

*carefully watch ourselves.* For God is in heaven, and thou upon earth. He is infinite, you are frail and mortal, and therefore to be profoundly reverent is your duty.

**3. A dream cometh through the multitude of business,** etc. Just as a worried, jaded, excited, preoccupied man, longing for restful sleep, tumbles and tosses on his bed while a whirl of disordered images dances through his feverish dreams, and wakes before daylight unrefreshed, so the "fool," the man who does not recognize what spiritual privileges are, turns to his devotions, which should be the rest and relaxation of his soul, and gets no good from them because of his feverish moral unrest, the idle clatter and irreverence of vows and prayers and promises, none of which was ever adequately considered.

**4, 5. When thou vovest a vow.** Men are not so ready to make formal vows now as in ancient worship, but, in truth, every time a man promises God and his fellow-man, or even promises himself in God's sight that he will be better, he has "vowed a vow," has made a promise which God expects him to perform. Nearly every man who promises to do right feels with more or less distinctness that he is sealing his part of a covenant, that he is making a promise to God, which has some relation to the promises of blessing God has made to him. And he is right in this opinion. (7) *Remember, whether you break your promises or not, God never breaks his;* and there are times in our experiences of unfaithfulness when no sorrow of secular life could be so great as for God promptly to fulfill his promises. But in any case (8) *A fool's voice means nothing; no one depends upon it for guidance;* and its utterances are characterized not by good sense, but by a multitude of ill-arranged words. **Better . . . not vow, than . . . not pay.** This does not mean, Better to make no good resolutions than to make them, and in weakness to break them. (9) *A good promise, faithfully kept for six months represents so much good done, the effects of which shall last through all*

*time, perhaps through all eternity.* Besides, if you keep a resolution for six months, or for one month, or for one day, you have thereby so strengthened your moral nature that the constant keeping of the resolution is thenceforth more easily possible. Verse 5 is simply a condemnation of heartless, thoughtless covenants with God, lightly made and lightly broken.

**6. Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin.** Do not incur sin by a rash vow. The verse is an intensification of the last one. "Flesh" here means the sensuous element in man's nature. **The angel,** God's messenger, referring here not probably to a supernatural visitant, but to a prophet or priest. **That it was an error.** This is, don't dodge, don't evade, don't say to your minister or class leader, "It was all a mistake; I did not mean to do it." Stand up squarely and acknowledge your shortcoming, if you have made one, but better still, don't come short. **Wherefore should God be angry.** Angry because you lie to conceal your wrong.

**7-9. There are also divers vanities.** A different translation has been suggested: "For so it happens through many dreams and vanities and many words." From all such foolish vanities the youth is instructed to turn away: **fear thou God. Marvel not at the matter.** Better, "Question not concerning the purpose." Do not dispute God's will, as if he had abandoned the world. **The king himself is served by the field.** Is dependent upon its cultivation.

**10-12.** Verse 10 reiterates the lesson of the inability of the human soul to take satisfaction from the things that minister to the human body. Verse 11 teaches that increased wealth brings increased expenditures; and that (10) *After a certain liberal margin has been passed a rich man has no advantage from his riches, "save the beholding of them with his eyes."* Verse 12 furnishes still another argument against anxiety to gain riches.

### CRITICAL NOTES.

The Book of Ecclesiastes—Hebrew name *Kohelath*—consists of a series of discourses bearing on the one great theme which the author repeats more than a score of times, "Vanity of vanities, the whole is vanity." The first series occupies chaps. 1 and 2, and sets forth the emptiness and unsatisfying nature of all things as tested by the personal experience of *Kohelath*. The second series, running through chaps. 3-5, maintains that all human affairs are under the control of God, and that man's highest good will be found in a reverent enjoyment of the good things which God grants him in the midst of his toil. The conclusion of this

series, embracing the lesson of this date, consists of a number of proverbs based upon the preceding observations. Then follows a third series of observations on earthly vanities, interspersed with wise proverbs, and concluding with chap. 8, verse 15. The fourth and final series runs from chap. 8, 16, to the end of the book, and maintains that the mysteries of life and being are a part of the unfathomable work of God, and the highest wisdom is to live cheerfully and fear and obey God, who will bring all things into judgment.

Like all the great thinkers who have studied the problems of life, *Kohelath* wavers between con-