

The Apostasy of Solomon - The Lesson of His Life.

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The book of Ecclesiastes was written by Solomon in his old age, after he had fully proven that all the pleasures earth is able to give are empty and unsatisfying. He there shows how impossible it is for the vanities of the world to meet the longings of the soul. His conclusion is that it is wisdom to enjoy with gratitude the good gifts of God, and to do right; for all our works will be brought into judgments.

Solomon's autobiography is a mournful one. He gives us the history of his search for happiness. He engaged in intellectual pursuits; he gratified his love for pleasure; he carried out his schemes of commercial enterprise. He was surrounded by the fascinating splendor of court life. All that the carnal heart could desire was at his command; yet he sums up his experience in this sad record:--

"I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit. That which is crooked cannot be made straight; and that which is wanting cannot be numbered. I communed with mine own heart, saying, Lo, I am come to great estate, and have gotten more wisdom than all they that have been before me in Jerusalem; yea, my heart had great experience of wisdom and knowledge. And I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly; I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit. For in much wisdom is much grief; and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow. I said in mine heart, Go to now, I will prove thee with mirth, therefore enjoy pleasure; and, behold, this also is vanity. I said of laughter, It is mad; and of mirth, What doeth it? I sought in mine heart to give myself unto wine, yet acquainting mine heart with wisdom; and to lay hold on folly, till I might see what was that good for the sons of men, which they should do under the heaven all the days of their life. I made me great works; I builded me houses; I planted me vineyards. . . . So I was great, and increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem; also my wisdom remained with me. And whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them, I withheld not my heart from any joy; for my heart rejoiced in all my labor; and this was my portion of all my labor. Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labor that I had labored to do; and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun."

The errors and follies of the present time are an exaggerated repetition of those of past ages. One generation after another give themselves up to the vain pursuit of peace and happiness in the world, a pursuit which ends in disappointment, and too often in despair. The way of true happiness remains the same in all ages. Patient continuance in well-doing will lead to honor, happiness, and eternal life.

Solomon sat upon a throne of ivory, the steps of which were of solid gold, flanked by six golden lions. His eyes rested upon highly cultivated and beautiful gardens just before him. Those grounds were visions of loveliness, arranged to resemble, as far as possible, the garden of Eden. Choice trees and shrubs, and flowers of every variety, had been brought from foreign lands to beautify them. Birds of every variety of brilliant plumage flitted from tree to tree, making the air vocal with sweet songs. Youthful attendants, gorgeously dressed and decorated, waited to obey his slightest wish. Scenes of revelry,

music, sports, and games were arranged for his diversion at an extravagant expenditure of money.

But all this did not bring happiness to the king. He sat upon his magnificent throne, his frowning countenance dark with despair. Dissipation had left its impress upon his once fair and intellectual face. He was sadly changed from the youthful Solomon. His brow was furrowed with care and unhappiness, and he bore in every feature the unmistakable marks of sensual indulgence. His lips were prepared to break forth into reproaches at the slightest deviation from his wishes.

His shattered nerves and wasted frame showed the result of violating Nature's laws. He confessed to a wasted life, an unsuccessful chase after happiness. His is the mournful wail, "All is vanity and vexation of spirit." "Woe to thee, O land, when thy king is a child, and thy princes eat in the morning. Blessed art thou, O land, when thy king is the son of nobles, and thy princes eat in due season, for strength, and not for drunkenness! By much slothfulness the building decayeth; and through idleness of the hands the house droppeth through. A feast is made for laughter, and wine maketh merry; but money answereth all things."

It was customary for the Hebrews to eat but twice a day, their heartiest meal coming not far from the middle of the day. But the luxurious habits of the heathen had been engrafted into the nation, and the king and his princes were accustomed to extend their festivities far into the night. On the other hand, if the earlier part of the day was devoted to feasting and wine-drinking, the officers and rulers of the kingdom were totally unfitted for their grave duties.

Solomon was conscious of the evil growing out of the indulgence of perverted appetite, yet seemed powerless to work the required reformation. He was aware that physical strength, calm nerves, and sound morals can only be secured through temperance. He knew that gluttony leads to drunkenness, and that intemperance in any degree disqualifies a man for any office of trust. Gluttonous feasts, and food taken into the stomach at untimely seasons, leave an influence upon every fiber of the system; and the mind also is seriously affected by what we eat and drink.

The life of Solomon teaches a lesson of warning not only to the youth, but also to those of mature age. We are apt to look upon men of experience as safe from the allurements of sinful pleasure. But still we often see those whose early life has been exemplary being led away by the fascinations of sin, and sacrificing their God-given manhood for self-gratification. For a time they vacillate between the promptings of principle, and their inclination to pursue a forbidden course; but the current of evil finally proves too strong for their good resolutions, as in the case of the once wise and righteous king, Solomon.

But Solomon addressed himself especially to the young in this urgent appeal: "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them." He concludes thus: "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil."

Dear reader, as you stand in imagination on the slopes of Moriah, and look across the Kidron valley upon those ruined pagan shrines, take the lesson of the repentant king home to your heart, and be wise. Make God your trust. Turn your face resolutely against

temptation. Vice is a costly indulgence. Its effects are fearful upon the constitutions of those whom it does not speedily destroy. A dizzy head, loss of strength, loss of memory, derangements of the brain, heart, and lungs, follow quickly upon such transgression of the rules of health and morality.

Genius and crime make a sad combination, which we too frequently see in those who have given up God in pursuit of the world. Many of our youth who are highly gifted go astray. Falling under temptation, they become the slaves of appetite and passion. Virtue and integrity are destroyed in them; vice becomes a tyrant, driving its victims from one excess to another, until reason, self-respect, family affection, and eternal interests, plead in vain for reform. It is not easy to regain the reins of self-government, when they are once surrendered to the baser passions.

Parents may learn a lesson from the history of Solomon. Their course of action in training their children for the duties of life, will remain as a living testimony of them when they are in their graves. There is no surer way to ruin children, both in body and soul, than to surround them with luxuries, provide them with plenty of money, allow them to frequent billiard tables, theaters, festivities, and other demoralizing scenes of amusement, to drink wine, and spend their time in delicate idleness. Reared in this way they do not feel the necessity of being able to support themselves, are devoid of energy in useful employment, avoiding systematic labor, having no respect for parents, or attachment for home. What will be the future of society and the State, if such men are chosen to offices of responsibility and trust? With no proper balance of conscience or principle, they will become the leaders and instigators of iniquity in high places, or the tools of other unprincipled and more daring men. The interests of community will not be held sacred by them; and they will sacrifice everything to their ruling desire.

Parents, let us rear our children in such a manner that our memory will not be to them as a Mount of Offense, as they look back upon a misspent life, the result of their injudicious training at our hands.

Let them rather look back upon a happy parental home, where vice of any sort was not tolerated, and where the law of kindness and right ruled, and the fear of the Lord was taught to be the beginning of wisdom.

Abraham pitched his tent, and by its side erected his altar. The tent was afterward removed, but the altar was enduring. Those memorable stones remained as a monument of his righteousness and devotion, and commemorated in the minds of his children, and children's children, the integrity of their father Abraham. There he had prayed, and made his vows to God. There angels had visited him with messages of mercy. Sacred spot indeed, where the weary pilgrim might send up his cry to Heaven for purity and holiness of heart. Mark the contrast between those memorials, and the ruins upon the Mount of Offense, which testified, for many generations, to the apostasy of Solomon.

Christian parents, shall the testimony of your lives, in the persons of your children, speak honorably of you when your voice is silent in the grave, or shall your mistakes and sins be perpetuated in your children, as a warning to others, and a blot upon your memory? {HR, June 1, 1878}