

FEAR OF DEATH

By Henry Law, 1873

While the Lord delays His coming, death works incessantly. There is no moment when its scythe is idle. We may soon feel its leveling blow. The debt of dying is due from us and all earth-born. "It is appointed unto men once to die."--Heb. 9:27.

Is there no comfort in this thought? Do no bright streaks illumine this horizon? The Christian replies, "Yes! verily, when death is viewed in gospel-light, its brow is clothed in smiles; its icy hand is no more chilly; it is despoiled of terror; its step is friendly; its approach is welcomed." Such is the picture which these pages strive to show. May every word be echo of God's truth!

But at the outset, barriers must be raised, and CAUTIONS duly set. These comforts are not widely strewn, as portion of all mothers' sons. They are not wild flowers of the open field. They are not berries which each passenger may pluck. They are not rays which gild the universe. They are not free as the air, and all-diffusive as the light. They are the heirdom *only* of the heirs of God.

The present purpose is to give true solace. But no solace finds true place, where God condemns. There is no real peace, where He is not a friend. Death smiles not, when God frowns. It cannot cheer the aliens from grace--the strangers from the covenant of promise. Such have no hope. The hopeless must be comfortless.

It is a fearful thought, that multitudes compose this class. Thronging travelers crowd destruction's broad way. A common feature shows their common state. They never feel the misery of sin--nor see the broken law--nor tremble at the impending curse. No tears of penitence bedew their eyes. No sighs of anguish

prove their contrite hearts. They do not flee from the wrath to come. They do not enter salvation's only ark. They do not wash in the cleansing stream. They do not cling to the saving cross. They do not hide in the sheltering wounds of Jesus. They are deaf to the Spirit's voice--the calls of earnest pastors--and all the warnings of the Book of Life. They continue in nature's darkness, and in nature's filth--"dead in trespasses and sins"--"enemies to God by wicked works"--slaves to the devil and bond-slaves of hell. Can such be told to have no fears of death? No! rather let the very mention of death horrify them. Let open graves and funeral-bells affright. To them death comes to dissipate delusion--to give reality to hated truths--to tear away their blinding veils--to end their respite--to consign them to their final doom. It is their long farewell to every ray of hope. To them to die is endless woe. Let them fear it with all fear.

But let not such be heeded with indifference. Who would pass by without a rescuing effort? Who would not strive to check them on the precipice's brink? While space remains the Spirit may give grace. By unexpected means he opens eyes, and softens hearts, and implants faith. The Gospel-net may catch men unawares. Arrows may pierce an unsought mark. Where terrors fail to terrify, the sight of bliss in others may allure. Thus death displayed as friendly to believers may bring others to believe. In this glad hope let death be viewed in Christian light.

It is sweet now to turn to those who are immediately addressed. Grace has made them to differ. Lovely lineaments show their heavenly birth. They have been taught sin's vileness, and its deathful stains. In deepest penitence they have abhorred themselves. They know that endless ruin is the wages of their guilt. Condemned in SELF, they fly to Jesus, as their only hope. They receive His full redemption with adoring hearts. They love their Savior with intensest love. Their new-born lives reflect their Heaven-sent light. They are trees of righteousness "the planting of the Lord." "A royal priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ." To them

"to live is Christ." The sequence may not be divorced. To them "to die is gain."--Phil. 1:21.

But often they ignore their joys. They think of death and tremble. It is so now. It has been so of old. The Spirit states the malady and cure. "Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death--that is, the devil--and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death."--Heb. 2:14,15.

Here is rebuke to all such tremblers. Shall Jesus die to bring deliverance, and shall this mercy be frustrated? Shall He by suffering purchase freedom, and shall they refuse the blessing? Shall they entwine again the broken fetters? Shall He extend a cup of joy, and shall they choose the dregs of the cup of trembling?

Surely Christ's death should slay this fear. The proof is obvious. Apply it to your case. You daily gaze on Jesus hanging on the Cross. You doubt not that His death is yours. You glory in Him as your all-expiating surety. You confidently shout, "I am crucified with Christ."--Gal. 2:20. Your faith, which makes you one with Him, gives interest in His entire work. You believe, then, that there is "no condemnation" for you. You see in every attribute of God a friend adorning you with salvation's robes. You know, that to you the law's thunder was all hushed at Calvary--that the devil cannot touch you--that hell cannot receive you--that your punishment is paid, and paid forever. Death then cannot harm you. It is an enemy which Christ has slain. It is now a phantom which inflicts no hurt--a shadow's shade--the embers of an extinguished earth--a pointless dart--a crushed opponent--a wounded snake. Why then do you fear it?

But let us take a nearer view. Death comes not only as no foe, but as a DELIVERER. It liberates from earth, and all the evils of which earth is the home. Let a few instances demonstrate this blessing. While we are engaged in flesh INBORN CORRUPTIONS are a

restless plague. We long to be pure, even as our God is pure. We pant for holiness, as the deer for water-brooks. But an evil fountain sends forth evil streams. The good that we would, we do not; but the evil that we would not do, that we do.--Rom. 7:19. What tears--what groans--what bitterness of heart ensue! How often do we mourn our God offended--our Jesus not glorified--the Spirit vexed! How often do we sigh for wings to fly away to heights above our nature's mire! When will it once be! Death comes, and we are free. Is it reason to fear its rescuing touch?

In our lowly climate TEMPTATIONS are a ceaseless storm. They rage from every side--in every form--at every age. We seek for shelter, but are still exposed. Hence we experience the constant struggle--the fierce fight--the absence of repose--the frequent wounds--the stings of conscience. Death sounds a solution. It ends the strife. It bears to regions far above assaults. It cries, "Comfort, comfort my people." "The warfare is accomplished." How precious is this peace! And shall we dread the herald with this olive branch!

Who can recount the SORROWS which infest this earth? The dismal train is long. No grief is absent. All miseries appear. To be a man is to have fellowship with tears. Humanity is the beaten path of woe. But at the touch of death sorrow and sighing flee away. With the last breath the last tear falls--the last sob wails--the last distress is felt. The Christian knows this well. Shall he then fear the hand which wipes his eyes, and decks him with eternal smiles?

Think, also, of the many PAINS, to which each sense is inlet, and each limb exposed. Hence days bring agony, and nights resound with groans. Who has not nursed beside a tossing bed! But pain expires when the body dies. Hence to fear death is to reject pain's total cure.

Let it be added that this rescue is no transient respite--no momentary pause--no fading garland--no

April-shower--no passing meteor--no shadow of a cloud--no lull between the tempest's gusts. On earth the resting traveler may soon be roused. The soldier may unsheath the sleeping sword. Renewed alarm may chase away short peace. But death's deliverance is complete--final--forever. It hides earth's evils in deep grave. They have no resurrection. The epitaph, "No more," proclaims their dissolution. Then fear not death which has no fears behind it.

But look again. Floods of new light break forth. To be unchained is gain. To be EXALTED is far more. Joseph rejoices to escape the prison. The joy is more to sit the next to Pharaoh on the throne. Mark then the bliss to which death's car uplifts.

Here let God's voice alone be heard, and mortal lips be silent. Heed the welcome, "Come you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."--Matt. 25:34. "Enter into the joy of your Lord."--Matt. 25:21.

Mark some of the DELIGHTS;--"In Your presence is fullness of joy--at Your right hand there are pleasures for evermore."--Ps. 16:11. "The Lamb, who is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters--and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."--Rev. 7:17. "The city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon to shine in it--for the glory of God lights it--and the Lamb is the light thereof."--Rev. 21:23.

Ponder the HONOR--"To him that overcomes will I grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I overcame, and am set down with My Father in His throne."--Rev. 3:21. "The glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one, even as We are one."--John 17:22. "It does not yet appear what we shall be--but we know, that when He shall appear we shall be like Him--for we shall see Him as He is."--1 John 3:2. "You shall receive a crown of glory that fades not away."--1 Peter 5:4. "They shall see His face, and His name shall be in their foreheads."--Rev. 22:4.

Scan the DURATION--"So shall we be forever with the Lord."--1 Thess. 4:17.

Such are some jewels from the kingdom's treasury. Such the true sayings of our God--uttered to give strong consolation--given, that we may exult in happy prospect of our heritage. Feast then richly at this table--inhale the sweetness of these fragrant flowers--revel in these luxuriant meadows. But powers strained to the utmost fail to grasp the coming glory. Who can count what exceeds number--or measure an immeasurable space--or fathom depths which have no end--or empty ocean of its countless drops--or span infinity--or overtop the heaven of heavens! But such task were easier far than to conceive what God has prepared for those who love Him.

Death bears the saints to the reality. It is then rightly classed among our treasures. "All things are yours, whether life or death, or things present, or things to come--all are yours."--1 Cor. 3:22. Let us not undervalue the passage to this bliss.

Many thoughts concur to chide away this fear. Mark its blame-worthiness. Our God has largely told us of *full joy with Him*. Shall we reply, "No! Rather let our days on earth be lengthened--let us still tarry in our homes of clay--not yet--not yet." In such reluctance there is shame. Where is the gratitude for Jesus' work! He has died that we may live with Him. Shall we desire a respite from such bliss! He sends His chariot to give convoy. Shall we shudder, shiver, and draw back! This is to vex the Spirit's love. He tenderly withdraws the veil, and gives enchanting glimpses of the kingdom. He paints the heavenly land as redolent of all delights. He strives to kindle warm desires--to excite us to heave detaining anchors--to cut entangling cords--to unmoor tackling--to spread the willing sail--to court the home-conveying breeze! Shall we decline and hug a sin-polluted shore! This is affront to His alluring teaching.

There is yet further blame in this timidity. It takes part with our deadliest foe. This world is Satan's

territory. While we tarry in his confines, it is his joy to worry--to molest--to roll us in his mire. And shall we choose to stay within his toils! It is his anguish when we gain escape. Shall we remain his willing sport, and dread the voice which summons us away! Is this abhorrence of the monster's touch! Is this desire to tread him under foot!

It is our glorious boast, that the world is crucified unto us, and we unto the world.--Gal. 6:14. If this be so, can we still cling to a decaying carcass! Is Egypt left behind! What means then, this lingering love of the flesh-pots--this dread to enter Canaan! Have we escaped the accursed city! What means then this pause--this backward look, and this reluctant step towards the mountains! Let the *culprit* tremble, when the bell tolls for execution. But let not the *prince* draw back from coronation--let not the bride turn from the shout, "Behold the Bridegroom comes." Let not the heir shrink from admission to his own castle--let not the Christian dread fulfillment of the word, "I will come again, and receive you unto Myself, that where I am, there you may be also."--John 14:3.

Mark next what noble instances rebuke this fear! And here the Bible shall alone instruct. For wisest cause it is not large in death-bed scenes. It tells us how to *live* and to secure a gainful death. It shows the homeward road, but entrances are sparingly revealed. But still some jewels sparkle in the page. The dying *Jacob's* chamber is thrown open. We enter and hear blessings flowing from expiring lips. Suddenly the stream is checked, and he triumphantly exclaims, "I have waited for Your salvation, O Lord."--Gen. 49:18. Who trembles when waiting for such blessed hope! The waiting Jacob is no slave of fear.

Mark, also, *Simeon* bounding to the wished-for goal. "Lord, now let Your servant depart in peace according to Your word--for my eyes have seen Your salvation."--Luke 2:29, 30. In peace there is no element of fear. Unruffled streams prove a surrounding calm.

Paul had been caught to Paradise, and the third heaven. How is he reconciled to remain on earth? Not by its love, but by the noble hope of helping others' faith. At last the end arrives. The veteran appears. Surveying the past and eyeing the future, he fearlessly exclaims--"For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day--and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing."--2 Tim. 4:6-8. The retrospect is calm--the testimony is glad--the assurance is full; the expectation is all of bliss. There is not a reluctant word.

In these examples learn how fearlessly saints die. We are wisely taught to take with us words, and turn unto the Lord.--Hos. 14:2. Our precious Book contains fit utterance for every hour of need--not least so for life's final scene. Let two instances suffice. Words of trust are brought to dying lips. "Into Your hand I commit my spirit, for You have redeemed me, O Lord, You God of truth."--Ps. 31:5. Again, "Yes, 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."--Ps. 23:4. The faithful utterance of such holy words is a strong fortress against fear. No limbs can tremble which have such a prop.

You may reply, The haven truly is desired, but tossing waves impede the entrance. *Pains and distress are common in last days. Life often ends in pangs of body.* Hence apprehensions cannot be dispelled. It is not *death*, but *dying* that affrights.

But perhaps such pains may never come. Some suddenly depart and know not until the home is reached. Without one moment's *twilight* there is *day*. Others are gently rocked asleep, as infant in a mother's arms. They doze away as on a downy couch. *It is unwise to dread what never may arrive.*

Why think of the huge stone at the tomb's mouth! It may be gone before your steps approach.--Mark 16:3, 4.

But what if nature should dissolve in pain! Are there no promises of compensating help! Is there no aid which makes all burdens light! Is there no presence which annihilates distress! Is there no joy which changes groans to smiles! Is it not pledged, "Fear not, for I am with you?" It is true now as when the words first left inspired lips, "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you--when you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, neither shall the flame kindle upon you."--Isa. 43:2.

Super-abounding comforts may destroy distress. Stephen's was no painless death. But showers of stones excited no complaint. He kneeled down, and prayed, and fell asleep. He saw his Savior, and forgot himself. Will not this Savior solace you! Time would fail to tell how martyrs have exulted at the stake, and in the fires glorified God.

Think of the agonies of Jesus's death. No pains of body could exceed. Moreover, desertion darkened, and the curse did its dire work. But in the prospect His light step sprang forward. He went before His disciples in the way, "and they were amazed, and as they followed they were afraid."--Mark 10:32. "For the joy that was set before Him, He endured the cross, despising the shame."--Heb. 12:2. *Follow Jesus, and bound through intervening pains to promised joy.*

Sometimes tender emotions make us cling to earth. Affection gilds our homes with gladness. Its claims are strong and dear. To love and to be loved, is holy pleasure-ground. To think of separation is irrepressible distress. But faith subordinates all feeling to God's will. *We may not dread what He decrees!*

We apprehend that our departure may entail loss on the survivors. Let us think rather that God can more

than compensate. His eye beholds, His hand protects, His bounty feeds the widow and the orphan-home. The house of grace knows not a widow's desolation. "Your Maker is your husband; the Lord of Hosts is His name."--Isa. 54:5. Where God is executor, there is no insolvency. Good legacies will be paid. Weep not then at the thought that others may be destitute. Your place will not be vacant, if supplied by God. Soon too--how soon--all who are one in Christ will follow. Brief is the parting--endless the reunion. But if you live they may precede, and leave you lonely. *By dying you escape bereavement's pangs.*

Think, also, the friends left here are few when numbered with the friends above. What joys are stored in fellowship with all the ransomed band! Who would not gladly die to intermix with this most glorious company--to see their beauty--to share their rapture--to enlarge their songs--to hold ecstatic communion--to be their fellow citizens! Add the remembrance of cloudless sight of God, and then enraptured wings will spread. The cry will break forth, "My soul thirsts for God--for the living God; when shall I come and appear before God."--Ps. 42:2.

Some feel that, to do work for Christ is their extreme delight. They shrink from death, which seems to end this service. Is it well-founded apprehension that work is limited to mortal life! But the realms of light are no inactive sphere. Is glory linked to dreamy ease? Jesus says, "My Father works hitherto, and I work." Fellow-workers with the Lord on earth are fellow-workers with the Lord forever. They "follow the Lamb wherever He goes." In His employments they are employed. Death may enlarge and multiply activities. "Bless the Lord, all His hosts, you ministers of His that do His pleasure."--Ps. 103:21. Do not think such work is adverse to a state of rest. Rest presupposes weariness--but weariness cannot be known where powers never flag. Eternal freshness never needs repose. Of spiritual bodies we may truly say, "They shall run and not be weary--they shall walk, and not faint."--Isa. 40:31.

Work on earth will not be less or worse because our hands no longer hold the tools. He, who bids us to cease, may give new impulse to new agents. Others more able and more fit may enter in. A vacant post is speedily supplied. It is a remnant of self-seeking which desires to occupy beyond allotted time. We have worked long. To God be all the praise! But it may be that weary evening may soil the luster of the morning zeal. It is sad when early influence and power wanes, and loving friends deplore, "This life has been too long." Trust God to take us in right time.

Remember, also, life is not really sweet, while love of it predominates. To hold it in loose hand is fully to enjoy. Let then all diligence be used to *weaken the roots of undue love to the world*. Fruits of the soil, and skill in arts, and growth in grace thrive most when means are sedulously plied. The husbandman who sparsely sows will sparsely reap. Cultivate therefore the precious graces, which root up inordinate attachment to the world.

FAITH, which unites to Christ, and feeds on redeeming work, holds fast the title-deeds of endless life, and longs for full possession. As faith strengthens, the promised land is the object of increased desire. Seek then advance in this death-conquering grace. Pray, also, that the Spirit's breath may fan HOPE into brighter blaze. Hope ever lives in soul-delighting prospects, and pants to cross the intervening stream. Let LOVE too perfectly pervade the heart. Waters of death cannot quench it. Opposing mountains cannot impede it. It overcomes all interposing hindrances, and yearns for God's immediate presence. Away with little faith, and little hope, and little love. They nurse tormenting fear. Abounding faith--assured hope--perfect love laugh it to scorn.

Soar, also, above the world, and its sordid vanities. Do not rest in a Delilah's lap. "Set your affections on things above." Realize that you are dead to all earth's nothingness. Live, where your life is--high with Christ

in God. Indifference to things below will relax all clinging grasps.

In thought, also, anticipate the hour of release. Be not a stranger to your dying hour. Often look death in the face. Often touch its chilly hand. So when it comes, it will not have a stranger-aspect. Who fears a trodden path! Who shrinks from an accustomed act! Who dreads the entrance of a well-known guest! Expectation makes way for welcome.

Above all, let HOLINESS do its perfect work. Let it entirely rule in body, soul, and spirit. Let it be the element in which you live and move--the belt of your loins--the path in which you walk--the sign conspicuous on your brow. It is the parent of 'no fear of death'. *One breath of fondled sin obscures the mirror which reflects heaven, and weakens the strength of fearlessness.* A guiltless conscience gives the fearless pillow.

May the Spirit's mercy make these reflections a real comfort to you! Live Christ--dwell in the Spirit--walk with God! Then while life lasts you will work cheerfully, with cheerful heart--willing to stay, but feeling that to depart is better--ready to sing, "Lift up your heads, O you gates, and be you lift up, you everlasting doors," a blood-bought soul comes in. "You heavenly mansions, make him room, for he must stay forever."