

mind. They give it in the simplest arithmetic: "The days of our years," says the Psalmist, "are three-score years and ten; and if, by reason of strength, they be four-score years, yet is their strength labor and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away."

Now, when we pronounce a thing to be long or short, we mentally compare or contrast it with something else from which it differs in durability. It is by contrasting the duration of human life with the duration of the things in which we live, that we fully realize the truth of our text. The man, for instance, who, after forty or fifty years' absence, revisits the home of his childhood and youth, is even painfully impressed with it. He finds that the friends and acquaintances of his early days have passed away, and the situation which they once occupied, filled by others. A new generation has sprung up. He sees new faces in the shops and fields, in the streets and houses. But if he turns from the world of living men to the world of Nature, he might fancy that he had never left his old home. The sun rises over the same hills—the river winds its way to the ocean through the same forests and fields—the old familiar flowers deck the garden and meadows, and mingle their sweet scent with every breeze that blows. And it is so with nature everywhere. The seers and prophets and holy men of Scripture have long ago mouldered in their graves, yet the traveller may now visit the same hills and glades with which their names and sayings and doings are associated. The disciples of our Lord have, nearly 1800 years ago, passed away from this world, yet the sea of Galilee may be now seen, in calm or storm, as when they dwelt on its shores, or plied the fisherman's task on its bosom. Our Lord himself has long ago ended His sorrows and sufferings, yet the brook Kedron flows to-day through the valley of Jehoshaphat as it did on that memorable night in which Jesus crossed it on His way to Gethsemane. We may enter Gethsemane and find it much the same now as then, yet we shall not find any sign that it was visited by Jesus; we shall not see anything to mark the spot where He knelt to pray; nor shall we hear even the echo of His voice which broke the stillness of that awful midnight, saying: "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done."

Now, there is nothing so natural and easy as to apply all this to ourselves. Wherever we turn our eyes, they rest on objects which we cannot help thinking will continue the same long after we have seen them for the last time. The scenes of our work and rest, of our joys and sorrows, shall remain long after our hands and hearts have ceased to work and feel. In a few more years, other worshippers shall fill this place, and others shall crowd the world's thoroughfare to "buy and sell and get gain."

It would be easy to multiply illustrations to show how short human life is, but let one more contrast suffice for the present. Compare the duration of our present life with the eternity which lies before us. We can number the years, the months, weeks, and days, and even hours of time, but we cannot make a definite calculation of eternity. You may add million to millions, yet you fail to state the duration of Hereafter. Our present life, compared to our future, is but as a leaf to the leaves of the forest, or as a drop of water to yonder ocean that sweeps and rolls from pole to pole.

II. What lesson does this important truth—the shortness and uncertainty of time—teach us? Is it a truth that should bring home to us no serious reflection, and no solemn warning? From the context, we may learn that the words of our text are specially addressed to those who plan a scheme "to buy and sell and get gain," with the confidence of undying men. By them the Apostle seeks to reprove those who live and move and act, from day to day, and year to year, as if this world were their abiding abode and continuing city. Such men he reproves, by bringing before them the shortness and uncertainty of this life. How suitable the theme! Surely no one cannot but loosen his grasp of the world, when he fully realizes that its interests are passing, and its pleasures perishable. Surely there are none who, when they compare time with eternity, but regard temporal interests, compared with spiritual, as a straw on the bosom of the mighty flood that stretches its volume far and wide. Survey, on the one hand, time and its interests, and, on the other, eternity, and are you not ready to say, with Solomon, in regard to the former, "All is vanity?" Now, this is just the lesson that the Apostle wishes us to learn from the words of the text. He seems to say: Why should you—a being destined for an unending eternity—waste your energies on a world that passeth away? Think of your high destiny, and prepare for it. Heaven, and not earth, is your home.

And it is just from this fact that our present life derives all its importance. Its importance arises, not from its own concerns, but from its relation to the world to come. It is short; yet it is all the time that God has given us to become meet for entering into His presence, who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity without abhorrence of, and indignation against it. It is uncertain; yet it is the seed-time of eternity. As we sow *now*, so shall we reap *then*. Sow the seeds of holiness, and you shall gather the fruits of peace and purity, righteousness and happiness. Or, sow and cherish the seeds of evil, and as certainly you shall reap misery and woe. Not more certainly does the husbandman reap in harvest according to the seed sown in spring, than shall the soul reap in eternity according to the seed sown in time.