

a child are joyous. "There is joy that a man-child is born into the world." Hope springs up in the fond parents' breast, and flatteringly whispers, "This same shall comfort us." And for the time the sober maxim of experience is quite forgotten, that children are "certain cares and uncertain comforts."

How opposite are the emotions which a death awakens! No longer does joy gladden the house—no longer does hope enliven the heart. All is sadness. Naomi sits alone, and cries amidst choking sobs, "The Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me." Rachel weeps for her child, and refuses to be comforted. David goes to the chamber over the gate, and piteously exclaims, "O Absalom, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, Absalom, my son!" Friends and relatives enter the house of mourning all heavy of heart, and sad of countenance. The funeral procession goes forth with its solemn burden, but only to leave the home and the hearts of the bereaved more desolate than before. And long months will elapse ere the voice of rejoicing is again heard in the once happy dwelling.

A birth thus occasions joy—a death grief; nor are these opposite emotions other than natural in the circumstances. Yet it deserves remark, that emotions exactly the converse would often attend these two seasons were the real issues of birth and of death known to us. Suppose the parent foresaw the future course of an undutiful child; suppose it foreshown to him that his son, instead of fulfilling his fond wishes and hopes, was to turn out a prodigal—was to tarnish the family name with crime, and to pass at last into eternity without hope—could he call his friends and his neighbours together to celebrate the birth, a auspicious event? Or suppose the bereaved family had full certainty of the heavenly blessedness of the father or the son of whom death has deprived them, could they fill their home with weeping for an event which at that very hour was making all heaven ring with gratulations? With such knowledge the feelings in both instances would be reversed—the day of birth would be the season of weeping, the day of death the season of festivity. Such knowledge has not been accorded us—in wisdom and mercy it has been withheld. Yet surely the consideration that the issues of birth and of death may be so different from what we are prone to imagine them ought not to be wholly lost upon us. This consideration may be insufficient to reverse the feelings which nature dictates, but it certainly ought to teach us moderation in the indulgence of our feelings, leading us, according to the apostolic injunction, to "rejoice as though we rejoiced not,

and to weep as though we wept not, knowing that the fashion of this world passeth away."

V. Let me next remind you of the contrast between our readiness to recall the "time to be born" and our reluctance to anticipate the "time to die."

Men are seldom indisposed to recall the season of their birth. They rather love to go back to it. They carefully keep its anniversary. And if there happens to be anything of a memorable kind connected with their entrance upon life—anything distinguished about their parents, or their birthplace, or the persons who then took an interest in their welfare—they are even proud and happy to recall and recite the fact. None but they whose birth has been in some way or other infamous, have any dislike to revert to the time when they began to be.

Are men equally disposed to bethink them of their death? Quite otherwise. They wilfully avert their eyes from that event. They would fain forget that such a gloomy event awaits them. And even when it is forced upon their thoughts, instead of detaining it before their minds, that they may ponder its issues and prepare for them, they only busy themselves in contriving how they may most speedily get rid of the unwelcome intruder.

Whence comes it that, while thus ready to go back on our birth, we are so reluctant to go forward to go forward to our death? Are we equally indisposed, in other instances, to antedate and live upon the future? If we had the prospect—to borrow an apposite comparison—of emigrating a few years hence to a foreign land, where we were to spend the remainder of our days, would we exclude that prospect from our thoughts, as we exclude the prospect of going at death to the land beyond the grave? No, verily. In that case how completely would our minds be filled with the prospect! How eager would we be in collecting information about that foreign land! How little interest would we take in anything which did not in one way or other help forward our preparation for it! Why, then, do we act so differently with reference to the land beyond the grave? Why, with the certain prospect of going thither, do we habitually shun the thought of it? Why, with a holy book in our hands—an "Emigrant's Guide"—richly stored with authoritative intelligence, do we evince so rooted an aversion to study its contents and complete our preparation? Alas! this strange variance between our practice and our prospects bespeaks and betrays our conscious guilt. Death is to usher us into the presence of a holy God, and the thought of encountering that dread presence makes us tremble. Death is the portal to the great