

## **Paths of Disappointment** by R.G. Lee

Vanity of vanities; all is vanity — Ecclesiastes 1:2

Thirty-seven times the word "vanity" occurs in the Book of Ecclesiastes. Moreover, vanity is the key word of the Book of Ecclesiastes — the keynote to its dirgelike message.

"Vanity of vanities...All is vanity!" Now these words are not due to a fit of temporary depression. They are not given utterance because of some passing adverse circumstance. They were not born of the quick and passing bitterness begotten by the foul play of some friend who turned traitor. Subtle pride did not prompt this language of Solomon. They are, according to our judgment, the result of experience arrived at after mature and deliberate thought. They are not the words of a man who walked a few paths, but the words of a man who walked many paths. Nor the words of one bored with the routine of some prosaic task. Nor the words of a man whose courage failed in some steep ascent of toil. Nor the words of one in prostrate rebellion against the tortures of some couch of pain.

Rather let us say that these are the words of one who sailed over many seas of human experience and made, with deliberate care, special notes and charts of his voyages. Words they are of one who drank of every cup and wrote a label for each. And in these words Solomon the wise, Solomon the rich, Solomon the mighty, has left the testimony that even a king could not find and cannot find genuine satisfaction in things finite, in things perishing, in things of the earth.

By what path shall I go to find the home of perfect happiness?  
Which road must I take to compass heart satisfaction?  
What must I do to find contentment?  
What must I do to have a "good time"?  
What must I do to be superior to the habitations in which I am domiciled?  
What must I do to have the merry heart within the stern war of things?  
What must I do to know the intoxication of pleasure without the dissipation of the soul's finest resources?

In answer, Solomon tried out five paths — leaving each, discarding each in turn, until he cried over the grave of all disappointed hopes, as his life's fair morning died in dark sunset, "Vanity of vanities; all is vanity!" And these five paths, which he tried out and traveled over and found paths of disappointment, do men try out and travel over today.

And these five paths are the only paths which men try. These five paths...compass all the experiences and all the imaginations of men. Let us be content to give these five paths telescopic observation, for we shall

not have time to give them microscopic scrutiny. May the instruction thereof be received. May the warning therein be heeded.

## I. THE PATH OF WISDOM

"I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly."  
(Ecclesiastes 1:17). Solomon knew everything as nearly as mortal man could know everything. His was no capsule brain capable of tidbits only. He was a scientist. He was a philosopher. He was a moralist and a historian. He was a publicist and a poet. He had a mind trained to observe...to meditate.

He had an imagination by which he interpreted the facts of history and built upon the premise of these facts the deductions of science. He walked familiarly through the fields of botany. "He spake of trees, from the cedar tree that is in Lebanon even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall" (I Kings 4:33). He brought forth the treasures of the mine. He knew nature's choir made up of the voices of birds, the wind in the boughs, the sea on the shore. He interpreted the messages of the heavenly bodies. He sailed the seas. He knew the birds. He wrote parables from the fields and the forests. He gathered great wealth of gold and precious stones. He wrote and published books. He wrote thousands of imperishable proverbs. He interpreted human experience. He philosophized about divine revelation.

But with all this, he missed the one essential and found no rest for his heart. It is he, this great Solomon with all his glory, who, after roaming through all the realms of thought and imagination, of human wisdom and human knowledge, cried "Vanity of vanities; all is vanity !"

"And I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly; I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit (Ecclesiastes 1:17).

Once, a man traveled a long way — a journey of many miles — to interview a distinguished scholar. The butler ushered him in, upon the presentation of his card, into the study of the great scholar. He was cordially greeted. Before seating himself he asked this question of the noted scholar:

"Doctor, I have come a long way to ask you just one question. I observe that the walls of your room are filled with books. This room is literally lined with them from ceiling to floor. I suppose you have read them all. I know you have written many books. You have traveled the world over; you have held intimate converse with the world's wisest men — its leaders of thought, its creators of opinion. Tell me, if you will, after the years you have spent in study, out of the things you have learned, what is the one thing best worth knowing? "

The great scholar's face flushed with emotion. He placed, with clumsy gentleness, both hands over the hands of his caller. And he said:  
"My dear sir, out of all the things I have learned there are only two lessons best worth knowing. The first is, I am a great sinner. The second is, Jesus

Christ is a great Saviour. In the knowledge of these two facts as applied in my own personal experience lies all my happiness and all my hopes ! "  
Thus we learn in that man's answer, in many ways, that men may know some things and not the best things—the things best worth knowing. Thus we see that men may treasure rags and throw away treasures.

Yes, though many may not see it, a man may know all about the rocks, and his heart be as hard as they.  
A man may know all about the winds and his life be swept by passions fiercer than they.

A man may know all about the tides and the seas, and his life resemble their troubled waters that rest not and know no peace.  
A man may know all about lights—the light of showers of meteors, the light of phosphorus, the light of millions of stars, the light of the moon when it hangs like a sickle, candle light, lamp light, electric light, the light of the aurora borealis—and not know Jesus who said "I am the light of the world."  
A man may know all about roads in the country, roads in the jungle, roads through burning deserts, and not know Jesus who said, "I am the way."  
All of which brings us to say — to ask — what shall it profit a man IF ...  
What shall it profit a man if he be a great artist and know not Jesus, the one altogether lovely?  
What shall it profit a man if he be a great architect and know not Jesus, the Chief Corner Stone?  
What shall it profit a man if he be a great baker and know not Jesus, the Living Bread?  
What shall it profit a man if he be a great banker and know not Jesus, the Priceless Possession?  
What shall it profit a man if he be a great biologist and know not Jesus, the Life?  
What shall it profit a man if he be a great builder and know not Jesus, the Sure Foundation?  
What shall it profit a man if he be a great carpenter and know not Jesus, the Door?  
What shall it profit a man if he be a great doctor and know not Jesus, the Great Physician?  
What shall it profit a man if he be a great educator and know not Jesus, the Teacher?  
What shall it profit a man if he be a great engineer and know not Jesus, the New and Living Way?  
What shall it profit a man if he be a great farmer and know not Jesus, the Sower and Lord of Harvests?  
What shall it profit a man if he be a great florist and know not Jesus, the Rose of Sharon?  
What shall it profit a man if he be a great geologist and know not Jesus, the Rock of Ages?

What shall it profit a man if he be a great astronomer and know not Jesus, the Star of Bethlehem?

What shall it profit a man if he be a great horticulturist and know not Jesus, the True Vine?

What shall it profit a man if he be a great judge and know not Jesus, the Righteous judge?

What shall it profit a man if he be a great jurist and know not Jesus, the True Witness?

What shall it profit a man if he be a great jeweler and know not Jesus, the Pearl of Great Price?

What shall it profit a man if he be a great lawyer and know not Jesus, the Sinner's Advocate?

What shall it profit a man if he be a great philanthropist and know not Jesus, the Unspeakable Gift?

What shall it profit a man if he be a great philosopher and know not Jesus, the Wisdom of God?

What shall it profit a man if he be a great sculptor and know not Jesus, the Living Stone?

What shall it profit a man if he be a great student and know not Jesus, the Incarnate Truth?

What shall it profit a man if he be a great sinner and know not Jesus, the Lamb of God?

Mere human wisdom never satisfies. Even if we knew all things, there are many things we never would and never could know. Millions of things we do not know. Write down all we know — it will be a small volume. Write down all we do not know of things in the heavens and things in the earth and things under the earth, it would be a large library of many shelves and many large volumes. But even if we knew all that there is to know in the realm of human knowledge, it would be a path of disappointment if, in knowing so much, we did not learn the two things most worth knowing.

Man, in the course of his life, lays down one world after another. First, the infant's world of toys is abandoned. Second, the boy's world of games, amusements. So also the youth's world of schemes, enterprises, the dreams of progress and wealth. The path of disappointment is the path of human wisdom that excludes the things best worth knowing and most worth knowing. Solomon sought experience and found disappointment in

## II. THE PATH OF WINE

"I sought in mine heart, to give myself unto wine, yet acquainting mine heart with wisdom; . . . 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" (Ecclesiastes 2:3).

Having tried the path of earthly knowledge and wisdom and failing to find and get guest room in the house of happiness, Solomon next turns to wine. "Wine maketh glad the heart" (Psalm 104:15). And so we hear him saying, "Come, now, I will prove thee with mirth, therefore enjoy thou pleasure" —that is, the pleasures wine is supposed to give. So Solomon "descends to the realm of the purely physical to cheer his flesh with wine."

I don't think he "descended to the low plain of sordid drunkenness," for he said, "I ... give myself to wine, yet acquainting my heart with wisdom." Doubtless Solomon was not in the gutter. Doubtless he never did some of the fool things men do when they get under the influence of wine. But it was he who wrote:

" Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babbling? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine. Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his color in the cup, when it moveth itself aright. At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder. Thine eyes shall behold strange women, and thine heart shall utter perverse things. Yea, thou shalt be as he that lieth down in the midst of the sea, or as he that lieth upon the top of the mast. They have stricken me, shalt thou say, and I was not sick—they have beaten me, and I felt it not; when shall I awake? I will seek it yet again." (Proverbs 23:29-35)

He discovered for himself and transmitted to future generations the bitterness of that experience and observation which finds in the dregs of the sparkling cup, the sting of the adder, the poison of the serpent ! Solomon, while doubtless never a debased drunkard, "learned the ropes" of the wine realm. And the warnings he has put out against the bottle are vivid and true warnings.

Now the follies of the wine realm are still with us. The bitter fruit of the wine press is with us. The sins of the wine cup are rampant. There is the wine domination of certain social circles. There is the wine domination of certain customs.

"There is the wine iniquity of certain political institutions, parties, and governments. Perhaps no factor in American life has dealt with a more arrogant hand. Perhaps no factor in our American life has carried a mightier weight of influence in social, commercial, political life than the wine business—the iniquitous whiskey business, the business without a conscience, the business without a care for the welfare of others."

But I am not to speak much of the drink business as a national curse, but as an individual curse, blight, and enormous sin. With many, what is the high mark of sociability today?

The offer and the acceptance of the invitation to " have a drink !"

I have never understood why a man should be understood as having a thought for my welfare to offer me that which would dim my eyes, dull my senses, tie up my tongue, addle my brain, blight my life. And I have never understood why a man should not invite me — or why he should take offense if I should invite him — to have with me a social drink of castor oil or milk of magnesia. This does not taste much worse than liquor, and it would have a far more remedial effect. But it is just not done in society.

To "have a drink," whether it is at the club-house, or in the business office, or in the hotel room, or at the college hop or on the joy ride is to drink liquor — some form of alcoholic beverage. And every drop is loaded with disappointment when it comes to bringing lasting joy.

Jack and Jill  
Went up the hill  
To get some bootleg liquor;  
Jack went blind  
And lost his mind,  
And Jill is even sicker !

Five drunk men, after the midnight hour had passed, leaned up against a telephone post in front of Mrs. Smith's home, knowing not whence they came nor whither they went. They shouted and whooped...The lady of the house, angry beyond words, threw open the window...she angrily shouted,  
"Hello! "

One of the drunks, with a wave of his hand and a bob of his head, said belchingly, "Hello, there — be you Mrs. Smith? "

"Yes," came the sharp, snapping answer.

"What do you want? "

" Please, ma'am...you...Lady...won't you...lady...come out and pick out Mr. Smith so the rest of us fellows can go home? "

More foolish and far more tragic things than that have men done under the influence of strong drink. Some, under its demoniac spell, have gone home at night not knowing a buzz saw from a silver dollar, thinking the keyhole the entrance to Mammoth Cave, and thinking the clothes wire a railroad track. And some, mastered by the demon of drink, have gone their way with murder in their eyes and hands.

A huge bottle would be an appropriate tombstone over many graves. Certainly a bottle in reality, whether visible or not, is the tombstone that stands above ruined hopes, broken families, disappointments, bitterness, and all misery. The bottle, the cup, the weak will, the blasted career—then the grave with a bottle as a tombstone.

But all who have walked the wine path, whether they be old, or whether they be young have found that "wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging, and whosoever

is deceived thereby is not wise" (Proverbs 20:1).  
This is not only the truth of God, but it is the verdict of the ages.  
Let us consider that verdict —

[1] On an early Egyptian tomb are these words:

"His earthly tenement was shattered by beer and wine, and his spirit departed before it was called for."

[2] In 550 B.C. Buddha gave a statement that flashed out in that day as lightning-

"Drink not liquors that intoxicate and disturb the reason."

[3] And Xenophon, 300 years before heaven put out its brightest star to mark the birthplace of the incarnate Christ in Bethlehem, said:

"Temperance means first, moderation in healthful indulgence and, secondly, abstinence from things dangerous, as the use of intoxicating wines."

[4] And Pliny, the Elder, speaking words without the least semblance of foolishness, in 79 A.D., said;

"There is nothing about which we put ourselves to more trouble than wine "

[5] And Chaucer chastised the winebibber in 1340 with this statement:

"Character and shame depart when wine comes in."

[6] And Shakespeare, from whose pen words of wisdom dropped like golden pollen from the stems of shaken lilies, thrust the wine-drinking curse through with these words:

"O thou invisible spirit of wine, if thou hast no name to be known by, let us call thee devil "

[7] And Abraham Lincoln, in whose heart was no room for the memory of a wrong, in 1842, said:

"Liquor might have defenders, but no defense. Whether or not the world would be vastly benefited by a total and final banishment from it, of all intoxicating drinks, seems to me not an open question."

[8] And Gladstone, who being dead yet speaketh in the parliaments of men, in 1898 said:

"The ravages of drink are greater than those of war, pestilence and famine combined. "

[9] And Georges Clemenceau, put forth words of wisdom that cannot be weighed in scales when, in 1920, he declared:

"It is definitely settled that alcohol is a poison; a poison destructive of human energy and, for this reason, of society as a whole."

[10] And Sir Wilfred Grenfell, whose name has been on the tongues of multitudes of English-speaking peoples, said:

"Alcohol has wrecked more lives, starved more children and murdered more women than any other single factor."

[11] And Thomas Edison, did not hesitate to declare:

"I still feel that prohibition is the greatest experiment yet made to benefit man."

But in the face of this verdict of the ages, and in the face of Bible truth, and

in the presence of multitudinous iniquities caused by strong drink, many clamour with more noise than sense in their words for personal liberty.  
Personal liberty!

But liberty without love is a dangerous thing indeed. On all sides men must surrender personal liberties for the public welfare.  
There can be no peace in the home without consideration of others.  
There can be no profit in business without consideration of the welfare of others. There can be no justice in government and no safety in society without consideration for the welfare of others.  
There can be no happiness, no culture, no security anywhere without sincere consideration of others — their comforts, their health, their prosperity...their rights.

Every city has fire limits [codes]. In certain districts only fire-proof construction can be used. Specifications that have to do with the minutest details must be complied with before even the foundation can be laid. Floors must be of concrete, roofs of slate. Why? Are not frame houses attractive? Certainly, but they could not be built in the crowded districts without endangering the entire community. They would be tinder boxes.  
Your present liberty — your right to build a frame house is thoroughly good of itself, and in its place — is entirely removed in the interest of public safety.

You cannot drive where you will. One must obey the traffic laws. One poorly managed automobile often congests a crowded avenue for several minutes. One wild driver kills and maims.  
You cannot eat what you will. The future builds upon the present. Today sanatoriums are crowded with dyspeptics who were the gormandisers of yesterday.  
You cannot walk the streets of the city — if you have smallpox.  
Personal liberty ends.

Drink destroys the liberty of the drinker. See him stagger and fall. He cannot direct his steps or rule his limbs. Hear him shout and curse. He does not know what he is saying, and has lost command of his thoughts and tongue. His eyes are dulled, his baser passions unleashed, his moral sense blunted, his better self chained. The drunkard, pitiable slave in body, mind and soul, is a refutation of the personal liberty plea.

Drink destroys the liberty of the drinker's wife and of his children.  
Is the woman in ragged garments and with a bruised face, lacking the necessities of life, free ?  
Is the lad forced to wear the shame of the drunkard's child, free?  
Is the broken-hearted parent who mourns the death of a dissolute son in a saloon brawl or on the public highway or in the bootlegger's den, free?  
Shall we continue to respect the "personal liberty" of those who would destroy themselves and us?

Shall we continue to respect the "personal liberty" of those who coin into money the tears of women and children and the cries of unfortunates possessed of a fiendish thirst they cannot master so long as the thing that arouses it survives because the laws of the nation are violated ?

"They are overcome with wine " (Isaiah 28:1). Men say they swallow strong drink. But strong drink swallows them. Strong drink eats up their substance. It eats up their health. It swallows up their happiness. It swallows many precious talents.

Strong drink does our schools and colleges no good. It does our secret orders no good. It does our merchants no good. It does our manufacturers no good. It does our railroads no good. It does our churches no good. It does no man any good. I do not claim that all I have written above is strictly original. But I do claim that all I have written is to give emphasis to all anybody says against strong drink and to make declaration that if I had one hair in my head that was in favor of strong drink " in any shape, form, or fashion " I would pull it out. And I take my stand with Guy Mark, who said-

"I am dry, bone dry because I have known unborn babes to be cursed through booze;

little children to starve because of booze-,  
young people to be stunted for life through booze;  
gifted women to become imbeciles through booze;  
leaders in industry to become beggars in the street because of booze;  
wedding rings to be sold for booze;  
every article of furniture to be pawned for booze;  
fortunes to be squandered for booze;  
girls to become prostitutes through booze;  
boys to become criminals through booze;  
women to be hanged because of booze;  
and men to go to the electric chair because of booze.

Because I have never known booze to contribute to the happiness of a single child, or to the mental ability of a single young person, or to the moral uplift of a single middle-aged person, or to the comfort and blessedness of a single old person."

Think of the disappointments that come in the path of wine. And remember what the Book hath said, namely:

"Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging; and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise." (Proverbs 20:1)...."Hear thou, my son, and be wise, and guide thine heart in the way. Be not among winebibbers; among riotous eaters of flesh; For the drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty; and drowsiness shall clothe a man with rags." (Proverbs 23:19-21).... "Woe unto him that giveth his neighbour drink, that putteth thy bottle to him, and maketh him drunk also, that

thou mayest look on their nakedness (Habbakuk 2:15)... "It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine; nor for princes strong drink. Lest they drink, and forget the law, and pervert the judgment of any of the afflicted. Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto those that be of heavy hearts." (Proverbs 31:4-6)

But Solomon traveled another path of disappointment, finding not the joy and peace his heart craved. It was

### III. THE PATH OF WEALTH

"Moreover the profit of the earth is for all: the king himself is served by the field. He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase; this is also vanity. When goods increase, they are increased that eat them; and what good is there to the owners thereof, saving the beholding of them with their eyes?

The sleep of the labouring man is sweet, whether he eat little or much: but the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep.

There is a sore evil which I have seen under the sun, namely: riches kept for the owners thereof to their hurt. But those riches perish by evil travail; and he begetteth a son, and there is nothing in his hand." (Ecclesiastes 5:9-15)

In these striking words we see that he found the path of riches a disappointing path also. Finding bitterness in the path of wine, finding no peace in human wisdom alone, he turned to the path of riches, hoping therein to find the joy and the peace the human heart needs.

See how rich he was.

"And they came to Ophir, and fetched from thence gold, four hundred and twenty talents, and brought it to king Solomon." (I Kings 9:28)

"And the navy also of Hiram, that brought gold from Ophir, brought in from Ophir great plenty of almug trees, and precious stones." (I Kings 10:11)

"Now the weight of gold that came to Solomon in one year was six hundred threescore and six talents of gold." (I Kings 10:14)

"And king Solomon made two hundred targets of beaten gold, six hundred shekels of gold went to one target. And he made three hundred shields, of beaten gold; three pounds of gold went to one shield; and the king put them in the house of the forest of Lebanon." (I Kings 10:16,17)

"Besides that he had of the merchantmen and of the traffic of spice merchants, and of all the kings of Arabia, and of the governors of the country." (I Kings 10:15)

"For the king had at sea a navy of Tarshish with the navy of Hiram: once every three years came the navy of Tarshish, bringing gold, and silver, ivory, and apes, and peacocks." (I Kings 10:22)

"And the king made silver to be in Jerusalem as stones, and cedars made he to be as the sycamore trees that are in the vale, for abundance." (I Kings 10:27)

"And Solomon gathered together chariots and horsemen; and he had a thousand and

four hundred chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen, whom he bestowed in the cities for chariots, and with the king at Jerusalem." (I Kings 10:26)

"So king Solomon exceeded all the kings of the earth for riches and for wisdom." (I Kings 10:23)

Yes, gifts poured into his coffers in a continuous stream so that he was able to hire men singers and women singers — able to build himself and his wives gorgeous palaces — able to enjoy all that money could provide. He was able at any time to pay a king's ransom for a day of pleasure. He had riches till the end of his life. He never knew the pinch of poverty — never knew any anxiety about his daily bread. Yet, even in the security of his nest of wealth, he fully realized the futility of their values. "Vanity of vanities ! "  
No man can buy a contented heart.

Money is powerless to furnish this. No man can purchase with riches a soul at peace with God. No man can pay in money the price of the hope of immortality and of a meeting in the Great Beyond. No man can find in riches the purchase price of God's favour or the realization of eternal salvation.

Not even in this day does money guarantee health, or hold friends, or bring contentment!

"They that will be rich fall into a temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition " (I Timothy 6:9)

"Go to, now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you. Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth eaten. Your gold and silver is cankered, and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire " (James 5:1-3)

"Labour not to be rich: cease from thine own wisdom. Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not ? for riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven." (Proverbs 23:4,5)

Disappointed in these three paths, Solomon turned to

#### IV. THE PATH OF WORKS

Wisdom, the many things he knew, brought him not to the house of abiding happiness...brought him not that joy which is ever rich and abiding. Wine turned out to be a mocker, as it always does-mocking him with the shadow instead of the substance of good things, mocking him with the desert where it promised an oasis.

And wealth had no power to satisfy. Amid all his abundance there was a lack — something that rested not and was not still, something that hungered and was not fed, something that was thirsty and found no satisfaction.. Solomon built palaces. Solomon established great public works. Solomon increased the size and magnificence of his city. Solomon transported forests.

He did mighty things in the matter of building cities and other great public works. He accomplished such things as multitudes have expected to provide satisfaction for life's labors. But when he had finished all his great works he looked out upon them and cried, "Vanity of vanities ! "

"And Solomon's wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east country, and all the wisdom of Egypt. For he was wiser than all men...and his fame was in all nations round about." (I Kings 4:30,31)

"But Solomon was building...He built also the house of the forest of Lebanon...And he made ...Then he made...Solomon made..." (I Kings 7:1-f )

"And Solomon built Gezer, and Beth-horon the nether, and Baalath, and Tadmor in the wilderness, in the land, And all the cities of store that Solomon had, and cities for his chariots, and cities for his horsemen, and that which Solomon desired to build in Jerusalem, and in Lebanon, and in all the land of his dominion." (I Kings 9:17-19)

Which, moreover, brings us the willingness to obey the exhortation given in I Cor. 15:58, namely:

" Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord."

But another disappointment Solomon trod. It was, we may term it,

## V. THE PATH OF WOMEN

When Solomon found disappointment in the path of wisdom, in the path of wine, in the path of wealth, in the path of great works of construction, he turned to seek happiness with women. With much wisdom given him, he played the fool with women. With much opportunity to do good, he delighted himself in indulgence with women. With the power to command and to persuade, with the whole world from which to choose, with wealth that was enticing, he strove to delight his heart with women.

"But king Solomon loved many strange women, together with the daughter of Pharaoh, women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Zidonians, and Hittites; Of the nations concerning which the Lord said unto the children of Israel, Ye shall not go in to them, neither shall they come in unto you: for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods: Solomon clave unto these in love. And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines: and his wives turned away his heart..." (I Kings 11:1-8)

Solomon knew what he was talking about when he said, "Give not thy strength unto women" (Proverbs 31:3). Solomon was speaking from the depths of bitter experience, teaching that the reproofs of instruction are the way of life, when he said:

"For the commandment is a lamp; and the law is light; and the reproofs of instruction are the way of life; To keep thee from the evil women, from the flattery of the tongue of a strange woman. Lust not after her beauty in thine heart; neither let her take thee with her eyelids. For by means of a whorish woman a man is brought to a piece of bread; and the adulteress will hunt for the precious life. Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned? Can one go upon hot coals, and his feet not be burned ? " (Proverbs 6).

Solomon had found out that in the path of women there is that experience that is as vinegar to the teeth and as smoke to the eyes. That is why he wrote:

"A foolish woman is clamorous; she is simple and knoweth nothing. For she sitteth at the door of her house, on a seat in the high places of the city. To call passengers who go right on their ways; Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither: and as for him that wanteth understanding, she saith to him, Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant. But he knoweth not that the dead are there; and that her guests are in the depths of hell." (Proverbs 9:13-18)

It was Solomon who had seven hundred wives, who said

"A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband: but she that maketh ashamed is as rottenness in his bones." (Proverbs 12:4)

"It is better to dwell in the corner of the house top, than with a brawling woman in a wide house " (Proverbs 21:9)

"It is better to dwell in the wilderness, than with a contentious and angry woman." (Proverbs 21:19)

It was Solomon who said many lovely things about women, lovely things which were true altogether, such as,

"Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing and obtaineth favour of the Lord " (Proverbs 18:22);

"A prudent wife is from the Lord " (Proverbs 19:14);

"Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies " (Proverbs 31:10)

And this, moreover, this truth he uttered in language descriptive of ancient day indulgence and descriptive also of this jazz-day indulgence:

" Say unto wisdom, Thou art my sister; and call understanding thy kinswoman; That they may keep thee from the strange woman, from the stranger which flattereth with her words. For at the window of my house I looked through my casement, and beheld among the simple ones, I discerned among the youths, a young man void of understanding, Passing through the street near her corner; and he went the way to her house, In the twilight, in the evening, in the black and dark night; And, behold there met him a woman with the attire of an harlot, and subtil of heart. (She is loud and stubborn; her feet abide not in her house: Now is she without, now in the streets, and lieth in wait at every corner). So she caught him, and kissed him, and with an impudent face said unto him, I have peace offerings with me; this day have I payed my vows, Therefore came I forth to meet thee, diligently to seek thy face, and I have found thee. I have decked

my bed with coverings of tapestry, with carved works, with fine linen of Egypt.

I have perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes and cinnamon. Come, let us take our fill of love until the morning: let us solace ourselves with loves. For the good man is not at home, he is gone a long journey: He hath taken a bag of money with him, and will come at the day appointed. With her much fair speech she caused him to yield, with the flattering of her lips she forced him. He goeth after her straightway, as an ox goeth to the slaughter, or as a fool to the correction of the stocks; Till a dart strike through his liver; as a bird hasteth to the snare, and knoweth not that it is for his life...Her house is the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death." ( Proverbs 7:4-f )

What has not woman meant to man ? She is the synonym of all that is holy in relation-synonym of all that is encouraging, stimulating, and soothing in life's stress and sorrows. Woman-God's loveliest gift to man. God pity the man who, in the dark hour of his dissolution, has no woman's hand to wipe away the death damp from his brow, or to smooth his pillow, and no woman's voice to whisper sweet words of cheer and comfort into his fast dulling ear. Woman-synonym of home and love, of wifehood, of motherhood, of sisterhood, of daughterhood.

Woman-synonym of all gentleness, of charm, of winsomeness, of heart's ease, of sacrificial service.

Woman-the uncomplaining bearer of burdens, the partner of pain and pleasure alike, the keeper of the mysteries of life, the fount of joy, the confidante of weakness and of sorrow, the sharer of tears and laughter.

Woman-she means to the race all that men's hearts have yearned for, in rest from labor, in refuge from defeat, in comfort from sorrow, in understanding and encouragement, in reproach, in cheer and encouragement in struggle.

Many times Solomon doubtless proved all this, for he was a married man. And yet, because he left God out and, reckoned not with his laws in relation to women, he found the path of women a path of great disappointments.

"Having tried all the avenues of legitimate love; he tried the other way. And so great was the disappointment and bitterness, he was constrained to cry, 'Vanity of vanities' Having tried all the delights of legitimate love, he then indulged himself in all the fancied pleasure of illegitimate love, and excitation of unholy desire and indulgence of animal appetite-the pursuance of purely fleshly pleasure. Here, too, for his joy he reaped ashes. Here, too, he found his honey turned to the bitterness of gall. Here, too, in these wide avenues of all illegitimate dealings with women, his delight faded into distaste and disgust ! Here, too, desire became despair.

And again his soul was wrung with the cry that has saddened the centuries-  
'Vanity of vanities!' "

Which brings us to speak of

## VI. OUR ONE HOPE

"The world by wisdom knew not God." (I Corinthians 1:21)

Poor rich Solomon.

Poor fool — wise-man Solomon.

Poor wine-tasting Solomon.

Type of all our wisdom — in the slough of despond.

Type of all our indulgence — in dark, abysmal despair.

Type of all man's wrong indulgence with women-surfeited with disgust.

For man's effort to find peace and happiness by the paths of wisdom and wine and wealth and works and women is written in the lives of men. The coarseness, the sensuousness, the unspirituality seen about us is tragic.

But God is ever the God of the second chance. It is ever the providence of his mercy, if we will turn from our wicked ways, to reverse the curse of sin.

Then — do this. Through Jesus who died for you — do this. With faith in the Christ who bore our sins in his own body on the tree (I Peter 2:24), and died the just for the unjust that he might bring us to God (I Peter 3:18) — embrace the cross now.

Then the cry of your despair will be turned into joy.

Then the consciousness of your lost estate will be changed into the sweet and blessed realization of eternal salvation.

There shall be no disappointment with you concerning him. There will be no disappointment with him concerning you.

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