

**THE BOOK OF
PROVERBS, EXPLAINED
AND ILLUSTRATED**

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The Book of Proverbs, Explained and Illustrated by Benjamin Elliott Nicholls

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BENJAMIN ELLIOTT NICHOLLS

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BY
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"Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto
according to thy word."—PSALM cxlv. 9.

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THOSE to whom the writer would desire to offer by this tract some little assistance, are the instructors of the young, especially teachers in Sunday-schools. It consists chiefly of illustrations by Scripture examples of some of those short but very comprehensive precepts, observations upon human life, human nature, and the dealings of God with man, which are contained in the Book of Proverbs; the teacher being left to carry the principle farther, as he may see fit. The chief reason why so many illustrations have been given, is to afford opportunity of bringing larger portions of Scripture history to notice, especially from the Old Testament; from which it is feared that the young, without some help, may not derive that improvement it is so calculated to afford them.—2 Tim. iii. 14—17. See p. 184 to 204.

THE
BOOK OF PROVERBS,
EXPLAINED AND ILLUSTRATED.

CHAPTER I.

GENERAL REMARKS ON THE BOOK OF PROVERBS.

CONTENTS.—§ I. Design of the Book of Proverbs. § II. Arrangement of its Contents.

§ I. *Design of the Book of Proverbs.*

THE leading design of this portion of God's word is, as stated at the beginning of it, to give to the young man knowledge and discretion (ch. i. 4.), which it especially directs him to seek by attention to the piquis instructions of his parents (ch. i. 8; vi. 20. 23.), and the precepts of heavenly wisdom. (ch. i. 20—23.)

It is indeed a storehouse of practical wisdom. It is a guide to his affections (iv. 6. 23.), to guard him against those temptations to which youth is most exposed (ch. i. 10; ii. 16—19; v. 1—14; vi. 24—35; vii. 5—27; ix. 13—18; xxiii. 26—35; xxix. 3.), and to direct him with regard to his settlement in life, by pointing out the advantages of a wise (xiv. 1; xix. 14; xxxi. 10—31.), the evil of a wrong choice (xi. 22; xix. 13; xxi. 9. 19; xxv. 24; xxvii. 15—16.). It moreover gives him that knowledge of the world, which will abundantly supply his want of experience, and guide his feet into the way of peace in his intercourse with it, teaching him what to expect and how to act under the ever-varying circumstances in which he may be placed.

But though so especially recommended to the young, the

book of Proverbs furnishes rules for the government of families, cities, kingdoms. Out of the vast treasures of learning left us in this small volume, the best advice is furnished to princes, councillors, judges, and other public ministers, or to all sorts of subjects in their several relations, and in every condition; to make them both pious and politic; to direct them in the choice of their comforts, in the education of their children, in the management of domestic affairs and in their transactions with other men; in contracting or conducting their friendships, in giving or taking good counsel and reproof, in making or preserving peace, in judging of men, and of the event of their designs. This book bridles the injurious tongue, corrects the wanton eye, and ties the unjust hands in chains. It persecutes sloth, chastises all absurd desires, teaches prudence, raises men's courage, and represents temperance and chastity after such a fashion, that one cannot but have them in veneration;—and thus is, as Basil says, an universal direction for all men, and for the whole of life. It is, moreover, important to observe, that it not only gives such universal directions, but enforces attention to them from those motives which can alone secure obedience to them, such as the authority of God (ch. xvi. 6.), his exact notice of all men's ways and hearts (ch. v. 21; xv. 11.), the rewards which attend righteousness (ch. xi. 18.), and the punishments which follow wickedness, by his just appointment, both in this world and the next (ch. xix. 29; xxiii. 17—19; xxvi. 10.).—See Lowth's Directions for Reading Holy Scripture and Bp. Patrick.

The terms wisdom and knowledge being sometimes applied to that which perverts rather than improves the mind, it is very important to observe that Solomon, the writer of this book, lays down this as the foundation of all his instructions, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge (ch. i. 7.); and, again, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (ch. ix. 10.); thus teaching us, that of all knowledge the knowledge of God is the chief, that there is no true wisdom without godliness, and that there can be no virtue in our intercourse with our fellow-creatures, where this is wanting as the motive of action.

When in this book folly and fools are spoken of, it em-

phatically refers to the transgression of God's law; as, of all folly, that is the most foolish.

The great design of Holy Scripture is, to make us wise unto salvation^a. It shows the necessity for salvation; it explains the nature of that salvation; and becomes, as the instrument of the Spirit, the power of God to salvation to every one that believeth^b. In the gradual development of this object, the book of Proverbs bears its part. The nature and consequences of sin are so described, as strongly to imply our need of that salvation which Christ has wrought out for us. See chaps. i. 24, &c. xvi. 5. xxi. 4. xxiv. 9, &c. vii. 27.

From the depravity of human nature, from man's inability to cleanse his own heart, and from his strong tendency to self-deception, as alluded to in chaps. xx. 9. xvi. 2, &c., is inferred his need of the sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit; and though it was reserved to the New Testament fully to exhibit his office, the Spirit of God is alluded to in ch. i. 23.

Whether the sacred writer intended expressly to prophesy of the Messiah, or whether the Israelites would generally consider him as the speaker, needs not to be determined; but with the light which the New Testament throws on the subject, it has been remarked by Bp. Patrick, that the description of wisdom contained in Prov. i. 20—23. viii. and ix., is expressed in such magnificent language, that the ancient Christians thought the application was to the wisdom revealed to us in the Gospel by the Son of God,—nay, to the Son of God Himself, the eternal word and wisdom of the Father. It may confirm this view of the subject, by comparing Prov. viii. 22, with John i. 1. xiv. 10.

It is said also, in Prov. viii. 23, "I was set up from everlasting." This description remarkably agrees with Micah's prophecy of the birth of Christ, (ch. v. 2.) quoted in Matt. ii. 6, which declares his goings forth to have been from of old, from everlasting; and agrees also with our Lord's declaration of Himself as the first and the last, who had glory with the Father before the world was, whom the

^a 2 Tim. iii. 15.

^b Rom. i. 16. Eph. vi. 17. John xvii. 17. 1 Pet. i. 23.