

# THE WESLEYAN.

PUBLISHED UNDER THE DIRECTION OF A COMMITTEE OF WESLEYAN MINISTERS AND FRIENDS IN LOWER CANADA,  
IN CONNECTION WITH THE BRITISH CONFERENCE.

"LET US CONSIDER ONE ANOTHER TO PROVOKE UNTO LOVE AND TO GOOD WORKS."—HEBREWS X. 24.

VOL. I.—No. 17.

MONTREAL, THURSDAY, MARCH 18, 1841.

[NEW SERIES, No. 10.]

## DIVINITY.

[FOR THE WESLEYAN.]

### THE BREVITY OF HUMAN LIFE.

*"He cometh forth like a flower: and is cut down."*  
JOB.

THIS truly affecting passage would form an appropriate epitaph for all mankind; and if adopted, would endue every tombstone and cenotaph with a warning and an instructing voice. The efforts of the chisel would then promote the enterprises of the pulpit; and the sculptor and the preacher would be "co-workers together," labouring for the diffusion of this salutary truth: "Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity." Were this, or a similar custom, introduced, "The Lively Oracles" would be lithographed in the abodes of the dead; words which the Holy Ghost uttered would be written on "tables of stone;" and the various symbols which friendship and love create to perpetuate the remembrance of their loss, would be so many voices issuing from the grave, and iterating the celestial response which the anxious prophet received from heaven: "The voice said, cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field; the grass withereth, the flower fadeth."

Zophar, one of the persons that came to console with Job, and minister unto him in his affliction, reproved him very sharply for justifying himself; and even charged him with laying claim to an uprightness from which he had wilfully departed. These bitter upbraidings were as spears and arrows entering into his flesh; and while his spirit was groaning under the anguish they occasioned, he began to repel them, and justify his own conduct. In the course of his defence, that fervour which innocence only can inspire, becomes very conspicuous, particularly when praying unto God, that he might be informed of his sins, and the end for which he was afflicted. (chap. xliii. v. 23, 24, 25.) The recollections of his former comfort and opulence pass before him like the visions of a former age; the recurrences of his mind render his misery more dark and grievous; and then the patriarch of Uz—like the shepherd of Bethlehem—the Arabian "whose face was foul with weeping"—as did the Israelite who watered his couch with his tears, cried aloud, "When I remember these things, I pour out my soul in me." His head is bowed down like a bruised reed, or a leaf broken by the wind; his strength is dried up like a potsherd; his eyes are almost consumed with weeping; sorrow and affliction are pouring out their last vial on his head; the grave is opening to receive him; death is coming up against him, wielding his scythe, and about to cut him down; and then, out of the fulness of his heart, he groans forth the elegiac language, of which, the words prefixed to these reflections form a portion: "Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble. He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down; he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not."

This portion of God's most true and lively word forms, in some measure, an epitome of human life; or an allegorical picture, in which the rise and progress of our earthly existence are represented by an appropriate similitude; and the termination thereof, by the swift and sudden destruction that cometh like a whirlwind; but that is sometimes produced by a violent and cruel hand. "He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down."

#### I. *Man cometh forth like a flower.*

During the brief period of their existence, flowers display a richness and exhale an odour which art can neither rival nor imitate. The raiment in which they are clothed is of exquisite fabric and delicate pattern; and surpasseth every thing which even the wardrobes of oriental royalty could produce. "Consider the lilies of the field how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin. And yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." (Matt. vi. 28, 29.) When flowers begin to droop and languish, our hearts are affected by their decaying condition; and the admiration which their bloom awakens, is succeeded by the sympathy which their decline elicits. The crown or chaplet which is twined round the brow of a conqueror, is composed of flowers, and the posy that perfumes the chamber of a recluse is constituted of the same materials. They are gems embellishing the earth, as stars embellish the firmament. Flowers ornament the palaces of kings, and beautify the dwellings of the poor. Their tints and colours vie with the hues of the rainbow; and the light and brilliancy emitted by precious stones are constantly issuing from their leaves. In a word—they bloom upon the grave, as emblems of the resurrection; and they supply the inspired writers with tender and nervous comparisons; and through these, are some of the principal truths of divine revelation conveyed to our hearts. The grass of the earth, and the flowers of the field, have been consecrated by the preachers of both the Old and New Testament, to expatiate on "THE BREVITY OF HUMAN LIFE;" the precariousness of the tenure by which it is held; and the absolute certainty of its speedy conclusion. David, "the anointed of the God of Jacob," describing the life of a ruler in Israel, among other terms, equally graphic and poetical, employs those that are annexed: "He shall be as the tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain." In one of his divine odes, "The sweet Psalmist of Israel," discoursing on the mercy of God, seeks occasion to extol this attribute, by describing those who are the objects of it: "As for man, his days are as grass; as a flower of the field so he flourisheth." The prophet Isaiah, contrasting the perpetuity of the gospel with the mortality of those to whom it is published, derives his illustrations from the same source: "Surely the people is grass; the grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever." To cheer the drooping hearts of the poor—to strew the roses of Sharon among the thorns which grow up in their path; and to humble all that trust in uncertain riches, the apostle James uses arguments suggested by the brief duration of flowers; and in which biblical divinity and natural philosophy are combined: "Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted—but the rich in that he is made low; because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away. For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withereth the grass, and the flower thereof falleth, and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth; so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways." James i. 9, 10, 11.

#### II. *Man cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down.*

The inspired writers, anxious that all should obtain the knowledge for which David so fervently prayed: "Lord, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am"—to make all generations of men feel that their days are "as an handbreadth," and their age "as nothing,"—these watchmen in Zion, all but exhausted the resources of an exceedingly tropical language. David,

consulting with Jonathan concerning his safety, says, "There is but a step between me and death." Job, reflecting on the rapid flight of time, cries out: "Now my days are swifter than a post." To describe its velocity, one compares it to "a weaver's shuttle;" and another likens it to "a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away." Again—"The brevity of human life," and the rapidity of our progress to the grave, is imaged forth by the ebbing of the tide; by the passage of the shadow which the declining sun casts upon the earth; and by the course of a bird flying through the air. The grass of the field which to-day is, and to-morrow is cut down; the flowers of the field, now blooming and beautiful, and anon withered and dead; the streams and rivers that incessantly flow in their channels—animate and inanimate creation—the things that are in heaven above, and in the earth beneath, and in the waters under the earth—all, all, with a silent but intelligible voice, cry, "All flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field; the grass withereth, the flower fadeth." Here are contained the memoirs of every individual; the history of all past, present, and future ages; the archives of every nation; and the epitaph of man in all his generations. The royal prophet felt the salutary influence of these truths in the midst of regal pomp and greatness; and though surrounded by the heads of the tribes, and the princes of the people, and the chief captains of his host, he was not ashamed to make this humble confession: "For we are strangers before thee, and sojourners, as were all our fathers; our days on the earth are as a shadow, and there is none abiding."

"Jesus, vouchsafe a pitying ray;  
Be thou my guide, be thou my way,  
To glorious happiness!  
Ah, write the pardon on my heart,  
And whenceso'er I hence depart,  
Let me depart in peace."

This devotional stanza is as replete with piety, as it is redolent of poetry; and may become unto all a fervent and an effectual prayer, which availeth much. And albeit they come forth like a flower, and are cut down; though their root "was old in the earth," and "the stock thereof die in the ground;" yet shall they bud, and bring forth boughs like a plant. Yea, they shall become plants of renown; even palm trees; and "shall flourish in the courts of our God" for ever and ever.

"Yet these, new rising from the tomb,  
With lustre brighter far shall shine;  
Revive with ever-during bloom,  
Safe from diseases and decline."

#### III. *Man cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down.*

The biblical trope that forms the basis of these reflections, is an opulent picture abounding in all the attractions of vivid delineation; and the tenderness, beauty, and pathos, of which it is composed, shall be exhibited under another aspect, stipulating, however, that this additional view shall close the present effort to shew the readers of "The Wesleyan" "THE BREVITY OF HUMAN LIFE;" and that it is incumbent upon us to do with all our might, whatsoever our hands findeth to do, "for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave whither thou goest."

There is in the short life of most persons, enough of grief and sorrow arising from ordinary visitations; but when death enters our dwellings, and forcibly tears away one that lived in our