

THE PORTSMOUTH HARBOUR TRAGEDY,

BY JONATHAN PLUMMER, A TRAVELLING PREACHER, PHYSICIAN, & POET.



AN ELEGIAC ODE & FUNERAL SERMON,

ON THE DEATHS OF EIGHT PERSONS, KILLED, OR MORTALLY WOUNDED, AT FORT CONSTITUTION, IN PORTSMOUTH HARBOUR, ON THE FOURTH OF JULY, 1809, BY THE BURNING OF ABOUT 500 WL. OF GUN-POWDER

NAMES OF THE DEAD, AS FAR AS THE WRITER HEREOF KNEW THEM, WHEN THIS WAS WRITTEN :

Ephraim Pickering, esq. — Paul; John Mitchel; — Trefethen; of unknown, about 18 years old; Sargant Albert; Paletiah M'Daniels; and Theodore Witham.

ODE.

ALMIGHTY ruler of the skies,
Beyond expression great and wise;
Beyond conception good and kind,
And of a lovely, lovely mind;
Who art a King, from pole to pole,
And a good Master of the whole;
And far beyond the poles, a King,
Whose praises fier ought to ring.

Deign, I beseech thee to bestow,
A proper turn to men below;
A willingness that thou should'st reign,
And be the God of earth and main;
And that thou should'st have thy lovely will,
While all the nations here are still;
And all the souls below the sun,
In Fatherhood shall be done.

Have mercy on the wounded, Lord,
Who are not yet to health restor'd;
The wounded who the other day,
Were almost forc'd from earth away,
When 'twas thine ever blessed will,
A number of our race to kill:
O! let them now for Zion run,
And say, O Lord, thy will be done.

May those who've friends, or neighbours lost,
And by this trying thing are cross'd,
Be still and know that thou art God,
And love and fear thy hand and rod,
And run for Zion day and night,
May they in peace delight,
And as they pass for Heaven on,
Cry, let the will of God be done.

SERMON.

First epistle of Peter, the first chapter, at the twenty-fourth verse, the first clause.

"For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of Man as the flower of grass."

WHEN in the smiling months of June and July, we ride or walk over the verdant plains, we often find flourishing fields of grass, adorned with beautiful flowers and yielding an odoriferous sweetness to the ambient air. This grass is not eaten by animals, nor cut by the scythe of the mower, may continue to grace the rural farms, until almost or quite winter; but then the chilling snow and the freezing frost will soon cause it to wither. It is but a little while at most that that part of it that is above the ground retains its life, and it is a less time that it shines in its blooming beauty; but often the keen scythes of the mowers lay it very low, a considerable time before the winter comes on.

We, the dying friends, are so much like the fragrant honeyuckles as id the blooming clover, in regard to the shortness of our stay in, and the suddenness of our departure from this world of trouble, that St. Peter, with great propriety, speaking of a metaphorical or figurative way, according to the translation of our bible, asserted, "that all flesh is as grass, and the glory of man as the flower of grass."

When we recollect the sudden deaths of so many of our fellow mortals, at or near a Fort near Portsmouth, on the FOURTH OF JULY, 1809, it may be very proper to call these instructive words of the Apostle to our minds and seriously to ponder upon, and to think of them. These departed fellow mortals were rejoicing, it is likely with great gladness in the independence and sovereignty of the tranquil and blessed states, and almost or quite forgetting that they ever had to die, when it pleased the superlatively, lovely controulor of the glittering worlds, by a sudden, and probably an unexpected explosion of gun-powder to put a period to their lives -- They were all it is likely expecting on the evening of that joyful and beautiful day, to see a brilliant display of fire-works and blazing sky rockets, ascending with dazzling lustre, nearly or quite to the lofty regions of the clouds. But ah! to them, how materially different were the exercises of the solemn evening to what they expected? Ah! how much surprised were they, in the evening, to find themselves unbidden spirits, in a state of existence, to them, altogether new? If any of them were the servants of the Lord, with what amazement they find that their grief and trouble were ended, and that eternal joys and endless raptures, would be their happy portions, forever and ever? Hosanna, eternal Hosanna, of the brilliant spot, and the resplendant offspring of David, and the bright, the glittering, the spotted, the transcendently glorious morning star. Hosanna, hosanna, hosanna. If any of them were the servants of the devil, and died in their sins, with what unspeakable grief did they find that they were totally and eternally undone, and forever cut off from every thing lovely and desirable, and doomed to such endless tortures and everlasting woes, as no mortal tongue can express, and no mortal man can form a full and perfect idea of! Ah, if any of them were such, how indelibly awful, how unspeakably dreadful was and is their grief? How many millions of millions of worlds like this, would they now give if they had them for the privilege of returning to this world to be candidators again for Heaven; to be again like the grass; to have again a chance to seek and find, and love and serve the Lord; to have again a chance to deny themselves, to take up the cross, and to follow King Jesus daily and becoming disciples of his to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling; to have a chance again to come out and to separate from sinners, to abstain from touching the unclean thing, and to have the controulor of the glittering worlds for their loving God, and to be his loving people; to have a chance again to lead sober, religious, and holy lives, in all godliness and honesty; and to be hated, persecuted, despised, ridiculed and accounted the filth and offscouring of all things for so doing, by a wicked and adulterous generation. Ah! how will they curse their unpareled folly when they consider, that like grass, they were here only for a little time, and yet foolishly spent that small, but inestimable valuable time, in neglecting the great salvation; in committing adultery or fornication; in lying, backbiting and slandering; in pursuing vain, silly, and wicked thoughts and actions; in asking and answering silly unprofitable, and wicked questions; in labouring for the meat that perishes as if it was the chief good; in treating others with contempt, and doing what they would not have others do; in despising and disregarding the sacred scriptures; in despising and disregarding the precepts of the Patriarchs and Prophets, the Evangelists and Apostles; and in treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath, by rejecting, with circumstances of indignity and insult, the tendered kindness and offered mercy, not of the adorable and benevolent Jesus only, but of the superlatively, lovely controulor of the glittering constellations, which roll in the immensity of space. If they did not halt, a quarter, or an eighth part of these unprofitable things, and yet so neglected the great salvation, as to turn against themselves, the blazing fury, the vindictive ire, the overwhelming vengeance of the King of Kings, how will they curse the mad, the silly, the shocking imprudence, the daring and outrageous presumption, that induced them so to do! But let us charitablely think that none of these our departed neighbours are people of such a dreadful kind. Let us charitably hope that they were pious, and servants of God, and that they have gone to inherit, a serene, joyful, a rapturous, a soft, enchanting kingdom, prepared for them by their Maker long, from the foundation of this present world.

But courteous reader, since all flesh is as grass and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass, let us incessantly take care not to provoke the Highest, by wicked actions, to mow us down before the winter, to strike us from off the face of the earth before we have lived that little space of time called seventy years. Godliness with contentment is great gain, having the promise of the short life that now is, and of that endless one which is to come. If we rouse against us by our sins the summing ire of the lion of the tribe of Judah, surely be very ill indeed with us. Let us immediately consider our ways, and see if we are at peace with him. If our wicked works have made him an enemy to us, let us at this moment in a difficult situation, be as quick as the lightning, and the carry, make the shaft that is shot out of a threshing floor by a whirlwind, and like the smook that goes up at the top of a chimney. We may be very soon drowned, struck dead by lightning, or be blown by gun-powder above the agitated clouds, or we may die in different places, of different disorders, before the commencement of another day. There is no kind of wisdom, understanding, or discretion in fighting against God. Let us then this moment lay down the weapons of our rebellion. Let us now cease to do evil, and learn to do well. Let us now break off our sins by righteousness, and our iniquities by turning to the Lord, lest before the dawn of another day, our guilty souls should be chased into those forlorn abodes of grief, where the worm dieth not, where the fire is not quenched, and where poor, careless, unconsidering, and heaven-daring sinners must suffer and grieve, and grieve and suffer, more millions of years (if their sufferings can be measured by years) than there are drops of water in all the oceans, spires of grass in the world, and particles of earth in our globe, for the want of the felicity of a drop of cold water to cool their tormented tongues, without obtaining the favour they will want!

(The remainder deferred)

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