

HEAVEN AND ITS SCRIPTURAL EMBLEMS

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Clark's study of heaven as revealed through the images and emblems of Scripture, examining the biblical descriptions of the heavenly home and the glories that await the redeemed.

9 Chapters

Table of Contents

1. 000 - Introduction
2. 01 - The Rainbow Around the Throne
3. 02 - The Rest for the People of God
4. 03 - No Night in Heaven
5. 04 - The Likeness of the Redeemed to Christ
6. 05 - No More Sea
7. 06 - The Angelic Inhabitants of Heaven
8. 07 - The Glory of Christ in Heaven
9. 08 - The Throne in Heaven

000 - Introduction

INTRODUCTION

It is not our purpose in the following work, to enter upon the discussion of the metaphysical questions which relate to the spiritual world. We propose to view Heaven through some of the scriptural emblems of its beauties, and examine a few of the prominent sources of its enjoyments. We would, in company with the Christian reader, ascend the mountains that are round about the New Jerusalem, and from their summits . . .

obtain glimpses of its splendors,

catch some faint strains of its melody, and

indulge the imagination in visions of its joys.

We would add a ray to the bright hopes of the departing spirit, add a drop to the cup of consolation which Christianity offers to the afflicted, and stimulate all believers to press forward towards the mark for the prize of their high calling. Were we, indeed, disposed or able to penetrate into the mysteries of the heavenly world, we would encounter, at the outset, an insurmountable difficulty, in the inadequacy of human language to express spiritual ideas. All our conceptions being derived from experience and observation, except, perhaps, those of intuitive truths, we can contemplate spiritual objects only through the medium of images, symbols, or analogies. Even the nicest definitions in theology, and the most abstract terminology, must be presented in figurative language.

It is true that the Deity has power, independently of the agency of human language, to communicate adequate views of spiritual realities. He can cause to pass before the intellectual vision the bright scenes of the celestial world — the splendors and joys of glorified saints. But our faculties, in their present state, are as little prepared for the full effulgence of heavenly scenes, as our organs of sight are to receive the light of the stars blazing upon us with the intensity of the sun's rays. In kindness, therefore, God has placed these glories at an immense distance from us, revealing only enough to excite faith, and inspire the heart with hope.

Should, however, a mind be enriched with adequate conceptions of Heaven, it would have no power to impart its impressions to others.

It is a deeply interesting fact in the history of our race, that one mind has been thus favored — has been admitted to the third Heaven, and there filled with the most glowing and enrapturing views of celestial felicity. But what the apostle Paul saw and heard, it was impossible for him to utter. The scenes he could not describe, though he felt intensely their power. The bright visions floated in his imagination through life, keeping ever alive in his heart "a desire to depart." To what extent the material world represents the spiritual, we cannot accurately determine, though it is the opinion of some eminent writers that the analogy between the two is very striking. "Holy Scripture," says one, "in fact, is only a gradual unrolling, or spiritualizing to us, of figures and forms that envelop and

represent the deeper truths of the spiritual life."

Another has beautifully said, "I have often thought that flowers were the alphabet of angels, whereby they write, on hills and fields, mysterious truths, which it is not given our fallen nature to understand."

Why may we not extend this idea, and regard all the objects around and above us — all that is beautiful in the sky, clouds, verdure and landscape — as constituting a language which teaches us, though imperfectly, spiritual truths, and reveals, though faintly, the glories of the heavenly world? It certainly must aid the devotions of the Christian, and solace him in his pilgrimage, to look up, and see hung around the visible universe, pictures of the invisible — to listen to the stars, as they softly yet eloquently declare the glory of God. It must increase his faith to view the decorations of this great temple, as the types and shadows of a new dispensation, and of a loftier and more spiritual worship. The duty of studying the intimations of Heaven which have come to us through nature or revelation, rests upon every Christian. Amid the practical schemes and intense activity of the present day, there is but little calm meditation. The spirit is not at rest long enough to reflect with accuracy the mansions and palaces of the celestial city. It is more like a turbulent stream than a smooth lake.

If we are heirs to a vast and splendid inheritance, if we are cherishing the hope of spending an eternity amid the felicities and glories of a spiritual kingdom, it is but reasonable that we meditate upon them before our departure there. Not content with being in the outer court, we should seek, under the Spirit's guidance, to enter the Holy of holies, and there sweetly commune with our Father, in whose presence "there is fullness of joy," — at whose "right hand there are pleasures forevermore!"

01 - The Rainbow Around the Throne

The Rainbow Around the Throne!

"And there was a rainbow encircling the throne!" Revelation 4:3 No portion of the Bible is so fruitful in heavenly emblems as the book of Revelation. They cluster and sparkle upon every page. They adorn every vision, and glisten from every truth which is recorded by the beloved disciple. As though conscious that the inspired volume is about to close, they crowd around the setting sun to receive its last beautiful rays, and throw their splendors over the whole heavens. The isle of Patmos, where this panorama of gorgeous images passed before the mind of John, presented a striking contrast to the scenes of which it was the theater. It was a lonely, barren spot in the Aegean Sea, so desolate that criminals were sent to it as a punishment. Domitian, the tyrant, banished the Apostle John there, thinking that the wildness and hardships of the place would induce him to renounce his religion. But his faith and devotion, instead of becoming weaker, kindled into a glow that pervaded his whole being. He felt that blessings now offered are of a spiritual nature.

Instead of manna to support the body, we have precious truths to nourish and invigorate the soul.

Instead of waters flowing from a rock, we may drink of "the pure river of the water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb."

Instead of following a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night, a divine, resplendent Being appears before us, saying, "I am the light of the world."

Instead of a mountain that might be touched — a mountain enveloped in clouds and darkness, shaken by peals of thunder, and rendered terrible by flashes of lightning — we "are come unto Mount Zion," whose mild beauties attract every beholder, and around whose summit play the soft beams from the Sun of righteousness.

Instead of a material city, we have pointed out to us, in the far distance, "the heavenly Jerusalem," with its sweet gardens, celestial palaces and thrones — "a city that has foundations, whose builder and maker is God."

Instead of being confined to the society of imperfect men, we are admitted to companionship with angels — to "the general assembly and church of the first born."

Indeed, all that the Christian can desire in this life, or hope for in the next, is pledged under this new and better covenant. No language can describe, no imagination can portray, the rich blessings which it secures to the believer. "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for those who love him."

How appropriate, then, that the throne of the Eternal should be arched over with the rainbow of promise, that the Christian should have before him this perpetual token, that a covenant-keeping God holds the reins of universal dominion! How full of comfort to the saint, that the eye of faith may

rest upon that rainbow! No sun is there, to dazzle the vision; no storm-cloud, with its rolling thunder and lightning flashes, overhangs the throne, to terrify those who approach it; but a rainbow, with its beautiful tints and soft rays, attracts them, inspiring in their hearts, confidence and hope. The weary Christian pilgrim may look upon it, and from the throne he hears the words, "Fear not, for I am with you! Be not dismayed, for I am your God!" Penitent prodigals, weary with toil, having found the ways of transgressors hard, may turn towards it an anxious eye, and they hear the imitation, "Come unto me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." The dying Christian, as earthly scenes are fading from the view, may behold it, and exclaim, "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me." This rainbow, however, does not stand alone, as a proof of the divine faithfulness. Our pathway through life is scattered with evidences of a Heavenly Father's care. His bounteous supply of our needs; his regard for life — in providing food; for the intellect — in furnishing knowledge; for the taste — in decorating so beautifully this globe, that is floating us through the heavens; his providential care — in guarding us from injury, in keeping the delicate and complicated workmanship of the human system in tune so long. All these are proofs that our future interests will be protected.

We reason justly, from this life to another; from what we see around us, and experience here — to what we may expect in a higher and nobler state of being. This present world is our school, to which we are sent to learn lessons of God's truthfulness and love. We are here taught to have faith in our great Benefactor, and to trust him for the blessings of another life, because he has done so much for us in this. The rainbow around the throne is also a token that the storms of human life shall before long pass away.

After a severe tempest, during which the raging elements have threatened to destroy every object within their reach, and the heavy crashes of thunder have appalled the stoutest heart — we have experienced the relief afforded by the subsiding of the storm, and seeing painted on the retiring clouds the rainbow of promise. As we looked abroad, instead of witnessing the marks of ruin, nature has appeared clothed in its loveliest hues, as though to mock the fury of the tempest. From the descending torrents, it has gathered refreshment and vigor, and even the lightning has done it a service, by purifying the atmosphere.

Thus the devout Christian sees in the rainbow around the throne the pledge that the trials and afflictions of life shall soon end, and perfect serenity be his portion. He reads inscribed upon it, in golden letters, the words, "There remains a rest for the people of God!" But the hour for this perfect rest has not yet come. The benefits of trials must first be gathered into the soul. The heart must be disciplined; faith must be cultivated; the power of the soul's endurance must be tested. It is not the design of God that the Christian "should be carried to the skies on flowery beds of ease."

He must "strive to enter in at the strait gate." He must "run with patience the race set before him." He must "fight the good fight of faith." All the scriptural expressions upon this point imply the necessity of earnest effort. The battle must be fought, before the triumph is celebrated. A great work must be accomplished in self-discipline — in the development and growth of holy principles — before we are prepared for the rewards of Heaven. In all the temptations and afflictions of life, the design of the Creator is discernible — and he has arched his throne with a beautiful rainbow, to assure his people that he will give peace to the troubled soul. And this rainbow is over the

heavenly throne to indicate that it is only when the Christian is near this throne, that he can enjoy perfect serenity. He must, as it were, enter into God, dwell amid his holy attributes, experience the fullness of his love — if he would enjoy that peace "that passes all understanding." That far-distant height, storms never reach. Clouds that cast shadows upon the earth, float beneath it. The passions and strifes of wicked men do not ascend to it.

There is infinite wisdom displayed in thus making the throne the seat of perfect peace; for, had we satisfying enjoyment here, we would become too much attached to the world. As it now is, we are reluctant to leave it. Amid all our trials and disappointments, its charms continue to fascinate us. Its cares absorb the attention. We seek its riches, covet its applause, and depend upon its pleasures.

Though we term human life a valley of tears, we are often reluctant to exchange it for Mount Zion — for the city of the living God. Though friends here are sometimes false, many receive with alarm the summons to mingle with an innumerable company of angels, and the general assembly and church of the first born. Though in this world the Christian has tribulation, he trembles at the thought of entering into the presence of God, where the Psalmist assures us "there is fullness of joy!"

It is therefore a wise provision that so many attractions cluster around the heavenly throne. It is a great kindness in the Supreme Father to draw away his children from the vanities of time, and fasten their attention upon the joys and splendors of immortality! The rainbow encircling the heavenly throne indicates, also, that there is ample power to confer and perpetuate this happiness. A throne is the emblem of strength and authority. Hence, it is not simply a Father, who promises to the Christian, peace — it is a Sovereign — one "who does according to his will, in the army of Heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth." The resources of God's boundless empire, are to be employed in executing his purposes of love. The vast revenues that flow into his treasury, are to be used in enriching and blessing his redeemed people. Those glorious, divine attributes, that built the universe, and peopled the millions of worlds that float in space, are to be exercised in promoting the happiness of the redeemed. With what inexpressible joy will the redeemed saint approach the throne, and view his rich and everlasting inheritance! With what rapture will he gaze upon the splendid manifestations which the Deity will make of himself, in his celestial kingdom!

"It is," says one, "a glorious thing, even, when the golden beams of day flood the canopy of Heaven, and forest, mountain and river, are beautiful with light — glorious, indeed, when the whole creation wakes up at the summons of the morning, as though the trumpet had sounded, and the vast grave of night were giving back the cities and solitudes that had gone down into its recesses. But in place of a firmament lighted up with a material body, we shall have the infinite vault converted into one brilliant manifestation of Deity — the splendid coruscations of righteousness, truth and love, weaving themselves together to form the arch; and the Deity glowing through immeasurable space, and pouring his own luster upon every object, and thus making the universe a reflection of his own glory." The rainbow around the throne is significant in another aspect. As the rainbow upon the cloud is formed by the union of the sunlight and the shower, so this may be said to be formed, by the union of mercy and justice. As an arch reaching to Heaven, it sustains the divine government; and its extremes, descending and resting upon the earth, show that divine mercy extends to man. Were only the justice of the Deity revealed — we would continually hear

the thunders of the law, and tremble before the terrors of its dreadful penalty. Were God only merciful, there would be no efficiency in his government, and no stability in his throne. But it is the mingling of the two that inspires us with confidence in the divine character, and secures to the obedient subject the rich rewards of his kingdom.

Mercy invites us to enter Heaven; justice protects us in our rights and privileges, after we have entered. Mercy opens the gates of the heavenly city; justice stands at the entrance, and demands holiness of character, in all those who would see God. Were justice destroyed, and the divine mercy of such a nature as to admit the whole race to Heaven, irrespective of qualifications or character, there could be no order or happiness in God's moral kingdom. The happiness of a rational being is not produced by the locality that he occupies. It flows from the inward sentiments, from the conduct, and character. It may be enjoyed in a higher degree in a prison than in a palace — on a solitary, barren island, than amid the luxuries and splendors of the most brilliant earthly court. Heaven might, indeed, be thrown open, unconditionally, to all mankind, without requiring of any repentance, faith, or love to God; but such a measure would not secure their salvation. The only salvation worthy of the name, is that which saves man from sin — from that which is the cause of his misery. He is the victim of a moral disease, and must apply for a remedy to the great Physician. His soul, originally designed as the temple of the living God, is shattered . . .

its columns are broken,

its walls have crumbled,

its altar is overthrown,

its worship is suspended.

It must therefore be rebuilt, and become a fit receptacle for the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The voice of penitential prayer must be heard within its walls. To the altar must be brought the sacrifice of a broken and contrite heart.

No, the Bible does not teach us that justice is annihilated because the scepter of mercy is extended. The Deity has not laid aside his sovereignty by becoming a Redeemer. The laws proclaimed on Mount Sinai are not annulled, by the love displayed on Calvary. Notwithstanding the ample provisions of the scheme of redemption, man is distinctly taught that he has duties to perform, as well as hopes to entertain. The proclamation made to all men is, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" — with fear, lest you fail of the great salvation; with trembling, lest you are startled, at last, by the utterance, "Depart from Me, for I never knew you!" In the eloquent language of another, we would say to all, "Strive — for the grasp of the destroyer is upon you, and if you are not wrenched away, it will palsy you and crush you. Strive — for the foe is on the right hand, on the left hand, before you, behind you, and you must be trampled under foot if you struggle not and strike not as those who feel themselves bound in a death-grapple. Strive — there is a crown to be won. The mines of the earth have not furnished its metal, and the depths of the sea hide nothing — so radiant as the jewels with which salvation is wreathed. Strive, then, in the strength of your risen Lord, and not in your own. You know not how soon that Lord may come. While the sun walks his usual path on the firmament, and the grass is springing in our fields, and merchants are crowding the exchange, and the avaricious counting gold, 'the sign of the Son of Man' shall be seen in the heavens, and the august throne of fire and of cloud, be set for judgment."

God grant that we may stand before that throne with the consciousness of sins pardoned — that we may look upon the rainbow around it as one of promise to us, and that under its beautiful light we may be guided to mansions in the skies!

How delightful to the Christian to think of the departed saints as having already passed under that rainbow, and received the welcome and blessing of a covenant-keeping God! Especially in the silence of night, when the stillness of the hour incites to meditation, do we love to think of our friends as having entered the bright mansions above. The stars seem to tell us of their homes and their happiness.

02 - The Rest for the People of God

A Heavenly Rest for the People of God "O, that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest." Psalms 55:6 "There remains, therefore, a rest for the people of God." Hebrews 4:9

We have, in these two passages, a wish and a promise. The wish indicative of man's restlessness here — and the promise affording an assurance of his repose hereafter.

It is the lot of all mortals to be dissatisfied. Our desires and attainments do not correspond. The ambitious man, who has reached certain heights of power — eagerly strains his vision towards loftier positions. The covetous man uses his wealth as fuel to feed the flame of his avarice. The scholar is stimulated, not satisfied, with his acquirements. His desire to know increases with his knowledge. His discoveries he uses as torch-lights with which to explore yet darker and more obscure regions. The monarch upon the throne of Israel, with all his wisdom, the power of his armies, the splendors of his reign — was not at rest. A humble subject, passing by, to his daily labor, the walls of his palace, and gazing upon the costly architecture, would naturally envy the fortunate occupant. As he heard the music of his players, and the songs of his choirs, he would feel that here there was positive and satisfying enjoyment. And as, at night, in his cottage, he reads the soothing and beautiful verses of the Hebrew poet, and drinks in their inspiration, he exclaims, "Happy, thrice happy monarch!" But what does the royal Psalmist say himself? — "Fearfulness and trembling are come upon me, and horror has overwhelmed me. O, that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest. Lo, then would I wander far off, and remain in the wilderness. I would hasten my escape from the windy storm and tempest." As the timid dove, startled by the howling wind, hastens, before the dark cloud, to the wilderness for shelter — so would the envied monarch leave behind him honor, royalty and his kingdom, and fly to the desert to obtain rest. Had he been, however, permitted to retire from office and authority, and resume his early occupation as a shepherd — had he exchanged the splendors of royalty, for the simplicity of rural life; the responsibilities of a magnificent sovereignty, for the care of a flock — would he have found satisfying repose? Would no enemies have troubled him in the wilderness, no quarrels vexed him, no calamities befallen him? Would no midnight howl from wild beasts, eager for prey, have disturbed his slumbers? And, though secure from all outward misfortunes, would he have had nothing to fear from the reproaches of conscience, the solicitations of evil passions, or the restless desires of unsatisfied affections? The wings of a dove, that bore him to any spot on earth — would not carry him beyond the boundaries of trouble and anxiety! He might reach the wilderness — but he would not find rest. That is not the portion of man here. His circumstances, his nature, his character, forbid it. But "there remains a rest for the people of God." It is above, on heights that earthly storms never reach; near pure rivers, that never swell into destructive torrents; in green pastures, and amid bright flowers that never fade.

Let us contemplate some of the features of this heavenly rest.

1. It is rest for the powers and aspirations of the soul. It does not involve inactivity and cessation from all effort; for such a state would be far from desirable. It is a repose analogous to that which

the earnest and diligent philosopher feels, when he has attained, in some satisfactory degree, the object of his researches; or that which the faithful Christian experiences, at the close of an eminently holy and useful life. The mind rests upon objects worthy of its powers, commensurate with its desires. It enjoys a mental tranquility never before experienced; for in this present world, there is an abiding consciousness of longings that can never be gratified. The intense thirst of the intellect for knowledge, for truth, for a clear insight into the mysteries of science and religion — cannot be satisfied. The mind is clogged by carnal, material objects. The perceptions are dimmed by the mists that are around us.

There is, too, the humiliating reflection that we are in a state of banishment from our Father's house — that we are wanderers in a moral desert, and that the storms of sin have shattered our powers. Though the vital principle is not extinct — though there are occasional flashes of the fire of genius, that throw their luster over the intellectual firmament — yet man is in ruins. His spirit is the sport of a thousand conflicting emotions, baffled plans, and thwarted purposes. But in Heaven above, there is peace — "the peace of God that passes all understanding." The divine image is re-impressed upon the soul, and man is restored to his allegiance, his dignity, and his relationship to the Deity. He . . .

is received into the presence of the infinite Sovereign,

dwells amid his holy attributes,

experiences the intensity of his love,

and is clothed in the robes of royalty. His powers are now in harmonious and vigorous action, and the tide of knowledge flows in upon him, as a pure, sparkling, refreshing stream. He enjoys the repose of perfect satisfaction. A palace is his home. Angels are his companions and instructors. God is his portion. He feels, as he never felt before, the beauty and soothing influence of the words, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside the still waters."

He rests, too, in the bosom of his Savior; for he has accepted the invitation, "Come unto me, all you that labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest." He experiences the fulfillment of the promise, "My peace I give unto you; not as the world gives give I unto you." As this language was addressed by Christ to his disciples while he was upon the earth, we might inquire: What peace could come from a heart that was wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities? What rest could he give, who himself was a "man of sorrows and acquainted with grief"? Must we not believe that, far below the troubles of Christ's agitated spirit, there were deep waters whose placid surface was never ruffled — waters that constantly reflected the palaces and cities of the celestial world — a divine ocean of satisfaction and happiness, from which flowed pure and refreshing streams? Indeed, he declared, "Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him, shall never thirst — but it shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life."

Even while his disciples were in the midst of severe trials and persecutions, he could yet impart to them a peace which the world could neither give nor take away. He could lift them far above their persecutors, into that serene atmosphere in which his own divine spirit floated — an atmosphere filled with the blessedness of Heaven.

Paul felt this satisfaction when he said, in writing to the Corinthians, "As sorrowing — yet always rejoicing; as poor — yet making many rich; as having nothing — and yet possessing all things." And if Christ could give to his disciples rest in the midst of their labors, and joy in the midst of their sorrows — how full will be the peace, how intense the pleasure, that he will impart when he receives them to his celestial kingdom! What a depth of meaning will be then contained in the words, "Not as the world gives, I give unto you." No transient good, no limited blessings, do I impart; but I give as a God — as a being who has infinite resources at his command, and who has the disposition as well as ability to bestow upon his friends the greatest blessings.

2. The heavenly rest promised involves a freedom from all doubts and anxieties concerning our religious state. There are favored seasons here, when the Christian can say, "I know that my Redeemer lives!" There are bright spots along the pathway of life, that seem to be illumined by some beam of light that has escaped from the celestial world.

But, at other times, harassing doubts overshadow the spirit. Faith is weakened. Confidence in God, in his promises, and even in the whole scheme of salvation, is shaken. The Bible seems full of dark mysteries and perplexing problems. Prayer is a burden, for the throne of grace appears to be afar off. Meditation only calls up images of coming evil. Not unfrequently a flood of unbelief will rush upon the mind, with such force as to threaten to sweep away every holy purpose and Christian hope.

Even the patriarchs and prophets, God's messengers to mankind — men eminent for their spiritual attainments, the light of whose example relieved the intense darkness of the early ages — even they had their seasons of perplexity and gloom.

Elijah, after witnessing the most wonderful displays of divine favor, and triumphing over the prophets of Baal, falls into a state of despondency, and requests that he may die. David, who could at one time greatly rejoice in the Lord, at another time exclaims, "I am troubled; I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the day." The apostles of Christ, who enjoyed the personal instructions of their master — who were his intimate companions in his walks, labors and devotions; who witnessed his miracles, and shared largely in his affections — were unstable in their faith and hopes. It required the greatest care and effort, on the part of Christ, to keep them from relinquishing their prospects of heavenly felicity.

Even that apostle who was denominated, preeminently, the "rock of the church, against which the gates of Hell should not prevail," was found, during the trial of his Master, standing outside the court, despairing of the cause he had espoused, and uttering falsehood and blasphemy. The apostle Paul, who at one time was full of confidence and hope, with his spirit glowing with anticipations of future blessedness, at another exclaimed, "O, wretched man that I am! who can deliver me from the body of this death?" Could the history and condition of one human heart, reputed eminent for holiness, be accurately portrayed — how dark and melancholy would be the picture! What distrust of God; what false conceptions of his moral government; what inadequate views of the atonement, and of the agency of the Holy Spirit! And even in cases where there is an earnest struggling after the higher life, and clearer views of divine and heavenly things — how slowly does the mind rise to "a full assurance of hope"!

While we are in the body, and immersed in the cares of life, we cannot, indeed, expect to obtain perfect spiritual repose. In spite of all our watchfulness and efforts, the flesh will war against the spirit. The atheism of the world will assail our faith. Material objects will hide from our view celestial and divine things. It is difficult to walk by faith, amid objects of sight; difficult to feel the presence of an invisible Being, who, though unseen by us, knows every thought and emotion of the heart; difficult to believe that a God of infinite purity can receive into his holy courts beings so defiled with sin — that the Infinite Jehovah can condescend to companionship with worms of the dust!

But, from all doubt and anxiety, "there remains a rest for the people of God." The hour is at hand — it is very near — when every cloud shall vanish from their spiritual horizon; when they shall recline in sweet security amid the bowers of a celestial paradise, with the river of life flowing at their feet, whose soft murmurings, falling as music upon their hearts, will express their inward serenity.

There, too, will be rest and happiness, for every variety of taste and age, among the redeemed. The bright visions of the young, who are early impressed with the fading nature of all earthly objects, the fond dreams of the meditative spirit, and the longings of the afflicted for consolation and rest — will there be fully realized.

3. This heavenly rest will include a freedom from all temptation and sin. Herein will be its chief excellence; for the great calamity that overtops all others, that throws into the shade all others, is moral evil. Physical pain, earthquakes, storms, disease — these are but the types and shadows of evil, in the comparison. Sin strikes inwardly. It assails the most noble part of man's nature; and makes havoc with godlike faculties and powers. Disease prostrates the body — but sin blasts the soul. War wastes empires — but sin wastes a spiritual empire of more value than the material universe — an empire of thoughts, desires, and hopes. Sin batters down walls that are designed for the protection of immortal interests. It breaks in the gates, and allows hosts of enemies to rush in and take possession. Sin demolishes every altar consecrated to Heaven, every temple devoted to worship. It obliterates all that is lovely and beautiful. And where sin is, there can be no peace. "The wicked are like the troubled sea, which cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt." Where there is the least remains of sin in the heart, there is a disturbance produced, just as the slightest mote in the eye occasions an irritation until it is removed. The Christian feels it in his seasons of religious meditations, in his hours of worship and prayer. He feels it especially when he is making efforts to advance in the divine life. He finds that every inch of ground is disputed by an antagonistic force, and that he must gird himself for the conflict. He discovers that he is called to "wrestle not against flesh and blood — but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." The power and number of the foes arrayed against him, require him to put forth his whole strength. If he would make progress in spirituality, he is convinced that he must have his "loins girt about with truth, and have on the breastplate of righteousness," that he must "take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit."

He is also deeply affected by the developments and effects of sin around him . . .

the awful apostasy of mankind,

the idolatry and debasement of millions of the human family,

the vices that reign in civilized communities,

the practical atheism of multitudes,

the systems of oppression that embody the worse forms of avarice and injustice,

the wrongs inflicted upon the innocent and unprotected

— these and other forms of sin distress him. Every blasphemous oath he hears, wounds him. Every instance of successful villainy causes him pain. He feels as did the Psalmist when he exclaimed, "Rivers of waters run down my eyes, because they keep not your law!"

When, too, the evil passions of men reach such an intensity as to become organized, and are directed against the Christian in the form of persecution — then he feels the severity of the battle here, and looks upward, with longing eyes, for rest.

Besides the ordinary evil influences against which he has to contend, he is now under a pressure that seriously tries his faith, and puts to the test his fortitude, and the strength of his devotion to Christianity. He is threatened with the loss of property, friends, and even life itself. He is exposed to the crudest insults, held up to the public scorn, made the victim of popular fury, driven from city to city, imprisoned, tortured, and perhaps put to death.

Yet what multitudes, during the severe persecutions through which the church has, at different periods, passed, have been sustained by the assurance that "there remains a rest for the people of God!" how many who compose the noble army of martyrs were enabled, by the energy of their faith and the intensity of their love for Christ, to press through all opposition! Neither flatteries nor threats, neither bribes nor tortures, could move them. They had counted "all things loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus." They had caught glimpses of the bright regions above, and they kept their eyes steadily fixed upon their heavenly hope. And, although clouds would sometimes intervene, and the heavens gather blackness, and the thunder roar, and the lightning flash — yet they were confident that the storm would break away — that the clouds would open, and they would again see, in the far distance, the peaceful mansions which were prepared for them!

We might cite noble instances of faith and fortitude, in the midst of the hazards and tortures of severe persecution — men who, while longing for rest, were yet willing to suffer all things for Christ's sake; who, while panting for Heaven, were yet submissive under the shocks of the world's wickedness and treachery. And these heroes, though they appeared calm to the spectators around them — yet were often the subjects of inward struggles and conflicts, of which the outward were but the types and shadows. The dying exclamation of Paul, "I have fought a good fight!" is full of intense meaning. It was no mere shadow of a warfare in which he was engaged. It was no holiday amusement that absorbed his energies, and taxed his strength. It was a conflict that required him to have on the whole armor of God — the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, the sword of the Spirit. He passed through an ordeal of fire and blood, that would have destroyed ordinary minds. He endured afflictions as a good soldier of the cross.

He adds, "I have finished my course." This was an intense relief. The apostle felt somewhat as his illustrious Master did when he exclaimed "It is finished!" for, with him, his trials and dangers were all finished. The work of life was done. His mission on earth was accomplished.

"I have kept the faith." This expression, too, is full of meaning; for that faith had been often in peril. The apostle was at times anxious lest he should lose it — lest his Christianity might suffer shipwreck in the storms through which he was called to pass. But now he can exclaim, "Blessed be God, I have kept the faith, and the faith has kept me — has kept my soul from being taken in the snares of the adversary; has kept my hopes from perishing; has kept me in favor with God and all holy beings! And now I go to my rest — go to enjoy the peace of God which passes all understanding."

And, at this hour, the apostles, prophets, martyrs, and hosts of the redeemed, are enjoying spiritual rest. Upon the banks of the Jordan, or under the shadows of the temples in the holy city, they can recline, and recount to each other the dangers through which they have passed, and rejoice together in the possession of everlasting rest!

4. The heavenly rest carries with it the idea of triumph. It is not only a peaceful and happy rest — but it is a triumphant and glorious rest. The redeemed rest, as conquerors, upon the fame of their exploits, upon the trophies of their victories. They have been faithful unto death, and have received immortal crowns. They have overcome the world, and, as a reward, are seated upon Christ's throne! "To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with Me on My throne!" Revelation 3:21. They are made pillars in the temple of God, and shall never leave. They have become kings and priests unto God!

"I beheld," says John, "and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands!" Revelation 7:9 The devout Payson, on his dying bed, feeling the glow of this triumph, exclaimed, "The battle's fought! the battle's fought! and the victory is won! I am going to bathe in an ocean of purity, and benevolence, and happiness, to all eternity!" At another time, he said, "The celestial city is fully in view. Its glories beam upon me, its breezes fan me, its fragrances are wafted to me, its music strikes upon my ear, and its spirit breathes into my heart. Nothing separates me from it but the river of death, which now appears as a narrow rill, which may be crossed at a single step, whenever God shall give permission. The Sun of Righteousness has been gradually drawing nearer and nearer, appearing larger and larger as he approached; and now he fills the whole hemisphere, pouring forth a flood of glory, in which I seem to float, like an insect in the beams of the sun; exulting — yet almost trembling, while I gaze on this excessive brightness, and wondering, with unutterable wonder, why God should deign thus to shine upon a sinful worm!" The pious Holland, while listening, in his dying hours, to the reading of the Scriptures, and giving his meditations upon each passage, suddenly exclaimed to his friend, "O, stay your reading! What brightness is this I see? Have you lighted up any candles?" They replied, "No, it is the sunshine;" for it was about five o'clock, on a beautiful summer's evening. "Sunshine!" said he. "Nay, it is my Savior's shine. Now, farewell world! Welcome, Heaven! The day-star from on high has visited me. O, speak it when I am gone, and preach it at my funeral — God deals familiarly with man! I feel his mercy; I see his majesty; whether in the body or out of the body, I cannot tell — God knows — but I see things that are unutterable!" Thus, full of rapture, he passed away to the spirit world, the sweet tones of his voice growing fainter and fainter, until they were merged in the melody of Heaven!

03 - No Night in Heaven

No Night in Heaven!

"And there shall be no night there!" Revelation 22:6 This is another of those striking and comprehensive utterances, by which John endeavors to describe what is indescribable, and to aid us in conceiving what is inconceivable. All attempts to comprehend the nature and blessedness of the heavenly state, are as ineffectual as an effort to measure with the eye the height of a mountain whose summit is enveloped and lost in the clouds — or to traverse, with our present organization, the distances that separate us from the fixed stars. Yet, as the astronomer, by careful study and the use of artificial aids, is enabled to enlarge his conceptions of the physical universe, and to gaze upon suns and systems that are invisible to the naked eye — so the Christian, with the assistance of the telescopic power of the Bible, may extend his views of the heavenly world, and discover new beauties and glories in the moral firmament above him. The terms darkness and light are often used in the Scriptures as emblems of spiritual objects. As descriptive of the prevalence of sin, darkness is said to cover the earth, and gross darkness the people. It is synonymous with ignorance, sorrow, wretchedness and the divine judgments. The day of the Lord coming in terror, is "a day of darkness and gloominess — a day of clouds and of thick darkness." For the finally impenitent there "is reserved the blackness of darkness forever." On the other hand, light is emblematic of loveliness, beauty, truth and happiness. Pouring forth from its center, it . . .

chases away the darkness,

renders visible the material universe,

decks a thousand objects with beauty, and

clothes the works of the great Architect with a drapery of richest luster and variegated splendor!

Light is to the eye, what truth is to the mind — the medium of communication with realities — the source of the highest stimulus and the most exquisite delight. The apostle declares that "God is light." He not only shines through his works, and pours his effulgence through suns and stars — but he is in himself light. Christ is exhibited to us as rising upon the world as "the Sun of righteousness, with healing in his wings." Christians are denominated "the light of the world;" and they are commanded to let their light so shine before men, that others, seeing their good works, may glorify their Father who is in Heaven. This image runs through the whole Christian economy, and furnishes, perhaps, the nearest approximation that we have to spiritual objects. Light's . . .

purity,

its ethereal nature,

its reviving, cheering influence,

its power to call the earth from the tomb of night, to the life and blessedness of day,

its capability of resting upon the world without participating in its corruptions, of entering every abode without feeling the contagion from their sinful inhabitants — render it a fit emblem of the unseen and spiritual.

Perhaps we may regard light as the connecting link between the material and the immaterial — as the element that will survive, in some form, the general wreck of all that is visible. It may not be altogether a suggestion of the imagination, that in the hour of the Christian's dissolution, while the body descends into darkness — the darkness of the grave — the spirit rises into light — the light of an eternal day. It may float away into higher regions, clothed in a robe of dazzling splendor, and radiant with all the colors of the rainbow! In our present sphere, God shines upon us through external mediums. He has suspended in the great temple of nature, a bright orb, through which he pours his effulgence upon the earth by day, and stars that relieve the darkness by night. He shines, too, through all his works . . .

through mountains, valleys and verdure,

through every tree, plant and flower,

through the plumage of every bird,

the mechanism of every insect,

through the organization of the human frame,

and through the workings of the intellect of man. But in that higher, nobler, purer state, towards which every earnest Christian is making progress, there will be no need of this external apparatus. It will be all swept away, and the redeemed will be admitted into the presence-chamber of the Infinite One. They will gaze, with an unclouded vision, upon the full effulgence of the Deity, and experience the blessedness of being where "light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart."

"There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign forever and ever!" Revelation 22:5 From this declaration, we learn, in the first place, that there will be, in that heavenly world, no need of rest. The absence of night, with our present constitution, and under the present economy of things, would be far from a blessing. After the toils of the day, we need repose. The gardener needs it, as he returns from his labors in the field. The tradesman, the artificer, the scholar — all, as the shades of night fall upon the earth, crave rest. Without it, the physical, and even the mental system, soon becomes exhausted — the muscles and sinews lose their strength; the machinery of mind and body is broken up. The most profound studies, the most interesting investigations, the most satisfying enjoyments, can be pursued only for a short period. A sense of weariness soon indicates our frailty, and the darkness of night comes to tell us of our weakness. The most intellectual philosophers, the proudest monarchs, the mightiest armies, must sleep.

How great, then, the change, in our physical and mental constitution, that will fit us for a world in which there is no night — where no fatigue will occasion the slightest suspension of our duties, or interruption of our joys! To what a height in the scale of existence does the conception lift us, to imagine ourselves possessed of bodies capable of an unceasing activity, and minds proof against the influence of fatigue!

It cannot but deepen our impressions of the blessedness of the heavenly state, to know that there, the discipline of the mind may be carried to the highest perfection — that the most profound, elaborate and important truths may be investigated without fatigue or interruption — that we may go from one height to another, in the scale of intellectual advancement, and yet, all the while, feel the freshness of the morning, and the vigor of youth.

It is difficult, nay, impossible, to conceive how rapidly the faculties will develop and powers expand in such a state. The ability of the mind . . .

to know and to worship God,

to admire his character,

to fathom the mysteries of his being,

to comprehend his providence,

to study his works —

will increase in a ratio that no present calculation can reach. The saint will become more intensely conscious of his likeness to Him, who, it is affirmed, "never slumbers or sleeps." Freed from the incumbrance of a material and perishable body, fired with the thought that even the rolling ages of eternity can bring with them no weariness or interruption, rejoicing in the evidence that every increase in knowledge is accession of strength — the glorified saint will be continually tracing out, with increasing distinctness, the lineaments of the divine image in which he was created.

But, besides affording a season for rest, night is necessary, in the present world, as an instructor. Had we perpetual sunshine on earth, our views of the power of the Deity, the extent of his authority, and the magnificence of the universe — would still be comparatively limited. We would suppose this earth to comprise by far the greater portion of the Creator's dominions, and we would be inclined to assign to ourselves a position of high importance in the scale of intelligences. But, as the sun sinks below the horizon, the great map of the universe is unrolled to our view. The myriads of lights that everywhere blaze over the canopy of Heaven tell us of other worlds, more vast and important, perhaps, than our own. They tell us of immensities that even the imagination of man cannot traverse. They tell us — O, wondrous discovery! — that we are surrounded with receptacles of life and happiness that in number defy all arithmetical calculation — that, for anything we know, are as numerous as the sands upon the sea-shore! And how many interesting conjectures does this discovery start up in the mind, as to the mission of these myriads of worlds — as to their size, shape, accompanying rings and satellites; the number, character and destiny, of their inhabitants; as to the probability that the work of creation is constantly going on, and the boundaries of the material universe enlarging, as one age follows another!

Yet, the fact that we need the darkness of night to open to us the wonders of creation, is itself evidence of the imperfections of our present organs of vision. The veil of night must fall, before we can even know of the existence of other systems. The sun must withdraw its brightness — to enable us to discern these distant orbs. And still, what we behold of them, compared with what is invisible, is to us what the beacon-lights along an extensive coast are to the mariner. He sees these faint glimmerings dotting the horizon, while the vast continent, with its peopled cities, its mountains, plains, rivers and forests, are totally invisible.

We are accustomed to speak of our wonderful powers of vision; and properly so, when we consider how extensive a panorama the eye is capable of surveying, and with what delicacy and accuracy a thousand objects may, at the same instant, be painted upon the retina. Yet, a moment's reflection will show us, that it is only a narrow stratum, comparatively, of even material objects, that is visible to us, while above and below, there are vast tracts that are only discernible by the aid of artificial means — such as the telescope and microscope. With the assistance of telescopic power we are able to go above, and view myriads of worlds, the existence of which could never have been discovered by the naked eye. With the microscope we can go below, and become acquainted with orders of existences, which display, equally with our own physical organization, the skill, wisdom and power, of the Creator. And, even with these aids, we know not how limited our incursions are into these foreign regions.

But, in another sphere, when this corruption shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal, immortality, we shall need no artificial aids to help us to discern surrounding objects. We shall need no veil of night to enable us to gaze upon the wonders and splendors of creation. With superior organs, with more refined senses, with enlarged faculties — we shall view the brilliant scenes around us, rejoicing in the dawnings of an eternal day — dawnings that will throw their luster upon turrets, palaces, cities and kingdoms, over which the mantle of night shall never be thrown!

There shall be no night of sorrow in Heaven. Darkness is the fit emblem of wretchedness. The afflicted spirit is under a cloud — is the victim of night-tempests, the gloom and fury of which can only be fully known by experience. The bereaved walk in a valley of tears, with crushed hearts, blighted hopes, agonizing thoughts. I need not tell the reader that this poor world is a world of sorrows, of disappointments, of calamities, that rend asunder the very heart-strings. I need not tell you of your liability to lose, with the suddenness of the lightning's flash, the dearest objects of your affections. I need not point you to the wrecks that are strewed along the coast of human life.

It is true that afflictions often come on a mission of benevolence. It is true that, with many of the children of sorrow, it is necessary that their sun of prosperity set, and a night of gloom shut down upon them — in order to render visible the stars of heavenly hopes. By no other means can they be induced to look upward, and cast their anchor of hope within the veil. By no other means can they be led to inquire, "Where is God, my Maker, who gives songs in the night?"

We allow, with a beautiful writer, "that in the deepest moral darkness there can be music — music which sounds softer and sweeter than by day; and that when the instruments of human melody are broken, there is a hand which can sweep the heart-strings, and wake the notes of praise."

Yet upon all, the sorrows of earth come with a crushing weight. "No chastisement for the present seems to be joyous — but grievous."

Ask the mother who is sitting by the side of her pale, cold child — a beloved form, silent, motionless, unconscious, the pulsations of life stopped, the spirit fled to return no more — ask her, if there is not a keenness in affliction!

Ask the youthful widow, whose bridal robes have been soon exchanged for the habiliments of mourning — whose bright visions of earthly happiness have all faded — whose beloved companion sleeps in the damp, silent, cruel grave — if earth's trials do not pierce the heart!

Enter the family where death has preceded you, and how suddenly has the voice of gaiety, and the music of mirth, been hushed! How changed is every countenance, every movement, every heart! The spirit of melancholy broods over the scene! The very rooms and furniture seem to share in the gloom. The very air seems to whisper, "Tread softly, for a dread, mysterious messenger has visited this family, and laid its hopes in ashes!" Bleeding hearts are here, to which mere words of comfort sound formal and cold. Sorrows are here, that nothing on earth can heal.

Visit the dying man, and learn lessons of affliction from . . .

his prostrate, emaciated form,

his wasted countenance,

his baffled plans,

his pains and groans,

his mysterious dread of that dark pathway into which he must soon go down! Nor can we, while in this world, escape these nights of sadness. We are frail, and disease may arrest us. We are mortal, and death may seize us. Our friends, children, companions, are merely lent to us, and the great Proprietor of all may take them back to himself.

We are sinners, and at any moment the calamitous results of our wickedness may be sprung upon us. The fruits of years of transgression may be compressed within a few short, fatal days.

We are surrounded with iniquity, in its various intense and destructive forms; and this keeps the fountain of sorrow open — the deep, wide, rushing tide, ever in motion. And night, especially, is the season of the triumphs of evil. Then crime stalks abroad; then villainy, under its cloak of darkness, executes its base and wicked designs; then the unwary are ensnared, the tempted fall, the innocent are sacrificed.

O, is it not a blessed announcement, that there is a world in which "there shall be no night!" — no night of crime, deceit, treachery or temptation — no night of pain, sickness or death!

O, tell it to the penitent, who is straggling against the evil habits and depraved inclinations of a wicked heart — who, on life's fierce battle-field, is striving to win an immortal crown!

Tell it to the dying man, who, restless upon his couch, through long, wearisome nights, is trying to learn the lessons of submission, and faith, and moral discipline, which his sufferings are teaching — who longs for light to break through the dark clouds that are gathering about him!

Hasten with the tidings to the bereaved family, and assure them that there is a world where these griefs shall be lifted from their oppressed spirits, and their present afflictions, if rightly improved, shall work out for them "a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory!" For where God is, there can be no night. Where bright, holy angels throng, there can be no sorrow. Where celestial music rolls through the galleries and arches of temples filled with the effulgence of the Deity, there can be no sighing. Where Jesus reigns in his majesty and glory, God will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away!" Revelation 21:4 No night in Heaven! Then . . .

no sad partings are experienced there,
no funeral processions move there,
no death-knell is heard there,
no graves are opened there,
no mysterious providences will there perplex us there,
no dark calamities will shake our faith there —

but we shall walk the golden streets of the eternal city, surrounded with perpetual brightness, breathing an atmosphere of heavenly purity, and free to enter the palaces of our King, or climb to heights over which no shadow ever passes!

If such, indeed, be the glory of Heaven, why should we desire to hold our friends and the objects of our affections to earth? Why keep them in a world of darkness and sorrow, when God calls them to the light and blessedness of an eternal day? The following sweet poetic dialog cannot fail to awaken the tenderest emotions in a mother's heart. It is entitled, "The Mother and Her Dying Boy."

BOY.

My mother, my mother! O, let me depart!

Your tears and your pleadings are swords to my heart.

I hear gentle voices, that chide my delay;

I see lovely visions, that woo me away.

My prison is broken, my trials are o'er!

O mother, my mother, detain me no more!

MOTHER.

And will you, then, leave us, my brightest, my best?

And will you run nestling no more to my breast?

The summer is coming to sky and to bower;

The tree that you planted will soon be in flower;

You loved the soft season of song and of bloom;

O, shall it return, and find you in your tomb?'

BOY.

Yes, mother, I loved in the sunshine to play,

And talk with the birds and the blossoms all day;

But sweeter the songs of the spirits on high,

And brighter the glories round God in the sky!
I see them, I hear them, they pull at my heart;
My mother, my mother, O, let me depart!

MOTHER.

O, do not desert us! Our hearts will be drear,
Our home will be lonely, when you are not here;
Your brother will sigh 'mid his playthings, and say,
I wonder dear William so long can delay.
That foot, like the wild wind — that glance, like a star,
O, what will this world be when they are afar?

BOY.

This world, dearest mother! — O, live not for this!
No, press on with me to the fullness of bliss!
And trust me, whatever bright fields I may roam,
My heart will not wander from you and from home.
Believe me still near you, on pinions of love;
Expect me to hail you, when soaring above.

MOTHER.

Well, go, my beloved! the conflict is o'er;
My pleas are all selfish — I urge them no more.
Why chain your bright spirit down here to the clod,
So thirsting for freedom, so ripe for its God?
Farewell, then, farewell, 'til we meet at the throne,
Where love fears no parting, and tears are unknown!

BOY.

O, glory! O, glory! what music! what light!
What wonders break in on my heart, on my sight!
I come, blessed spirits! I hear you from high.
O, frail, faithless nature! can this be to die?

So near! what, so near to my Savior and King?

O, help me, you angels, His glories to sing!

There will be no night of ignorance in Heaven. Here on earth, our highest attainment in knowledge is comparative ignorance. Our clearest conceptions of truth are confused and indistinct. Even the little knowledge that we do possess, costs us a vast amount of toil, protracted study and conflicts, with wandering thoughts and perplexing doubts. We can learn of God, the greatest and best of beings, only through dim shadows, and faint types, and material representations. Our views of his moral government, obtained through his providential dealings here, are crude and unsatisfactory. When we are enjoying the bright sunlight, and all nature is clothed with richness and beauty — when we walk amid the mountains and majestic forests, God's earthly palaces, and breathe the fragrance of flowers, and tread beneath our feet the soft verdure, and see above us the crimsoned clouds and mild blue vault, and, amid all, drink of the cup of pleasure — then we are ready to exclaim, with the Psalmist, "The Lord is good, and his tender mercies are over all his works!" But let the scene be changed. Let the midnight tempest arise, and our habitations quiver under the fury of the storm; let the earth tremble under the successive peals and crashes of the thunder, and the heavens seem on fire from the incessant flashes of lightning; let the shrieks of bereaved friends tell where the fatal waters have struck — and amid the wild terror of the scene, doubts will throng the mind as to the infinitude of the divine love, as to the purely benevolent design of God's moral administration. These checkered scenes will perplex us, and we are led to exclaim, with the apostle, "How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out." Even with the aid of Scripture, how little we absolutely know of the Deity — his designs, plans and works; how little of the mysteries of the future life — of the wonders of that state to which time is so rapidly bearing us! "Now we see through a glass darkly." "Now I know in part." In the departments of human learning, too, the same obscurity and uncertainty perplex us. Upon the most important principles in science, philosophy and ethics, we find that the wisest men are divided. Rival schools are contending for directly opposite systems of thought. The principles of one age are supplanted by the fruits of the superior intelligence and more profound investigations of that which follows it. How different is the science of astronomy, for example, from what it was a century ago! A single modern discovery of a gifted astronomer has effected a complete revolution in the ideas, calculations and studies, of the world, upon this science; and what new changes and discoveries await it, the future alone can reveal! In mental philosophy, how little satisfactory progress has been made! Nothing, in fact, has been accomplished here, worthy of the name of science. No principles are permanently settled. Human language, in its present state, at least, seems to be too gross a medium through which to communicate, with accuracy and precision, a knowledge of the elements and interior workings of the intellect of man. But in Heaven there will be no night of ignorance. There, with unfettered powers — with a clear, discriminating reason; with a keen, spiritual vision — we shall see and know all truth. We shall . . .

be liable to no mistakes,

be exposed to no errors,

be perplexed with no mysteries.

We shall no longer need to pass through the tedious processes of study and investigation. We shall no longer be baffled, in our attempts to ascend the heights of knowledge, by a shattered memory, a perverted judgment, and powers weakened by sin. We shall see as we are seen, and know as we are known. As the elements and essence of our own being lie exposed to the eye of the Infinite Intelligence — so the elements and essence of all other beings and objects will be clearly seen by us. We shall have a view of the power, majesty, excellence and splendor, of the Deity, of which we can now form no conception. God will, as it were, enter into the mind of the saint, take possession of it as his own temple, and fill it with the luster of his own being, with the purity of his own nature, with the blessedness and perfection of his own character. And the very act of beholding God will strengthen the powers and enlarge the capacities of the mind. It will develop faculties that now lie slumbering in the intellect, the opening of which will afford the most exquisite delight, and be as the dawns of a new creation upon the soul — dawns that will pour their effulgence through all the chambers of the memory, and all the faculties of the soul.

And, as we extend our view to other beings and objects, we shall comprehend and realize the meaning of the language, "They shall need no candle, neither light of the sun — for the Lord God gives them light." The candle of human instrumentalities is no longer needed. The sun itself is quenched; for God, the author of light, shines in its stead. That splendid orb that had lighted the pathways of so many generations — that had poured its golden beams upon so many mountain-tops, and painted so many flowers with beauty — whose rays had sparkled in a thousand gems, and sported upon numberless ocean waves — is forever quenched.

Under the intense effulgence of God's glory, all clouds will be dissipated, all mysteries solved. The attributes of the Deity will shine in unclouded splendor, illuminating the whole heavens with their rich and variegated coruscations, and revealing the fact that the universe is one vast temple, whose arches echo the music of the spheres, and the adoring accents of thronging worshipers.

"There shall be no night there" — for it is eternal day. Every object is brilliant with an effulgence more intense than the sun-light. The tree of life casts no shadows indicative of a setting sun. The sparkling of the crystal river is never dimmed by the mantle of darkness. The white-robed multitude continually go in and out of the glittering city, their brows irradiated by that shining light, which shines more and more unto the perfect day!

04 - The Likeness of the Redeemed to Christ

The Likeness of the Redeemed to Christ!

"We know that when He shall appear, we shall be like Him — for we shall see Him as he is!" 1 John 3:2

"Our citizenship is in Heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will transform our vile body into the likeness of His glorious body!" Php 3:20-21

"So will it be with the resurrection of the dead.

The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable;

it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory;

it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power;

it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body!" 1 Corinthians 15:42-44

It is a blessed feature of the gospel, that it reveals the Christian's likeness to his Savior. It assures him that he is made a "partaker of the divine nature," — is "changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." This change is started at the moment regeneration takes place. The divine image is then stamped anew upon the newborn soul. The rudiments of a transformation appear, that will carry the subject forward through successive stages of improvement, until he attains "unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." At the period of conversion, the real life of the soul begins. Previous to this, it is "dead in trespasses and sins." It has organs of vision — but no insight into spiritual truth. It has the power of speech — but its utterances are incoherent and false. But at the new birth, its true life commences. It becomes then like him who is "the way, the truth, and the life."

We may regard the likeness referred to as relating to . . .

the external appearance,

the intellectual and moral nature, and

the state of felicity which the saints will enjoy in common, though not in degree, with the Redeemer.

Paul says that Christ (Php 3:21) "shall transform our vile body into the likeness of His glorious body!" Of the precise nature of "His glorious body" — we have no adequate conception. Indeed, the meaning of the word glory, as applied to celestial objects, it is difficult to define. It primarily signifies to open, to expand with clearness. Hence, brightness, splendor. The celebrated John Howe defines the glory of Deity to be "nothing else but resplendent excellency, the luster of excellency, or real worth made conspicuous."

Paul, in writing to the Corinthians, attempts to describe the glorious bodies of the redeemed, and language seems to break down under the weight of his thoughts, or, rather, it is consumed by their glow and excessive effulgence. "So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable;

it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory;

it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power;

it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body!" A few beams of this celestial glory have at different times reached the earth. They rested upon Mount Sinai, when God appeared to give his law through his servant Moses. They shone about the tabernacle, and in the temple, when special manifestations of the Deity were made. At the birth of the Savior, the pious shepherds were dazzled and affrighted, as "the glory of the Lord shone round about them." At his baptism, the heavens were opened — or, as some foreign commentators interpret the passage, the heavens were cleft asunder, as though by vivid lightning, and the glory burst through and rested upon the Savior. On the mount of transfiguration, the three apostles beheld our Lord in his glorious body. Luke describes the scene thus: "As He was praying, the appearance of His face changed, and His clothes became dazzling white!" Luke 9:29

We might cite other instances — but these suffice, as examples of the point under consideration. Those who enjoyed these beatific visions had views of a "glorious body" that we cannot obtain. Stephen at the time of his martyrdom, Paul when converted, the favored company who witnessed the ascension of Christ, and those just referred to — all obtained as vivid impressions of glory as our present organs of vision are capable of receiving.

Although we are less favored — yet there are certain features of this subject, upon which faith may rest with confidence. In the first place, we shall have some form of bodily organization in Heaven. Whether material elements will enter into the composition of this body, or what will be its form, size or appearance, we cannot now determine. We are assured that it will be like Christ's glorious body, and we may infer that it will bear some resemblance to our present bodies, as in the case of Christ, when Paul, Stephen, and others, recognized him in his glorious body. At least, the change, though great, though inconceivably wondrous, will not be such as to destroy our personal identity, any more than that which takes place when the helpless infant becomes a full-grown and vigorous man. The same being who here, on life's battle-field, straggles with corruption — shall be clothed with incorruption; the same mortal, here frail, weak, liable to disease, injury and death, shall be clothed with immortality. The change will be such, however, as will fit us for our new state and new duties. It is the universal law among animal existences, that the organization of the being shall be suited to its element — the fish to the water, the beast to the field and forest, the bird to the air. When the insect is removed from one element to another, there is a corresponding change made in his organization; as, for instance, when the crawling worm is converted into the beautiful butterfly — and, instead of mingling in the dust, sports in the sunbeam, and is regaled amid the fragrance of flowers.

It is therefore in accordance with the established order of nature, that "we shall all be changed." We shall have bodies like Christ's "glorious body," suited to a celestial sphere; with organs of sight that will enable us to view spiritual objects; with organs of hearing that will catch the strains of

celestial music; with a splendid and effulgent attire, suitable to our admission to the palace of the great King; with an ethereal organization, fitted to execute, with lightning speed, the commands of our Sovereign. So great will be this change that Paul says, to the Colossian Christians, in their present state, "You are dead," — that is, dead comparatively; dead to all worldly hopes and blessings — "and your life is hid with Christ in God." The life-principle has not perished — but it is hid away, as a valuable treasure, where it will be safe. He then immediately breaks forth with the sublime announcement, "When Christ who is our life shall appear, then shall you also appear with him in glory!" You shall mingle with the bright and illustrious throng that attend him. You shall share his honors, participate in his triumphs, and constitute, in fact, the pomp and regal splendor of this great conquest celebration. The likeness of the glorified saint to his divine Lord will also respect the INTELLECTUAL nature. Some people may be disposed to confine the resemblance to the external appearance, or bodily organization; but such would be a very partial and unsatisfactory likeness. Besides, the passage does by no means require so limited an interpretation. The likeness referred to is general and complete. "As we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly." When the Psalmist exclaims, "I shall be satisfied when I awake in your likeness," he means something more than an external likeness to his Lord. The satisfaction and joy that he anticipates must have a deeper source than this. They must spring from an intellectual and spiritual resemblance.

If the body is to undergo such astonishing changes — if corruption is to put on incorruption, and this mortal become immortal — why should not the mind be greatly changed? Why should not this thinking, feeling, acting, energizing principle within us, be clothed with new powers and fresh energies? In the present state, the mind is weakened by sin. The storms of iniquity have beat upon it, and shattered its noble faculties, and deranged its fine powers. The reason holds but a precarious authority, and is often silenced and overpowered by passion. The judgment is perverted. The walls of memory are broken down. The will acts inconstantly, and often feebly. Our ideas are crude, indistinct, partial, and unsatisfying. Our truth is half error; our faith is half skepticism.

"We know but in part." "We see as through a glass darkly." But "when he shall appear, we shall be like him!" Out of this wreck of mind, this chaos of mental faculties, will spring a godlike intellect — sound, vigorous, clear, mighty in all its powers. Its full glory, its surpassing excellence, its vast superiority to mind in its present state, "does not yet appear." Nor will any effort or study here make this apparent. We may seek for light earnestly, diligently, and yet no rays will even skirt the darkness of our ignorance. We may knock at the door of the most subtle science, of the most profound erudition, of the sublimest theology, and yet no response will be heard. We may sit at the feet of men inspired of the Holy Spirit, and all they can tell us is, "it does not yet appear what we shall be." We may go to God, in earnest supplication, and the reply to our petitions is, "Have faith."

Indeed, to describe a glorified intellect, is to possess it. To be able to delineate its divine excellencies and vast capacities, would be proof that we had passed out of this present state of being — that we had already exchanged the earthly for the heavenly.

Let us, then, be content to walk around our spiritual Zion; for we cannot enter in. The gates are closed. The great King has not sent for us yet. Death has not yet received his commission to release us — to take off these material clogs, and let the spirit rise. We may meditate outside,

profitably. We may "mark well her bulwarks, and consider her palaces." We may make sure that "this God is our God," and that "he will be our guide even unto death." Then we shall be like him. Then we shall renew our strength, and "mount up with wings as eagles." The gates will open, and the splendors of immortality will burst upon the new powers and capacities of the soul! And not only shall we be overwhelmed with these brilliant scenes — but our faculties will be such as will enable us to see Christ as he really is. We shall not behold him through vague types and dim shadows — but in all his glory — in the full effulgence of his divine perfections.

Yet this language must be qualified; for, with all our accession of vitality, capacity and glory, we shall still be finite; and no finite can comprehend the infinite. To whatever heights the Supreme Intelligence may elevate us, there will yet remain a measureless gulf between the Creator and the creature. The Highest must still stoop to bestow his blessings. Communion with us, on his part, must still be condescension. And down to the last ages, if there can be last ages in eternity, the inquiry will still run along the ranks of the most gifted and elevated of the heavenly hosts, "Who by searching can find out God; who can find out the Almighty unto perfection?"

We must be infinite, to comprehend the infinite. We must be gods, to fully know God. And yet we may with strict propriety say that when we awake in his likeness, we shall behold his full effulgence and glory; for it will be full to us. It will fill every capacity, and satisfy every desire. And to whatever heights the law of progress, in its eternal operation, may carry us — we shall still be overpowered with views of the divine excellence and glory. In our estimation, infinite will be piled upon infinite, like Alps upon Alps. When we consider . . .

how contracted our minds are here,

how limited our sphere of vision,

how faint our impressions of the Deity —

we are struck with the immensity of the change that is to be wrought in us. We cannot grasp it, nor comprehend it. It is like converting . . .

dew-drops into oceans,

pebbles into worlds,

the dust floating in a sunbeam — into stars of the first magnitude, destined to shine forever and ever! And although the thought is noble, exciting, stimulating — yet there is also something solemn in this aspiration to be like God. There is a fearful grandeur in the idea of seeking and expecting a resemblance to the Infinite One, the great I Am! And there is a sense in which a desire to be like God is impious. The haughty Prince of Tyre was severely rebuked by the prophet, because he set his "heart as the heart of God." The threat was uttered, "Behold, I will bring strangers upon you, the terrible of the nations; and they shall draw their swords against the beauty of your wisdom," Ezekiel 25:6-7. The first transgression arose from a desire to "be as gods;" and the very essence of sin is to seek a supremacy over the Supreme Being. But a proper imitation of God is a matter of command and duty.

It is required of us by the Sovereign, as evidence of our loyalty.

It is required by our Heavenly Father, as proof of our affection.

It is required by the Creator, as proof of our respect and reverence. The likeness to the Deity that we anticipate, will also be a MORAL likeness. We shall resemble God . . .

in holiness,

in benevolence,

in perfect love.

"We shall see him as he is," and this will be enough to kindle in the soul the most intense desires to be like him in those moral attributes which are the chief ornament and glory of his character. As the sun, on rising above the horizon, dissipates the darkness of night, and turns all the objects it illumines, as it were, into light — reflections of its own brightness and glory — so the Sun of Righteousness assimilates to itself all the beings upon which it shines, imparting to them a divine luster. A vision of God's holiness . . .

transforms the soul into the same element,

obliterates all impurity,

spiritualizes what before was carnal, and

chases away every cloud of skepticism. A view of his majesty brings every faculty and desire into sweet subjection to his will. A sight of his infinite love renders the beholder lovely. The whole constellation of his virtues, shining down at once upon the redeemed spirit, fills it with a glory that will never grow dim! And this moral likeness will be to the saint a source of infinite felicity. He will feel that sin, the cause of all corruption, danger and wretchedness, is forever banished from his soul; that it will . . .

no more blast his virtues,

no more peril his hopes,

no more cripple his energies,

no more shatter his good resolutions,

no more open upon his spirit the flood-gates of unbelief.

He is now free, gloriously free. The monster is slain, is dead, without the possibility of a resurrection. The battle is fought; the victory won

Well does the Psalmist exclaim, "I shall be satisfied when I awake in your likeness." Satisfied? The word is too feeble, too inexpressive. And yet it is the best that the language affords. Satisfaction to gratify desire to its full extent. And if this is done, the bounds of possibility are reached. Omnipotence can do no more than satisfy every desire. But we would look at this moral likeness a little more carefully. It consists not simply in the absence of sin — but in the presence of perfect holiness. It is a vital, living, soul-pervading, soul-transforming principle, that inclines one to love all that is excellent, pure, and lovely. It leads one to seek the society of holy angels, and a holy God. The glorified saint desires to enter the divine Shekinah, the presence-chamber of the great King,

the place where his honor dwells. He desires . . .

to breathe its pure atmosphere,

to experience its sacred influences,

to draw near to the fountain of light, and life, and all blessedness,

to feel the pulsations of that great divine heart, that sends its streams of benevolence to the furthest extremities of the universe! This holiness has so penetrated his nature, as to become a part of his being, as really as light is part of the sun, or oxygen is a part of the atmosphere. It has . . .

taken complete possession of the spirit,

regulates every faculty,

gives exercise to every power, and

reigns over the motives, desires and purposes, of the soul.

There is no more any conflict — no warring of the flesh against the spirit. A blessed peace reigns. A calm felicity like a summer-cloud rests upon the soul.

And, as the capacities of the mind expand, there is a corresponding increase of holiness. Indeed, there is in holiness itself a power that acts mightily upon the intellect and heart.

It gives clearness to the mental vision;

it gives extent and compass to the power of thought;

it creates pure thoughts;

it creates as well as satisfies desires;

it calls forth the affections, and fills the heart with a glowing love, that waters cannot quench, nor floods drown.

There is another feature of this likeness of the glorified saint to the Deity. He will be like him in HAPPINESS. He will have access to all the sources and rivers of delight, that contribute to swell the ocean of divine felicity.

God will open before him his works, and bid him look abroad upon the magnificence and splendors of creation.

Worlds upon worlds,

stars upon stars,

systems piled upon systems —

will pass in review before him!

He will understand and realize why at the dawn of the creation "the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy!"

He will view, also, the government and providence of God. That mighty system of moral forces and instrumentalities, that sustains the divine authority, will open before him, in all its stupendous machinery and glorious ends! He will rejoice that he is under the protection of such a government — will rejoice in its wise sanctions and infinite rewards. He will sympathize with the great Ruler in its equitable administration, and participate with him in the glory of its successful operation in every part of the habitable universe.

He will also find happiness in the ideas and sentiments of the Godhead. Having a similarity of taste, feeling and purpose, he will covet the society of the Deity, and will exclaim, with an emphasis never experienced on earth, "In your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand there are pleasures forevermore!"

He will know what it is "to sit together" with prophets, apostles, martyrs, and hosts of the redeemed, "in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." And O, what floods of joy will fill the soul, when the saint awakes to the full consciousness, that the resources of God's boundless universe are at his command! What rapture will thrill every sensibility of his nature, when he fully realizes that he has reached those glorious heights for which he had been so long toiling — that he has received the crown after which he had been striving — that he is an inhabitant of that celestial city, to which he had for so many years prayed, and struggled, to be admitted!

"When, on Devotion's seraph wings, the spirit soars above,
And feels your presence, Father, Friend, God of eternal love,
Joys of the earth, you fade and die before that living ray,
Which gives to the enrapt soul a glimpse of pure and perfect day —
A gleam of Heaven's own light, though now its brightness scarce
appears, Through the dim shadows which are spread around this valley of tears!
But your unclouded smile, O God, fills that all-glorious place,
Where we shall know as we are known, and see you face to face!"

05 - No More Sea

NO MORE SEA!

"And there was no more sea." Revelation 21:1 This remarkable declaration has excited the attention and curiosity of many of the readers of the Apocalypse. The inquiry has been made, why a circumstance like this should appear in a heavenly vision, and be deemed of sufficient importance to be recorded by an inspired pen. In the hints and descriptions which are given of the future world, it is not always easy to determine what is to be taken literally, and what figuratively; and this difficulty has occasioned, in a great measure, the diversity of opinion which prevails respecting the meaning of various passages relating to this subject.

But, whatever may be the precise import of these words, they suggest to the mind several features of "the new heavens and new earth," upon which we may meditate with pleasure and benefit.

1. In the first place, we learn from this language, that there will be, in that blessed abode, no changes or vicissitudes in the condition of the saints. The sea is the emblem of change. It is never perfectly at rest. The ebb and flow of the tides, the various currents passing through it, the changes in the temperature of the atmosphere, keep it constantly in motion. It fluctuates with every passing breeze, yields to every impression, and is disturbed by a thousand different causes. At one moment it lies perfectly calm and placid, with not a ripple upon its bosom — its silvery surface reflects every object along the shore. It is a mirror to the skies, to the pale moon, the stars, and the clouds. It seems, at such an hour, the emblem of peace and security. It invites the voyager to trust to its waters, and to float quietly upon its placid bosom. But soon a change steals over the scene. The breeze springs up, and slightly agitates the waters. A dark cloud is seen rising in the distant horizon. The muttering of an approaching storm is heard. Dim shadows begin to fill the air, and the howl of the tempest breaks the silence of the hour. How rapidly, now, does the beauty of the scene change to wild sublimity! How sudden the transition from security to the most imminent danger — from feelings of delightful admiration to indescribable terror! As such, the sea affords a vivid picture of human life. Change, instability and disappointment, are inscribed upon everything pertaining to our earthly existence. The hopes and prospects of the individual fluctuate. A thousand invisible influences are working upon him, affecting his character, molding his opinions, and strengthening or weakening good principles. The Christian is at one time on the mount, in the enjoyment of perfect serenity. The pure atmosphere around him diffuses through his system the glow of spiritual health. He gazes with delight upon the wide and beautiful prospect that opens before him. But the next hour he is in the valley, oppressed with cruel doubts and distressing fears. His bright hopes have all fled. The beautiful prospect is shut out from his view, and the mountains, that had lifted him to the skies, become a dark rampart around him.

Families, too, are subject to constant changes. Not a day nor an hour passes in which some circle is not broken by death. The tenderest ties are severed; the fondest anticipations of happiness are suddenly blasted. The father who but yesterday gazed with thankfulness and affection upon his fair boy, participating in his sports, and rejoicing in his progress and culture — today follows his

cold remains to the silent grave. The wife, by one fatal stroke, is deprived of her companion and protector, and is left to battle life's stern realities alone.

Communities and nations are constantly changing. From our churches, from the marts of business, and the halls of pleasure, multitudes are daily withdrawing — while others are stepping in to take their places. Upon the throngs that we encounter in the streets, upon the crowds that gathered to listen to the eloquence of the orator or the sweet strains of music, upon the mightiest armies and most densely populated cities, there is written, "passing away!" The continents are covered with the monuments and burial-places of dead empires. As one wave follows another upon the sea, so generation follows generation, each in its turn breaking and dashing upon the shores of eternity. The moral condition of the world has been emphatically one of change. It has been like a restless, boisterous ocean, with its dangerous currents, its quicksands, fatal rocks and fearful whirlpools. Strong temptations, violent passions, and the influx of various forms of error and infidelity, have spread their disturbing influences over the entire moral world.

But, in the vision that John had of the new heavens and the new earth, he tells us "there was no more sea." All there is permanent, and unalterably settled. Not a wave or ripple ever agitates the surface of celestial purity and felicity. The saints, having passed through their last great change, know no other change but progress in holiness and happiness. Their mansions are neither built upon the sand nor float upon treacherous billows — but rest upon the solid rock. No more doubts shake their faith; no more currents of worldly influences impede their progress in the divine life; no more weary watchings for the beacon-lights of hope are endured. The dim visions of future happiness have opened into glorious realities. The voyage of human life is passed, and the happy spirits have reached the haven of rest. They enjoy the protection and blessing of the "Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning."

2. In the next place, the sea reminds us that no privations, afflictions, trials and hardships, are experienced in the heavenly world. What multitudes, upon the ocean, are cut off from the refined enjoyments of social life, the blessings of domestic fellowship, and the privileges of Christian worship. No sacred temples line the pathways upon the ocean; no Sunday church-bell summons the mariner to the holy sanctuary. The voice of the preacher, the stirring notes of praise, the swell of the organ, reach not his ears. Arduous duties may claim his attention, or great dangers may surround him, during the hallowed hours of public prayer and worship. Thus, deprived of the religious advantages and aids enjoyed by others, he often has . . .

no God to worship,

no altar before which he bows,

no Savior in whom he trusts,

no Holy Spirit to enlighten, comfort and bless him. Nor is he any more favored in intellectual advantages. No institution of learning offers its treasures of knowledge to those whose home is on the sea. There is, indeed, upon the ocean, an education that is in many respects peculiar, and in some sublime. The dark, rolling waves, as they rise from their unfathomed cavern homes, tell of His power "who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand." The wide expanse, stretching in every direction as far as the eye can reach, teaches the infinitude of the divine Being. The midnight tempest announces, in solemn and solemn tones, that there is a Sovereign above, in

whose estimation "the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance." Everything around the mariner teaches him of the power and majesty of Jehovah; and would he but listen, he might hear voices that would instruct him in his duty and his destiny. But there are other educational influences that too often obtain the mastery over him. Confined to a companionship that is hostile not only to mental development — but to moral culture — deprived of those healthful stimulants and religious restraints that surround others — he has but little chance of escaping the debasement of his intellectual powers, and the destruction of his moral principles.

These privations and dangers, inseparable from a life at sea, occasion the deepest anxieties, and often keenest sorrows, upon the land. Here is a mother whose son is far away upon the mighty deep. With what strong affection and intense solicitude does she follow her boy, in his pathless track upon the waves! Perhaps he is an only child, and one in whom all the hopes of a fond mother center. In the quiet hours of night, when past scenes crowd around the memory, and stand before the mind as present realities, she thinks of him, prays for him, pleads with the God of the ocean to protect him. She reflects upon the care with which he was cherished in infancy — the interest with which she watched his opening faculties and powers — the toil and patience expended in planting in him right principles, and qualifying him for usefulness and happiness. All the incidents of his departure rise up before her imagination. His preparation for the voyage, his enterprise, his noble bearing, his last farewell — the tear of affection, that, in spite of his efforts, started in his eye, as he grasped a mother's hand — come thronging around her memory; and in that hallowed hour she tries to picture to herself his situation.

Perhaps he is exposed to powerful temptations, and all her care and labor to fortify him, in early life, against such assaults, are to be sacrificed in one fatal hour. Perhaps he is lying in his narrow, gloomy room, prostrated by severe sickness, with no kind friend to cool his fevered brow, no mild voice to whisper words of encouragement and hope. Perhaps he is encountering his first storm at sea, and his young heart throbs as its fierce howl sweeps by him. Perhaps he is aloft, striving with one hand to bind the fluttering sail, while with the other he clings for his life to the treacherous rope. He is, at least, far away; and, whatever dangers may surround him, she cannot go to him — cannot help him, except by her prayers.

How many have fathers upon the sea, whom they revere and love — whose toils they would gladly lighten, whose dangers they would gladly share! When bowing around the family altar, they remember him. While engaged in their daily duties, they think of his kindness, and of the tokens of his love that he has brought from distant climates. In every disaster or shipwreck of which they read, their thoughts revert to him, with the hope that he is safe. The possibility that he is exposed to dangers — that they may never see him again — may no more experience his warm embraces — comes like an arrow to the heart.

How many have beloved companions upon the ocean, concerning whom the deepest anxiety is felt! For a long time, no tidings of the absent have been received. Days, weeks and months, drag heavily on, leaving behind them only hope. A heart full of affection is kept in cruel suspense. A wreck has been seen. Perhaps it is all that remains of the missing ship and its gallant crew. The evidences for and against this opinion are weighed with scrupulous exactness. Every circumstance is examined with the most intense and painful interest. And not infrequently the mind for years is kept in a state more agonizing, and more wasting to the spirits, than would be

produced by a knowledge of the certain death of the departed.

How little, after hearing of a wreck, and of the sad fate of all on board the ship, do we realize that there were sons, fathers and husbands, in that struggling, gasping group — that those lifeless forms were bound to friends by ties as strong and tender as those that unite us to the dearest objects of our affection! How little do we think of the families, in different towns and villages, to whom the announcement of the wreck comes as a thunderbolt — whose sighs, and tears, and habiliments of mourning, tell where the lightning of affliction has struck! Is there not a depth and intensity of meaning, to such, in the declaration of John, that in the heavenly world there is no more sea — no more separation from dear friends — no more nights of weary watchings and deep agony — no more startling news of the loss of those we love? The sea is the emblem of all life's trials. Its ceaselessly rolling billows shadow forth the agitations of many hearts. Its roar is the echo of the groans of an afflicted world. Its perils are emblematic of the moral dangers that surround the soul of man. We are all upon the ocean of life. Every human being has his voyage to make, his dangers to encounter. Many a dark wave lies between us and the haven of rest. We have barks freighted with more precious substances than silver or gold. The merchant may lose his ships. The sea may engulf his property, and leave him a bankrupt. This is a calamity. But greater calamities threaten many voyagers now sailing upon the ocean of life. They are attempting to make the passage without noticing the compass, whose needle points to the throne of God, and with no pilot at the helm. They seldom consult their chart, that marks out the only course by which they can reach the celestial city — that indicates the rocks and dangers of the way. They heed not the beacon-lights held forth by patriarchs, prophets and apostles. Though the forms of these holy messengers may be seen moving along the shore, with torches in their hands — though their voices may be heard amid the roar of the waters, warning the careless mariner of the dangers that surround him, pleading with him to escape the wild breakers that have swallowed up thousands of others — yet he heeds them not.

Bent upon his pleasures, absorbed by his schemes for transient good, he thinks that it will be time enough to arouse himself when the peril is more apparent. He sees that his ship is strong. Every timber is sound; every plank is bolted with iron. He looks above, and every mast, spar, sail and rope, is in its place. What need of alarm, when everything appears so secure?

Thus reasons the man in health and prosperity. But suddenly the alarming tidings ring through the cabin, that the ship has struck, and is fast upon the rocks. Now, in the panic of the hour, the voyager runs to his chart; but this cannot help him. He looks at his compass; but it points where he cannot go. He seizes the helm; but its power is gone. He pleads for deliverance; but there comes from the shore a voice, "Too late!"

He lifts his agonizing cry to God for mercy; but he hears the dreadful response, "Since you rejected me when I called and no one gave heed when I stretched out my hand, since you ignored all my advice and would not accept my rebuke, I in turn will laugh at your disaster; I will mock when calamity overtakes you — when calamity overtakes you like a storm, when disaster sweeps over you like a whirlwind, when distress and trouble overwhelm you. "Then they will call to me but I will not answer; they will look for me but will not find me. Since they hated knowledge and did not choose to fear the LORD, since they would not accept my advice and spurned my rebuke, they will eat the fruit of their ways and be filled with the fruit of their schemes. For the waywardness of the

simple will kill them, and the complacency of fools will destroy them!" Proverbs 1:24-32

O! is it not a blessed announcement, that there is a world where no such moral danger will surround the soul — where no waves of temptation will roll over us, and no sea of sorrow endanger our hopes or our happiness?

3. In the next place, we are assured, by the declaration before us, that no storms will arise in the eternal home of the blessed. The sea is emphatically the theater of storms. Here they rage with their greatest fury, and produce the most marked and terrific results. How frail an object is the stoutest ship, when in the fatal grasp of an ocean tempest! With what speed it is driven before the resistless force of the wind! How easily the billows sport with it, tossing it from wave to wave, as though it were but a feather! The stroke of a single surge makes every timber tremble, and causes the vessel to quiver like an aspen-leaf!

I need not describe a storm at sea. Its violence, its solemn grandeur and disastrous effects, have oft been told. The piercing, maddened winds; the wild, foaming surges; the appalling lightning, the crashing thunder, the reeling of the ship like a drunken man, the strained and breaking ropes, the bending masts, falling spars, rent and torn sails, the cold mist that fills and darkens the air, the consternation of rapidly-beating hearts, the dread, horrible suspense of the hour — all these are familiar to the reader.

I have read of Christian voyagers who have said that they never knew the full meaning of the apostle's declaration until they had experienced a storm at sea. And not a few, going down into the dark waters, have derived great comfort from the assurance that in the heavenly world there is no more sea. There, serene skies, an unclouded atmosphere and perfect peace, forever reign. The saint, instead of gazing upon a wild waste of waters, is surrounded with the splendors of celestial cities. Instead of the roar of midnight tempests — the music from angelic choirs, and from the worshiping multitude around the throne, thrills his soul.

Yet these earthly storms have their mission. Rightly viewed, they are the messengers of Jehovah, sent to proclaim his indignation towards our sinful race. They indicate that this panting, groaning earth, lies under the curse of its Creator. They are designed to restrain man in his wickedness — to remind him of the laws of the supreme Sovereign, which he is so ready to break, and to warn him of more terrible disasters that await the impenitent in another life. Were it consistent with the principles of God's moral administration, he would not inflict upon one of his creatures the slightest pain or sorrow. Not a storm would arise; not a wreck would be found upon the sea; no calamity would be experienced. But his authority has been resisted; his laws have been broken and trampled under foot; and by storms, earthquakes, pestilence and death — he is teaching the world that he is still a sovereign — that he has not abdicated his throne, and has no intention of abdicating it!

He is endeavoring to convince man that it is not for his interest to provoke his wrath; but that it is the part of wisdom to yield to his authority, and seek his favor. He also assures us that it is his ardent desire to receive his children to the happiness and glory of Heaven, as soon as it can be done consistently with the claims of justice, and the interests of his moral kingdom. He infinitely prefers to treat us as a kind Father, than to deal with us as an arbitrary Sovereign; and, in the fullness of his love, he makes proclamation that there is a world where there is no more pain or

sorrow — where "all tears shall be wiped away!"

4. The last point that we would notice is, that in Heaven there is no sea to furnish a burial-place for the dead. Since the beginning of the world, what vast multitudes have been deposited in the seaman's church-yard! Though no tolling bell has called together sympathizing friends, though no green sod has opened to receive them, and no quiet grove invited them to rest beneath its shadows — yet they have had their funeral services. The winds have sung their requiem, the waves have furnished a winding-sheet, and coral monuments mark their resting-places. Generation after generation have sunk in the dark waters, and now wait the summons of the last trumpet-peal. Multitudes more will follow them, and go down to sleep beside them.

Yes, there is a home, far above all ocean tempests — a home where the death-chill from cold waters will never be experienced! At the appointed hour, the sea shall give up its dead. Coral tombs, and "the giant caverns of the unfathomed ocean," will resign their charge; and this corruption shall put on incorruption, and this mortal be clothed with immortality. Then may the glorified saints, having reached the haven of peace, cast their anchors within the veil, and feel secure from all danger!

"O, for a breeze of heavenly love,

To waft my soul away

To the celestial world above,

Where pleasures never decay! From rocks of pride on either hand,

From quicksands of despair,

O, guide me safe to Canaan's land,

Through every fatal snare!

Anchor me in that port above,

On that celestial shore,

Where dashing billows never move,

Where tempests never roar!"

06 - The Angelic Inhabitants of Heaven

The Angelic Inhabitants of Heaven "Praise him, all his angels." Psalms 147:2 "And all the angels stood round about the throne!" Revelation 8:11

Having considered, in the preceding articles, the evidences of a future life, and viewed Heaven under various scriptural emblems — having inquired into the likeness of the redeemed to Christ, and exhibited the social enjoyments connected with the recognition of friends in Heaven, and the blessedness of spiritual worship in a divine temple — we come now to speak of those holy and resplendent beings who crowd the courts, and palaces, and cities, of the great King, and who continually surround the eternal throne. For a knowledge of their existence, character and employments, we are indebted solely to the sacred Scriptures. The light of nature furnishes no evidences respecting them, although analogy renders it probable, since there are successive gradations of being below man — that there are higher orders of intelligences above him. While we find every department of nature which we have explored instinct with life and crowded with animate existences, we cannot suppose that man constitutes the boundary line on the ascending scale. From the investigations and discoveries of modern science, we learn that even far below the last range of beings visible to the naked eye, there are countless myriads of animacule, more than a million of which find ample accommodation in a single drop of water. Indeed, we are told, what is hardly conceivable, that "within the narrow space of a grain of mustard-seed, eight million living active creatures can exist, all richly endowed with the organs and faculties of animal life." In taking one and subjecting it to a careful microscopic examination, it displays a precise and complicated organization, consisting of bones, muscles, sinews, lungs, and all the parts of a perfect and active being. Within this little form are found the sensibilities, emotions, instincts and desires, that belong to higher orders of animate existence.

Those that inhabit, as myriads do, delicate flowers, are environed with beauties and splendors, that to them constitute a glorious paradise.

"A distinguished botanist, on subjecting a flower, from which he heard a soft murmuring sound, to the microscope, observed that it was filled with minute insects, who were sporting among the narrow pedestals that supported its leaves. Amid the beauties and fragrance of their little world, he could distinctly observe their movements and enjoyments. The base of the flower, under the influence of the microscope, extended itself to a vast plain; the slender stems of the leaves became trunks of so many stately cedars; the threads in the middle seemed columns of massive structure, supporting at the top several ornaments, and the narrow spaces between them were enlarged into walks and terraces. On the polished bottoms of these, brighter than Parian marble, walked the winged inhabitants, which from dusky insects, as they appeared to the naked eye, rose to beautiful glittering animals, stained with living purple, and with a glossy gold that would have made all the labors of the loom contemptible in the comparison." For several days the botanist viewed the scene with unabated wonder and admiration.

Another remarks: "I have never made observations of the corolla, simply of the smallest flower, without finding it composed of an admirable substance, half transparent, studded with brilliants, and shining in the most lively colors. The beings that live under a reflex thus enriched must have ideas, very different from ours, of light and the other phenomena of nature. A drop of dew, filtering in the capillary and transparent tubes of a plant, presents to them thousands of cascades; the same drop, fixed as a wave on the extremity of one of its prickles, an ocean without a shore; evaporated in the air, a vast aerial sea. It is credible, then, from analogy, that there are animals feeding on the leaves of plants, like the cattle in our meadows, which repose under the shade of a dome imperceptible to the naked eye, and which from goblets formed like so many suns quaff nectar of the color of gold and silver."

If, with so lavish a hand, the Creator has thus crowded every leaf, flower and drop of water, with sportive and happy beings — then can we suppose that the formation of man has exhausted his power, and that in regions above, there are vast moral wastes which were never occupied by higher orders of intelligences? Is there given to these infinitesimal insects a paradise of the richest luster and variegated splendor? Is every flower a world, with its costly architecture, its beautiful scenery, and its various orders of busy inhabitants — while in God's mighty spiritual kingdom there are none to admire his works, or render to him homage, except the comparatively few that have been here redeemed from the dominion of sin?

We cannot for a moment entertain such a thought; and yet, as we have already remarked, our only positive and reliable source of evidence upon the subject is the Bible. To the unprejudiced and believing mind, however, the proofs from this source are abundant and satisfactory; for the existence of holy angels is recognized by nearly all the inspired writers. The resplendent beings are represented . . .

as surrounding the throne of the Deity,

as engaged in acts of worship,

as moving amid the splendors of a celestial paradise, and

as employed on missions of high importance, and on errands of benevolence. The early Hebrews and the patriarchs were favored with visits and communications from them. They appeared sometimes in visible forms, and at other times in dreams and visions. During the period of the Judges, and about the time of the Babylonian captivity, they are introduced to our notice. Previous to the introduction of Christianity, they were seen gathering around the earth, hovering over the Holy Land, and giving to the devoted servants of God intimations of the Messiah's approach. But the period most distinguished for their appearance and agency was that marked by the mission of our Savior, and the labors of the apostles. Then they came not only as interested spectators of the thrilling scenes which were transpiring — but to aid in carrying out the benevolent designs of Heaven toward an apostate world. As a celestial convoy, they accompanied the Savior in his journeys and visits, watching over him in times of peril, strengthening him when weak, and comforting him in his trials and sorrows.

But, beside Jewish and Christian writers, those of other nations have entertained and advanced opinions, respecting orders of intermediate spirits, corresponding somewhat to those recorded in the Scriptures. The Egyptians and the Greeks, according to the testimony of their eminent

philosophers, believed in the existence of spirits, and in their agency in the affairs of mankind. They thought that the immense interval between their own souls and the infinite Deity could not be, reasonably, regarded as a vast waste — but must be filled with orders of spiritual existences, of various degrees of power and perfection. Plato, Aristotle and the Stoics, all admitted this doctrine, although they differed in their views respecting some branches of it. When Christ was upon the earth, the Sadducees were regarded as holding a fundamental error, in denying the existence of angels, and contending that the language used in the Old Testament, in reference to them, was to be taken figuratively. Several distinguished modern infidels have adopted and advocated the same opinion. Others have erred in the opposite direction, by assigning to the angels too exalted a character, and rendering to them superstitious worship. As a subject of purely scientific inquiry, the doctrine of angelic existence has claims upon our attention. But that which specially awakens our interest in it is the fact, that we look to this order of intelligences for our companions and instructors in the future life.

Besides anticipating the joyful recognition of our pious friends in the spirit world, the true Christian aspires to a companionship with those holy beings, who for ages have been studying the works and perfections of the Deity, and ministering at the altars and worshiping within the courts of the celestial temple. If, therefore, we can learn something of the bright inhabitants of those distant realms, before our departure thither — if we can be convinced that we shall be welcomed to the upper kingdom by orders of intelligences that in purity, power and splendor, far surpass our loftiest conceptions — our zeal to make preparation for that world will be quickened, and our views of its blessedness will be greatly elevated. Our investigations will respect the origin, nature, character and employments, of the holy angels. With regard to their origin, the sacred writers give us no definite or satisfactory information. Moses, in his historic records, treats of the creation of our globe and of man, without reference to other orders of intelligences, or to what transpired previous to these events. Paul, indeed, declares, that God created all things that are in Heaven and in earth, "visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers." Consequently, he created angels; at what period, however, or under what circumstances, we have no data upon which to form an opinion.

Various views have been expressed, by distinguished writers, respecting the time of their creation, many of which are entitled to but little consideration. Some have held, that they were created after man, as God, in the Mosaic account of the creation, proceeded from the lower and inferior of his works, up to the higher. But the opinion that seems most in accordance with reason and the Scriptures is, that they were created before the visible world, and acted an important part in the affairs of the universe, for ages previous to the creation of man. This view was taken by many of the fathers of the church, and is advocated by distinguished modern theologians. Nor is it an idea altogether fanciful, that they may have passed through, upon material worlds, a state of probation bearing some analogy to our own; and that they may have been subjected, in the infancy of their being, to a course of moral discipline that fitted them for their present high station and important duties. The law of discipline under which man lives, and makes progress, and attains to virtue and holiness, may be the universal law of rational beings. We cannot, indeed, conceive of one's acquiring force of character and strength of religious principle, without the exercise of resistance; nor can we conceive of the exercise of resistance without temptation, or evil in some form, to resist.

If temptation could reach those angels "which kept not their first estate — but left their own habitation," and if our first parents were so early called to meet it — then temptation may be a force that every intelligent being, in some stage of his existence, must resist. But it is needless to pursue a point upon which we can only give conjectures, and concerning which both nature and revelation are silent. With regard to the nature of angels, we can only conceive of them as spiritual beings, possessing mental endowments like our own, although in a much higher state of perfection. Our knowledge of being, in general, and of the possible varieties and capabilities of different orders of intelligences, is exceedingly limited. For even our ideas of God, we are dependent upon the consciousness we have of our own mental attributes, states, and feelings. We conceive of him as a being having our spiritual attributes — but in an infinite degree. We can in no other way, with our present organization, form notions of him; and notions thus formed must necessarily be crude and imperfect.

Thus, in our conceptions of angels, we picture to our minds beings in nature like ourselves, though far surpassing us in every intellectual and moral attribute. Their range of knowledge, their power of investigating and discerning truth, their capabilities of managing great enterprises, and discharging the duties of lofty and responsible positions — greatly transcend these advantages and qualities in man, in his highest state of culture. The question, whether angels have a bodily organization, is one that we shall not attempt to decide. The Bible is silent upon this point, and the arguments a priori which are sometimes adduced in favor of the idea prove nothing. The assertion, that if angels were pure spirits they could not act upon the material world, is entitled to no consideration, from the fact that it can neither be sustained nor refuted. The early fathers who were imbued with the Platonic philosophy — Justin, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, and others — regarded all spirits as inhabiting subtle bodies, which are imperceptible to any of our senses. This opinion was opposed by many of the schoolmen, who maintained that angels had no bodies, although they had the power of assuming a bodily form, when it was necessary for the accomplishment of a particular mission.

While, however, the Scriptures are silent upon this and some other points, they teach that there are various ranks among these angelic intelligences, possessing different degrees of dignity, power, and excellence; corresponding, in some measure, to the gradation which exists in human society. This fact is clearly brought to light in the writings of Daniel and Zechariah, and was recognized by Christ and his apostles. The angel who appeared unto Zacharias said unto him (Luke 1:19): "I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and am sent to speak unto you, and to show you these glad tidings." He thus distinguishes himself from angels of an inferior rank, and was one of the favored number who were admitted to the presence of the great King, and entrusted with embassies of the highest importance. As the prime minister of an eastern monarch was admitted, at all times, to the presence of his sovereign, while those of an inferior rank were excluded, so Gabriel had the high honor of entering into the presence and standing before the Sovereign of the universe.

Michael is also spoken of as one of the chief princes of the heavenly hosts. He is referred to several times, in the Old Testament, as a being of exalted rank, and as destined to perform an important part in the final consummation of all things. In the revelation made to John, he appears as the leader of the celestial warriors who fought against the dragon and his hosts. His special official duty seems to be, to guard the citadels of Heaven against the assaults of their foes, and to

watch the movements of those fallen spirits who are in rebellion against their Sovereign. The term archangel occurs but twice in the Bible; once as applied to Michael, and again in 1 Thessalonians 4:16 : "For the Lord himself shall descend from Heaven, with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God."

Many have supposed that the cherubim mentioned in the Old Testament constituted a class of angels; but they were originally hieroglyphic figures, composed of various creatures — a mingling of man, an ox, an eagle, or a lion. They are first mentioned by Moses (Genesis 3:24), as stationed at the east of the garden of Eden, with a flaming sword, to cut off all access to the tree of life. They were inwrought in the tapestry of the ark, and also placed as figures over the ark of the covenant, in the tabernacle, and afterwards in Solomon's temple. In the vision of Ezekiel, the cherubim appear in a new form, and are described with great distinctness. They are instinct with life, move in a whirlwind, and are emblematic of the divine majesty and glory. They are also represented as appearing in the clouds, and bearing the Deity (Psalms 18:1-50) through the skies with great magnificence and grandeur. They are referred to by Josephus, and by the oriental writers generally. The seraphim were evidently an order of angelic beings of a very high rank. The original Hebrew word signifies to burn, and a Jewish commentator says that the name was given on account of their shining, fiery appearance.

They are alluded to but once in the Scriptures, and then by the prophet Isaiah, in his sublime description of the manifestation of Jehovah to him, Isaiah 6:2-6. In the vision, God is represented as seated upon a throne, high and lifted up, surrounded with the emblems of dignity and majesty, and attended by ministers called seraphim. He is clothed with a robe of royalty, the train of which fills the temple. These ministering spirits, in an attitude of the most profound veneration, are solemnly engaged in the worship of the great King. So solemn and sublime are the services, that the pillars of the edifice tremble, and the whole interior is filled with a cloud, the symbol of the divine presence. The spirits reverently veil their faces in the presence of the Infinite, and, with the deepest awe, cry, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty!"

We would next inquire into the character and attributes of the heavenly inhabitants. The Scriptures teach us that they are distinguished for . . .

their intellectual faculties and attainments,

their power,

their holiness,

their benevolence, and

their great personal glory.

While we conceive of them as richly endowed with intelligence and wisdom, we would be cautious not to ascribe to them divine attributes. However elevated and superior a created intelligence may be, the distance between him and the Creator is still infinite. And though he continues to advance from one height to another, as the ages of eternity roll on — yet there remains a vast gulf which he can never pass. There are regions above, stretching away into measureless distances, which he can never reach. The boundaries, however, of angelic intelligence and knowledge, we cannot accurately define. It is evident that there are subjects which are beyond their comprehension.

Connected with the scheme of redemption, there are deep mysteries "which the angels desire to look into." The hour of the destruction of Jerusalem, the Savior declares, "knows no man, no, not the angels of Heaven." And in the book of Job, we are told that God charged his angels with folly. Yet their intellectual power, their vast stores of knowledge, the wonderful discoveries that they have made — are such as surpass all human comprehension. For ages, they have been studying the works of God; searching the profound depths of the divine wisdom and goodness; penetrating into the qualities and essence of matter and mind; exploring the physical, intellectual, and moral universe; having a range of inquiry and research extending from the throne of God down to the minutest atom; and, consequently, their powers and acquisition vastly transcend our loftiest conceptions. In anticipating companionship with such beings, we may indulge the expectation of deriving the highest intellectual benefits from their society. We may reasonably hope that communing with their spirits, or listening to their discourses, will greatly stimulate our own minds, and will enrich our understandings with the most precious treasures of knowledge. A thousand difficulties will be solved. Perplexing mysteries will be cleared up. Scientific and moral truth will be clothed with fresh charms, under their instructions; and the soul will kindle into a glow of intense enthusiasm, at the thought of the splendid fields of knowledge that are yet to be traversed, and of the facilities and aids to be enjoyed in exploring them. The power of angels is represented as immensely great. This is indicated in the appellations given to them in the Scriptures — They are called Powers, Thrones, Authorities, Dominions, Principalities, etc.

David exclaims, "Bless the Lord, you his angels, who excel in strength." Several instances are given in the Scriptures of the exercise of their power. In one night, an angel destroyed, of the army of Sennacherib, an hundred and eighty-five thousand men. As though by a single stroke, this vast multitude were stretched dead throughout the camp. The sentinels, as, early in the morning, they passed from tent to tent, were appalled at the sight of their prostrate fallen warriors, who but yesterday were in the full glow of health and courage, and stood ready for the fiercest conflict. The slaughter of the first-born, in Egypt, was accomplished by one angel, within so short a period that the wild lamentations of bereaved parents burst at once from their habitations. Every house was, in an instant, a scene of indescribable consternation, and every street was lined with the habitations of death. To effect the destruction of Jerusalem, on account of the sin of David, in numbering the people — but one angel was sent forth. "And David lifted up his eyes and saw the angel of the Lord stand between the earth and the Heaven, having a drawn sword in his hand stretched out over Jerusalem." How terrible and sublime was the scene! Around the offending monarch lay the holy city, the metropolis of the religious world, with its inhabitants slumbering in supposed security. The pale moon was throwing its silver beams upon the turrets and battlements, and upon the domes of the highest palaces. The stars were calmly looking down upon the plains, mountains and gardens, of Judea. Directly over the city was this bright and powerful being, grasping a glittering sword. A single movement of the fatal weapon, and death might enter every habitation. A single stroke, and that magnificent city might become a vast tomb, with no beating heart, no sign of life, within its walls. Do we wonder that "David and the elders of Israel, who were clothed in sackcloth, fell upon their faces!" Do we wonder that they pleaded earnestly with God, that that dreadful sword might be returned into its scabbard? In the glorious visions that passed before John, as described in the book of Revelation, angels are represented as clothed with vast power, as controlling the physical elements, holding the four winds of Heaven, and executing the judgments of God upon his guilty subjects. In the descriptions, given in this book, of the angels,

there is a mingling of beauty and sublimity, of majesty and terror, of thrilling eloquence and solemn grandeur, that cannot be surpassed.

While the heavens were covered with scenes descriptive of the glory of Christ, of the prosperity of his church, and of the triumphs of his kingdom — while important events in the history of the world's renovation and redemption crowded upon each other, in their struggle to manifest themselves — the apostle sees seven mighty angels standing before God, with seven trumpets in their hands. As one startling peal follows another, the most terrible woes descend and burst upon the world. The sky is darkened by fearful storms, and the deep, heavy thunder, and appalling lightning, tell that the day of God's wrath has come! The guilty stand aghast, and gaze with horror upon the scene. Chariots of fire are seen coursing through the heavens, and bearing the messengers of the divine vengeance. Burning mountains are hurled to and fro, and consume everything within their reach. Stars fall, the sun becomes darkened, and the moon refuses to shed its light. "And I beheld, and heard an angel flying through the midst of Heaven, saying with a loud voice, Woe, woe, woe, to the inhabitants of the earth, by reason of the other voices of the trumpet of the three angels, which are yet to sound!" In the midst of these wild commotions and terrible calamities, an announcement comes to the apostle, in a voice of thunder, "Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication!" He hears the crash of her falling palaces and towers, and sees the smoke ascending from her ruins. The shrieks of her guilty inhabitants rend the air. Her haughty kings are laid low, and their scepters, crowns and thrones, are buried beneath the ruins of the city. They experience the fulfillment of the terrible prophecy, "If any man worships the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand — the same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation." The apostle also has a view of a great battle between the holy angels and the enemies of Jehovah; Michael and his hosts are arrayed against the dragon and his angels; the two parties virtually representing the principles of redemption and holiness on the one hand — and the elements of wickedness and rebellion on the other. A fierce struggle takes place, in which each contends for the victory. The holy angels are nerved for the conflict by the consciousness that they are defending the citadels of Heaven, protecting the throne of Jehovah, and guarding the interests and happiness of millions of obedient subjects, against the destructive purposes of intruders and rebels. Thus animated by the purest motives and loftiest purposes, and sustained by an Almighty arm, they overcome and subdue their foes.

These judgments, thus brought upon the enemies of God, all the holy angels are represented as approving. "After these things, I heard a great voice of much people in Heaven, saying, Alleluia: salvation and glory and honor and power unto the Lord our God, for true and righteous are his judgments!" And again, "I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia; for the Lord God omnipotent reigns!"

Eminent holiness is also a characteristic of the celestial inhabitants. This is abundantly evident, from the nature of their abode, their proximity to the Holy of holies, the Biblical representations of their character, and the services and worship in which they are constantly engaged. On the morning of the creation, they are introduced as employed in acts of worship. As the beauties of the new-made earth appear, and planets and suns burst forth from chaos and darkness, at the

summons of Omnipotence, "the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy." As the Lord of Glory leaves his throne, and comes upon his sacred mission, a multitude of heavenly hosts attend him; and as the royal retinue draw near to earth, they are heard by pious shepherds "praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." Their holy character may be inferred, too, from the fact that, "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repents." The news that one wanderer is returning to his Father's house, that one spirit is breaking away from the dominion of sin — sends a thrill of joy through their shining ranks; it flies from host to host, rolling up a wave of exultation, and causing Heaven to swell with new anthems of praise, and fresh songs of triumph. The holiness of angels is indicated in their cheerful and uniform obedience. They are often spoken of as being sent by God upon various missions to the earth. "My God has sent his angel, and has shut the lions' mouths that they have not hurt me," Daniel 6:22. "In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth," Luke 1:26. "Now I know of a surety that the Lord has sent his angel, and has delivered me out of the hand of Herod," Acts 12:11.

Thus we find that the angels are ever ready to obey their Sovereign, and execute his will. Their plans and purposes are in unison with the Divine Mind. They have no selfish ends in view, no unholy desires to gratify. They have no higher ambition than to execute, with fidelity and success, the commands of their King. They delight in serving. They glory in their loyalty. They covet no other state, for they have reached the highest state attainable by created intelligences. They can go no higher, without being infinite. They can occupy no loftier positions, without being gods.

They know, too, that holiness and happiness are inseparably connected. One sinful act, they are aware, would banish them from royal courts, strip them of all honors, plunge them from light into darkness, from celestial heights and pleasures into the regions of despair. Hence, they are held by the strongest motives to their allegiance to God. They feel that their interests are identified with the interests of God's holy kingdom, and that their happiness depends upon the perpetuity of the divine government, and the supremacy of the divine will.

How delightful to contemplate these pure and bright beings, whose thoughts, purposes and deeds, are resplendent with holiness, whose characters are free from the least imperfection, and over whose spirits no shadow of sin or evil ever passes! Their very names give to us exalted conceptions of their purity, dignity, and elevated position.

They are called Sons of God. They bear the image of the Father, are the members of his family, the recipients of his warm paternal affections, and they return to him the love and services of obedient children.

They are Living Ones; beings instinct with life, full of animation, in whom are condensed all the attributes of intelligence, and the perfections of moral worth. Their powers have developed and expanded under the genial influences of Heaven, and amid beauties and splendors that have left their images impressed upon them.

They are Burning Ones; beings that shine with celestial luster, with the brightness of "morning stars." They reflect the beams of the Sun of Righteousness, and are radiant with the beautiful tints of the rainbow. "I saw," says John, "another mighty angel come down from Heaven, clothed

with a cloud; and a rainbow was upon his head, and his face was, as it were, the sun, and his feet as pillars of fire." And again, "After these things I saw another angel come down from Heaven, having great power: and the earth was lightened with his glory." His very presence illuminated the mountains, and valleys, and plains, and spread over the whole scene a heavenly luster.

Another characteristic of the celestial inhabitants is their pure benevolence. Although they are often represented as executing the judgments of Jehovah, as in the sublime visions that passed before John — yet they delight in missions of love. With what alacrity did an angel hasten to Hagar in the wilderness, to relieve her distress, and afford her comfort in her loneliness and sorrow!

What earnestness did the angels manifest to save Lot and his family from the ruin in which Sodom and its guilty inhabitants were to be involved! In the quiet of evening they approached the house, to warn them of their danger, and afford them time to prepare for their flight. Patiently they wait for the slow hours of night to bring the dawn of the morning. As soon as the sun rises, and its rays gild the towers and turrets of the city, the angels, with their charge, are seen hurrying towards the gates. Having reached the plain, they observe, in Lot and his family, indications of a reluctance to proceed. With the deepest anxiety apparent in their countenances and manner, they cried out, "Escape for your life! look not behind you, neither stay you in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest you be consumed!" A very touching example of angelic tenderness and love is furnished in the case of the prophet Elijah. This servant of the Lord, after a most triumphant vindication of the sincerity of his faith, and the truth of his religion, upon Mount Carmel, had escaped from his persecutors, and reached the wilderness, weary and exhausted. Reclining under a juniper-tree, and pleading, almost in despair, for death, he fell asleep. An angel was sent to him, and, bending over the unconscious slumberer, is impressed with the prophet's destitute and sad condition. He who, but a short time previous, had called fire from Heaven, and confounded vast multitudes of people — who had defied and slain four hundred and fifty of the prophets of Baal — was now a solitary fugitive in a desert, homeless, friendless, and ready to die. The angel prepares his food, and, touching him, said, "Arise and eat." Having obeyed, he again laid down. The angel addressed him the second time, and besides giving him food, he cheered and strengthened him. But the most beautiful and affecting instances of the love of angels are furnished in their ministrations to our Lord, while he was upon the earth. In his infancy they watched over him, with the utmost solicitude. When a cruel tyrant, thirsting for his blood, formed a conspiracy to destroy him, an angel said to Joseph, "Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be you there until I bring you word." It was not enough that he warned him to escape — but such is his tender care, that he tells him not to stir from his retreat, until he brings him word. He wishes to guard every avenue through which the treachery or hatred of Herod could reach the infant Savior. As the Messiah grew up, he was constantly watched over and guarded by the bright squadrons that were sent from his Father's kingdom. In every stage of his progress he was emphatically "seen of angels." They witnessed his humility, strict obedience, conflicts, and bitter trials. When severely tempted by Satan, and left upon the pinnacle of the temple, "angels came and ministered to him." In that terrible scene in the garden, when he struggled with "the rulers of the darkness of this world," when his mysterious and solemn agony forced the blood through the pores of his skin, and he was ready to faint from exhaustion, "there appeared an angel unto him from Heaven, strengthening him." With the most intense sympathy, with a spirit alive to every want, pain and groan, of the Savior, the celestial messenger delights to soothe his anguish and support his

burdens. When betrayed by Judas, and about to be seized by the cruel mob, Christ said, "Don't you know that I can now ask my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?" So ready was the Father to send them, that a word only was necessary to secure the presence of a force, that would instantly disarm every foe. We may almost see the legions pressing forward for the conflict, their swords flashing amid the darkness of that cruel night, their countenances burning with zeal to rescue the Lord of glory. But they are held back by the arm of Omnipotence. No legion is sent out, no celestial warriors engaged in the conflict. At the victory of the Messiah over death and Hell, the angels come to celebrate. Their arrival is announced by the shock of an earthquake. "There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from Heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men!" Matthew 28:2-4

How much is compressed within this short description! What benevolence, purity and glory, beam forth from this mysterious messenger! Behold him, sitting in dignity and conscious strength, upon that stone. The Lord has risen, and departed. The sentinels lie apparently dead at his feet. His robes are of the purest whiteness. His countenance shines with an effulgence that can only be compared to the lightning. The pious women, who came to the tomb seeking their Lord, he endeavors to soothe. He bids them hasten and assure his disciples that he has risen from the dead. But our limits will not allow us to refer to all the instances of angelic sympathy and love, recorded in the Scriptures. We have said enough to show the nature and character of the inhabitants of that bright world, to which the saints are soon to be introduced.

We have seen that holy angels occupy the highest rank in the scale of created intelligences; that they are endowed with brilliant powers, vast capacities, an intense desire for knowledge and love of truth; that they possess every virtue that contributes to form an elevated and holy character; that there is a grandeur connected with them, that is calculated to excite our highest admiration, and warmest affection. To dwell with such bright, pure spirits forever — to enjoy their society, listen to their discourses, walk with them amid the bowers, streams and fountains, of the celestial paradise; worship with them in the temples of the New Jerusalem; soar with them amid the worlds and systems that float around the throne of their great King, to bow with them in deep reverence before the Eternal God — how blessed and glorious such anticipations! How rapidly will our social nature be developed and strengthened, under circumstances so favorable! With what delight shall we look upon their white robes, their celestial forms, their dazzling countenances, their eyes beaming with true affection, their lips uttering words of wisdom and love! With what rapture shall we listen to their songs and praises! As we approach the eternal city, we may hear, bursting from every inhabitant, the loud chorus, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will towards men!" As we draw nearer the cry from the heralding angels reaches us: "Lift up your heads, O gates! and be lifted up, O ancient doors! that the King of glory may come in!" Psalms 24:9. The choirs from within are heard anxiously inquiring, "Who is the King of glory?" The shout of the approaching hosts answers, "The Lord, strong and mighty; the Lord, mighty in battle!"

Again the summons peals forth from the glowing, resplendent legions — "Lift up your heads, O gates!" The same inquiry comes from within the city, "Who is this King of glory?" The innumerable hosts, now burning with devotion, and wrought up to the highest degree of enthusiasm, thunder out, in peals that almost shake the walls and gates, "The Lord Almighty, he is the King of glory!"

The Lord of cherubim and seraphim, angels and archangels, of the redeemed multitudes gathered out of every nation, tribe and kingdom, "he is the King of glory!" And when we are admitted within the city, and the full splendor of angelic worship bursts upon us, we can only give vent to our overpowering emotions in the sublime language of John: "Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. In a loud voice they sang: Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!" Revelation 5:11-12

07 - The Glory of Christ in Heaven

The Glory of Christ in Heaven "They shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of Heaven, with power and great glory." Matthew 24:30

"Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in Heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father!" Php 2:9-11

Heaven without Christ would be like the firmament without a sun. We would have, indeed, the stars, angelic spirits, whose light and beauty would cheer us; but there would be no bright luminary to pour its effulgence upon the cities, and gardens, and kingdoms, of the celestial world. Many advantages would be enjoyed by the saints, in the society of the holy angels; but "the chief among ten thousand," the "one altogether lovely," would be absent! As Christ is the central power, the vital animating principle, the "all in all," of the church militant — so he will be the object of the highest admiration, and most intense delight, of the church triumphant. The redeemed will gaze upon him with emotions that will thrill every sensibility, and stir the deepest and holiest feelings of the soul. They will recognize in him "the author and finisher of their faith;" their "great advocate" at God's right hand; the "bright and morning star;" the "only-begotten of the Father;" the "Emmanuel, Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, who is exalted far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion." That which will strike the saints with amazement and delight, will be the contrast between the Savior's circumstances in Heaven — and those that surrounded him upon the earth.

Instead of a crude and comfortless structure for the resting-place of his infant form, instead of wandering homeless and friendless upon a bleak and desolate world — he will be surrounded with the magnificence of royal palaces, and the splendor of heavenly cities.

Instead of being an object of scorn and hatred, driven from village to village, a "man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" — he will be attended with myriads of celestial beings, who will regard him with the most intense affection, and who will bow before him, in obedience to the royal edict, "Let all the angels of God worship him."

Instead of meeting a few humble disciples in an obscure room, he will stand in the midst of "a great multitude, which no man can number, of all nations and kindred and people and tongues, clothed with white robes and palms in their hands."

Instead of performing here and there a miracle, before a company of the idle, the curious and the skeptical — he will present to the universe the miracle of a world redeemed from the power of sin — a world raised from darkness and wretchedness into the regions of light, purity, and blessedness. The same being who was crudely seized in the night by an armed mob; hurried away to a mock trial; scourged, spit upon, crowned with thorns that pierced his fevered brow; driven towards Calvary amid the jests and wild clamor of an infuriated rabble — who, exhausted from fatigue and torture, was nailed to the accursed tree, and expired, amid rending rocks, opening graves, a darkened sky, and the shouts of merciless foes — shall be seen exalted far above all

principalities and powers, and receiving the homage and enthusiastic praises of the hosts of Heaven! His glory will appear in the new and wonderful developments that will be made of his character. While upon the earth, his virtues shone with all the beauty and luster that could be conveyed through the medium of a human body. Though incarnate, he was yet, here, "the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person." The glory of the Father shone through him, and he revealed its excellencies, just as light, shining through a prism, develops its beautiful colors. In his whole life he reflected the virtues and holy principles of Heaven. Not a cloud of error ever cast its shadow over his pure spirit;

not a sinful word ever escaped his lips;

not a selfish motive influenced his conduct.

He was the Shekinah of the temple of humanity. From his sacred person streamed forth a divine light, that relieved the darkness of the world. He was the "Holy of holies" of a spiritual temple, in which all the nations of the earth will, one day, assemble for worship.

He was also a force for immeasurable good among guilty men. His mission constituted the epoch in the world's history, towards which all previous events, prophetic utterances and revelations, converged, and from which flowed the influences and moral agencies that are revolutionizing and blessing the nations. He was, in fact, himself, history; the only history that embodies the records of what is imperishable in the career of man; the only history that infallibly indicates the destiny of the race, and that will, in future ages, be studied with absorbing interest. For in him centered the hopes, happiness and glory, of all future generations. As the second Adam, he came as the progenitor of a new, more elevated, and spiritual race. As a king, the scepters of all other kings must grow weak before his increasing power. As the founder of an empire, all other empires must break up, that from their ruins may rise, in its beauty and majesty, the kingdom of Christ. As the author of a new system of faith, he must advance until the human mind is purged from all error; until infidelity lays down its arms, in meek submission; until every idol falls, every heathen temple is deserted, and every priesthood is merged in the office of the one great High Priest.

But, notwithstanding Christ manifested and accomplished so much — yet human nature, in its best state, is comparatively an imperfect medium, through which to exhibit the power and luster of divine virtues. When Christ visited us, we are informed that he laid aside his glory and the robes of royalty, and "made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant." The act of appearing in a lonely condition, however, we do not regard as of great moment, while contemplating the mission of the Redeemer; for all the honors of princes, and the splendor of earthly palaces, and the brilliant insignia of worldly distinctions, were as nothing, compared with the glory that he had with the Father. His becoming incarnate, whether he appears as a servant or a king, required him to lay aside the peculiar splendor of his person; and had he come forth from a princely court rather than a manger, he would still have humbled himself. The widest distinctions in human society are so narrow and insignificant as not to enter into the account, when we speak of the incarnation of so exalted and illustrious a Being. Neither do these distinctions furnish any basis to aid us in our endeavors to measure the height of his heavenly glory. As the most distant points in the earth's wide orbit around the sun seem to be in the closest proximity, when the astronomer attempts to make the intervening line the basis of mathematical inquiry into the distance of a fixed star — so the wide distinctions among men dwindle into insignificance, when we attempt to

measure and comprehend the exaltation of Christ in his celestial state. His object in coming to our world was to enter the heart of humanity; at what point was a matter of but little consequence. He doubtless had good reasons for selecting the lowest rank. He may have seen more worth, more stern integrity and warm affection, there, than in higher ranks. He may have perceived in this class elements of character upon which he could rely in the hour of trial — a strength of principle having force adequate to smite the giant systems of iniquity and hypocrisy against which he must contend. He certainly found more sympathy, more real friendship and devotion, there, than elsewhere.

Besides, the object of Christ's mission was not to benefit a few, in select and exclusive circles — but to bless the mass of mankind. He came to address man as man — to lay down rules for his government in all the varied circumstances and conditions of life. He came to throw into society elements and principles that would elevate the whole people, that would revolutionize the sentiments and hopes of the race, that would work society clear of every form of vice, every system of error and oppression, and establish the reign of right, justice, and holiness. Nor was he content with simply giving to the world principles for the government of their conduct. He gave to them a life. He exhibited to them principle and truth, in action; living, moving and breathing, in an example. He not only pointed out the way to Heaven — but he showed men how to walk therein. He not only warned them against temptation — but taught them how to grapple with it, and how, in the fiercest conflict, to obtain the mastery. He not only said, "Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you," but he gave the most illustrious example of these precepts that the world ever beheld.

He not only told us to make preparation for death — but he showed us how to die, and by his resurrection and ascension he "brought life and immortality to light." As we may learn more of the nature and glory of light from the sun, than from the clearest and most accurate definitions of the word which lexicographers can furnish; so we may learn more of virtue, of theology and of moral truth, from the life of Christ — than from the most elaborate and voluminous systems of divinity. And if the excellencies of his character shone so brightly in this dark world — if they were fraught with so many blessings, amid circumstances so adverse to their influence — then how glorious must be the developments of his divine attributes in that celestial abode, where he has a name that is above every name, where he is exalted far above all principalities and powers!

If here his purity, holiness and benevolence, were so conspicuous, and excited such admiration and gratitude in the hearts of his disciples — then with what rapture will the redeemed in Heaven gaze upon the full opening of his divine nature, and the splendors of his exalted and matchless character! Language, indeed, fails us, in our attempts to describe the emotions of the soul, when it shall view for the first time the Savior, radiant with the glory of his divine person!

"O, could I speak the matchless worth,

O, could I sound the glories forth,

Which in my Savior shine!

I'd soar and touch the heavenly strings,

And vie with Gabriel, while he sings,

In notes almost divine.
I'd sing the precious blood he spilt,
My ransom from the dreadful guilt
Of sin, and wrath divine;
I'd sing his glorious righteousness,
In which all-perfect, heavenly dress,
My soul shall ever shine.
I'd sing the characters he bears,
And all the forms of love he wears,
Exalted on his throne;
In loftiest songs of sweetest praise,
I would to everlasting days
Make all his glories known.
Well, the delightful day will come,
When my dear Lord will bring me home,
And I shall see his face;
Then, with my Savior, brother, friend,
A blessed eternity I'll spend,
Triumphant in his grace!"

Although our clearest conceptions of Christ in glory must be necessarily partial and obscure, and our delineations must fall vastly below the reality — yet we would, in dependence upon divine aid, examine separately some of the attributes which in combination give such perfection and luster to the Savior's character.

Conspicuous above all other virtues will appear his love. This will be the most brilliant star in the whole constellation, and will excite among the redeemed around his throne the most profound gratitude and intense delight. It will be seen that all the other attributes are tributary to this; that the omnipotence of Christ has been employed in opening channels through which his love might flow forth to the rational creation; that his wisdom has been exercised in devising means for reaching every heart that was willing to be the recipient of its blessings; and that the eternity of his being gives perpetuity to the manifestations of his benevolence.

It will be seen, while contemplating the dignity and glory of Christ, how great was the love that prompted to such sacrifices as were necessary to effect the redemption of sinners. This subject will fill the saint with amazement, with infinite wonder. It will swell and expand before his

imagination, the more he meditates upon it. It will spread out before him as an ocean — boundless, fathomless; an ocean which none but an immortal being, with the ages of eternity before him, can traverse. He will see that, as the system which Christ established upon the earth requires centuries for its full development, and the growth of its rich benefits — so this attribute of divine love, though it opens with such brilliancy before the redeemed, will yet require the ages of eternity for the manifestation of its various elements, and the full display of its surpassing glories. Long will be the period before he will "be able to comprehend, with all saints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height: and to know the love of Christ, which surpasses knowledge."

Yet even now he can scarcely believe that such a being took upon him our nature, and was made in the form of a servant. "What!" he exclaims, "was he whom I now behold encircled with such honors — receiving the worship of myriads of angels — once a babe in Bethlehem, the object of a tyrant's hatred and the public's scorn? Was he once hunted, like a wild beast, from village to village, by bloodthirsty enemies? Was he a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief? Was it this glorious personage . . .

who hung upon the cruel cross,

whose hands and feet were lacerated by the nails,

whose side was pierced, and

who expired amid tortures and insults, that the heart sickens to contemplate?

"O! as I look from these heights down upon that dark world — that abode of misery, theater of crimes, wars, oppression, pestilence and death — I can scarcely believe that it was ever visited by so pure and resplendent a being! The mystery of godliness — 'God manifest in the flesh' — is increased, rather than diminished.

"I had hoped to have unraveled this mystery — but it grows upon me. The more I attempt to grasp it, the more it spreads out and extends beyond my comprehension. At every attempt to fathom it, it becomes deeper and deeper. 'God manifest in the flesh!' O, let the words be inscribed upon every arch and column in the holy city! Let them be engraved upon every redeemed soul! Let them constitute the chorus of every anthem, and inspire every heart with the spirit of enthusiastic devotion! Let them thrill the universe with gratitude and praise!

"And to remember that these sacrifices were made and sufferings endured for me, that I might be redeemed from the curse of the law — that I, a guilty wanderer, might be brought back to my Father's house!"

"O, for this love let rocks and hills

Their lasting silence break;

And all harmonious human tongues

The Savior's praises speak!

Angels, assist our mighty joys,

Strike all your harps of gold!

But when you raise your highest notes,

His love can never be told!" As the ages of eternity roll on, new features of this attribute, as we have already intimated, will be developed. Fresh coruscations will burst forth, and shed their radiance upon all surrounding objects. Its blessings, too, will be experienced in a far higher degree there, than they could be on earth. With glorified bodies, with enlarged capacities, with purified hearts — we shall be fit receptacles for the holy influences and rich benefits imparted by this benevolence. There will be no obstacles, as there were upon earth, to impede the flow of the mighty tide.

Among the vast multitude, there will be no blind waiting to receive their sight, no sufferer needing immediate relief, no sick to be healed, no dead to raise, no skeptic to convince, no foe to disarm; but all will be prepared to receive the full and repeated impressions of this love.

Having reached a world where there is no more pain, sickness or death, where there is no night of sorrow, where there is "a rest for the people of God," they will experience more fully the blessedness, and drink more deeply from the fountain, of this love. And Christ will be able to accomplish his ardent wish, expressed on earth in the following language: "That the love with which you (the Father) have loved me may be in them, and I in them." His desire was, that the infinite love that the Father entertained towards him, should be in all his followers, and that he might himself dwell in them. It was not enough that they were near him, and looked upon him, and felt the power of his example, and experienced the benefits of his affection; but he wished to be in them, to have his image stamped upon them, to have them united to himself as the branches are united to the vine!

He desired to establish a divine unity that would embrace all his followers — a unity, not only of spirit, sentiment and life — but of being. "Holy Father, keep through your own name those whom you have given me, that they all may be one; even as you are in me, and I in you, that they also may be one in us." This wish the Savior dwelt upon, with peculiar emphasis, in his farewell address to his disciples, and in the fervent prayer which he afterwards offered up in their behalf. He comforted them with the assurance that this union should be consummated in Heaven, and that they should there behold his glory, and experience the full blessedness of his love. "Father, I will that they also whom you have given me, be with me — that they may behold my glory." The wisdom of Christ will constitute an element of his glory. Of this wisdom we obtain some glimpses here, from the plan of redemption, the manner of its execution, and its application to the condition and necessities of man. But our knowledge of God — of his divine government, of the nature and consequences of sin, and of the realities of the future life — is too limited to allow us to obtain adequate conceptions of the wisdom of Christ. Even inspired men do not attempt to unfold it. In their comprehensive and sententious language, they speak of Christ as one "in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." He is called, too, "the wisdom of God;" not simply wise, or a striking manifestation of wisdom — but the very essence and substance of wisdom.

We may well suppose that, to carry into successful operation a plan such as he formed, of taking his stand between the divine government with its rigid laws and fearful penalties, on the one hand — and the rebellion and awful degeneracy of mankind, on the other — and attempting to reconcile the two, and bring into harmony the opposing parties, required a degree of wisdom of which no finite mind can conceive. To be stationed between such forces, for the purpose of hushing the

storm of battle, breaking every hostile weapon, bringing order out of confusion, loyalty out of rebellion — was an undertaking that required, not only infinite love — but boundless wisdom — wisdom adequate to such a distribution and adjustment of influences as would accomplish the design. The wisdom required in creating a world, or in constructing the human frame, or the more delicate piece of workmanship, the mind — is of an inferior character to that demanded by this enterprise. For this is a moral enterprise, one with which physical force has nothing to do. It pertains to a moral government, and moral subjects. The government above must be sustained, at all hazards. That cannot be lowered. Its requisitions admit of no compromise. In the maintenance of its stability and authority, is involved everything that is dear to God, or valuable to the universe. The honor of the Deity, the highest happiness of his holy subjects, the accomplishment of his eternal designs — are all connected with it. Better that Heaven and earth pass away — better that all that is material, and visible, and finite, be swept from existence — than that one jot or tittle of that law remain unfulfilled. On the other hand, the free agency of man must be preserved. However desperate his wickedness, or fierce his passions, or corrupt his heart — he must be reached, if reached at all, by moral means. He cannot be dragged by force out of the deep pit into which he has plunged himself. His sensibilities must be affected, his heart must be moved, his sense of gratitude must be touched.

Besides, the balance of influences between the myriads of worlds that are scattered through immensity must be preserved. It becomes a matter of precise calculation how much moral influence can be employed by the Supreme Executive, consistently with other claims, to overcome the wickedness and apostasy of man. This scheme of redemption is no secret matter. It is no private or local enterprise. It is open to the gaze and scrutiny of all intelligences. Angels desire to fathom its mysteries, desire to solve the problem how God can be just, and yet justify those who believe. All the subjects of God's government are interested in the bearings of this scheme upon the administration, upon the claims of strict justice, and upon their own relations to the Deity. It must, therefore, be conducted with infinite wisdom, and with a full knowledge of all the influences that may flow from it — all the springs of action, among myriads of intelligences, that it may impact. In the execution of the plan, the principles of worldly wisdom and the elements of worldly power are entirely disregarded. At the first opening of the enterprise, it appears to human view a failure. The great agencies of influence, kings, governments, priests, the learned and wealthy classes, are against it. Its hero succeeds in gathering a few disciples from among the obscure and illiterate — but upon others his mission makes, comparatively, a slight impression. After various reverses, the whole scheme ends in, apparently, a total defeat. The Messiah, who but recently was so full of promises to his followers, hangs dead upon a cross. His few friends have scattered, and the affairs of the world go on as usual. The inhabitants of Jerusalem pursue their avocations, as though nothing of marked importance had occurred.

But, lo! this mysterious being emerges from the tomb, and the apparent defeat is in reality a triumph! That which seemed a failure, is success. The very opposition, ignominy, suffering and death, are to the Messiah the sources of his power. The wickedness of the world furnishes him with weapons with which he may make successful war upon wickedness. Every blow that fell upon him was an earthquake shock to the citadel of iniquity. Every insult, was an assault upon the kingdom of darkness. Every mocking word that was uttered against him, foretold the downfall of the powers of sin.

Such was the consummate wisdom with which this drama of salvation was conducted, that it was made to bear with equal power upon the government above, and the rebels below. It satisfied the law, rendering it consistent for the Supreme Judge to pardon the penitent believer; and it was calculated, above all other means, to make a beneficial moral impression upon mankind. Its apparent weakness, constituted its strength. Its ignominy, was the source of its glory. Christ crucified was "the power of God and the wisdom of God." The arm that quivered upon the cross, upheld the moral government of the universe. The heart that bled, was destined to send its pulsations through the human family, and affect all succeeding generations, down to the end of time. But the wisdom of Christ can be fully developed and seen, only with the full development of this mighty scheme of salvation upon a wider and loftier field than this. When redemption shall have worked out its sublime results here, rolled from the earth the darkness and gloom of heathenism, lifted the nations from their degradation and moral debasement, and then breaks forth, with still more glorious achievements, upon the plains of the celestial kingdom — then will the wisdom of Christ appear in its full perfection. It will be seen that, instead of destroying the law, he has fulfilled all its requisitions, and rendered it honorable. Instead of weakening the divine government, he has added to its strength and authority. He has furnished the most abundant evidence and the most impressive illustrations of the justice, as well as the mercy, of God. He has exalted the divine character in the estimation of all rational creatures, and his great atoning sacrifice has served to consolidate the administration of Heaven, and has thrown a luster and glory over the entire moral universe.

Another feature in Christ's glory, which will stand out with distinctness and prominence, will be his power. Besides his infinite love and boundless wisdom, the manifestations of his power will excite the admiration of the saints. "They shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of Heaven, with power, and great glory." Indeed, seven hundred years before Christ's advent upon the earth, Isaiah prophesied, "His name shall be called the Mighty God!" And a thousand years previous, David, in referring to his coming, after speaking of his beauty and eloquence as a king, exclaimed, "Gird your sword upon your thigh, O most mighty, with your glory and your majesty. And in your majesty ride prosperously, because of truth and meekness and righteousness."

Upon this passage, Bishop Horne forcibly remarks, "The Messiah is, in these words, magnificently described, as making his progress among the nations, seated in his triumphal chariot, adorned with all the regal virtues, achieving the most astonishing victories, and, by the irresistible might of his power, subduing idolatry and iniquity to the faith and temper of the Gospel." The Psalmist continues, "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever: the scepter of your kingdom is a righteous scepter." After describing his battles and victories, the Messiah is presented as seated upon a throne that shall endure forever, and as swaying a scepter pledged to an administration of righteousness.

John also refers to him as a conqueror: "I saw, and behold a white horse; and he who sat on him had a rainbow, and a crown was given unto him; and he went forth conquering and to conquer." Just before his ascension, he said to his disciples, "All power is given unto me in Heaven and in earth." And in many passages of Scripture we find the attribute of omnipotence ascribed to him.

While he was upon the earth, his power was manifested in various ways. By his miracles he demonstrated his control over the elements and laws of the physical world — over diseases and

death. He also showed that the evil spirits were subject to his power, and that all the holy angels were under his authority. Behold him, calming the troubled sea, hushing the winds to rest, and walking upon the waves. Behold him, at one time, turning water into wine; at another time, feeding thousands with a few loaves and fish; at another, withering, by a word, a fig-tree. Behold him passing through Galilee, "healing all manner of sickness, and all manner of disease among the people." Wherever he moves, "the blind receive their sight, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up." So charged and impregnated is he with power, that there is healing virtue even in the hem of his garment! Nor are these the first manifestations of his omnipotence. John declares, that "all things were made by him, and without him was not anything made, that was made." The language of Paul, upon this point, in his epistle to the Colossians, is most decisive and unqualified. After speaking with enthusiastic eloquence of the efficacy of Christ's atoning sacrifice, he says, "For by him all things were created: things in Heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy!" Colossians 1:16-18

Future events, also, are subject to the power of Christ. His word will bring forth the dead from their tombs: "All that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth." The trumpet-peal will roll over the islands, and oceans, and continents of the earth. It will break the long silence of the tomb, be heard in the caverns of the deep, reverberate over the fields of battle, and summon the multitude, who have crowded this planet, to judgment! The work of judging the world, and of rewarding the righteous and punishing the wicked, will be performed by him. He is repeatedly represented, by the sacred writers, as seated upon his throne with all nations gathered before him, and rewarding each individual according to their deeds. His power is also exhibited in other forms in the Scriptures. He is spoken of as "mighty to save," as "able to support them that are tempted," as "able to save to the uttermost" all who may come to him and put their trust in him. In his conflicts with his enemies he is exhibited as subduing them, as treading them beneath his feet, as breaking them with a rod of iron, as dashing them in pieces like a potter's vessel. Thus, though without the external marks of authority — though he moved about as a servant among the princes of the earth — though he was poor among the opulent, and a despised Nazarene among the proud and haughty Pharisees — yet within his sacred bosom slumbered a power that held a universe within its grasp; a power acknowledged by all ranks of spiritual existences, from the highest archangel down to the lowest of the fallen spirits. And when Christ shall appear in his exaltation, then will this attribute be seen in its full majesty and glory. All the inspired utterances that we have quoted will be luminous with new meaning. The saint will understand the import of the declaration "all power in Heaven and in earth is given unto me." He will see that this power extends over every world and system, and through all ranks of intelligences. He will see that the authority of Christ is acknowledged by every holy being in the universe; and he will be ready to join in the ascription, "Unto him who loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and has made us kings and priests unto God and his Father — to him be glory and dominion, forever and ever!"

It will also serve to increase the admiration of the saints, as they gaze upon the Savior's glory, to learn by what gracious instrumentalities, and frequent manifestations of his power — he has

carried them safely through the temptations of life, and enabled them to reach their everlasting home.

Previous to Christ's departure from earth, he made to his followers the promise, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world!" He also assured them that he would send the Comforter, who would teach them all things, and bring to their remembrance, and forcibly impress upon their minds, the precious doctrines which he had taught them. The holy angels he sent forth "to minister to them who shall be heirs of salvation." Thus every heavenly agency was employed in promoting the sanctification of the church, and advancing believers in the divine life.

God the Father, and God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, angels and archangels, are concentrating their influences upon the Christian, to spiritualize him, and fit him for the joys and duties of an immortal state. And were we to be suddenly endowed with powers of vision that would enable us to discern spiritual objects, we would behold multitudes of "ministering spirits," who were sympathizing with the saints in their trials and discouragements, engaging with them in their conflicts with sin, and aiding them in wrestling "against principalities and powers, and the rulers of the darkness of this world." We would behold the blessed Comforter strengthening the weak, sustaining the faint-hearted, and inciting all to watchfulness, self-examination and prayer. An omnipotent Savior would be seen entering his temple, the soul of the believer — seeking to purify its atmosphere, decorate its walls, strengthen its columns, quicken its devotion, and bring every thought, desire and purpose of the soul, to the altar, to receive consecration at his hands.

"Lo, I am with you always." What is the full import of these words? By what secret avenues does the Savior gain access to our spirits? How does he touch the springs of action — how does he . . .

excite holy desires,

protect us from the adversary,

incline our feet heavenward,

"work in us both to will and to do of his own good pleasure"?

We know not now — but we shall know hereafter. And a knowledge of what has been done to promote our sanctification, a knowledge of the vast moral machinery that has been kept in motion to . . .

sustain our faith,

suppress the risings of a sinful nature,

preserve the supremacy of moral principle in the soul, and

carry forward the work of a thorough spiritual renovation —

will excite the highest gratitude and most intense admiration. The Christian will see that his pathway here was lined with invisible agencies, more potent than the highest visible means of grace; that he was instructed by more eloquent messengers than ever addressed him from the pulpit; that he was "surrounded with a great cloud of witnesses," who watched with intense concern his progress, and stimulated him to "run with patience the race set before" him. He will

see what solicitude and effort it has cost the "author and finisher of his faith" to perfect his sanctification, and fit him for his present exalted position, and rapturous joys.

08 - The Throne in Heaven

The Throne in Heaven

"I saw a great white throne, and him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the Heaven fled away." Revelation 20:11 Our views of the heavenly world would be incomplete, unless we consider the moral government which God has established over his kingdom. This is presented to us, in the passage which we have quoted, under the emblem of "a great white throne." The whiteness of the throne indicates, not only its purity — but its brilliancy. Yet the luster is not so dazzling as to prevent the apostle from beholding the Being who is seated upon the throne. Aided by supernatural powers of vision, he sees Jehovah in his majesty, before whom the earth and the heavens flee away. Such is the intensity of his glory, that the universe is represented as dissolving before it, and the laws of nature as being suspended. Similar expressions are found in the Psalms of David, and in the writings of the prophets. At the appearance of Jehovah, the earth trembles, the mountains melt, the seas retire. "The mountains quake at him, the hills melt, and the earth is burned at his presence; yes, the world, and all that dwell therein." The throne of Jehovah is often referred to, in the Scriptures, as the symbol of regal authority, and the seat of sovereign power. The Psalmist declares, "The Lord has prepared his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all." The prophet Isaiah says, "I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple." Daniel, in describing the vision he had of the "Ancient of days," says, "His throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire. Thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him." This emblem is referred to, with great frequency, by John. Indeed, as the panorama of heavenly glories passed before him, the throne was a bright and conspicuous object, in almost every scene that presented itself. When the first trumpet sounded, and "a door was opened in Heaven," he perceived in the distance a throne, and one who sat thereon; and, as the celestial vision was drawing to a close, and its brightness fading from the view, this was one of the last objects to sink and disappear below the horizon. At one time, it appeared encircled with a gorgeous rainbow, and lightnings and thunderings proceeded out of it, and seven brilliant lamps threw their luster upon it. At another time, he saw a golden altar before it, and the incense from the censer of the angel ascended, and enveloped the throne. At another, it was surrounded with a sea of glass, and "a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal," flowed from it; and the invitation was given, "Let him that is athirst come; and whoever will, let him take the water of life freely." If the apostle hears "the voice of many angels," they are around the throne. If he beholds, in another scene, a great multitude, stretching away as far as the eye can reach, they are "before the throne." An emblem thus conspicuous, and appearing as the central object in so many celestial views, must be full of important meaning. May we be aided by divine assistance in our endeavors to interpret it! The fact that the throne was constantly kept before the mind of the apostle, indicates the supremacy and perpetual authority of God's moral government. It teaches mankind that this government should occupy a prominent place in their estimation; that its principles should be the object of frequent meditation, and careful study; and that, amid the most glowing anticipations of heavenly felicity, the Christian should never forget that he owes

allegiance to an infinite Sovereign, and is under laws that require of him perfect obedience. The origin, nature, extent and glory, of this government, are points worthy of our consideration.

It's ORIGIN. A supreme moral government grows, naturally, out of the existence and character of God, and the nature of his moral kingdom. The primary conception, in the human mind, of the Deity, is that of a being who has power over his works, and authority over his creatures. To suppose a Supreme Being to create intelligent beings, without inherent laws to govern them, or without the purpose to subject them to his authority, is to invalidate our essential ideas of God. Besides, the creation of an intelligent being, without principles of action, would subserve no good purpose — any more than the creation of worlds, or a material universe, without physical laws. Indeed, we can no more conceive of a reasonable being, without law, than we can conceive of a sun without light, or an atmosphere without oxygen, or a planetary system without the principle of gravitation.

Those, therefore, who come to God, believing that "he is," must also believe "that he is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him;" that he has established over his rational creation a moral government, involving a system of rewards and punishments; and that he has so ordered his administration that rich blessings shall flow from obedience, and disastrous consequences follow a course of disobedience. This government grows, too, out of the infinite and perfect attributes of the Deity. It flows from him, as the pure river of the water of life flows from his throne. Every perfection of his nature contributes to its purity and excellence. His boundless goodness prompts him to frame a government best suited to the needs of his subjects, and adapted to secure their highest happiness. His infinite wisdom enables him to make such a selection of laws, and so arrange the forces and influences of his government, as to attain, in the most perfect manner, the ends of his administration. Had we the ability to go beyond the external and visible features of this government, and penetrate into its hidden and complicated machinery, and perceive the workings of the influences and motives which are employed to develop and control the energies of its subjects — we would see that divine wisdom was stamped upon every part of the system. We would see that, whatever imperfection or disorder may have crept into certain portions of God's vast empire, his government was adapted and designed to secure the perfect holiness and happiness of every rational being in the universe.

This, in my view, is a fundamental truth, which is not to be disturbed, and need not, if we are honest, be disturbed, by any speculations or theories that we may entertain upon other points, connected with, or growing out of, this moral government. When the infinite Jehovah, with the solemnity of an oath, declares, "As I live, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked," I listen as a believer in the truth of the declaration, and in the sincerity of its author. And when I view the wise adaptation of God's government to his moral kingdom, I feel the force of the inquiry, "What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it?" The infinite knowledge of Jehovah qualifies him to administer this government to the best advantage, and with reference to the interests of all ranks of intelligent beings. Having spread out before him the character, history, position and circumstances, of every individual subject; possessing the faculty of attending, at the same time, to the interests of a world, and the needs of the humblest of his creatures; capable of grasping, at a glance, everything that is transpiring in the millions of worlds that float around his throne; capable of reading the thoughts, and scanning the motives, of every mind — he is prepared, as no other being in the universe is, to administer a moral government. His government,

therefore, exists as an absolute necessity. We cannot contemplate it, in its connection with a single divine attribute, without having it forced upon us, as essential to the very existence of a moral kingdom. Let it be crushed, and the moral universe must be crushed with it. The two stand or fall together.

We do not wonder, therefore, that, in the visions that passed before the apostle John, a throne should have been so often seen. We do not wonder that, in the revelations that the Deity made of himself to the ancient prophets, he should so often appear surrounded with the splendors of royalty, and the emblems of absolute sovereignty. The divine holiness is another attribute from which a moral government springs. God's sense of right and justice prompts him to establish these principles over his creatures. If his subjects are made in his likeness and image, they must be governed by the laws that govern him. As a holy being, he cannot approve of anything but holiness in his kingdom. He cannot, either, avoid doing all in his power to secure universal holiness. To suppose otherwise, is to suppose that he can act against the dictates of his own nature, and in violation of a principle that is dearer to him than the universe.

It is true that evil exists under this government; but this is a foreign and antagonistic element, against which the whole force of the administration is arrayed. To affirm, as some writers have done, that sin is necessary to the system, or in any manner receives the divine approbation, is to insult the Deity, and throw into inexplicable confusion all our moral conceptions. Against such an idea the human reason and the divine revelation utter their solemn and unqualified protest. The divine will is fully expressed in this law: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might." And this law is binding, and always was, and ever will be, upon every individual subject. It has never been repealed, or qualified, or suspended; and it never will be, while God remains a holy being. Every instance of its violation dishonors God, weakens the government, and entails upon the transgressor, and upon all who come under his influence, disastrous consequences. Our next inquiry respects the NATURE of this government. It is styled a moral government, because it is a system established by a moral governor over moral subjects. It respects the actions of free moral agents, and aims at controlling them by the power of motives. Physical force cannot enter into it, for the obvious reason that its subjects are by nature susceptible only to the power of moral influences. The physical universe is so constituted as to be governed by physical laws, and by no others. The revolution of the planets could be no more produced by moral influence, or simple authority, than the obedience of a free agent could be secured by physical force. In the material, animal and moral kingdoms of God — each department is governed by laws adapted to the nature of the subject. The animal creation are governed by the laws of instinct, and hence are not capable of moral action, nor susceptible to the power of influence. But intelligent beings, made in the image and likeness of God, endowed with the powers of reason, judgment and free action, must be under a moral system. They must be governed by the influence of divine authority, acting, through the susceptibilities and reason, upon the will. The idea of a forced obedience is an absurdity. Holiness of character produced by omnipotence is, in the very nature of things, an impossibility. Obedience is the voluntary action of a free agent. The homage, worship and services, that are rendered in Heaven, by the saints and angels, are all the voluntary offerings of loyal subjects. They are the expressions of gratitude and love, awakened by a view of the excellencies of the divine character, and an experience of the divine love; and their virtue consists in their being voluntarily rendered to the Author of all good. Beings that are not

capable of volition, that have not the power of choice, are not capable of rendering worship.

Such, then, was the government that was symbolized in "the great white throne" that appeared before John — a government suited to the nature of intelligent moral beings, and adapted to secure their highest and lasting happiness. And in this vision we are presented with the sublime spectacle of vast multitudes of holy and resplendent beings, surrounding the throne, and freely rendering to the "King of kings and Lord of lords" the enthusiastic homage of grateful and loyal hearts. They are held in allegiance to that throne by the power of benevolence. The divine love manifested towards them — draws out their love towards the Sovereign, and every affection of their heart becomes a tie that binds them to him. And this privilege, of rendering to the infinite Jehovah voluntary worship and services, will not only contribute to the glory of the Sovereign — but will be a prominent source of the felicity of the saints. It will be a living and perpetual fountain of blessedness: a fountain increasing with the development of our being, and with the growth of our capabilities to love and serve God; a fountain that will not only send forth streams — but will swell into an ocean of happiness! This government, while it is thus adapted to the nature of its subjects, is entirely independent of them. In this respect, it differs from all human governments, which, to a greater or less extent, are derived from the consent of the governed.

It is an absolute and unlimited sovereignty — all the elements, principles and laws of which, have come directly from the Deity. The creature has no more contributed to its excellence and glory, than he has contributed to the essence of God. It is as much above the skill and wisdom of finite beings, as the Creator is above the creature. It stands out alone, a vast moral system, bearing the impress of divine wisdom and goodness. It is an embodiment of the eternal principles of right, justice and holiness — principles that have dwelt forever in the divine mind.

God had before him every possible form of government that could be established; and he selected this, not only as the best — but as the only perfect government that could be framed. Its independence, therefore, is an absolute necessity. The governor could no more have consulted his subjects as to the kind of government that he should establish over them, than he could have consulted them as to whether they would have a sun in the heavens. From his very nature, and his relations to his creatures, he must give laws, and not receive them; must establish principles, and not derive them from any external source. "Whom did the LORD consult to enlighten him, and who taught him the right way? Who was it that taught him knowledge or showed him the path of understanding? Surely the nations are like a drop in a bucket; they are regarded as dust on the scales; he weighs the islands as though they were fine dust. Before him all the nations are as nothing; they are regarded by him as worthless and less than nothing. To whom, then, will you compare God? What image will you compare him to?" Isaiah 40:14-18 The Deity can be the recipient of nothing from without, for the whole universe is but the manifestation of himself. He has written his omnipotence upon the stars, and his wisdom upon the movements of planetary systems, and the forces and laws of nature. He has created light as the symbol of his love, and spread out the ocean as the emblem of his infinity. Yet all that is visible and known to us, is but a faint expression of Him who is seated upon the throne of the universe. From regions far beyond the stars, there comes to us a voice, "Who by searching can find out God; who can find out the Almighty unto perfection?"

Such a being must be a sovereign of absolute and unlimited authority. By virtue of his divinity, he has the right to make laws for all his creatures. Yet this sovereignty is not, as we have seen, a tyranny. It has not been established to gratify the mere love of power. It is not administered, as many human governments are, on the principle of sacrificing every interest to the arbitrary will of the despot. It exists for the happiness of the subject, as well as the glory of the Ruler. We cannot examine one of its elements, or principles, without perceiving its benevolent design. The divine goodness is as conspicuous in it as the divine sovereignty. Indeed, the sovereignty in the government is the executive power that gives efficacy to the goodness. A finite being might, in his compassion, desire the welfare of others, without having the power to secure it. But God, by virtue of the attribute of sovereignty, is enabled to accomplish his wishes in regard to the happiness of his obedient subjects. He is not only a being "gracious and full of compassion," but "he does according to his will, in the army of Heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand, or say unto him: What are You doing?" In the series of views that we have presented, in this volume, of the blessedness of Heaven, we have abundant proof of the beneficial results of the combined action of the divine sovereignty and goodness. We see them . . .

in the preparations that are made for the saints;

in the rewards that are promised to the faithful; and

in the glories and honors that the holy angels have for ages enjoyed. As we look down the long vista of an immortal state, they crowd upon the vision, inspiring confidence as well as hope; giving us the assurance that the great Ruler "is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think!" Our definition of the nature of this government would be incomplete, without remarking that it is a system of laws to which are attached severe penalties. The throne which appeared to the apostle John was surrounded not only with the emblems of the purity and love of the Deity — but also with the symbols of his justice. Thunderings and lightnings were seen to proceed from the throne. And the apostle adds, "I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in those books, according to their works; and whoever was not found written in the book of life, was cast into the lake of fire!"

It has not fallen within the scope of the topics which we have been considering, to refer, except incidentally, to the condition of those who pass from this world in a state of impenitence and unbelief; and we would gladly have confined our thoughts to the bright visions of the future life which are found in the Holy Scriptures. But, in contemplating that stupendous moral government which the infinite Jehovah has established, we cannot avoid seeing its dreadful penalty. In viewing God as the sovereign of the universe, we cannot fail to perceive that "clouds and darkness are round about Him;" that "righteousness and judgment are the foundation of His throne." Being Himself a God of strict justice and perfect holiness — He must punish the wicked, as well as reward the righteous. And fearful as is the penalty with which the transgressor of His law is threatened, we affirm that it is as fully sustained by the divine benevolence as by the divine justice. For God, as a benevolent being, as a ruler who is anxious to secure the greatest amount of obedience and happiness in His kingdom, is called upon to make the most emphatic manifestation of his abhorrence of sin that it is possible to make. He is called upon to show to His moral universe

. . .

the absolute supremacy of His authority,
his rightful claims to the services and affections of every subject,
and His entire disapprobation of every form and degree of sin.

He must therefore attach to the transgression of His law a penalty, that will carry with it the greatest possible moral influence. Any penalty that is limited or finite obviously fails to do this. And should God fail to express, in the strongest manner, His hatred of sin — should He fail to present to His subjects the strongest motives to induce them to obey Him — how could we prove His infinite benevolence?

It is true, that the punishment announced in the Scriptures against the wicked is in the highest degree terrible. The mere thought of an immortal spirit lost forever is inconceivably dreadful. But it should be remembered that the sin against which this penalty is threatened is . . .

a terrible evil,

an infinite evil,

an evil that threatens . . .

the overthrow of God's righteous government,

the annihilation of His authority, and

the destruction of His moral universe.

Sin is a foe, which, if allowed to exert its full force, and send out all its destructive influences, would defeat the benevolent designs of God, and involve the whole universe in one general ruin. This evil must, therefore, from the very necessity of the case, be held in check by the strongest barriers that omnipotence can raise. It must be crushed by the most potent forces that can be brought against it. The honor of God,

the stability of His government, and

the interests of His obedient subjects, demand this.

Every man feels the importance, in human governments, of maintaining the majesty of law, and punishing transgressors. The welfare of society, the authority of the government, and a just regard to the rights of the innocent, require it. Now, if this must be done in limited and local communities, and where only temporal affairs and interests are involved — then how much more necessary is it that the authority of God's government be sustained — a government that extends over millions of worlds, and that embraces within its sway the thoughts, motives and deeds, of countless myriads of subjects! In this connection, the inquiry presses itself upon our attention: If there is so much sin in that portion of God's kingdom with which we are acquainted, notwithstanding the severity of the penalty of the law — what would be the effect, were the penalty removed? Suppose, for a moment, that there were no restraining influences arising from the fear of the dreadful consequences of evil — have we not reason to believe, from the present moral condition of mankind, that wickedness would greatly increase, and the authority of God be, to a greater extent than it now is, set at defiance?

We have given prominence, in the views already advanced, to the power of the divine love; but we would not overlook the fact, that there is such a principle as divine justice. We may delight ourselves with the contemplation of the beauties and glories of the heavenly world — but we would not keep out of sight the great truth, that righteousness and judgment are the foundation of God's throne! The next point deserving of our attention is the EXTENT of the divine government. Reason and revelation both teach us that God's authority is coextensive with his rational creation. It reaches to the remotest bounds of the habitable universe.

Every angel in Heaven,

every inhabitant of earth,

the millions of beings that people the worlds that are above and around us —

are all subjects of the divine authority. "His kingdom rules over all." Every human mind is conscious that it is subject to the requisitions of law. This consciousness it cannot shake off. It is a part of its nature. It is as indestructible as its own being. The sense of right and wrong that is planted in every breast, the obligation under which one feels to follow the dictates of an enlightened conscience, the self-approbation that flows from right conduct, and the remorse that the transgressor experiences — all spring from this government.

If a person follows a wicked course of conduct, it is not necessary to bring him to a formal trial, in order that the ends of justice may be attained. He is arrested by his own conscience, is summoned before a judge within his own bosom, is tried by a jury impelled from his sense of right and justice, and condemned to the loss of peace of mind and the favor of Heaven. And reason teaches us that the power of this internal, self-working government, is felt by every intelligent being in the universe. No angel is so exalted as to be beyond its influence, and no being has fallen so low as to have had its lineaments effaced from his memory. The principle termed conscience, which is planted in every soul, is the viceroy of Heaven's King, appointed to guide the subject in the path of duty, to warn him of danger, and to enable him to secure the high rewards that are promised to the obedient.

We speak of this government as coextensive with God's moral kingdom; but this language, obviously, fails to convey to our minds adequate conceptions either of the government or of the kingdom over which it is established; for modern science has thrown open to us an extent of empire that is beyond the grasp of the mightiest and loftiest of human intellects. With the aid of telescopic power, we discover that immensity is crowded with worlds and systems, of which, before, we had no knowledge; and that this earth, instead of being a central and important portion of God's dominions, to which all that is visible in the heavens is tributary and secondary — is, in fact, but one amid myriads of worlds, which vastly surpass it in magnificence and splendor. We discover that the universe is of such an extent that this earth, with its islands, continents and oceans, is but a speck — a speck, the loss of which would be no more felt than the fall of a leaf in a vast forest, or the removal of a single grain of sand from the sea-shore. In our attempts to comprehend the extent of this empire, we are not only utterly baffled — but we perceive it stretching away, in every direction, towards a mysterious infinity; and the impression is made upon the mind, that it is absolutely boundless! The idea has been advanced, that it may be the Creator's design to excite the wonder, and sustain the adoration, of His subjects, by views of the magnitude

of a kingdom the boundaries of which no finite mind will ever reach! An eloquent writer has said that there is "an unsealed barrier, beyond which no power, either of eye or of telescope, shall ever carry us; that, on the other side, there is a height, and depth, and length, and breadth, to which the whole of this concave and visible firmament dwindles into the insignificance of an atom! And though all which the mind of man can take in, or his imagination grasp at, were swept away — there might still remain as ample a field, over which the Divinity might expatiate, and which He might have peopled with innumerable worlds! Though this earth were to be burned up, though the trumpet of its dissolution were sounded, though yon sky were to pass away as a scroll, and every visible glory which the finger of Divinity has inscribed on it were to be put out forever — an event so awful to us, and to every world in our vicinity, by which so many suns would be extinguished, and so many varied scenes of life and of population would rush into forgetfulness — what is it in the high scale of the Almighty's workmanship? — a mere shred, which, though scattered into nothing, would leave the universe of God one entire scene of greatness and of majesty!"

If such is the immensity of the Creator's dominions — an immensity so vast that the solitude created by the destruction of all that is visible would be but a small, unoccupied point, to the infinite mind of God. If the innumerable galaxies consist of clusters of stars, and those stars swell to the magnitude of brilliant suns, and those suns present themselves to our view as the central orbs of vast planetary systems, that are filled with an innumerable population — then what must be the grandeur of that divine government, which spreads its protecting shield over so vast an empire, and requires the homage and services of the countless myriads of its inhabitants!

What must be the attributes of that monarch, who, while presiding over such a kingdom, and taking within his comprehensive grasp the interests of various ranks of intelligences, as numerous, perhaps, as the worlds around us — and at the same time can notice . . .

every thought that enters my mind,

every motive that influences my conduct, and

every circumstance that contributes to form my character,

and decide my destiny! An administration thus universal, and embodying the eternal principles of right, justice and benevolence, must be in the highest degree powerful and glorious!

Although no physical forces can enter into its operations — yet it has a moral power, a divine energy, that is felt in every part of the habitable universe. All the influence of the divine character, and the force of the divine authority, are infused into it, and are among its constituent elements. It is penetrated and permeated by the infinite attributes of the Deity, and must partake of the power that belongs to God. It is a revelation and embodiment of the moral qualities of the Deity, just as the material universe is a revelation and embodiment of the divine omnipotence. Its chief force is derived directly from the character of its author. To aid us in conceiving of the moral power of the Supreme Intelligence, we need only reflect upon the capabilities for exerting influence with which even his finite creatures are endowed.

Every human being is so constituted that he cannot fail to send forth an influence. While he is a focus towards which the power from all other beings converges, there emanates from him a moral force that reaches, for anything we can tell, the utmost boundaries of social existence. Though

man is finite and dependent — the creature of yesterday — still, he cannot isolate himself. The power inherent in his being streams forth from him, as light pours from the sun, or heat from the internal fire of the earth. He is, in one sense, a sovereign who cannot abdicate. He is a force for evil or good, in the moral universe, which cannot be annihilated. Every action that he performs lives — becomes an imperishable monument. Every word he utters goes forth as a winged messenger, upon an immortal mission. Every thought leaves an indelible impression upon the universe. In remarking upon this subject, a distinguished writer says, "It is as if each man had his foot upon the point where ten thousand telegraphic wires meet from every part of the universe, and he were able with each volition to send abroad an influence along these wires, so as to reach every created being in Heaven and in earth. It is as if we were linked to every created being by a golden chain, and every pulsation of our heart, or movement of our mind, modified the pulsation of every other heart, and the movements of every other intellect."

Now, if such be the power of a creature — then what must be the power of an infinite Creator? If such are the relations that finite beings sustain to each other, and the force that they necessarily exert one upon another — if there are lines of influence passing between them, as rays of light pass from star to star, or sun to sun, intersecting each other at almost every point — then what must be the moral power that flows from the Creator to his creatures — from him in whom "we live and move and have our being"?

United as we are to the moral Governor of the universe by ten thousand ties; dependent upon him for every benefit that we receive — our obligations increasing with every new manifestation of his kindness, and every day's experience of his love. We cannot but feel the influence of his character, and perceive the mighty moral forces that are inherent in his government. And as, from age to age, blessings continue to flow from his administration, its power must continue to increase; and since the period can never arrive when the creature will cease to be dependent upon the bounty of the Creator, it follows that the moral power of this government will never cease to increase. It must continue to augment throughout eternity. But who can describe, or even conceive of the glory of this divine government, that throws its luster upon every world, and fills immensity with its splendors? When its grand purposes shall have been accomplished, the sublime spectacle will be presented of a universe crowded with loyal and adoring subjects. From every world will ascend, to the infinite Sovereign, anthems of praise, and the incense of holy worship. Every planet will glitter with temples, whose lofty architecture, and splendid proportions, and costly decorations, will indicate the prevalence of devotion, and the homage that is rendered to the divine authority. And if we are so happy as to reach the heavenly world, the first object upon which the eye will rest will be "the great white throne." And as we advance from one stage of progress to another, and new scenes open before the mind — this throne will appear, as it did to the apostle John, rising in its splendor, conspicuous above every other object.

Wherever we may wander, in whatever duties we may be engaged, or whatever studies or pleasures may occupy us, we shall never lose sight of the throne. It will stand forever, to remind us that we are under authority — that amid our greatest enjoyments and highest honors, we yet owe allegiance to an infinite Sovereign, and are subject to the laws of him whose "dominion is an everlasting dominion." It will stand as the eternal bulwark of the holiness and happiness of God's empire, and the pledge that the rewards of Heaven are immortal!

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