

[B.C. 980.]

LESSON XI.—VANITY OF WORLDLY PLEASURE.

[December 14.]

Ecclesiastes 2. 1-13.



1 I said *a* in mine heart, Go to now, I will prove thee with mirth: therefore enjoy pleasure: and, behold, *b* this also is vanity.

a Luke 12. 19.—*b* Isa. 50. 11.

2 I said *c* of laughter, It is mad; and of mirth, What doeth it?
c Prov. 14. 13; chap. 7. 6.

3 I *d* sought in mine heart *a* 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 *b* all the days of their life.

d Chap. 1. 17.—*a* To draw my flesh with wine.—

b The number of the days of their life.

4 I made me great works; I builded me houses; I planted me vineyards;

5 I made me gardens and orchards, and I planted trees in them of all kind of fruits;

6 I made me pools of water, to water therewith the wood that bringeth forth trees;

7 I got me servants and maidens, and had *c* servants born in my house; also I had great possessions of great and small cattle above all that were in Jerusalem before me;

c Sons of my house.

8 I *e* gathered me also silver and gold, and the peculiar treasure of kings and of the provinces; I gat me men singers and women singers, and the delights of the sons of men, as *d* musical instruments, and that of all sorts.

e 1 Kings 9. 28; 10. 10, 14, 21.—*d* Musical instruments

9 So *f* I was great, and increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem: also my wisdom remained with me.

f Chap. 1. 16.

10 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 labour: and *g* this was my portion of all my labour.

g Chap. 3. 22; 5. 18; 9. 9.

11 Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do; and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun.

12 And I turned myself to behold wisdom, *h* and madness, and folly: for what can the man do that cometh after the king? *e* even that which hath been already done.

h Chap. 1. 17; 7. 25.—*e* Or, in those things which have been already done.

13 Then I saw *f* that wisdom excelleth folly, as far as light excelleth darkness.

f That there is an excellency in wisdom more than in folly.

GENERAL STATEMENT.

The Book of Ecclesiastes holds a singular position in the canon of Scripture. It takes its stand not in heaven, but on the earth, and leads through various paths, only to show their usefulness; and directs to God, by proving the

vanity of the earth. The lesson of the week is found, not in its opening, but its closing sentences, which point to the service of God as the only worthy object of life. It may have been written by the one, and the only one among the sacred writers, who had the fullest experience of life in all its phases, a wise philosopher, a great king and a man of pleasure. Either it was penned by Solomon himself, as its language intimates, or by some later writer enabled by divine power to enter into the experience of Solomon, and of the two alternatives the former seems the most reasonable. It is the search of a soul after the highest good, passing through fields of pleasure, of sin, of learning, testing every experience which promises enjoyment, and finding in all earthly things the same inability to meet the wants of the soul, until the seeker reaches the conclusion that in the fear of God, and the keeping of his law, are found the highest aims of man. It is an experience like that of the physician who tests poisons on himself that he may warn others against them, an experience from which Solomon himself came forth defiled and blighted, and therefore a story which is told as a beacon to warn, and not a buoy to guide. The young man of to-day may not plead Solomon's conduct as an excuse for his own delvings in the dark pool of worldly pleasure, but rather may learn to avoid the errors of which the wise man tells us his own bitter experience.

EXPLANATORY AND PRACTICAL NOTES.

Verse 1. I said in mine heart. This verse and the one following form a heading to the section, and state in brief what is given at length in the succeeding verses, the failure of Solomon's attempt to find satisfaction in worldly pleasure. In mine heart should be "to my heart." Go to. An ejaculation like our "Come, now." Prove thee with mirth. He had already tested the search for knowledge, and found it "vanity;" now he undertakes a search for pleasure. Yet we are to remember, first, that it was not for sensual gratification, but for the gaining of wisdom; and, secondly, that he kept in view the facts of death and eternity, two realities overlooked by most pleasure-seekers. This also is vanity. This word means "breath," and is the name Abel, in Gen. 4. 2. It denotes that which passes away quickly, leaves no result, and fails to satisfy the heart of man. He means here, not that enjoyment is evil or wrong, but that it fails when made the chief end of existence. 1. Those have the most pleasure who seek it the least.

2. I said of laughter. This he said, not at the beginning, but at the end of his experience. It is mad. The merriment of the mere pleasure-seeker is like the laughter of the insane, for it is hollow, and strives to hide realities. 2. Look at the faces of men who seek