

preparation? The all-merciful Disposer has doubtless wise and gracious ends to serve by keeping us in ignorance of a date which is to Himself fixed and certain; and who can question that one of these ends is to persuade us to be *always* ready, and to spend every day as if it was our last?

§ III. Both seasons further agree in being *singularly eventful in their issues*.

\* How big with important consequences is the birth of a child! Common and familiar as it is, it is really, as one has remarked, a greater event than the creation of a sun. Think what has happened when a child is born into the world. A conscious being has begun to live—an immortal spirit has been added to the intelligent universe—a creature has come into being which shall survive yonder orb of day! The sun, confessedly glorious as it is, is but a mass of passive, unconscious matter: it cannot think, it knows not its own splendour, it feels not its own heat, and ere long it will be extinguished. But that feeble babe, which has just come weeping into the world, is endowed with *mind*, is capable of right and wrong, is accountable to God, is destined to suffer or to enjoy throughout endless duration. You cannot tell, indeed, what precise lot awaits the infant stranger; you cannot tell whether his new-found being is to prove a blessing to him, or only a curse; a dark mystery yet hangs over the untravelled path before him. But this very mystery serves to heighten the interest and anxiety with which you regard him. And as you gaze on his yet unexpressive countenance, and meditate on his yet undeveloped history, the conviction grows upon you, that a more solemn and suggestive spectacle than a new-born infant the sun does not shine upon in all its circuit.

But is death a less eventful crisis? Assuredly no. To-day you see a man walking in the majesty of his strength, with the bloom of health on his cheek and the beams of intelligence in his eye; and, behold, to-morrow he is a piece of cold insensate clay, which requires to be borne from his house and buried out of sight—a trophy of the spoiler Death! Now your eye rests on some great one of the earth, so far exalted in rank and riches above his fellows, so surrounded with admiring dependants, so capable of making thousands happy, that you might deem him a god in this lower world, or at least of another lineage and nobler destiny than ordinary mortals;—you look again and he is laid in his coffin, stripped of all his distinctions, with the doom written on his ghastly brow, “Dust to dust, ashes to ashes;”—another trophy of the leveller Death! You visit a family on occasion of some domestic festive, when all its members, far and near,

are collected, and all, from hoary grandsire to lisping grandchild, unite in a happy interchange of home affections. It is a lovely sight;—a sight which earth may well be proud of, and which even heaven may stoop down well pleased to see. You return a few weeks after, and how altered is the scene! The grandsire's chair is vacant; or the lisping babe has faded like a gathered lily; or, in place of the blooming maiden who filled the house with merry glee, there is only a white-shrouded corpse! It is now the house of mourning; and the stifled sobs which break its gloomy stillness suffice to tell what a cruel sunderer of family bonds is Death.

Nor are these the whole of the issues of death. Like birth, death ushers into a new existence; and how eventful that after-existence! Even were death nothing more than a dissolution of the body, and a sunderance of the ties which bind to earthly friends and earthly hopes, it would be impossible to regard it as other than a most affecting catastrophe. But death is immeasurably more. It is the birth-time of a future ceaseless existence; it is the portal to eternity. Instead of being an isolated moment unconnected with the remembered past, and unrelated to the expected future, the “time to die” is the very crisis of being—the consummation either of the threatening. He that believeth not shall be damned,” or the promise “He that believeth shall have everlasting life.” Then probation ends and retribution begins. Then the immortal spirit is either charmed away as by celestial music to its heavenly home, or hurried in utter dismay to its “own place” in Tophet. This hour our brother shall be with us here on earth, alive, like ourselves, to all the interests of the present world, feeling the same wants, looking upon the same scenes of earth and sky, and asking, with us, anxious but unanswered questions about the eternal future. The next hour death comes, and in a moment he is in the midst of yon dread realities—cognisant of them all, amazed at them all, and established in his “lot” for ever! O! could we but have for a moment the veil withdrawn which shrouds the mystery of death—could we but pass for a moment, either with the dying believer into the ineffable light and felicity of the Saviour's presence, or with the dying sinner into the black darkness in which he vanishes—we should never again let go the conviction, that of all eventful moments the most awfully eventful is the “time to die.”

IV. Passing from points of resemblance to points of contrast, I remark that the “time to be born” and the “time to die” present a contrast in the feelings which they respectively occasion.

The feelings usually excited by the birth of