

The Lesson in Literature and Art

1. The depths of our misery can never fall below the depths of mercy.—*Sibbes*.

2. Prayer is so mighty an instrument that no one ever thoroughly mastered all its keys. They sweep along the infinite scale of man's wants and of God's goodness.—*Hugh Miller*.

3. Verse 1.

The boast of heraldry, the pomp of power,
And all that beauty, all that wealth e'er gave,
Await alike the inevitable hour:

The paths of glory lead but to the grave.
—*Gray*.

4. Sophocles, the most renowned of the Grecian poets, almost equally distinguished as dramatist, statesman, and philosopher, closed a career of eighty years, which the world has called brilliant, five centuries before the birth of our Saviour. But, unenlightened by Christianity, there was no happy paradise of God opening before him. As he sank into the rayless grave he left behind him the following pathetic testimony:

"Man's happiest lot is not to be;
And when we tread life's thorny steep,
Most blest are they who, earliest free,
Descend to death's eternal sleep."
—*J. S. C. Abbott*.

5. One may live as a conqueror, or a king, or a magistrate, but he must die a man. The bed of death brings every human being to his pure individuality, to the intense contemplation of that deepest and most solemn of all relations, the relation between the creature and his Creator.—*Webster*.

6. Verses 2, 3. There are not many who finish their lives before they die. Very few go willingly; most are forced, and not a few are dragged to the grave. Instead of leaving the world, they are hunted out of it.—*Gotthold*.

7.

More things are wrought by prayer
Than this world dreams of. Wherefore let thy voice

Rise like a fountain for me night and day.
For what are men better than sheep or goats,
That nourish a blind life within the brain,

If, knowing God, they lift not those hands of prayer,
Both for themselves and those who call them friends?

For so the whole round earth is every way
Bound by gold chains about the feet of God.
—*Tennyson*.

8. Verse 5.

Two angels, one of Life and one of Death,
Passed o'er our village as the morning broke;
The dawn was on their faces, and beneath.
The somber houses hearsed with plumes of smoke.

Their attitude and aspect were the same.

Alike their features and their robes of white
But one was clothed with amaranth, as with flame,

And one with asphodels, like flakes of light.

And he who wore the crown of asphodels,
Descending, at my door began to knock,
And my soul sank within me, as in wells
The waters sink before an earthquake's shock.

I recognized the nameless agony.

The terror and the tremor and the pain,
That oft before had filled or haunted me,
And now returned with threefold strength again.

The door I opened to my heavenly guest,
And listened, for I thought I heard God's voice;

And, knowing whatso'er he sent was best,
Dared neither to lament nor to rejoice.

Then with a smile that filled the house with light,

"My errand is not Death, but Life," he said;
And ere I answered, passing out of sight,
On his celestial embassy he sped.

All is of God! If he but wave his hand,
The mists collect, the rain falls thick and loud,

Till, with a smile of light on sea and land,
Lo! he looks back from the departing cloud.

Angels of Life and Death alike are his:
Without his leave they pass no threshold o'er;
Who, then, would wish or dare, believing this,
Against his messengers to shut the door?

—*Longfellow*.

Lesson Side-Lights and Illustrations

1. An unusually helpful manual of reference in connection with the lessons now under consideration is William Day Crockett's volume, issued by the Book Concern in 1897, *A Harmony of the Books of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles*. Side by side in this work we find

various versions of the same incident, each one affording some phase of the case which the other does not. For example, in order to have a complete view of the incident to be studied here we must also read 2 Chron. 32, 24-26, and 2 Kings 20, 1-11. The student of the Word

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