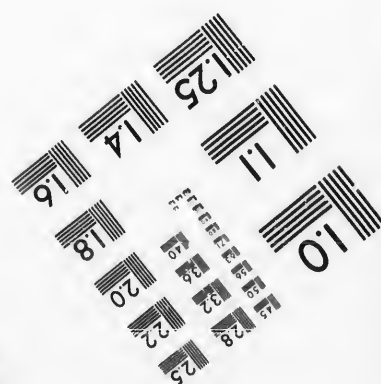
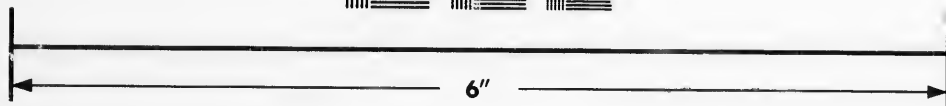
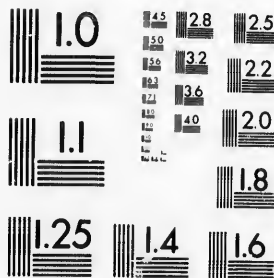


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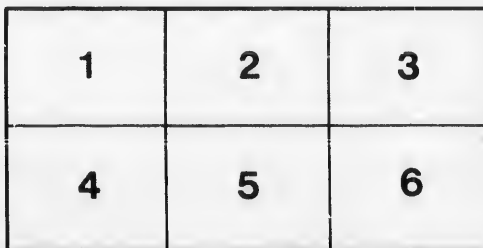
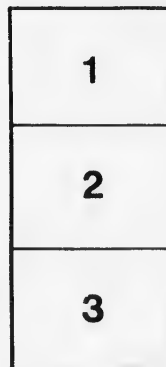
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T

PREA

7-24

The President's Death:

AND

THE LESSONS IT TEACHES:

A SERMON

PREACHED IN THE BAPTIST CHAPEL, BRANTFORD, C. W.

ON THE EVENING OF

SABBATH, APRIL 23rd, 1865,

BY

THE REV. WILLIAM STEWART, B. A.

(PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.)

BRANTFORD:

PRINTED AT THE OFFICE OF THE BRANTFORD "COURIER."

1865.

JOS. S. S. S.
OCT. 12, 1871

TO
THE DEACONS AND MEMBERS
OF THE
BAPTIST CHURCH, BRANTFORD,
THE FOLLOWING SERMON
PREACHED IN THE ORDINARY COURSE OF HIS MINISTRY,
AND
PUBLISHED AT THE REQUEST OF VALUED FRIENDS,
IS RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED
BY THEIR
OBLIGED AND AFFECTIONATE PASTOR.

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The President's Death.

"Thy hands *were* not bound, nor thy feet put into fetters; as a man falleth before wicked men, so fellest thou; and all the people wept again over him." II SAMUEL, III. 34.

The first part of the verse now read, contains the simple, yet touching lamentation uttered by King David over Abner, the son of Ner, after he had fallen by the murderous hand of Joab. As he was flying from a bloody battle-field in Gibeon, Abner in self-defence had reluctantly killed the swift-footed Asahel, Joab's brother. The wild warrior-chief determines to be revenged. His young brother had been the darling of the family, and the idol of the rude soldiery. The revenge of Joab was postponed for a time; but on hearing that Abner had been received into the favor of David, a feeling of jealousy was mingled with the passion of vengeance for his brother, and gained the mastery over him. He broke out into violent remonstrance with the king, and immediately sent a messenger after the departing Abner. With the unsuspecting generosity of a noble nature, the chieftain at once returned to Hebron. Joab met him in the gateway of the town, took him aside as if with a peaceful intention, and then treacherously smote him with deadly blow "under the fifth rib." David burst into passionate grief and invective when he heard of the act. The assassin was too powerful to be punished; but the king compelled him to appear at the funeral in sackcloth and torn garments. David, over the rest of whose life fear of Joab, one of "these

men the sons of Zeruah," cast a shade, as a mark of respect to the memory of Abner, followed the bier, and poured forth a simple dirge over the slain, which has been rendered thus:—

As a villain dies, ought Abner to die?
 Thy hands, not fettered;
 Thy feet, not bound with chains;
 As one falls before the malicious, fellest thou!

It is almost unnecessary to state that these words have not been chosen as a text containing truth to be illustrated and enforced, but rather as a motto which strikingly depicts the sad end of him, the lessons of whose loss we are this night met to learn. A wail has gone throughout the length and breadth of this northern continent; and tidings of the great sorrow will soon be flashed, as on lightning-wing through every corner of the civilized world. Thousands of homes in the neighboring republic have been suddenly darkened: it is as if one of their own household lights had been extinguished by the chill touch of death. In our own province, an electric touch of sympathy, that shows all the world to be akin, has awakened a universal grief. As with blanched cheek and bated breath, men read the early telegrams of President Lincoln's assassination on that sad Saturday morning, it seemed to many like some terrible dream, from which the sleeper would give worlds to awake, and find that it was all unreal. And when at length the mind took in the dread reality, the sickened heart cried out, whereunto shall all this tend? "How long, O Lord, how long?" In reply there came to the ear of faith this voice of inspiration, "Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth."

No apology is offered for the choice of this sad calamity as the subject of remark this evening. God, in revelation, finds a place for the names, and deeds, and death of the noble, the ruler, and the king; and when in his providence, there has happened the death of one, whose acts for four years past, have claimed the attention of the civilized world, and whose name has been "familiar to the ear as household words," surely we cannot be wrong if we turn our thoughts to the sad and solemn event. Indeed, I hold it to be the duty of the

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religious teacher, to seize on every favorable occasion for conveying to the understanding and impressing on the conscience of his hearers, the truths he has been commissioned by God to communicate to men. True, I should deem it alike a desecration of this day and of this desk, were I to obtrude my own political opinions, or harangue this audience in the venomous spirit of the third-rate demagogue. It is as the Christian Minister, and not as the paltry politician I desire to speak. Above the noisy, dusty atmosphere of mere party faction, let us seek to raise our thoughts, and while the grief of a common loss weighs on every heart, and the pathos of sympathy trembles on every lip, let us "hear the rod, and who hath appointed it."

I. The first and chief lesson taught by the tragic event is one of *recognition of God's hand, and resignation to his will*. "God moves in a mysterious way." "His judgments are a great deep." "Thy way, O God, is in the sea, and Thy path in the great waters, and thy footsteps are not known." "Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?" True indeed, God cannot be the author of sin; but in his providence he hath permitted this national calamity to befall, and "He doeth all things well." History and experience alike demonstrate, that God often allows what he does not approve. Faith is frequently staggered by the seeming discrepancy between what is taught in the word and what is permitted in the providence. In the darkest dispensation, however, the Christian may rest assured of this, that "all things work together for good to them that love God." When the wildest storms are raging, the believer may derive comfort from the thought, that he has a friend in Omnipotence, and a hiding-place within the tabernacle of the Most High. "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble: therefore will not we fear." Still with our weak faith and limited vision, we are all too apt to think that the cause of truth or of liberty is laid low, if one of its chosen champions has been taken away from earth. But O, it is not so! When will Christian men learn that all things are under the guidance of a better wisdom than theirs? and that out of the greatest calamity God can evolve the highest

good? Either with or without human instrumentality, he can carry on his undisturbed affairs. Frequently it happens that the very events that we deem most disastrous, are by his all-controlling rule, made to work together for the ends that he deems most desirable. The sun has not set, although it disappear for a time behind a cloud; and so, although God's dealings may, for a brief period, seem dark and disastrous, yet in the end he "will bring forth his righteousness as the light, and his judgment as the noon-day." In the present state of the problem of providence is "too high," for us; "we cannot attain unto it;" but what we know not now, we shall know hereafter. Meanwhile, in this and every calamity, with humble recognition of God's hand, and holy resignation to his will, be it ours ever to say, "Just and true are all thy ways, thou King of saints!"

Still, the thought will recur to us, *Such a death, of such a man, and at such a critical crisis!* What a threefold mystery have we here! What can be its design? Has this great calamity been permitted because the nations of the earth once more need to learn the lesson, "Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man in whom there is no help. His breath goeth forth; he returneth to the earth; in that very day his thoughts perish." Was there a danger that the general and enthusiastic joy at the downfall of Richmond, and the prospect of a speedy suppression of the rebellion, should degenerate into self-glorification and even riotous revelry; and did this form another reason why God allowed the ruthless assassin to fire the unerring shot, and lay the Chief Magistrate low in death that the joy of the nation might be turned into mourning? May not the just anger evoked by the inhuman deed, be one of the chief weapons which God will yet use, to punish the upholders of slavery for their determined defence and maintenance of that God-dishonouring system—that "sum of all villainies?" Or does the Judge of all the earth design yet more strikingly to teach that great nation—what he has been evidently teaching them "by terrible things in righteousness," during the four years he has had a controversy with them—that the glory of the emancipation of the slave belongs only to himself? If by the stern logic of events, the Cabinet at

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Washington has been forced to the conclusion that the integrity of the Union could only be conserved by the abolition of slavery; may not God's design in this terrible providence be, to teach the nation yet further, that He is the sole Ruler—that even the clear head and the kind heart of Abraham Lincoln are not absolutely necessary (although men so judged,) to the actual accomplishment of national freedom and unity? Human reason, groping blindly after truth, asks questions like these. But the answers are yet in the uncertain future. We know only in part; for we forget the past, misunderstand the present, and fear the future. Yet still these great truths afford a firm foundation on which faith may rest, that the Judge of all the earth will do right, and that “though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not go unpunished.” God hath not forgotten the cry of the oppressed, nor refused to hear the prayer of his people. He is still our hope and trust. For though clouds and darkness may be round about God, justice and judgment are the habitation of his throne. And all the more that the murderous blow has fallen, to Him let us look, on Him let us call, and in Him alone let us hope.

II. Another lesson taught by the calamity is, *gratitude for the memory of the departed President*. Abraham Lincoln was an honest man, and

“An honest man's the noblest work of God.”

True, he had his enemies. No sooner did he assume the Presidential chair, than he was ridiculed as a mere pettifogging village attorney: boor, beast, and even worse epithets were freely applied to him. His very personal appearance was lampooned, and his jokes were retailed with villainous additions. Yet heeding not these railings, this man pursued the even tenor of his way. So free was he from taint of selfishness or guile, so immovable by passion, and so inaccessible to revenge, it was long before he was understood by wily and time-serving politicians. But his simple honesty of purpose at length won him a way to the heart not of the North merely, but of

the civilized world. He was one of nature's true nobility. By persevering industry and honest integrity, he rose from the toil of a backwoods farm to the chief magistracy of a mighty nation. Entering on office under circumstances of peculiar and unparalleled difficulty, he announced his policy with firm yet temperate resolve. Wisely did he hold the reins of government, and steadily did he rise in the affections of his countrymen and the respect and esteem of the world. "*Sic semper tyrannis*," shouted the assassin: but this man was no tyrant. No statesman of purer patriotism ever filled the presidential chair. When the question of a new election came to be discussed, the man who for four years had guided the Ship of State so skillfully through the terrible breakers, was again the all but unanimous choice of the loyal people of the nation. Could stronger proof than this be given of his noble qualities alike of head and heart? His patent of nobility was a truer and worthier one than that which is merely transmitted from sire to son. Who can think of all that he was, without recalling the verse of our greatest living English poet:—

"Howe'er it be, it seems to me
'Tis only noble to be good:
Kind hearts are more than coronets,
And simple faith than Norman blood."

It was not merely for what he *was*, however, but for what he *did* that the name of Lincoln should be held in grateful remembrance.—Although born in a slave state, he was a hater of slavery from the beginning,—at least, he always held it to be a great and grievous evil; and God in his providence made him the deliverer of the oppressed. As the author of the noted Proclamation of Emancipation, his name will be transmitted to generations yet unborn. Through many weary years the poor slave had been praying for deliverance. He felt that though a man in heart and soul, the dearest rights of manhood were all denied him. He had been whipped and scourged, robbed and imprisoned, and all for neither crime nor fault of his! His children had been snatched away from him and frequently sold into a bitterer bondage than his own, among the deadly swamps of the Carolinas or

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the cane-brakes of Louisiana. He had cried to God for help, and yet cried in vain, while tears of blood were wrung from his breaking heart. He had told his sorrows to Jesus; and yet no helper came. But the day of his deliverance has dawned! The year of jubilee has come! And henceforth every lover of liberty throughout the world will hold in grateful and admiring recollection, the name of Abraham Lincoln, the Emancipator of the slave, the true friend of freedom.— Can we wonder that, when he was in Richmond a few days before his death, the negroes hailed his arrival with shouts of joy, and gathered around him, as he moved simply and familiarly among them, with reverence and admiration, such as they might have accorded to some superior being? True indeed, it may be said that Mr. Lincoln's views of slavery were greatly changed during his four years of office. It may even be added that it was for the restoration of the Union and not for the freedom of the slave that the North at first was fighting. Man's object in the war might be the perpetuation of national unity; God's object was the liberation of the down-trodden and oppressed. Still, granting fully that God did teach the late President and his party by the progress of the conflict that the fetters of the slave must be stricken from off his limbs, ere the national breach could be healed; were they not willing enough to learn the lesson, and honest enough to act up to it? Every close observer of the struggle has seen, that during the past few months, the war had become virtually an anti-slavery one. Never was there an honest recognition of the fact that the origin of the war was slavery,—or rather that the history of the conflict has been the history of God's controversy with the nation on account of slavery—than is to be found in President Lincoln's late inaugural address, a brief state paper which for moral dignity, unaffected solemnity, and noble Christian sentiment has never been equalled:

"Fondly," said he, "do we hope, fervently do we pray, that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if it be God's will that it continue until the wealth piled up by bondmen by two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be repaid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said that

the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. With malice towards none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds, to care for those who shall have borne the battle, and for their widows and orphans. And with all this let us strive after a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations."

These golden sentences are not the utterances of a mere earthly potentate or party politician. They are stamped with the seal of a deeper wisdom and a truer simplicity than any words mere statesman ever uttered. They seem to have been conceived more in the spirit of a prophet of the older dispensation, or of a puritan of the seventeenth century, than of a nineteenth century statesman. It requires no prescient wisdom to foretell that they will be embalmed for ages in the memory and heart of Christians and lovers of liberty throughout the world. Devoutly thankful should we be to the Giver of all good, that great men have not yet died out from the earth; that such a man was raised up by God at such a period—a man whose sole principles of action seemed to be, the good of his country, and, as far as he was given to know it, the glory of his God.

There is just one event connected with his departure, that Christian men will *not* desire to embalm in their grateful memories. Need I say that I refer to his presence in a theatre, when he was shot by the cowardly assassin? What Christian man, what thinking man would seek to meet his end in such a scene? The very first thought that arose in almost every breast when the sad news came was this: O, if he was to die, would he had died elsewhere! I have no desire at present, nor indeed is this the time for me to discuss the question as to the lawfulness or moral influence of the stage. I hold, and am ready to prove, that the theatre is a place of vain and expensive amusement, a place unfriendly to piety, and hurtful to morality—a place, in short, whose frequenters are "lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God." True, I am willing to throw the cloak of Christian charity over the President's presence there on that fatal night. I make every allowance for the fact that he was present on that Good Friday evening (*Good Friday*—does not the name seem almost a mock-

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cry of a nation's grief?) rather to please the populace than to please himself. Yet still the sad fact remains. No wonder that his poor widowed wife, as she was led from the building where he breathed his last, should have exclaimed, as she looked across the street in sobs of hysterical sorrow, "Oh! that horrible house; take me away from it!" The spot had not always been the site of a theatre. Holy men had prayed there; hymns of praise had been sung there; souls had been born again there. The first Baptist Church of Washington had worshipped for years on the very spot where the theatre now stands. But I gladly leave this, in one sense, the saddest aspect of a sad subject. More I do not desire to say: as a minister of truth and righteousness, less I have not dared to say. And, men and brethren, is not this the lesson for every one, never to frequent any scene where we would not want death to find us?

III. The next lesson we may learn from the sad event, is one of *sympathy with the bereaved*. It is a christian duty to weep with those that weep. So closely are we identified with our brethren across the lines in language and laws, in commerce and institutions, that what rejoices them must gladden us, and what afflicts them must grieve us. The loss of a chief ruler at almost any time, brings home to every heart in a nation a sense of sad bereavement. Were our own beloved Queen to be suddenly removed by death, (a calamity which may God long arrest,) what a wail of woe would arise throughout the length and breadth of her mighty empire! History tells us that when Mirabeau died, France groaned and wept as one man. For days nothing else was heard or thought of, but the incalculable loss of their sovereign mind. When men met in coffee-rooms and at street corners, and one said to another, "fine weather, Monsieur," the sadly invariable reply was, "yes, fine weather; but Mirabeau is dead." Far intenser, and better founded is the grief, not of the United States alone, but of this whole Western Continent, and will be the sorrow of Europe at the sad loss of Abraham Lincoln. The sympathy will be general and genuine. The loss is not that of one country merely, but of the civilized world. A great man has fallen; a friend of peace

and liberty and right has been removed; a nation has been deprived of its head,—of one who had lived in more hearts than ever American President had lived in before,—of one whose memory will be handed down to posterity, as second only to Washington, the father of his country, if indeed he be second. What man, what lover of his kind, what christian can refuse the tribute of sympathy? We grieve because he was taken away at the time when his great work seemed on the eve of completion, when national re-construction and liberty seemed well-nigh secured. We sympathize with the nation because there seemed no man better fitted than he, to heal the wounds of the conflict and repair the sad losses of war, to accomplish the great work of national re-union, to teach that people the heroic, Christian duty of forgetting injuries and forgiving enemies, and cultivating peace with all the nations of the earth. And who that has the heart of a man, could refuse the prayer and tear of sympathy to the bereaved family, and especially to her who has been so suddenly and ruthlessly rendered a widow. Poor lady! God pity and comfort her! What Christian heart would refuse to pray that she may have the sympathy of Him who was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, and the consolations of his glorious gospel? Will not Britain's Queen, our own loved Lady, who now sits a sad widow upon a lonely throne, shed tears and send words of sympathy to her sister in sorrow? And when the cloud of this great grief drops its showers of bitterness over the fatherland, will not every Christian heart that feels the thrill of sorrow pour forth its supplication to Him who relieveth the widow, who proclaims, "thy Maker is thy husband;" and in whom the fatherless findeth mercy? This general sympathy will cement the nations more closely than ever. There cannot be war now between the two greatest Christian countries of the world. If there should be, I could almost imagine that the blood of the murdered President would cry out against it. But it cannot, must not be. Civilization—liberty—human brotherhood—Christianity—all forbid. Surely enough of brother's blood has been shed during the last four years, to teach peace to the nations of the earth.

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IV. A fourth lesson to be learned from this bitter bereavement is one of *humility and caution*. When men read with almost blinded vision the sad details of the atrocity, they were ready to hang the head with shame at the thought, that any one in the shape of a man could have done the murderous act. It seemed to many as if the history of the world had been reversed, and we had suddenly been thrown back into the darkness of the middle ages. And yet it was a man that did the deed. Call him fiend, murderer if you will, the fact remains the same, that he is still a wearer of our common nature. Shall I shock you, my dear hearers, if I say, that but for God's grace we might have been equally guilty? True, if either the thought or committal of such an act were laid to the charge of any man here, he would indignantly ask with Hazael, "Is thy servant a dog that he should do this thing?" And yet that foul crime was the act of fallen humanity. We cannot tell with what temptation Satan may have plied the miserable assassin; we cannot tell whether placed in his circumstances and looking at the deed from his perverted light we might not have been equally guilty. While deeply thankful to God, that by his providence and his grace, he has hitherto restrained these hearts of ours, from which proceed all evil thoughts, let us pour forth our lamentations to-night over the defection of poor frail human nature, a defection that has been exhibited not only in this brutality, but in the history of the human family, from the days of Cain till now,—a history stained with crime and written in letters of blood.

And is not this the lesson of caution that we especially need, *Beware of indulging a revengeful spirit*. Justice is one thing; and justice demands, that "whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed." Let the cold-blooded murderer, if caught alive, be made an example of; let crime be punished openly and without stint, according to the strict letter of the statute-book; but be it ever remembered, that a spirit of revenge is as impolitic as it is wicked. "Vengeance belongeth unto me: I will repay, saith the Lord." How hard it is to check the rising spirit, and to enter in at the strait gate of the Saviour's teaching, we all may find, when we come

to practice precepts like these : " Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you and pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you." Yet this is duty, Christian duty. If our hearts are burning with revenge, think you that our Heavenly Father will ever hear our prayers ? Brethren, whenever you feel an unholy thought arise within you, go in spirit to Calvary, that centre of all holy motive and source of all divine strength. See there the mangled, crucified Jesus, whose one life was worth infinitely more than that of ten thousand Presidents, and whose death involved more guilt in its perpetration than that of ten thousand Booths, and ask, what says he ? Do his dying lips breathe malice or revenge ? Oh no ! When " he was reviled, he reviled not again ; when he suffered, he threatened not."

" And when upon the cross he hung,
With all his foes in view—
' Father, forgive them,' Jesus said,
' They know not what they do.' "

Brethren, He is our pattern. The heart may have, probably must have its own feelings ; still let grace prevail, and let us learn to be Christ-like and forgiving too ! God help the neighbouring nation and its rulers, while ever pursuing the path of justice and rectitude, to keep revenge in check ; and God forbid that national guilt should ever be augmented by the infliction of merely national vengeance ! May the mantle of the murdered President, who ever breathed the spirit of kindly forgiveness to his foes, descend on his successor !

V. Finally, is not this the solemn lesson to all, viz :—*the uncertain tenure of all earthly possessions, and even of life itself ?* Nothing is more frequent in the world, nothing is more neglected by the world than death. When one eminent and illustrious in State has been laid low in the dust of death, it is one of God's ways of checking human thoughtlessness, and convincing man of his mortality. As exposed to the fell dart of the King of terrors, peasant and president stand on a common level. Death spares neither the lofty nor the lowly. The tide of bereavement that rolls through our fallen world, breaks on the threshold of the lowest log-cabin, and dashes its black

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wave over the summit of the highest earthly seat. The ebon sceptre of the grisly king is strong in might; but, blessed be God! there is a stronger. It is wielded by the omnipotent arm of the King of kings,—of Him who is the

“Death of death, and hell’s destruction.”

As dying men, then, let us take heed to the lessons of this awful calamity. It is a great voice from the Infinite and Unseen, calling on all who have ears to hear to listen, on all who have hearts to feel to be impressed, on all who have loins to gird and lamps to trim, to gird the one and trim the other, that they may be ready for the Bridegroom when he is ready for them!

Men and brethren, “what is your life? It is even a vapour that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.” What is fame? A bubble which bursts,—a breath which expires. What is dominion? A house built upon the sand. What are thrones, sceptres and presidential chairs? Shadows all, mere symbols of unsubstantial, unsatisfying good; and over them the wind of divine judgment passeth, and lo! they are gone. Be persuaded then, to “set your affections on things above, and not on things on the earth.” This evening’s service will not have been held in vain, if by God’s grace only one soul here be brought to a simple and sincere trust in the Crucified One, who died that men might live. Then, in whatever form death may come to us,—even if it should be by the dagger of the assassin or the shot of the murderer,—or, as is far more likely, if it should be in our own quiet home-chamber, surrounded by the ministrations of sorrowing loved ones, we shall experience that for us “to depart and be with Christ, will be far better.” For by the merits and mediation of the Saviour in whom we trust, we shall go to a position higher than earthly Prince or President ever occupied—

“From grief and groan,
To a golden throne,
Beside the King of Heaven.”

