

## ANNIHILATION.

They boast that "death is an eternal sleep,"  
Where, if no morning e'er restores delight,  
At least, no mourner ever wakes to weep—  
The simile is false; the eudless night  
That has no dawn, brings not the soul to rest;  
But to despair: For he who rests awakes  
To conscious ease that satisfies his quest  
For recompense of pain—The life that makes  
A woeful ending is a woeful life.  
He is the victor who retains the field  
When battle ends: And thus the closing strife  
Of earth-born angulsh, if the future yield  
No compensation, must forever cast  
Its blackness backward on the wretch's fate.  
Let nature speak, whose craving, deep and vast  
Yearns for existence, be our conscious state  
Or sweet or bitter; like the seeing eye  
Insatiable of light, or ear of sound,  
Desire instinct, inwrought of God most high  
Not rule of interest astutely found  
By after calculation, as is taught  
Of our first father's sleep in Paradise  
His drowsed sense, untroubled, though he thought,  
He then to nothing whence he took his rise  
Was lapsing swift. It is the voice divine  
Speaking within us, which instructs our wish  
For endless being. Else why is it mine  
Unlike the unreasoning bird or beast or fish,  
To recollect the past; to anticipate;  
To fear the future woe; to hope the good?  
Accursed was the gift of prescient thought  
That raised our empty pride above the brood  
Of brutish things; for it a lie hath taught.  
The hind can crop the herb and course the lawn,  
Or drink the mountain spring with thoughtless glee,  
Untroubled by the hour her dying fawn  
Cost her a transient pang; nor doth foresee  
The hunter's coming shaft that seeks her breast,  
No memory brings past sorrows, no foresight  
Arrays its future terrors to molest  
Her present joy: One sudden thrill of fright,

One stroke, one death-throe ends the whole career,  
Simple and brief, but rounded in its joy.

Why should I die like her if I must fear,  
Remember, hope, desire, doomed to employ  
My noblest powers of being to pursue  
Futility? Why mine to stretch the thought  
To progress onward, and the endless view  
Of growth of soul with larger glories fraught,

In widening vistas mounting through the realms  
Of knowledge boundless? Why when present love  
With its alluring bliss the heart o'erwhelms,  
Is it ordained our foresight still must rove  
To future days, that love might fill like this  
With equal joys, yet know it must not be?

Why is it reason will not, cannot cease  
To frame that thought supreme, eternity;  
Capacious of infinitude of good,  
Mocking the soul with cravings infinite,  
If life must be the span the bestial hood-  
Enjoys? Abhorred span! that art but meet  
To shew us Being's woes, and then its loss  
Irreparable. Cursed be the boon

Of such existence, cheating with its dross  
The golden hopes it sanctioneth, as soon  
As they begin to glow—The better lot  
Is given the brute, who drinks the trivial cup  
Of life, and ends, forgetting and forgot.

If death ends all, a blacker thought looms up:  
Then all we love must perish when they die;  
We part forever, and the love that lests  
Our hearts remains a wound that shall not dry  
Its bitter stream till Nothingness arrest

Our woe and being by one common blow.  
Love is immortal: all things else may die;

The forest kings decay, the ceaseless flow  
Of ancient rivers, proudly sweeping by  
Long buried cities, wane, the steadfast heads  
Of everlasting mountains waste and stoop,  
The hoary seas desert their sunless beds;  
This ordered frame may backward droop  
To endless chaos—But the eye

That shines with love's self-sacrificing light  
Outlasts the beams which from Arcturus fly,  
Orion or Bootes: it is bright

With God's own rays. He is the sun of love  
And they the orbs that round the centre roll  
Reflecting him, as they forever move  
In circles shaped by his supreme control.  
He is eternal; so the gift divine!

Is all we love then, mortal? Do the fires  
 Of genius, kindled from the heavenly shrine  
 Of truth and beauty, perish, as expires  
 The gilded hutterfly or tinted rose?  
 Or shall the Sage's vision, that can pierce  
 Through Nature's secrets, make the sea disclose  
 His deep abyss, and ride his billows fierce,  
 Can map the planet's pathway and foretell  
 Their sure returns, can bridge the flood;  
 That can the storm-cloud's subtle hoit expel,  
 "Can look from nature up to nature's God,"  
 And in his works can read his deeper thought;  
 Be quenched in darkness like the rotting eye  
 Of newt or toad? The heroism that wrought  
 A nation's disenfranchisement, fain to die  
 For country's weal, and seek no recompense  
 But conscious right, the martyr's steadfast faith  
 Which joys to die for Truth, and own no sense  
 Of fiery torments: mother's love, which hath  
 No thought of self, consummate effluence  
 Of heaven's own virtue; perish evermore  
 As utterly as hypocrites' pretense,  
 Or as the bubbles hursting on the shore,  
 Or as the glitter of the serpent's scales  
 Decaying back to dust? 'Tis blasphemy!  
 Bethink ye; If this creed of death prevails  
 To doom our spirits to mortality,  
 It leaves no trace of God on nature's page—  
 If man is soulless, then an athelst world  
 Is all he knows, where senseless forces rage  
 In fire, and sea, and storm, and suns are hurled  
 With troops of waiting stars, by aimless might,  
 Through voids immense, and blind mechanic fate  
 Inexorable, on its throne of night,  
 Sightless and pitiless maintain its state  
 In earth or heaven there is no ear to hear  
 The sufferer's prayer; no heart to feel his woe;  
 No hand to shield the gust, or to repair  
 The foulest wrong that ruthless force can do?—  
 So right eternal perishes, and crime  
 Endures eternal, scorning all repeal.—  
 Then are this lower earth these heavens sublime  
 One vast machine, 'neath whose remorseless wheel  
 The corn is human hearts, instinct of pain,  
 And joy, and hope, and fear, that writhe and bleed,  
 Till ground to nothingness. Oh piteous grain!  
 Oh dreadful engine! Monster! that dost feed  
 Thine endless grind with countless precious lives!

Is such a world our home? 'Tis dark as bell!  
 Its joys but mock us, since no joy survives;  
 But death and loss irreparable dwell  
 Perpetual masters. Yet, one other fate  
 There is more black—the eternal recompense  
 Which conscious guilt forewarns it, may await  
 The soul which cannot die, nor find defense  
 Against the Judge changeless, omnipotent—  
 Ah! this the thought which drives the coward heart  
 The desperate alternative to choose  
 'Twixt hell and nothingness—A better part  
 Appears to faith—Then why, Oh mortals, lose  
 That nobler choice, Redemption? bought with blood  
 Of God incarnate, wrought by power divine,  
 The safe inheritance of perfect good.  
 The grace that shall your inmost souls refine  
 From error, sin and sorrow, and bestow  
 The angels' life of bliss and purity,  
 Whose years are measured only by the flow  
 Of God's eternity: The gift as free  
 To every thirsting soul as air of heaven!  
 Why do men turn from glories such as these  
 To dreary night and death? and still elect  
 Infinite loss and naught o'er boundless seas  
 Of joy? Because, O shame! Their guilty fears detect  
 The treason and the folly they have wrought  
 Against themselves and their best destiny  
 In serving sin! This infamy hath taught  
 (And this alone) the atheist's grovelling plea,  
 That death may be to them "eternal sleep."