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I. AUTHORITY IN REVELATION AND MORALS.

FIVE FALLACIES AND ONE FIASCO CONVERGENT.

CURRENT literature, popular addresses and constantly recurring conversations in social intercourse, discover six convergent influences actively at work in society. Four are newer; two older. The aim of each is to shift the basis of authority in moral and religious life. The six forces differ widely in nature and in the character of those who direct the propagation and transmission of them through society. But, without collusion and moving along different, and sometimes antagonistic, lines, they tend to the same result, the annihilation of finality and authority in ethics and revelation. The convergence implies the superintendence of the same evil personality, shrewdly intruding himself into these different spheres of life and giving a common direction to their movements.

1. Blatant last century infidelity holds that miracles cannot be proven by testimony, and that, therefore, the claims of Christianity cannot be established because resting on them. It denies the relevancy or pertinency of what are called the evidences of Christianity, and in regard to Scripture would say: granted that a revelation has been made, it cannot be authenticated. It scoffs at religion as a superstition, and sneers at authoritative morals as the silly scruples of childhood and inexperience—greenness. Its ethics are utilitarian only. The best that it can say is, moral principles must be obeyed, because it is for the good of society. The evil of such a system was shown long ago in the famous passage about balances when held in the hands of self.—*David Hume, his confrères and followers.*

## V. THE ROYAL TEACHING PREACHER.

We will not at this time pause to discuss the questions of the authorship and design of the Book of Ecclesiastes. We are willing to accept the traditional view, and attribute it to the great name with which it has usually and for many ages been associated. Adopting this view, we may well say that Ecclesiastes is a most remarkable book, written by a most remarkable man, in a most remarkable age, among a most remarkable people. David had founded a great kingdom on the western Mediterranean with his capital at Jerusalem, extending from the Euphrates to Egypt. Syria and Edom and Arabia yielded him uncounted tribute. The Phœnicians were his commercial allies. The commerce of Persia and Africa and India passed across his kingdom, and the caravan trade of all Central Asia poured its riches into the lap of Judah and Israel. Egypt, and Babylon, and the Hittites, the three powers of the East which held the balance of power and disputed with each other the empire of the world for a thousand years, were in eclipse for a season, beaten small by internal dissensions and external foes. David's kingdom stood forth among the nations as the only great and glorious kingdom on earth for eighty years. He and his people saw universal empire in easy grasp, and he numbered the people and mobilized the entire military strength of his kingdom to this end. But his hand was stayed and his plans were blasted by the plague from the Lord.

He had a mission of conquest, but not with the sword. He had a promise of universal empire for himself and his seed, and the time seemed opportune.

Solomon came to the throne with the arts of peace. It was necessary to consolidate the kingdom with commerce and culture, with learning and religion. His mission was to consecrate the civilization of his day. It was no mean civilization. There is no place for fashionable hypotheses of barbaric and semi-barbaric codes and customs in that day. Agnosticism itself now begins to concede the substantial truth of the world-wide tradition of a golden

age in the earlier times. The deeper the archæologist explores into those old civilizations, the more profound is his astonishment at the records. At Jerusalem gold and silver were multiplied as the stones in the streets. Art and architecture, tapestry and needlework, stonecutting and metallurgy, tillage and vine-dressing reached the very climax of excellence.

That people had a mission—a God-given mission—first proclaimed to Abraham ten centuries before, “I will bless them that bless thee and curse them that curse thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.”

The kingdom was unique, with Jehovah, the Second Person of the Trinity, as the civil head of the commonwealth, himself appointed to be universal king. The time seemed opportune to bless all nations of the earth and to prepare the nations for the coming of David’s son, in whom the covenant should be completely fulfilled. Only a viceroy was needed with the requisite endowments.

Plato’s ideal commonwealth was now, if ever, to be realized. Mentor’s ideal kingdom, so beautifully unfolded to Telemachus, his royal pupil, seemed about to have a realization, of which Mentor nor Apollo ever dreamed.

Solomon was raised up and equipped with wisdom—wisdom to rule, an “understanding heart to judge the people,” to “discern between good and evil.” And because he chose this, the Lord said, “I have given thee a wise and understanding heart; so that there was none like thee before thee, neither shall any arise after thee like unto thee. And I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked, both riches and honor; so that there shall not be any among the kings like unto thee all thy days.”

His wisdom was all-embracing for acquisition of knowledge, and equally effective for imparting the same to admiring pupils. All forms of learning and wisdom and knowledge met in him. He was a *poet*, for his songs were a thousand and five; he was a *philosopher*, for he spake three thousand proverbs; he was a *preacher*, and the pulpits of all ages discuss his themes; he was a *scientist*, comprehending the whole range of natural history; a *botanist* and a *dendrologist*, for “he spake of trees, from the cedar that is in Lebanon even to the hyssop that springeth out of

the wall"; he was a *zoölogist* and an *ornithologist*, an *entomologist* and an *ichthyologist*, for "he spake also of beasts, and of fowl, and of creeping things, and of fishes;" and, withal, he was a *teacher*, for he "*spake*" of all these things, "and there came of all people to hear the wisdom of Solomon, from all kings of the earth which had heard of his wisdom."

Nor did he stand alone, for there was wisdom in the "children of the east country" and in "Egypt." He had peers, though not his proper equals, in "Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, and Chalchol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol." Could we find such a man to-day, and plant him at one of our great centres of travel, commerce, or education, we would have a great university, to which learned professors and eager pupils alike would flock, and wealth would pour unstinted offerings at her feet; so there, kings and queens were his pupils. The queen of Sheba, herself the wisest among women, "came to prove him with hard questions," and "she communed with him of all that was in her heart," and "Solomon told her all her questions; there was not anything hid from the king which he told her not;" and her voluntary *tuition* offering was "an hundred and twenty talents of gold, and of spices very great store, and precious stones."

Yet his kingdom failed. Alas, alas! Solomon was but a man; his head reeled and turned in the very zenith of his glory; he grew dizzy in those heights; wealth and luxury did their corrupting work for himself and his people. His very wisdom became a snare, and both his wisdom and his power were prostituted to ignoble aims. Lust and sin marred his work and cut off his opportunity.

We have not the heart to unfold the story of his polygamy, idolatry, covetousness, and oppressions, fitly ending in the decay of his kingdom and the secession of ten tribes to Jeroboam, and the centuries of decay and cursing, of which he himself sowed the seeds amid regal splendor.

The Book of Ecclesiastes recounts his experiences of life. He drank at every fountain of mere human good. He tells the story fairly; he tells the story honestly; he tells it sadly, almost bitterly. "Vanity of vanities," you read in the opening; "Vanity of van-

ities," as the story progresses; "Vanity of vanities," "all is vanity," is the echoing wail at the close.

He exhausted every category in search of the *summum bonum*. Let us trace some of his experiments.

1. He sought it in *wisdom* and *knowledge*. (i. 16-18.) "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."

2. He sought it in *riches* and in the *pleasures which they afford*. (ii. 4-11.) "I made me great works; I builded me houses; I planted me vineyards; I made me gardens and orchards, and I planted trees in them of all kinds of fruits. I made me pools of water, to water therewith the wood that bringeth forth trees; I got me servants and maidens, and had servants born in my house; also I had possession of great and small cattle above all that were in Jerusalem before me; I gathered me also silver and gold, and the peculiar treasure of kings and the provinces; I got me men-singers and women-singers, and the delights of the sons of men, as musical instruments, and that of all sorts. And whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them; I withheld not my heart from any joy. And behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun."

3. He then sought refuge in a *materialistic* and *epicurean philosophy*. He unified man and beast into one category. (iii. 19-22.) "That which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that a man hath no preëminence above a beast: for all is vanity." "All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again." "Who knoweth the spirit of a man, whether it goeth upward, and the spirit of a beast, whether it goeth downward to the earth?" "Wherefore I perceive that there is nothing better, than that a man should rejoice in his own works; for that is his portion: for who shall bring him to

see what shall be after him?" "Then I communed with mirth, because a man hath no better thing under the sun than to eat and to drink, and to be merry." So said the rich fool in the parable, so said they in Isaiah's day, and so in Corinth, and so to-day, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die."

4. He also *stumbled at the inequalities of Providence* in this life. (vii. 15.) "All things have I seen in the days of my vanity: there is a just man that perisheth in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man that prolongeth his life in his wickedness." Also (viii. 14), "There is a vanity which is done on the earth; that there be just men unto whom it happeneth according to the work of the wicked; again, there be wicked men, to whom it happeneth according to the work of the righteous: I said this also is vanity." And out of it all he argued a shallow expediency and a colorless mediocrity. "Be not righteous overmuch; neither make thyself overwise; why shouldest thou destroy thyself? Be not overmuch wicked, neither be thou foolish; why shouldest thou die before thy time?"

5. He tried *fatalism* and *skepticism*, the unfailing refuge of the sensualist. (ix. 11, 12.) "I returned and saw under the sun that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favor to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all. For man also knoweth not his time; as the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare; so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them."

"All things come alike to all; there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked." "A living dog is better than a dead lion." "The dead know not anything, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy are now perished." "There is no work, nor device, nor wisdom, nor knowledge, in the grave whither thou goest."

Oh! the blank despair offered alike by fatalism and skepticism. Your soul cannot rest in it; no more could his. Such a creed is worse than vanity. The soul recoils from its hopeless blank of

nothingness. A certain annihilation were a sweet refuge compared to it.

6. Therefore, forsaking all these, he sought the chief good in *official* and *professional activity*. (xii. 9, 10.) "Moreover, because the preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge; he sought out and set in order many proverbs, he gave good heed." Yea! "the preacher sought to find out acceptable words; and that which was written was upright, even words of truth." How he magnifies his office as *teacher*, *preacher* (?) and *author*! "The words of the wise are as goads, and as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies, which are given from one shepherd."

But alas, this, the highest of all callings, is not man's chief good. Oh! how pathetic is his lament, as he adds, "And further, my son, by these be admonished; of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh." What does he mean? Does he disparage his wisdom, and his authorship, and his teaching? Does he discourage academic and scientific learning, or put any slight upon the honors which scholastic ambition craves and wins? We think not. These things are not the chief good—the sum of all one's endeavor and the goal of all one's ambition.

The royal teacher of Israel has *one more lesson*, and that is but the conclusion of all the rest. The whole of his argument culminates in this, and the trend of his logic is to exclude all else but this. He differentiates all else but this. "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter, Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man." Or, as the Revised Version has it, "This is the end of the matter; all hath been heard," etc. He states it in proverbial and aphoristic form, the condensed experience of a life-time of observation and experiment, carrying with it all the self-evidencing power of an axiom; and he hurls it at his class with all the power and precision with which his father David handled his weapons of war. 'Tis the last lesson. 'Tis also the first lesson; (Prov. i. 7), "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." Proverbs ix. 10 reiterates the same. Psalm cxi. 10, "A good understanding have all they that keep his commandments." This is the "whole of man." You talk of

manliness; why, 'tis godliness. The restoration of God's image is true manhood. All else but this is folly, mere emptiness and vanity, a "sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal."

Was not this your first lesson at your mother's knee, when she taught you to fold your hands in prayer? the first lesson in the catechism? "Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever." 'Tis the inspiration of the Christian educator, and the very genius of the Christian school. Literature, science, and philosophy have their place, not supreme, but ancillary to true wisdom. Education should be the handmaid of religion. Unsacred secular learning is a delusion and a snare. Daily prayers, Sunday Bible classes and church attendance, throughout childhood, youth, and academic life find their explanation here. Even secular associations, colleges and universities dare not neglect them wholly. The study of the Bible, which is rapidly becoming a universal text-book, seeks to unify all sound learning, and is but the emphasizing of this lesson. What other nucleus will one find about which all his heart and life may crystallize?

But, why such a failure as Solomon, the wise man so unwise? Was he a failure? Was Job a failure as he sat in the ashes, stripped and speechless? God has given notable solutions of the great problems of the ages. Job in the ashes vindicated the righteous against the slanderer for all time. Solomon also: "Who will show us any good?" is the despairing cry of the ages. *He* exhausted the problem. He only, of all men, ever had the opportunity, and we may accept his testimony. This testimony is ample for all times and conditions. Call you a hundred witnesses, each a preëminent votary of his own cherished pursuit, and what can they add to this testimony? "Fear God and keep his commandments." This is personal religion, active service, heart service. Here meet faith and obedience. The preacher does not argue its importance. Nor will we.

He fastens and clinches the nail with one word, *judgment*. "For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil." (xi. 9.) "Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart and in



the sight of thine eyes; but know thou that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment." The judgment is the supreme test of all things—the day of doom. Then let us settle every question in the light of the judgment—every question of pleasure, of ambition, of calling, of duty, and of service. Nor dare we forget that in the judgment "we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous."

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