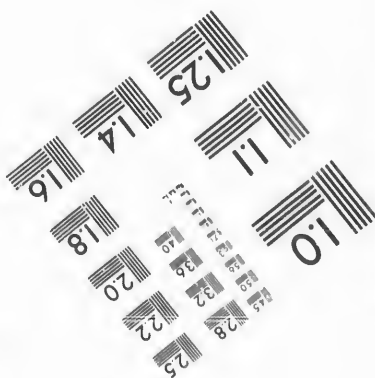
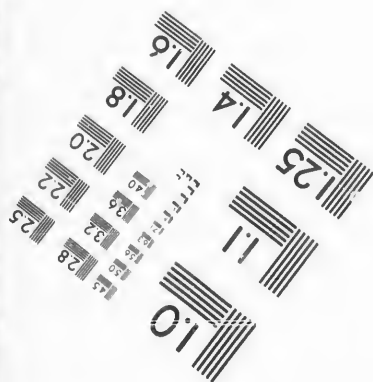
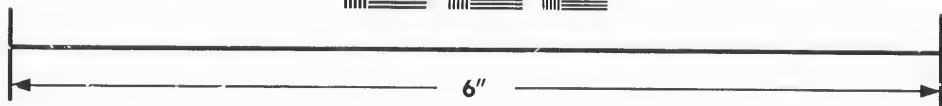
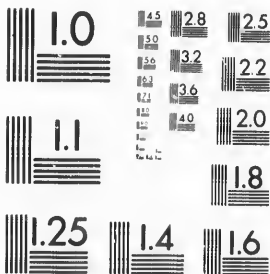


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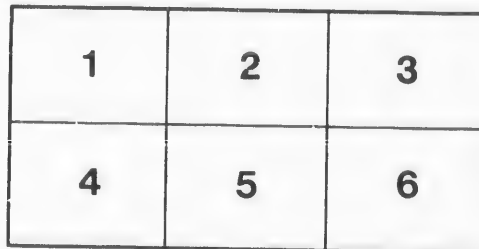
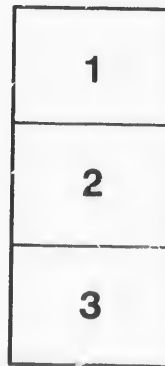
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PLEASURES OF PIETY.

BOOK V.

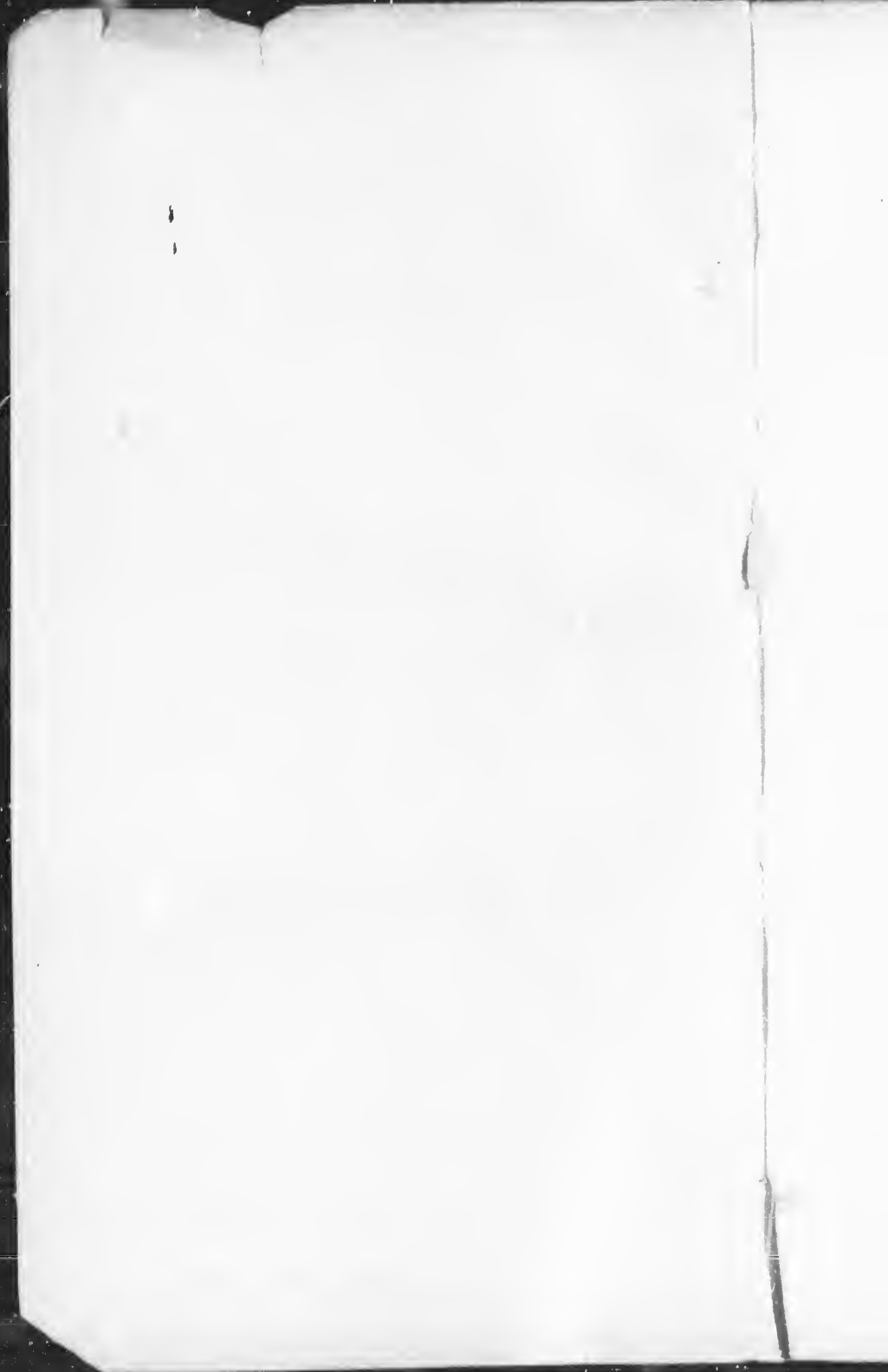
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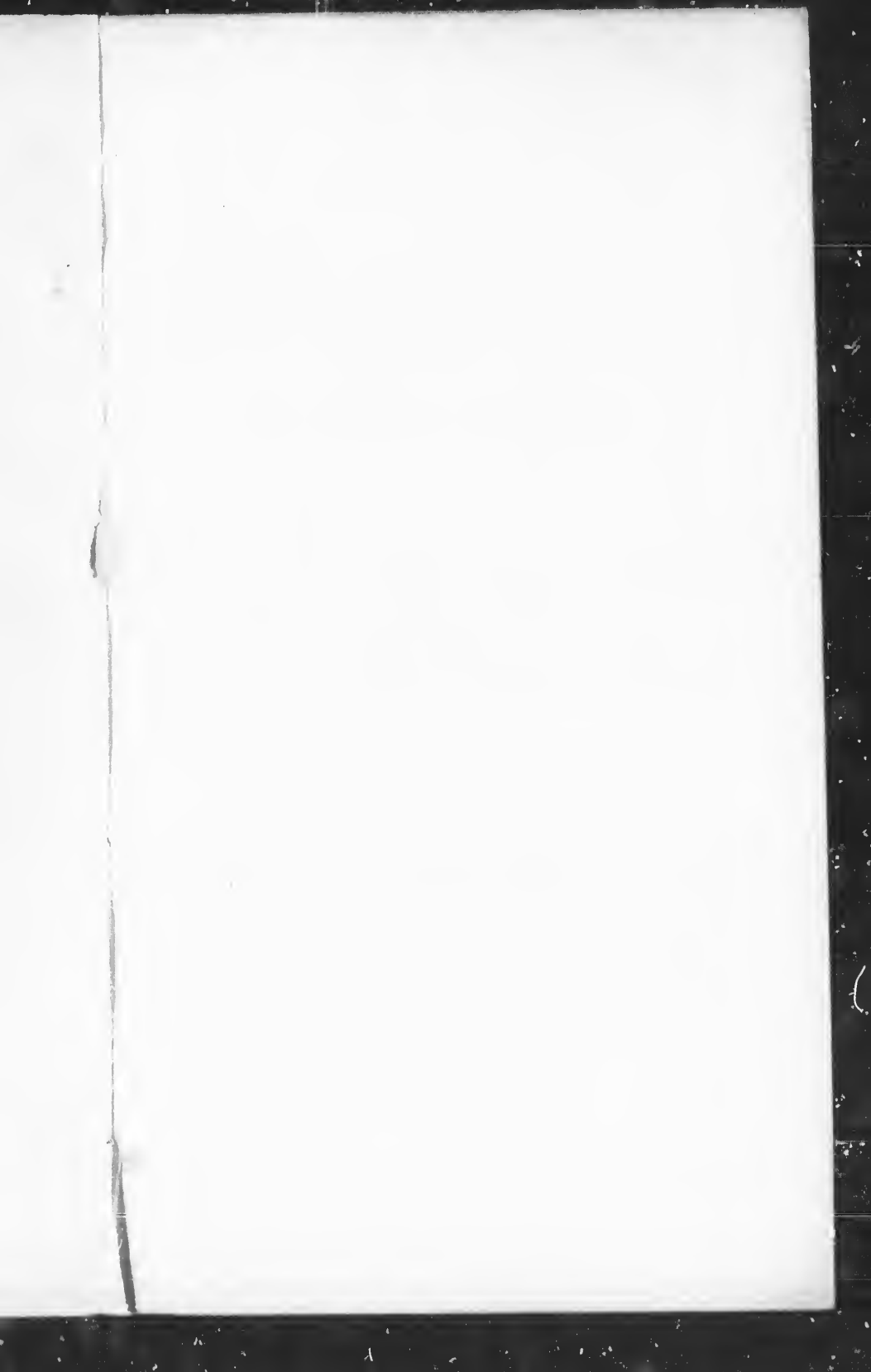
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ARGUMENT.

PLEASURE FROM CONSIDERING THE CHARACTER  
OF CHRIST AS REVEALED IN THE GOSPEL.—  
RELIGIOUS CONTROVERSY NOT FAVOURABLE  
TO PIETY.—THE NATIVITY OF CHRIST—HIS  
LIFE—HIS DEATH—HIS RESURRECTION—HIS  
ASCENSION.

GREAT was that prophet whom Jehovah chose,  
His elect sons from bondage to set free ;  
And lead them safely through a howling wild,  
Beset with dangers, to that fruitful land,  
The promis'd gift of heaven ; but greater far  
Is he whom now I sing ; the Son of God,  
The Saviour of mankind ; who humbly clothed  
Himself in human nature, and his life  
Gave as a ransom for our ruin'd world.

How various the conceptions of mankind  
 Respecting the Messiah! Some him deem  
 A man, not more; an angel some; and some  
 Believe him God! 'Midst this perplexity  
 Of jarring thoughts, where shall we go to find  
 The truth? Can sages tell his origin?  
 His nature do they know? All human skill,  
 This question to resolve, is impotent;  
 Supernatural aid is needful; then inquire  
 Of those alone whom God has qualified  
 By agency divine; and they will tell  
 Both whence, and who, the great Redeemer is.

Those attributes divine, which neither man,  
 Nor high born angel, can participate;  
 The names, which Deity alone can bear;  
 And worship, that to none but God is due;  
 The scriptures openly to him apply;  
 And he as openly, what they ascribe,  
 As his just right receives. Hence, who deny  
 His true divinity, must too reject  
 The evidence of Scripture, for this truth

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Is there inserib'd in characters so plain,  
That all, who will, may read, and understand.

But stop, my Muse, nor heedlessly descend  
Down to the deep, dark, desolate, domain  
Of cheerless controversy! where loud winds,  
With endless fury, rave 'mong briers and thorns,  
Where every reptile venomous slow crawls;  
And where the blessed light of heaven shines not,  
But fitful meteors cast a lurid gleam  
On the bewilder'd travellers's irksome way!

Though sometimes needful in the cause of truth,  
Oft controversy blights the noblest powers  
That grace the human soul; and, after years  
Of rancorous dispute, the matter leaves  
Unsettled as before! While stormy winds,  
And beating rains, destroy the tender flowers,  
Which beautify the earth; the gentle gales,  
And softly falling dews, make the grass spring,  
Unfold the bud, and nurse the mellowing fruit;  
Ev'n so the mind, in all its faculties,

Beneath tuition dictated by love,  
 Expanding flourishes. Not dipt in gall  
 Was that angelic pen which wrote the terms  
 Of reconciliation between sinful man  
 And his offended God; then never ought  
 The messengers of peace, with burning pen  
 In hateful discord dipt, to woo mankind  
 Back to the path of truth; for human wrath,  
 Though God oft make it praise him, never can  
 Work out his righteousness; or, helpful, turn  
 One wandering sinner from the way of death.

To every creature an appointed sphere,  
 By the wise laws of righteous Heaven, is fixt  
 Immoveable. The meanest worm, that ne'er  
 Ambitious crawls beyond its native cled,  
 In its own proper circuit, is as free  
 As the fleet roe whose ample range extends  
 O'er lofty mountains, and far-stretching plains.  
 Though swift and high the strong wing'd eagle soar,  
 There is a bound aerial that she  
 Can never pass: nay, from heaven's sapphire gates

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There is a distant point, which not the wing  
Of Gabriel can reach ! Man also has,  
Ev'n for his strongest intellectual powers,  
A limit set ; to know this limit well,  
And therein give his faculties full scope,  
In serving his Creator, shows him wise,  
And will afford him joy   at to attempt  
What lies beyond the province of the mind,  
Betrays him ignorant, and fills his soul  
With sad perplexity, and rankling doubt ;  
And makes him foolish as the weak-eyed bat,  
That would forsake the twilight mantled tower,  
To join the eagle in her sunward flight!

Instructive pleasing task, by light divine,  
Full beaming from God's holy word, to trace,  
With meek adoring mind, the sacred steps  
Of the Messiah, while he lowly walk'd  
In the abodes of men. Where'er he went,  
Disease and sickness, pain and sorrow, fled ;  
Nay, fled even death, man's formidable foe,  
As flee the dark and dismal shades of night,

Before the rosy beams of waking morn,  
And leave the joyous earth enrob'd in smiles.

As day not instantaneous forth at once  
Bursts on th' astonish'd sight, but dim at first  
Breaks o'er the eastern mountains, then the clouds'  
That fleecy hang in the grey orient sky,  
Enkindling with the upward sloping beams  
Of the approaching sun, glow vividly ;  
Then the great orb of light himself appears  
Full o'er the inflam'd horizon, and dispels  
Each trace of darkness from th' abodes of men ;  
Even so, amid the dismal gathering gloom  
Which hung o'er Paradise for man's offence,  
The Gospel faintly dawn'd ; and brighter still  
O'er the dark moral world it rose, till life  
And immortality, by its glad beams,  
Were openly reveal'd. The woman's Seed,  
In Eden was, by God himself, foretold ;  
And prophets still, from age to age, announ'd  
His coming ; and, in plainer terms, declar'd  
His person, character, and offices ;

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Until at last, an angel from the sky  
To Nazareth descending thus address'd  
His virgin mother : "Hail, thou that art high  
In favor, God is with thee ; thou art blest  
Above thy fellow women ; for, by power  
Divine, thou shalt conceive, and bear a Son,  
Whom Jesus thou shalt name, because from sin  
His people he shall save. Great shall he be,  
Son of the Highest call'd ; and the Lord God  
To him shall give his father David's throne,  
Despite his bitter enemies, and he  
Eternally o'er Jacob's house shall reign ;  
Nor shall his kingdom ever have a close."

Now was the ancient prophecy fulfill'd,  
Which Israel utter'd on his dying bed  
Respecting Shiloh's coming ; for the tribes,  
Obedient to the mandate of a king  
Not sprung from Judah, and that nothing knew  
Of Judah's God, crowded the public ways,  
Not as, at festive seasons, when they walk'd,  
From strength to strength, cheer'd by the joyful  
                  strains

Of elevating music, to appear  
 Before their God in Zion ; but, all sad,  
 Each seeks his native city, that he may,  
 Ev'n there, be mark'd a tributary slave  
 Of haughty Rome! Then pious Joseph, urged  
 By the decree of proud Augustus, came,  
 From Nazareth with Mary his espous'd,  
 To Bethlehem, their royal ancestor's  
 Paternal town ; but, though of royal line,  
 And near to be deliver'd of a Son,  
 The heir of all things both in earth and heaven ;  
 A stable was the palace, and a stall  
 The chamber, where the blessed virgin bore  
 That heavenly child, of whom the prophets sung  
 In strains so rapturous ; and his first robes  
 Were humble swaddling bands, and his first couch  
 Was a cold manger where the beasts were fed !  
 O wonderful humility ! Who can  
 Contemplate this great sight, and yet be proud  
 Of earthly riches, or of earthly state ?  
 Or haughtily a fellow-being scorn,  
 Because his birth mean, and obscure,

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Attracted not the notice of mankind,  
Or wak'd one echo with a natal song?

But though no human voices, loudly rais'd  
In joyful acclamation, mark'd the hour,  
The blessed hour, when, of a virgin born,  
The Prince of life appear'd; all heaven rejoic'd;  
And the dark caves of hell return'd the groans  
Of its inhabitants. Down from the sky,  
A bright angelic band, descending swift,  
Illumed the midnight plains of Bethlehem  
With the clear shining of their heavenly robes,  
And to the wondering shepherds straight reveal'd  
The joyful tidings of the Saviour's birth,  
And where they would behold the babe divine,  
Low in a manger sleeping, careful watch'd [told,  
By her that brought him forth. Their message  
Before they speed their flight back to heaven's  
gates,  
They hovering o'er the highly honoured earth,  
Prais'd God aloud for his good will to men.

Nor were the Gentile nations not appriz'd  
 Of his nativity, by God decreed  
 Not only to restore the chosen tribes  
 Of Jacob to full liberty from all  
 Their stern oppressors; but to raise mankind  
 Through earth's remotest bounds, and make them  
 The joy of his salvation. A bright star [feel  
 Flam'd in the orient, which sages knew  
 To mark his natal hour; hence taught, they came  
 To Judah's favour'd land, bearing rich gifts,  
 And when they found him, laid them at his feet,  
 Whom, lowly worshipping, they own'd a king  
 Whose sceptre soon would reach o'er all the earth,  
 While every nation blest his happy reign.

Time pass'd; and now at Jordan's sacred stream,  
 Where thousands flock'd to be baptiz'd of John  
 His great forerunner, to that solemn rite  
 Himself submitting, o'er his blessed head,  
 Heaven's sapphire gates were open'd and reveal'd,  
 A glory brighter than when noonday sun  
 Shines through an aperture of some dark cloud

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Which veils the azure sky ; while, like a dove,  
The Holy Spirit, visibly disclos'd,  
Descending lighted on him ; and a voice,  
Loud speaking from the dazzling glory, said,  
"This is my well beloved Son, in whom  
My soul delighteth; and, through whom well pleas'd,  
Unto myself I reconcile the world."

Behold the Son of God attested thus,  
And thus prepared for conflict, issue forth  
To the lone wilderness himself to meet,  
And overthrow, that enemy who first subdu'd  
The human race to bondage, by his wiles  
Lusnaring, leading them to sin against  
Their gracious Maker, and from Paradise  
To be outcast. But though our father fell  
By strong temptation tried, not so God's Son  
On whom man's help was laid ; he firmly stood  
Defying all the tempter's subtile arts ;  
And after forty days' and forty nights'  
Hard contest in the desert, he return'd

To Galilee victorious, and began  
To preach salvation to the human race.

Methinks I hear his sweet mellifluous voice  
God's law expounding to large listening throngs,  
Warning them earnestly to flee from wrath,  
To the Messiah who alone can save;  
And, while the prophets point to one to come  
As a Redeemer, Jesus to himself  
Directs their weary, fainting, trembling souls,  
Saying, "I who speak to you myself am he."

Ye reverend servants of the Son of God,  
Whose office is to lead mankind to heaven ;  
Behold the model which your Master left  
Of public teaching ; ever follow that,  
Nor fear success. It shows not intellect,  
But unbelief, t'address immortal souls  
On matters of eternity, in mode  
Abstract and hard to comprehend. Be *plain*,  
Despite th' unhallow'd sneer, and foul reproach,  
Of those, unfaithful to their sacred trust,

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Who, poor deluded mortals, think themselves  
Highly to be admir'd because they preach,  
Not to be understood by the base crowd,  
But only by the learn'd, as if men's rank,  
Or wealth, or learning, could enhance, or lower  
The value of their souls! The learn'd and great  
Despis'd the Saviour's preaching, and were left  
To perish; while th' illiterate and poor  
Heard him with pleasure, understood, believ'd;  
And so were fitted for immortal joy  
With God in heaven. Besides, it argues not  
A powerful mind well tutor'd, t'obscure  
The subject it professes to unfold,  
But the reverse. Minds are like burning lights,  
The strong and clear make objects plain; the weak  
And dim, leave them obscure. The glorious sun  
Is still the nobler light, though the pale moon,  
With many a gloomy shadow, makes earth's heights  
Seem higher, and her hollows more profound,  
Than when illumin'd by his powerful rays.  
Be *bold*--th' ambassadors of heaven's high King,  
Who speak by his authority, ought ne'er

To court the smiles of princes, nor to dread  
Their frowns! Be *earnest*—none are so who speak,  
With cold indifference of heaven and hell  
To dying men! Can you behold the tears  
Of prophets, and apostles; nay, the tears  
Ev'n of the Son of God! and yet commend  
Those dull, cold, heartless, preachers, who ne'er  
One pitying tear for ruin'd souls? If while [shed  
Some question merely politic pervades  
The public mind, the most lethargic rouse  
To animation; and, with lifted arm,  
Expressive eye, and countenance deep mark'd  
With high emotion, now, all eloquent,  
Express themselves with feeling, and declare  
They are in earnest, if mere wordly men  
Deem coldness, in a question that concerns  
The public weal, a crime, and warmth, a virtue;  
O! why should those, whose office 'tis to teach  
Mankind, in matters which affect their welfare  
Through the long ages of eternity,  
Deem coldness here a virtue, zeal, a crime?

While Jesus taught in true simplicity,  
With fervent zeal; he show'd himself divine,  
By various miracles, in open view  
Perform'd; and while his mighty works declared  
His power omnipotent, they also show'd  
His mercy and his love, to fallen man  
Unparallel'd. The water into blood  
He turns not, but to wine: with fire from heaven,  
He blights no mocking eye, but gives the blind  
Their sight: He none with sickness smites, nor  
But heals the sick, and raises up the dead, [death,  
Turning the house of mourning into joy.  
The tempest he not raises but subdues;  
Brings no destroying hail to smite the earth  
With barrenness; nor locusts to devour  
The fruitful fields; but, in the desert wild,  
Compassionate, vast multitudes he feeds,  
With a few fishes and a little bread  
So amplified, by his almighty power,  
That all are satisfied, and yet remains,  
Of fragments, more than was at first possess'd!

Methinks I see him seated on a hill,  
Near the Tiberian lake, where thousands flock,  
From all the country round, leading the blind,  
Bearing the lame, and sick, and sore diseas'd,  
To be relieved from all the various ills ;  
Nor do they seek his generous aid in vain.  
O wondrous spectacle ! those at his feet  
Laid down pale and emaciated, rise  
All flush'd with rosy health ; the lame leap up  
Not lame ; the deaf obey his call ; the dumb  
Rise singing ; and the blind, now blind no more,  
Rise gazing with astonishment on all  
Around ; while twice ten thousand voices wake  
The mountain echoes with Jehovah's praise !

Again I see him, as the prophet sung  
Of the Messiah, Zion's mighty King,  
All meek and lowly, on an ass's colt  
Riding ; while a large multitude strip off  
Their upper robes, and strew them in the way,  
Mixt with green branches of the joyful palm ;  
And rapturous the loud hosannas raise



To David's Son, who, in Jehovah's name,  
Comes with salvation to his chosen race.

But why, amid so universal joy,  
Is he, who causes it, himself so sad?  
Ne'er was a prospect so magnificent,  
And beautiful as that which now they saw  
From th' Olive mount. Full to the view expos'd  
All Canaan lay. Jerusalem appear'd  
Close underneath the eye, seen in each street  
With people thickly throng'd; while all her towers  
Shone brightly in the sun. Another scene  
Rose to the Saviour's sight than that beheld  
By those who follow'd him! He saw the streets  
Flowing with blood of Zion's citizens;  
Her lofty edifices crumbling down,  
Amid devouring flames, whose lurid glare  
Shone on the ghastly faces of the dead,  
And dying, who, in countless numbers, lay,  
Thick as autumnal leaves, scattered around  
Unpitied! He beheld each eminence,  
Which overlook'd the city, planted thick

With crosses, on which ignominious hung  
The sons of Jacob, while, before their eyes,  
That glorious temple where Jehovah dwelt,  
Sunk down in smouldering ruin! He beheld  
Those who escaped from slaughter, captive led  
To bondage more enduring, more severe,  
Than that 'neath which of old their fathers groan'd  
In Egypt! Thus beholding such a scene  
Of misery, the piteous Jesus wept.

The scene is chang'd—now in Gethsemane,  
Retir'd alone, he to his Father kneels  
Ardent in prayer. Each quivering leaf is still,  
Awed into silence while its Maker speaks.  
In heaven's high azure vault, the peaceful night,  
Hangs forth her silver lamps, sweet shedding down,  
On earth, a soft pale light; and all around  
Is beautiful. But what mean these deep sighs,  
And heavy groans, which issue from the spot  
Where Jesus kneels? O! he is deeply wounded!  
See! how his blood, distaining all his robes,  
Falls to the ground, like copious drops of dew

From the night shepherd's locks. No human foe  
Is near, and yet he bleeds! Ah! tis the sword,  
Not of infuriated feeble man,  
That now awakes to smite him, but the sword,  
The keen edg'd sword! of an avenging God  
Rais'd against rebel men, that they, deep pierc'd,  
May feel eternal agony; and He,  
The Son of God, between them and that sword,  
Casting himself as a broad shield, receives  
Its dreadful strokes! Hence flows his precious  
And hence the awful anguish of his soul [blood!  
Unspeaking, breath'd out in sighs and groans!

The scene is chang'd—stript of his blood stain'd  
And fix'd high on a tree, by rugged nails [robes,  
Fore'd through his hands and feet, naked he hangs,  
'Mid scoffing thousands! In his sacred flesh  
Deep are the traces of the cruel scourge!  
Sore is his visage marr'd with impious blows!  
A crown of thorns fix'd on his blessed head,  
In fiendish mockery, makes many a wound [hair,  
Whence blood flows copious drenching his long

And, trickling down the furrows of the lash,  
Falls to the earth: His mother sees him hang  
Expos'd and bleeding; hears the horrid shouts  
Of those who mock his bitter agony!  
Keen anguish, as a sword, pierces her soul!  
Ev'n angels stand aghast at the dire scene;  
And instantly those scoffers, into hell,  
Would smite un pitying; did not God's arm  
Hold back their flaming swords, at the request  
Of Him who, on the cross, asks and receives  
Forgiveness for his foes. Their swords restrain'd,  
Those angels with their wings veil the bright sun,  
Spreading thick darkness over all the earth,  
In unison with the appalling scene  
On Calvary; and hiding from the eye  
Of public scorn, the dying Prince of life!

But, ah! that veil of darkness cannot hide  
The bleeding victim from the cruel sight [round  
Of this world's prince, whose archers, hovering  
in countless myriads, pour their fiery shafts  
Into his soul unceasing! How intense

The holy angels on the conflict gaze,  
Nor dare to interfere! For though their strength,  
Superior to ill angels, might ward off,  
Successfully, each deadly shaft propell'd  
By power not infinite; yet arrows keen,  
Ev'n from th' Almighty's arm, stick fast within  
His agonizing soul; which powerful shafts,  
Did he oppose, would smite ev'n Gabriel down  
Quick as the oak falls by the bolt of heaven!

What means that loud and lamentable cry?  
Has God forsaken his beloved Son?  
Is man's redemption lost? The sun shines forth—  
Ah me! how ghastly pale is Jesus now!  
His eyes are waxing dim, and his parch'd lips  
Scarcely quiver! Yet he yields not up his soul,  
Until he cries, triumphantly aloud, [shout  
"Tis finish'd!" And though men heed not the  
Of victory thus rais'd, in their behalf,  
By God's own Son; yet, in reply, the earth  
Quakes to its centre; and the flinty rocks  
Break into pieces; while the thick wove veil,

That hides from view the holiest of all,  
 Rending in twain from top to bottom, shows  
 The mercy-seat to all alike reveal'd !  
 Nay ; ev'n the dead hear the victorious cry,  
 " 'Tis finish'd," and, arising from the tomb,  
 Walk to the holy city, and declare  
 That Jesus, dying, has abolish'd death,  
 And spoil'd the grave ! The angels hear the cry,  
 " 'Tis finish'd," and with speed, to heaven's bright  
 They bear the joyful tidings ; a glad shout [gates  
 Rings through the empyrean, onward still,  
 Throughout the universe, from sun to sun,  
 From star to star, resounding ; hell's dark caves  
 Alone the echoes mournfully return.

The scene is chang'd—now lowly in the tomb  
 The Saviour sleeps in death ; a darksome cloud  
 Hangs heavy o'er his chosen little band  
 Of faithful followers ; and all his foes  
 Rejoice. In the grave's mouth a stone is fixt  
 Secure, and seal'd. A Roman guard, well arm'd,  
 Before the sepulchre keeps anxious watch.  
 And why ? Lest those weak timid fishermen,

Who fled their Master while he liv'd, should, now  
That he is dead, wax bold ; and, from the grave  
Stealing the body, teach that he has risen  
By his own power, and so seduce mankind,  
But all the efforts of his foes are vain,  
To hold him in the tomb ; as well may night,  
By rolling to the eastern gates of morn,  
A gloomy cloud keep back the rising sun.

Scarcely had the sabbath ended, and the dawn  
Shed feeble twilight o'er Judea's hills ;  
When a bright angel bursting from the sky,  
Descended to the sepulchre ; the earth  
Quak'd at his coming, and the guard turn'd pale  
With icy terror ! Back he roll'd the stone  
From the grave's mouth, and boldly sat on it,  
Despite the Roman spears that glittered in  
The radiant beams of his own countenance,  
And sparkling robes ! Then, bursting the strong  
bands  
Of death and hell, the Son of God walk'd forth,  
A mighty conqueror, to die no more !

Meanwhile those pious women, who had seen  
Where Jesus was intomb'd and mark'd the spot,  
They, rising early long ere yet 'twas day,  
Came towards the sepulchre, with costly drugs  
T' embalm their Master's body, wondering much  
Who would the stone remove which clos'd his grave,  
And grant them free admittance. Who can tell  
The mingling feelings which possess'd their minds,  
When they the open tomb beheld, and heard  
The angel's narrative? How did they run  
To spread the joyful tidings that their Lord,  
Whom late they saw expire on Calvary,  
And laid in Joseph's tomb, was now alive;  
That they themselves had seen him, heard him  
    speak,  
Had held him by the feet, had worshipp'd him;  
And that even from himself they brought the news  
Of his arising! Still the evidence  
Of their strange tidings, like the dawning light,  
Grew brighter; till, at last, Jesus himself,  
His followers being met, stood in the midst,



And, after friendly salutation, show'd,  
His hands and feet mark'd with the rugged nails ;  
His side imprinted with the soldier's spear ;  
Then were they glad to see their risen Lord !

The scene is chang'd — Now on Mount Olivet  
The Son of God, his Father's gracious work  
In man's behalf well finish'd, ready stands  
To mount th' aerial regions, and possess  
His everlasting throne. The fishermen  
Of Galilee are with him, to receive  
His parting blessing, He is not ashamed  
To own them as his kinsmen, though around,  
Not viewless to his eye, heaven's shining hosts  
Stand gazing with astonishment He cheers  
Their drooping minds, informing them aright  
Of his true kingdom. Then, full in their view,  
He leaves the earth, slow rising through the air ;  
The dazzling splendour of his glorious train  
He veils, in mercy to their feeble sight,  
Till high ascended ; then the heavenly host,  
Made visible, unfold their sparkling wings,

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And mark his path with brightness, as if all  
The glittering stars, leaving night's vault ungem'd  
Had in one glorious constellation met,  
To light the Conqueror to his many crowns!

END OF BOOK FIFTH.

gem'd

