that men can turn, and in doing so, it is in harmony with what we practically find human capacity to be, apart from theories of metaphysicians. Men turn up and down, for good and evil, according to the pressure of surrounding circumstances and influences. They become educated or remain in a brutalised state according as they are compelled to submit to instruction or left to run to waste. Wisdom recognises this moral elasticity of man’s situation, or implores them to turn. It presents an incentive. The spirit of wisdom — the knowledge conveyed in wisdom’s words — will become the property of those who give heed — a precious property — conferring, even now, a wealth of grace and excellence and honour, and in the end, the otherwise unpurchasable glory of everlasting life.

### 9. The Divine Invitation That Is Largely Ignored

*“I have called and ye refused: I have stretched out my hand and no man regarded” (Proverbs 1:24).*

This is the present situation as regards the bulk of mankind. A call has come. It has come authentically, and it has come in a definite and palpable form. It came to Israel by personal hands and in visible form. It has been extended to the nations of the earth by an embassy as real and as personal as any ambassadorate that ever leaves any country for another court. The men by whose actual hands it came to the Gentiles are in their graves. But their message has survived them, and is intact,

and in the hands of every nation upon earth that circulates the Bible. Yet the call is refused: the stretched out hand is disregarded. The Bible is neglected: Bible things excluded from practical human interest and attention; and men everywhere pre-occupied with their own devices. There will be a terrible sequel. Retribution has been long gathering, and will shortly burst in devastating storm. Blessed will those then be seen to be who have not been carried away by the universal folly, but have heartily accepted the call of wisdom, and bowed reverently before her outstretched arm.

### 10. When Virtue Shall Laugh At Vice

*“I will laugh at your calamity, I will mock when your fear cometh” (Proverbs 1:26).*

This is no idle threat. Now and hereafter it will be fulfilled, but more particularly hereafter. It is the end that waits the persistent disregard of wisdom’s ways. It is a terrible end. What more cruel, crushing withering experience could a man have than to be laughed at in the crisis of his calamity. Such a thing is considered inhuman; but this will be a moment when it will be just. “The righteous shall rejoice when he seeth the vengeance.” It is the terrible destiny in reserve for ungodly men (whom the Lord shall consider responsible), to be laughed at in the midst of the “tribulation and anguish and wrath” that will come upon them in the hour of judgment — to be laughed at, too, not by friends, not by evil men, but by Eternal Goodness, incarnate in Jesus and the saints, in “the day of the manifestation of the sons of God!” “He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall have them in derision” (Psalm 2). The Lord is slow to anger, but there is a limit to His patience, and when once His wrath is kindled, more hapless lot is not possible to man. Oh that men would open their eyes beforehand to the terrible issues of folly. It is vain to bewail them when they open their jaws to devour.

### 11. A Time When Yahweh Hears No Longer

*“Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer. They shall seek me early, but they shall not find me” (Proverbs 1:28).*

It is possible to have too slack views of the divine clemency. Men are taught such views from the pulpit everywhere. It is a public tradition retailed in every form of ingenious diversification and worked into every shape suggested by imaginative fervor, that God’s love is so great and so cheap that the vilest can command it at the latest moment of an abandoned course by a mere spasm of remorse. No greater falsehood or more irrational sentiment could be put into circulation. Apos-

tolic doctrine is sterner and more reasonable stuff altogether. This is the tone of it: "Be not deceived. God is not mocked. Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." The man who sows a lifetime to the flesh, will find himself terribly out of his calculation if he accept clerical leading in this matter. Many a man will get down on his knees at the last, and with uplifted hands, implore in vain with agonising earnestness that the award of justice may be averted. They will call loudly; but there will be no response. Their earnest appeals will find a deaf ear. This God says, and His word is truth.

### 12. Truth Rejected Brings Divine Retribution

*"They hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the Lord. They would none of my counsel. They despised all my reproof. Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices" (Proverbs 1:29-31).*

Here is a hating and not a choosing that are very common among mankind. Men mostly love that which gratifies appetite, or the lust of pride and beauty. They love "pleasure" and they hate knowledge; and as for the fear of the Lord, it is a worse than meaningless phrase with them. It is a nauseous thing — a weak thing — a thing of pious cant. Such aversions are irrational. They have their root in a dark and untrained state of mind. They are kin with barbarism. Knowledge is the highest exercise and most beautiful ornament and sweetest employment of the human mind. The fear of the Lord is its crowning glory, and its most precious acquisition. The despisers thereof will yet find their folly in the terrible desolation of a hopeless life, and in the blight and failure of all their joys. Destruction and misery are in their ways. The divine counsel rejected, will recoil with terrible retribution on the heads of the infatuated mortals who will seek in vain to be delivered from the fruit of their own ways.

### 13. The Divine Refuge Midst Evil Circumstances

*"Whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil" (Proverbs 1:33).*

But now and hereafter. The "Me" in the case is the eternal and universe-filling "Me" — the Creator, the Sustainer, the Possessor of heaven and earth. Hence the strength of the proverb. Though God is "high", He has regard for the lowly: He loves those who love Him, and who hope in His mercy and do His commandments. This He has revealed. All we have to do is to believe it. The result is safe-dwelling and freedom from fear. "Wherefore should I fear," asks David. "The Lord

is my defence. I will not fear what man can do unto me." If the Lord chastise, that is another thing: this David was ready to accept, as the visitation of love. But he had no fear such as plagues the mere man of the flesh. If this is the case with the righteous while sin reigns on earth and God's face is hidden, what must it be when the wicked are rooted out of the earth, and the tabernacle of God is with men?

### 14. The Lack Of Appeal Of Knowledge

*"My son . . . receive my words and hide my commandments with thee" (Proverbs 2:1).*

Nothing more unpalatable in the way of advice could be uttered in Gentile circles — and there are scarcely any other than Gentile circles. But here and there, there is a responsive ear, in which the words are uttered not in vain. "My words," the words of God, are received and embraced, and stored deep in the inner man; and here they must remain to be effectual for their work. And here they cannot remain without steady renewal in the daily readings of the Scriptures. The human mind is very weak, especially to divine ideas. A constant supply is the cure. Nothing else will finally satisfy the taste which they generate. Nothing else will so secrete the commandments of God in the heart as that. They will be an ever-living and available power of action. But for this, a man must stoutly fight, else this wise policy will be taken out of his hands through the chronic oppositions and revolts of the Gentile mind, within and without. Having taken the right cue from the Spirit's voice, let him close his ears to the devil's din that would call him in other directions, and go straight onward to the heavenly city.

### 15. How To Be Wise

*"Incline thine ear to wisdom: apply thine heart to understanding" (Proverbs 2:2).*

This means making an effort. An effort is necessary. There are things that require no effort, such as breathing, seeing with the eyes, getting hungry, etc. Such things that come by effort are more precious and more enjoyable than those that come of themselves. Because of this, and the trouble necessary to get at them, the bulk of mankind, as things are now upon the earth, never attain them. The schoolboy prefers play to lessons; and would never learn if he were left to himself. Grown schoolboys are mostly the same, hence men, almost universally, die without understanding. That which is agreeable is their rule: not that which is wise. God calls upon us to act differently: to "incline" and "apply" our minds to the highest wisdom — the knowledge of Himself, and His ways, and His purpose as revealed. Obedience will

prove sweet in the end, and nonetheless because it has to be yielded as the cost of self-denial meanwhile.

### 16. The Way To Search For Knowledge

*“Cry after knowledge: lift up thy voice for understanding; seek her as silver, and search for her as for hid treasures” (Proverbs 2:3-4).*

Exertion is never so energetic, perseverance never so tenacious, skill never so thorough, as when money is to be got. This is the divine measure of the industry we are called upon to exercise in the quest for the precious mental attainment variously expressed as knowledge, understanding, and wisdom. Such earnestness and activity with such an object is repugnant to modern maxims. “Take it easy,” is the world’s prescription concerning “the one thing needful”. As to making money, there is no bound to the diligence it will allow and advise you to put forth. We have to choose between what the world advises and what God advises. We are naturally more inclined to take the world’s advice because it is more pleasant. But we do not require to go far to see that what is the most pleasant is not necessarily the best, but in all probability the worst. The time will come when it will be manifest to all men that he only has acted the wise part who has made wisdom his friend at whatever labour and cost; for wisdom will crown her children for ever when sinners rot in dishonoured dust.

### 17. The Benefits Of Knowledge

*“Then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God” (Proverbs 2:5).*

That is, when you have applied your mind with diligence to the search. How could you expect it otherwise? Many people do. Through the demoralising influence of inherited tradition, they have a habit of assuming that knowledge is the easiest of attainments — that, in fact, a man has only to will his consent, at a convenient moment (generally put off to the last) to find his mind aglow with divine light as by an inspiration. This is a fatal mistake. God’s own question is: “Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may ye also do good that are accustomed to do evil.” The mind sets in the form of its predominant activities. It is the law of things — the inevitable result of the principle upon which we have been made. Hence, in whatever department of knowledge a man labours, his mind opens and expands more and more in that direction. The most difficult problems at last become easy. And it is not less so in the highest of all knowledge — the knowledge of God as revealed in Moses, the prophets and the apostles, and nowhere else.

### 18. The Benefits Of Wisdom

*“When wisdom entereth into thine heart, and knowledge is pleasant unto thy soul, discretion shall preserve thee; understanding shall keep thee” (Proverbs 2:10-11).*

Wisdom is a safe guide even now. The man who disregards her is exposed to evils and dangers from which the child of wisdom is, by the very exercise of wisdom, ‘preserved’ and ‘kept’. The wicked destroy themselves by their folly and live not out half their days. Life, even as it now is, is a thing of conditions. Compliance with them is a necessity. If a man allow not himself sufficient reflection to note and consider what they are, and humility enough to conform to them, he will suffer inevitably for his neglect. ‘In wisdom’ all things are made, and it is only by the exercise of wisdom that we can obtain the satisfaction that comes from being in harmony with them. If this is true of the life that now is, how much more is it of the life that is to come.

### 19. The Deliverance Effected By Understanding

*“Understanding shall . . . deliver thee from the way of evil man — the man that speaketh froward things” (Proverbs 2:11-12).*

The understanding of chemistry or astronomy will not do this, but the understanding of wisdom will. The wisdom teaches a man to fear God, to have great respect to His commandments, and strong faith in His promises of good to come. This wisdom is not destitute of philosophy, in the sense of perceiving the inherent fitness of things; but its power lies more in conviction towards God than in discernment of moral beauty in the abstract. And its power manifests itself in decisive separation from the evil man — the man whose characteristic is found in his tongue as much as in any part of his ungodly portraiture. He speaks “froward things”. Of another class of man, it is said that his tongue talketh judgment: “the law of his God is in his heart.” It is far from being so with the evil man. His tongue talketh superficiality and wickedness, and he does it in a wicked manner which is almost universal in the world. He mouths all subjects arrogantly, boastfully defiantly, flip-pantly, frowardly. Understanding delivers the saints of God from such “whose end is destruction whose God is their belly, who mind earthly things.”

## 20. Only The Wise Walk Surely

*“He that walketh uprightly walketh surely” (Proverbs 10:9).*

Crooked ways are perilous. Even if they succeed, they yield little satisfaction; and there is always the danger of discovery and confusion. Ways of uprightness are ways of safety, even in the ordinary dealing of men, but the principal blessedness (next to the perfect satisfaction that comes of the answer of a good conscience) lies in the prospect that lies in store. In the present time, uprightness often fails to bring advantage, as in the days of Israel, when “he that departed from evil *made himself a prey*” (Isa. 59:15). The chief excellence of uprightness will be apparent in the days of recompense when the Lord at his coming will “bring to light the hidden things of darkness and make manifest the counsel of the heart.” Uprightness in that day will receive His recognition and open reward. On that day, it will be seen clearly by all that the path of righteousness is the path of safety and honor and life. Therefore, walk bravely in it, however dark and difficult it may sometimes prove. There is light in the end.

## 21. The Day When Folly Will Reap Its Result

*“Riches profit not in the day of wrath; but righteousness delivereth from death” (Proverbs 11:4).*

The present is not a day of wrath, but the day of long suffering and patience, and men fail to know the opportunity it gives them. The day of wrath is coming, though the common run of men remain as unbelieving and scornful of the fact as the men of Noah. Paul speaks of it as “the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.” The righteous judgment exists: God’s estimate of human character is the fact of any moment; but it is not “revealed”. It will be revealed. A day is apportioned for the revelation, and that day is a day of wrath as regards the vast majority of mankind. In that day, riches will profit nothing, they profit something now: the universal mind is mercenary; and wherever gold exists, heads bend to it, and in this fact, the possessor finds pleasure and profit, and makes riches his strength and his refuge. But his refuge will fail him when the day of wrath arrives. Riches will not hide a man from the righteous judgment of God. The mercenary heads that meanwhile dip to the rich man will be mown like grass before the scythe. Righteousness only (and this consists alone in the doing of the commandments of God) will deliver a man in that terrible day.

## 22. The Healing Balm Of Words of Wisdom

*“There is that speaketh like the piercings of a sword; but the tongue of the wise is health” (Proverbs 12:8).*

Most men have discovered the truth of this by bitter experience. It is the propensity of the natural mind to take pleasure in inflicting pain — in boyhood, killing cats and plucking the wings of flies; in manhood, saying cutting things. The reverse of health comes from the influence of such. They distress and check and blight and kill. There are degrees in the ugly phenomenon. The world is full of it, and it is mostly in the superlative form. If one thing distinguishes the true sons of God more than another from the evil generation in which they live, it is in the contrast they present to it in this matter. What Solomon says of the model wife is true of them all: “The law of kindness is in her mouth.” There is nothing but comfort and encouragement and life in the tongues of the wise. It is a thing to aim at: “speech always with grace, seasoned with salt.” Words in this form are as a healing medicine, while the words of the wicked are swords. What a blessed day for the world when it is under the guidance of men whose tongue is health.

## 23. The Permanency Of Truth

*“The lip of truth shall be established for ever, but a lying tongue is but for a moment” (Proverbs 12:19).*

This is true, now and hereafter — in little things and large. A man found to be a liar is avoided by righteous and wicked alike. His “establishment” is impossible. He is found at last in the vagrants’ ward or between sandwich boards on the street. A man whose word can be trusted makes his way, and secures, in some shape or form a place in the little “ever” of the present life. But how much more glorious is the hereafter application. “The truth” of God is a fact in the earth, whether men appreciate it or not. The lip dedicated to it will be found on earth in the endless aeon that succeeds the human era; when the tongues that are so much and so variously exercised in the endless mendacities of an age of falsehood (religious, doctrinal, social, commercial, practical, constructive, and actual) will have subsided into the long dead silence from which they will never wake.

## 24. True Riches and Poverty Contrasted

*“There is that maketh himself rich, yet hath nothing: there is that maketh himself poor, yet hath great riches” (Proverbs 13:7).*

In prospect of the Lord’s appearing, every one can see the force of this proverb. A man devoting the wisdom and labour of his life to self-

enrichment, will find no favour with Christ who asks, as the condition of acceptance with him, that we be “good stewards” of what God may place in our hands, abounding liberally to every good work, and bearing the burdens of the afflicted. Such a man, therefore, though for the time he succeed in making himself as rich as Rothschild, prospectively considered, “hath nothing.” All that he has will pass out of his hands at death, and when he comes forth at the resurrection empty-handed, he is manifested as one of those who “lay up treasures for themselves, and are not rich towards God” (Luke 12:21). In contrast to him will be the man who, liberally using his means for the work of Christ, as he goes along, remains poor, but dies to open his eyes (in a moment) to the inheritance with which Christ, at his coming, will endow his faithful brethren.

There is, doubtless, a present application to the words as well, though it is not so striking as the one noticed. A man bent on riches may become penurious as to insulate himself from all men, and be practically a poor man, while a man with a generous heart may so use what he has as practically to possess that which is his neighbour’s, in so far as they eagerly place it at his disposal.

### 25. On Exercising Discernment

*“The simple believeth every word” (Proverbs 14:15).*

There is a certain kind of simplicity that is good — simplicity concerning that which is evil (Rom. 14:19). But to be simple in the sense of the proverb, is evil. To be simple in this sense is to be undiscerning. What we hear requires discernment as to whether we receive it or not; and this discernment comes of experience and reflection. Most of the talk that goes on among men is mere babble. Even things untrue, or most inaccurate, easily get into circulation and credit, with the common run of people, and if you trust to the echoes of common talk you will certainly be led astray — grievously so, sometimes — especially so as affecting matters of divine principle. Exercise discernment: make sure of the foundations, before committing yourself. Be not of the simple, who believeth every word. On the other hand, do not belong to that other, but more pretentious class of simpletons who believe nothing, unless their own precious eyes have seen. Nothing requires less capacity than unbelief: it is the highest exercise of the finest faculties of the human organisation, that enables the mind judicially to extract conviction from evidence that may lie scattered far and wide.

### 26. Only The Wise Speak Sober Wisdom

*“The lips of the wise disperse knowledge: but the heart of the foolish doest not so” (Proverbs 15:7).*

Considering that “the wise shall inherit glory,” and that “shame shall be the promotion of fools,” in whom God “takes no pleasure” (Ecc. 5:4), it is important for us, as those who are striving to be among the former, to note every divinely recorded characteristic of the wise man. Here is one, very identifiable, but rarely to be met with on the world’s highway: he deals in knowledge. His talk is the talk of reason and sobriety. He walks in the light himself and the effect of his walk is to enlighten others. How different it is with 99 men out of every 100 you meet. Their talk is all froth — the bubbling of folly. They strain after that which is witty — that which is smart — that which is scornful and depreciative of others, — that which is telling and caustic, even when they don’t mean it. Anything in the way of sober knowledge or instruction is abhorrent to them, and scouted as “long-faced” and “old-fogey,” “The heart of fools poureth forth foolishness:” and “the foolish shall not stand in thy presence.”

### 27. Two Forms of Worship

*“The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord, but the prayer of the righteous is His delight” (Proverbs 15:8)*

The wicked sometimes sacrifice. They did so under the law, and they do so under the gospel. The form of the sacrifice differs, but the spirit of the thing is the same. They give for Divine use, but instead of being acceptable, it is “abomination” to God. The reason is to be found in the mind in which it is given. It is not given from a love of God, or from a desire to be in the way of obedience, but either from a superstitious notion that it may avert the consequences of their wicked course in common life (which is the most respectable form of this wickedness), or from a desire to be considered religious by his fellow-sinner, or to propitiate the good graces of the priesthood, through whom he may obtain influence and trade with the people. The approaches that please God are the approaches of “upright” men — men who fear God and work righteousness in private as well as in public — every day as well as Sunday — in the transactions of common life as well as in religious exercises — towards enemies as well as among friends.

### 28. The Test Of A True Walk

*“The way of the wicked is an abomination unto the Lord: but He loveth him that followeth after righteousness (Proverbs 15:9)*

The moderns in their sublime speculations have lost the idea of anything being “an abomination of the Lord.” Nothing is more certainly or more frequently revealed in the Scriptures. It is a comfort to those who “follow after righteousness”; it is also a warning. The comfort lies here: The way of the wicked is a distress to the righteous; is it not a comfort to them to know that what distresses them is an abomination to God? The warning comes thus: the way of the wicked is an abomination to God; will not the righteous, then, be on their guard against being involved in that way? There is nothing in “air, earth or sky” to tell us that the way of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord. Looking at these, it seems as if the way of the wicked were a matter of sheer indifference to all creation. But it is only fools that are misled by appearances. God’s views are hidden from human discernment: but they exist for all that; and the day of their manifestation will be a terrible day for the wicked, and a supreme day for the righteous.

### 29. The Joy Of The Foolish

*“Folly is joy to him that is destitute of wisdom: but a man of understanding walketh uprightly” (Proverbs 15:21).*

Folly is of two sorts, acted and spoken. The former is what is called “larking,” and the latter, punning, to which latter also belong all varieties of comic literature, so abundant in the present day. There are people who find delight in both sorts: to whom they are “joy.” Solomon says it is an evidence of destitution of wisdom. Experience is in harmony with his assertion. The first element of wisdom is the fear of God (Prov. 1:7). Those who find their joy in folly have a distaste for things pertaining to godliness — as disaster amounting to aversion. Some think they may indulge folly a little. It is dangerous. It is apt to get the upper hand. It disinclines to wisdom in proportion as it is active. Sobriety is enjoined: unwise jesting is forbidden (Eph. 5:4). Gravity comes with understanding Jesus, the wisest, was a man of sorrows. The emptiest headed are the most prone to wear the cap and bells.

### 30. How To View Sin

*“Fools make a mock of sin” (Proverbs 16:9).*

The idea of sin depends upon the idea of God. A thing is sinful because God forbids it. Take God’s command away and a man is then at

liberty to do just as he inclines to. Expediency will be his only check. The idea of anything being sin is in that case a chimera — a faction of a sour imagination: which is how sin is estimated by the fools who are in the enormous majority throughout the world. They may be deterred from doing a thing because it is unmanly, or because it is dishonorable in human eyes, or because it would not pay, but the idea of a thing being sinful has no weight with them. This, with them, is old-womanish and weak. They make a mock at sin because they make a mock at God. The reality and dreadfulness of sin is felt in proportion as the reality and dreadfulness of God is realised. He has given us the means of realising this by the exhibition of His hand in the past. The record is authentic and convincing, but in the midst of the world’s Babel, the record is cast behind the back. “Blessed are they that keep His testimonies and that seek Him with the whole heart.”

### 31. Avoid Scandalizing

*“He that covereth a transgression seeketh love, but he that repeateth a matter separateth friends” (Proverbs 17:9).*

There are few men who seek to hide the faults of others. The universal propensity is to make them the subject of conversation. It is a mischief-working propensity. We are all faulty enough to make getting on a matter of delicate management, but the difficulty is immensely exaggerated by the tale-bearer. He acts upon your imagination and makes you see evil where you would have been blind. Yea, he sometimes makes you see evil where there is none. Your manner is unconsciously chilled towards the victim of his gossip, and the chill reacts upon him and from him to you, and men otherwise friends are separated. The only plan is to refuse to listen, and in your own practice be silent concerning faults, remembering that all are more or less faulty, and that the only way to get at the little good there is in an evil state is by exercising the charity that covers a multitude of sins.

### 32. Two Kinds of Love

*“A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity” (Proverbs 17:17).*

Yes, a *friend* — a true friend — loveth at *all times*. Fair weather friends love only when the sun shines, and they love at that time not for your sake, but for their own. It is the chance of benefit for themselves that inspires their friendship. This is manifest every day in society. They are each others’ friends so long as they are well off; but let a man fall from his position and become poor, he is mercilessly “cut” by acquaintances. Former friends look down their nose when they meet. This is the world’s love; it is the love of mammon at heart. But a

“friend” is one who loves with the love of God. Such will love you much for your own sake, if you are wise and good; if you are not, then for God’s sake, who by Christ has commanded the love even of enemies, still more the unfortunate. This man will love “at all times,” because the source of his love is steady, and independent of the transient circumstances of human condition. It is a benevolent love which seeks the advantage of its object and not benefit from it. Adversity, which frightens off the cowardly, selfish, sickly friendship of the world, will only manifest with greater brightness the brotherliness of the true friend.

### 33. How To Be Happy

*“A merry heart doeth good like a medicine; but a broken spirit drieth the bones” (Proverbs 17:22).*

Every man recognises this to be true. What does the fact point to but this, that gladness is the normal state of man. But we are face to face every day with this other fact, that sorrow and not gladness is the prevalent state of man. Hence a third fact is involved — that there must be some cause for the actual human state being so different from the normal state. This third fact the Bible and nothing else supplies: that man is out of joint with God. Adam expelled from Eden is the typical position of the world’s race. There can be no true merriness of heart till reconciliation is consummated in a full return to friendship with God. Mankind will then know the truth of what David says: “In thy favor is life.” Broken spirit and dry bones will be the universal experience till the proclamation is made: “Behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain.”

### 34. The Observation Of The Wise and Foolish

*“Wisdom is before him that hath understanding, but the eyes of a fool are in the ends of the earth” (Proverbs 17:24).*

God has made all things; and the discerning contemplation of them inspires the heart to say with David: “In wisdom hast thou made them all.” This wisdom is manifest to the eyes of “him that hath understanding,” wherever he may be. He discovers wisdom in the constitution of even the commonest things, and not only perceives wisdom in them, but acquires it in the discernment of how to adapt himself to them. To such, all things are wise and all things wonderful. To the proximate gratifications of sense, and the destructive mental incandescence scripturally described as foolishness — wisdom is never next.

If he admire it sentimentally, it is a thing far off in another age or in another country. A stranger stands high with him, but a prophet in his own town he cannot honour, even if he be Jesus of Nazareth. His eyes are in the ends of the earth, where things can be no use to him; and if you took him to live at the ends of the earth, his eyes would turn back to the place he came from in the same foolish way.

### 35. The Emptiness Of The Fool’s Understanding

*“A fool hath no delight in understanding, but that his heart may discover itself” (Proverbs 18:2).*

The mind that finds pleasure in exercising itself as to the how and wherefore of things is not the mind of a fool, unless the exercise in question is confined to small and unimportant things (for doubtless some men are very curious about things of no importance, and quite indifferent as to those that are). But in general the fool hath no delight in understanding, even in small things. If he dabble in such things at all, educationally or otherwise, it is that “his heart may *show itself*”: that is, that he may make a display, and obtain notice. It is not that he has any delight in the matters of study, as such as becomes visibly manifest when he is left to the attraction of the thing itself, without outside stimulus. When there is no opportunity of notice, his interest flags and dies, and he drifts away in some other direction of sensationalism. Many men in this way are interested in the truth when it is an affair of public meeting, debate, or open exhibition in some form or other; but when it is only an affair of private life, they go as dead as ditch water. The value of pondering Solomon’s reminder lies in the recollection that God “hath no pleasure in fools.”

### 36. The Refuge Of The Righteous

*“The name of Yahweh is a strong tower; the righteous runneth into it and is safe” (Proverbs 18:10).*

Not only in the sense made familiar by the apostolic institutions, but in all sense, the name of the Lord is a tower of defence. A man puts on the divine name and receives the forgiveness of sins and the hope of the undefiled inheritance; but if he stops short here, he will have no experience of the fulness of the truth exposed by Solomon. In how many situations and experiences of life do we find ourselves assailed, within and without, till utterly broken down and in despair almost. “Then I remembered God.” Such was David’s resource; and such will the righteous find to be effectual still: a protection against adversity, a consolation in distress, a succor in temptation, and unfailing strength in the last hour of weakness. But, finally, will the righteous find everlasting refuge when, at the Lord’s coming, they run into the glorious name

that cometh from far — the Lord Jesus, who is not only a mighty and precious friend, but more than friend can ever be to friend in present experience — a new nature which we shall put on, a glory with which we shall be arrayed, a temple we shall enter, a body in which incorporate, we shall be as in a tower — safe for ever.

### 37. The Trials Of The Wealthy

*“The rich man’s wealth is his strong city, and as an high wall in his own conceit” (Proverbs 18:11).*

Wealth is a great power for good, but is rarely used to that end. It is usually made a pedestal of self-elevation, or a refuge of self-comfort. Spiritually speaking, wealth is a greater trial than poverty. Few men can stand it. Job was one who could and did. He did not make gold his hope; he did not rejoice because his wealth was great. He did not withhold the poor from their desire, or cause the eyes of the widow to fail. He did not despise lowly men, or forget that all have one Maker. So he declares of himself. In this, he presented a contrast to the exhibition described by Solomon above, and which has not ceased to be common: A proud independence and callous indifference to other men because of wealth; and an arrogant self-assertion, because having no need to conciliate other men for what they need. Such an effect of wealth can only follow from the heart-seared man, and not from God. Where God is seen, as in the case of Job, goodness and humility are as much exhibited in riches as in poverty. It will be a happy day when the riches of the world are in the hands of those in whom God is developing this qualification for their use in the day of exaltation.

### 38. The Diplomacy Of Deceit

*“A man’s gift maketh room for him, and bringeth him before great men” (Proverbs 18:16).*

True, but this is due only to the mercenary state of society now upon earth. Did men truly “fear God,” they would “hate covetousness” and resent the gift of the suitor as a dangerous article; binding even the wise. It is a remarkable fact that the lower down men are in the scale of intelligence, the more susceptible they are to the power of what in the east is called “backsheesh”. A noble insensibility to sordid considerations is only to be found where God and not man is feared. This tells us of itself that the only true and good relation for man is that of faith in God, and entire subjection to His will. This makes him pure in heart, independent of man, bent only on doing righteousness. When the day comes (long promised, but certain in its final advent) that will see the glory of the Lord in all the earth, the day will have gone for ever when a man’s gift maketh room for him, and bringeth him before great men.

### 39. The Wisdom of the Wise

*“Cease, my son, to hear the instruction that causeth to err from the words of knowledge” (Proverbs 19:27).*

There are different modes of endeavouring to acquire the knowledge of wisdom; and out of them all, one is best, viz., the one negatively indicated in these words of Solomon. Go straight at the object of your search. Do not go around about, or dally on the road. There is a good deal of plausible take in the world about hearing all sides of a question. It is deceptive entirely. A man need not go the round of all error to find the truth. If he do, he will be of the class spoken of by Paul “as ever learning and never able to come to a knowledge of the truth.” A man’s life is too short, and his capacity too limited for this mode of getting at wisdom. We need not read all books; we need not listen to all fools, in order to decide whether we should believe God’s most glorious words, and obey His life-giving commandments. Paul’s attitude is the model: “I determined to know nothing among you but Jesus Christ, and him crucified.” “I count all things but dross, that I may win Christ.” A thorough policy in all things is always the most successful, and in nothing more so than in the pursuit of that wisdom which is more precious than rubies.

### 40. A Pit To Avoid

*“The mouth of a strange woman is a deep pit: he that is abhorred of the Lord shall fall therein” (Proverbs 22:14).*

While woman is the sweetest of man’s earthly alleviation, she is liable to become his most terrible woe. Solomon is a standing illustration. He was wiser than all men: Yet, “even him did outlandish woman cause to sin” (Neh. 13:20). Their sweetness is their power for good or evil. There is only one mode of dealing with it that secures the good and fences off the evil, that is, rigidly regulating it by the law of God. What He allows has no sting in the sweetness; what He forbids will turn to misery and ruin. “Rejoice with the wife of thy youth.” This is the institution on which His blessing rests. Have nothing to do with another: that is His commandment. Walk in the way of these His appointments, and you will find sweetness, honour, and life. If you ignore His command and consult only your inclinations, the mouth of strange women (alluring and enticing and fascinating at first) will prove the pit of your disgrace and ruin; your fall into which will be evidence of the Lord’s abhorrence.

### 41. The Need Of Discipline

*“Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child: but the*



*rod of correction shall drive it far from him” (Proverbs 22:15).*

A child is an object of endearment to parental feeling; and if there be a lack of parental discernment of what is wise and good, the sense of endearment will arrest the hand of correction, to the child's detriment. There is a tendency in most fathers and mothers to think that their child is an exception to Solomon's rule; and there is a tendency in modern sentiment to rebel against Solomon's 'rod of correction'. They think wisdom is in a child as sweetness is in a strawberry; and that you have only to let it grow, with a little interference as possible, to have the result desired. Experience, and a study of nature, show Solomon to be absolutely right. Wisdom comes with education only, and the principal part of education, in the early stage, is the parental rod of correction. In all stages suffering is the way to obedience and moral development. Where there is no suffering, there is no ripeness, no sympathy, no consideration for others, no quickening; but a dull, selfish, wilful disposition, that disqualifies for the approbation or the use of God and man.

#### **42. The Deceitfulness Of Fleshly Wisdom**

*“Cease from thine own wisdom” (Proverbs 23:4).*

This is like the command to labour not to be rich; it is contrary to human thought. It does not occur to the man of mere nature that there is any other wisdom to trust than his own. It is the tendency of the human mind to think greatly of human wisdom, and to advise its cultivation and praise greatly its attainment. The modern style is to call this human wisdom divine wisdom, and to teach that in no other form can divine wisdom come to us. But there is a wisdom as much higher than man's as the heaven is higher than the earth. This wisdom is the Eternal Wisdom manifest in the construction of heaven and earth. It is real wisdom, whether applied in creation; or in telling us what course to follow, or in indicating the course of futurity. Man's wisdom is not real, because it is based on partial knowledge (very partial) and imperfect judgment. It is all on the surface, and as limited in time, space, and application as puny man himself is limited in the limitless universe. A man's true wisdom is to know this, and therefore not to trust to his own wisdom in the interpretation of the mysterious problem of life and its duties; but to accept the guidance of the wisdom of God. We could not have done this if the wisdom of God had not revealed itself to us. The wisdom of God spoke in Israel; and the spoken wisdom having become the written wisdom, we are enabled to obey the precept which tells us to surrender to the guidance of God's wisdom as preceptively delivered to us in the Scriptures, and to “cease from thine own wisdom,”

which will assuredly lead thee astray. It is a deceptive. A man need not go the round of all error to find the truth. If he do so, he will be of the class spoken of by Paul “as ever learning and never able to come to a knowledge of the truth”. A man's life is too short, and his capacity too limited for his mode of getting at wisdom. We need not read all books; we need not listen to all fools, in order to decide whether we should believe God's most glorious words, and obey His life-giving commandments. Paul's attitude is the model: “I am determined to know nothing among you but Jesus Christ, and him crucified.” “I count all things but dross that I may win Christ.” A thorough policy in all things is always the most successful, and in nothing more so than in the pursuit of that wisdom which is more precious than rubies.

#### **43. The Test Of An Honest Reputation**

*“As the fining pot for silver and the furnace for gold, so is a man to his praise” (Proverbs 27:21).*

You call a thing silver; the melting pot will confirm or confute, according to the fact. So reputed gold will be manifest in its true character in the furnace, whatever words may say about it. Solomon truly says, so is a man to his reputation. He himself will destroy praise or dispel slander, according as the fact may be. Do you speak highly of him when he is unworthy of it? Your sweet words will dissolve like snowflakes in water before the actual experience of him which people will get. Do you speak evil when it is not justifiable? It will only be like the superficial smut, disfiguring it for a moment, but disappearing in the fire which brings out the brilliant glow of the true metal. In a sense, no man can befriend you; no man can stand in your way. It is what you are yourself that will make or destroy you. None can destroy the evil man like himself, and none can build you up if your substance is sand. Walk in wisdom and righteousness, and you are safe, even in the natural working out of things: how much more when the Lord is the wall of your defence as He is to all those who put their trust in Him.

#### **44. Fruits Of Faithfulness**

*“A faithful man shall abound with blessings, but he that maketh haste to be rich shall not be innocent” (Proverbs 28:20).*

“Abound with blessings”; that is, with good deeds to others. These are the fruits of faithfulness, and faithfulness is the disposition to use what God puts in our power in the way He commends. To bless others is one of the principal features of His will concerning us. It was exemplified, as all excellencies were, in the case of Jesus, who “went about doing good”. A faithful man will “excel in this grace also”, as

Paul exhorts. But a man hasting to be rich is almost certain to fail in this. His blessings turn inward. His good deeds are nipped in the bud. His aim to do good to himself makes him unconcerned about others; and being unfruitful of blessing, he dies not innocent, with “much goods laid up for many years”.

#### 45. The Folly of Contending With The Foolish

*“If a wise man contend with a foolish man, whether he rage or laugh, there is no rest” (Proverbs 29:9).*

It requires wisdom on each side — that is, the quick perception of facts, and candor in the recognition of them — before argument, public or private, can be conducted with any beneficial result. If one of the combatants is dull and perverse, the keenness and candor of the other is thrown away; he might as well speak to a horse. Banter or earnest appeal, the result is the same. “There is no rest,” and cannot be. A wise man recognising this, avoids collision with such, in obedience to another proverb, which says: “Go from the presence of a foolish man when thou perceiveth not in him the lips of knowledge” (Ch. 14:7). The fool’s policy takes the opposite direction. “A fool’s lips enter into contention, and his mouth calleth for strokes” (Ch. 18:6). When two such get together, what a whirlwind.

#### 46. A Time To Speak

*“A fool uttereth all his mind; but a wise man keepeth it in till afterwards” (Proverbs 29:11).*

There is a time to be silent, as well as a time to speak. A man’s power to recognize this time is almost a criterion of wisdom in general. A man without discernment speaks whatever he thinks. As a bell to the waves, or the Aeolian lyre to the wind, so is his mouth to his feelings; answering to every shaking gust, every expanding swell. He may think honesty calls for it: this is an artificial theory of honesty. Honesty demands truthfulness in what we say, but not in the saying of all we know or think. There is prudence as well as honesty. Prudence controls the tongue, which, as James says, is a little member with power out of all proportion to its size. It is often a power for destruction, for burning; it usually creates perpetual blight. It may be a fountain of blessing. To be so, it must be withheld from bitter words, even if bitter feelings are stirring for utterance. Words of patience, words of kindness, answers of softness belong to the lips of saints. Words of another kind destroy the owner.

#### 47. Following A Multitude To Do Evil

*“When the wicked are multiplied, transgression increaseth; but the righteous shall see their fall” (Proverbs 29:16).*

“Everybody does it”. This is a common apology for doubtful ways. Sinners take courage from sinners, and when there are many of them, the bands of iniquity are strong. But numbers do not alter principles. “Though hand joined with hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished”. The transgressors were numerous at the flood; and again in the wilderness under Moses; and again, in Jerusalem in the days of Christ. And they are in the overwhelming ascendant at this closing hour of the times of the Gentiles. Let us not be deceived by their numbers. It is their destiny to “fall”, and the righteous shall “see it”, as they have repeatedly done in the past. It will be a poor consolation when the crisis arrives to think that in the day of our opportunity (foolishly squandered) we only increased the transgression by doing what everybody else of the multiplied transgressors did.

#### 48. The Folly Of Pride

*“A man’s pride shall bring him low; but honour shall uphold the humble in spirit” (Proverbs 29:23).*

True, even now! Pride excites the contempt of all men, even of the proud themselves; in fact, none are so scornful of pride as they. The consequence is a proud man falls low in the general esteem, even in a corrupt society, and in that same society, a man of knowledge and goodness is held in good repute if he be of a modest unassuming deportment. But with what tremendous force will the proverb be realised in the day of Christ (and this is the true light in which to measure everything: because the day of Christ is the day of the true issues of things). Where will the proud man be then? He is tolerated now by fellow-sinners; but the day for the toleration of such will then be over. Low indeed, even unto death, will they be brought in the very presence of God’s men of humble spirit who will be exalted.

*We are living in momentous times. Christ's advent is impending. Ere long his power and might will be seen and felt in all the earth. Christ is coming to destroy the wicked, and to inaugurate his righteous and beneficent reign. The world neither expects nor wants Christ, and ridicules those who do. As in the days of Noah and Lot, so now, men are unbelieving and disobedient, restraints are relaxed and standards are lowered. These trends affect even Christ's followers. The days of Noah are noted for apostasy among the sons of God, and rejection of the requirements of separateness. We need to be on our guard against these trends. A study of Proverbs, and a practical application of the principles outlined therein, will guard the reader from the tendencies of this present evil age, and guide him along the pathway to life eternal. The wisdom set forth therein is "a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her; and happy is every one that retaineth her" (Prov. 3:18).*