

## THE GREY HAIRS.

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"Grey hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knoweth not."—Hosea viii. 9.

Ephraim was the leading tribe of that portion of the Hebrew people which formed the kingdom of Israel, after the disruption in the time of Rehoboam.

"Backsliding Israel" mingled with the heathen, and learned their works and because of their departure from God they ultimately perished off the good land. The present is a striking representation of their condition, while yet in Palestine. In "grey hairs," we recognize the symbol of old age, and we readily associate with them the ideas of diminished strength, the dim eye, the tottering steps, the nerveless grasp of the man whose youthful joys have passed, whose boasted strength is gone, and who has come near the time when "the silver cord shall be loosed, the golden bowl be broken, the pitcher be broken at the fountain, and the wheel broken at the cistern, the dust shall return to the earth as it was, and the spirit to God who gave it." When the work of gradual decay will be consummated, and the worn out frame repose in the tomb.

Grey hairs which thus in nature betoken decay, are aptly used to signify spiritual declension and the figure is instructive. Unless when accidental circumstances operate upon the body either by immediately crushing its powers or fanning the flame which burns them up, the decay of strength is gradual, to the man himself imperceptible and often more distinctly marked by his neighbors and acquaintances than by him. Here the analogy between natural decay and spiritual is close. The prostration of spiritual strength is in most cases gradual, and often is its unhappy subject startled into a sense of his actual position through

the observation of others or by some fearful act of impiety into which in his wanderings from God he has been betrayed, and which, seen by the twilight that yet rests upon his soul exhibits his true position, produces complete impenitency, leads to a divorce from holiness, or, on the other hand to the mournful cry, "O that I were as in months past, as in the days when God preserved me, when his lamp shined upon my head, and when by his light I walked through darkness; as I was in the days of my youth when the secret of God was upon my tabernacle," Job xxix. 2-4; and to the expression of sorrow because of departure from God: "I have gone astray like a lost sheep: seek thy servant for I do not forget thy commandments." Happy is it when thus the soul returns and finds afresh the peace of God which passeth all understanding.

The soul enriched with the hope of immortality enjoys the prospect of an eternal state of bliss, where is incorruptibility, where it will range over new and brighter fields, and find far higher pleasures than are ever culled in this sin-smit world. Such a view of the future gives to any sign of premature decay an aspect of sadness which cannot be considered without causing the deepest sorrow.

We look on physical decay with sorrow, but especially are we so affected where such decay is premature and the sun of life, rapidly advances to the west, while it is yet noon; but in this there is nothing at all to compare with the decay of piety in the soul, and its hindrance thereby in reaching to the stature of the perfect man in Christ Jesus, the blasting of hopes once cherished