Last Things

Johnson Grant, 1828

I. DEATH

"It is appointed for men once to *die*, and after that the judgment!" Hebrews 9:27

"Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom." Psalm 90:12

The sacred penman — the sacred poets, have lavishly poured forth images to express the temporal character of human life. It is . . .
as short as a span,
as fleeting as a shadow,
as unsubstantial as a vapor,
as fading like a flower that comes up, and is immediately cut down and withered.

Thus creation on every side furnishes emblems of mortality — and man, the lord of creation, is the grand prototype, to which all these emblems refer.

His hopes and his joys,
his fears and his sorrows,
his studies,
his pursuits,
his occupations —
are all but preludes and preparatives for a dreadful, inevitable catastrophe. Death finally winds up the short-lived tale, and closes the chequered scene.

An outcome, thus certain, would, even were it distant, be dreadful — but it is near at hand; it is ever impending. In the life of every individual, each minute may be the last sand-grain — each passing incident may be the scythe-stroke of dissolution.

Death distant! No, alas! he's ever near us,
And shakes the dart at us in all our actings;
He lurks within our cup when we're in health;
Sits by our sick-bed; mocks our medicines;
We cannot walk, or sit, or sleep, or travel,
But Death is by, to seize us when he desires!

To maintain a due impression and a wholesome alarm, as to the *certainty* and *proximity* of death — instances of it are continually occurring. Death's shafts fly thick — his victims are every instant falling on this globe; which is *one vast burying ground*; and weekly — almost daily, they fall in every neighborhood.

The *angel of destruction* knocks at every door — his sword ever reeking with death. Within a few years, there is not a house in which he leaves not one dead. To strike the greater terror, he observes no *order* in his seizures. He lifts the latch of the *humble cottage* — and breaks through the guards of the *stately palace*. The high and the low are alternately and promiscuously his prey. Nor can piety herself, though smiling at his malice, charm him into a Passover of her habitation.

And as with every *condition*, so he deals with every *age*. Walking abroad in the earth, he now smites the lisping *infant*, with eyes just opened on the world! Now he arrests the *youth*, with high-beating heart, and with pulses keenly alive to pleasure! Now he levels to the ground, the full-grown *man*, while confiding and exulting in his strength. And now, though rarely, he allows the *lamp of life* to be extinguished through the mere exhaustion of the oil.

Death — thus *certain*, thus *near*, and thus *continually* occurring — is furthermore *universal*.

Learning and ignorance,
power and weakness,
idleness and exertion,
gaiety and seriousness,
health and sickness,
virtue and vice —
must all after a few years terminate in dissolution.

There is not one of us, but is destined to experience his death-struggle — not one but must sooner or later close his eyes on this visible, earthly scene.

Sometimes the *thread of life* is snapped hastily asunder — and sometimes it gradually unwinds itself. Sometimes the work of death proceeds in masses, and by thousands.

The earthquake and the conflagration;
the hurricane and the tempest;
the famine and the pestilence;
the conflict of fleets or of armies —
are the mighty weapons of Omnipotence; when for purposes of wisdom or of vengeance, God would disarrange His own general laws, and outstrip the course of nature, in depopulating the multitudes of mankind.

But the usual march of destruction is *slow, silent, piecemeal* — though not less *unerringly certain* — until almost imperceptibly a generation is swept away from the earth! Thus, whether *singly*, or in *aggregate* — it is appointed unto all men once to die. "For I know that you will bring me to death and to the house appointed for All Living."

To pronounce death *universal*, is to call it *unavoidable*. Our days are threescore years and ten — some linger upon earth beyond that term; but there is no medical skill, no peculiar privilege, which can stay the advance of decrepitude, or save from *the inexorable destroyer.*

It might be imagined, that the *certainty*, the *nearness*, the *continual occurrence*, the *universality*, the *unavoidableness* of Death would conspire to render it a subject of frequent and familiar meditation. Yet strange to tell, these truths, through their notoriety and commonness (which should send them home to the heart) make but a slight impression, and are almost wholly unheeded!

The remembrance of them too, is to most men irksome; it dampens the enjoyment of worldly pleasure, and quenches the ardor of worldly pursuit. Whenever, therefore, death intrudes itself, it is sedulously repelled: "The righteous perishes and no man lays it to heart; they are destroyed from evening until morning, and no one regards it."

The thought of death, indeed, should so intimately and so constantly mix itself up with all our other thoughts, as to sadden our most innocent satisfactions, and to impede the common business and useful purposes of our calling. But this surely can be no reason, why the remembrance of mortality, the consideration of our departing hour, should be always and altogether banished. There are pauses in employment, there are interruptions in recreation, there are holy seasons expressly set apart for it.

Let us direct our attention during these times to Death, the end of all men, and of all things with which men busy themselves — and afterwards to those solemn matters by which death is followed . . .
to the grave;
to the intermediate state;
to judgment;
to Hell; and
to Heaven.

In this first discourse of the series, I shall take into consideration:
1st. The *origin* and *nature* of Death.
2d. What *changes* take place at the time of Death.
3d. What may be expected as the *consequences* of Death.
4th. What circumstances may serve to mitigate the terrors, or to counteract the evils of Death.

1. We are first to consider the ORIGIN and NATURE of Death.

Death, we are informed in Scripture, is the punishment of the fall of Adam. "In the day that you eat the forbidden fruit, you shall surely die," said God to the first man, on placing him in paradise. That man disobeyed: he tasted, he deteriorated his nature, he died — that is to say, at that moment he became *mortal*.

By one man's disobedience *sin* entered into the world, and *death* by sin. Now the *universality* of death is a plain and necessary consequence, resulting from the fall of Adam. For since all are *children of Adam*, all inherit from that first parent the elements of depravity, and therefore the seeds of death. All, the unconscious *infant*, as well as the wayward *adult* — may strictly be said to have sinned, because all derive from their progenitor, the rudiments of sin.

Hence, then, the death of all: for "Death is the wages of sin"; "and so death passed upon all men, for all have sinned." Thus, in Adam, all die: for not only did all the generations, and all the myriads of the human race, exist in the loins, and follow the physical structure of Adam — but *all partake, by birth, of his debased, of his sinful, and, consequently, of his mortal nature.*

2. Such being the *origin* and *nature* of Death, let us next ask, **What CHANGES take place at the time of Death?**

Death is a closing of the eyes to the cheerful light of day — an insensibility to all that is happening under the sun. It is . . .
to depart forever from this beautiful world;
to leave our home and its comforts;
to be welcomed no more by the caresses of our children;
to become unconscious and deaf to the voice of friendship;
and to exchange all the schemes of ambition, all the satisfactions of possession, and all the comforts of our lot — for the coldness, the darkness, the solemn stillness of the tomb.

We see that at death, that . . .
the *eyes* are sealed,
the *lungs* forget their office,
the *pulses* cease to beat,
the *blood* no longer courses within the veins,
the silver cord of the *tongue* is loosed,
the *limbs*, the supporters of the house, fall prostrate like broken columns, and the powerless right hand forgets its cunning.

Everything seems to bespeak a cessation, an extinction of being; and hence, with the sole exception of some unhappy suicides, driven to desperation, or afflicted with insanity, all men instinctively cling to life; and even when looking for immortality with the faith which borders on assurance, contemplate with dread the idea of dissolution.

3. What may be expected as the CONSEQUENCES of Death, is my third head of discourse.

It is no wonder that in so entire a dissolution as this, so complete a breaking up of that admirable and strange compound, which forms the physical system — the mind of the natural man should see only a ruin, incapable of salvage, "water spilt on the ground, and no more to be gathered up."

Some of the Sacred writers, indeed, assuming the sentiments, and uttering the doubts of the skeptic, or of man without the gospel, seem to speak of death with a *despondence* and *utter despair*; which the unintelligent have conceived to be but the voice of their own private persuasion. "But man dies and is laid low; he breathes his last and is no more." Job 14:10. "When his breath leaves him, he returns to his earth; in that very day his thoughts, plans, and purposes perish." Psalm 146:4

It is no wonder that such should have been the conclusions of ancient wisdom, when not cheered by the hopeful rays of the New Testament.

Heathen and skeptics impressed with these sentiments, have placed the height of virtue in making up their minds, to meet, with *stoic fortitude*, an inevitable event. They have asked themselves what is so pleasant as sinking into a deep slumber? And why, then, they have rejoined, should death be feared, which is only a sleep that shall last forever? But such gloomy reasoning can surely be of little force, either to satisfy or to quiet the mind. But there is horror at the bare thought of *utter extinction* — and all have a longing after futurity — the irrepressible spring — the inextinguishable ardor — which proclaim the spirit to be immortal.

Atheism cannot soothe and quiet the desolate heart, which death has bereaved of the objects of its dearest affection; and which feels it to be little else than a cruel mockery to urge, that these objects are now as if they had never been; and that itself, which loved them, will shortly be as they are. Human nature, stronger than atheistic reasoning, seeks a higher consolation; and will be pacified with nothing short of renewed consciousness, and of the actual restitution of what has been torn away.

But *where* — or *when* — or *how*? Are these *wishes* proofs of immortality? Are these *feelings* certainties? Are these *probabilities* matters of assured reliance? Here are the intricate questions which nature cannot solve. Hence the soul of the skeptic subsides into a horrid tumult and wild anarchy, of contending aspirings and misgivings: gleams overcast by clouds — alternations of hope and despair.

And what is the moral result of this boasted stoicism — this proud philosophic fortitude? The great bulk of mankind, once rendered skeptical in their belief of futurity, would disdain all moral restraints, and think only of immediate enjoyment. Considering only the manifest uncertainty of life, would exclaim, in wild recklessness, "If the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we will die!" 1 Corinthians 15:32

4. This leads me to the last question I chalked out for consideration — namely, **What circumstances may serve to mitigate the terrors, or to counteract the evils of Death?** For even when we are thus assured, that there is a life after the present — and that "the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth — those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of damnation" — another ground of anxiety and alarm yet remains, which it baffles all the boasted resources of philosophy, and all the pride and power of human reasoning to remove.

Can we, on a full review of our lives, or a minute inspection of our hearts, claim a part in the lot of the righteous; or assure ourselves of approbation from a just and holy God? Let us have a care lest we deceive ourselves in a matter so momentous — lest we cherish an error until it be utterly irretrievable.

How rests the condition of our souls before God?

How many presumptuous offences have the *best* to account for?

How great is our sinfulness?

How numerous are our faults?

How often has our conduct been wayward?

How negligently have we guarded our lips?

How innumerable are our offences of the heart and of the thoughts, which will all be brought up against us in judgment!

Even our *better* actions, on which we plume ourselves, and by virtue and power of which we boldly claim eternity — have we probed them to their secret motives? Have we searched how much belongs to mere impulse — and how little to self-denial? How much belongs to worldly selfishness — and how little to the pure love of God? How much is mere glitter — and how little is fine gold? Though these things may have all passed slightly over our minds, though they have vanished from computation, and ceased to impress conscience — assuredly they are, every one, registered in the books of God.

Well, then, might the man after God's own heart exclaim, "Enter not into judgment with your servant, O Lord; for in your sight shall no man living — not the holiest, not the purest — be justified!"

Where then, is the strength of what we vainly call our virtues!

Where is the confidence of our hopes of eternal bliss!

How, knowing ourselves, can we dare to prate of *merit*, or to look even in our best works for recompense! There is a law of inflexible moral justice against us — and that law is the sting of death.

It is only under Christianity, it is only under the doctrine of the cross, that man can re-assure himself, and sing the dying song, "O death, where is your sting! O grave, where is your victory?" There *was* a sting in death, but it is extracted. There was a rigorous law, but it has lost its terrors. Thanks be unto God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

By this reliance upon Christ and His substitutionary atonement, our obedience though imperfect, is accepted; and life while drooping, is cheered. The penitent, who distrusts and disclaims his own merit — sees the salvation of God, and learns to depart in peace.

I shall now, in conclusion, set before you two portraits; the one, that of a lost sinner departing without salvation. The other, that of the saved sinner, the righteous man, looking up with modest confidence, to the Savior in whom he has trusted, and the God whom he has loved.

First, then, contemplate the **lost transgressor** at the hour of death. His guilty pleasures, his ill-gotten gains, the honors, to attain which, he has stained the true honor of man — must now, in a little while, be left behind. Let us convey ourselves to the death chamber, where, at length, the son of disobedience reaches the end of all those chequered joys, for which he has made a barter of his soul. You shudder at the dismal gloom of a room, where the gleam of red embers, or the feeble glimmering of a candle, imperfectly displays to view the ghastly countenance of the dying man. An hireling attendant sits in silence by his side. Friends, too conscious of his past misconduct, regard one another with looks of dismay; unable to dispel or to suppress their apprehensions, as to the dreadful outcome of impending dissolution.

On entering this abode of stillness and sadness, you behold all around:
the unavailing apparatus of medical skill;
the range of half-exhausted medicine vials;
the simmering drink that may allay the thirst of fever;
the choice food that has been but tasted and loathed.

No sound disturbs the mournful domain of death, except the dull register of existence, whose strokes, like a death-watch, taking note of the gliding moments, give dismal warning to the patient, that his last hour is about to strike — and remind him, how little he has profited under the sun; while precious, irretrievable, feather-footed time, has stolen away in these apparently insignificant portions.

If, on witnessing this spectacle, you recoil appalled — if the blood courses, chilled within your veins; how will you reflect on the terrors which beset the departing transgressor, on perceiving himself arrived at the last end of a life, misused, and not to be recalled — on the brink of a dark abyss wherein he is about to be fall, into an eternity wherein he has everything to apprehend?

Now, perhaps, some friend, with ill-judged indulgence, approaches to soften down crimes into infirmities. Perhaps some bold religious teacher, invited to the couch of death, promises with full assurance, a peace that may be imaginary, and pours the *balm of Falsehood* on the soul that is ready to perish.

Heaven forbid that in meditating on the sinner's close of life, we should presume to set bounds to the mercy of God in Christ Jesus. Heaven forbid that we should pronounce, absolutely, that there is no hope, should penitence then only be born in the soul, when it is struggling in the agonies of dissolution. But whether, in any particular instance of what is called a *death-bed repentance*, the penitent be truly contrite, or only terrified, and half-converted; whether, if a new lease of years were conceded, the heart renewal is so complete and so powerful, as to break the *chain of evil habits*, and to bid defiance to the returning smiles and vanities of the world — these are solemn questions, which ought to warn the spiritual counselor, or the friend, against too rashly *promising a transit through the portals of bliss, unto him, who, throughout life, had trodden the crooked paths of iniquity*.

Yet, however this may be, not the palliations of friendship — not the promises of ignorance — not the honied flatteries of self-love, suffice to drown, wholly, the honest clamors of the reproachful conscience. *Memory* will still point, with leaden finger .
. ,
to years squandered in folly, or abused by vice;
to opportunities cast away;
to spiritual impulses resisted;
to friends seduced by persuasion, or corrupted by example;
to a long course of profaneness, falsehood, lust, selfishness — to a train of sins, thickening and blackening with the march of time — while fear, glancing on futurity, will command the dying enemy of God to tremble.

Of how little value or avail do those excessive cares of a worldly mind, which had driven true religion from the affections — or those sinful pleasures which had debased and ruined the soul — at this moment appear in his sight! He has sown the wind — and reaped the whirlwind! He has served a treacherous master — and his wages is death! "Ah!" he exclaims, "had I devoted myself to God, as I have toiled for the world and for Satan — He would not have abandoned me in this, my last extremity. I thought the life of the godly was madness — but now, how different is their situation from mine!

As his strength decays, his spirits sink — a *dejection* deepening into *horror*. Cold dews burst forth in big drops upon his forehead — indications of the bodily and mental strife within. His eyes swim — and now see his cherished vanishing world, indistinctly. He mutters with his lips, a few incoherent, uncertain expressions — the blended language of dread and despair. Specters seem to flit before his sight — the grisly shapes of former sins. He hears at a distance the clanking of everlasting chains, the mingled yells of the torturers and the tortured, ascending from the bottomless abyss.

Half-rising, affrighted, shuddering, he makes one feeble and desperate effort to cling to the disappearing world. In vain. Exhausted, and sinking back, he casts on the empty scene, a last, wild look of agony — and all the rest is silence. He is gone:
gone from the wealth he had dishonestly amassed;
gone from his pride in the praise of men;
gone from a body, the house of his voluptuousness,
and gone from a world, the shrine of his idolatry.

He is gone to appear before the omniscient, inflexibly righteous Judge — trembling, defenseless, stained with iniquity, and covered with confusion!

Yet, as dreadful as is the picture I have here delineated, this is the end of every man who lives in sin, with a seared conscience and a false tranquility — and carries the flatteries of self-delusion forth to the very confines of eternity!

But averting our view from such distressing contemplations, permit me now to display that beautiful contrast, which will assuage the pain you have been hitherto enduring. Approach, you mirthful and thoughtless multitudes, who are treading the paths of sin, and the rounds of dissipation; who are ever asking, 'Who will show us any good?' or seeking some new pleasure — come to the couch and the dying hour of the **Christian**, and learn what you must believe — what you must practice — what you must become, if you would be truly and finally happy.

"The righteous," it is said, "has hope in his death," and though, truly, at that solemn moment . . .
when pain rends the frame, or the whole head is sick unto death;
when the prospect of the dark and dreary tomb can hardly fail to strike a chilling terror to the best-fortified heart;
when a final farewell is about to be pronounced to objects on which the purest affections had reposed;
when the warm and cheerful precincts of day, the blue skies, the rich wrought handiwork in this fair palace of nature, are about to be relinquished;
and an is abode to be entered, where the worm, the sole companion, is about to supply the place of father, and sister, and brother;
above all, when the recollection of those thousand imperfections and sins which stain the record of the best-spent life, will summon up within the delicate conscience some portion of shame, of distrust, of reluctance to advance to judgment; though there is yet a general remembrance of right principles, of pure motives, of uniform fidelity, of habitual integrity of purpose, which, cannot but speak the departing spirit of the Christian into composure, and embolden it to look up to the cross of Christ, as a deliverance on which it may rest with humble assurance of faith. In the mean time, the Divine Comforter, the Spirit of peace and joy, pours forth his balms, and confirms his declaration, "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright; for the end of that man is peace!"

Approaching nearer, you observe around this death-bed, the same external array of sadness, and dismal prognostics of departure, as you had witnessed near that of the lost sinner — the same darkness — the same stillness — a similar circle of disconsolate friends. But when you steadfastly regard him, for whom the sorrows of these friends are flowing, you find not the same *cloud* lowering on his brow; the same *terror*, or what is worse, the same *callous indifference*, depicted on his countenance. You find . . .
meekness, patience, resignation, serenity, like a hovering troop of cherubs;
and delightful retrospection, and humble hope, and chastened joy;
and the grateful acquiescence in the release from a sinful body;
and the glad anticipating glance, that darts forward into the courts of God.

You find a soul desirous to forget itself — to think only of those whom it is preparing to leave behind; anxious to impart to them a last lesson of wisdom, and by descanting on the blissful hope in futurity, to soothe and to console their sorrow.

"Let each prepare for his own inevitable hour: let faith, piety, holiness smooth the bed of death, that the *passage from world to world* may be welcomed; and that the pillow may be soft on which the last sleep is to be taken."

Thus, like a venerable patriarch . . .
distributing blessings,
instructing his household,
prophesying of hereafter —
he meets death as an event, of which he had lessened the horrors, by rendering them *long familiar* in meditation; and assuaged the sorrows of death by a life of vigilance in piety. He *resigns* his spirit as gently as he had possessed it; and the same peace which he had enjoyed while yet living, (the outcome of a holy life and an unruffled conscience,) continues to beam upon him after the soul has forsaken its tenement — and is pursuing its way through the heavens.

I well know, brethren, that on hearing this recital — though feeble the tongue that has rehearsed it — one sentiment, one wish pervades every breast, *"May I die the death of the righteous, and may my last end be like his!"* But have you duly weighed the means of attaining this latter end? Is it distinct in your apprehension, that to *live the life of the righteous* is the needful preparation for dying his death?

What, in truth, is life, or how ought it to be estimated? A wise man, a believer, will above all regard life as an opportunity of making his calling and election sure — as a brief season to be occupied in one continual preparation for death.

But how differently does the lost multitude regard it! Assured of their impending death, continually threatened with it, they live as though it were afar off — as though they were to live forever — like *secure mariners*, whose ship is amidst destruction, seeing wrecks floating around them, and a fierce storm on the horizon involved in mists — they relinquish the rudder, and set the sails, and allow the vessel to drive at the mercy of wind and tide. Like *indolent travelers*, they loiter when they should proceed — they strike into each inviting bypath, until the shadows of night surprise them.

Dissolve, child of Heaven, this fatal enchantment. Assume once more your cloak and your bag — bind on your sandals, and seek the *heavenly Zion*, with your face turned thitherward. Seek it with every faculty of your soul — seek it by every action of your life. Look not wistfully back on the *sinful city* whence you have escaped — from the noble career to which your Lord had beckoned you. Mistake not your *inn* for your *home* — your *cottage of clay* for your *everlasting dwelling*.

Engage in the concerns, participate in the satisfactions of the present scene, as one going a journey — with your loins girded, and your staff firm in your hands, and the latchet of your shoes securely tied. Often recall your thoughts from the mart of occupation and the crowds of pleasure; and observe, like the chosen people, a feast of tabernacles, a solemn memorial, that you are a dweller in *tents*.

"By faith Abraham made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in *tents*, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise!" Hebrews 11:9

"For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come!" Hebrews 13:14

So when death shall sooner or later arrive, to detach you more completely from the surrounding scene, his blow may be welcomed as *that happy consummation which transmits you to "the rest remaining for the people of God;"* to a better country, that is, to an heavenly country, prepared for all those who by faith and continuance in well-doing, look for the glorious appearance of their Lord and Savior.

To you will it belong to exclaim, with confident hope, "For I know, that when . . .
the earthly house of this tabernacle shall be dissolved,
the wilderness of life shall have been left,
the Jordan of death passed,
and the promised land entered —
I have an endless rest from my long and weary pilgrimage! When the earthly tent I live in is destroyed, I have a building from God, not built by human hands, whose builder and maker is God — eternal in Heaven!"

II. THE GRAVE!

"I know you will bring me down to *death* — to the house appointed for all the living!" Job 30:23

"It is appointed for men once to *die* — and after that the judgment!" Hebrews 9:27

In the center of ancient Rome was erected a *gilded pillar* — to which all the public ways, leading to that vast metropolis of the world, converged. Thus do the various walks and pursuits of human life, terminate alike in one outcome — the grave. Whether we join the band of holy pilgrims, or of lawless rebels — we shall reach at last a common resting-place' in our journey. Whether we select the wide or the narrow way — there is a point where these tracks meet — a column to which they equally conduct.

Let us go forth in imagination for a moment among the mansions of silence, and contemplate the scene of desolation — the multiplied image of death. What do we find here? A surface of living vegetation, overspreading a soil of bodily decay. The ground has risen and swollen with the transmuted spoils of life — and its richness is the moldering corpse. The sinewy cords of *manhood* — the rosy light of *youth* — the blooming cheek of *infancy* — these — these supply the nutrients which feed this green turf, and those painted wild flowers whereon we tread.

To give method to our reflections, we may regard *the receptacle of all living*, in four several points of view.

1st. As a monument recording the true estimate of terrestrial concerns.

2nd. As a place of rest.

3rd. As the porch of eternity.

4th. As the extreme boundary of probation.

1. When we calmly regard the grave — the abode of inaction and forgetfulness, as recording **the true estimate of terrestrial concerns** — how does their magnitude dwindle in our estimation! How vain do they appear! How worse than vain seems immoderate anxiety in toiling for them!

What is *worldly glory* — when soon a few feet of earth shall bound the possessions of him, whose ambition embraced the globe?

What is the *love of worldly wealth*, when the cottager who rests beneath the grassy mold — sleeps there as soundly as the tenant of the mausoleum? How silent, how insensible are the ashes of our forefathers, who here repose within their narrow beds! Where are . . .
the *passions* that agitated their bosom,
the *hopes* that encouraged them,
the *joys* that delighted them,
the *cares* that at concerned them,
the *desires* which they pursued?

"Their *love* and their *hatred* and their *envy* have already perished; neither have they any more a share in anything that is done under the sun!" Ecclesiastes 9:6

A *cemetery*, with its population slumbering in the dust, and with all its marble monuments and visible records of mortality — speaks a solemn lesson — to the pride, and the jealousy, and the strife, which ever recur in the present scene. Like the scroll of the prophet, it is written within and without — with wailing, and lamentations, and woe. It is, in emblem, what the sentence prescribed by the wisest king, at the conclusion of his encyclopedia of knowledge, was, in words, "Meaningless! Meaningless! Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless." Ecclesiastes 1:2

True, from the silent tenants, and from the sad memorials of the place, there issues no audible language. Nevertheless, their noiseless voices are heard among them — and passing from bitter sarcasm to solemn warning, they remind us, as we meditate amidst the field of desolation — what shadows we are, and what shadows we pursue!

2. This leads us, next, to contemplate the Grave, as a place of **rest**. Apart from all hopes of what is reserved beyond it, the children of sorrow might enjoy a melancholy satisfaction, in looking to the lap of earth as the *home* where their sufferings are to terminate — the *pillow* on which the weary head shall lay itself down, forget the past, and rest from its labors.

Supposing that your Redeemer had never come forth from the tomb — or that an ulterior existence were scarcely even a matter of conjecture — it would yet charm the severer dispensation of distress; it would speak the breaking heart into a pensive tranquility, to reflect . . .
that every hour is taking a *grain* from the hour-glass of adversity;
that the author of calamity has erected the tomb as its bounding pillar;
that he has provided an asylum, a region of oblivion and of peace . . .
where woe shall cease to weep, and patience to suffer,
where poverty may at length find a refuge from the sorrows,
and shame find a refuge from the scoffings of the world.

But, thanks be unto Him who has brought immortality to light, we are not left with this sad solace of adversity

3. We are also taught to regard the grave as **the porch of eternity**. Mournful indeed would be the lot of man, had he no fairer promise amidst the evils of life, than the refuge of eternal sleep — no richer balm than the miserable comfort of annihilation. Truly dismal would seem the receptacle of all living, to the eye which could penetrate no further than its frightful entrance.

Men of other times, generations that have passed away — perpetual, and without a dawn is your night of stillness — we call, but you hear not our voices, nor shall you know that your names are remembered. Silent, forever silent are . . .
the patterns of *piety*,
the luminaries of *wisdom*,
the idols of *renown*,
heroes of ancient and of modern days,
warriors who spread dismay, or opposed injustice on the earth,
statesmen, whose councils influenced the fate of empires,
orators, who chained the attention, and swayed the will of multitudes,
philosophers, writers, poets, artists, whether your impulse were philanthropy, or your own passion were fame — here are mingled your remains with those of the obscure peasant,
alike the food of the worm,
the tenants of the dungeon,
and ignorant of what is passing but a few feet above you!

Of what avail are now the flights of your genius, or the monuments of your pride — the works of your munificence, or the story of your deeds? To you, all these things are now, as though they had never been! What though here the wicked does indeed cease from troubling, and the slave is free from his master — and the prisoners repose together — and the weary be at rest? — while consciousness, motion, life, have utterly ceased.

We tread over the bodies of a blended multitude . . .
the throngs of cities,
the hermits of deserts,
the instructors of our childhood,
the companions of our toils,
the sharers of our secret counsels,
the aged relative,
the speechless babe.

Mournful going forth! vast family of death! The earth that is heaped over you, cannot be disturbed from within. On the eyes that have closed upon the cheerful light of day — its rays are never again to beam.

To the same *land of forgetfulness* we are ourselves proceeding — pushed forward with a *certainty* which cannot be shunned; and a *celerity* which it is impossible to slacken. The day is not distant, and may be now about to come forth — when we shall be added to this vast heap of desolation, and forgotten — when the earthly frame will crumble among its kindred clods of the valley — and the unbound breath of life, having finished its work, will "vanish into thin air."

In light of our soon and certain death — how lighter than vanity seem the attainments of life! O, how doubly oppressive all life's burdens — when we think, that after we have borne about, for a few short and evil days, this frail and feverish being — the hillock of turf will alone mark out our place; the head shall be laid down on the bed of forgetfulness, and we shall go there, whence we shall not return!

Away all romantic desires of higher attainments in this life — in the estimation of a corrupt and a surface-seeing world! Away! for what remains but to make the most of present time, to eat and to drink and be happy, since tomorrow we die — and then all the rest is darkness, and is nothing.

Such, such would be the dreary condition of man, if unapprized, if unassured of futurity — and here would close, in gloom and in horror, all *the sorrowful reflections which a visit to the sepulcher could suggest*. Wherever, under these views, he should cast his eyes for consolation — all would to him appear blasted and unpleasurable. Walking abroad in the spring, he would but deplore those happier days, of an innocence, no more to return — of which the budding foliage, and the fresh creation spoke — but would not there trace the analogy of resurrection. Listening to the voice of music, he would lose those promises of heavenly choirs, and of a brighter world, which constitute its highest charm. Under the loss of friends, he could know nothing of re-union. And in deciphering the mystic characters of the starry heavens, he would be utterly dissevered from all purer information.

Wandering along the shore of a dark ocean, to which no certain boundary of coast could be descried — he would proceed as the slave of impulse, the idolater of the present; and satisfied, even in his best moods and moments, with the scantiest acquisitions in holiness.

To us, however, whom divine revelation has certified, that when dust returns unto dust — the unfettered soul shall remount on a wing of insoluble identity, unto the presence of him who gave it — an ampler, nobler range of thought and of hope is opened. To us, the ground of the cemetery yet teems with animation, and the ashes of our forefathers glow with their usual fires. We wait for a morning, when the earth, to which they are committed, shall render back her invaluable deposit — when travailing, as does the mother, she shall, at one fruitful pang, restore all her children unto a second life.

"And he said unto me — Son of man, can these dry bones live? and I answered, O Lord God, you know." To God, the Builder of the living fabric, it is an easy labor to gather together and rearrange its scattered fragments. To you, the great Gardener, who has summoned from the earth the first fruits — it is but the breath of your will to bring to life the whole harvest. How gladly do we listen to the voice of your holy prophet announcing beforehand the errand of your Divine Son — the deliverer from the dungeon, and the grand atoning sacrifice for sin, "I will ransom them from the power of the grave — I will redeem them from death. O death! I will be your plague! O grave! I will be your destruction!"

How gladly, after the announcement had been verified, the deliverance completed, and the atoning sacrifice offered up — do we listen to the exulting echo, responding from the voice of your holy apostle, "O death, where is now your sting! O grave, where is your victory!" Thus assured, it is ours to interrogate the grave concerning its hidden treasures, and to unravel many mysterious dealings of Providence. The *sorrower* can now traverse the field of death, the place of desolation — with calmness. He can mark the green sod, which covers his earthly pleasures and hopes — with a soul resigned and satisfied. There, he can say, reposes my beloved relative — that shorter span of earth marks out where an infant is laid. Silent, beneath this hallowed urn, is the friend that loved me as a brother.

Here are the *spoils of mortality*, awaiting the resurrection. For know, O grave, that you shall render back your trust — and your clods shall leap into life; and be filled with a new animation — and I shall know once more those whom I have known; and the clasp of resurrection shall be indissoluble.

It was a dim surmise respecting future life, suggested by lofty inquiry, or by weeping friendship, that dictated, even among heathen nations, a reverence for the abodes of the departed. No greater affliction could be conceived than the lack of burial — nor severer cruelty than the denial of it — nor heavier imprecation than the wish that it might not be obtained. The great Athenian legislator devoted to the infernal furies, the impious violators of the sepulcher. Indeed the place of graves is secure under the protection of government — if that *asylum of the dead* were ever disturbed. It was, no doubt, the hope of rejoining beloved friends in a world to come; and a desire to mitigate the bitterness of inevitable present separation, which created this veneration for the dead.

Survivors delight, in most parts, to decorate these resting-places, with the fairest sculptures of art, and the tenderest effusions of affection. They adorn the churchyard with flowers, emblematic of future animation; and with evergreens, significant either of perpetual remembrance in the living, or of imperishable life in the departed. There broods the melancholy evergreen, casting its protection over the interred body. The departed are conceived to delight in these honors; and to rejoice when "the clods of the valley are thus made sweet unto them."

And let modern and spurious liberality say what it will — this general respect for the remains of the deceased, is well deserving of being kept up, as connected with Scriptural truth. Let the humble believer be left in the enjoyment of his notion, that rudely to violate the abodes of mortality, is but part of an infidel plan for teaching that nothing survives the destruction of their mortal being, and that death is an eternal sleep. The tomb in which the Author of Christianity was laid, was constructed at once for ornament and security. "There was a garden, and in the garden a sepulcher: and it was hewn out of a rock, and guarded by a ponderous stone." Nay, *"I now rest in peace"* was admired even by an Infidel, as the most affecting of all monumental inscriptions. It is the voice which imagination would conceive as coming from the grave, provided the dead could speak.

4. But though the grave is not, to our consciousness, the furthest verge of the universe — though we know it to be the gate by which we and all men pass from the visible to the invisible world — it is still entitled to attention, as the extreme boundary of life. Where the tree falls — there it lies. We bid adieu forever to the shores which we are passing; for when the vessel has once reached its destined port, it neither returns nor repeats its course. *"Lazarus, come forth!"* was a miracle; a deviation from the course of nature. The tomb heard, in its cavities, the solemn mandate. It heard — it obeyed — it gave back its prey; then immediately closed its gates, and shut up its secrets, until the time of the restitution of all things.

We, when we have once descended there, cannot return to the land of the living, to amend what we have done amiss, or to perform what we have neglected. No change of heart can take place there.

He who is unjust — must be unjust still.

He who is condemned — is condemned forever.

He who is lost — cannot be found.

He who tastes the second death — cannot be spiritually alive again. "For when you go to the grave, there will be no *work* or *planning* or *knowledge* or *wisdom*" — nor *repentance*.

Let us not evade the truth — we know that our appointed labor — a labor to be performed on earth, or not to be performed at all — is no easy, no trivial task of an hour. It is comprehensive and difficult — embracing . . .
our duties to God;
sincere repentance;
the crucifying of the old man;
faith, worship, holiness, perseverance;
our duties to our brethren;
activity and usefulness;
and love to God and man.

For fulfilling this circle of various offices — the time allowed is brief: a portion of it gone, and what remains uncertain. What, then, is the inference? If such is the character of *what* our hand finds to do, and such the character of the *time* assigned for doing it — then surely wisdom counsels that we ought to do it with our might.

This is certain, whether we speak with reference to temporal, or to our more strictly spiritual concerns. Even in the labors of our calling, in the accomplishment of worldly schemes, so far as they may comport with holiness, or constitute duty — the impending night incites us not to be slothful in business. He who puts his hand to the plough, will do well to beware of looking back, or of loitering in his toil. And he who goes late into the field of industrious exertion, must hasten to *redeem the time*. Now to redeem the time, is to use what remains of it to good purpose — to make a proper arrangement and distribution of our days. It is to intersperse moments of meditation among the hours of bodily or mental toil; and to give no more to pleasure, than is needful for the recruiting of the spirits. It is to resolve in the morning — to *act* in the day — to *reflect* at night. It is to desist from the chase of objects which are frivolous and contemptible in themselves — or irrelevant to the main business of our calling. Whatever we take in hand, we may never do amiss — and by proposing the divine glory as the scope and mark of our undertakings, to consecrate the whole routine of life, as a series of acts of service towards God. This is to redeem the time.

But if wisdom dictate such prudence and diligence with respect to the vain schemes, and perishable acquisitions of the present life; which however innocent and beneficial in themselves, are not immediately and directly connected with salvation — by how imperious a voice are we exhorted to execute with our might, without hesitating, without procrastination — the great, the all-important, the indispensable work of preparing the spirit for eternity.

This is the thing eminently and essentially belonging to our peace — it is the work, of which the neglect in this our day, deprives us of happiness and of hope forever. You may leave the stately mansion which you have founded, unfinished; and your heir will render it habitable for himself. You may leave the agriculture of your estate uncompleted, and fare never the worse for it in futurity. Blamelessly may you relinquish your plans of profit, pleasure or honor — for there may be humility in poverty, and modesty in seclusion — and both conditions are favorable to piety and perseverance. Your income may be little — your industry moderate — and all may nevertheless continue prosperous and well with you.

Overstrained frugality is the idolatry of covetousness; and *Martha* may be too careful and troubled about many things. If you have neglected the care of your health — if you have fallen into difficulties or distress — you may even yet hope for a favorable change, or at the worst, *look to death as a deliverance from suffering*. But if you now neglect *the one thing needful* — if you suffer this irrecoverable opportunity to pass unimproved — if you unhappily procrastinate the interests of immortality — then you are cut off from all hopeful expectation — bereft of all solace — and destitute of all happiness. You fling into the wide ocean, *the pearl of great price.* You cast away an advantage which it is impossible to retrieve — and forfeit a felicity of which you never can supply the absence.

While an hour yet remains then — arise and be doing.

While you still live and mingled move with upon the surface of this earthly ball,
while you are not yet mingled with the thousands who sleep within its bosom,
while you walk above graves, which yet you do not occupy,
while you yet tread upon the worm, by which you will speedily be devoured
— beg for repentance and faith in the glorious gospel.

Avoid the inactivity, in order to escape the fate of the unprofitable servant. Hasten to work the work of him who has sent you — who commands the grave to yawn before each step of your path in life — but whose calls subside as it were into the summer breeze — when he invites you with the still small voice within, "Why do you stand here idle all the day — go into the vineyard, though it be now the eleventh hour — and what is right I will give you."

III. THE GENERAL JUDGMENT

"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad." 2 Corinthians 5:10

The end of the world, with all the pomp and terror of its accompanying circumstances, has employed the most sublime efforts of the pencil and the pen. But when we regard it as an impending certainty — we cannot but own the expedience of realizing to our imagination, the events of that great assize.

Faith has been defined as the substance of things hoped for — the evidence of things not seen. Each act of the mind, therefore, which connects us with the invisible world — which transports us among things that are to be, and situations in which we must be placed hereafter — is a partial exercise of that faith, which embraces, when viewed in air its implications and consequences, the whole duty of man.

The first circumstance meriting notice, as very greatly heightening the solemnness of the event we are about to contemplate — is *the silent and unsuspected manner of its approach*. Attempts have been made; by deciphering prophecy, to ascertain the period of time determined in the counsels of God for bringing this visible universe to an end — but these must needs be little better than conjectural: since, "of that day, and of that hour, knows no man, no, not the angels of Heaven, but the Father only." God has been judged sufficient to acquaint us, that that great day, "for which all other days were made," will come upon the world in a thunder-clap of surprise; when they are not thinking of it — when they are thinking of everything else; carrying on wars, ratifying treaties, forming alliances, planning public works, pulling down granaries and building larger ones. While the whole world is thus absorbed in occupations, which (when *exclusively* or *mainly* attended to) characterize a worldly mind — the Son of man will come upon it, with the unexpectedness of "a thief in the night."

And as it was in the days of Noah, and in the days of Lot — they sold, they bought, they planted, they built — until sudden destruction came upon them unawares — even thus shall it be in the day of the Son of man. The day, whereon the sun, which had ruled and measured the days for so many generations — shall rise for the last time — in the portentous hue of blood, and shall afford no other warning to the then existing generation, that he will never more attire himself in his robe of radiance — or return unto the chambers of the east.

In the depth, then, of this general slumber of souls — a loud and tremendous voice will suddenly be heard — sounding from one end of Heaven to the other, and going abroad to the uttermost parts of the earth; a voice striking terror to the race that shall be living, and penetrating the inmost cells and catacombs of death. "The end is come!" amidst thunderings it will cry, "Burst the bands of sleep, you tenants of the tomb — and you, you living ones, prepare for judgment."

Taking Scripture for our guide, let us suppose this scene arrived. Let us behold its sights — and listen to its sounds. What a shout is that, which bursts the concave of Heaven? It is the Lord, descending with armies of angels — with a retinue of ten thousands of his saints! And behold! a mighty form — the herald of his approach, planting one foot on the trembling ocean, and another on the withering land — lifts his hand towards Heaven, and swears by Him who lives forever and ever, that *time shall be no more!*

Now nearer shines the descending glory — surpassing the Shechinah in its splendor — outstripping the comet in its speed — and beaming forth from the east unto the west! He comes, the faithful witness — the first-begotten of the dead — the prince of the kings of this earth. He is treading the air with buoyant step, and traveling upon a path-way of clouds. He comes, not now the lowly wanderer of Galilee — not the son of the carpenter, despised, rejected, buffeted — not the man of sorrows, who had nowhere to lay his head. Far otherwise. His countenance is as the sun — his eyes are as a flame of fire — his feet are as of brass, and burn like a furnace! His voice is as the rushing of many and of mighty waters.

He comes, and lo! his winnowing fan is in his hand; and he will thoroughly cleanse his garner. His arrowy lightnings play around him — while the foundations of the round world, are split apart at the blast of the breath of his displeasure. He comes, not now to suffer — but to rule — to receive homage — to reward, to punish, to destroy! The pomp of the *victor*, the majesty of the *sovereign*, the terrors of the *judge* — are combined to wipe away the ignominy of crucifixion — and to obliterate the dishonors of the tomb!

Can we wonder, that an event so alarming and so important shall be accompanied by miraculous signs — by mighty and unheard-of prodigies? — that the vast globe of day shall sicken into darkness — that the fine silver on the shield of night shall be dimmed — that the stars shall shoot, and reel, and fall in showers from heaven — like a fig-tree scattering her figs, when shaken by a mighty wind?

Can we wonder, that the unpoised world should stagger like a drunken man — -and that earthquakes should rend it to its center — that millions of bursting meteors should thwart each other in the troubled sky, and that while thus the powers and the pillars of the firmament shall be shaken, the hoarse vault shall roar as with the crash of an universe?

Can we wonder, that the elements themselves shall be molten — that fire shall fuse the rocks, and lick up the hissing waters — and mingle the beauty of nature — the pride of art — the monuments of power — in one universal combustion and ruin?

Can we wonder, that mountains and islands shall be removed; and that the heavens, starting back from the footsteps and face of their Lord, shall shrivel and pass away, like a parched and gathered scroll?

Subterranean thunders responding to the artillery of heaven — volumes of flame and smoke ascending from the heaving and the rocking ground — mighty lakes boiling like cauldrons of floating fire; and huge ignited masses rolling down into expanding chasms — do all proclaim, in horrible concert, that nature is at her last gasp, and that the day of the Lord — the great and terrible day — has come!

But to proceed — the whole system of worldly affairs will now be stopped — those wheels of the vast machine of society, which had been going forward for so many centuries, will stand still. The living, aghast, seem bereft of life — the half-drained and steaming ocean casts forth its dead upon its shores — the soil of every grave is heaved away; mausoleums and tombs are overthrown — bone adjusts itself anew to its bone — and millions of shrowded forms arise. The lids of the urn and of the coffin are torn open — man is again fashioned out of the dust of the ground — the dead start to warmth, and animation, and motion, and come forth — those who have done good, unto the resurrection of life — and those who have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation!

But what pulses of alarm will beat at the hearts — what feelings shake the frames of this vast reanimated multitude! Consternation! trembling! horror! despair! "Men's hearts failing them for fear!" Where are the happy few, the unwearied, unswerving faithful, who will lift up their heads with confidence — who, from the tomb, will stretch forth their hands, unappalled — and cry, in humble hope, "Even so, Lord, come Lord Jesus — come quickly!"

Ah! will not rather the most righteous have their secret misgivings — will not apprehensions damp the best-founded expectations? Will not the purest hearts accord in the cry — "Who may abide the day of his coming!" But if judgment thus begun, "to be fearful at the house of God" — then what will be your foreboding, you children of disobedience? If the righteous can scarcely "hope to be saved" — then where — where shall you, the ungodly, and you, the sinful, appear? You will seek to glide back into the darkness of the tomb! Shrieking will you flee to dens, to coverts, to caverns of the earth, from the thunderbolts of pursuing vengeance! "Fall on us," you will cry to the crumbling mountains and to the blazing rocks — -fall, fall and hide us from the face of Him that sits on the throne — and from the wrath of the lamb — for the great day of his wrath has come!

Behold the Judge, now seated on his throne, which he has planted on the ashes of this world. On his *right* hand are ranged the brotherhood of the faithful — on his left, speechless, terrified, despairing — a guilty multitude, abiding their final doom. All around, and on high, behold myriads of the heavenly host — according to their degrees and virtues — their *robes* spotless as the light; their *brows* encircled with starry diadems — their *countenances* beaming pure love toward their destined companions — while beneath, at the flaming mouth of the unplummeted deep — the dark ministers of vengeance await, in sullen expectation, or in ferocious triumph, the mandate to seize upon their victims!

Remote systems, thus dispeopled of their inhabitants — and the congregated universe — a multitude which no man can number, standing in solemn stillness — in breathless attention, throughout their dense throngs and depth of unmeasured files — while there is thus a solemn pause in the anthems of praise, "a silence in Heaven for half an hour;" while the tangle of the firmament is hushed as in the sleep of midnight — an order is issued forth for the unsealing of the judgment-book.

"Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done!" Revelation 20:11-13

"I am he," the Judge proclaims from his tribunal, "who has obtained redemption. Heirs of promise — children of the new covenant — stand forth and declare — how has each acquired a saving interest in this astonishing ransom.

Then, while some stand all mute with confusion — while others vainly plead excuses for their impenitence — -while many shrink appalled at the yawning of the dread abyss — even then, on the unbelieving, the profane, the deceitful — on the unjust, the unchaste, the idolaters of the present world — will the doom be pronounced; "I don't know you — depart from Me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels!"

To those, who have studied, though in much infirmity — to walk blameless in the ways of God — to those, who by faith and repentance, have laid hold on the cross of reconciliation — to those, who have, in life, looked upwards for spiritual support — the Savior will then address himself, "Come, you who are blessed by My Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world!"

We are acquainted by Paul, that these sentences being pronounced — the faithful will be caught up to meet the Lord on high, and so shall be ever with the Lord. And while the triumphant Savior is thus re-ascending to his Father's house, with a pageantry, bright beneath the splendors of the opening heavens — while he is bearing, amidst his regal ensigns — the spoils of the vanquished, the arrows of death, and the keys of Hell — when he is conducting to the courts of light the first-born whom he has ransomed — how descriptive of his glory seems the prophecy of the Psalmist, "God is gone up with a shout — the Lord with the sound of a trumpet: sing praises to God; for He is king over all the earth — sing praises, for He is greatly exalted."

Inspiration even accompanies their progress to the confines of day, to the portals of the celestial palaces: "Lift up your heads — it sings — you everlasting gates — and the King of glory shall come in: Who is this King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty — the Lord mighty in battle."

Respecting the children of disobedience — we have the information of Scripture, that the Son of man will send forth his angels, who shall gather out of his kingdom all that work iniquity — and bind them hand and foot and cast them into outer darkness — darkness only illuminated by the glowing of a lurid furnace!

Gladly would I leave the picture *incomplete*. Gladly would I draw a *veil* over the horrors of that dismal scene; I would hide the malignant satisfaction with which demons of darkness will spring forth, and fasten upon the newly-condemned — and toss them with skewers head-long into the unfathomable pit — *but I must not spare you a beneficial alarm.*

O! the horror and the agony of that last parting look, which they will cast upon the firmament of light — and on the skirts of the Savior's distant glory — and on the disappearing throng of the faithful, which contains many a kind relative and slighted adviser. O! the wild shriek, and the frantic struggle, and the unheeded cry for *help* — and the vainer cry for *mercy*.

O! that by expunging the *picture* — I could blot out the *reality* — of . . .
the bloated sensualist,
the remorseless oppressor,
the shameless adulteress,
the defrauder of the orphan,
a Dives, penitent too late,
a Judas, who had cut himself off from hope,
a Cain,
a Korah,
a Herod,
a Sapphira —
deprived of all room for repentance — plunging into one Hell, but carrying within their bosoms another, to which that Hell seems a Heaven!

Let it suffice to state, that all who here upon earth shall have worshiped the beast and his image, shall drink the undiluted wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of his indignation.

Suffice it, that all whom don't have their name written in the book of life — shall be cast forth among the billows of a sea of fire, prepared for demons and impenitent mortals, and shall be there tormented day and night forever and ever, by that great Dragon — the old Serpent — the Devil — and his mustered hosts! For bound though he is with a ninefold chain, by that Son of the light — who has trampled on his neck, and tamed his writhing folds — and hurled him down, and all his apostate angels with him, from the hitherto endurable plains of earth, as of old from the happy realms and crystal battlements of Heaven — who has shut them up and secured them in the bottomless pit — and has fastened it with many bolts — and set a seal, which no man can break, upon its entrance — yet are this arch-deceiver and his subordinate demons are still left with their full power to punish.

The gates of the dungeon and prison house, are now closed — they have grated on their ponderous hinges for the last time; they are closed, never more to be opened.

Solemn consideration! whatever are the sufferings which that unhappy multitude are gone to experience, whether torments of body, or pangs of soul — the word of truth declares, that their doom is *irreversible* — their condition *unalterable*; that there is no ray of hope, no suspension of pain — that the woe is without limits; and the full bowl of Divine fury is never to be exhausted. The inscription over the gate of Hell, devised by the great poet of that doleful region, is not less correct in reality than in imagination: *"You who enter in, relinquish all hope!"*

Having thus attempted, though with enfeebled pencil, to portray the circumstances of this solemn catastrophe — I shall hasten to conclude with offering a few suitable *reflections*.

1. With reference to the CERTAINTY of these events. There is an oracular voice of nature enshrined within every bosom — there is a hope in virtue, and a fear in guilt, which announce a judgment to come. Reason too, intimates, that in the end of time — the Almighty will vindicate his wisdom and goodness — by assigning to vice and virtue more equal retribution, than is usually awarded in this lower world.

And this *tribunal of righteousness* seems further to be requisite, in order to rectify many errors in human opinion. The world judges of characters by external acts — and hence it frequently happens that the *wicked* man, who contrives merely to save appearances — and who can throw an imposing gloss over the blackness of his evil deeds, carries away the palm of public applause, "has truly his reward." While on the other hand, by an unfortunate combination of circumstances — connected with the avidity of men to grasp at occasions of detraction — the oppressed servant of God may sink under unmerited censure.

Shall not he then, who revels in such ill-gotten tributes, dread a period of requital — when the arm of injustice shall be withered — when the tongue of deceit shall be silenced in shame?

Shall not the drooping sufferer lift up his head, in the expectation of an hereafter — when his cause shall be made known, and his calumny removed; and his innocence brought forth, clear as the noon-day?

Again, there are certain vices, which, being fashionable, or linked with great talents, or blended with captivating accomplishments, or softened by courteous manners — experience too liberal an indulgence in the world. While for some individual fault, when in one fatal moment committed — the sincere penitent can find no pardon among men, no removal of the *brand* upon his forehead — though he seek it constantly and carefully with tears.

It might be presumed then, in reason, I say — that an equitable correction of these erroneous views and sentiments of men — in the presence of an assembled universe, enters into the scheme and economy of Divine Providence.

But while conscience and reason declare the *probability* — Scripture proclaims the *certainty* of this solemn consummation. "It is appointed unto all men once to die — and after that the judgment." "Marvel not at this, for the hour approaches when all that are in the graves shall rise, and come forth, the *good* to life — and the *wicked* to destruction. For we must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ — that everyone may receive according to what he has done."

Do not imagine, then, that you have been here contemplating . . .
a fictitious history,
an account to amuse the imagination,
a tale which has no place but in the imagination of the narrator,
a prophecy of allegorical or doubtful meaning, which may or may not be literally accomplished.

Do not imagine that you have been anticipating an event buried in the womb of *uncertainty* — or a scene in which you will have no personal concern. Remember that Heaven and earth shall pass away — but that one jot or tittle of these things shall not pass away. Represent them then to meditation, now, as *solid realities* — in which each person shall bear a prominent part. Instead of being dismissed with indifference, let them impress every mind with the feelings (but more permanent) which they once produced in that of the Roman governor. "And as Paul reasoned of judgment to come — Felix trembled."

2. I now pass on to observe, in the second place — that though we cannot tell the day, nor the hour, nor the age — when our Master shall return to judgment — though the present generation passes away like all the preceding ones; though all things still continue as at the beginning — and the promise of the Savior's coming remains unfulfilled for cycles and cycles of ages — yet the account now given of the great day of recompense — as coming *suddenly*, when men shall be singing the song of peace and safety — may be appropriated by every man to his own particular case; since the *day of death* — equally uncertain, will fix his final doom, and virtually prove the day of judgment unto Him.

"Be therefore patient: establish your hearts — for the coming of the Lord — the coming of *death* — draws near. Watch therefore — for you know not at what time the Master of the house (or the Monarch of the dead) shall come — at evening, or at midnight, or at the cock-crowing, or in the morning — lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping." To every one whom death awaits, to all may it be said, "the end of all things is at hand — be therefore sober, and watch unto prayer!"

3. Thirdly — let us learn, with reference to our brethren — to judge no man before his time — as befits those who possess only the criterion of appearances — until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness — and make manifest the counsels and secrets of the heart — and then shall every man have his true measure of praise or condemnation before God; and the fire shall "try every man's work."

To sum up all — that the expectation of this great event may not prove, in our case, a certain fearful looking for of judgment, and of fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries — that we may have confidence and not be ashamed before our Lord at his coming, let us stand like men who wait for their Lord, looking in every moment of life for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God, and our Savior Jesus Christ.

I shall accordingly take leave of this important subject with the following passage, extracted from the second general epistle of Peter.

"But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness. So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him!" 2 Peter 3:10-14

IV. HELL

"Then they will go away to eternal punishment!" Matthew 25:46

That punishment is reserved in another state of being, for guilt contracted in the present — an express revelation was hardly necessary to warn mankind. Had no Scripture been promulgated — had no inspired prophetic voice announced the woes which await the offending and unrepentant soul — conscience, the *veiled prophet within* — would have afforded at least some intimation, (indistinct indeed and imperfect, with respect to minuter details — yet as to the general fact,) sufficiently intelligible to convince, sufficiently dreadful to alarm.

Reason, too, calmly speculating on the divine attributes — and observing that transgression is, in the great majority of instances, permitted, without molestation — to revel in its forbidden pleasures.

Or, to speak more properly, observing that the stings of a disturbed conscience, which sin and self-love knows too well how to blunt — and whatever other minor distresses may here ensue, as the temporal consequences of guilt — are for the most part, *inadequate* as punishments to that guilt. *Reason*, I say, placing this view of life before its contemplation, could hardly fail to predict a future state of bodily or mental pain, wherein *retributive justice would be more strictly executed*.

Accordingly all people, of every age and climate — having formed a religion by the light of nature for themselves — have assigned to guilt a place of sorrow beyond the grave — and reinforcing the internal menaces of remorse, have taught the offender to tremble under the apprehension of a heavier punishment than it is in the power of man to inflict; or than can be inflicted within the compass of time:
The scourge of furies;
the gnawing vulture;
the thirsting lip, still parched but never moistened;
the labor ever fruitless, yet ever renewed;
intense heat or perpetual winter, and
various other descriptions of suffering, invented by different pagan nations, as their fears were severally molded by their local situation, their manners, or their passions — evince the punishment of wickedness in another world, to be one of those doctrines of which God — to point out their primary importance, and indisputable certainty, thought proper never to leave himself wholly without a witness.

While the voice of Scripture Revelation, wherever it has extended, having confirmed the forebodings of *conscience* and the inferences of *reasoning* — it has supplied the defective understanding of both, by unfolding much concerning the nature of the punishment reserved for evil-doers.

To its information, expressed or implied, on this solemn subject, I purpose at present to direct your views. May the meditation, though for the moment displeasing and irksome, terminate in a joyous outcome! May the Omnipotent grant, in my weak efforts, that knowing, and setting forth the terrors of the Lord — I may persuade men, by timely repentance, to turn into the path of salvation.

1. Actual bodily suffering, then, seems unequivocally revealed, as one part of the sorrows to be sustained by the children of perdition. There are minds of sentimental feeling, or of selfish presumption — by which this is regarded as a hard saying — minds which refine too far on the expressions of Scripture, and construe its plain statements into metaphorical allusions.

As the souls of men, however, are to be rejoined to their bodies — it cannot be believed that their future punishments will be *exclusively* mental. Our blessed Redeemer suffered intensified bodily torments, in ransoming mankind from destruction — and hence it seems to follow, that the unbelieving and unrepentant among mankind, should incur a similar punishment.

It is natural to suppose too, that deeds done in the *body*, should be expiated by *bodily* suffering — and however cruel it may seem in a minister of the gospel of love, to advance and to insist upon this supposition — it would be far more cruel to *lull his people in a fallacious security*, by inculcating unscriptural mitigations of punishment — by speaking *smooth things*, and *prophesying deceits*.

When, in short, I open the New Testament in various places — when I discover our Lord himself there declaring, that the angels shall sever the wicked from the godly, and cast them into a furnace of fire — when I read again, that the unprofitable servant shall be cast into outer darkness where shall be weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth — when I read that the fearful and unbelieving, and abominable, and murderers, and liars, shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone — and that the smoke of their torment ascends up forever and ever — I cannot doubt that such passages are to be, in some measure, literally understood.

Nor ought any human sentimentality to withhold from transgressors a representation of the suffering which they are doomed to feel . . .
when the *eyes*, that had communicated only impurity to the soul — shall be forever excluded from the cheerful light;
when the *hand* of robbery, of fraud, or of oppression — shall be bound with everlasting chains;
when the *tongue*, that was habitually exercised in falsehood, in calumny, in profanation, in blasphemy — shall call in vain for a drop of cold water to quench its burning fever;
when the whole body is tormented, but *not consumed* in the flames.

Some may call this interpretation too *literal* and harsh. Still, if there existed only the *faintest probability* — the chance of one against a thousand — that such, or nearly such, is the undisguised fact — shall we incur that hazard, on the strength of a *perhaps*?

Or what is still weaker — of our own biased conclusions, drawn from a partial view of the gentler attributes of God, which overlooks the stricter qualities of his character, and the express declarations of his revealed will?

2. If, however, to suffer bodily pains be a punishment so dreadful in apprehension, as to induce transgressors to soften down, by lenient interpretations, the plain terms in which it has been predicted — we shall probably agree in the sequel, that it is the *least* severe woe denounced against the sons and daughters of disobedience — that it is nothing, absolutely nothing, when compared with those *mental* tortures which Scripture announces. Nay, which arise out of the situation of the condemned — out of the nature and constitution of the human soul.

To rise from the lower to the more intense of these sufferings — a deep sense of SHAME is the first that demands our notice.

Shame can exist, even when there is no detection of the guilt by others. In this life, indeed, some of our less honorable acts, and perhaps all our unworthy thoughts, we are fortunate enough in concealing from others. And so strangely are we constituted, that, with respect to these, the multitude, with the exception of some holy minds, are at present sensible of but little compunction. But their deep sensibility to a more delicate shame, will, in another world, be roused from its long torpor. With a brow forever clouded, with an eye that cannot look up — will they own the self-humiliating nature of vice — and their cheek will burn with the perpetual crimson of the consciousness that they have fallen by their own sin, and forfeited the good opinion of God.

Like our first parents — in the hour of their disobedience, they will seek — but in vain, to hide themselves from the Searcher of hearts. They will cover themselves with their own confusion as with a mantle, and will call on the shadows of Hell to wrap them in friendly concealment. They will exclaim, "Why did we come forth out of the womb of the earth — only that our eternity should be consumed in shame?"

But shame will derive its most pointed sting from that conscious sense of universal contempt, which results from *full detection and exposure*. When men have reason to believe that that tall measure which they take of their goodness, that proud opinion with which they regard their own merits, is not recognized by those around them — that the self-complacency, which is in great measure the essence of their happiness, is far from being warranted in the minds of the respectable — this sense of public disesteem is of itself sufficiently galling. But, if the internal monitor, the echoing voice of self-contempt, proclaims that they have earned no better opinion, that they deserve the scorn they suffer — if they find themselves pointed forth as wicked and evil; shunned, despised — a hissing and a byword, the outcasts and refuse of society, and can only, on introspection, find an acknowledgment that the scorn is just — then no bodily pain, perhaps, no mental anguish, can be compared with their internal dissatisfaction.

Let the wicked man, therefore, gather together in recollection, all that is . . .
base in his principles,
depraved in his thoughts,
faulty in his conduct —
whether already exposed or dexterously concealed — let him conceive it as proclaimed with the voice of a trumpet that shall be heard to the furthest ends of the earth — heard at once in his near neighborhood, and throughout the unexplored distances of the universe — heard by friends who once admired his imagined sincerity, and by foes, who will exult in his degradation — heard at once by angels and by fiends, in all the heights and depths of space — and while on all hands he looks round on countenances frowning abhorrence, and listens to the many voices and hootings of contempt, and reproach, and execration — that portion of his punishment now under consideration, will be conceived with some distinctness.

"Many of those who sleep in the dust shall awake, some to shame and everlasting contempt." And when the *veil of self-delusion* shall be thus torn away; when flattery shall no longer soothe the ear of pride; when the unrighteous shall read in every eye their own deformity, and hear their character from every tongue, well may they exclaim, "What fruit have we then of those things, whereof we are now ashamed?"

Truly, in this respect, the very best have reason to fear — to ask, "Who may abide the day of his Master's coming?" Who may sustain the blazing eye of infinite purity? Whose conscience is so spotless as to look fearlessly forward to the unreserved exposure of all its secrets, and to own, like the woman of Samaria, "here is one who has told me all the things I have ever done in my life!"

Yet the faithful may be comforted when they add to this reflection, that in *their* case, the day of the Lord will bring to light many unnoticed good deeds, many secret struggles, many misgivings preceding their lapses — and the deep compunctions which followed them — their resolutions, their vows, their prayers, their deliberate preference of holiness — their earnest desire to fulfill their duties — their sincere zeal for the divine honor — their love and gratitude towards the Author of their salvation — the uniform soundness of their principles, and the general integrity of their lives. These, they may humbly hope, will abate much of the shame, which a knowledge of their errors will excite in that great assembly.

But the wicked can promise themselves none of these stays: nothing to restore them to their own good opinion; nothing to compensate the scandal from without — nothing to banish the inward blush of the soul.

3. REMORSE, we are assured, will be experienced, in its extreme gnawings, by the reprobate, in a future state. Whatever differences of opinion may be entertained, as to the endurance of bodily pain in a place of punishment — of the *certainty of remorse* there can be no question, whether we confine attention to the speculations of reason, or look to the positive denunciations of Scripture.

If it is true that wicked men shall exist hereafter, and shall possess consciousness — the remembrance of their evil deeds must necessarily attend them — to pierce them to the soul; to bereave them of a moment's ease. The *worm* that gnaws memory, and never dies — the *fire* that rages in the spirit, and is not quenched — intimate that the horrors of remorse will be co-existent with the duration of consciousness.

On earth, indeed, an absorption in sensual pleasure — and the glosses of self-love, too often abate and deaden the pangs of a guilty conscience — so much, indeed, as to afford but little apprehension with regard to their future severity. Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore is the heart of the sons of men fearlessly set in them to do evil. But be not deceived: whatever a man sows, that shall he also reap. A time is at hand, when *conscience* will rouse from its slumber, will assume its rule of terror and of anguish, and will prey with devouring tooth on the sinful and impenitent heart!

Imagine to yourself the transgressor, sitting in woe and in solitude, wringing his hands, smiting his bosom — feeling himself to be alone worthy of reproach, yet willing to reproach Heaven; and blaspheming God. See him, as he wears, in fruitless remorses, the long, long night that knows no morn — poring over the story of his folly; bewailing his wasted, irrecoverable time; and vainly wishing it were in his power again — now awake to the utter vanity of those poor treasures, and those short-lived joys, for which he once bartered his immortal soul!

Imagine him looking upwards, and discerning no glimpse of day. Imagine him looking downwards — and not finding even a grave — groping all around in that darkness that may be felt, but arriving at no door, no exit, no escape! And then sitting down again to his melancholy musings, until he is worked up into the frenzy — or worn into the idiocy of despair; and (but that that too is impossible) he would gladly commit suicide of the soul — and *escape out of misery into nothingness* — and still the pendulum within swings and swings; and the laden wheels of the hours move heavily — and every minute is like an eternity; and every instant is a sword; and withal, the task of reflection is still to begin again anew.

Imagine this in a single captive — and only multiply the image throughout all the cells and regions of sorrow — and then, I think, we might waive the question about bodily torments, in their direct and literal import — and then, I think, we might concede its figurative construction — for here is more than the yelling demon, the triple-bolted dungeon, and the sulphurous pool — O! here is Hell enough!

4. But remorse, considered merely as *anguish for past guilt*, when its folly, its unprofitableness, its dismal outcome shall be manifested — will be inconceivably aggravated by the sense of its ingratitude to God. To contemplate — when no pleasure, no enterprise, no favorite pursuit will remain to divert attention from one sole object — the boundless and amazing beneficence of the Most High — the lavish profusion of his mercies displayed in creating, preserving, redeeming — and then to look inwards, on the wretched creature of his hands, which has made light of his bounties, grieved his Spirit, neglected his offered salvation — to behold in perspective a long futurity which must be passed in exclusion from the light of the countenance, and in exposure to the ever-enduring displeasure of a Being so good and gracious — will constitute a portion of the mental pain of another world — not inferior in severity to the very sorest that could afflict the body.

"The Lord Jesus shall be revealed in flaming fire, taking vengeance on every one that knows not God, and obeys not the gospel of his Son" — who shall be punished with the stings of conscious ingratitude to the kindness of Heaven, and shall ratify, in the approval of his own heart, the doom of everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power!

Convinced that he has sinned willfully, after having been blessed with a knowledge of the truth, how dreadful the thought, that there remains now no hope of ever being again pardoned, pitied or loved, by Him who was once all pardon, all pity, all love — no more sacrifice for sin, no sweet influences of a Comforter — but one protracted series of *galling remembrances*, that all these blessings were once within his grasp — of self-reproaches, for having wearied out the amazing mercy by which they were offered — and of reluctant vindications of the justice by which they have been withdrawn.

5. Heart-depressing and intolerable as will be all these reflections, how much more ample a source of anguish opens to our view, in *the transgressor's envy of the lot of the righteous, and consciousness of the high felicity which he himself has forfeited!* It seems clear, from the parable of Dives and Lazarus, that in some manner the children of perdition will see, afar off — the Heaven from which they have excluded themselves. They will be cursed with a distant sight of joys, which they are doomed never to participate.

Again we are told, that it will be one source of the weeping and gnashing of teeth among the wicked — to see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets in the kingdom of God — and themselves thrust out. They will exclaim, "Happy, happy inheritors of glory — time was, when, in scorn, we deemed your life madness; when we conceived it folly to make sacrifice of present joys, for a futurity which we deemed precarious. Now you are comforted — and we are tormented. Time was, when we were situated in our state of trial, as you were. We were gifted with all your opportunities — entitled to all your hopes; like you, we were invited to enter in at the gate of Heaven. How have we turned aside from the path which was smoothed for us! Now our trampled on advantages that can never be restored! Now — while you are experiencing, in the presence of God, a fullness and a purity of joy — and at his right hand pleasures forevermore — ours, alas! by an *irrevocable* doom, is one long dreary night of protracted sorrow . . .
pangs without intermission;
regrets without avail;
a prison-house cheered by no beam of comfort!

6. Amidst these multiplied forms of tribulation and anguish, it might be some relief, some abatement of pain — could the tormented soul find but *one virtuous bosom* on which it might pillow its sorrows; where it might derive the *balm of condolence*, or taste the *sweets of friendship*. But on all sides it looks in vain. In that dismal abode, there is no society but that of *fiends*, or of evil men transformed into their similitude.

No voice of gentleness,
no accent of solace,
no music of compassion,
no soft air of sympathy steals peaceful throughout the gloom.

No sound is heard, but . . .
cursings and blasphemies;
the clanking of chains;
the yellings of unutterable anguish.

The demons, who once seduced men by tempting descriptions of the forbidden fruit, and by the soothing promise, "You shall not surely die!" — now enjoy the infernal triumph of their power — now live to glut their appetite for vengeance; to heat the furnace seven times hotter; to knot their lash of scorpion remembrances; to hold up before the sinner the mirror of his deformity; and to roar in his ears the history of his crimes.

Or if, perhaps, the rolling billows in the lake of fire, whether literal or figurative, shall toss him to an encounter with some partner of his shame, some unhappy being, who in the upper world of light, had been misled by his example, or seduced by his persuasion — he will only increase of torment, in the *reproaches* vented by the bitterness of a ruined soul — in the *curses* poured forth by the fury of a soul in tortures. "Wretch, it is *you* who has cast me into this gulf — but for you I would have kept the path of my innocence! May a ten-fold wrath from God befall you! May a thousand Hells be your portion!"

There are the assassin, the blasphemer, the traitor to his trust; who lived in rebellion, and perished in impenitence. There are the unbeliever, who industriously propagated unbelief — the self-destroyer, who rushing into the presence of his Judge, precluded of all power of repentance, and hope of pardon. "But the fearful, and the unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars — shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."

7. To finish this dreadful picture (and whatever pain it may afford us — it is better to contemplate an irksome truth now, than hereafter to experience the woe of having neglected it) — it only remains that we stamp all these varied forms of suffering with the common character of PERPETUITY.

Eternal pain;
eternal shame;
eternal contempt;
eternal remorse;
eternal banishment from the presence of God;
eternal envying of the lot of the good;
eternal society of the devil, and his angels —
all protracted through the infinite ages of duration.

The woe knows no limit;
the vial of fury knows no exhaustion;
the dungeon gate will no more expand.

No hope of escape, however faint — no prospect of a termination of punishment, however distant — can visit *the cheerless prison-house of despair*.

Let some controvert this point of Christian doctrine — on the presumption of its irreconcilableness with the divine mercy; and of the *disproportion* they conceive to exist between the most flagrant or impenitent guilt — and tortures at once so exquisite and so protracted. But without entering at present into any minute disquisition, let it suffice to observe, that the justness of such an opinion is at least greatly to be suspected — as being evidently the suggestion of a heart wishing to soften down to itself the consequences of its deliberate iniquity.

We are to receive both the *promises* and *threatenings* of God — as they are set forth in Scripture — that a hope so precarious is, at the lowest estimate, is most unsafe. That to lay open a prospect of *release* from future punishment, at whatever distance of time, would be to *harden guilt*, and to *prolong impenitence*. It were to abate a wholesome dread of the power and wrath of God, who though merciful in the accepted time, is in the end, a consuming fire. It were to make the gift of redemption appear less valuable — and the necessity of fleeing from the wrath to come less urgent.

Since the happiness of the just is represented as *everlasting* — it were to destroy the analogy which demands the same belief, with respect to the punishment of the ungodly. For the same word is used in both clauses of the text, "Then they will go away to *eternal* punishment, but the righteous to *eternal* life." Matthew 25:46

It were to take from Hell, its most dreadful character — if it were not *eternal*. "The worm *never* dies;" "the banishment from the presence of God is *everlasting*;" "the chaff is burnt with *unquenchable* fire; the smoke of their torment ascends *forever* and *ever* — these shall go away into *everlasting* punishment."

If these things are so — if, indeed, it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God — then how deeply essential must it be to our well-being, that we arise and flee from the wrath to come!

O! what would many, who have now finished their course, and are reserved in chains and darkness, willingly give in exchange for permission to return but for a moment to the precincts of light, that they might enjoy and improve, though it were only a day — but one only of those days, which many of us who possess them, place too little value!

Since the night comes upon us, when no man can work — let us up and be doing, while it is happily called day. Although the minister is sometimes compelled to have recourse to *the terrors of the Lord*, it is infinitely more pleasing to him to draw forward his fellow servants, with the gentler cords of love unto Christ, and obedience to his gospel. Scripture revelation has disclosed the mysterious way, by which our sins may be blotted out. "I am the way, and the truth, and the life." Transgressor! — turn quickly into this secure path, that your iniquities may be blotted out from the book of judgment, and that you may find rest to your endangered soul.

V. HEAVEN

"You will show me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy, at Your right hand there are pleasures forevermore!" Psalm 16:11

To a being like man, warned by the experience of all past generations, that he has but *a short time to sojourn* upon earth — daily reminded by the frailty of his own frame, and the various accidents to which his brethren around him are exposed — that life, which at the longest is no more than a span, may be *suddenly* and abruptly cut off — and discovering, from the surmises of reason, and the clear revelation of Scripture, that another scene of existence is to succeed the present — to a being so situated, the wish must be natural, to obtain, if it be possible, a minute account of the state on which he is about to enter — the *joys* which he hopes to inherit, the *occupations* in which the happy, among whom he trusts he shall be numbered, will eternally be engaged.

Were it only to gratify the spirit of inquiry, in a matter so important and significant, the mind would long to penetrate into the world of spirits. But the desire becomes at once more ardent and more reasonable, when the knowledge to be acquired is sought (as it ought to be) with a view to the regulation of present conduct. I mean, under the impression that a view of our eternal occupations will naturally suggest to us the wisest and the fittest method of disciplining the soul in preparation for them.

It is true, that Heaven has been revealed in the sacred volume, more in *general description* than in minute detail — yet knowing, as we do, in part, and allowed to lift up a corner of the azure curtain which hides eternal things — we may humbly venture to anticipate our promised bliss, as composed of the following ingredients:

1st. Freedom from all imperfections of body and soul.

2nd. Intellectual improvement.

3rd. Advancement in virtue.

4th. Praise and worship of God.

5th. Fellowship with the heavenly inhabitants.

6th. A refined renewal of inferior pleasures.

1. Freedom from all imperfections of body and soul. From these seats of unalloyed delight — **bodily** pain, infirmity and sickness, together with anxiety, depression, anguish, remorse, those far more distressful evils of the mind — will be wholly and forever removed. For we are assured that our frame shall be "changed into the likeness of Christ's incorruptible and glorious body;" — and that "there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying."

Our **intellectual** faculties, in a similar manner, will be purified from whatever now obstructs their operations.

Impressions will not vanish from the tablet of memory;
attention will not be subject to distractions and weariness;
no cloud will intervene between perception and its objects;
and reason will be exempt from all uncertainty in its conclusions.

Where death is destined to be swallowed up in victory, our enjoyments cannot be tainted by a dread of instability.

Where God shall wipe away all tears from all faces;
where we shall hunger no more, and thirst no more;
where we shall eat of the fruits of paradise, and drink of the new wine in our Father's kingdom;
and are clad in the vestments reserved for the saints of God — there, there can be no evil, and no apprehension of it.

Collect, in short, under a single view, whatever appears desirable . . .
in health, and youth, and vigor;
in refinement of taste;
in force of understanding;
in intellectual exertion;
in sublime meditation;
in peace and holy pleasure —
and when you have added to the combination, the quality of *perpetuity*, and the boundless perspective of eternal augmentation — you will have shadowed out a bliss to be realized in Heaven.

2. Among these blessings, **intellectual improvement** well merits our particular mention, in regard to its probable rapidity and extensiveness, and to the sublime pleasure which it will, no doubt, communicate. "*Now* we see things imperfectly as in a cloudy mirror — but *then* we will see everything with perfect clarity. All that I know now is partial and incomplete — but then I will know everything completely."

A variety of *impediments* in the present life, are incidental to the acquirement of human knowledge:
injudicious or scanty education,
the necessity of manual labor,
the call of domestic duties,
the shortness of our days,
the multiplicity of sciences,
ignorant instructors,
prevailing errors,
the slow pace of learning,
facts hitherto unexplored,
the bias of prejudice,
the violence of passion,
the indolence of luxury —
one or other of these causes *excludes* most men from much of the edifying and delightful instruction which they might attain — while a vast and boundless field of intelligence lies still beyond the grasp of human comprehension, and remains to be acquired in a more perfect state of being.

In that higher condition, all these obstacles will be removed. And while the most simple and unlettered disciple will pass, on the moment of his awaking in the heavenly world, into the possession of clearer and ampler information — than the most studious or wise, by investigation the most patient, and thought the most profound, has ever attained on earth — it may be generally expected, that *our faculties will expand* with the increase and novelty of our acquirements, that the mind will be invigorated with fresh powers and endowed with new capacities, to adapt it for the contemplation of that endless succession of unthought-of scenes, and ever-thickening wonders, through which it is destined to rise.

But to be particular, the *film of sin* being removed from our intellectual vision, and the spirit being clothed with a glorified frame — we may humbly presume that we shall be permitted to gratify that innocent and manly principle of *curiosity*, which is implanted in our breasts as the spring of research, but which is here disappointed in so many instances, by the variety of its objects, and the imperfection of the human faculties.

To traverse that country, the blue hills of which we had faintly seen from the opposite shore,
to see what earthly eye has never witnessed,
to hear what human ear had never heard,
to trace the eccentric path of the heavenly luminary as it shoots into the depths of immensity,
to move along the beam of light,
to visit new planets,
to behold fresh creations,
to discern by how the planetary orbs have woven their mystic dance, and observed their stated rounds;
to understand how the seed sown and dying in the earth, has sprung up and spread into the beautiful flower;
to understand how *instinct* supplied the animal tribes with a blind substitute for the *light of reason*;
to understand how impressions were conveyed to the mind of man through the gross medium of sense
— these, my brethren, are employments, now transcending our powers, though not, it is presumed, unworthy of them — to which we may trust we shall in future be rendered adequate.

Though our knowledge on our first arrival in the courts above, will doubtless exceed all that we can at present ask or think — we may suppose that the whole which we are destined to attain, will *not* burst at once upon our view. Our path in this respect will resemble the shining light, which shines more and more unto the perfect day. Whether to impart the pleasures of novelty and surprise, in the most exalted form, and with reference to the most sacred subjects, or to afford fresh themes for . . .
the sentiments of love,
the effusions of gratitude,
and the songs of praise —
it is to be expected that we shall pass, in endless succession, from scene to scene, and ascend from discovery to discovery, while by proportionate gradations our powers will be invigorated, and our capacities progressively unfolded!

While each new enlightenment will be thus unattended with difficulty, the rapidity of attainment will keep full pace with the ardor of desire. And since the creature must not hope ever to rival the Creator, if there are mysteries reserved for the comprehension of the Eternal alone, it may be conceived that no desire to fathom these depths will be permitted to disquiet the minds of the just; that they will shrink back in devout awe, and turn with enraptured and unalloyed gratitude to the wonders which are granted them to explore.

But while we thus enkindle the ardor of devotion by contemplating those more delicate springs of *natural* phenomena, which are in immediate contact with the hand of the great Mover; it is chiefly by taking more *enlarged views of the conduct of Divine Providence in regulating the moral world*, that we shall be said to "see face to face." What an amazing and delightful field of knowledge is opened, in the prospect of obtaining a full and clear discernment of the attributes, the designs, and the ways of the Most High God; of why God made his way in the tempest and conflagration, and planted his footsteps in the troubled deep — by what links our temporary sufferings were connected with our eternal bliss. Above all, what unspeakable satisfaction in exploring the mystery of redemption, and the agency of free grace! Of comprehending — in a word — with all saints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, and to know the love of Christ, which surpasses knowledge, that we may be filled with the fullness of God!

But here let the boldness of conception check its flight. The way of curiosity is at this point cut off . . .
no human foot has trodden these precincts,
no eye has even distantly descried them,
no man has seen God at any time, in the full refulgence of his majesty on high! A great chasm now remains in our sacred knowledge — to be supplied by ampler revelations, and comprehended by more exalted faculties.

3. But if several of these prospects of intellectual improvement should by some be attributed to the unsubdued pride of human reason, and pronounced beneath the regard of beatified spirits — we need not dread the charge of visionary conjecture, in proceeding to affirm that **the pleasures of improving virtue will constitute a chief ingredient in our expected happiness**. Purified from all sin, from every occasion of that uneasiness and shame, which restrain the glowing love of God, and much impair the pleasure of contemplating his perfections — the spirits of the just made perfect will approach, with ardor resembling that which fires seraphic natures — with that perfect love which casts out fear — to behold the glories of the Father of the universe. And thus enabled to endure an approximation to him, will recover more of his likeness, by reflecting the light of his countenance, and by kindling amidst the irradiations of his love. But we all, beholding with open face the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory!

Improvement in holiness and virtue presupposes in the first instance, one very high portion of enjoyment — security from falling into sin. It is further, more than probable, that while the remembrance of our worthier services, of temptations resisted, self-denials endured, the tear of penitence, the promptitude of relief — will be drawn forth in lines prominent and strong — the traces of those multiplied imperfections and failures, which on earth disturb the tranquility of good men, will either be obliterated, or in some manner rendered less painful on review, and preserved only to increase our *love* of God, and our *gratitude* for the stupendous exercise of his loving kindness, displayed in the redemption of transgressors.

In this manner the pleasure of Heaven will be experienced in its highest perfection. And if even here on earth, mingled with bitter recollections, it be often a source of unspeakable comfort — how delicious a feast will it spread for the pure in heart, when they shall drink of the celestial vine, free from sinful admixture, in their Father's kingdom!

Warranted by the united voices of *reason* and *Scripture* in believing that our holiness, like our knowledge, will be progressive — we cannot unreasonably promise ourselves the high satisfaction of perceiving, that we are making *eternal approaches to the fountain of excellence* — perpetually improving in resemblance to those perfections which shall call forth our wonder, our praise, and our love.

Blessed, O God! are those who dwell in your house — they will go on from strength to strength — they will still narrow their orbits of approach to your throne, and of similitude to your glories — until every one of them appear before you in the holy of holies in your courts above — the inmost recess of your pavilion and the full blaze of your immediate presence!

4. These views naturally introduce the mention of **praise and worship** as a principal occupation and pleasure of the world to come. Devout minds, thus going on to perfection, will be eager to ascribe to God, the giver of all good — the glory of their progressive advancement — and thus happy to worship him for all their pure sensations of high and complicated delight.

Each new discovery,
each augmented bliss,
each pulse of joy,
each advancement towards excellence —
will wake the remembrance of that infinite goodness, which has spread forth *a banquet of such unmerited bounties* — will urge the blessed to unbosom their gratitude, to pour out their raptures, before the footstool of the Eternal God, who, by thus being the center and sum of their felicity, will be unto them — as the apostle has described Him, *"all in all."*

Nor will gratitude and devotion be silent sentiments. Though the *heart* is their choicest oratory — though there is still a voiceless thought — an unutterable feeling — the most eloquent avowal of the inadequacy of expression — yet not to the secret cell of the heart, will these ardent sentiments be confined!

New, though glorified bodily organs, are not given to immortal spirits, without an intention of their being *employed*. And though devout feelings will often find utterance in the less enraptured adoration of glowing and sublime language, such as poetic fancy never arranged, or the fire-touched lip of prophecy never poured forth — it is chiefly *in the elevated melodies of celestial voices* that the praises and worship of God will resound throughout the courts of immortality.

That angels and archangels, and all the host of Heaven, will laud and magnify the name of God, in the devotion of "harps and hymns" — that *holy affections will be expressed by holy music* — music — now as *soft* as the chiming spheres — now as *swelling* as the lyre of the winds — now as *loud* as the artillery of the sky — we are informed by that apostle, to whom the Savior called, and who calls unto each of us in his revelations, "Come up higher; and I will show you the things that shall be hereafter."

And if the combination of well-adjusted voices, and of various instruments attuned in harmony, afford to the ear on earth a more than earthly gratification — if it elevates and purifies the affections of the mind — then to what holy rapture will the soul be raised by the pealing anthem of the multitude whom no man can number, of myriads of angels, and the general assembly of the first-born — having golden lutes, and vials full of fragrances, encircling the throne of the ever-blessed one, and singing a new song, and exclaiming, "You are worthy to take the book, for you were slain, and have redeemed us to God by your blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation!"

We cannot, indeed, doubt, that "praise Him in the timbrel and dance — praise Him upon the stringed instruments and organ," is a mystical expression: and alludes to some aerial measure, soft and augmenting, accordant to the labyrinthine circuit accomplished by the immortal bands; while, (like wheeling planets with their pomp of satellites) they would survey on all sides the perfections of the Divinity.

But if a mortal could dare into the Heaven of heavens; and seeming to catch the murmur of their lofty song, could impart to ears of flesh a faint conception of its grandeur — what must be the *real* clash of heavenly worship be — the full concerting of immortal choirs — the burst of many voices, like the rushing of many waters, which shall roll on high along the vault of immensity, ever crying and responding, *"Hallelujah! Hallelujah! for the Lord God omnipotent reigns!"*

5. Fellowship with the heavenly inhabitants is another portion of our expected happiness. That those who have in life been linked in the bands of amity, shall be re-united in their beatified state, may be inferred, from the declaration made by our Lord to his apostles, that he and they should reconvene in the same place, as well as from many passages in the revelations of John, and others of the sacred books — to say nothing of our cherished instincts — our natural hopes of finding this ingredient in our happiness — to say nothing of our conviction that Providence would not instill such views, without intending to realize them — or of the encasement of each separate spirit in a glorified body, as taught by Paul to the Corinthians — a doctrine which, by establishing a future identity — affords a sure pledge of recognition.

Taking the fact therefore for granted, I proceed to observe, that this renovated fellowship will be far more refined than the purest terrestrial friendship — as the interchanged ideas will be more exalted, and as the participated experiences will necessarily be experiences of more pure and elevated happiness. Nor is it less obvious, that the delights of knowledge and of worship will be heightened by being enjoyed in union with a holy and glorified society — since already, the most ordinary pleasure imparts two-fold gratification, when converted into a tie which links kindred minds in the bands of holy brotherhood and of virtuous concord.

But, further — such ties, reconnected among human beings who shall have been received into everlasting mansions — will be productive of higher than their original gratification, in consequence of the improved dispositions of the associates. They will be equally exempt from those temporary alienations, which proceed from self-love, jealousy, suspicion, pride, contending interests, sallies of passion, and from those impediments to their present perfection, which slight differences in opinion, taste, knowledge, temper, principle, or unavoidable seasons of absence, present. No accident, no instability, no dread of future interruption or separation, will dampen their pure delights.

It is not, however, to this narrow circle alone, with whom we had formerly shared our confidence — that our social affections may be expected to extend. That *communion of saints*, in which we profess our belief, will unite in celestial fellowship *all* the devout and the faithful, who have lived in different ages from the beginning of time — and all those our contemporaries — a union with whom on earth may have been hindered by difference of rank, or remoteness of local situation.

These, purified from the imperfections of mortality, rendered every way worthy of the kindliest regard, and linked in one holy, happy association — are destined to be *our immortal companions*, and fellow worshipers. Objects being in this manner provided in abundance, for the warmest and amplest effusion of social affection — all these, sympathizing with the joy of each other. And, like the endless reflections of opposing mirrors, the peace and bliss of every individual being again and again participated and enjoyed and reverberated by all around him — benevolence will circulate throughout the courts of God — and Heaven will be found, in the most exalted sense, the place of perfect concord.

But if to some, in consideration of their more zealous service, and more uniform obedience, are allotted a better recompense in kind or in degree — others, far from envying, will find an increase to their own happiness, in rejoicing in the good of their fellow-servants, and in contributing to its advancement.

With glorified beings thus . . .
illuminated by knowledge,
perfected in virtue,
immortal in existence —
we are appointed to hold sweet, loving, refined, perpetual fellowship. "And they all shall be one" — "one fold under one shepherd" — having one heart and one spirit. Walking in the light, and having fellowship one with another, for them is reserved the happy experience, that when *faith* shall be lost in vision, and *hope* in the possession of its objects — that *love* never fails.

6. Whether any of those pure earthly pleasures will again be experienced in our heavenly state — has been questioned by some who have explained all the passages seeming to promise such inferior constituents of felicity, as being figurative representations of spiritual joys, analogous to such material objects in their effects. To me it seems clear, that since the spirits of the happy are to be invested with glorified bodies, it is intended that some of these pure pleasures shall constitute a distinct ingredient in our happiness.

The *ear*, we are expressly informed, will be delighted with the most exalted strains of celestial harmony. And it appears to be a forced misunderstanding of sacred writ from its obvious meaning, to give a spiritual interpretation to the rivers of pleasures, and the tree of life, and the city whose streets are of gold, whose walls are of jasper, and whose gates are of one pearl — as to resolve the song of Moses and of the Lamb, into an imaginary concord of sympathies, and an harmony of speechless devotion.

All commentators, I believe, are agreed — that the first Eden was *literally* an oriental garden — an oasis of sweets — a region of perpetual spring — where flowers of all hues, and fruits of all flavors, gemmed and embossed the green carpeting of nature — where innocence was shaded with the mantling vine; where the course of "crisped brooks that strayed from their sapphire founts," and the lapse of murmuring falls — like the descent of heavenly influences; together fed the calm and reflective lake, which made meditation the image and the thought of Heaven. And aided by "soft airs dispensing native perfumes," and by the voices of fearless joy, emitted from earth, sky, water — nourished in the untainted bosoms of the original pair — tranquility, contentment, peace.

Why then should it be supposed that those secondary pleasures, which are derived from the shade of embowering leaves, and the refreshment of well-springs of living waters — from the many-colored hues of aerial variations — from the face of the new universe decked in beauty, or rough with wildness — will be discontinued — or rather will not be *highly improved?*

"And I saw new heavens and a new earth, and the holy city descending from heaven — and the foundations of her walls were garnished with all manner of precious stones — in the midst of the street, and on either side the river, was there the tree of life for the healing of the nations." "They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters!"

Such, my brethren, appears to be the utmost extent of our reasonable views, or our clear knowledge, in relation to our occupations and enjoyments in a higher state of existence. If any, not satisfied with it, are yet disposed to ask why we have not been favored with still ampler information? Let them reflect, that the *present limited nature of their faculties* must preclude their entire comprehension of things not seen — and let them learn to receive with gratitude the light imparted, as being at once as *strong* as their filmy intellectual vision could admit without being dazzled, and as *abundant* as is necessary to animate their spirits, and to illuminate their path, in journeying to the land of their eternal rest.

Let it not be forgotten, that if power were bestowed to scale the crystal battlements of the skies, and to perceive distinctly the unimagined scenes and transactions beyond its guardian cherubim and fiery sword, its outposts and sentinels of stars — Faith, which is the evidence of things not seen, could no longer have existence.

It is moreover to be apprehended, that the minds of men, enraptured with the beatific vision, perpetually presented to them, in full perceptibleness and almost tangible form — would neglect as insipid those every-day duties, which they are called into this existence to perform; that the reasonable but then zestless comforts of life would provoke their dissatisfaction, instead of awakening their thankfulness; that all their thoughts would be absorbed in an unprofitable abstraction, a gloomy and highly reprehensible impatience to be released before the appointed time of their change should arrive; and that Heaven should be marred by too intense meditation on it.

The wisdom of Providence being thus strikingly illustrated, in the measure of its given information respecting the world to come — information neither so *scanty* as to leave room for distrust or error — nor yet so *excessive* as to overwhelm the power of comprehension, to slacken the arm of activity, or to banish the tranquility of contentment — the improvement which it behooves us to derive from our present meditations is a conviction of the propriety of complying with the divine intention, in revealing futurity in these wise proportions.

On reviewing the constituents of our immortal felicity, it cannot fail to strike us as a general observation, that none of them are of a nature grossly and exclusively sensual. Hence we may infer with the fullest assurance, that a spiritual life is necessary on earth — as the proper qualification for our destined employments. If we find that in these, the groveling cares of earth, sensuality, ambition, covetousness, have no place — it follows that those whose god is their appetite — who thirst after power — who live but to amass treasures — are deliberately unfitting themselves for the refined joys of eternity — so that Heaven would be to them no place of happiness, even if no barrier forbade their entrance.

That gratification which the habitual *drunkard* would derive from an hour of spiritual fellowship — that joy which the *indolent* would find in successful research, or the *atheist* in the consolations of religion — that satisfaction which the lustful eye would derive from exquisite beauty, or the ear sealed with wax from the voice of the charmer — such delight would the depraved of this lower world experience in the mansions of unearthly bliss. To them, alienated from the love of God, and from a preference for the unadulterated delights of piety — the bowers of paradise would yield no bloom, the airs of Heaven would breathe no sweetness, and the music of angels utter no melody.

To hasten towards a close — let us learn from these meditations, that when we cultivate holiness, we lay up treasures in heaven — the pleasures of reflection, and a possession to be infinitely improved. That when we elevate our nature above base desires, when in due subservience to our moral dispositions, in the spirit of humanity, and with motives of religion, we dig in the *mines of wisdom*, and strengthen our intellectual powers — we then exercise our minds in studies, which in a more exalted sense, shall enter into our eternal employments — that when we unite in the bands of virtuous association, we form to ourselves the beginnings of a joy, which although imperfect, checkered, liable to rude interruption for a season — will at length break forth, and bidding defiance to the shaft of death — that finally, when we bend at the footstool of the Eternal, when we survey with gratitude the works of his creation — when the heart extols his love with the sentiments or the accents of praise — we are drawing down Heaven to earth, and entering upon the pleasure of immortal beings, while yet sojourners in the valley of sorrow. We are approximating to the bliss of eternity — contracting the habitudes of angels — securing Heaven by acquiring a *fitness* and a *relish* for it — pitching our tent on the last edge of the wilderness — and hailing, in near perspective, the land of our rest.

For happiness so transcendent as that now unfolded, which, be it still however remembered, description cannot adequately paint, or imagination conceive — how reasonable the demand, how advisable the exchange, that we should sacrifice the base pursuits, the unworthy desires, which belong exclusively to this lower world! Who would not resolve to accomplish what is demanded — to renounce what is forbidden — to sustain with fortitude all allotted trials — and to abound unto the end in the work of the Lord — when assured that his labor is not only not in vain, but will be crowned with a recompense so unspeakable and full of glory?

For enjoyment so real, so unmixed, so lasting — will not the Christian forego the contemptible pleasures of a day — acquired with pain, embittered by sorrow, possessed with insecurity — and speedily to be lost forever? Will he not even stand ready, if occasion requires, to endure the rigors of self-denial, and the martyrdom of evil report, to pluck out a right eye, to tear himself from all the chains that anchor him to earth — to surrender comforts, possessions, life itself — to suffer the loss of all things, and to account them of no value — in a word, to go and sell all that he has, that he may purchase the Pearl of inestimable price?