AN

ADDRESS

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

PEITHESSOPHIAN AND PHILOCLEAN SOCIETIES

OF

RUTGERS COLLEGE,

ON THE

LITERARY CHARACTER OF THE SCRIPTURES,

DELIVERED AND PUBLISHED BY REQUEST OF THE PEITHESSOPHIAN SOCIETY.

BY ALEXANDER H. EVERETT.

NEW-YORK:
PRINTED BY JARED W. BELL, 17 ANN-STREET.

MDCCCXXXVIII.

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CORRESPONDENCE.

PEITHESSOPHIAN HALL, RUTGERS COLLEGE,
July 17th, 1838.

HON. A. H. EVERETT,

SIR—At a meeting of the Peithessophian Society, held in their Hall, immediately after the delivery of your address, this day. It was unanimously resolved,

"That the thanks of this Society be presented to the Hon. Alexander H. Everett, for his able, eloquent, and impressive address, this day delivered, and that a copy of the same be requested for publication."

We were appointed a Committee, under the above resolution, to convey to you the enclosed resolution of thanks. Permit us to hope that you will accede to the general wish of the honorary, graduate, and regular members of our Society, and permit the same to be given to the public, as we believe its operation and effect, when published, will be beneficial and useful to the community at large.

Very Respectfully, your obedient servants,

JOHN S. CANNON,
WILLIAM H. LACY,
THEODORE F. WYCKOFF, } Committee.

New Brunswick, N. J. July 18th, 1838.

GENTLEMEN,

I have received your letter of yesterday, and beg you to accept my best thanks for the very friendly terms in which you are pleased to notice the address.

I am too well aware how entirely inadequate a hasty essay of this kind must be to a subject of such importance, and should rather prefer that it might not be published: but if the Society think that the publication would be in any way advantageous to the cause which we all wish to promote, I shall not feel myself at liberty to decline their request.

With great respect, I am gentlemen,
Your friend and obedient servant,
A. H. EVERETT.

Messrs. JOHN S. CANNON,
WILLIAM H, LACY,
THEODORE F. WYCKOFF, } Committee.

ADDRESS.

GENTLEMEN OF THE SOCIETIES,

THE occasion which has called us together, and which, by your appointment, has devolved upon me the agreeable, though arduous task of addressing you, is one of a deeply interesting character. For those of you who are more immediately concerned in the ceremonies of the day, it marks the dividing line between the walks of studious and active life. Thus far you have pursued your course under the eye of affectionate and careful friends,—of tender parents, or watchful guardians and tutors. Their experience and love have supplied the want of the mature judgment, which your youth denied you, and have brought you safely, through many perils, to the portals of the great theatre of the world. To-day you pass the threshold. No longer looking up to others with implicit faith as the guides of your course, and as mainly responsible for its direction towards good or evil, you are now to go forward as independent, self-directed, self-sustaining men,—to discharge the duties,—to encounter the labours and perils,—and to reap the rewards and honours which may have been reserved for you. Like some gallant ship, bound for distant regions, and freighted with a rich cargo, which the care of her owners has provided with all the necessary stores, and safely towed out of harbour, you this day spread your canvass to the breeze, and launch out boldly upon the broad ocean of life.

But though you are now to go forth and pursue your course as independent, responsible men, you go not forth alone. The friends, whose care and kindness watched over your earlier years, are still

to accompany and aid you as counsellors. They are now assembled to witness, with affectionate and eager interest, your departure from the retreats of preparatory study, and to welcome you to the open field of manly exertion. They are to co-operate with you in its toils,—to sustain you, as far as may be, in its perils,—to sympathize with you in good and in evil fortune. As you advance in life, new relations of a dearer and tenderer kind than any that you have yet formed await you. A home of your own creation,—the true temple of happiness and virtue,—will receive you into its charmed circle, and bind you with new and delightful ties to your brother men. It is also your fortune to have your birth in a land of equal laws, and of wise and well-administered political institutions. Your country spreads over you her broad protecting shield, to guard you from all injustice or oppression at home or abroad; secures to you unimpaired the fruits of your industry; lays open to your enterprize, unfettered by monopoly or privilege, every branch of useful and honourable labour, and holds out to your noble ambition her highest places of trust and honour as the rewards of zealous and successful exertion in her service. In a still more elevated sphere, the All-Seeing Eye watches over you with a love surpassing that of friends, parents, or protectors, and will make all changes and chances work together for good for those who love him and keep his commandments.

It is, therefore, under happiest auspices, gentlemen and friends, that you this day go forth from the shades of academic retirement to the walks of busy life. You go forth, as well you may, with fresh and buoyant spirits. You look forward with hope and confidence to the future. To the eye of ingenuous youth the world appears in prospect like some enchanted landscape of perennial verdure, adorned with fairest roses, and glittering with the fresh dews of the morning.

> "Fair laughs the morn, and soft the zephyr blows,
> While proudly riding o'er the azure realm,
> In gallant trim the gilded vessel goes,
> Youth at the prow, and Pleasure at the helm."

For you, gentlemen, may no clouds overspread this bright pro-

spect! May no disappointment blast the promise of so fresh a spring! May the highest hopes and wishes of your friends be more than realized in your future course! May your country hereafter register your names among those of her worthy and well-beloved children! And may the Great Being, in whose hands are the issues of all events, receive you, on the final day of account, to the rewards of good and faithful servants!

In executing the task which you have assigned me, I would gladly say something to enforce upon your minds the motives to upright and honourable conduct that result from the various considerations to which I have now alluded. Of these motives, the highest, the purest, and, if duly weighed, the most effective and powerful are those which are founded in religion. When we view the mind, not as a mere ephemeral form of matter, but as a substantial intelligence,—kindred in some sense, as we are permitted to say, to the High and Holy One that inhabiteth eternity,—every pleasure, care, and duty, presents itself under a new aspect; the ordinary temptations to vice lose their charm; the passing troubles of the world are divested of their sting; and a celestial day-spring illuminates the otherwise dark and dreary chaos of human existence. A full exposition of the nature of the religious motives to good conduct, would, however, be hardly appropriate to the present occasion, and still less so to the studies and pursuits of the present speaker. It belongs to the habitual duties of the sacred desk. The objects of our meeting are of a literary character, and naturally suggest for our reflections a theme of the same description. In accordance with this suggestion, and with a view, at the same time, to the high importance of religious influences on the minds of the young, I propose to offer, in the present address, a few remarks upon the literary and scientific character of the Scriptures. These ancient records that embody for us the religious spirit, which, we may hope, is not entirely foreign to other forms of faith, are venerable and interesting under every point of view. Their most important aspect is that under which they are considered as the symbols and assurances of divine truth; but regarded merely as literary monuments, they are not only the most ancient and curious, but I may safely say, the most extraordinary and valuable in the whole

compass of literature. "Independently of the divine origin of the Scriptures," says the accomplished and clear-headed Sir William Jones, "I have found in them more true wisdom,—more practical good sense,—a warmer benevolence, and a higher strain of thought and poetry than I have met with in any other work that I have perused, or indeed all other works put together." In this opinion I entirely concur. On a subject so extensive, you will, of course, not expect a complete and regular disquisition. I can only offer a few imperfect hints, which for the sake of some appearance of method, I will arrange under the three heads, into which the illustrious Bacon divides the whole field of Learning, Philosophy, Poetry, and History.

1. The Philosophy of the Scriptures is at once sublime and simple. It satisfies the highest aspirations of the highest minds, and it falls within the comprehension of the humblest inquirer, who honestly seeks to understand it. It embraces the material universe with its glorious and complicated system of

> "—— planets, suns, and adamantine spheres,
> Wheeling unshaken through the void immense;"

the moral world, where the ruling spirits of good and evil carry on a perpetual warfare, with alternate, and apparently not unequal advantage;—the great problems that have attracted, exercised, and defied the severest study of generation after generation:—it embraces them both with unshrinking grasp, and solves them with a single word. It carries home the sublime truth to the simple heart of the common believer with a clearness of conviction, that Socrates and Cicero in their happiest hours of inspiration never knew. This word of power that solves these mighty and momentous problems,—that carries home this cheering conviction to the believing heart,—need I say to you, gentlemen,—is GOD!

When from the merely spontaneous exercise of our intellectual and physical powers, we first turn the mind inward to reflection upon its own nature, and outward to an inquiring contemplation of the objects around us, we find ourselves part and parcel of a vast system. We ask, with intense curiosity, with agonizing interest, "What am I? Whence came I? What means this glorious pano-

rama of ocean, air, and earth that I see around me,—these splendid orbs that illuminate the day and night,—these lesser lights that twinkle and burn around them,—the seasons with their everchanging round? Who can tell me the secret of the being and working of this wondrous machinery? Did necessity fix it firmly, as it is, from all eternity? Has accident thrown it together to remain till some other accident shall reduce it to nothing, or did some masterworkman adapt it, with intelligent design, to some great and good end? If so, what means this dismal shade of evil that overshadows with its dim eclipse so large a portion of this good and fair creation? What relation do I bear individually to the grand whole? Am I a mere ripple on the boundless ocean of being, swelling into life for a moment and then subsiding for ever, or is this curiously compacted frame the abode of a substantial, immortal mind, destined to exist hereafter through countless ages of happiness or misery?"

The greatest and wisest men of all ages and countries have undertaken to answer these questions in various ways, but generally with slender success. One tells us that the origin of all things is in water, another that it is in fire; a third places it in the earth, and a fourth in the air. Epicurus resolves the universe into primitive atoms, while Zeno fixes it firmly in the brazen bonds of necessity. In regard to the problem of the moral world opinions are equally various. In one system fate is the supreme arbiter, and chance in another. Some acknowledge the existence of gods, but place them apart in some remote celestial sphere, where they live on regardless of the stir and bustle of this lower world. A few, more wise than the rest, obtain some faint glimpse of the truth, of which, however, they avow that they feel no certain assurance. All is doubt, uncertainty, error. There is no absurdity so great, says Cicero, that some distinguished philosopher has not made it the basis of his theory. The labours of modern inquirers have not been attended with better results. They have terminated in reviving successively, one after anot r, the exploded follies of antiquity. One denies the existence of mind, and another that of matter, while a third doubts the reality of either. All,—I mean all whose researches have been conducted independently of Scripture,—

deny the reality of moral distinctions, and reduce man to a level with the animals around him. Such are the noble and consolatory views which the wisdom of Europe proclaimed within our own day, through the mouths of her ablest and most judicious apostles, as the last results of the labours of all preceding ages upon the great problem of God, man, and the universe.

If we turn to the teachers of the various religions, the scene is, if possible, still less agreeable. Stocks and stones,—the beasts of the field, and the fowls of the air,—the vilest reptiles,—nay, the very vegetable products that serve for daily food, are held up by the most learned and civilized nations as objects of reverence and arbiters of human fortune. Enlightened Egypt, in her brightest days of power, wisdom, and glory, enrolled the beetle and the onion on the list of her divinities. The mythology of Hindostan is, if possible, still more monstrous. Revolting or childish fables are presented as solutions of the great problem of the universe. The world reposes on the back of an elephant, and the elephant, again, upon a tortoise, which finally rests upon nothing. Even in the elegant creations of the brilliant fancy of Greece, we discern little more than the sports of infancy playing in wantonness with ideas, of the importance of which it is utterly unconscious. In its severer moods, the Greek mythology presents the most desolating views of the destiny and character of our race. Take, for example, the fable of Prometheus :—On the side of a rocky precipice of immeasurable height, a human being extends his giant length, writhing in agonies of extremest torture. Chains of iron attach him to the cliff, while a vulture of enormous size, hovering over him perpetually, tears his entrails, which are constantly renewed by the supernatural fiat of destiny. This is the Titan Prometheus, as described by the gloomy genius of Eschylus. His crime was, that he had given life to human figures of clay of his own formation, by touching them with fire which he had stolen from heaven. He is intended as an emblem of humanity. The moral is, that wretchedness is the lot of man, and that superiority of intellect, though employed for the most beneficial objects, only dooms its possessor to intenser misery. The wayward genius of Byron, who had chiefly sought for speculative truth in the sources to which I have alluded above was captivated by this heart-rending fable, which he

seems to have regarded as the vehicle of important truth, and has dressed it up in some of his finest poetry.

"Titan! to whose immortal eyes
The sorrows of mortality,
Seen in their sad reality,
Were not as things that gods despise:
What was thy pity's recompense?
A suffering, silent, but intense:
The rock, the vulture, and the chain:
All that the proud can feel of pain;
The agony they do not show,
The suffocating sense of woe,
That speaks but in its loneliness,—
And then is silent, lest the sky
Should have a listener, nor will sigh
Unless its voice be echoless."

All the errors, absurdities, and fables to which I have now alluded, have been sustained and illustrated in ancient and in modern times, with the whole power of the human understanding in its most improved condition. Eloquence, logic, learning, and wit, have been employed to make the worse appear the better reason, until the honest inquirer, who seeks for truth through the mazes of these controversies, finds himself completely bewildered and hopeless of arriving at any satisfactory result, were there no other difficulty to be encountered but the extent of the ground to be gone over. To crown the whole, the severest and most celebrated metaphysician of modern times affirms, that the truth cannot, in fact, be discovered by the mere use of the understanding in the ordinary sense of the term; and in proof of his assertion furnishes what he considers complete and unanswerable demonstrations on both sides, of all the great questions that most deeply interest the mind, at the head of which is the existence of God.

From this chaos of controversy, doubt, confusion, imposture, and error, we turn to the Scriptures. Here, gentlemen, we find ourselves at once in a new atmosphere. The very first sentence removes all difficulty. What do I say? The light breaks upon us before the sentence is finished. The first half-sentence settles at once and forever, the great problem of the universe. IN THE BEGINNING

God. No metaphysics; no logic; no rhetoric;—no tedious induction from particular facts; no labored demonstration *à priori* or *à posteriori*;—no display of learning; no appeal to authority;—but just the plain, simple, naked, unsophisticated truth: In the beginning God.

With the utterance of this little word, an ocean of light and splendor bursts at once upon the universe, and penetrates its darkest recesses with living beams of hope and joy. Order, harmony, intelligent design for happiest ends, take the place of unintelligible chaos and wild confusion. A cheerful confidence in the wisdom and goodness of an All-Wise and Almighty Creator, is substituted for gloomy doubt, and blank despair. Evil still remains, but how different is its character! In a universe of chance and fate, it is a blind, irresistible power, like the destiny of ancient fable: treading under its giant feet with remorseless fury, the fairest flowers of the natural and moral creation. "In a godless universe," says Madame de Stael, "the fall of a sparrow would be a fit subject for endless and inconsolable sorrow." With an Almighty Father at the helm, evil, physical and moral, puts on the character of discipline. We cannot, it is true, penetrate the necessity of its existence, or the nature of the good which it is intended to effect. We are tempted at first to exclaim with the eloquent sophist of Geneva, "Benevolent Being! where, then, is thy Almighty Power? I behold evil on the earth." But what then? Does our limited intelligence comprehend the universe? Can the infant at his mother's breast understand why the honied stream is removed from his lips, and a bitter draught of medicine substituted for it? Does the little child realize why the kind father confines him in schools,—refuses him the indulgences which he thinks so delightful,—inflicts upon him, perhaps, a severe punishment for some, to him, unimaginable fault? To the child, the lapse of a few years makes all these mysteries clear; in the mean time, his confidence and love for his parents induce him to submit with undiminished cheerfulness, where he cannot understand. Shall the frail being of a day repose with less faith and hope upon the bosom of Omniscient and Omnipotent goodness? How beautiful is the language, in which a late English writer expresses the effect upon the inquiring mind, oppressed with

doubts and fears, of the introduction of an intelligent principle into the theory of the universe.

"Fore-shadows,—say, rather, fore-splendors,—of that truth, and beginning of truths fell mysteriously upon my soul. Sweeter than day-spring to the shipwrecked in Nova Zembla;—ah! like a mother's voice to her little child, that strays bewildered, weeping in unknown tumults;—like soft streamings of celestial music to my too exasperated heart, came that Evangile:—the universe is not dead and demoniacal,—a charnel-house with spectres, but god-like, and my Father's."

In the beginning God. This little phrase, then, gentlemen, solves in one word, the problem of the universe. The same strain of thought runs through the whole volume; but if it ended here, the system of speculative wisdom would be perfect. It suffers no subtraction: it admits no addition. In the beginning God.

But knowledge is not every thing. We are not only intelligent, but active beings. A complete system of philosophy must include the essence of practical, as well as speculative wisdom. Satisfied upon the theory of the universe, I turn my views again homeward. I seek for a rule of practical conduct. What are my relations to the beings around me? How am I to act? What am I to do? Here, too, the schools are given up to inextricable doubt, disputation and confusion; and here again, the Scriptures interpose with another masterly solution, in a single word: Love.

Interrogate the doctors, and you find their answers as various as their names. All agree in this: that the object in life is happiness, but how shall I attain it? Wherein resides this long-sought *summum bonum:* this far-famed *fa'r-and-good*, of the Porch and the Academy? Zeno stretches the inquirer upon the rack, and endeavors to persuade him that he is happy, by convincing him that pain is not an evil. Epicurus unlocks the blooming gardens of sensual indulgence. Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die. "Wonder at nothing," says Horace,—"that is the only way by which a man can make or keep himself happy." The son of Ammon seeks for happiness in the "pride, pomp and circumstance of glorious war," and weeps at last, that he has only one world to conquer. The student thinks that he has found it in his library. "When I am once

fairly seated before a fine old parchment," says the disciple in Goethe's Faust,—" all Paradise opens before me." But the master has already learned that, of making many books, there is no end; and that much study is a weariness of the flesh. And what says the sweet songster of Twickenham,—the charming poet of the Essay on Man:—he, whose life, according to a brother bard, was an even more endearing song than his writings; and who, if this eulogy be true, had a right to judge of that in which he himself excelled? Hear him addressing his celebrated "guide, philosopher and friend!"

> "Oh Happiness! our being's end and aim;
> Good! Pleasure! Ease! Content! whate'er thy name;
> That something still that prompts the eternal sigh,
> For which we bear to live or dare to die;
> Which still around us yet beyond us lies,—
> O'erlooked,—seen double,—by the fool and wise.
> Plant of celestial growth! if dropped below,
> Say in what mortal soil thou deign'st to grow!
> Fair opening to some court's propitious shrine,
> Or deep with diamonds in the flaming mine?
> Twined with the wreaths Parnassian laurels yield,
> Or reaped with iron harvests of the field?
> Where grows? Where grows it not? If vain the toil
> We ought to blame the culture not the soil.
> Fixed to no spot is happiness sincere;
> 'Tis nowhere to be found or everywhere;
> 'Tis nowhere to be bought, but always free,
> And fled from monarchs, St. John, dwells with thee!"

Beautiful, brilliant, but, alas, too flattering eulogy! No, gentlemen! happiness never dwelt in that troubled bosom where love of pleasure and ambition reigned supremely to the last. The guide, philosopher, and friend, whom our delightful, but too mistaken moralist has addressed in these beautiful verses, was never happy for a moment,—no, not even in that hour of triumph when he gave the law as prime minister of England over half the globe,—when his eloquence ruled in parliament,—when the seductive charm of his person and manner captivated all hearts in the saloon, and when the greatest wits and poets of England were

proud to share the retirement of his leisure hours, and exhausted their finest strains of eloquence and song in his praise. Still less was he happy, when the charming Minstrel of the "Essay on Man," composed under his instruction, and dedicated to him that celebrated poem; and when fallen from his high estate, attainted of treason, barely permitted, after years of exile and poverty, to breathe his native air, and till his paternal acres, he destroyed the quiet which he might have enjoyed by unavailing efforts to grasp the glittering baubles, which in his brilliant youth he had so easily won and so early lost; and by efforts still less pardonable, and happily not less unavailing, to disturb the religious faith of his countrymen. No, gentlemen! happiness dwells not in the propitious shine of courts, nor yet in the flaming depths of the diamond mine. It is not to be conquered on the battle-field; nor is it gathered in, as the bard of Twickenham knew too well by his own experience, with the richest harvest of Parnassian laurels. But the error lies still deeper. Happiness is not, as it is here represented, "our being's end and aim." The object of life is improvement, progress, preparation for an infinite future. Happiness, so far as we enjoy it in this mingled state of being, is the indirect result of employing the proper means to effect these objects. Abandon then, gentlemen, the poet's treacherous guide, who was a wretched philosopher, and at best a very doubtful friend. Open the Scriptures, and you will there find that rule of practical conduct which he vainly sought to establish in so many beautiful, but too unsuccessful moral essays, revealed with unerring certainty in a single word: "I give unto you a new commandment, that ye LOVE ONE ANOTHER."

What says the beautiful and original writer whom I just now quoted?

"There is in man a higher than love of happiness: he can do without happiness, and find blessedness. Was it not to preach forth this same Higher, that sages and martyrs, the priest, and the poet, in all times have spoken and suffered, bearing testimony through life and through death, to the *Godlike* that is in man; and that in the *Godlike* only he hath strength and freedom? On

the roaring billows of time thou art not ingulfed, but borne aloft to the azure of eternity. Love not pleasure;—love God?

"Small is it that thou canst trample under foot the world with its injuries as old Greek Zeno taught thee. Thou mayst love the world with its injuries and because of its injuries. For this a greater than Zeno was needed and he too was sent. Our highest Orpheus walked in Judea eighteen hundred years ago. His sphere-melody, flowing in wild, native tones, took captive the rav shed souls of men; and being of a truth sphere-melody, still flows and sounds, though now with thousand-fold accompaniments and rich symphonies, through all our hearts and modulates and divinely leads them. Sweep away the illusion of time. Glance, if thou hast eyes, from the near-moving cause to the far-distant mover. Oh! could I transport thee direct from the beginnings to the endings, how were thy eye-sight unsealed and thy heart set flaming in a light sea of celestial wonder. Then sawest thou that through every star,—through every grass-blade,—and most of all, through every living soul the glory of a present God still beams:—that this fair universe, were it in the meanest portion thereof, is, in very deed, the star-domed city of God!"

Such, gentlemen, is the *philosophy* of the Scriptures;—a complete code of practical and speculative wisdom in two little words: a philosophy, original, profound, sublime; and, at the same time clear to the common understanding, satisfactory to every uncorrupted heart. You will perceive, that I speak of this philosophy, not as a doctrine resting on the authority of Divine revelation, and recommended as such to our respect and belief. I look at it merely in its own intrinsic character, and point out to you the originality, completeness, and evident self-demonstrating truth, which distinguish it in both its parts from all the other systems which have engaged the attention of men. Let us now look for a moment at the *poetry* of the Bible.

II Here, gentlemen, we find ourselves at once in the midst of a new world of wonders. Poetry, in all its highest departments of sublimity, pathos, and beauty, is scattered through the pages of the sacred volume with a profusion, which we look for in vain

in any other quarter. Here, too, "the highest heaven of invention," to use the language of Shakspeare, opens upon us at the very threshold. *God said, let there be light, and there was light.* What power of thought! What simplicity of language! The greatest critic of antiquity pronounces this passage, as I need not remind you, the finest specimen of the sublime which he had any where met with. Consider for a moment the variety and vastness of the images compressed into this little sentence;—a universe weltering in blind and formless chaos;—the breath of God moving mysteriously over the confused mass;—the word of power issuing unspoken from the depths of the Almighty mind, and followed instantaneously by the presence of the new and brilliant element. The least of these ideas would furnish a common poet with pages of rhetoric. The record of creation compresses them all into a single line. *God said, let there be light, and there was light.* How tame in comparison with this is even the splendid versification of the minstrel of Paradise Lost!

> "God said, let there be light! and forthwith light
> Ethereal, first of things, creation pure,
> Sprang from the east, and through the azure vault
> To journey on its airy course began."

Through this magnificent entrance we approach the blooming abode of our first parents. How charming, and yet how mysterious and mournful, considered merely under a poetical point of view, is this ancient eclogue! Here again how various, and yet how striking are the images and thoughts expressed in a few short paragraphs! A new race of beings, created by the will of God and formed after his image;—their innocence and happiness;—the freshness and beauty of the garden that is given them for a residence, with its various vegetable products, including the wondrous trees of knowledge and of life;—the celestial beings, not excepting the great creating Power himself, who disdains not to visit these yet unpolluted haunts in the cool of the evening;—the mysterious principle of evil, intruding itself by stealth into this abode of bliss, and turning all its beauty into bitterness;—finally, the sad reverse;—the departure of the exiled pair, and the messenger of God stationed

with his sword of flame at the gate of Eden to prevent their return. What a picture! The highest reach of the human intellect in poetry, the Paradise Lost, is, I need not say, the mere filling up of this splendid outline;—a filling up, completed,—we might almost believe, from its perfection,—with more than ordinary aid from that Divine Spirit, which the sublime minstrel invokes with so much earnestness at the outset.

> "Chiefly thou, great Spirit! that dost prefer
> Before all places the upright heart and pure,
> Assist me, for thou know'st: Thou from the first
> Wast present, and with mighty wings outstretched,
> Dove-like, satst brooding o'er the vast abyss,
> And mad'st it pregnant: what in me is dark
> Illumine: what is low raise and support:
> That, to the height of this great argument,
> I may assert eternal Providence,
> And justify the ways of God to man."

The same height of poetical excellence is sustained through every part of the Scriptures. The limits of the occasion prevent me from going into detail; nor is it necessary upon a subject so familiar to you. Let me barely recall to your remembrance the charming narrative of the life of Joseph, which combines with the strongest internal evidence of its literal truth all the interest of the most pathetic romance;—the beautiful Pastoral of Ruth;—the sublime Tragedy of Job;—the splendid lyrical effusions of the earlier and later bards that are scattered like gems over the rich groundwork of the historical and prophetical books;—the treasures of thought concentrated in the Proverbs;—the impassioned tenderness that breathes through the love songs of Solomon;—finally, and above all, the magnificent productions of the "Monarch Minstrel" himself;—a collection of odes, unequalled, unapproached, I may say, even in mere literary merit, in any other language; odes before which Pindar and Horace, and the modern lyrical poets of highest fame hide their diminished heads; odes, whose essential power and beauty, no dress, however unworthy, can wholly disguise—which even in the bald imitations of the modern versifiers

thrill with delight, and exalt with religious rapture every feeling heart in the whole population of Christendom.

It would be impossible, as I remarked just now, to discuss, however summarily, on the present occasion, all the various topics suggested by this brilliant and extended series of literary works. In order to fix our ideas, let us, nevertheless, bring before us, for a moment, a detached passage from this grand national library,—this Encyclopedia, for such it may, in fact, be called, of Hebrew literature. Take, for example, the lament of David upon the death of Saul and Jonathan. There are few incidents in the course of human affairs more affecting than the fall of a young warrior in battle. Who among us has not felt his heart melt within him like water, at the recollection of the fate of our own Warren, cut off prematurely in the bloom of youth and beauty, on the first and last of his fields? Jonathan was the beloved friend of David. For Saul, to whom he was indebted, in the first instance, for his political advancement, although he had afterwards much reason to complain of the causeless jealousy and even persecution of the wayward king, he had ever cherished the sentiments of respect and gratitude, which were natural, under such circumstances, to his generous and elevated character. Their fall awakens all his feelings; and he pours them out with the pure taste and concentrated power that belong to his style, in perhaps the most touching of all his poems.

"The beauty of Israel is slain upon his high places! How are the mighty fallen!

"Tell it not in Gath! Publish it not in the streets of Askelon: lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph.

"Ye mountains of Gilboa! let there be no dew, neither rain upon you, nor fruits for offerings! for there the shield of the Mighty One was vilely cast away; the shield of Saul as if he had not been anointed with oil.

"From the blood of the slain,—from the battle of the mighty, the bow of Jonathan turned not back, the sword of Saul returned not empty.

"Saul and Jonathan were loving and pleasant in their lives, and in their deaths they were not divided. They were swifter than eagles: they were stronger than lions.

"Ye daughters of Israel! weep over Saul, who clothed you in scarlet, who put ornaments of gold upon your apparel!

"How are the mighty fallen in the midst of the battle! Oh, Jonathan! thou wast slain on thy high places.

"I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan! very dear hast thou been unto me; thy love for me was wonderful, passing the love of woman.

"How are the mighty fallen, and the weapons of war perished!"

III. Such, gentlemen, are the richness and value of the *poetry* of the Bible. I had selected one or two other passages, not inferior to that which I have recited as specimens, but the limits of the occasion compel me to omit them. Let us now, in conclusion, glance for a moment at some portions of the sacred record which belong to the department of *history*.

Here, gentlemen, we find ourselves carried back once more to the opening passage, which I have already cited, as embodying the essence of the *philosophy* of the Bible, and exhibiting, at the same time, in the judgment of the most celebrated critics, the noblest example of the sublime in *poetry*. It is also the record of the most important facts in the history of the world. The creation from nothing of the unformed elements of the universe; —their separation and arrangement; —the origin of man; —the introduction of the principle of evil; - its gradual prevalence throughout the extended population of the earth, and the final submersion of a guilty race under the waters of a universal deluge; —these are the grand physical and moral revolutions that occupy the first chapters of the Bible. In all this, gentlemen, there is much that transcends the bounds of human reason. The existence of a great, uncreated Mind; —creation; - the presence of evil in a system formed and governed by Omniscient and Almighty Goodness, are facts beyond our comprehension. What then? Can we comprehend the least of the ordinary operations of nature that are going on around us? Is not the act of my own will by which I lift my arm as incomprehensible as the existence of God? Is not the articulate voice that bursts from my own lips, as great a miracle to me as the word of power that raised a universe out of nothing? We are surrounded on all sides by mystery. The dew-drop that glitters in the morning sunbeam — the animalcule floating in it, whose existence can only be detected

by a microscope,—are each a miniature world of wonders. Why, then, should we be surprised that a veil of mystery, which human reason seeks in vain to penetrate, overhangs the cradle of the universe? Let us rather be surprised at the presumption of beings who attempt with their little limited intelligence to grasp infinity. Suffice it to say, that the results of experience, when they bear upon the Scripture record, entirely concur with it. The chronology of the different nations of the old world, though in some cases apparently at variance with that of the Bible, is found on more correct examination to confirm it. The last and most thorough researches in geology, conducted by the illustrious Cuvier, verify in the minutest particulars the Scripture account of the great revolutions of the globe.

From these grand and mysterious events, we pass to others of a different character. After unfolding the wonders of creation, the Scripture record takes up a less extensive but still most interesting theme, the history of the Hebrew nation, the most remarkable that has ever appeared upon the earth. We trace it through the successive periods of its origin, progress, and maturity to its final destruction. The commencement carries us back to a beautiful scene of pastoral simplicity. We behold the venerable patriarchs encamped in Arab fashion on the green banks of the Jordan. As the setting sun illuminates the landscape with its ruddy glow, we see them seated in the doors of their white tents to contemplate its glory. Their sons and daughters,—their kindred, domestics, and friends,—are gathered around them. Flocks and herds are returning from their distant pastures. Every thing indicates repose, abundance, and simple happiness. In the background of the picture, we discern approaching slowly, a youth of comely appearance accompanying a fair maiden and their attendants. It is the son of the Patriarch. He went forth to meditate at eventide, and he has met the promised bride whom the care of his affectionate parents has provided for him. Her love shall console him for the loss of his mother. As she reaches the tent, the young men and maidens crowd with delight around the expected guest; the Patriarch receives her with grave cordiality, and a general joy pervades the whole encampment.

What a charming spectacle! These celebrated plains of Palestine, afterwards the seats of so many rich and powerful cities, the scenes of so many wondrous and world-important events, are at this time frequented only by a few tribes of wandering shepherds. So pure are the lives of the patriarchs, that the messengers of heaven condescend at times, as of old in the garden of Eden, to partake their hospitality. Even here, however, the principle of evil is not wholly absent. The patriarchal families are disturbed with internal jealousies, and embroiled with troublesome neighbours. They witness with dismay the terrible judgments inflicted on the corrupt cities of the lake. In the mean time, however, their wealth and numbers increase. In the next generation they are surrounded by troops of retainers,—maintain relations of peace and war with neighbouring states, and appear already as shepherd princes.

The scene now changes to the banks of the Nile. A famine compels the patriarchal families to take refuge in Egypt, where one of their leaders has already been stationed to prepare the way for them, and by his extraordinary sagacity and purity of conduct, has raised himself from the condition of a slave to that of prime minister. What a contrast in the aspect of every thing around them with the country they have left! Splendid cities, temples, palaces, and obelisks of ever-during granite take the place of the rocky hills and green vallies of Palestine. Instead of the miniature Jordan passing with its slender tide from one lake to another, the magnificent Nile pours from its undiscovered mountain sources its swelling flood through a channel of a thousand miles to the ocean. This celebrated stream, which now works its way through masses of ruins, its waters undisturbed by any navigation, except the skiff of the occasional traveller, was then the thoroughfare of business for a large portion of the civilized world. These massive ruins, which even in their forlorn abandonment overwhelm the observer with unmingled wonder, were then, in their complete state, the brilliant abodes of wealth and luxury, swarming with inhabitants, rich in all the treasures of art and science, which were carried at that time to nearly as high a degree of perfection as they are with us. Thebes, now a granite quarry of roofless walls and broken columns, half buried in sand, was then a mighty metropo-

lis, sending forth, as described by Homer some centuries afterwards, a hundred war-chariots from each of her hundred gates. As the solitary wanderer from Europe now surveys these unequalled monuments,—the pyramids,—the obelisks with their mysterious hieroglyphical inscriptions,—the temples and colonnades measured not by the foot or the yard, but by the league and square mile,—he is lost in amazement, and is half tempted to attribute them to some giant race of Titans or Cyclops, far transcending in dimensions and strength the puny beings that now people the globe.

Such was the state of Egypt at the time when the patriarchal families took refuge there. It would be instructive and interesting to trace their history in detail through its subsequent periods, but the limits of the occasion render it impossible, and the theme is already familiar to you. Its outline is too correctly given in the brief sketch by a recent poet of the general history of nations:

"There is a moral in all human things,
'Tis but the sad rehearsal of the past;
First freedom and then glory; when these fail,
Vice,—wealth,—corruption,—barbarism at last."

Adventurous, enterprizing, religious in their earlier days,—wild and warlike under Joshua, Saul, and David—luxurious under Solomon, the Hebrews soon sink into corruption, and are crushed and carried away captive by the neighbouring states. This catastrophe closes the career of the nation, which can hardly be said to have survived in the miserable remnant who returned from Assyria, and maintained for several centuries a lingering struggle for a wretched provincial existence, which was finally extinguished in blood by the overwhelming power of Rome. The later pages of the sacred record are occupied with the wailings of the exiles over their unhappy destiny, —their lamentations for their lost country,—their stern denunciations of their oppressors, and their glowing prophecies of a future day of greatness and glory, which is to arise in some mysterious way on their posterity;—prophecies, which, I need not say, the progress of the Christian religion has converted into history.

In what sweet and melting strains the ancient Hebrew lyre echoes the lament of these heart-broken patriots!

"By the rivers of Babylon we sat down and wept; yea, we wept as we remembered Zion."

The skillful, though wayward hand of Byron has called forth from the same instrument a tone of soul-subduing pathos in his Hebrew melodies.

"The wild gazelle on Judah's hills
Exulting yet may bound,
And drink from all the thousand rills
That gush on holy ground.
Her airy step and glorious eye
May pass in tauntless transport by.

A step as fleet, an eye more bright,
Has Judah witnessed there,
And o'er her scenes of lost delight
Inhabitants more fair.
The cedars wave on Lebanon,
But Judah's lovelier maids are gone.

More blest each palm that shades her plains
Than Judah's scattered race,
For taking root it there remains
In solitary grace.
It may not quit its place of birth,
It will not thrive in other earth.

But we must wander witheringly
In other climes to die;
And where our fathers' ashes be,
Our own may never lie.
The temple has not left a stone,
And mockery sits on Salem's throne."

How grand and lofty is the strain in which the bard of Twickenham—sustained for once by an inspiration nobler than his own,—bursts forth, as it were, in spite of himself, into a rapture of sublimity, in depicting after the Hebrew poets the glories of the promised Messiah!

"Rise! crowned with light! imperial Salem, rise!
Exalt thy towering head, and lift thine eyes;
See a long race thy hallowed courts adorn;
See future sons and daughters yet unborn,

In crowding ranks on every side arise,
Demanding life,—impatient for the skies.
See barbarous nations at thy gates attend,
Walk in thy light, and in thy temples bend.
See thy bright altars throng'd with prostrate kings,
And heaped with odors of Sabean springs;
For thee Idume's spicy forests blow,
And seeds of gold on Ophir's mountains glow.
See heaven its sparkling portals wide display,
And burst upon thee as a flood of day.
No more the rising sun shall gild the morn,
Nor evening Cynthia fill her silver horn;
But lost, dissolved in thy superior rays
One tide of glory, one unclouded blaze
O'erflow thy courts: the Light himself shall shine
Revealed, and God's eternal day be thine.
The seas shall waste—the skies in smoke decay,
Rocks fall to dust, and mountains melt away.
But fixed thy word—thy saving power remains!
Thy realm for ever lasts! thy own Messiah reigns!"

No common verses these, gentlemen! and yet there are persons who tell us that Pope was not a poet. Had he always written thus, I think there could have been but little question about it. Religion, gentlemen, after all, seems to awaken the genius of poetry, quite as effectually, as well as to much better purpose, than the praise of war or wine. Her snow-white robe and sparkling diadem, are, methinks a not less attractive vesture for the muse than the rosy chaplets of the banqueting room, or the transparent tissues of the half-uncovered Venus. It would give me pleasure, gentlemen, to dwell more at length on these seductive topics, but the limits of the occasion compel me to hurry to a close. Let us, however, glance for a moment at some of the characters that figure most prominently in the strange eventful history to which I have now so briefly adverted.

What an array, in fact, of interesting personages crowd the pages of this varied narrative! Remark, I pray you, the grave majesty of Abraham;—the unsullied purity and high political talent of Joseph;—Moses, the lawgiver, poet, and father of his people;—the graceful piety of the infant Samuel gradually maturing into

the dignity of the priestly ruler;—the wild and frenzied heroism of Saul;—the various gifts and graces of the unrivalled Monarch Minstrel, and the splendid pageant of his brilliant son and successor! How distinctly all these and a hundred other characters stand out from the canvass, demonstrating by the strongest internal evidence to every experienced eye, that they are not fancy pieces, but portraits from the life! What charming apparitions of female grace and heroism beam forth from the midst of this throng of warriors, priests, and poets! The beauty of Sarah, that subdued all hearts even at the brilliant court of Egypt;—the touching self-devotion of the daughter of Jepthah;—the poetical enthusiasm of Miriam;—the masculine valor of Deborah and Judith;—finally, the far-famed Egyptian bride, whose praise will live forever, embalmed in the song of songs, which is Solomon's!

Let us select, at the risk of being tedious, from this long list of characters, one or two of the more conspicuous, and dwell upon them a little more particularly. Glance, for a moment, gentlemen, at the great lawgiver; the first, humanly viewed, of what Bacon declares to be the first class of great men, the founders of nations. Of humble origin, he is thrown by chance into the midst of the most powerful, learned, and luxurious court of his time. He is the favorite of the sovereign's daughter. Wealth and beauty waste their blandishments upon him. What will he become? Probably an effeminate courtier,—at best a book-learned priest,—a bold ambitious warrior;—a sagacious politician;—the Talleyrand of the Nile. Ah, no! Beneath that ample forehead the eye of genius burns undimmed by the corrupting influence of a courtly atmosphere, but with no impure or selfish flame. In the palaces of their oppressors, his heart beats with patriotic sympathy for the wrongs of his people. In the ardor of his zeal, he is driven to an act of violence which withdraws him from the circle of the court, and sends him forth for a while to lead the life of his shepherd ancestors in the plains of Midian. But the vision of his injured countrymen pursues him to his retreat, and he forms the magnificent project of redeeming them from bondage, and establishing them as an independent nation in their ancient territory of Palestine. Behold him reappearing, no

longer the favorite of the sovereign's daughter, but an exile, stained with blood, unprotected, unprovided with human means, at the splendid court of the Pharaohs, to demand the liberation of his countrymen! What will be his fortune? In all human probability,—by the aid of only human means,—disgraceful failure in his project;—for himself, untimely destruction. Idle terrors! He comes authorized from above. What grand and terrible displays of power attest his mission! At the voice of the obscure exile, the great river of Egypt runs blood: darkness shrouds her territory: death enters every dwelling from the cottage of the laborer to the splendid palaces of Thebes and Memphis, until the last act of retributive justice swallows up in the floods of the Red Sea, the hosts of the still unsubdued and false-hearted oppressor. Emancipation is effected. The harder task remains of organizing this scattered tribe of liberated slaves into a body politic. Will the steady patriot,—the dauntless champion,—the successful leader of the people understand the mysteries of political science? Will he be able to arrange, with all the necessary checks and balances, the complicated machinery of a new constitution? Fear not for him, man of many books! He possesses a source of information more certain than any of your theories, richer than all the pigeon-holes of all the constitution-makers. He is inspired by the fear and love of God which are the end as well as the beginning of wisdom. He builds his political structure on the Rock of Ages: the gates of Hell cannot and will not prevail against it. Then was revealed to the world, for the first time, the beautiful spectacle of a political constitution founded in truth, justice, and equal rights. It was revealed for the perpetual instruction of all succeeding generations. Amid the changing forms of national existence, it survives, and will survive for ever, the substantial basis of the legislation of Christendom. The lawgiver has accomplished his mission: his work is done. It remains for younger and bolder spirits to remove the last obstacles, and open the way with the sword to the field where this great political experiment must be tried. But does no alloy of ambition mingle with the lofty purposes of the venerable Founder? Will he willingly resign to others in his old age the control of the nation which he has

been the instrument of creating? Behold him on the top of Mount Pisgah casting a single glance of hope and joy at the promised abode of his people, and then cheerfully investing with the robe of authority his chosen successor. What remains to crown his already unrivalled name? The laurel of the poet adorns the thoughtful brow of the veteran statesman. The voice that marshalled the people to freedom,—that proclaimed the constitution and the laws, —through life celebrates their achievements in fervid strains of poetry, and breathes its last sigh in a song of praise and blessing on the tribes.

Such, gentlemen, was the great Hebrew lawgiver: in a merely secular view, perhaps the highest name in human history. Less imposing, but still more engaging and attractive, is the far famed "monarch minstrel." He, too, combines the various glories of statesman, warrior, and poet. To him belongs the merit of raising the tribes from the precarious condition of a number of scattered settlements, intermingled with still unsubdued, and, not unfrequently, victorious enemies, into one united, powerful, prosperous state. Under him the vision of the great Founder is for the first time fully realized, and the chosen people assume an independent rank among the nations of the earth. In his military character the highest warlike talents,—dauntless courage, pushed to the verge of rashness,—unerring judgment,—prompt decision,—indefatigable activity,—are accompanied by tenderness for the fallen foe,—contempt for self-indulgence,—devotion to the sex,—respect for religion, —in short, all the fairest graces of the most improved states of civilization. Behold him at the cave of Adullam, dashing from his parched lips the untasted water from the well of Beth-lehem that had been too dearly purchased by the jeopardy of precious blood! Behold him in the wilderness of En-gedi, sparing the life of his deadly foe who at the same moment is pursuing him with the rage of insanity! In all his relations to Saul, what considerate kindness,—what noble forbearance under the most revolting injuries! We seem to see the principle of good encountering that of evil in personal conflict, and overcoming it by the gentle weapons of kindness and charity. In his intercourse with Jonathan, what romantic friendship,—what sincere devotion! We feel, as we read it, that there is no empty

show in the charming lament which I just now quoted over the fallen Beauty of Israel. No character in therecords of Christian chivalry at its brightest periods,—not the fearless and faultless Bayard,—not the perfect Alfred himself, exemplifies so completely what that famous institution was or should have been. But with all his merit as a warrior and statesman, the gift by which he rises highest in comparison with the great of other ages and nations, is undoubtedly that of *Poetry*. Philosophy and song have rarely taken up their abode in palaces, and when they have done so they have generally put on a loose and gallant dress accommodated to the scene around them. When the chivalry of Europe, in the middle ages, cultivated literature, it dwindled very soon into a *gay science*, to use the language of the time, comprehending little but romances and light love songs. Even in the hands of Solomon, the lyre of his lofty father begins already to send forth a softened and somewhat effeminate strain. In the works of David, for the first and only time in the history of the world, the sublime idea of Religion, that concentrated essence of all truth,—is embodied in the highest strains of poetry. Compare these divine odes with the best lyric poetry of any other nation. Compare them,—I will not say with Anacreon, with Sappho, with the lighter portions of Horace, or with Moore, poets professedly of a free and almost licentious cast,—but compare them with all that ancient or modern lyric bards have furnished most excellent in sublimity, pathos, and moral beauty: compare them with Pindar,—with Horace in his highest flights,—with the French Rousseau,—the German Klopstock, Schiller, Burger,—the English Milton, Dryden, and Gray.—Of the whole list, Pindar alone sustains the comparison with some degree of success,—so far as the mere form of composition is concerned,—by the power, splendor, and fullness of his style. "Pindar," says his Latin imitator, "like a river descending from a mountain, and swelled by copious rains above its banks, pours forth the vast, deep, boiling torrent of his song."

> Pindarum quisquis studet æmulari,
> Jule! ceratis ope dædalea
> Nititur pennis, vitreo daturus
> Nomina ponto.

Monte decurrens, velut amnis, imbres
Quem super notas aluere ripas,
Fervet immensusque ruit profundo
Pindarus ore.

Splendid, and as respects the mere form of composition, not unmerited eulogy! But how poor and mean are his subjects, when compared with those of David! Of Pindar, more truly, perhaps, than of any other writer, we may say, that the workmanship excelled the stuff. *Materiem superabat opus.* What a waste of the richest gifts of mind to commemorate the triumphs of the race-ground and the wrestling match,—to adorn the interminable fables of a childish and corrupt mythology! In the matchless odes of David, on the other hand, as I just now remarked, the finest poetry is employed to embody the most profound wisdom. His only subject is Religion,—sublime, beautiful, pure, and true,—as she reveals herself to the highest contemplations of the noblest minds. But is not this devotional language a mere lip-service? a form of sound words employed by the king to set a good example to his court? Ah, no! Religion is his pride, his delight, his passion. There is no mistake about his meaning. His poetry is a boiling flood, like that of Pindar, though heated with a far different fire. Every verse is alive,—breathing, burning, throbbing with unaffected sentiment. Whence, then, comes this sudden burst of light and glory from the centre of the deepest intellectual and moral darkness? How happens it that the ruler of a little semi-barbarous eastern state has reached in his odes a height of sublimity, pathos, moral and religious truth, which Pindar never dreamed of, and Milton vainly sought to imitate? Answer, infidelity! Answer, scepticism! When you have done your best in vain, Faith supplies the solution with a word. Ah, splendid bard! could but a ray of your divine inspiration have fallen upon that wayward heart which was destined three thousand years afterwards to celebrate with not unequal powers of verse your unfading glory!

The harp the monarch minstrel swept,
The king of men, the loved of Heaven,
Which music hallowed as she wept
O'er tones her heart of hearts had given,—
Redoubled be her tears: its chords are riven.

It softened men of iron mould;
  It gave them virtues not their own.
No ear so dull,—no heart so cold,
  That felt not,—fired not at its tone,
Till David's lyre grew mightier than his throne.

It told the triumphs of our king,
  It wafted glory to our God,
It made the gladdened vallies ring,
  The cedars bow,—the mountains nod,
Its sound aspired to Heaven, and there abode.

When the Greek artist undertook to represent on canvass the tragic scene of the sacrifice of Iphigenia, he employed every secret of his talent in heightening the expression of grief upon the faces of the assistants, but when he came to that of Agamemnon he drew a veil over it, for he felt that the depth of a father's despair under such circumstances, was beyond the reach of the pencil. There is one other character, gentlemen, in Scripture, which should now be presented to you as a summary of all that I have said, but I dare not make the attempt. What language can delineate, or pretend to give an idea of perfection? What early maturity! While yet a child, he astonishes the wisest by his learning. What docility to his parents! What affection for his friends! What indulgence to the fallen! What sympathy with female weakness, and infant innocence! What faultless purity of life! With all this gentleness, what unshrinking severity for vice! With all this innocence, what unerring sagacity! In this lowly condition what power of thought, what elevation of sentiment, what grace and charm of language! "Never man spake as he spake." In his doctrine, what before unheard of, unthought of, wisdom; the wisdom not of books, but of the heart! "I give unto you a new commandment, that ye love one another." In conduct, what unaffected self-sacrifice! "Father, forgive them! they know not what they do." Whence then comes this moral phenomenon, still more strange, and on ordinary principles, inexplicable than the one just alluded to? If the history be true, how happens it that the most unpropitious circumstances have brought out this grand result? If false, how is it that a few illiterate persons have invented a character, which to invent would

be, in one form, to realize? Answer once more, infidelity! Answer once more, scepticism! Gentlemen, infidelity, scepticism, have answered. The force of truth, long since, tore from the lips of one of their ablest champions the reluctant confession. Hear it in the words of Rousseau:

"*Socrates lived and died like a philosopher: Jesus Christ lived and died like a God!*"