

from earth. It is no *greater*, but it is certainly more *striking*: it carries with it a more emphatic lesson. It tells us that the mightiest on earth must die, that no rank, no power, no extent of dominion, or abilities for command, or talents for strategy or warfare, no might, no prowess, no conquests, can keep sickness or death at a distance. They obey a higher behest than any on earth. Death is the Messenger—it is the decree—of God. “*Thus saith the Lord, thou shalt die, and not live.*” When once that decree has gone forth, no earthly dignity or power, can stay it. Hezekiah must prepare himself to die, when the Lord had spoken the word.

And as in death the greatness of rank, and the greatness of dominion, are extinguished, so every other kind of greatness shares the same fate. Genius cannot bid away death:—no amount of talent can shield its possessor. Every now and then we hear of some who had distinguished themselves in the paths of literature and science struck down, another light extinguished, another power gone from the earth.

Nor will riches bribe away death.—Hezekiah had much wealth, much treasure in his palace, as he afterwards shewed to the ambassadors from the King of Babylon. But these had no power to purchase release from death. The decree was: “*thou shalt die, and not live.*” And did the monarch think that either his rank, or his power, or his riches could save him? The same Omnipotent being that had issued the decree alone could revoke it, and he made his prayer to God accordingly, and though that prayer prevailed so that fifteen years were given to his life—he was allowed fifteen years more on the earth—yet the decree was fulfilled, and Hezekiah at length slept with his fathers.

*The good die.* Hezekiah: “trusted in the Lord God of Israel; so that after him was none like him among all the Kings of Judah, nor any that were before him—For he clave to the Lord, and departed not from following him, but kept his commandments, which the Lord commanded Moses.” To have lived virtuously and piously may be a great support in death, but it will not exempt from it. Death has passed upon all men because all have sinned. All are under that law which will people the graves, and has already made the earth one vast sepulchre, where is entombed the dust of generations. Only two of our race have escaped death;

and this was not so much for their pre-eminent goodness, as, doubtless, to be an embodied representation of the *resurrection*, when that doctrine was yet but partially revealed. The good and bad have alike been subject to death; and so will it be till death has filled his garner—till the earth is sown with the dead, and the harvest of the world has come. Often, “the good die first”: they are taken away from the evil to come. How many affecting examples have we of this! We must speak in much ignorance regarding the ways, or purposes, of God in removing any from this scene of probation. But the early death of the pious and the good would seem to indicate some special design in taking them away from the world. They are *housed* in heaven. But it is not of the *early death*, that we are now speaking—it is of the *death of the good*. They must die: we are not to count it strange that they die. Their death but tells us, and there is no other explanation of the mystery, that *they have sinned and fallen in Adam*. The universal law of mortality points to some such event as Adam’s fall. Scripture alone tells us why it is that the good and the virtuous and the amiable die, for it tells us that *all have sinned*. There is but one way of getting the victory over death, and that is through him who hath destroyed death, and him that hath the power of death, that is the Devil,—who hath abolished death and brought life and immortality to light by the gospel. *Then death is changed*. The physical event is the same, but all its more momentous aspects are different. For, how does the Apostle argue? “The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law, but thanks be unto God who giveth us the victory through Jesus Christ our Lord.” The worst part of death is not the physical change implied in it: though that we cannot help regarding with some terror, with some feelings of reluctance and awe. When we look at it in its *physical* aspects, we connect it with *supposed remaining consciousness on the part of the soul*. We think how awful it must be to be dead: as if the *soul* was conscious of death—as if it felt that “cold obstruction”—as if it forsook this warm earth, and became a tenant of the grave, a “kneaded clod.” All the physical terrors of death are obviously owing to this illusion. And accordingly, even the good, the most virtuous, the most pious, have their shrinkings on this very account. So it seems to have been with Hezekiah. He seems to have recoiled from death in its physical