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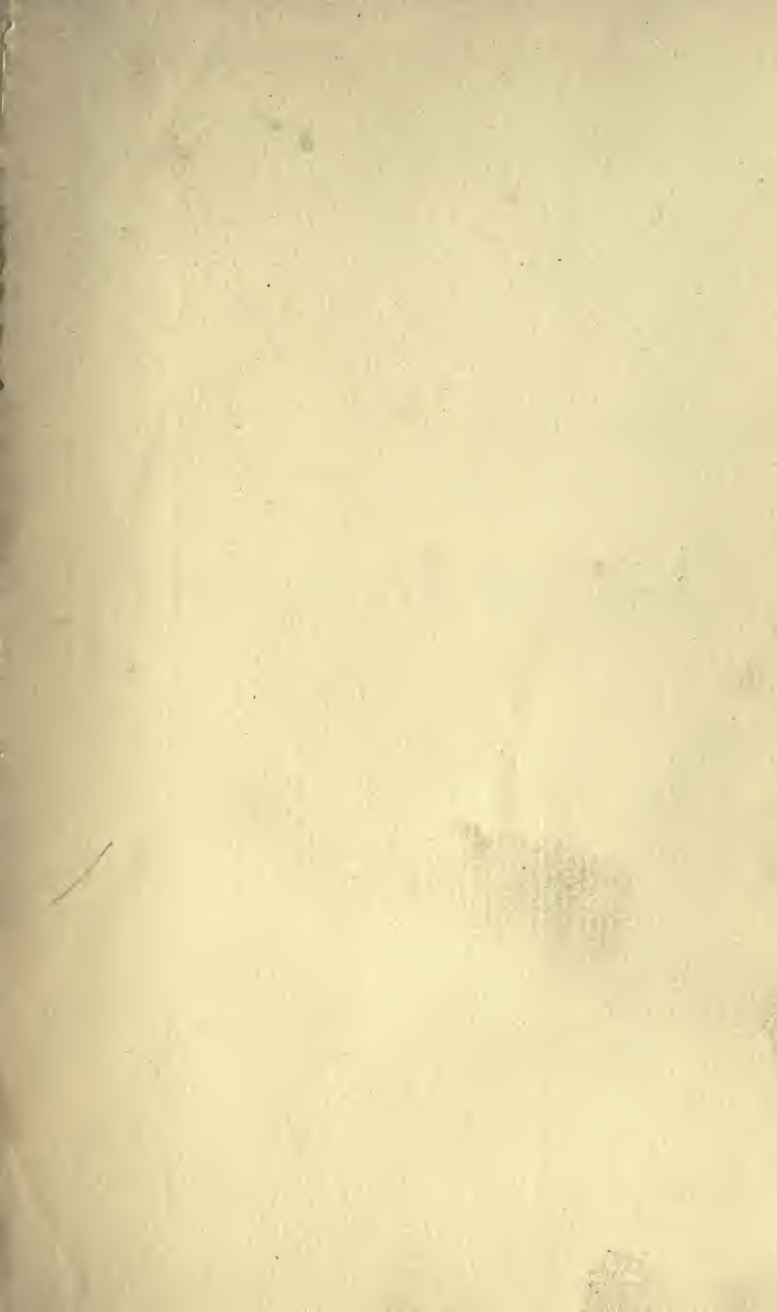
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THIS LIFE AND THE NEXT



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THIS LIFE
AND THE NEXT

IMPRESSIONS AND THOUGHTS OF NOTABLE
MEN AND WOMEN FROM PLATO
TO RUSKIN

COLLECTED AND ARRANGED BY
ESTELLE DAVENPORT ADAMS

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PREFACE

THIS little volume has arisen out of a collection of extracts made by the compiler, in the course of her reading, for her own pleasure and advantage. It was suggested to her that the subject with which the extracts dealt—that of *This Life and the Next*—was of universal interest, and that the passages which had attracted her would, if brought together, be acceptable to many other readers.

It is in the hope that this may prove to be so that this selection from a collection has been undertaken. There is no pretension to comprehensiveness or completeness—practically unobtainable within a reasonable space. What the compiler has sought to do has been to select for the present purpose the utterances of men and women, of different climes and times, who may be regarded as representative of various classes, temperaments, and tendencies.

The extracts have been made, for the most part, less often from formal publications than from autobiographies, letters, and journals—in the belief that the writers have given expression to their impressions and reflections more fully and freely in the latter than in the former.

Where possible, the quotations have been carefully

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dated, in order that they may illustrate, as occasion serves, the changes in, or confirmation of, opinion effected by time. It has especially been sought to record, where obtainable, the writers' latest comments upon Life as they had known it and Death as it presented itself to their imagination.

A few of the passages here printed have not till now appeared in volume form.

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“ Life, Death, and that vast For-ever.”

C. KINGSLEY.

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PLATO (427-347 B.C.)

SURELY when the soul cannot be killed or destroyed by its own depravity and its own evil, hardly will the evil, which is charged with the destruction of another thing, destroy a soul or anything else, beyond its own appropriate object. . . . Hence, as it is destroyed by no evil at all, whether foreign to it or its own, it is clear that the soul must be always existing, and therefore immortal. . . .

Shall we not agree that all things which come from the gods come in the best possible shape to the man whom they love, unless some past sin has already doomed him to a certain amount of suffering? . . . Hence, in the case of the just man, we must assume that, whether poverty be his lot, or sickness, or any other reputed evil, all will work for his final advantage, either in this life, or in the next.

For, unquestionably, the gods can never neglect a man who determines to strive earnestly to become just, and by the practice of virtue to grow as much like God as man is permitted to do.

If we follow my advice, believing the soul to be immortal, and to possess the power of entertaining all evil as well as all good, we shall ever hold fast the

upward road, and devotedly cultivate justice combined with wisdom, in order that we may be loved by one another and by the gods, not only during our stay on earth, but also when, like conquerors in the games collecting the presents of their admirers, we receive the prizes of virtue.¹

CICERO (100-43 B.C.)

THE nearer death advances towards me, the more clearly I seem to discern its real nature. . . . The soul, during her confinement within this prison of the body, is doomed by fate to undergo a severe penance: for her native seat is in heaven; and it is with reluctance that she is forced down from those celestial mansions into these lower regions, where all is foreign and repugnant to her divine nature. But the gods, I am persuaded, have thus widely disseminated immortal spirits, and clothed them with human bodies, that there might be a race of intelligent creatures, not only to have dominion over this our earth, but to contemplate the host of heaven, and imitate in their moral conduct the same beautiful order and uniformity, so conspicuous in those splendid orbs. This opinion I am induced to embrace, not only as agreeable to the best deductions of reason, but in just deference also to the authority of the noblest and most distinguished philosophers. . . . When I consider the faculties with which the human mind is endued; its amazing celerity; its wonderful power in recollecting past events, and sagacity in

¹ From the *Republic*, Bk. x. (trans. by Davies and Vaughan).

discerning future; together with its numberless discoveries in the several arts and sciences—I feel a conscious conviction that this active, comprehensive principle cannot possibly be of a mortal nature. And as this unceasing activity of the soul derives its energy from its own innate powers without receiving it from any foreign or external impulse, it necessarily follows (as it is absurd to suppose the soul could ever desert itself) that its activity must continue for ever. . . .

Tell me, my friends, whence is it that those men who have made the greatest advances in true wisdom and genuine philosophy are observed to meet death with the most perfect equanimity, while the ignorant and unimproved part of our species generally see its approach with the utmost discomposure and reluctance? Is it not because the more enlightened the mind is, and the farther it extends its view, the more clearly it discerns in the hour of its dissolution (what narrow and vulgar souls are too short-sighted to discover) that it is taking its flight into some happier region? . . . The sincere truth is, if some divinity would confer on me a new grant of my life, and replace me once more in the cradle, I would utterly, and without the least hesitation, reject the offer: having well-nigh finished my race, I have no inclination to return to the goal. For what has life to recommend it? or rather, indeed, to what evils does it not expose us? But admit that its satisfactions are many; yet surely there is a time when we have had a sufficient measure of its enjoyments, and may well depart contented with our share of the feast. For I mean not, in imitation of some very considerable philosophers, to represent

the condition of human nature as a subject of just lamentation: on the contrary, I am far from regretting that life was bestowed upon me, as I have the satisfaction to think that I have employed it in such a manner as not to have lived in vain. In short, I consider this world as a place which Nature never designed for my permanent abode; and I look upon my departure out of it, not as being driven from my habitation, but as leaving my inn. . . .

And, after all, should this my firm persuasion of the soul's immortality prove to be a mere delusion, it is at least a pleasing delusion, and I will cherish it to my latest breath. I have the satisfaction in the meantime to be assured that if death should utterly extinguish my existence, as some minute philosophers assert, the groundless hope I entertained of an after-life in some better state cannot expose me to the derision of these wonderful sages when they and I shall be no more. In all events, and even admitting that our expectations of immortality are utterly vain, there is a certain period, nevertheless, when death would be a consummation most earnestly to be desired: for Nature has appointed to the days of man, as to all things else, their proper limits, beyond which they are no longer of any value. In fine, old-age may be considered as the last scene in the great drama of life; and one would not, surely, wish to lengthen out our part till we sunk down in disgust and exhausted with fatigue.¹

¹ From a translation, by W. Melmoth, of the essay *De Senectute*, which, it is believed, was written by Cicero a year or two before his death.

LUCRETIUS (95-51 B.C.)

FOR I, if still you are haunted by the fear
 Of Hell, have one more secret for your ear.
 Hell is indeed no fable; but, my friends,
 Hell and its torments are not there, but here.

No Tantalus down below with craven head
 Cowers from the hovering rock: but here instead
 A Tantalus lives in each fond wretch who fears
 An angry God, and views the heavens with dread.

No Tityos there lies prone, and lives to feel
 The beak of the impossible vulture steal
 Day after day out of his bleeding breast
 The carrion of the unsatiable meal.

But you and I are Tityos, when the dire
 Poison of passion turns our blood to fire;
 For despised love is crueller than the pit,
 And bitterer than the vulture's beak desire. . . .

Oh forms of fear, oh sights and sounds of woe!
 The shadowy road down which we all must go
 Leads not to these, but from them. Hell is here,
 Here in the broad day. Peace is there below. . . .

Brother and friend, this life brings joy and ease
 And love to some, to some the lack of these—
 Only the lack; to others tears and pain;
 But at the last it brings to all the peace

That passes understanding. Sweet, thrice sweet,
 This healing Gospel of the unplumbed retreat,
 Where, though not drinking, we shall no more thirst,
 And meeting not, shall no more wish to meet.

Rest, rest, perturbed bosom—heart forlorn,
 With thoughts of ended joys, and evil borne,
 And—worse—of evil done: for they, like thee,
 Shall rest—those others thou hast made to mourn.

Even if there lurk behind some veil of sky
 The fabled Maker, the immortal Spy,
 Ready to torture each poor life he made,
 Thou canst do more than God can—thou canst die.

Will not the thunders of thy God be dumb
 When thou art deaf for ever? Can the Sun
 Of all things bruise what is not? Nay—take heart;
 For where thou goest, thither no God can come.

Rest, brother, rest. Have you done ill or well,
 Rest, rest. There is no God, no Gods, who dwell
 Crowned with avenging righteousness on high,
 Nor frowning ministers of their hate in Hell. . . .

Flakes of the water, on the waters cease!
 Soul of the body, melt and sleep like these.
 Atoms to atoms—weariness to rest.
 Ashes to ashes—hopes and fears to peace!¹

¹ From *Lucretius on Life and Death* (trans. by W. H. Mallock),
 Parts vi. and vii.

HORACE (65-8 B.C.)

SEEK not to lift the veil forbidden,
Nor vainly scan the future hidden ;
Nor strive with Babylonian lore
Our fate's dark secret to explore :
Far wiser is it to endure
Those ills of life we cannot cure.
What though this winter, that exhausts
The Tyrrhené surge on shattered coasts,
Should be the last for thee and me ?
It matters not, Leuconoè !
Fill high the goblet ! Envious Time
Steals, as we speak, our fleeting prime.
Away with hope ! Away with sorrow !
Snatch thou To-day, nor trust To-morrow.¹

Be hoary Inachus thy sire,
Or be thou risen from the mire ;
Be rich, or poor, it boots thee not :
Unpitying Orcus casts thy lot.
All, all, we drive to doom. The urn
Discharges every Life in turn :
For every Life, or soon or late,
The boat, and endless exile, wait.²

¹ *Odes*, Bk. i. ode xii., trans. by Sir Stephen de Vere.

² *Ibid.* Bk. ii. ode iii., trans. by W. E. Gladstone.

EPICTETUS . . . (Circa 94–138 A.D.)

LIFE is indifferent; the use of it not indifferent.¹

If any one is unhappy, remember that he is so for himself; for God made all men to enjoy felicity and a settled good condition. . . .

Was reason given us by the gods for the purpose of unhappiness and misery, to make us live wretched and lamenting? O, by all means, let every one be immortal! Let nobody go from home! Let us never go from home ourselves, but remain rooted to a spot like plants! . . .

Who can be a good man who doth not know what he is? And who knows this and forgets that all things made are perishable, and that it is not possible for man and man always to live together? What then? To desire impossibilities is base and foolish: it is the behaviour of a stranger [to the world]; of one who fights against God the only way he can—by his principles. . . .

Say that the fall of the leaf is ominous, and that a candied mass should be produced from figs, and raisins from grapes. For all these are changes from a former into another state; not a destruction, but a certain appointed economy and administration. Such is absence, a small change; such is death, a greater change; not from what now is nothing, but to what now is not.

What, then, shall I be no more?

¹ From the *Discourses*, trans. by Elizabeth Carter, 1758 Bk. ii. chap. vi.

You will be; but [you will be] something else, of which, at present, the world hath no need: for even you were not produced when you pleased, but when the world had need [of you]. Hence a wise and good man, mindful who he is, and whence he came, and by whom he was produced, is attentive only how he may fill his post regularly and dutifully to God.¹ . . .

After you have received all, and even your very self, from another, are you angry with the giver, and complain if he takes anything away from you? Who are you, and for what purpose did you come? Was it not he who brought you here? Was it not he who showed you the light? Hath not he given you assistants? Hath not he given you senses? Hath not he given you reason? And as whom did he bring you here? Was it not as a mortal? Was it not as one to live, with a little portion of flesh, upon earth, and to see his administration; to behold the spectacle with him, and partake of the festival for a short time? After having beheld the spectacle, and the solemnity, then, as long as it is permitted you, will you not depart when he leads you out, adoring and thankful for what you have heard and seen?²

¹ From the *Discourses*, trans. by Elizabeth Carter, Bk. iii. chap. xxiv.

² *Ibid.* Bk. iv. chap. i.

MARCUS AURELIUS

ANTONINUS . . . (121-180)

SINCE it is possible that thou mayest depart from life this very moment, regulate every act and thought accordingly. But to go away from among men, if there are gods, is not a thing to be afraid of, for the gods will not involve thee in evil; but if indeed they do not exist, or if they have no concern about human affairs, what is it to me to live in a universe devoid of gods or devoid of providence? But in truth they do exist, and they do care for human things, and they have put all the means in man's power to enable him not to fall into real evils. And as to the rest, if there was anything evil, they would have provided for this also, that it should be altogether in a man's power not to fall into it. Now that which does not make a man worse, how can it make a man's life worse? But neither through ignorance, nor having the knowledge, but not the power to guard against or correct these things, is it possible that the nature of the universe has overlooked them; nor is it possible that it has made so great a mistake, either through want of power or want of skill, that good and evil should happen indiscriminately to the good and the bad. But death certainly, and life, honour, and dishonour, pain and pleasure, all these things equally happen to good men and bad, being things which make us neither better nor worse. Therefore they are neither good nor evil.¹

¹ From the *Thoughts* (trans. by George Long), ii. xi.

Of human life the time is a point, and the substance is in a flux, and the perception dull, and the composition of the whole body subject to putrefaction, and the soul a whirl, and fortune hard to divine, and fame a thing devoid of judgment. And, to say all in a word, everything which belongs to the body is a stream, and what belongs to the soul is a dream and vapour, and life is a warfare and a stranger's sojourn, and after-fame is oblivion. What then is that which is able to conduct a man? One thing, and only one, philosophy. But this consists in keeping the dæmon within a man free from violence and unharmed, superior to pains and pleasures, doing nothing without a purpose, nor yet falsely and with hypocrisy, not feeling the need of another man's doing or not doing anything; and besides, accepting all that happens, and all that is allotted, as coming from thence, wherever it is, from whence he himself came; and, finally, waiting for death with a cheerful mind, as being nothing else than a dissolution of the elements of which every living being is compounded.¹

OMAR KHAYYÁM

(Circa 1050-60—1123)

OH threats of Hell and Hopes of Paradise!
 One thing at least is certain—*This* Life flies;
 One thing is certain and the rest is Lies;
 The Flower that once has blown for ever dies.

¹ From the *Thoughts* (trans. by George Long), ii. xvii.

Strange, is it not? that of the myriads who
 Before us pass'd the door of Darkness through,
 Not one returns to tell us of the Road,
 Which to discover we must travel too. . . .

I sent my Soul through the Invisible,
 Some letter of that After-life to spell :
 And by and by my Soul return'd to me,
 And answer'd " I Myself am Heav'n and Hell." . . .

We are no other than a moving row
 Of Magic Shadow-shapes that come and go
 Round with the Sun-illumined Lantern held
 In Midnight by the Master of the Show ;

But helpless Pieces of the Game He plays
 Upon this Chequer-board of Nights and Days ;
 Hither and thither moves, and checks, and slays,
 And one by one back in the Closet lays. . . .

The Moving Finger writes ; and, having writ,
 Moves on : nor all your Piety nor Wit
 Shall lure it back to cancel half a Line,
 Nor all your Tears wash out a Word of it.

And that inverted Bowl they call the Sky,
 Whereunder crawling coop'd we live and die,
 Lift not your hands to *It* for help—for *It*
 As impotently moves as you or I.¹

¹ From the *Rubaiyat* (Englished by Edward FitzGerald).

DANTE ALIGHIERI (1265-1321)

[Beatrice has urged the Poet to

“Look downward and contemplate what a world
Already stretch’d under our feet there lies.”]

I STRAIGHT obey’d ; and with mine eyes return’d
Through all the seven spheres ; and saw this
globe
So pitiful of semblance, that perforce
It moved my smiles : and him in truth I hold
For wisest who esteems it least ; whose thoughts
Elsewhere are fix’d, him worthiest call and best.¹

I in one God believe ;
One sole eternal Godhead, of whose love
All heaven is moved, himself unmoved the while.
Nor demonstration physical alone,
Or more intelligential and abstruse,
Persuades me to this faith : but from that truth
It cometh to me rather, which is shed
Through Moses, the rapt Prophets, and the Psalms,
The Gospel, and what ye yourselves did write
When ye were gifted of the Holy Ghost.
In three eternal Persons I believe ;
Essence threefold and one ; mysterious league
Of union absolute, which many a time
The word of gospel lore upon my mind

¹ From *Paradise*, Canto xxii. (trans. by Cary).

Imprints : and from this germ, this firstling spark,
The lively flame dilates ; and, like heaven's star,
Doth glitter in me.¹

The King, by whose rich grace His servants be
With plenty beyond measure set to dwell,
Ordains that I my bitter wrath dispel
And lift mine eyes to the great consistory ;
Till, noting how in glorious quires agree
The citizens of that fair citadel,
To the Creator I His creature swell
Their song, and all their love possesses me.
So, when I contemplate the great reward
To which our God has called the Christian seed,
I long for nothing else but only this.
And then my soul is grieved in thy regard,
Dear friend, who reck'st not of thy nearest need,
Renouncing for slight joys the perfect bliss.²

FRANCESCO PETRARCA

(1304–1374)

OH blessed life everlasting promised to us,—life in which there is no past, no future, in which everything belongs to the present ! In that life our desires and our hopes will be fulfilled ; we shall for ever rejoice in truth, our only blessedness. There, all that once delighted us does delight us, and will delight us immu-

¹ From *Paradise*, Canto xxiv. (the Poet's reply to St. Peter).

² To Giovanni Quirino (trans. by Rossetti in *Dante and his Circle*).

tably and for evermore,—we shall rejoice in our hearts' desire without its being lessened; it will be fulfilled, but not quenched; it will be appeased and kept alive; it will never be lost by satiety nor be marred by change and chance, by care and fear. Happy the pilgrim who, guided by divine mercy, enters at last upon that life.¹

Why should it trouble me that I am old, if it does not trouble me that I am living? Life without old age cannot be long. I should not wish to be younger, but to have led a more virtuous and laborious life. There is nothing I so much lament as my not having been able to do in a given time what I ought to have done. Hence I work with all my might to make up towards evening for the idleness in which I spent the day, and I often think of the saying of that wise prince Cæsar Augustus: "What is done well is always done without delay"; of the philosophical utterance of the great Plato: "Happy he who can even in his old age enrich his mind with wisdom and truth"; or of the catholic maxim of Saint Ambrose: "Happy is he who, though stricken in years, has forsaken the way of error; happy he who, under the very sickle of death, freed his soul from vice."²

¹ From *Thoughts from the Letters of Petrarch* ("Letters of Old Age"), Bk. iii., letter 9 (trans. by J. Lohse).

² *Ibid.* Bk. xvii., letter 2.

GEOFFREY CHAUCER

(Circa 1340-1400)

A THOUSANDE tymes I have herd telle,
 There ys joy in hevене, and peyne in helle,
 And I accorde wel that it ys so ;
 But, natheles, yet wot I wel also,
 That ther is noon dwellyng in this coundree,
 That eythir hath in hevене or helle ybe,
 Ne may of hit noon other weyes witen,
 But as he hath herd seyde, or founde it writen ;
 For by assay ther may no man it preve.

But God forbede but men shulde leve
 Wel more thing then men han seen with eye !
 Men shal not wenen every thing a lye
 But yf hymselfe yt seeth, or elles dooth ;
 For, God wot, thing is never the lasse sooth
 Thogh every wight ne may it not ysee.¹

MICHEL ANGELO

BUONARROTI (1474-1564)

NOW hath my life across a stormy sea,
 Like a frail bark, reached that wide port where all
 Are bidden, ere the final reckoning fall
 Of good and evil for eternity.

¹ From *Prologue of Nine Goode Wymmen*.

Now know I well how that fond phantasy
Which made my soul the worshipper and thrall
Of earthly art, is vain ; how criminal
Is that which all men seek unwillingly.
Those amorous thoughts which were so lightly dressed,
What are they when the double death is nigh ?
The one I know for sure, the other dread.
Painting nor sculpture now can lull to rest
My soul, that turns to His great love on high,
Whose arms to clasp us on the cross were spread.¹

The fables of the world have filched away
The time I had for thinking upon God ;
His grace lies buried 'neath oblivion's sod,
Whence springs an evil crop of sins alway.
What makes another wise leads me astray,
Slow to discern the bad path I have trod :
Hope fades, but still desire ascends that God
May free me from self-love, my sure decay.
Shorten half-way my road to heaven from earth !
Dear Lord, I cannot even half-way rise
Unless Thou help me on this pilgrimage.
Teach me to hate the world so little worth,
And all the lovely things I clasp and prize,
That endless life, ere death, may be my wage.²

If life gives us pleasure, we ought not to expect displeasure from death, seeing it is made by the hand of the same master.³

¹ In letter to Vasari, Sept. 1554 (trans. by J. A. Symonds).

² In letter to Vasari, about the same period (same translator).

³ In *Life*, by Vasari.

SIR THOMAS MORE (1478-1535)

SO should the lover of God esteem, that he
 Which all the pleasure hath, mirth and disport
 That in this world is possible to be,
 Yet till the time that he may once resort
 Unto that blessed, joyful, heavenly port,
 Where he of God may have the glorious sight,
 Is void of perfect joy and sure delight.¹

[In the church of his village (wrote Erasmus in 1532-33) Sir Thomas More has constructed a family tomb. . . . On the wall he has placed a tablet with a record of his life and his intentions :—]

And that this tomb made for him in his lifetime be not in vain, nor that he fear death coming upon him, but that he may willingly, for the desire of Christ, die and find death not utterly death to him, but the gate of a wealthier life, help him, I beseech you, good reader, now with your prayers while he liveth, and when he is dead also.

I have lived, methinketh, a long life, and now neither I look nor long to live much longer. I have, since I came to the Tower, looked once or twice to have given up my ghost ere this, and, in good faith, my heart waxed the lighter with hope thereof. Yet forgot I not that I have a long reckoning and a great to give account of. But I put my trust in God, and in the merits of His bitter Passion, and I beseech Him to give

¹ From *Twelve Rules of John Picus*, etc.

me and keep me the mind to look to be out of this world and to be with Him. For I can never but trust that who so long to be with Him shall be welcome to Him; and, on the other side, my mind giveth me verily that any that ever shall come to Him shall full heartily wish to be with Him ere ever he shall come at Him.¹

BENVENUTO CELLINI (1500–1570)

AS o'er my past and painful life I pause,
But not unheedful of Heaven's gracious care,
Shielding the gift it gave: in mind I bear
Proud deeds I did, yet live. In honour's cause
I served, and high adventures were my laws,
Till fortune bow'd to toils now cowards dare,
And worth and virtue bore me onwards, where
Leaving the crowd, I pass'd on with applause.
One thought still irks me: that my life's best prime
Of richest promise, vain and idly fled,
Bearing my best resolves, like air away,
Which I could now lament, but have no time.
To *welcome*² born, I proudly raise my head,
Fair Florence' son—bright flower of Tuscany.³

¹ From letter written in the Tower to Dr. Nicolas Wilson, 1535

² "Well-come"—Benvenuto.

³ Written about 1558-59.

MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE

(1533–1592)

*Vixi, et quem dederat cursum fortuna peregi.*Virg. *Aen.* iv. 653.

I have liv'd, and the race have past,
Wherein my fortune had me plac't.

IT is all the ease I find in my age, and that it suppresseth many cares and desires in me, wherewith life is much disquieted. The care of the world's course, the care of riches, of greatnesse, of knowledge, of health and of myselfe.¹

Were I to live againe, it should be as I have already lived. I neither deplore what is past, nor dread what is to come: and if I be not deceived, the inward parts have neerely resembled the outward. It is one of the chieftest points wherein I am beholden to fortune, that in the course of my bodies estate, each thing hath beene carried in season. I have seene the leaves, the blossomes, and the fruit; and now see the drooping and withering of it. Happily, because naturally. I beare my present miseries the more gently because they are in season, and with greater favour make me remember the long happinesse of my former life.²

¹ From the *Essayes*, trans. by Florio, Bk. ii. chap. xxviii.

² *Ibid.* Bk. iii. chap. ii.

A man should runne the badde, and settle himselfe in the good. This vulgar phrase of *passé time*, and to *passé the time*, represents the custome of those wise men who thinke to have no better account of their life than to *passé it over* and escape it: to *passé it over* and *bawke it*, and so much as in them lyeth, to ignore and avoyd it, as a thing of an yrkesome, tedious, and to be disdained quality. But I know it to be otherwise; and finde it to be both priseable and commodious, yea in her last declination; where I hold it. And Nature hath put the same into our hands, furnished with such and so favourable circumstances, that if it presse and molest us, or if unprofitably it escape us, we must blame ourselves. *Stulti vita ingrata est, trepida est, tota in futurum fertur* (Gen. Epist. xv.).

A foole's life is all pleasant, all fearefull, all fond of the future. I therefore prepare and compose myselfe to forgoe and lose it without grudging; but a thing that is loseable and transitory by its owne condition: not as troublesome and importunate. Nor beseemes it a man [not] to be grieved when he dieth, except they be such as please themselves to live still. There is a kinde of husbandry in knowing how to enjoy it. I enjoy it double to others. For *the measure in jovissance dependeth more or lesse on the application we lend it.* Especially at this instant, that I perceive mine to be short in time, I wil extend it in weight: I wil stay the readines of her flight by the promptitude of my holdfast by it: and by the vigor of custome, recompence the haste of her fleeting. According as the possession of life is more short, I must endeavour to make it more profound and full. Other men feele the sweetnesse [of a] contentment and prosperity. I feele it as well as they; but it is not

in passing and gliding; yet should it be studied, tasted, and ruminated, thereby to yield it condigne thanks, that it pleased to grant the same unto us. . . .

As for me then, I love my [life] and cherish it, such as it hath pleased God to graunt it us. . . . I cheerefully and thankfully, and with a good heart, accept what nature hath created for me; and am there with well pleased, and am proud of it. Great wrong is offered unto that great and all-puissant Giver, to refuse his gift, which is so absolutely good; and disanull and disfigure the same, since hee made perfectly good. *Omnia quae secundum naturam sunt, estimatione digna sunt* (Cic. *Fin. Bon.* iii). *All things that are according to nature are worthy to be esteemed.*¹

MIGUEL DE CERVANTES

(1547–1616)

A DIEU to gaiety, adieu to wit, adieu my pleasant friends, for I am dying, yet hoping to see you all again happy in another world.²

¹ From the *Essayes*, trans. by Florio, Bk. iii. chap. xiii.

² From the Prologue to *The Wanderings of Persiles and Sigismunda*.

SIR WALTER RALEIGH

(1552-1618)

WHAT is our life? The play of passion.
Our mirth? The music of division.
Our mothers' wombs the tiring-houses be,
Where we are dressed for life's short comedy.
The earth the stage; Heaven the spectator is,
Who sits and views whosoe'er doth act amiss.
The graves which hide us from the sorching sun
Are like drawn curtains when the play is done.
Thus playing, post we to our latest rest,
And then we die in earnest, not in jest.¹

Even such is time, that takes in trust
Our youth, our joys, our all we have,
And pays us but with earth and dust;
Who, in the dark and silent grave,
When we have wandered all our ways,
Shuts up the story of our days;
But from this earth, this grave, this dust,
My God shall raise me up, I trust!²

Whosoever he be to whom Fortune hath been a servant and the Time a friend, let him but take the account of his memory (for we have no other keeper of our pleasures past), and truly examine what it hath reserved, either of Beauty and Youth, or foregone delights; what it hath saved, that it might last, of his

¹ From a music-book of 1612 (anonymous).

² Found in Raleigh's Bible in the gate-house at Westminster, 1618.

dearest affections, or of whatever else the amorous Spring-time gave his thoughts of contentment, then unvaluable; and he shall find that all the Art which his elder years have, can draw no other vapour out of these dissolutions than heavy, secret, and sad sighs. He shall find nothing remaining but those sorrows which grow up after our fast-springing youth, overtake it when it is at a stand, and overtop it utterly when it begins to wither; insomuch as looking back from the very instant time and from our now being, the poor, diseased, and captive creature hath as little sense of his former miseries and pains as he that is most blessed in common Opinion hath of his forepast pleasures and delights. For whatsoever is cast behind us is just nothing; and what is to come, deceitful hope hath it. *Omnia quae ventura sunt in incerto jacent.* Only those few black Swans I must except, who, having had the grace to value worldly vanities at no more than their own price, do, by retaining the comfortable memory of a well-acted life, behold death without dread, and the grave without fear, and embrace both as necessary guides to endless glory.¹

EDMUND SPENSER (1553-1599)

WHEN I bethinke me on that speech why-leare
 Of Mutabilitie, and well it way!
 Me seemes, that though she all unworthy were
 Of the Heav'ns Rule: yet, very sooth to say,
 In all things else she beares the greatest sway:
 Which makes me loath this state of life so tickle,

¹ From the preface to the *History of the World*.

And love of things so vaine to cast away :
 Whose flowring pride, so fading and so fickle,
 Short Time shall soon cut down with his consuming
 sickle.

Then gin I thinke on that which Nature sayd,
 Of that same time when no more Change shall be,
 But stedfast rest of all things, firmly stayd
 Upon the pillours of Eternity,
 That is contrayr to Mutabilitie ;
 For all that moveth doth in Change delight ;
 But thenceforth all shall rest eternally
 With Him that is the God of Sabaoth hight :
 O ! that great Sabaoth God, grant me that Sabaoth's
 sight.¹

SIR PHILIP SIDNEY (1554–1586)

I WOULD not change my joy for the empire of
 the world.

All things in my former life have been vain, vain,
 vain.²

FRANCIS BACON (1561–1626)

(VISCOUNT ST. ALBANS)

THE World's a bubble, and the life of man
 Less than a span :
 In his conception wretched ; from the womb,
 So to the tomb ;

¹ *The Faerie Queene*, Book vii. Canto viii.

² Spoken on his death-bed.

Curst from the cradle, and brought up to years
 With cares and fears.
 Who then to frail Mortality shall trust,
 But limns the water, or but writes in dust.

Yet since with sorrow here we live opprest,
 What life is best?
 Courts are but only superficial Schools
 To dandle fools:
 The rural parts are turned into a den
 Of savage men:
 And where's a city from all vice so free,
 But may be term'd the worst of all the three?

Domestic cares afflict the husband's bed,
 Or pains his head:
 Those that live single, take it for a curse,
 Or do things worse:
 Some would have children: those that have them, none,
 Or wish them gone:
 What is it then to have or have no wife,
 But single thralldom or a double strife?

Our own affections still at home to please
 Is a disease:
 To cross the sea to any foreign soil,
 Perils and toil:
 Wars with their noise affright us; when they cease,
 We're worse in peace;—
 What then remains, but that we still should cry
 Not to be born, or, being born, to die?¹

¹ From "Poems of Francis Bacon" (1870).

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

(1564-1616)

[There are those who hold that all the sonnets of Shakespeare were dramatic, in the sense of giving voice to thoughts and emotions not his own. On the other hand, Wordsworth declared that in the sonnets the poet had "unlocked his heart"; and we find Dr. Dowden writing—"With Wordsworth, Sir Henry Taylor, and Mr. Swinburne, with François Victor Hugo, with Kreyssig, Ulrici, Gervinus, and Herman Isaac, with Boaden, Armitage Brown, and Hallam, with Furnivall, Spalding, Rossetti, and Palgrave, I believe that Shakespeare's Sonnets express his own feelings in his own person." In the following passages, therefore, Shakespeare may perhaps be giving utterance to his own views of Life and Death.]

LIKE as the waves make towards the pebbled shore,
So do our minutes hasten to their end;
Each changing place with that which goes before,
In sequent toil all forwards do contend.
Nativity, once in the main of light,
Crawls to maturity, wherewith being crown'd,
Crooked eclipses 'gainst his glory fight,
And Time that gave doth now his gift confound.
Time doth transfix the flourish set on youth
And delves the parallels in beauty's brow,
Feeds on the rarities of nature's truth,
And nothing stands but for his scythe to mow.¹ . . .

¹ From Sonnet lx.

That time of year thou mayst in me behold
 When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang
 Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,
 Bare ruin'd choirs, where late the sweet birds sang.
 In me thou see'st the twilight of such day
 As after sunset fadeth in the west,
 Which by and by black night doth take away,
 Death's second self, that seals up all in rest.
 In me thou see'st the glowing of such fire
 That on the ashes of his youth doth lie,
 As the death-bed whereon it must expire,
 Consumed with that which it was nourish'd by.¹ . . .

No, Time, thou shalt not boast that I do change:
 Thy pyramids built up with newer might
 To me are nothing novel, nothing strange;
 They are but dressings of a former sight.
 Our dates are brief, and therefore we admire
 What thou dost foist upon us that is old,
 And rather make them born to our desire
 Than think that we before have heard them told.
 Thy registers and thee I both defy,
 Not wondering at the present nor the past,
 For thy records and what we see doth lie,
 Made more or less by thy continual haste.

This I do vow, and this shall ever be;
 I will be true, despite thy scythe and thee.²

Poor soul, the centre of my sinful earth,
 [Press'd by] these rebel powers that thee array,
 Why dost thou pine within and suffer dearth,

¹ From Sonnet lxxiii.

² Sonnet cxxiii.

Painting thy outward walls so costly gay?
 Why so large cost, having so short a lease,
 Dost thou upon thy fading mansion spend?
 Shall worms, inheritors of this excess,
 Eat up thy charge? is this thy body's end?
 Then, soul, live thou upon thy servant's loss,
 And let that pine to aggravate thy store;
 Buy terms divine in selling hours of dross;
 Within be fed, without be rich no more:
 So shalt thou feed on Death, that feeds on men,
 And Death once dead, there's no more dying then.¹

[Passages in Shakespeare's plays cannot, of course, be regarded with certainty as the expression of the poet's own sympathies and reflections. At the same time there are some pronouncements by his characters on This Life and the Next which by their strong accent of sincere conviction seem to suggest that Shakespeare may be speaking in them for himself as well as for his creations. Hence the inclusion in this volume of the following well-known speeches]:—

Reason thus with life:

If I do lose thee, I do lose a thing
 That none but fools would keep: a breath thou art,
 Servile to all the skyey influences,
 That dost this habitation, where thou keep'st,
 Hourly afflict: merely, thou art death's fool;
 For him thou labour'st by thy flight to shun,
 And yet runn'st towards him still. Thou art not
 noble;

¹ Sonnet cxlvi.

For all the accommodations that thou bear'st
 Are nursed by baseness. Thou'rt by no means
 valiant ;

For thou dost fear the soft and tender fork
 Of a poor worm. Thy best of rest is sleep,
 And that thou oft provokest ; yet grossly fear'st
 Thy death, which is no more. Thou art not thyself ;
 For thou exist'st on many a thousand grains
 That issue out of dust. Happy thou art not ;
 For what thou hast not, still thou strivest to get,
 And what thou hast, forget'st. Thou art not
 certain ;

For thy complexion shifts to strange effects,
 After the moon. If thou art rich, thou'rt poor ;
 For, like an ass, whose back with ingots bows,
 Thou bear'st thy heavy riches but a journey,
 And death unloads thee. Friend hast thou none ;
 For thine own bowels, which do call thee sire,
 The mere effusion of thy proper loins,
 Do curse the gout, serpigo, and the rheum,
 For ending thee no sooner. Thou hast nor youth
 nor age ;

But, as it were, an after-dinner's sleep,
 Dreaming on both ; for all thy blessed youth
 Becomes as aged, and doth beg the alms
 Of palsied eld : and when thou art old and rich,
 Thou hast neither heat, affection, limb, nor beauty,
 To make thy riches pleasant. What's yet in this
 That bears the name of life ? Yet in this life
 Lie hid more thousand deaths : yet death we fear,
 That makes these odds all even.¹

¹ From *Measure for Measure*, Act iii. Sc. i.—The Duke to Claudio.

To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,
 Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
 To the last syllable of recorded time ;
 And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
 The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle !
 Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
 That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
 And then is heard no more : it is a tale
 Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
 Signifying nothing.¹

. . . . To die, and go we know not where ;
 To lie in cold obstruction and to rot ;
 This sensible warm motion to become
 A kneaded clod ; and the delighted spirit
 To bathe in fiery floods, or to reside
 In thrilling region of thick-ribbed ice ;
 To be imprison'd in the viewless winds,
 And blown with restless violence round about
 The pendent world ; or to be worse than worst
 Of those that lawless and incertain thought
 Imagine howling : 'tis too horrible !
 The weariest and most loathed worldly life
 That age, ache, penury and imprisonment
 Can lay on nature is a paradise
 To what we fear of death.²

To be, or not to be : that is the question :
 Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
 'The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
 Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,

¹ From *Macbeth*, Act v. Sc. v.—Spoken by Macbeth.

² From *Measure for Measure*, Act iii. Sc. i.—Spoken by Claudio.

And by opposing end them? To die—to sleep—
 No more; and by a sleep to say we end
 The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks
 That flesh is heir to, 'tis a consummation
 Devoutly to be wish'd. To die—to sleep—
 To sleep! perchance to dream! ay, there's the rub;
 For in that sleep of death what dreams may come,
 When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
 Must give us pause: there's the respect
 That makes calamity of so long life;
 For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,
 The oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely,
 The pangs of disprized love, the law's delay,
 The insolence of office, and the spurns
 That patient merit of the unworthy takes,
 When he himself might his quietus make
 With a bare bodkin? who would fardels bear,
 To grunt and sweat under a weary life,
 But that the dread of something after death,
 The undiscover'd country from whose bourn
 No traveller returns, puzzles the will,
 And makes us rather bear those ills we have
 Than fly to others that we know not of?
 Thus conscience does make cowards of us all.¹ . . .

BEN JONSON . . (1572-73-1637)

IT is not growing like a tree
 In bulk doth make man better be,
 Or standing long an oak, three hundred year,

¹ From *Hamlet*, Act iii. Sc. i.—Spoken by Hamlet.

To fall a log at last, dry, bald, and sear ;
 A lily of a day
 Is fairer far, in May,
 Although it fall and die that night ;
 It was the plant and flower of light.
 In small proportions we just beauties see ;
 And in short measures life may perfect be.¹

JOHN DONNE . . (1573-1631)

(DEAN OF ST. PAUL'S)

DEATH, be not proud, though some have callèd
 thee
 Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so :
 For those whom thou think'st thou dost overthrow
 Die not, poor Death ; nor yet canst thou kill me.
 From rest and sleep, which but thy picture be,
 Much pleasure ; then from thee much more must flow ;
 And soonest our best men with thee do go—
 Rest of their bones and soul's delivery !
 Thou'rt slave to fate, chance, kings, and desperate men,
 And dost with poison, war, and sickness dwell ;
 And poppy or charms can make us sleep as well
 And better than thy stroke. Why swell'st thou then ?
 One short sleep past, we wake eternally,
 And Death shall be no more : Death, thou shalt die.²

¹ From "Ode on Sir Lucius Cary."

² "Death."

JOSEPH HALL . . . (1574–1656)

(BISHOP OF EXETER AND NORWICH)

IF earth (that is provided for Mortalitie, and is possessed by the Maker's Enemies) have so much pleasure in it that Worldlings thinke it worth the account of their Heaven; such a Sunne to enlighten it, such an Heaven to wall it about, such sweet Fruits and Flowers to adorne it, such variety of Creatures for the commodious use of it: what must Heaven needs be, that is provided for God himselfe and his friends? How can it bee lesse in worth then God is above his Creatures, and God's Friends better then his Enemies? I will not onely bee content, but desirous, to be dissolved.¹

If I die, the World shall misse me but a little: I shall misse it lesse. Not it me, because it hath such store of better men. Not I it, because it hath so much ill, and I shall have so much happinesse.²

Our infancie is full of folly; youth of disorder and toyle; age of infirmitie; each time hath his burden, and that which may justly worke our wearinesse; yet infancie longeth after youth, and youth after more age: and he that is very old, as he is a child for simplicitie, so he would be for yeeres. I account old age the best of three; partly for that it hath passed through the folly and disorders of the others; partly for that

¹ From *Meditations and Vows*, the First Centurie, xxi.

² *Ibid.* xxvii.

the inconveniences of this are but bodily, with a bettered estate of the minde; and partly for that it is neerest to dissolution. There is nothing more miserable than an old man that would be young againe.

It was an answer worthy the commendations of Petrarch, and that which argued a minde truly philosophical of him who, when his friend bemoaned¹ his age appearing in his White Temples, telling him hee was sorrie to see him looke so old, replied, Nay, bee sorrie rather that ever I was yong to be a foole.²

In heaven there is all life, and no dying; in Hell is all death, and no life; in earth there is both living and dying; which, as it is betwixt both, so it prepares for both. So that he which here below dies to sin doth after live in heaven; and contrarily, he that lives in sinne upon earth dies in hell afterwards. What if I have no part of joy here below, but still succession of afflictions? The wicked have no part in heaven, and yet they enjoy the earth with pleasure: I would not change portions with them. I rejoyce that, seeing I cannot have both, yea I have the better. O Lord, let me passe both my deaths heere upon earth. I care not how I live or die, so I may have nothing but life to looke for in another world.³

. . . Whence is this naturall madnesse in us men, that wee delight so much in this uncleane, noysome, darke, and comfortlesse prison of earth? and thinke not of our release to that lightsome and glorious Paradise

¹ Bemoaned.

² From *Meditations and Vows*, the Third Centurie, xliiii.

³ *Ibid.* xliiii.

above us, without griefe and repining? We are sure that we are not perfectly well heere; if we could be as sure that we should be better above, we would not feare changing. Certainly our sense tels us we have some pleasure heere; and we have not faith to assure us of more pleasure above; and hence we settle ourselves to the present, with neglect of the future, though infinitely more excellent; the heart follows the eyes, and unknown good is uncared for.¹

WILLIAM DRUMMOND

(OF HAWTHORNDEN) (1585-1649)

THIS life, which seems so fair,
 Is like a bubble blown up in the air
 By sporting children's breath,
 Who chase it everywhere
 And strive who can most motion it bequeath,
 And though it sometime seem of its own might
 Like to an eye of gold to be fix'd there,
 And firm to hover in that empty height,
 That only is because it is so light.
 But in that pomp it doth not long appear;
 For even when most admir'd, it in a thought,
 As swell'd from nothing, doth dissolve in nought.²

My thoughts hold mortal strife;
 I do detest my life,
 And with lamenting cries,
 Peace to my soul to bring,
 Oft call that prince which here doth monarchise;

¹ From *Meditations and Vows*, the Third Centurie, xciii.

² Madrigal i.

But he, grim-grinning king,
 Who caitives scorns, and doth the blest surprise,
 Late having deckt with beauty's rose his tomb,
 Disdains to crop a weed, and will not come.¹

WILLIAM BROWNE

(OF TAVISTOCK) (About 1591-1645)

LOADEN with earth, as earth by such as I,
 In hope of life, in Death's cold arm I lie;
 Laid up there, whence I came, as ships near spilt
 Are in the dock undone to be new built.

Short was my course, and had it longer bin,
 I had return'd but burthen'd more with sin.
 Tread on me he that list; but learn withal,
 As we make but one cross, so thou must fall,
 To be made one to some dear friend of thine,
 That shall survey thy grave, as thou dost mine.

Tears ask I none, for those in death are vain,
 The true repentant showers which I did rain
 From my sad soul, in time to come will bring
 To this dead root an everlasting spring.

Till then my soul with her Creator keeps,
 To waken in fit time what herein sleeps.²

ROBERT HERRICK (1591-1674)

BORNE I was to meet with Age,
 And to walke Life's pilgrimage.
 Much I know of Time is spent;

¹ From Madrigal v.

² "My Own Epitaph," 1614.

Tell I can't, what's resident.
 Howsoever, cares, adue ;
 Ile have nought to say to you :
 But Ile spend my comming houres
 Drinking wine and crown'd with flowres.¹

A wearied Pilgrim, I have wandred here
 Twice five and twenty (bate me but one year).
 Long I have lasted in this world ('tis true) ;
 But yet those yeers that I have liv'd, but few.
 Who by his gray haire doth his lusters tell,
 Lives not those yeers, but he that lives them well.
 One man has reach'd his sixty yeers, but he,
 Of all those three-score, has not liv'd halfe three ;
*He lives who lives to Virtue : men who cast
 Their ends for Pleasure do not live, but last.*²

I do believe that die I must,
 And be return'd from out my dust ;
 I do believe that when I rise,
 Christ I shall see with these same eyes ;
 I do believe that I must come,
 With others, to the dreadfull Doome ;
 I do believe the bad must goe
 From thence to everlasting woe ;

I do believe the good and I
 Shall live with Him eternally ;
 I do believe I shall inherit
 Heaven, by Christ's mercies, not my merit ;
 I do believe the One in Three,
 And Three in perfect Unitie ;

¹ "On Himselfe."

² "On Himselfe."

Lastly, that Jesus is a Deed
Of Gift from God: *And here's my Creed.*¹

As wearied *Pilgrims*, once possest
Of long'd-for lodging, go to rest,
So I, now having rid my way,
Fix here my Button'd Staffe and stay.
Youth (I confess) hath me mis-led,
But Age hath brought me right to Bed.²

SIR THOMAS BROWNE

(1605-1682)

NOW for my life, it is a miracle of thirty years, which to relate were not a history, but a piece of poetry, and would sound to common ears like a fable. For the world, I count it not an inn but an hospital, and a place not to live but to die in. The world that I regard is myself; it is a microcosm of my own frame that I cast mine eye on; for the other, I use it but like my globe, and turn it round sometimes for my recreation. Men that look upon my outside, perusing only my condition and fortunes, do err in my altitude; for I am above Atlas his shoulders. The earth is a point not only in respect of the heavens above us, but of that heavenly and celestial part within us. That mass of flesh that circumscribes me limits not my mind. That surface that tells the heavens it hath an end cannot persuade me I have any. I take my circle to be above 360. Though the number of the ark do measure my body,

¹ "His Creed."

² "His Own Epitaph."

it comprehendeth not my mind. Whilst I study to find how I am a microcosm, or little world, I find myself something more than the great. There is surely a piece of divinity in us; something that was before the elements, and owes no homage to the sun. Nature tells me I am the image of God, as well as Scripture. He that understands not thus much hath not his introduction or first lesson, and is yet to begin the alphabet of man. Let me not injure the felicity of others if I say I am as happy as any. *Ruat coelum, fiat voluntas Tua*, salveth all; so that whatsoever happens, it is but what our daily prayers desire. In brief, I am content; and what should providence add more? Surely this is it we call happiness, and this do I enjoy; with this I am happy in a dream, and as content to enjoy a happiness in a fancy as others in a more apparent truth and reality.¹

We term sleep a death. . . . In fine, so like death, I dare not trust it without my prayers and a half adieu unto the world, and take my farewell in a colloquy with God:—

. . . Sleep is a death; O make me try,
 By sleeping, what it is to die!
 And as gently lay my head
 On my grave, as now my bed.
 Howere I rest, great God, let me
 Awake again at last with Thee.
 And thus assur'd, behold I lie
 Securely, or to wake or die.
 These are my drowsie days; in vain

¹ From *Religio Medici*, Part II. sect. xi.

I do now wake to sleep again ;
O come that hour when I shall never
Sleep again, but wake for ever !

This is the dormative I take to bedward ; I need no other *laudanum* than this to make me sleep ; after which I close mine eyes in security, content to take my leave of the sun, and sleep unto the resurrection.¹

Our hard entrance into the world, our miserable going out of it, our sicknesses, disturbances, and sad rencounters in it, do clamorously tell us we come not into the world to run a race of delight, but to perform the sober acts and serious purposes of man ; which to omit were foully to miscarry in the advantage of humanity, to play away an uniterable life, and to have lived in vain. Forget not the capital end, and frustrate not the opportunity of once living. Dream not of any kind of metempsychosis or transanimation, but into thine own body, and that after a long time ; and then also unto wail or bliss, according to thy first and fundamental life. Upon a curricule in this world depends a long course of the next, and upon a narrow scene here an endless expansion hereafter. In vain some think to have an end of their beings with their lives. Things cannot get out of their natures, or be or not be in despite of their constitutions. Rational existences in heaven perish not at all, and but partially on earth ; that which is thus once, will in some way be always ; the first living human soul is still alive, and all Adam hath found no period.²

¹ From *Religio Medici*, Part II. sect. xii.

² From *Christian Morals*, Part III. sect. xxiii.

EDMUND WALLER (1605-1687)

THE seas are quiet when the winds give o'er ;
 So, calm are we when passions are no more !
 For then we know how vain it was to boast
 Of fleeting things, so certain to be lost.
 Clouds of affection from our younger eyes
 Conceal that emptiness which age descries.

The soul's dark cottage, battered and decayed,
 Lets in new light through chinks that time has made ;
 Stronger by weakness, wiser men become
 As they draw near to their eternal home.
 Leaving the old, both worlds at once they view
 That stand upon the threshold of the new.¹

JOHN MILTON . (1608-1674)

THUS with the year
 Seasons return ; but not to me returns
 Day, or the sweet approach of even or morn,
 Or sight of vernal bloom or summer's rose,
 Or flocks, or herds, or human face divine ;
 But cloud instead, and ever-during dark
 Surrounds me ; from the cheerful ways of men
 Cut off, and, for the book of knowledge fair,
 Presented with a universal blank
 Of Nature's works, to me expunged and rased,

¹ From "Of the Last Verses in the Book," composed when he was over eighty years of age.

And wisdom at one entrance quite shut out.
So much the rather thou, Celestial Light,
Shine inward, and the mind through all her powers
Irradiate ; there plant eyes ; all mist from thence
Purge and disperse, that I may see and tell
Of things invisible to mortal sight.¹

When I consider how my light is spent
Ere half my days, in this dark world and wide,
And that one talent which is death to hide
Lodged with me useless, though my soul more bent
To serve therewith my Maker, and present
My true account, lest He returning chide ;
“ Doth God exact day-labour, light denied ? ”
I fondly ask. But Patience, to prevent
That murmur, soon replies, “ God doth not need
Either man’s work or his own gifts. Who best
Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best. His state
Is kingly ; thousands at his bidding speed,
And post o’er land and ocean without rest ;
They also serve who only stand and wait.”²

BLAISE PASCAL (1623–1662)

THE immortality of the soul is a matter of so great moment to us, it touches us so deeply, that we must have lost all feeling if we are careless of the truth about it. Our every action and our every thought

¹ From *Paradise Lost*, Bk. iii.

² Sonnet [On His Blindness].

must take such different courses, according as there are or are not eternal blessings for which to hope, that it is impossible to take a single step with sense or judgment, save in view of that point which ought to be our end and aim.¹

. . . We need no great elevation of soul to understand that here is no true and solid satisfaction, that all our pleasures are but vanity, our evils infinite, and lastly that death, which threatens us every moment, must infallibly and within a few years place us in the dread alternative of being for ever either annihilated or wretched.

Nothing is more real than this, nothing more terrible. Brave it out as we may, that is yet the end which awaits the fairest life in the world. Let us reflect on this, and then say if it be not certain that there is no good in this life save in the hope of another, that we are happy only in proportion as we approach it, and that as there is no more sorrow for those who have an entire assurance of eternity, so there is no happiness for those who have not a ray of its light.²

Between us and hell or heaven there is nought but life, the frailest thing in all the world.³

When I consider the short duration of my life, swallowed up in the eternity before and after, the small space which I fill, or even can see, engulfed in the infinite immensity of spaces whereof I know nothing, and which know nothing of me, I am terrified, and

¹ From the *Thoughts of Blaise Pascal* (trans. by Kegan Paul).

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

wonder that I am here rather than there, for there is no reason why here rather than there, or now rather than then. Who has set me here? By whose order and design have this place and time been destined for me?—*Memoria hospitis unius dici praetereuntis.*¹

This is what I see and what troubles me. I look on all sides, and see nothing but obscurity; nature offers me nothing but matter for doubt and disquiet. Did I see nothing there which marked a Divinity I should decide not to believe in him. Did I see everywhere the marks of a Creator, I should rest peacefully in faith. But seeing too much to deny, and too little to affirm, my state is pitiful, and I have a hundred times wished that if God upheld nature, he would mark the fact unequivocally, but that if the signs which she gives of a God are fallacious, she would wholly suppress them, that she would either say all or say nothing, that I might see what part I should take. Instead of this, in my present state, ignorant of what I am and of what I ought to do, I know neither my condition nor my duty. My heart is wholly bent to know where is the true good in order to follow it; nothing would seem to me too costly for eternity.²

Having no certainty apart from faith, whether man was created by a good God, by an evil demon, or by chance, it may be doubted whether these principles within us are true or false or uncertain, according to our origin.

And more than this: that no one has any certainty, apart from faith, whether he wake or sleep, seeing that

¹ From the *Thoughts of Blaise Pascal* (trans. by Kegan Paul).

² *Ibid.*

in sleep we firmly believe we are awake, we believe that we see space, figure, and motion, we are aware of the lapse and measure of time ; in a word, we act as though we were awake. So that half of our life being passed in sleep, we have, by our own avowal, no idea of truth, whatever we may suppose. Since, then, all our sentiments are illusions, who can tell but that the other half of life wherein we fancy ourselves awake be not another sleep somewhat different from the former, from which we wake when we fancy ourselves asleep? . . . In a word, as we often dream that we dream, and heap vision upon vision, it may well be that this life itself is but a dream, on which the others are grafted, from which we wake at death ; having in our lifetime as few principles of what is good and true as during natural sleep, the different thoughts which agitate us being perhaps only illusions, like those of the flight of time and the vain fantasies of our dreams.¹ . . .

I love poverty because he [Jesus] loved it. I love wealth because it gives the power of helping the miserable. I keep my troth to every one, rendering not evil to those who do me wrong ; but I wish them a lot like mine, in which I receive neither good nor evil from men. I try to be just, true, sincere, and faithful to all men ; I have a tender heart for those to whom God has more closely bound me ; and whether I am alone or seen of men I place all my actions in the sight of God, who shall judge them, and to whom I have consecrated them all.

Such are my opinions, and each day of my life I bless my Redeemer who has implanted them in me, who has

¹ From the *Thoughts of Blaise Pascal* (trans. by Kegan Paul).

transformed me, a man full of weakness, misery, and lust, of pride and ambition, into a man exempt from all these evils, by the power of his grace, to which all the glory is due; since of myself I have only misery and sin.¹

MADAME DE SÉVIGNÉ

(1626–1696)

IN reality it [old age] is not at all what one expects. Providence leads us with so much goodness through the different stages of our life, that we hardly are conscious as they pass by. This loss is effected with such gentleness, that it is imperceptible: it is the hand on the dial which we do not see moving. If at twenty they were to give us the position in the family, and to show us in a looking-glass the countenance which we have or should have at sixty, comparing it with that of twenty, we should be quite overcome and horrified at that face; but it is day by day that we grow older: to-day we are as we were yesterday, and to-morrow as to-day; and thus we go on without feeling it,—and this is one of the miracles of that Providence that I adore.

How foolish it is not to enjoy with gratitude the consolations which God sends us, after the afflictions which He sometimes causes us to feel! There is, it seems to me, great wisdom in enduring storms with resignation, and in enjoying the calm when it pleases Him to restore it to us, for this is to follow the ordinances of Providence. Life is too short to halt too long

¹ From the *Thoughts of Blaise Pascal* (trans. by Kegan Paul).

in one frame of mind ; one must take the days as they come,—and I feel that I am of this happy temperament.¹

BENEDICT BARUCH SPINOZA

(1632–1677)

I ENJOY life, and endeavour to pass it not in weeping and sighing, but in peace, joy, and cheerfulness, and from time to time climb thereby a step higher. I know, meanwhile (which is the highest pleasure of all), that all things happen by the power and unchangeable decree of the most perfect Being.²

. . . Between derision and laughter I mark a great difference. For laughter, like jesting, is mere pleasure; and therefore is in itself good, so it be not excessive. Surely 'tis but an ill-favoured and sour superstition that forbids rejoicing. For why is it a better deed to quench thirst and hunger than to drive out melancholy? This is my way of life, and thus I have attuned my mind. No deity, nor any one but an envious churl, hath delight in my infirmity and inconvenience, nor reckons towards our virtues weeping, sobs, fear, and other such matters which are tokens of a feeble mind ; but contrariwise the more we are moved with pleasure the more we pass to greater perfection—that is, the more must we needs partake of the divine nature. Therefore it is the wise man's part to use the world and delight himself in it as he best may, not indeed to satiety, for that is no delight.³ . . .

¹ Trans. by Miss Thackeray (Mrs. Ritchie).

² From letter written to W. Van Blyenburgh (about 1664).

³ From the *Ethic* (trans. by F. Pollock), Part iv., Prop. 45, Schol.

The common sort . . . mostly seem to hold themselves to be free in proportion as they may do after their own lusts, and to be deprived of their right in proportion as they are bound to live after the commandment of God's law. So they hold piety and religion, and generally everything that belongs to firmness of mind, to be burdens, and hope after death to cast them off and have the reward of their service, that is of piety and religion. But not merely this hope, but likewise (and chiefly) fear, to wit of being punished with grievous torments after death, doth move them to live after God's law, so far as their poverty and weakness of spirit doth admit. And if men had not this hope and fear, but held that the mind perishes with the body, and no longer life remains for poor mortals (worn out forsooth with the burden of pious living), they would go back to their own desires, guide their actions by the desire of the moment, and be ruled rather by hazard than by themselves.¹ . . .

JOHN LOCKE . . . (1632-1704)

ALL the use to be made of it is that this life is a scene of vanity that soon passes away and affords no solid satisfaction but in the consciousness of doing well and in the hopes of another life. This is what I can say upon experience, and what you will find when you come to make up the account.²

¹ From the *Ethic* (trans. by F. Pollock), Part v., Prop. 41, Schol.

² From letter written to Anthony Collins, August 1704.

Look on this world only as a state of preparation for a better. As for me, I have lived long enough, and I thank God I have enjoyed a happy life; but, after all, this life is nothing but vanity. . . . I heartily thank God for all his goodness and mercies to me, but, above all, for his redemption of me by Jesus Christ.¹

SIR ISAAC NEWTON

(1642–1727)

I DO not know what I may appear to the world, but to myself I seem to have been only like a boy playing on the sea-shore, and diverting myself in now and then finding a smoother pebble or a prettier shell than ordinary, whilst the great ocean of truth lay all undiscovered before me.²

WILLIAM PENN (1644–about 1718)

I HAVE often wondered at the *unaccountableness* of Man in this, among other things; that tho' he loves *Changes* so well, he should care so little to hear or think of his *last, great, and best Change too, if he pleases.*

Being, as to our Bodies, composed of *changeable Elements*, we, with the World, are made up of, and subsist by *Revolution*. But our *Souls* being of another and *nobler Nature*, we should seek our *Rest* in a *more enduring Habitation*.

¹ Spoken the evening before his death.

² Uttered a short time before his death.

The truest end of Life is to know the Life that *never ends*.

He that makes this his *Care* will find it his Crown at last.

Life else were a *Misery* rather than a Pleasure, a *Judgment*, not a Blessing.

For to *Know*, *Regret*, and *Resent*; to *Desire*, *Hope*, and *Fear* more than a Beast, and not live beyond him, is to make a Man *less than a Beast*.

It is the *Amends* of a short and troublesome Life that *Doing well* and *Suffering ill* Entitles Man to One *Longer* and *Better*. . . .

And this is the Comfort of the Good that the Grave cannot *hold* them, and that they live as soon as they die.

For Death is no more than a *Turning* of us over from Time to Eternity.

Nor can there be a Revolution without it; for it supposes the Dissolution of one form in order to the Succession of another.

Death, then, being the *Way* and *Condition* of Life, we cannot love to live, if we cannot bear to die.¹

DANIEL DEFOE . . (1663-1731)

I KNOW too much of the World to expect good in it, and have learnt to value it too little to be concerned at the evil. I have gone through a life of wonders, and am the subject of a vast variety of

¹ From *Some Fruits of Solitude*, Part i. (Religion).

providences; I have been fed more by miracle than Elijah when the ravens were his purveyors. I have, some time ago, summed up the scenes of my life in this distich:

No man has tasted differing fortunes more,
And thirteen times I have been rich and poor.

In the school of affliction I have learnt more philosophy than at the academy, and more divinity than from the pulpit; in prison I have learnt to know that liberty does not consist in open doors and the free egress and regress of locomotion. I have seen the rough side of the world as well as the smooth, and have, in less than half a year, tasted the difference between the closet of a king and the dungeon of Newgate. I have suffered deeply for cleaving to principles. . . .

I have a large family—a wife and six children—who never want what they should enjoy, or spend what they ought to save. Under all these circumstances, and many more, my only happiness is this: I have always been kept cheerful, easy, and quiet, enjoying a perfect calm of mind. . . . If any man ask me how I arrived at it, I answer him, in short, by a constant, serious application to the great, solemn, and weighty work of resignation to the will of heaven.¹

I am so near my journey's end, and am hastening to the place where the weary are at rest, and where the wicked cease to trouble; be it that the passage is rough and the day stormy, by what way soever He

¹ From Preface to *A Review of the State of the British Nation*, vol. viii. 1712.

please to bring me to the end of it, I desire to finish life with this temper of soul in all cases: *Te Deum Laudamus*.¹

JONATHAN SWIFT (1667-1745)

(DEAN OF ST. PATRICK'S)

LIFE is not a farce; it is a ridiculous tragedy, which is the worst kind of composition.²

JOHN GAY . . . (1688-1732)

AH! what is life? with ills encompass'd round,
Amidst our hopes, Fate strikes the sudden wound:
To-day the statesman of new honour dreams,
To-morrow death destroys his airy schemes;
Is mouldy treasure in thy chest confined?
Think all that treasure thou must leave behind. . . .
Should certain fate th' impending blow delay,
Thy mirth will sicken and thy bloom decay;
Then feeble age will all thy nerves disarm,
No more thy blood its narrow channels warm. . . .
Who then would wish to stretch this narrow span,
To suffer life beyond the date of man?

The virtuous soul pursues a nobler aim,
And life regards but as a fleeting dream:
She longs to wake and wishes to get free,
To launch from earth into eternity.³

¹ From letter to Henry Baker, August 12, 1750.

² Letter written to Pope in April 1731.

³ From "A Thought on Eternity."

Life is a jest, and all things show it ;
I thought so once, but now I know it.¹

CHARLES, BARON DE MONTESQUIEU (1689-1755)

IF the immortality of the soul were an error, I should be sorry not to believe it. I vow that I am not so humble as the atheist ; I know not how they think, but for me, I do not wish to exchange the idea of immortality against that of the beatitude of one day. I delight in believing myself as immortal as God himself. Independently of revealed ideas, metaphysical ideas give me a vigorous hope of my eternal well-being, which I would never renounce.²

LADY MARY WORTLEY MONTAGU . . (1689-1762)

I HAVE long thought myself useless to the world. I have seen one generation pass away, and it is gone ; for I think there are very few of those left that flourished in my youth. You will perhaps call these melancholy reflections : they are not so. There is a quiet after the abandoning of pursuits, something like the rest that follows a laborious day. I tell you this for your comfort. It was formerly a terrifying view to

¹ "My Own Epitaph."

² From *Pensées Diverses*.

me that I should one day be an' old woman. I now find that Nature has provided pleasures for every state. Those are only unhappy who will not be contented with what she gives, but strive to break through her laws by affecting a perpetuity of youth.¹

I believe, like all others of your age, you have long been convinced there is no real happiness to be found or expected in this world. You have seen a court near enough to know neither riches nor power can secure it; and all human endeavours after felicity are as childish as running after sparrows to lay salt on their tails; but I ought to give you another information, which can only be learned by experience, that liberty is an idea equally chimerical, and has no real existence in this life. I can truly assure you I have never been so little mistress of my own time and actions as since I have lived alone. Mankind is placed in a state of dependency, not only on one another (which all are in some degree), but so many inevitable accidents thwart our designs and limit our best-laid projects. The poor efforts of our utmost prudence and political schemes appear, I fancy, in the eyes of some superior beings like the pecking of a young linnet to break a wire cage, or the climbing of a squirrel in a hoop; the moral needs no explanation: let us sing as cheerfully as we can in our impenetrable confinement, and crack our nuts with pleasure from the little store that is allowed us.²

I thank God I can find playthings for my age. I am not of Cowley's mind, that this world is—

¹ Letter written to her daughter, the Countess of Bute, March 2, 1751.

² To the same, January 23, 1755.

A dull, ill-acted comedy ;

Nor of Mrs. Philips's, that it is—

A too well acted tragedy.

I look upon it as a very pretty farce, for those that can see it in that light. I confess a severe critic, that would examine by ancient rules, might find many defects ; but 'tis ridiculous to judge seriously of a puppet-show. Those that can laugh and be diverted with absurdities are the wisest spectators, be it of writings, actions, or people.¹

We have all our playthings ; happy are they that can be contented with those they can obtain : those hours are spent in the wisest manner that can easiest shade the ills of life, and are the least productive of ill consequences.²

EMANUEL SWEDENBORG

(1689–1772)

WE must remain in this world as long as Divine Providence deems fit. He who is conjoined to the Lord has already a foretaste of eternal life, and cares but little for this transitory state. Believe me, if I knew that God would to-morrow take me from the world to Himself, I should like to have the musicians brought to me to-day, and, for a good conclusion, make myself right merry.³

¹ Letter written to her daughter, the Countess of Bute, September 22, 1755.

² To the same, September 30, 1757.

³ To a Friend, in April 1769 (from *Life and Writings*, by W. White).

PHILIP, EARL OF
CHESTERFIELD . . (1694-1773)

I BELONG no more to social life, which, when I quitted busy public life, I flattered myself would be the comfort of my declining days; but that, it seems, is not given me. I neither murmur nor despair; the lot of millions of my fellow-creatures is still worse than mine. Exquisite pains of the body, and still greater of the mind, conspire to torture many of them. I thank God I am free from both; and I look upon the privation of those ills as a real good.¹ . . .

My deafness grows gradually worse, which in my mind implies a total one before it be long. In this unhappy situation, which I have reason to suppose will every day grow worse, I still keep up my spirits tolerably; that is, I am free from melancholy, which I think is all that can be expected. This I impute to that degree of philosophy which I have acquired by long experience of the world. I have enjoyed all its pleasures, and consequently know their futility, and do not regret their loss. I appraise them at their real value, which in truth is very low; whereas those who have not experienced always overrate them. They only see their gay outside, and are dazzled with their glare; but I have been behind the scenes. It is a common notion, and, like many common ones, a very false one, that those who have led a life of pleasure and business can never be easy in retirement; whereas I am persuaded that they are the only people who can, if they have any

¹ From letter written October 10, 1753.

sense and reflection. They can look back *oculo irretorto* (without an evil eye) upon what they from knowledge despise; others have always a hankering after what they are not acquainted with. I look upon all that has passed as one of those romantic dreams that opium commonly occasions, and I do by no means desire to repeat the nauseous dose for the sake of the fugitive dream.¹

Fontenelle's last words at a hundred were, *Je souffre d'être*. Deaf and infirm as I am, I can with truth say the same thing at sixty-three. In my mind, it is only the strength of our passions and the weakness of our reason that make us fond of life; but when the former subside and give way to the latter, we grow weary of being, and willing to withdraw.²

I always made the best of the best, and never made bad worse by fretting; this enabled me to go through the various scenes of life, in which I have been an actor, with more pleasure and less pain than most people. You will say, perhaps, one cannot change one's nature, and that if a person is born of a very sensible, gloomy temper, and apt to see things in the worst light, they cannot help it, nor new-make themselves. I will admit it to a certain degree, and but to a certain degree; for though we cannot totally change our nature, we may in a great measure correct it by reflection and philosophy; and some philosophy is a very necessary companion in this world, where, even to the most fortunate, the chances are greatly against happiness.³

¹ From letter written March 12, 1755.

² From letter written, February 28, 1757.

³ From letter to his son (April 27, 1759).

WILLIAM HOGARTH (1697-1764)

THUS have I gone through the principal circumstances of a life which, till lately, past pretty much to my own satisfaction, and, I hope, in no respect injurious[ly] to any other man. This I can safely assert: I have invariably endeavoured to make those about me tolerably happy, and my greatest enemy cannot say I ever did an intentional injury; though, without ostentation, I could produce many instances of men that have been essentially benefited by me. What may follow, God knows.¹

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN (1706-1790)

FROM the poverty and obscurity in which I was born, and in which I passed my earliest years, I have raised myself to a state of affluence and some degree of celebrity in the world. . . . Constant good fortune has accompanied me even to an advanced period of life. . . . This good fortune, when I reflect on it (which is frequently the case), has induced me sometimes to say, that if it were left to my choice I should have no objection to go over the same life from its beginning to the end; requesting only the advantage authors have of correcting in a second edition the faults of the first. So would I also wish to change some incidents of it for others more favourable. Notwith-

¹ From *Autobiographical Notes*.

standing, if this condition was denied, I should still accept the offer of recommencing the same life.¹

I never doubted . . . the existence of a Deity—that he made the world and governed it by his providence; that the most acceptable service of God was the doing good to man; that our souls are immortal; and that all crimes will be punished and virtue rewarded, either here or hereafter.²

It may be well that my posterity should be informed that to this little artifice [his scheme of moral perfection], with the blessing of God, their ancestor owed the constant felicity of his life, down to his seventy-ninth year, in which this is written. What reverses may attend the remainder is in the hands of Providence; but, if they arrive, the reflection on past happiness enjoyed ought to help his bearing them with more resignation. To *Temperance* he ascribes his long-continued health, and what is still left to him of a good constitution; to *Industry* and *Frugality* the early easiness of his circumstances and acquisition of his fortune, with all that knowledge that enabled him to be a useful citizen, and obtained for him some degree of reputation among the learned; to *Sincerity* and *Justice* the confidence of his country, and the honourable employments conferred upon him; and to the joint influence of the whole mass of the virtues, even in the imperfect state he was able to acquire them, all that evenness of temper and that cheerfulness in conversation which makes his company still sought for, and agreeable even to his young acquaintance. I hope,

¹ From his *Autobiography*.

² *Ibid.*

therefore, that some of my descendants may follow the example and reap the benefit.¹

It is a great stupidity, or thoughtlessness, not to perceive that the happiness of rational natures is inseparably connected with immortality. Creatures only endowed with sensation may, in a low sense, be reported happy so long as their sensations are pleasing; and if those pleasing sensations are commensurate with the time of their existence, this measure of happiness is complete. But such beings as are endowed with *thought* and *reflection* cannot be made happy by any limited term of happiness, how great soever its duration may be. The more exquisite and more valuable their enjoyments are, the more painful must be the thought that they are to have an end; and this pain of expectation must be continually increasing the nearer the end approaches. And if these beings are themselves immortal, and yet insecure of the continuance of their happiness, the case is far worse, since an eternal void of delight, if not a state of misery, must succeed.²

Existing here is scarce to be called life; it is rather an embryo state, a preparative to living; a man is not completely born till he is dead.³

Here is my creed: I believe in one God, the creator of the universe. That he governs it by his Providence. That he ought to be worshipped. That the most acceptable service we render to him is doing good to his other children. That the soul of man is immortal,

¹ From his *Autobiography*.

² From the *Pennsylvania Gazette* (4th Dec. 1735).

³ From the *Beauties of Franklin*.

and will be treated with justice in another life respecting its conduct in this. These I take to be the fundamental points in all sound religion. . . . As to Jesus of Nazareth . . . I think the system of morals and his religion, as he left them to us, the best the world ever saw or is like to see; but I apprehend it has received various corrupting changes, and I have, with most of the present dissenters in England, some doubts as to his divinity; though it is a question I do not dogmatise upon . . . I see no harm, however, in its being believed, if that belief has the good consequence, as probably it has, of making his doctrines more respected and more observed; especially as I do not perceive that the Supreme takes it amiss by distinguishing the unbelievers in his government of the world with any peculiar marks of his displeasure. I shall only add respecting myself that, having experienced the goodness of that being in conducting me prosperously through a long life, I have no doubt of its continuance in the next, though without the smallest conceit of meriting such goodness.¹

DR. JOHNSON . . . (1709-1784)

BOSWELL: "But is not the fear of death natural to man?" *Johnson*: "So much so, sir, that the whole of life is but keeping away the thoughts of it. . . I know not whether I should wish to have a friend by me, or have it all between God and myself."²

"It matters not how a man dies, but how he lives. The act of dying is not of importance, it lasts so short

¹ From letter to the Rev. President Stiles (March 9, 1790).

² From the *Life*, by Boswell (1769).

a time. . . . A man knows it must be so, and submits. It will do him no good to whine.”¹

I ventured to lead him to the subject of our situation in a future state, having much curiosity to know his notions on that point. *Johnson*: “Why, sir, the happiness of an unembodied spirit will consist in a consciousness of the favour of God, in the contemplation of truth, and in the possession of felicitating ideas.” . . . *Boswell*: “One of the most pleasing thoughts is, that we shall see our friends again.” *Johnson*: “Yes, sir; but you must consider that, when we are become purely rational, many of our friendships will be cut off. Many friendships are formed by a community of sensual pleasures: all these will be cut off. We form many friendships with bad men, because they have agreeable qualities, and they can be useful to us; but after death they can no longer be of use to us. We form many friendships by mistake, imagining people to be different from what they really are. After death we shall see every one in a true light. Then, sir, they talk of our meeting our relations: but then all relationship is dissolved; and we shall have no regard for one person more than another, but for their real value. However, we shall either have the satisfaction of meeting our friends, or be satisfied without meeting them.” *Boswell*: “Yet, sir, we see in Scripture that Dives still retained an anxious concern about his brethren.” *Johnson*: “Why, sir, we must either suppose that passage to be metaphorical, or hold with many divines, and all the Purgatorians, that departed souls do not all at once arrive at the utmost perfection of which they are

¹ From the *Life*, by Boswell (1769).

capable." *Boswell*: "I think, sir, that is a very rational supposition." *Johnson*: "Why, yes, sir; but we do not know it is a true one." . . . *Boswell*: "Do you think, sir, it is wrong in a man who holds the doctrine of Purgatory to pray for the souls of his deceased friends?" *Johnson*: "Why, no, sir." . . . *Boswell*: "As to our employment in a future state, the sacred writings say little. The Revelation, however, of St. John gives us many ideas, and particularly mentions music." *Johnson*: "Why, sir, ideas must be given you by means of something which you know; and as to music, there are some philosophers and divines who have maintained that we shall not be spiritualized to such a degree, but that something of matter, very much refined, will remain. In that case, music may make a part of our future felicity."¹

The return of my birthday, if I remember it, fills me with thoughts which it seems to be the general care of humanity to escape. I can now look back upon three-score and four years, in which little has been done and little has been enjoyed; a life diversified by misery, spent part in the sluggishness of penury and part under the violence of pain, in gloomy discontent or importunate distress. But perhaps I am better than I should have been if I had been less afflicted. With this I will try to be content.

In proportion as there is less pleasure in retrospective considerations, the mind is more disposed to wander forward into futurity; but at sixty-four, what promises, however liberal, of imaginary good can futurity venture to make? Yet something will be

¹ From the *Life*, by Boswell (1772).

always promised, and some promises will always be credited. I am hoping and I am praying that I may live better in the time to come, whether long or short, than I have yet lived, and in the solace of that hope endeavour to repose.¹

“The better a man is, the more afraid is he of death, having a clearer view of infinite purity. . . . Ah! we must wait till we are in another state of being, to have many things explained to us.”²

I [Boswell] talked to him of misery being the “doom of man,” in this life, as displayed in his “Vanity of Human Wishes.” Yet I observed that things were done upon the supposition of happiness; grand houses were built, fine gardens were made, splendid places of public amusement were contrived, and crowded with company. *Johnson*: “Alas, sir, these are only struggles for happiness. When I first entered Ranelagh it gave an expansion and gay sensation to my mind, such as I never experienced anywhere else. But, as Xerxes wept when he viewed his immense army, and considered that not one of that great multitude would be alive a hundred years afterwards, so it went to my heart to consider that there was not one in all that brilliant circle that was not afraid to go home and think, but that the thoughts of each individual there would be distressing when alone.”³

I expressed a horror at the thought of death. *Mrs. Knowles*: “Nay, thou shouldst not have a horror for what is the gate of life.” *Johnson*: . . . “No

¹ From letter to Mrs. Thrale, September 1773.

² From *Life*, by Boswell (1777).

³ *Ibid.*

rational man can die without uneasy apprehension.” *Mrs. Knowles*: “The Scriptures tell us, ‘The righteous shall have *hope* in his death.’” *Johnson*: “Yes, madam; that is he shall not have despair. But, consider, his hope of salvation must be founded on the terms on which it is promised that the mediation of our Saviour shall be applied to us,—namely, obedience; and where obedience has failed, then, as suppletory to it, repentance. But what man can say that his obedience has been such as he would approve of in another, or even in himself upon close examination, or that his repentance has not been such as to require being repented of? No man can be sure that his obedience and repentance will obtain salvation.” *Mrs. Knowles*: “But divine intimation of acceptance may be made to the soul.” *Johnson*: “Madam, it may; but I should not think the better of a man who should tell me on his death-bed he was sure of salvation. A man cannot be sure himself that he has divine intimation of acceptance; much less can he make others sure that he has it.” *Boswell*: “Then, sir, we must be contented to acknowledge that death is a terrible thing.” *Johnson*: “Yes, sir, I have made no approaches to a state which can look on it as not terrible.” . . . *Boswell*: In prospect death is dreadful, but in fact we find that people die easy.” *Johnson*: “Why, sir, most people have not *thought* much of the matter, so cannot *say* much, and it is supposed they die easy. Few believe it certain they are then to die; and those who do, set themselves to behave with resolution, as a man does who is going to be hanged; he is not the less unwilling to be hanged.”¹

¹ From *Life*, by Boswell (1778).

I never thought confidence with respect to futurity any part of the character of a brave, a wise, or a good man. Bravery has no place where it can avail nothing; wisdom impresses strongly the consciousness of those faults of which it is itself perhaps an aggravation; and goodness, always wishing to be better, and imputing every deficiency to criminal negligence, and every fault to voluntary corruption, never dares to suppose the condition of forgiveness fulfilled, nor what is wanting in the crime supplied by penitence.

This is the state of the best, but what must be the condition of him whose heart will not suffer him to rank himself among the best, or among the good? Such must be his dread of the approaching trial as will leave him little attention to the opinion of those whom he is leaving for ever; and the serenity that is not felt, it can be no virtue to feign.¹

Write to me no more about *dying with a grace*; when you feel what I have felt in approaching eternity—in fear of soon hearing the sentence of which there is no revocation—you will know the folly; my wish is that you may know it sooner. The distance between the grave and the remotest point of human longevity is but a very little, and of that little no path is certain. You knew all this, and I thought that I knew it too; but I know it now with a new conviction. May that new conviction not be vain!²

“Live well, I conjure you; and you will not feel the compunction at the last which I now feel.”³

¹ From letter to Mrs. Thrale (March 1784).

² From another letter to Mrs. Thrale (March 1784).

³ To a lady (on his death-bed).

DAVID HUME . . (1711-1776)

I NOW reckon upon a speedy dissolution. I have suffered very little pain from my disorder; and, what is more strange, have, notwithstanding the great decline of my person, never suffered a moment's abatement of spirits; insomuch that were I to name the period of my life which I should most choose to pass over again, I might be tempted to point to this later period. I possess the same ardour as ever in study, and the same gaiety in company; I consider, besides, that a man of sixty-five, by dying, cuts off only a few years of infirmities; and though I see many symptoms of my literary reputation's breaking out at last with additional lustre, I know that I could have but a few years to enjoy it. It is difficult to be more detached from life than I am at present.¹

By the mere light of reason it seems difficult to prove the Immortality of the Soul; the arguments for it are commonly derived either from metaphysical topics, or moral, or physical. But in reality it is the Gospel, and the Gospel alone, that has brought *life and immortality to light*.

I. Metaphysical topics suppose that the soul is immaterial, and that 'tis impossible for thought to belong to a material substance. But just metaphysics teach us that the notion of substance is wholly confused and imperfect, and that we have no other idea of any substance than as an aggregate of

¹ From *My Own Life* (conclusion).

particular qualities inhering in an unknown something. Matter, therefore, and spirit are at bottom equally unknown, and we cannot determine what qualities inhere in the one or in the other. They likewise teach us that nothing can be decided *a priori* concerning any cause or effect, and that, experience being the only source of our judgments of this nature, we cannot know from any other principle whether matter, by its structure or arrangement, may not be the cause of thought. Abstract reasonings cannot decide any question of fact or existence. But admitting a spiritual substance to be dispersed throughout the universe, like the ethereal fire of the Stoics, and to be the only inherent subject of thought, we have reason to conclude from *analogy* that nature uses it after the manner she does the other substance, *matter*. She employs it as a kind of paste or clay; modifies it into a variety of forms or existences; dissolves after a time each modification, and from its substance erects a new form. As the same material substance may successively compose the bodies of all animals, the same spiritual substance may compose their minds; their consciousness, or that system of thought which they formed during life, may be continually dissolved by death, and nothing interests them in the new modification. The most positive assertors of the mortality of the soul never denied the immortality of its substance; and that an immaterial substance, as well as a material, may lose its memory or consciousness, appears in part from experience, if the soul be immaterial. Reasoning from the common course of nature, and without supposing any new interposition of the Supreme Cause, which ought always to be excluded from philosophy, *what is*

incorruptible must also be ingenerable. The soul, therefore, if immortal, existed before our birth, and if the former existence noways concerned us, neither will the latter. Animals undoubtedly feel, think, love, hate, will, and even reason, though in a more imperfect manner than men : are their souls also immaterial and immortal ?

. . . If any purpose of nature be clear, we may affirm that the whole scope and intention of man's creation, so far as we can judge by natural reason, is limited to the present life. . . .

If the reason of man gives him great superiority above other animals, his necessities are proportionably multiplied upon him ; his whole time, his whole capacity, activity, courage, and passion, find sufficient employment in fencing against the miseries of his present condition, and frequently, nay, almost always, are too slender for the business assigned them. A pair of shoes, perhaps, was never yet wrought to the highest degree of perfection which that commodity is capable of attaining ; yet it is necessary, at least very useful, that there should be some politicians and moralists, even some geometers, poets, and philosophers, among mankind. The powers of men are no more superior to their wants, considered merely in this life, than those of foxes and hares are, compared to *their* wants and to their period of existence. The inference from parity of reason is therefore obvious.¹

¹ From an essay "On the Immortality of the Soul," published after his death.

JEAN JACQUES ROUSSEAU

(1712-1778)

WHAT! always to see men false, wicked, malevolent! always masks, always traitors, and not one single face of a man! Ah! this life to me is insupportable; and as its end can be the only close to my troubles, I desire to leave it; and this will be the beginning of that felicity for which I feel myself born, and which I have vainly sought on earth. How I long for that happy time!¹

Consumed by an incurable malady, which draws me by slow degrees to the grave, I often turn an eye of interest towards the career I quit, and without moaning over its close, I would gladly begin it anew. Meanwhile, what have I experienced during that space that deserves my attachment? Dependence, errors, vain desires, poverty, infirmities of every kind, short pleasures, prolonged griefs, real evils, and shadowy blessings. Ah! without doubt to live is a beautiful thing, since a life so unfortunate leaves me so many regrets.²

You weep then at my happiness—eternal happiness, which men no more can disturb? I die in peace; I never wished harm to any one, and I can rely on the mercy of God.³

¹ Letter to St. Germain (February 1770).

² Written *circa* 1776-77.

³ To his wife on his death-bed (Gaberel's *Rousseau et les Genevois*).

HORACE WALPOLE (1717-1797)

(EARL OF ORFORD)

UNALTERABLE in my principles, careless about most things below essentials, indulging myself in trifles by system, annihilating myself by choice, but dreading folly at an unseemly age, I contrive to pass my time agreeably enough, yet see its termination approach without anxiety.¹

Could I finish my course in peace—but one must take the chequered scenes of life as they come. What signifies whether the elements are serene or turbulent when a private old man slips away? What has he and the world's concerns to do with one another? He may sigh for his country, and babble about it, but he might as well sit quiet and read or tell old stories; the past is as important to him as the future.²

SIR JOSHUA REYNOLDS

(1723-1792)

NORTHCOTE said it was one of Sir Joshua's maxims that the art of life consisted in not being upset by trifles. We should look at the bottom of the account, not at each individual item in it, and see how the balance stands at the end of the year. We should be satisfied if the path of life is clear before us, and not fret at the straws or pebbles that lie in our way.³

¹ From letter written to the Hon. H. S. Conway, June 1776.

² From letter written to Sir Horace Mann, November 1781.

³ From Hazlitt's *Conversations with Northcote*.

IMMANUEL KANT (1724-1804)

AFTER we have satisfied ourselves of the vanity of all the ambitious attempts of reason to fly beyond the bounds of experience, enough remains of practical value to content us. It is true that no one may boast that he *knows* that God and a future life exist; for if he possesses such knowledge, he is just the man for whom I have long been seeking. All knowledge (touching an object of mere reason) can be communicated, and therefore I might hope to see my own knowledge increased to this prodigious extent by his instruction. No, our conviction in these matters is not *logical*, but *moral* certainty; and, inasmuch as it rests upon subjective grounds (of moral disposition), I must not even say *it is* morally certain that there is a God, and so on, but *I am* morally certain, and so on. That is to say, the belief in a God and in another world is so interwoven with my moral nature that the former can no more vanish than the latter can ever be torn from me.¹

GOTTHOLD EPHRAIM

LESSING . . (1729-1781)

I HAVE nothing against the Christian religion; on the contrary, I am its friend, and shall remain well-disposed and attached to it all my life. It answers the purpose of a positive religion as well as any other.

¹ From *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781).

I believe it, and hold it to be true, as much as one can believe and hold to be true any historical fact whatever. . . . I cannot deny the possibility of the direct influence of the Holy Spirit, and assuredly would wilfully do nothing which could hinder this possibility from becoming a reality.¹

EDMUND BURKE . (1729–1797)

EVERY man would lead his life over again; for every man is willing to go on and take an addition to his life, which, as he grows older, he has no reason to think will be better, or even so good, as what has preceded.²

WILLIAM COWPER (1731–1800)

HE is the happy man whose life even now
Shows somewhat of that happier life to come;
Who, doomed to an obscure but tranquil state,
Is pleased with it, and, were he free to choose,
Would make his fate his choice; whom peace, the fruit
Of virtue, and whom virtue, fruit of faith,
Prepare for happiness; bespeak him one
Content indeed to sojourn while he must
Below the skies, but having there his home. . . .
Not slothful he, though seeming unemployed,
And censured oft as useless. Stillest streams
Oft water fairest meadows, and the bird
That flutters least is longest on the wing.

¹ From fragment published among his posthumous works.

² Quoted by Boswell in his *Life of Johnson*.

Ask him, indeed, what trophies he has raised,
Or what achievements of immortal fame
He purposes, and he shall answer—None.
His warfare is within. There unfatigued
His fervent spirit labours. There he fights,
And there obtains fresh triumphs o'er himself,
And never-withering wreaths, compared with which
The laurels that a Cæsar reaps are weeds. . . .
So life glides smoothly and by stealth away,
More golden than that age of fabled gold
Renowned in ancient song; not vexed with care
Or stained with guilt, beneficent, approved
Of God and man, and peaceful in its end.
So glide my life away! and so at last,
My share of duties decently fulfilled,
May some disease, not tardy to perform
Its destined office, yet with gentle stroke
Dismiss me weary to a safe retreat
Beneath the turf that I have often trod.¹

The colour of our whole life is generally such as the three or four first years, in which we are our own masters, make it. Then it is that we may be said to shape our own destiny, and to treasure up for ourselves a series of future successes or disappointments. Had I employed my time as wisely as you in a situation very similar to yours, I had never been a poet, perhaps, but I might by this time have acquired a character of more importance in society, and a situation in which my friends would have been better pleased to see me.²

¹ From *The Task* ("The Winter Walk at Noon"), written in 1783-84.

² From letter to William Rose.

GEORGE WASHINGTON

(1732-1799)

AT length, my dear Marquis, I am become a private citizen on the banks of the Potomac; and under the shadow of my own vine and my own fig-tree, free from the bustle of a camp and the busy scenes of public life, I am solacing myself with those tranquil enjoyments, of which the soldier, who is ever in pursuit of fame, the statesman, whose watchful days and sleepless nights are spent in devising schemes to promote the welfare of his own, perhaps the ruin of other countries, as if this globe was insufficient for us all, and the courtier, who is always watching the countenance of his prince, in hopes of catching a gracious smile, can have very little conception. I have not only retired from all public employment, but I am retiring within myself, and shall be able to view the solitary walk, and tread the paths of private life, with heartfelt satisfaction. Envious of none, I am determined to be pleased with all; and this, my dear friend, being the order for my march, I will move gently down the stream of life, until I sleep with my fathers.¹

The more I am acquainted with agricultural affairs, the better I am pleased with them; insomuch that I can nowhere find so great satisfaction as in those innocent and useful pursuits. In indulging these feelings I am led to reflect how much more delightful to the undebauched mind is the task of making

¹ From letter written to his dearest friend and fellow-soldier about 1785.

improvements on the earth, than all the vain glory that can be acquired from ravaging it by the most uninterrupted career of conquest.¹

Do not flatter me with vain hopes ; I am not afraid to die, and therefore can hear the worst. Whether to-night or twenty years hence makes no difference. I know I am in the hands of a good Providence.²

EDWARD GIBBON (1737-1794)

WHEN I contemplate the common lot of mortality, I must acknowledge that I have drawn a high prize in the lottery of life. The far greater part of the globe is overspread with barbarism or slavery : in the civilised world, the most numerous class is condemned to ignorance and poverty ; and the double fortune of my birth in a free and enlightened country, in an honourable and wealthy family, is the lucky chance of a unit against millions. The general probability is about three to one that a new-born infant will not live to complete his fiftieth year. I have now passed that age, and may fairly estimate the present value of my existence in the threefold division of mind, body, and estate. The first and indispensable requisite of happiness is a clear conscience, unsullied by the reproach or remembrance of an unworthy action.³

The present is a fleeting moment, the past is no more, and our prospect of futurity is dark and doubtful.

¹ From letter written to Arthur Young about same period.

² Said to his physician.

³ From *Memoirs of My Life*.

This day may *possibly* be my last: but the laws of probability, so true in general, so fallacious in particular, still allow about fifteen years. I shall soon enter into the period which, as the most agreeable of my long life, was selected by the judgment and experience of the sage Fontenelle. His choice is approved by the eloquent historian of nature, who fixes our moral happiness to the mature season in which our passions are supposed to be calmed, our duties fulfilled, our ambition satisfied, our fame and fortune established on a solid basis. In private conversation, that great and amiable man added the weight of his own experience; and this autumnal felicity might be exemplified in the lives of Voltaire, Hume, and many other men of letters. I am far more inclined to embrace than to dispute this comfortable doctrine. I will not suppose any premature decay of the mind or body; but I must reluctantly observe that two causes, the abbreviation of time and the failure of hope, will always tinge with a browner shade the evening of life.

The proportion of a part to the whole is the only standard by which we can measure the length of our existence. At the age of twenty, one year is a tenth perhaps of the time which has elapsed within our consciousness and memory; at the age of fifty it is no more than the fortieth, and this relative value continues to decrease till the last sands are shaken by the hand of death. This reasoning may seem metaphysical, but on a trial it will be found satisfactory and just. The warm desires, the long expectations of youth, are founded on the ignorance of themselves and of the world: they are gradually damped by time and experience, by disappointment or possession; and after the middle season

the crowd must be content to remain at the foot of the mountain, while the few who have climbed the summit aspire to descend or to expect a fall. In old age, the consolation of hope is reserved for the tenderness of parents who commence a new life in their children, the faith of enthusiasts who sing Hallelujahs above the clouds, and the vanity of authors who presume the immortality of their name and writings.¹

ANNA LETITIA BARBAULD

(1743–1825)

LIFE! I know not what thou art,
But know that thou and I must part;
And when, or how, or where we met,
I own to me's a secret yet.
But this I know, when thou art fled,
Where'er they lay these limbs, this head,
No clod so valueless shall be,
As all that then remains of me.
Oh whither, whither dost thou fly,
Where bend unseen thy trackless course,
And in this strange divorce,
Ah tell where I must seek this compound I?

To the vast ocean of empyreal flame,
From whence thy essence came,
Dost thou thy flight pursue, when freed
From matter's base encumbering weed?
Or dost thou, hid from sight,
Wait, like some spell-bound knight,

¹ From *Memoirs of My Life*, March 2, 1791.

Through blank oblivious years the appointed hour,
 To break thy trance and reassume thy power?
 Yet canst thou without thought or feeling be?
 O say what art thou, when no more thou'rt thee?

Life! we've been so long together,
 Through pleasant and through cloudy weather;
 'Tis hard to part when friends are dear;
 Perhaps 'twill cost a sigh, a tear;
 Then steal away, give little warning,
 Choose thine own time;
 Say not Good-night, but in some brighter clime
 Bid me Good-morning.¹

JAMES NORTHCOTE, R.A.

(1746-1831)

WERE God, he said, to leave him to select his own heaven, content would he be to occupy that little painting-room [his studio in Argyle Street, London] with a continuance of the happiness he had experienced there—"even for ever."²

JOHANN WOLFGANG

VON GOETHE (1749-1832)

THE common fate of man, which all of us have to bear, must fall most heavily on those whose intellectual powers expand very early. For a time we may

¹ "Life."

² From Northcote's *Conversations with James Ward*.

grow up under the protection of parents and relatives; we may lean for a while upon our brothers and sisters and friends, be supported by acquaintances, and made happy by those we love, but in the end man is always driven back upon himself, and it seems as if the Divinity had taken a position towards men so as not always to respond to their reverence, trust, and love, at least not in the precise moment of need. Early enough, and by many a hard lesson, had I learned that at the most urgent crisis the call to us is, "Physician, heal thyself;" and how frequently had I been compelled to sigh out in pain, "I tread the wine-press alone!"¹

I have ever been esteemed one of Fortune's chiefest favourites; nor will I complain or find fault with the course my life has taken. Yet, truly, there has been nothing but toil and care; and I may say that, in all my seventy-five years, I have never had a month of genuine comfort. It has been the perpetual rolling of a stone, which I have always had to raise anew. My annals will render clear what I now say. The claims upon my activity, both from within and without, were too numerous.

My real happiness was my poetic meditation and production. But how was this disturbed, limited, and hindered by my external position! Had I been able to abstain more from public business and to live more in solitude, I should have been happier, and should have accomplished much more as a poet.²

At the age of seventy-five one must, of course, think

¹ From *Autobiography*.

² From *Conversations with Eckermann* (1824).

sometimes of death. But this thought never gives me the least uneasiness, for I am fully convinced that our spirit is a being of a nature quite indestructible, and that its activity continues from eternity to eternity. It is like the sun, which seems to set only to our earthly eyes, but which, in reality, never sets, but shines on unceasingly.¹

Man should believe in immortality ; he has a right to this belief ; it corresponds with the wants of his nature, and he may believe in the promises of religion. But if the philosopher tries to deduce the immortality of the soul from a legend, that is very weak and inefficient. To me the eternal existence of my soul is proved from my idea of activity ; if I work on incessantly till my death, nature is bound to give me another form of existence when the present one can no longer sustain my spirit.”²

The Futures hides in it
Gladness and sorrow ;
We press still thorow,
Nought that abides in it
Daunting us—Onward !

And solemn before us,
Veiled, the dark Portal,
Goal of all mortal.
Stars silent rest o’er us—
Graves under us, silent.

While earnest thou gazest
Comes boding of terror,

¹ From *Conversations with Eckermann* (1824).

² *Ibid.* (1829).

Come phantasm and error ;
Perplexes the bravest
With doubt and misgiving.

But heard are the voices,
Heard are the sages,
The Worlds and the Ages :
“ Choose well ; your choice is
Brief, and yet endless.”

Here eyes do regard you
In Eternity's stillness ;
Here is all fulness,
Ye brave, to reward you.
Work, and despair not.¹

MADAME ROLAND (1754-1793)

THE glorious idea of a Divine Creator, whose providence watches over the world ; the immateriality of the soul, and lastly its immortality, that consolation of persecuted and suffering virtue—can these be nothing more than amiable and splendid chimeras ? Yet what absurdities enwrap these difficult problems ! What accumulated objections involve them if we wish to examine them with a mathematical rigor !—But no : it is not allotted to man to behold these truths in the full day of perfect evidence ; and what does it signify to the sensible soul that he cannot demonstrate them ? Is it not sufficient that he feels them ?²

In the silence of the closet and the dryness of dis-

¹ Translated by Carlyle.

² From *Private Memoirs*.

cussion I can agree with the atheist or the materialist as to the hopeless insolubility of certain questions; but in the bosom of the country and in the contemplation of nature my soul soars to the vivifying principle that animates all things, to the all-powerful mind that arranges them, to the goodness that invests them with such exquisite charms. Now, when thick walls separate me from my loved ones, when society heaps upon us evil after evil as a punishment for having sought its welfare, I look beyond the bounds of life for the reward of our sacrifices and the felicity of reunion. How? In what manner? I am ignorant; I only feel that it ought to be so.¹

JOSEPH JOUBERT (1754-1824)

THE evening of life comes bearing its own lamp.

Life is a country that the old have seen and lived in. Those who have to travel through it can only learn the way from them.

Our life is woven wind.²

A little vanity, and a little gratification of the senses—these are what make up the life of the majority of women and men.

This life is but the cradle of the other. Of what importance, then, are illness, time, old age, and death?

¹ From *Private Memoirs*.

² Matthew Arnold's translation.

They are but different stages in a transformation that doubtless has only its beginning here below.¹

WILLIAM BLAKE . (1757-1828)

I KNOW that our deceased friends are more really with us than when they are apparent to our mortal part. Thirteen years ago I lost a brother, and with his spirit I converse daily and hourly in the spirit, and see him in remembrance in the region of my imagination. I hear his advice, and even now write from his dictates. Forgive me for expressing to you my enthusiasm, which I wish all to partake of, since it is to me a source of immortal joy, even in this world. May you continue to be so more and more, and be more persuaded that every mortal loss is an immortal gain. The ruins of time build mansions in eternity.²

I have been very near the gates of death, and have returned very weak, and an old man, feeble and tottering, but not in spirit and life, not in the real man, the imagination which liveth for ever. In that I grow stronger and stronger as this foolish body decays. . . . Flaxman is gone, and we must soon follow every one to his own eternal house, leaving the delusions of goddess Nature and her laws to get into freedom from all the laws of the numbers—into the mind in which every one is king and priest in his own house. God grant it on earth as it is in heaven.³

¹ From Joubert's *Selected Thoughts* (trans. by Katharine Lyttelton).

² From letter to a friend (1800).

³ *Ibid.* (1827).

I know of no other Christianity and of no other gospel than the liberty both of body and mind to exercise the divine arts of imagination—imagination, the real and eternal world of which this Vegetable Universe is but a faint shadow, and in which we shall live in our eternal or imaginative bodies when these vegetable, mortal bodies are no more. The Apostles knew of no other Gospel. What were all their spiritual gifts? What is the Divine Spirit? Is the Holy Ghost any other than an intellectual fountain? What is the harvest of the Gospel and its labours? What is that talent which it is a curse to hide? What are the treasures of Heaven which we are to lay up for ourselves? Are they any other than mental studies and performances? What are all the gifts of the Gospel? Are they not all mental gifts? Is God a spirit who must be worshipped in spirit and in truth? And are not the gifts of the Spirit everything to man? O ye religious, discountenance every one among you who shall pretend to despise art and science. I call upon you in the name of Jesus! What is the life of man but art and science? Is it meat and drink? Is not the body more than raiment? What is mortality but the things relating to the body which dies? What is immortality but the things relating to the spirit which lives eternally? What is the joy of Heaven but improvement in the things of the spirit? What are the pains of Hell but ignorance, idleness, bodily lust, and the devastation of the things of the spirit?¹

The world of imagination is the world of eternity. It is the divine bosom into which we shall all go after

¹ From *Jerusalem* (preface to the fourth chapter).

the death of the vegetated body. The world of imagination is infinite and eternal, whereas the world of generation or vegetation is finite and temporal. There exist in that eternal world the eternal realities of everything which we see reflected in this vegetable glass of nature.

All things are comprehended in their eternal forms in the divine body of the Saviour, the true vine of eternity, the human imagination, Who appeared to me as coming to judgment among His Saints, and throwing off the temporal that the eternal might be established.¹

Men are admitted into heaven not because they have curbed and governed their passions, or have no passions, but because they have cultivated their understandings. The treasures of heaven are not negations of passion, but realities of intellect, from which the passions emanate, uncurbed in their eternal glory. The fool shall not enter into heaven, let him be ever so holy. Holiness is not the price of entrance into heaven. Those who are cast out are all those who, having no passions of their own, because no intellect, have spent their lives in curbing and governing other people's by the various arts of poverty and cruelty of all kinds.²

In paradise they have no corporeal and mortal body. That originated with the Fall, and was called Death, and cannot be removed but by a Last Judgment.³

¹ From *Prose Fragments* ("Identity").

² *Ibid.* ("Why Men Enter Heaven").

³ *Ibid.* ("Good and Evil").

LORD NELSON . (1758–1805)

THERE is no true happiness in this life, and in my present state I could quit it with a smile.¹

Believe me, my only wish is to sink with honour into the grave, and when that shall please God, I shall meet death with a smile. Not that I am insensible to the honours and riches my king and country have heaped upon me—so much more than any officer could deserve; yet am I ready to quit this world of trouble, and envy none but those of the estate six feet by two.²

ROBERT BURNS. (1759–1796)

I NEVER hear the loud, solitary whistle of the curlew in a summer noon, or the wild, mixing cadence of a troop of grey plovers in an autumnal morning, without feeling an elevation of soul like the enthusiasm of devotion or poetry. Tell me, my dear friend, to what can this be owing? Are we a piece of machinery which, like the Æolian harp, passive takes the impression of the passing accident? or do these workings argue something within us above the trodden clod? I own myself partial to such proofs of these awful and important realities—a God that made all things—man's immaterial and immortal nature—and a world of weal or woe beyond death and the grave!³

¹ From Southey's *Life*.

² *Ibid.* From letter written to a friend (about 1800).

³ From letter to Mrs. Dunlop, January 1, 1789.

Religion, my honoured friend, is surely a simple business, as it equally concerns the ignorant and the learned, the poor and the rich. That there is an incomprehensible Great Being, to whom I owe my existence, and that He must be intimately acquainted with the operations and progress of the internal machinery, and consequent outward deportment of this creature which He has made—these are, I think, self-evident propositions. That there is a real and eternal distinction between virtue and vice, and, consequently, that I am an accountable creature; that from the seeming nature of the human mind, as well as from the evident imperfection, nay, positive injustice, in the administration of affairs, both in the natural and moral worlds, there must be a retributive scene of existence beyond the grave—must, I think, be allowed by every one who will give himself a moment's reflection. I will go farther, and affirm that from the sublimity, excellence, and purity of His doctrine and precepts, unparalleled by all the aggregated wisdom and learning of many preceding ages, though to *appearance* He Himself was the obscurest and most illiterate of our species—therefore JESUS CHRIST was from God.

Whatever mitigates the woes, or increases the happiness, of others, this is my criterion of goodness; and whatever injures society at large, or any individual in it, this is my measure of iniquity.¹

It occasionally haunts me, the dark suspicion, that immortality may be only too good news to be true.²

There are two great pillars that bear us up, amid

¹ From letter to Mrs. Dunlop, 1789.

² From a letter.

the wreck of misfortune and misery. The one is composed of the different modifications of a certain noble, stubborn something in man, known by the names of courage, fortitude, magnanimity. The other is made up of those feelings and sentiments which, however the sceptic may deny or the enthusiast disfigure them, are yet, I am convinced, original and component parts of the human soul; those *senses of the mind*, if I may be allowed the expression, which connect us with, and link us to, those awful obscure realities—an all-powerful and equally beneficent God, and a world to come, beyond death and the grave. The first gives the nerve of combat, while a ray of hope beams on the field; the last pours the balm of comfort into the wounds which time can never cure.¹

FRIEDRICH VON SCHILLER

(1759–1805)

WE speak with the lip, and we dream in the soul,
 Of some better and fairer day;
 And our days, the meanwhile, to that golden goal
 Are gliding and sliding away.
 Now the world becomes old, now again it is young,
 But “the Better” ’s for ever the word on the tongue

At the threshold of life Hope leads us in—
 Hope plays round the mirthful boy;
 Though the best of its charms may with youth begin,
 Yet for age it reserves its toy.

¹ From letter to Mr. Alexander Cunningham in February 1794.

When we sink at the grave, why the grave has scope,
And over the coffin Man planteth—Hope!

And it is not a dream of a fancy proud,
With a fool for its dull begetter;
There's a voice at the heart that proclaims aloud—
“We are born for a something Better!”
And that Voice of the Heart, oh, ye may believe,
Will never the Hope of the Soul deceive!¹

What thy religion? those thou namest—none?
None why—because I have religion!²

And thou fearest to die! Wouldst live for ever and
ever?
Live in the Whole! It abides when thou art hurried
away.³

JEAN PAUL RICHTER

(1763–1825)

HOW little as yet have I done or enjoyed! . . .
We take the seed of life for the harvest of it—
the honey-dew on the ears for the sweet fruit—and we
chew the flowers, like cattle! Ah! thou great God,
what a night lieth around our sleep! We *fall* and
rise with closed eyelids, and fly about blind, and in a
deep slumber.⁴

Most of man's pleasures are but preparations for

¹ “Hope” (trans. by Edward, Lord Lytton).

² “My Belief,” *ibid.*

³ “Immortality” (trans. by E. P. Arnold-Forster).

⁴ From *Flower, Fruit, and Thorn Pieces*.

pleasures ; he thinks he has attained his *ends*, but he has merely got hold of his *means* to those ends. The burning sun of bliss is beheld of our feeble eyes but in seventy mirrors of our seventy years. Each of these mirrors reflects that sun's image less brightly—more faint and pale upon the next ; and in the seventieth it shimmers upon us all frozen, and is become a moon.¹

A man may, for twenty years, believe the Immortality of the Soul ; in the one-and-twentieth, in some great great moment, he for the first time discovers with amazement the rich meaning of this belief, the warmth of this Naphtha-well. . . . I could with less pain deny Immortality than Deity ; there I should lose but a world covered with mists, here I should lose the present world, namely, the Sun thereof ; the whole spiritual universe is dashed asunder by the hand of Atheism into numberless quick-silver-points of *Me's*, which glitter, run, waver, fly together or asunder, without unity or continuance. No one in Creation is so alone as the denier of God ; he mourns, with an orphaned heart that has lost its great Father, by the Corpse of Nature, which no World-spirit moves and holds together, and which grows in its grave ; and he mourns by that Corpse till he himself crumble off from it. The whole world lies before him, like the Egyptian Sphinx of stone, half-buried in the sand ; and the All is the cold iron mask of a formless Eternity.

I merely remark farther, that with the belief of Atheism the belief of Immortality is quite compatible ; for the same Necessity which in this Life threw my light dewdrop of a *Me* into a flower-bell and—under a

¹ From *Flower, Fruit, and Thorn Pieces*.

Sun, can repeat that process in a second life; nay, more easily embody me the second time than the first.¹

When, in your last hour (think of this), all faculty in the broken spirit shall fade away and die into inanity,—imagination, thought, effort, enjoyment,—then at last will the night-flower of Belief alone continue blooming, and refresh with its perfumes in the last darkness.²

When I look at what has been made out of me, I must thank God that I paid no heed to external matters, neither to time nor toil, nor profit nor loss; the thing is there, and the instruments that did it I have forgotten, and none else knows them. In this wise has the unimportant series of moments been changed into something higher that remains.³

I have described so much, and I die without ever having seen Switzerland and the ocean, and so many other sights. But the Ocean of Eternity I shall in no case fail to see.⁴

MARIA EDGEWORTH

(1767–1849)

AS we advance in life we become more curious, more fastidious in gilding and gilders; we find to our cost that all that glitters is not gold, and your every-

¹ From *Flower, Fruit, and Thorn Pieces* (trans. by Carlyle).

² From *Levana* (trans. by Carlyle).

³ From *Biographical Notes* (trans. by Carlyle).

⁴ *Ibid.*

day bungling carvers and gilders will not do. Our *evening gilders* must be more skilful than those who flashed and daubed away in the morning of life, and gilt with any tinsel the weather-cock for the morning sun.¹

When I felt that it was more than probable that I should not recover, with a pulse above a hundred and twenty and at the entrance of my seventy-sixth year, I was not alarmed. I felt ready to rise tranquil from the banquet of life, where I had been a happy guest; I confidently relied on the goodness of my Creator.²

NAPOLEON I. . . (1769-1821)

I KNOW men . . . and I can tell you that Jesus Christ is not a man. Superficial minds see a resemblance between Christ and the founders of empires, the conquerors and the gods of other religions. The resemblance does not exist; the distance between Christianity and any other religion whatever is infinite. . . . In Lycurgus, Numa, Confucius, and Mahomet I see law-givers, but nothing which reveals the Deity. They did not themselves raise their pretensions so high. They surpassed others in their times, as I have done in mine. There is nothing about them which announces Divine beings; on the contrary, I see much likeness between them and myself. . . .

It is not so with Christ. Everything in Him amazes me; His mind is beyond me, and His will confounds

¹ From letter to Mrs. Ruxton (1825).

² From letter to a friend (1843) after a dangerous illness.

me. There is no possible term of comparison between Him and anything of this world. He is a Being apart. His birth, His life, His death, the profundity of His doctrine, which reaches the height of difficulty, and which is yet its most admirable solution, the singularity of this mysterious Being, His empire, His course across ages and kingdoms—all is a prodigy, a mystery too deep, too sacred, and which plunges me into reveries from which I can find no escape; a mystery which is here, under my eyes, which I cannot deny, and neither can I explain. . . . In short, and this is my last argument, there is not a God in Heaven, if any man could conceive and execute with full success the gigantic design of seizing upon the supreme worship by usurping the name of God. Jesus is the only one who has dared to do this. He is the only one who has said clearly, affirmed imperturbably, Himself of Himself, *I am God*, which is quite different from the affirmation *I am a god*. History mentions no other individual who qualified himself with the title of God, in the absolute sense. How, then, should a Jew to whose existence there is more testimony than to that of any of His contemporaries, He alone, the son of a carpenter, give Himself out as God Himself, for the Self-existent Being, for the Creator of all beings? He claims every kind of adoration, He builds His worship with His own hands, not with stones, but with men. And how was it that, by a prodigy surpassing all prodigies, He willed the love of men—that which it is most difficult in the world to obtain—and immediately succeeded? From this I conclude His Divinity. Alexander, Cæsar, Hannibal, all failed. They conquered the world, but they were not able to obtain a friend. . . .

Now that I am at St. Helena—now that I am alone, nailed to this rock, who fights and conquers empires for me? What courtiers have I in my misfortune? Does any one think of me? Does any one in Europe move for me? Who has remained faithful? Where are my friends? . . . Our existence has shone with all the brilliancy of the diadem and of sovereignty. . . . But reverses have come. By degrees the golden hues are effaced, the floods of misfortune and the outrages to which I am every day subjected carry away the last tints. Only the copper remains . . . and soon I shall be dust. Such is the destiny of great men; of Cæsar and of Alexander; we are forgotten, and the name of a conqueror, like that of an emperor, is only the subject of a college theme. Our exploits come under the ferule of a pedant, who either praises or insults us. A few moments and this will be my fate; what will happen to myself? . . . I die prematurely, and my body will be returned to the earth to become pasture for worms. This is the destiny, now very near, of the great Napoleon.¹

ARTHUR, DUKE OF WELLINGTON . (1769–1852)

WHAT I am particularly anxious to remove from your mind is the notion that I am a person without any sense of religion. If I am so, I am unpardonable, as I have opportunities to acquire, and have acquired, a good deal of knowledge on the subject.

¹ Spoken to one of his generals at St. Helena.

I don't make much show or boast on the subject; I have never done so. The consequence is that, in these days of boasting, I have been set down from time to time, and this even upon professional matters, upon which it might be imagined that from the commencement of my career I had been sufficiently tried. Then in private life I have been accused of every vice and enormity; and when those who live with me, and know every action of my life and every thought, testify that such charges are groundless, the charge is then brought, "Oh, he is a man without religion." As I said before, I am not ostentatious about anything. I am not a "Bible Society man" upon principle, and I make no ostentatious display either of charity or of other Christian virtues, though I believe that, besides enormous sums given to hundreds and thousands who have positive claims upon me, there is not a charity of any description within my reach to which I am not a contributor.¹

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

(1770-1850)

THE thought of our past years in me doth breed
 Perpetual benediction: not indeed
 For that which is most worthy to be blest—
 Delight and liberty, the simple creed
 Of Childhood, whether busy or at rest,
 With new-fledged hope still fluttering in his breast:—
 Not for these I raise
 The song of thanks and praise;
 But for those obstinate questionings
 Of sense and outward things,

¹ From letter to Bishop of Exeter (January 1832).

Fallings from us, vanishings ;
 Blank misgivings of a Creature
 Moving about in worlds not realised,
 High instincts before which our mortal Nature
 Did tremble like a guilty Thing surprised :
 But for those first affections,
 Those shadowy recollections,
 Which, be they what they may,
 Are yet the fountain light of all our day,
 Are yet a master light of all our seeing ;
 Uphold us, cherish, and have power to make
 Our noisy years seem moments in the being
 Of the eternal Silence : truths that wake,
 To perish never ;
 Which neither listlessness, nor mad endeavour,
 Nor Man nor Boy,
 Nor all that is at enmity with joy,
 Can utterly abolish or destroy ! . . .
 What though the radiance which was once so bright
 Be now for ever taken from my sight,
 Though nothing can bring back the hour
 Of splendour in the grass, of glory in the flower ;
 We will grieve not, rather find
 Strength in what remains behind ;
 In the primal sympathy
 Which having been must ever be ;
 In the soothing thoughts that spring
 Out of human suffering ;
 In the faith that looks through death,
 In years that bring the philosophic mind.¹

What manifold reason, my dear Sir George, have

¹ From "Ode" ("Intimations of Immortality," etc.), 1803-6.

you and I to be thankful to Providence! Theologians may puzzle their heads about dogmas as they will, the religion of gratitude cannot mislead us. Of that we are sure, and gratitude is the handmaid to hope, and hope the harbinger of faith. I look abroad upon Nature, I think of the best part of our Species, I lean upon my friends, and I meditate upon the Scriptures, especially the Gospel of St. John, and my creed rises up of itself with the ease of an exhalation, yet a fabric of adamant.¹

I am standing on the brink of that vast ocean I must sail so soon; I must speedily lose sight of the shore, and I could not once have conceived how little I now am troubled by the thought of how long or short a time they who remain on that shore may have sight of me. The other day I chanced to be looking over a MS. poem belonging to the year 1803, though not actually composed till many years afterwards. It was suggested by visiting the neighbourhood of Dumfries, in which Burns had resided, and where he died; it concluded thus:

Sweet Mercy to the gates of heaven
This minstrel led, his sins forgiven;
The rueful conflict, the heart riven
 With vain endeavour,
And memory of earth's bitter leaven,
 Effaced for ever.

Here the verses closed; but I instantly added, the other day—

But why to him confine the prayer,
When kindred thoughts and yearnings bear
On the frail heart the purest share

¹ From letter to Sir George Beaumont (May 1825).

With all that live?—
The best of what we do and are,
Just God, forgive!

The more I reflect upon this last exclamation, the more I feel justified in attaching comparatively small importance to any literary monument that I may be enabled to leave behind. It is well, however, I am convinced that men think otherwise in the earlier part of their lives.¹

Where lies the truth? has Man, in wisdom's creed,
A pitiable doom; for respite brief
A care more anxious, or a heavier grief?
Is he ungrateful, and doth little heed
God's bounty, soon forgotten; or indeed,
Must Man, with labour born, awake to sorrow
When Flowers rejoice and Larks with rival speed
Spring from their nests to bid the Sun good morrow?
They mount for rapture as their songs proclaim
Warbled in hearing both of earth and sky;
But o'er the contrast wherefore heave a sigh?
Like those aspirants let us soar—our aim,
Through life's worst trials, whether shocks or snares,
A happier, brighter, purer Heaven than theirs.²

SIR WALTER SCOTT (1771–1832)

THE great art of life, so far as I have been able to observe, consists in fortitude and perseverance. . . . Life . . . is like a game at cards—our hands are

¹ From letter to Professor Henry Reed (December 1839).

² Sonnet written in 1846.

alternately good or bad, and the whole seems at first glance to depend on mere chance. But it is not so, for in the long-run the skill of the player predominates over the casualties of the game.¹

This is a melancholy letter, but it is chiefly so from the sad tone of yours—who have had such real disasters to lament—while mine is only the humorous sadness which a retrospect on human life is sure to produce on the most prosperous. For my own course of life, I have only to be ashamed of its prosperity and afraid of its termination; for I have little reason, arguing on the doctrine of chances, to hope that the same good fortune will attend me for ever. I have had an affectionate and promising family, many friends, few unfriends, and, I think, no enemies—and more of fame and fortune than mere literature ever procured for a man before.

I dwell among my own people, and have many whose happiness is dependent on me, and which I study to the best of my power. I trust my temper, which you know is by nature good and easy, has not been spoiled by flattery or prosperity; and therefore I have escaped entirely that irritability of disposition which I think is planted, like the slave in the poet's chariot, to prevent his enjoying his triumph.

Should things, therefore, change with me—and in these times, or indeed in any times, such change is to be apprehended—I trust I shall be able to surrender these adventitious advantages, as I would my upper dress, as something extremely comfortable, but which I can make shift to do without.²

¹ From letter written in 1817 (*Life*, by Lockhart).

² *Life*, by Lockhart. From letter to the Countess Purgstall (1821).

There is no theme more awful than to attempt to cast a glance among the clouds and mists which hide the broken extremity of the celebrated bridge of Mirza. Yet, when every day brings us nearer that termination, one would almost think that our views should become clearer as the regions we are approaching are brought nigher. Alas! it is not so; there is a curtain to be withdrawn, a veil to be rent, before we shall see things as they really are. There are few, I trust, who disbelieve the existence of a God; nay, I doubt if at all times, and in all moods, any single individual ever adopted that hideous creed, though some have professed it. With the belief of a Deity, that of the immortality of the soul and of the state of future rewards and punishments is indissolubly linked. More we are not to know; but neither are we prohibited from our attempts, however vain, to pierce the solemn, sacred gloom. The expressions used in Scripture are doubtless metaphorical, for penal fires and heavenly melody are only applicable to bodies endowed with senses; and, at least till the period of the resurrection of the body, the spirits of men, whether entering into the perfection of the just or committed to the regions of punishment, are incorporeal. Neither is it to be supposed that the glorified bodies which shall arise in the last day will be capable of the same gross indulgences with which they are now solaced. That the idea of Mahomet's paradise is inconsistent with the purity of our heavenly religion will be readily granted; and see Mark xii. 25. Harmony is obviously chosen as the least corporeal of all gratifications of the sense, and as the type of love, unity, and a state of peace and perfect happiness. But they have a poor idea of the Deity, and

the rewards which are destined for the just made perfect, who can only adopt the literal sense of an eternal concert—a never-ending Birthday Ode. I rather suppose there should be understood some commission from the Highest, some duty to discharge with the applause of a satisfied conscience. That the Deity, who himself must be supposed to feel love and affection for the beings he has called into existence, should delegate a portion of those powers, I for one cannot conceive altogether so wrong a conjecture. We would then find reality in Milton's sublime machinery of the guardian saints or genii of kingdoms. Nay, we would approach to the Catholic idea of the employment of saints, though without approaching the absurdity of saint-worship which degrades their religion. There would be, we must suppose, in these employments difficulties to be overcome and exertions to be made, for all which the celestial beings employed would have certain appropriate powers. I cannot help thinking that a life of active benevolence is more consistent with my ideas than an eternity of music. But it is all speculation, and it is impossible even to guess what we shall [do], unless we could ascertain the equally difficult previous question, what we are to be. But there is a God, and a just God—a judgment and a future life—and all who own so much let them act according to the faith that is in them. I would [not], of course, limit the range of my genii to this confined earth. There is the universe, with all its endless extent of worlds.¹

It is not my Charlotte—it is not the bride of my youth, the mother of my children, that will be laid

¹ From *Journal*, December 10, 1825.

among the ruins of Dryburgh, which we have so often visited in gaiety and pastime. No ! no ! She is sentient and conscious of my emotion somewhere—somehow ; *where* we cannot tell ; *how* we cannot tell ; yet would I not at this moment renounce the mysterious yet certain hope that I shall see her in a better world, for all that this world can give me.¹

The evening sky of life does not reflect those brilliant flashes of light that shot across its morning and noon. Yet I thank God it is neither gloomy nor disconsolately lowering ; a sober twilight—that is all.²

What is this world ? A dream within a dream ; as we grow older, each step is an awakening. The youth awakes, as he thinks, from childhood—the full-grown man despises the pursuits of youth as visionary—the old man looks on manhood as a feverish dream. The Grave the last sleep ?—no ; it is the last and final awakening.³

I am drawing near to the close of my career ; I am fast shuffling off the stage. I have been, perhaps, the most voluminous writer of the day ; and it *is* a comfort to me to think that I have tried to unsettle no man's faith, to corrupt no man's principle, and that I have written nothing which on my death-bed I should wish blotted.⁴

¹ From *Journal*, May 18, 1826. Written two days after his wife's death.

² *Ibid.* February 1, 1827.

³ *Ibid.* May 13, 1827.

⁴ From *Life*, by Lockhart (1832)

Lockhart, I may have but a minute to speak to you. My dear, be a good man—be virtuous—be religious—be a good man. Nothing else will give you any comfort when you come to lie here.¹

SYDNEY SMITH . (1771–1845)

(CANON OF ST. PAUL'S)

WE count over the pious spirits of the world, the beautiful writers, the great statesmen, all who have invented subtly, who have thought deeply, who have executed wisely: all these are proofs that we are destined for a second life; and it is not possible to believe that this redundant vigour, this lavish and excessive power, was given for the mere gathering of meat and drink. If the only object is present existence, such faculties are cruel, are misplaced, are useless. They all show us that there is something great awaiting us; that the soul is now young and infantine, springing up into a more perfect life when the body falls into dust.²

“Hic jacet!”—O humanarum meta ultima rerum!
 Ultra quam labor et luctus curaeque quiescunt,
 Ultra quam penduntur opes et gloria flocci;
 Et redit ad nihilum vana haec et turbida vita.
 Ut te respicerent homines! Quae bella per orbem,
 Qui motus animorum et quanta pericula nostra
 Acciperent facilem sine caede et sanguine finem!

¹ From *Life*, by Lockhart (1832). Last words on his death-bed.

² From a sermon on the “Immortality of the Soul.”

Tu mihi versare ante oculos, non tristis imago,
Sed monitrix, ut me ipse regam, domus haec mihi
cum sit

Vestibulum tumuli, et senii penultima sedes.¹

[“Hic jacet!”—O last goal of human things, beyond which labour and mourning and cares are at rest,—beyond which riches and glory are weighed as nothing, and this vain and turbid life returns to nought! Oh that men would thus regard thee! What wars throughout the world, what passions of the soul, how many dangers besetting us, might so obtain an easy termination without slaughter or blood! Mayest thou be present before my eyes, not a mournful image but an admonisher, that I should regulate myself; since this house is to me the vestibule of the tomb, and the *next to closing* seat of my old age!]

SAMUEL TAYLOR

COLERIDGE . . . 1772–1834

IF the duty of living were not far more awful to my conscience than life itself is agreeable to my feelings, I should sink under it. . . . But God’s will be done. To feel the full force of the Christian religion it is, perhaps, necessary for many tempers that they should first be made to feel, experimentally, the hollowness of human friendship, the presumptuous emptiness of human hopes.²

¹ Lines supposed to have been composed by him shortly before his death.

² From letter to W. Collins, A.R.A. (December 1818).

All Nature seems at work. Slugs leave their lair—
The bees are stirring—birds are on the wing—
And Winter slumbering in the open air,
Wears on his smiling face a dream of Spring!
And I the while, the sole unbusy thing,
Nor honey make, nor pair, nor build, nor sing.

Yet well I ken the banks where amaranths blow,
Have traced the fount whence streams of nectar flow.
Bloom, O ye amaranths! bloom for whom ye may,
For me ye bloom not! Glide, rich streams, away!
With lips unbrightened, wreathless brow, I stroll:
And would you learn the spells that drowse my soul?
Work without Hope draws nectar in a sieve,
And Hope without an object cannot live.¹

Verse, a breeze 'mid blossoms straying,
Where Hope clung feeding, like a bee—
Both were mine! Life went a-maying
 With Nature, Hope, and Poesy,
 When I was young!

When I was young?—Ah, woful *When*!
Ah! for the change 'twixt *Now* and *Then*!
This breathing house not built with hands,
This body that does me grievous wrong,
O'er aery cliffs and glittering sands,
How lightly *then* it flashed along:—
Like those trim skiffs, unknown of yore,
On winding lakes and rivers wide,
That ask no aid of sail or oar,
That fear no spite of wind or tide!

¹ "Work without Hope" (lines composed February 21, 1827).

Nought cared this body for wind or weather
When Youth and I lived in't together.

Flowers are lovely ; Love is flower-like ;
Friendship is a sheltering tree ;
O ! the joys, that came down shower-like,
Of Friendship, Love, and Liberty,
Ere I was old !

Ere I was old ? Ah woful Ere,
Which tells me, Youth's no longer here !
O Youth ! for years so many and sweet,
'Tis known, that Thou and I were one,
I'll think it but a fond conceit—
It cannot be that Thou art gone !
Thy vesper-bell hath not yet toll'd :—
And thou wert aye a masker bold !
What strange disguise hast now put on,
To *make believe*, that thou art gone ?
I see these locks in silvery slips,
This drooping gait, this altered size :
But Spring-tide blossoms on thy lips,
And tears take sunshine from thine eyes !
Life is but thought : so think I will
That Youth and I are house-mates still.

Dew-drops are the gems of morning,
But the tears of mournful eve !
Where no hope is, life's a warning
That only serves to make us grieve,
When we are old :
That only serves to make us grieve
With oft and tedious taking-leave,
Like some poor nigh-related guest,
That may not rudely be dismiss ;

Yet hath outstay'd his welcome while,
And tells the jest without the smile.¹

At this moment, in great weakness and heaviness, [I] write from a sick-bed, hopeless of recovery, yet without prospect of a speedy removal. And I thus, on the brink of the grave, solemnly bear witness to you that the Almighty Redeemer, most gracious in His promises to them that truly seek Him, is faithful to perform what He has promised, and has reserved, under all pains and infirmities, the peace that passeth all understanding, with the supporting assurance of a reconciled God, who will not withdraw His Spirit from me in the conflict, and in His own time will deliver me from the evil one. Oh . . . eminently blessed are they who begin *early* to seek, fear, and love their God, trusting wholly in the righteousness and mediation of their Lord, Redeemer, Saviour, and everlasting High Priest, Jesus Christ.²

Stop, Christian passer-by!—Stop, child of God,
And read with gentle breast. Beneath this sod
A poet lies, or that which once seem'd he.—
O, lift one thought in prayer for S. T. C. ;
That he who many a year with toil of breath
Found death in life, may here find life in death !
Mercy for praise—to be forgiven for fame
He ask'd, and hoped, through Christ. Do thou the
same !³

¹ "Youth and Age" (1822-32).

² From letter to Adam Steinmetz Kennard (his godson), July 1834.

³ "Epitaph."

ROBERT SOUTHEY (1774–1843)

ALMOST the only wish I ever give utterance to is that the next hundred years were over. It is not that the uses of this world seem to me weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable—God knows far otherwise! No man can be better contented with his lot. My paths are paths of pleasantness. . . . Still the instability of human happiness is ever before my eyes; I long for the certain and the permanent.¹

My notions about life are much the same as they are about travelling—there is a good deal of amusement on the road, but, after all, one wants to be at rest.²

My disposition is invincibly cheerful, and this alone would make me a happy man if I were not so from the tenour of my life; yet I doubt whether the strictest Carthusian has the thought of death more habitually in his mind.³

I could agree with you that “personal identity unbroken by death” were little to be desired, if it were all—if we were to begin a new life in the nakedness of that identity. But when we carry with us in that second birth all that makes existence valuable, our hopes and aspirations, our affections, our eupathies, our capacities of happiness and of improvement; when we are to be welcomed into another sphere by those dear ones who have gone before us, and are in our turn to

¹ Written April 30, 1809.

² Written May 22, 1809.

³ Written February 3, 1815.

welcome there those whom we left on earth, surely, of all God's blessings, the revelation which renders this certain is the greatest. There have been times in my life when my heart would have been broken if this belief had not supported me. At this moment it is worth more than all the world could give.¹

Whether Hope and I shall ever become intimate again in this world, except on the pilgrimage to the next, is very doubtful; nor ought it to be of much importance to a man in his sixty-fourth year. I have had a large portion of happiness, and of the highest kind; five and thirty years of such happiness few men are blest with. I have drunk, too, of the very gall of bitterness; yet not more than was wholesome; the cup has been often administered, no doubt because it was needed. The moral discipline through which I have passed has been more complete than the intellectual. Both began early; and, all things considered, I do not think any circumstances could have been more beneficial to me than those in which I have been placed. If not hopeful, therefore, I am more than contented, and disposed to welcome and entertain any good that may yet be in store for me, without any danger of being disappointed if there should be none.²

CHARLES LAMB (1775-1834)

AND now I go
Again to mingle with a world impure,

¹ From letter to — (November 1837).

² From letter to T. H. Taylor (June 1838).

With men who make a mock of holy things
 Mistaken, and of man's best hope think scorn.
 The world does much to warp the heart of man,
 And I may sometimes join its idiot laugh.
 Of this I now complain not. Deal with me,
 Omniscient Father ! as thou judgest best,
 And in Thy season *tender* Thou my heart.¹

A heavy lot hath he, most wretched man !
 Who lives the last of all his family ;
 He looks around him, and his eye discerns
 The face of the stranger, and his heart is sick.
 Man of the world, what canst thou do for him ?
 Wealth is a burden which he could not bear ;
 Mirth a strange crime, the which he dares not act ;
 And wine no cordial, but a bitter cup.
 For wounds like his Christ is the only cure,
 And gospel promises are his by right,
 For these were given to the poor in heart.
 Go, preach thou to him of a world to come,
 Where friends shall meet and know each other's face.
 Say less than this, and say it to the winds.²

And we are clay
 In the potter's hands ; and, at the worst, are made
 From absolute nothing, vessels of disgrace,
 Till, His most righteous purpose wrought in us,
 Our purified spirits find their perfect rest.³

Fresh clad from heaven in robes of white,
 A young probationer of light,
 Thou wert my soul, an Album bright,

¹ From "To Charles Lloyd" (August 1797).

² Written October 1797.

³ From "Written on Christmas Day," 1797.

A spotless leaf; but thought and care,
 And friend and foe, in foul or fair,
 Have "written strange defeatures" there;

And Time, with heaviest hand of all,
 Like that fierce writing on the wall,
 Hath stamp'd sad dates—he can't recall;

And error gilding worst designs—
 Like speckled snake that strays and shines—
 Betrays his path by crooked lines;

And vice hath left his ugly blot;
 And good resolves, a moment hot,
 Fairly began—but finish'd not;

And fruitless, late remorse doth trace—
 Like Hebrew lore, a backward pace—
 Her irrecoverable race.

Disjointed numbers; sense unknit;
 Huge realms of folly, shreds of wit,
 Compose the mingled mass of it.

My scalded eyes no longer brook
 Upon this ink-blurred thing to look—
 Go, shut the leaves, and clasp the book.¹

WALTER SAVAGE LANDOR

(1775–1864)

THE leaves are falling; so am I;
 The few late flowers have moisture in the eye;
 So have I too.

¹ "In My Own Album."

Scarcely on any bough is heard
 Joyous, or even unjoyous, bird
 The whole wood through.

Winter may come : he brings but nigher
 His circle (yearly narrowing) to the fire
 Where old friends meet.

Let him ; now heaven is overcast,
 And spring and summer both are past,
 And all things sweet.¹

I strove with none, for none was worth my strife,
 Nature I loved, and next to Nature, Art ;
 I warmed both hands before the fire of life,
 It sinks, and I am ready to depart.²

WILLIAM HAZLITT (1778-1830)

IF I had few real pleasures or advantages, my ideas, from their sinewy texture, have been to me in the nature of realities ; and if I should not be able to add to the stock, I can live by husbanding the interest. As to my speculations, there is little to admire in them but my admiration of others ; and whether they have an echo in time to come or not, I have learned to set a grateful value on the past, and am content to wind up the account of what is personal only to myself and the immediate circle of objects in which I have moved, with an act of easy oblivion,

And curtain-close such scene from every future view.

For myself I do not complain of the greater thickness of the atmosphere as I approach the narrow house. I

¹ *Miscellaneous Poems* (1846).

² Written on his seventy-fifth birthday.

felt it more formerly, when the idea alone seemed to suppress a thousand rising hopes, and weighed upon the pulses of the blood. . . . At present I rather feel a thinness and want of support; I stretch out my hand to some object, and find none; I am too much in a world of abstraction; the naked map of life is spread out before me, and in the emptiness and desolation I see Death coming to meet me.

In my youth, I could not behold him for a crowd of objects and feelings, and Hope stood always between us, saying, "Never mind that old fellow!" If I had lived, indeed, I should not care to die. But I do not like a contract of pleasure broken off unfulfilled, a marriage with joy unconsummated, a promise of happiness rescinded. My public and private hopes have been left a ruin, or remain only to mock me. I would wish them to be re-edified. I should like to see some prospect of good to mankind, such as my life began with. I should like to leave some sterling work behind me. I should like to have some friendly hand to consign me to the grave. On these conditions I am ready, if not willing, to depart. I shall then write on my tomb—GRATEFUL AND CONTENTED. But I have thought and suffered too much to be willing to have thought and suffered in vain.¹

SIR CHARLES JAMES NAPIER

(1782-1853)

MY wish is to be clear of public life altogether. Am I doing good thereby? God knows the life of this world is hateful to me, and but for those

¹ From *Autobiography* in the *Memoirs* by his grandson (1828).

in it with me should not be mine. A tent and a desert, with little food and drink, is the life for which I was made.¹

Vanity! all is vanity! said Solomon, and I have never doubted it, and have so little that if I could at once undo my battles and destroy all knowledge of my name this minute it would be done; but having studied war and mischief all my life, the "love of trade" is in me, and I am indifferent to success.²

This is the twelfth anniversary of my marriage with my present wife, who is all goodness and virtue. God spare her to me till He takes me out of this world. She will rejoin me hereafter in the *central sun*, where I suppose we shall all go. For there must be a centre to the heavens as to all things, and in that centre we may believe the Deity dwells, and there receives his creatures after death. May my sins not prevent my being there, with all of mine who have gone before in recognition and love. What is to happen to us? . . . I do not think my balance-sheet will be white; no man's is. I try hard to do my duty, but do not satisfy myself, and God will not make me judge my own soul, or I am a lost man. Yet if so, there must be a purgatory, for I could not honestly pronounce myself worthy of heaven, not altogether of eternal damnation.³

Content is all, and content men can be if their minds are firm and convinced, as mine is, that there is a future state. I believe that, because it is not in me

¹ From *Journal*, November 13, 1844.

² *Ibid.* November 28, 1844.

³ *Ibid.* April 19, 1847

to think such a large workshop is made for nothing! Oh! thou central sun! when shall I see thee, live in thee, and defy the evil genius which pulls us down to baseness? . . . Perhaps thou, oh sun! art but one of an infinity of worlds which whirl round the God! He has given us a minute part to act, and such smallness seems to argue that we are too small to be of importance in that machine to conceive the vastness of which even thought falls short and hopeless. . . . But look below! Are there not things in myriads as much less than us, as we are less than the globe in which we are shut up? Are not their bones, fibres, muscles, all made with a perfection of attention? May not death give us a huge form in spirit? May we not go higher or lower as we have served under the banner of the good or evil Spirit? I may become a horse, a dog, a rat, an insect most minute after death, and be conscious of my degraded state. And I may rise to something as much above what I now am, as much as I now am above the insect, and so get nearer to the central sun; yet perhaps to our sun, or our moon, or some other planet, or the secret of death may burst at once upon me! The grave is the entrance to life; to a life of further trials, and more or less happiness as we are more or less in the hands of the good spiritual God, or those of the evil material God—if God means power. For that two Gods, a bad and a good, exist and struggle for us and for all things, I believe, and that in exact proportion to our virtue are we freed from the evil spirit, whereas our crimes cast us bound at his feet.

¹ From *Journal*, May 20, 1847.

LEIGH HUNT . . (1784-1859)

I MUST therefore end life as I began it, in what is perhaps my only true vocation, that of a love of nature and books ;—complaining of nothing ; grateful if others will not complain of me ; a little proud, perhaps (nature allows such balm to human weakness), of having been found not unworthy of doing that for the Good Cause, by my sufferings, which I can no longer pretend to do with my pen ; and possessed of one golden secret, tried in the fire, which I still hope to recommend in future writings ; namely, the art of finding as many things to love as possible in our path through life, let us otherwise try to reform it as we may.¹

The reader will see at once how “unorthodox” is my version of Christianity when I declare that I do not believe one single dogma which the reason that God has put in our heads, or the heart that he has put in our bosoms, revolts at. For though reason cannot settle many undeniable mysteries that perplex us, and though the heart must acknowledge the existence of others from which it cannot but receive pain, yet that is no reason why mysteries should be palmed upon reason of which it sees no evidences whatever, or why pain should be forced upon the heart for which it sees grounds as little. . . . What evils there are, I find, for the most part, relieved with many consolations ; some I find to be necessary to the requisite amount of good.²

¹ From “Farewell Address” in the *Monthly Repository* (1838).

² From the *Autobiography*.

May all of us who desire to meet elsewhere do so, and be then shown the secret of the great, the awful, yet, it is to be trusted, the beautiful riddle; for why so much half-beauty here, and such need for completing it, if complete it is not to be? I do not think that enough has been made of that argument from analogy, divine as was the mind of Plato, that suggested it. Oh, why did any kind of religious creed ever put such injustice into its better portion as to render it possible for any of the Maker's infirm creatures to wish it might not be true, even for others' sakes? For my part, infirm as I am, I fear it not for myself or for my body, trusting, as I do, to that only kind of divineness which it is possible for me to believe in, which has *itself* made it impossible for me to believe otherwise. As to the fulfilment of these yearnings on earth to be made entire in a future state, I can no more believe in the existence of regions in space where God has made half-orbs in their heavens, or half-oranges on their trees, than I can believe He will fail to make these anxious, half-satisfied natures of ours, which thus crave for completeness, as entire and rounded in that which they crave for as any other fruits of His hands.¹

THOMAS DE QUINCEY

(1785-1859)

OFTEN and often, in years after all was gone, I have passed old Brathay, . . . and, seating myself on a stone by the side of the mountain river Brathay, have staid for hours listening to the same

¹ From the *Autobiography*.

sound to which so often Charles Lloyd and I used to hearken together with profound emotion and awe—the sound of pealing anthems, as if streaming from the open portals of some illimitable cathedral; for such a sound does actually arise, in many states of the weather, from the peculiar action of the river Brathay upon its rocky bed; and many times I have heard it of a quiet night, when no stranger could have been persuaded to believe it other than the sound of choral chanting—distant, solemn, saintly. Its meaning and expression were, in those earlier years, uncertain and general; not more pointed or determined in the direction which it impressed upon one's feelings than the light of the setting suns: and sweeping, in fact, the whole harp of pensive sensibilities rather than striking the chord of any one specific sentiment. But since the ruin or dispersion of that household, after the smoke had ceased to ascend from their hearth or the garden walks to re-echo their voices, oftentimes, when lying by the river-side, I have listened to the same aerial saintly sound, whilst looking back to that night, long hidden in the frost of receding years, when Charles and Sophia Lloyd, now lying in foreign graves, first dawned upon me, coming suddenly out of rain and darkness; then— young, rich, happy, full of hope, belted with young children (of whom also most are long dead), and standing apparently on the verge of a labyrinth of golden hours. Musing on that night in November 1807, and then upon the wreck that had been wrought by a space of fifteen years, I would say to myself sometimes, and seem to hear it in the songs of this watery cathedral— Put not your trust in any fabric of happiness that has its root in man or the children of men. Sometimes

even I was tempted to discover in the same music a sound such as this—Love nothing, love nobody, for thereby comes a killing curse in the rear. But sometimes also, very early on a summer morning, when the dawn was barely beginning to break, all things locked in sleep, and only some uneasy murmur or cock-crow, at a faint distance, giving a hint of resurrection for earth and her generations, I have heard in that same chanting of the little mountain river a more solemn if a less agitated admonition—a requiem over departed happiness, and a protestation against the thought that so many excellent creatures, but a little lower than the angels, whom I have seen only to love in this life—so many of the good, the brave, the beautiful, the wise—can have appeared for no higher purpose or prospect than simply to point a moral, to cause a little joy and many tears, a few perishing moons of happiness and years of vain regret! No! that the destiny of man is more in correspondence with the grandeur of his endowments, and that our own mysterious tendencies are written hieroglyphically in the vicissitudes of day and night, of winter and summer, and throughout the great alphabet of Nature! But on that theme—beware, reader! Listen to no *intellectual* argument. One argument there is, one only there is, of philosophic value: an argument drawn from the *moral* nature of man, an argument of Immanuel Kant's. The rest are dust and ashes.¹

¹ From the *Autobiography*.

BENJAMIN ROBERT HAYDON

(1786-1846)

SO intensely, my great friend, is Christianity interwoven in my Being, that I know it to be His revealed will as if I heard His voice. It is in my heart, my brain, my blood. What a trial of faith did I pass through with Hunt, Hazlitt, Shelley; and yet all this added to my convictions. I am come now to consider death as a change of sensation only; to go from one scene to another, as the only thing that makes life worth enduring. This is no Cant, but Truth.¹

Whether it be that imagination overrates the happiness that is to come and underrates that which exists, or that languor succeeds excitement and disappointment gratification, God only knows; but the longer a man lives the more he is convinced that honesty, peace, independence, and virtue are all that are requisite to ensure tranquillity on earth, and that this world is but a world of trial, imperfect and uncertain.²

I do not believe in "lie still" until the Resurrection. There is nothing in creation analogous to that, or to annihilation. All existence is birth, destruction, reproduction; and why should the whole system be so, and man only and his nature be an exception after death? The doctrine of instant consciousness after death is borne out by Scripture, and by the whole of creation, and by the solar system to boot. I see the same sun,

¹ From letter to Wordsworth (September 1841).

² From *Table-Talk*.

and moon, and stars that were beheld by the Egyptians, Chaldeans, Syrians, and Babylonians. Why should inanimate matter without the power of deduction and invention be re-animate only? Must that Divine gift of thought not be reproduced? Impossible! How can we conceive that the Power which created us with such palpable inferiority in stability to the earth, the sun, the air, should not recompense the agony we feel at our weakness by a resuscitation after death, more stable than either? It must be. The idea of Annihilation after death could not be endured.¹

SIR JOHN FRANKLIN

(1786-1847)

I WOULD humbly offer my grateful thanks to Almighty God that the peculiar circumstances of my situation, arising from want of society and full occupation, have led me to seek that consolation from the perusal of religious books which I have found—especially in the Holy Bible—abundantly supplied. To this sacred volume I have applied for grounds of hope, comfort, and support, and never in vain; and I am fully convinced that therein, and therein only, can be found the treasures of heavenly love and mercy. . . . Christ, who died for the salvation of sinners, is the way, the truth, and the life. Whoso cometh unto Him in full purpose of heart shall in no wise be cast out. Can anything be more cheering than these assurances, or better calculated to fill the mind with heavenly impressions, or lift up the heart in grateful

¹ From *Table-Talk*.

adoration to God? This is the commencement of the Christian joy which, if it beget a live faith that worketh by love, producing the fruits of obedience, will lead to everlasting life.¹

MARY RUSSELL MITFORD

(1786–1855)

PRAY for me, my dear friends! We are of different forms, but surely of one religion—that which is found between the two covers of the Gospel. I have read the whole twice through during the last few weeks, and it seems to me, speaking merely intellectually, more easy to believe than to disbelieve. But still I am subject to wandering thoughts—fluttering thoughts. I cannot realise even that which I believe. Pray for me, that my faith be quickened and made more steadfast.²

I am now reading the Gospels for the third time with a calm conviction and a fearful, trembling, humble hope, trusting only in God's mercy, and believing that mercy will be extended to all who seek it, under whatever sect they may be gathered, provided they seek it in sincerity.³

LORD BYRON. . (1788–1824)

I NOW come to a subject of your inquiry which you must have perceived I always hitherto avoided

¹ From letter to his sister (Mrs. Wright), 1820.

² From letter written August 23, 1854.

³ From letter written October 2, 1854.

—an awful one—“Religion.” . . . My opinions are quite undecided. . . . I believe doubtless in God, and should be happy to be convinced of much more. If I do not at present place implicit faith in tradition and revelation of any human creed, I hope it is not from want of reverence for the Creator but the created, and when I see a man publishing a pamphlet to prove that Mr. Pitt is risen from the dead (as was done a week ago), perfectly positive in the truth of his assertion, I must be permitted to doubt more miracles equally well attested; but the moral of Christianity is perfectly beautiful—and the very sublime of virtue—yet even there we find some of its finer precepts in the earlier axioms of the Greeks—particularly “do unto others as you would they should do unto you”—the forgiveness of injuries and more which I do not remember.¹

I thank you very much for your suggestion on religion. But I must tell you, at the hazard of losing whatever good opinion your gentleness may have bestowed upon me, that it is a source from which I never did, and I believe never can, derive comfort. If I ever feel what is called devout, it is when I have met with some good of which I did not conceive myself deserving, and then I am apt to thank anything but mankind. On the other hand, when I am ill or unlucky, I philosophise as well as I can, and wish it were over one way or the other—without any glimpses at the future. Why I came here, I know not. Where I shall go to, it is useless to inquire. In the midst of myriads of the living and the dead worlds—stars—

¹ From letter to Miss Milbanke (Sept. 1813).

systems—infinity—why should I be anxious about an atom? ¹

Our life is a false nature—'tis not in
 The harmony of things,—this hard decree,
 This uneradicable taint of Sin,
 This boundless Upas, this all-blasting tree,
 Whose root is Earth—whose leaves and branches be
 The skies which rain their plagues on men like dew—
 Disease, death, bondage—all the woes we see,
 And worse, the woes we see not—which throb through
 The immedicable soul, with heart-aches ever new.

Yet let us ponder boldly—'tis a base
 Abandonment of reason to resign
 Our right of thought—our last and only place
 Of refuge; this, at least, shall still be mine:
 Though from our birth the Faculty divine
 Is chained and tortured—cabined, cribbed, confined,
 And bred in darkness, lest the Truth should shine
 Too brightly on the unprepared mind,
 The beam pours in—for Time and Skill will couch the
 blind. ²

My altars are the mountains and the ocean,
 Earth, air, stars—all that springs from the great Whole,
 Who hath produced, and will receive, the soul. ³

If I were to live over again, I do not know what I
 would change in my life, unless it were *for—not to have
 lived at all*. All history and experience, and the rest,

¹ Letter to Miss Milbanke, March 3, 1814.

² From *Childe Harold*, Canto iv. cxxvi., cxxvii. (1818).

³ From *Don Juan*, Canto iii. st. civ. (1821).

teaches us that the good and evil are pretty equally balanced in this existence, and that what is most to be desired is an easy passage out of it. What can it give us but years? and those have little of good but their ending.¹

Of the immortality of the soul it appears to me that there can be little doubt, if we attend for a moment to the action of mind; it is in perpetual activity. I used to doubt of it, but reflection has taught me better. It acts also so very independent of body—in dreams, for instance; incoherently and *madly*, I grant you, but still it is mind, and much more mind than when we are awake. Now that this should not act *separately*, as well as jointly, who can pronounce? The stoics, Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius, call the present state “a soul which drags a carcass”—a heavy chain, to be sure; but all chains, being material, may be shaken off. How far our future life will be *individual*, or, rather, how far it will at all resemble our *present* existence, is another question; but that the mind is eternal seems as probable as that the body is not so. Of course I here venture upon the question without recurring to revelation, which, however, is at least as rational a solution of it as any other. A *material* resurrection seems strange, and even absurd, except for purposes of punishment; and all punishment which is to *revenge* rather than *correct* must be *morally wrong*; and *when the world is at an end*, what moral or warning purpose *can* eternal tortures answer? Human passions have probably disfigured the divine doctrines here;—but the whole thing is inscrutable.²

¹ From his *Journal*, 1824.

² *Ibid.*

It is useless to tell me *not to reason* but to *believe*. You might as well tell a man not to wake but *sleep*. And then to *bully* with torments, and all that! I cannot help thinking that the *menace* of hell makes as many devils as the severe penal codes of inhuman humanity make villains.¹

I have often been inclined to materialism in philosophy, but could never bear its introduction into *Christianity*, which appears to me essentially founded upon the *soul*. For this reason Priestley's Christian Materialism always struck me as deadly. Believe the resurrection of the *body* if you will, but *not without a soul*. The deuce is in it, if, after having had a soul (as surely the *mind*, or whatever you call it, *is*) in this world, we must part with it in the *next*, even for an immortal materiality! I own my partiality for *spirit*.²

“No man would live his life over again” is an old and true saying which all can resolve for themselves. At the same time, there are probably *moments* in most men's lives which they would live over the rest of life to *regain*. Else why do we live at all?³

ARTHUR SCHOPENHAUER

(1788–1860)

OUR life is like a journey on which, as we advance, the landscape takes a different view from that which it presented at first, and changes again as we come nearer. This is just what happens—especially

¹ From his *Journal*, 1824.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

with our wishes. We often find something else, nay, something better than what we were looking for; and what we look for, we often find on a very different path from that on which we began a vain search. Instead of finding, as we expected, pleasure, happiness, joy, we get experience, insight, knowledge—a real and permanent blessing, instead of a fleeting and illusory one.¹

A complete and adequate notion of life can never be attained by any one who does not reach old age; for it is only the old man who sees life whole and knows its natural course; it is only he who is acquainted—and this is most important—not only with its entrance, like the rest of mankind, but with its exit too; so that he alone has a full sense of its utter vanity, whilst the others never cease to labour under the false notion that everything will come right in the end.²

When a man is old, to die is the only thing that awaits him; while if he is young, he may expect to live; and the question arises which of the two fates is the more hazardous, and if life is not a matter which, on the whole, it is better to have behind one than before? Does not the preacher say: *the day of death [is better] than the day of one's birth?* It is certainly a rash thing to wish for long life; for, as the Spanish proverb has it, it means to see much evil,—*Quien vida vive mucho mal vive.*³

No man ought to expect much from others, or, in general, from the external world. What one human

¹ From *Counsels and Maxims*.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

being can be to another is not a very great deal; in the end every one stands alone, and the important thing is *who* it is that stands alone. . . . As Goldsmith puts it in *The Traveller*—

Still to ourselves in every place consign'd
Our own felicity we make or find. . . .

There is not much to be got anywhere in the world. It is filled with misery and pain; and if a man escapes these, boredom lies in wait for him at every corner. Nay more; it is evil which generally has the upper hand, and folly makes the most noise. Fate is cruel, and mankind pitiable. In such a world as this, a man who is rich in himself is like a bright, warm, happy room at Christmastide, while without are the frost and snow of a December night. . . .

Life is such a poor business that the strictest economy must be exercised in its good things. Youth has enough and to spare in itself, and must rest content with what it has. But when the delights and joys of life fall away in old age, as the leaves from a tree in autumn, fame buds forth opportunely, like a plant that is green in winter. Fame is, as it were, the fruit that must grow all the summer before it can be enjoyed at Yule. There is no greater consolation in age than the feeling of having put the whole force of one's youth into works which still remain young.¹

¹ From *The Wisdom of Life*.

BRYAN WALLER PROCTER

(1787-1874)

I NO longer look at the world through a rose-coloured glass. The prospect, I am sorry to say, is gray, grim, dull, barren, full of withered leaves, without flowers, or, if there be any, all of them trampled down, soiled, discoloured, and without fragrance.

I have grown old, and apathetic, and stupid. All I care for in the way of personal enjoyment is quiet, ease—to have nothing to do, nothing to think of. My only glance is backward. There is so little before me that I would rather not look that way.

My youth? I wonder where it has gone. It has left me with grey hairs and rheumatism, and plenty of (too many other) infirmities. I stagger and stumble along, with almost seventy-six years on my head, upon failing limbs, which no longer enable me to walk half a mile. . . . Sometimes I wish that I had tried harder for what is called Fame, but generally (as now) I care very little about it. After all—unless one could be Shakespeare, which (clearly) is not any easy matter—of what value is a little puff of smoke from a review?

How short it is to look back on life! Why, I saw the home, the other day, where I used to play with a wooden sword when I was five years old! It cannot surely be eighty years ago! What has occurred since? . . . A few nonsense verses, a flogging or two (richly deserved), and a few whitebait dinners, and the whole is reckoned up.¹

¹ From *Autobiographical Fragments*.

MICHAEL FARADAY (1791-1867)

THOUGH I pretend not to have been much involved in the fogs, mists, and clouds of misfortune, yet I have seen enough to know that many things usually designated as troubles are merely so from our own particular view of them, or else ultimately resolve themselves into blessings. Do not imagine that I cannot feel for the distresses of others, or that I am entirely ignorant of those which seem to threaten friends for whom both you and I are much concerned. I do feel for those who are oppressed either by real or imaginary evils, and I know the one to be as heavy as the other. But I think I derive a certain degree of steadiness and placidity amongst such feelings by a point of mental conviction, for which I take no credit as a piece of knowledge or philosophy, and which has often been blamed as mere apathy. . . . The point is this: in all kinds of knowledge I perceive that my views are insufficient and my judgment imperfect. In experiments I come to conclusions which, if partly right, are sure to be in part wrong; if I correct by other experiments, I advance a step, my old error is in part diminished, but is always left with a tinge of humanity, evidenced by its imperfection. . . . In affairs of life 'tis the same thing; my views of a thing at a distance and close at hand never correspond, and the way out of a trouble which I desire is never that which really opens before me. Now when in all these, and in all kinds of knowledge and experience, the course is still the same, ever imperfect to us, but terminating

in good, and when all events are evidently at the disposal of a Power which is conferring benefits continually upon us, which, though given by means and in ways we do not comprehend, may always well claim our acknowledgment at last, may we not be induced to suspend our dull spirits and thoughts when things look cloudy, and, providing as well as we can against the shower, actually *cheer our spirits* by thoughts of the good things it will bring with it? and will not the experience of our past lives convince us that in doing this we are far more likely to be right than wrong?¹

There is no philosophy in my religion. I am of a very small and despised sect of Christians, known, if known at all, as *Sandemansians*, and our hope is founded on the faith that is in Christ. But though the natural works of God can never by any possibility come in contradiction with the higher things that belong to our future existence, and must with everything concerning Him ever glorify Him, still I do not think it at all necessary to tie the study of the natural sciences and religion together, and, in my intercourse with my fellow-creatures, that which is religious and that which is philosophical have ever been two distinct things.²

High as man is placed above the creatures around him, there is a higher and far more exalted position within his view; and the ways are infinite in which he occupies his thoughts about the fears, or hopes, or expectations of a future life. I believe that the truth of that future cannot be brought to his knowledge by

¹ From letter to E. Barnard, July 1826.

² From letter to a lady, October 24, 1844.

any exertion of his mental powers, however exalted they may be; that it is made known to him by other teaching than his own, and is received through simple belief of the testimony given. . . . I have never seen anything incompatible between those things of man which can be known by the spirit of man which is within him, and those higher things concerning his future which he cannot know by that spirit.¹

I cannot think that death has to the Christian anything in it that should make it a rare, or other than a constant, thought; out of the view of death comes the view of the life beyond the grave, as out of the view of sin (that true and real view which the Holy Spirit alone can give to a man) comes the glorious hope; without the conviction of sin there is no ground of hope to the Christian. As far as he is permitted for the trial of his faith to forget the conviction of sin, he forgets his hope, he forgets the need of Him who became sin, or a sin-offering, for His people, and overcame death by dying. And though death be repugnant to the flesh, yet, where the Spirit is given, to die is gain.²

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

(1792-1822)

I AM content to see no farther into futurity than Plato and Bacon. My mind is tranquil; I have no fears and some hopes. In our present gross material

¹ From lecture at the Royal Institution, 1854.

² From letter to Mrs. Deacon, August 12, 1859.

state our faculties are clouded; when Death removes our clay coverings the mystery will be solved.¹

Death is the veil which those who live call life; they sleep, and it is lifted. Intelligence should be imperishable.²

I hope, but my hopes are not unmixed with fear for what will befall this inestimable spirit when we appear to die.³

The One remains, the many change and pass;
 Heaven's light forever shines, Earth's shadows fly;
 Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,
 Stains the white radiance of Eternity,
 Until Death tramples it to fragments.—Die,
 If thou wouldst be with that which thou dost seek!
 Follow where all is fled!—Rome's azure sky,
 Flowers, ruins, statues, music, words, are weak
 The glory they transfuse with fitting truth to speak.

Why linger, why turn back, why shrink, my Heart?
 Thy hopes are gone before: from all things here
 They have departed; thou shouldst now depart!
 A light is past from the revolving year,
 And man, and woman; and what still is dear
 Attracts to crush, repels to make thee wither.
 The soft sky smiles,—the low wind whispers near;
 'Tis Adonais calls! oh, hasten thither,
 No more let Life divide what Death can join together.⁴

¹ From Trelawney's *Recollections of the Last Days of Shelley and Byron*.

² *Ibid.*

³ From *Journal*, July 1814.

⁴ From "Adonais" (1821).

ALPHONSE DE LAMARTINE

(1792–1869)

I DO not believe myself to be either the first or the last of men: I think I am simply what God made me—a man subject to ordinary changes; placed by Providence in the world; rather superior to the vulgar herd; trained in a pure, noble, and virtuous home—an atmosphere, indeed, which does not assert itself, but which makes itself *felt*, especially by a child; afterwards perverted, although not radically, by association with wild, vicious young men of my own age, the contact with whom insensibly chilled both heart and soul; then brought back and sobered by age to do my work of good and evil in the world; bearing ever about with me the remembrance of my father's honourable career, of my mother's tender piety; and at last growing old with a quiet resignation, submitting to the judgments of men, and waiting with confidence for that of my Creator—that is all! May He forgive and have mercy upon me! I ask but for His justice; for His justice is but the expression of His mercy.¹

WILLIAM CHARLES MAC-

READY . . . (1793–1873)

N EARLY fifty-eight years of my life are numbered: that life was begun in a very mediocre position—mere respectability. . . . My heart's thanks are con-

¹ From *Twenty-five Years of My Life*, Book i. 1.

stantly offered to God Almighty for the share of good He has permitted to be allotted to me in this life. I have attained the loftiest position in the art to which my destiny directed me, have gained the respect of the honoured and respected, and the friendship of the highly-gifted, amiable, and distinguished. My education, my habits, my turn of mind did not suggest to me the thought of amassing wealth, or I might have been rich; I have what I trust will prove competence, and most grateful am I for its possession. My home is one of comfort and of love, and I look towards it with cheerfulness and delightful security of heart, and most gratefully and earnestly do I bless the name and thank the bounty of Almighty God, Who has vouchsafed such an indulgence to me, undeserving as I have been, and sinner as I am. Blessed be His name! Amen.¹

There surely cannot be an end to all here, or all who have innocently suffered, from the blessed Jesus downwards, have existed for sorrow without comfort, and seemingly without cause. But He Who made us must have His own purposes. Let us wait and adore.²

JOHN KEATS. . . . (1795–1821)

FOR a life of Sensations rather than of Thoughts! It is “a Vision in the form of Youth,” a shadow of reality to come—and this consideration has further convinced me,—for it has come as auxiliary to another favourite speculation of mine—that we shall enjoy

¹ From *Diary*, February 3, 1851.

² *Ibid.* August 17.

ourselves hereafter by having what we called happiness on Earth repeated in a finer tone.¹ . . .

You know my ideas about Religion. I do not think myself more in the right than other people, and that nothing in this world is proveable.²

The goings on of the world makes me dizzy. There you are with Birkbeck—here I am with Brown—sometimes I fancy an immense separation, and sometimes, as at present, a direct communication of Spirit with you. That will be one of the grandeurs of immortality. There will be no space, and consequently the only commerce between spirits will be by their intelligence of each other—when they will completely understand each other, while we in this world merely comprehend each other in different degrees—the higher the degree of good so higher is our Love and Friendship.³

The common cognomen of this world among the misguided and superstitious is “a vale of tears,” from which we are to be redeemed by a certain arbitrary interposition of God and taken to Heaven. What a little circumscribed straightened notion! Call the world if you please “The vale of Soul-making.” Then you will find out the use of the world (I am speaking now in the highest terms for human nature, admitting it to be immortal, which I will here take for granted, for the purpose of showing a thought which has struck me concerning it). I say “*Soul-making*”—

¹ From letter to Benjamin Bailey, November 1817.

² From letter to same, March 1818.

³ From letter to George and Georgiana Keats, 1818-19.

Soul as distinguished from an Intelligence. There may be intelligences or sparks of the divinity in millions—but they are not Souls till they acquire identities, till each one is personally itself. Intelligences are atoms of perception—they know and they see and they are pure, in short they are God. How then are souls to be made? How then are these sparks which are God to have identity given them—so as ever to possess a bliss peculiar to each one's individual existence? How but by the medium of a world like this? This point I scarcely wish to consider because I think it a grander system of salvation than the Christian religion—or rather it is a system of Spirit-creation. This is effected by three grand materials acting the one upon the other for a series of years. These three materials are the *Intelligence*, the *human heart* (as distinguished from intelligence or Mind), and the *World* or *Elemental Space*, suited from the proper action of *Mind and Heart* on each other for the purpose of forming the *Soul* or *Intelligence destined to possess the sense of Identity*.¹

For six months before I was taken ill I had not passed a tranquil day. . . . The beauties of nature had lost their power over me. How astonishingly (here I must premise that illness, as far as I can judge in so short a time, has relieved my mind of a load of deceptive thoughts and images, and makes me perceive things in a truer light),—how astonishingly does the chance of leaving the world impress a sense of its natural beauties upon us! Like poor Falstaff, though I do not “babble,” I think of green fields; I muse with

¹ From letter to same, April 15, 1819.

the greatest affection on every flower I have known from my infancy; their shapes and colours are as new to me as if I had just created them with a superhuman fancy. It is because they are connected with the most thoughtless and the happiest moments of our lives. I have seen foreign flowers in hot-houses, of the most beautiful nature, but I do not care a straw for them. The simple flowers of our Spring are what I want to see again.¹

SIR HENRY HAVELOCK

(1795–1857)

IT was while the writer was sailing across the wide Atlantic toward Bengal (1823) that the spirit of God came to him with its offer of peace and mandate of love, which, though for some time resisted, at length prevailed. Then was wrought that great change in his soul which has been productive of unspeakable advantage to him in time, and he trusts secured him happiness in eternity.²

I have for forty years so ruled my life that when death came I might face it without fear.³

THOMAS CARLYLE (1795–1881)

MY Belief in a special Providence grows yearly stronger, unsubduable, impregnable.⁴

¹ From letter to James Rice, February 16, 1820.

² Described by himself.

³ Spoken to Sir James Outram in his last moments.

⁴ From *Correspondence with Emerson*, May 13, 1835.

O perhaps we *shall* all meet YONDER, and the tears be wiped from all eyes! One thing is no Perhaps: surely we *shall* all meet, *if* it be the will of the Maker of us. If it be not His will,—then is it not better so?¹

We ought to say, May the Heavens give us thankful hearts! For, in truth, there are blessings which do, like sun-gleams in wild weather, make this rough life beautiful with rainbows here and there. Indicating, I suppose, that there *is* a Sun, and general Heart of Goodness, behind all that; for which, as I say again, let us be thankful evermore.²

In general Death seems beautiful to me; sweet and great. But Life also is beautiful, is great and divine, were it never to be joyful any more.³

The gloom of approaching old age is very considerable upon a man; and on the whole one contrives to take the very ugliest view, now and then, of all beautifullest things, and to shut one's lips with a kind of grim defiance, a kind of imperial sorrow which is almost like felicity,—so completely and composedly wretched, one is equal to the very gods!⁴

Man follows man. His life is as a tale that has been told; yet under Time does there not lie Eternity? Perhaps my father, all that essentially was my father, is even now near me, with me. Both he and I are

¹ From *Correspondence with Emerson*, November 5, 1836.

² *Ibid.* September 25, 1838.

³ *Ibid.* December 2, 1838.

⁴ *Ibid.* June 25, 1852.

with God. Perhaps, if it so please God, we shall in some higher state of being meet one another, recognise one another. As it is written, We shall be for ever with God. The possibility, nay (in some way), the certainty of perennial existence daily grows plainer to me. "The essence of whatever was, is, or shall be, even now is." God is great. God is good. His will be done, for it will be right.¹

I live mostly alone with vanished shadows of the Past. Many of them rise for a moment inexpressibly tender. One is never long absent from me. Gone, gone, but very beautiful and dear. Eternity, which cannot be far off, is my one strong city. I look into it fixedly now and then. All terrors about it seem to me superfluous; all knowledge about it, any the least glimmer of certain knowledge, impossible to living mortal. The universe is full of love, but also of inexorable sternness and severity, and it remains for ever true that God reigns. Patience! Silence! Hope!²

"Youth," says somebody, "is a garland of roses." I did not find it such. "Age is a crown of thorns." Neither is this altogether true for me. If sadness and sorrow tend to loosen us from life, they make the place of rest desirable. If incurable grief be *love* all steeped in tears, and lead us to pious thoughts and longings, is not grief an earnest blessing to us? Alas! that one is not pious always; that it is anger, bitterness, impatience, and discontent that occupies one's poor weak heart so much oftener. . . .

¹ Written in 1866.

² From *Journal*, March 8, 1867.

The last stage of life's journey is necessarily dark, sad, and carried on under steadily increasing difficulties. We are alone; all our loved ones and cheering fellow-pilgrims gone. Our strength is failing, wasting more and more; day is sinking on us; night coming, not metaphorically only. The road, to our growing weakness, dimness, injurability of every kind, becomes more and more obstructed, intricate, difficult to feet and eyes; a road among brakes and brambles, swamps, and stumbling places; no welcome *shine* of a *human* cottage with its hospitable candle now alight for us in these waste solitudes. Our eyes, if we have any light, rest only on the eternal stars. Thus we stagger on, impediments increasing, force diminishing, till at length there is equality between the terms, and we do all infallibly ARRIVE. So it has been from the beginning; so it will be to the end—for ever a mystery and miracle before which human intellect falls *dumb*. Do we reach those *stars* then? Do we sink in those swamps amid the dance of dying dreams? Is the threshold we step over but the *brink* in that instance, and our *home* thenceforth an infinite Inane? God, our Eternal Maker, alone knows, and it shall be as He wills, not as we would.¹

I wish I had strength to elucidate and write down intelligibly to my fellow-creatures what my outline of belief about God essentially is. It might be useful to a poor protoplasm generation, all seemingly determined on those poor terms to try Atheism for a while. They will have to return from that, I can tell them, or go down altogether into the abyss. I find lying deep

¹ From *Journal*, December 22, 1867.

in me withal some confused but ineradicable flicker of belief that there is a "particular providence." Sincerely I do, as it were, believe this, to my own surprise.¹

My strength is faded nearly quite away, and it begins to be more and more evident to me that I shall not long have to struggle under this burden of life, but soon go to the refuge that is appointed for us all. For a long time back I have been accustomed to look at the *Ernster Freund* as the most merciful and indispensable refuge appointed by the Great Creator for His wearied children whose work is done. Alas, alas! the final mercy of God, it in late years always appears to me, is that He delivers us from life which has become a task too hard for us.²

SIR CHARLES LYELL

(1797-1875)

YOUR articles on a "Future State" in the *Theological Review* have interested me much, but they confirm my opinion that we are so much out of our depth when we attempt to treat of this subject, that we gain little but doubt in such speculation. . . . I am told that the same philosophy which is opposed to a belief in a future state undertakes to prove that every one of our acts and thoughts are the necessary result of antecedent events and conditions, and that there can be no such thing as free-will in man. I am quite content that both doctrines should stand on the same founda-

¹ From *Journal*, December 28, 1870.

² *Ibid.* November 7, 1878.

tion, for as I cannot help being convinced that I have the power of exerting free-will, however great a mystery the possibility of this may be, so the continuance of a spiritual life may be true, however inexplicable or incapable of proof. . . . I am told by some that if any of our traditionary beliefs make us happier and lead us to estimate humanity more highly, we ought to be careful not to endeavour to establish any scientific truths which would lessen and lower our estimate of man's place in nature; in short, we should do nothing to disturb any man's faith, if it be a delusion which increases his happiness. But I hope and believe that the discovery and propagation of every truth, and the dispelling of every error, tends to improve and better the condition of man, though the act of reforming old opinions and institutions causes so much pain and misery.¹

HONORÉ DE BALZAC

(1799-1850)

FOR the soul there arises every day a fresh spring-time and a beautiful fresh morning. . . . You cannot judge of what your future life will be by that which is past. How many have begun to lead a fresh, lovely, and peaceful life at a much more advanced age than yours! We exist only in our souls. You cannot be sure that your soul has come to its highest development.²

Upon what foundation is religious belief grounded?

¹ From letter to Miss F. P. Cobbe, 1873.

² From letter to the Duchesse d'Abrantès, Paris, 1831.

Upon the consciousness of the infinite that is within us, which proves that there exists something beyond us, and that leads us by severe induction to religion—to hope.¹

Sixteen hours a day dedicated to the making of a literary monument which will be gigantic, leave no time at my disposal. This privation of the pleasures of the affections is the heaviest tax I can pay to futurity. As to the pleasures of the world or of life, Art has killed them all, without regret on my part.²

My friend, . . . all good fortune is built up by courage and industry. I have seen many evil days; but by dint of courage, and especially by hope, I have always struggled through.³

HEINRICH HEINE (1799-1856)

LET others enjoy the thought of the loved one wreathing their tombstone with flowers and moistening it with faithful tears. O women! hate me, laugh at me, mock me!—but let me live! Life is all too merrily sweet, and the world is all too lovingly confused. It is the dream of a wine-drunk divinity, who has slipped out without leave-taking from the symposium of the gods and laid himself to sleep in a lonesome star, and knows not that he himself creates what he dreams. His dream-pictures take now madly

¹ From letter to Louise, about 1836-37.

² From letter to Théodore Dablin, Paris, January 1845.

³ From letter to M. Laurant-Fan, Paris, December 1849.

mingled shapes, now shapes harmoniously reasonable,—the Iliad, Plato, the Battle of Marathon, Moses, the *Venus de Medici*, Strasburg Cathedral, the French Revolution, Hegel, Steamboats, are individual happy thoughts in this creating god-dream; but it will not last long. The god will awake, will rub his drowsy eyes, will laugh, and our world will relapse into nothingness—nay, it will not even have existed. But yet I live. Though only the shadow in a dream, still this is better than the cold, blank emptiness of death. Life is the highest of earth's good; its bitterest evil is Death.¹

All my reason, all my knowledge tells me that the belief in a personal continuance after death is an illusion. There is no trace of this in the Old Testament. Moses was much too healthy a man for this. That sickly sect who proceeded from Christ to Christianity, and subsequently to asceticism, invented immortality. In my understanding I am thoroughly convinced of our cessation of existence. I cannot seize or comprehend it because I still exist. I only understand that with egotists the thought of a cessation of existence is a consoling one. To a loving heart it is, in spite of all science, inconceivable.²

For four years now I have renounced all philosophic pride and am returned back to religious ideas and feelings. I die in the belief of one only God, the eternal creator of the world, whose pity I implore for my immortal soul. I lament that I have at times spoken of sacred things without due reverence, but I was carried away more by the spirit of the time than

¹ From *Book le Grand* (trans. Snodgrass).

² Said to Adolph Stahr.

by my own inclinations. If I unwittingly have violated good manners and morality, which is the true essence of all monotheism, I pray both God and man for pardon.¹

SIR HENRY TAYLOR

(1800–1886)

I QUITE agree with you that it is very disagreeable to grow old; and I have always thought that if I had been Providence I would have made life *begin* with dotage and decrepitude, and go on freshening and improving to a primal death. . . . After fifty, one has not the loss of youth to look forward to, and that is one source of sadness removed. And to me it used to be, thirty or forty years ago, a chief source of sadness: for I was very fond of my youth, and cared more for it than for eyes, ears, brains, stomach, and all the rest. Now they have a fair share of my regard, and I shall be sorry for their decay. . . . My main resource is in my business. Acting with a purpose, with steadiness, and regularity is the best support to the spirits, and the surest protection against sad thoughts. . . . Sydney Smith's precept is, "Take short views of life." I had felt the same thing when I said that

Foresight is a melancholy gift,
Which bares the bald and speeds the all-too-swift.²

¹ From the seventh clause of his Will.

² From letter to Mrs. Edward Villiers, 1862.

HARRIET MARTINEAU

(1802–1876)

I NEITHER know nor much care how it happens that I find myself sinking more rapidly than hitherto. All I know is that I am fully satisfied with my share of the interest and amusement of life, and of the value of the knowledge which has come to me by means of the Brain, which is worth all the rest of us.¹

My household believe that the end is not far off. Meantime I have no cares or troubles beyond the bodily uneasiness (which, however, I don't deny to be an evil). I cannot think of any future as at all probable, except the "annihilation" from which some people recoil with so much horror. I find myself here in the universe—I know not how, whence, or why. I see everything in the universe go out and disappear, and I see no reason for supposing that it is not an actual and entire death. And for *my* part, I have no objection to such an extinction. . . . Now that the event draws near, and that I see how fully my household expect my death pretty soon, the universe opens so widely before my view, and I see the old notions of death and scenes to follow to be so merely human—so impossible to be true, when one glances through the range of science—that I see nothing to be done but to wait, without fear or hope or ignorant prejudice, for the expiration of life. I have no wish for further experience, nor have I any fear of it. Under the weariness of illness I long to be asleep, but I have not set my mind on any state.²

¹ From letter to a friend, January 25, 1876.

² From letter to Mr. Atkinson, May 19, 1876.

VICTOR HUGO (1802-1885)

YOU say, "Where goest thou?" I cannot tell,
 And still go on. If but the way be straight,
 It cannot go amiss! before me lies
 Dawn and the Day; the Night behind me; that
 Suffices me; I break the bounds; I *see*,
 And nothing more; *believe*, and nothing less.
 My future is not one of my concerns.¹

THOMAS LOVELL BEDDOES

(1803-1849)

TO-DAY is a thought, a fear is to-morrow,
 And yesterday is our sin and our sorrow;
 And life is a death
 Where the body's the tomb,
 And the pale sweet breath
 Is buried alive in its hideous gloom.
 Then waste no tear,
 For we are the dead; the living are here,
 In the stealing earth, and the heavy bier.
 Death lives but an instant, and is but a sigh,
 And his son is unnamed immortality,
 Whose being is thine. Dear ghost, so to die
 Is to live,—and life is a worthless lie.—
 Then we weep for ourselves, and wish thee good-bye.²

Life was too great a bore on one peg, and that a bad one.³

¹ "The Poet's Simple Faith" (trans. by Edward Dowden).

² "A Dirge."

³ From note, written in pencil, found folded on the poet's bosom, as he lay insensible after taking poison.

HECTOR BERLIOZ (1803-1867)

IT seems to me that I am going down hill with fearful velocity; life is so short, and the thought of its approaching end appears to have occurred to me very often for some time past, and so it comes to pass that I snatch with fierce avidity, rather than gather, the flowers within my reach as I glide down the slope of the bitter incline.¹

I am in a hurry to untie or cut all the bonds which chain me to art, so that I may be at any time ready to say to death, "Whenever you please!" I dare not complain when I think of your intolerable sufferings. . . . Are such sufferings the compulsory consequences of our organisations? Must we be punished for having throughout our lives adored the beautiful? Probably so. We have drunk too deeply of the intoxicating cup; we have run too far after the ideal.²

True it is that this adoration of art renders us cruelly exacting, and makes everyday life, which, alas! is the real life, press twice as heavily upon us. What are we to do? To hope? To despair? To resign ourselves? To sleep? To die? Not so. After all, by faith alone we are saved; by faith only we are lost. "All the world's a stage." What world? The earth? The world of fashion? And are there players, too, in the other worlds? Are the dramas there as sad or as visible as among us? Are their theatres as tardy in

¹ From letter to Humbert, October 3, 1841.

² From letter written August 26, 1862.

enlightenment, and have their audiences time to grow old before their eyes are opened so that they see clearly? ¹

RALPH WALDO EMERSON

(1803–1882)

I ASK constantly of all men whether life may not be poetic as well as stupid? ²

My whole philosophy—which is very real—teaches acquiescence and optimism. ³

To live too long is the capital misfortune, and I sometimes think, if we shall not parry it by better art of living, we shall learn to include in our morals some bolder control of the facts. ⁴

Let a man learn to look for the permanent in the mutable and fleeting; let him learn to bear the disappearance of things he was wont to reverence, without losing his reverence; let him learn that he is here, not to work, but to be worked upon; and that, though abyss open under abyss, and opinion displace opinion, all are at last contained in the Eternal Cause—

If my bark sink, 'tis to another sea. ⁵

All the comfort I have found teaches me to confide

¹ From letter written November 10, 1864.

² From letter to Carlyle, June 30, 1840.

³ From letter to same, July 31, 1841.

⁴ From letter to same, September 26, 1864.

⁵ From essay on "Montaigne."

that I shall not have less in times and places that I do not yet know. I have known admirable persons without feeling that they exhaust the possibilities of virtue and talent. I have seen what glories of climate, of summer mornings and evenings, of midnight sky,—I have enjoyed the benefits of all this complex machinery of arts and civilisation, and its results of comfort. The good Power can easily provide me millions more as good. Shall I hold on with both hands to every paltry possession? All I have seen teaches me to trust the Creator for all I have not seen. Whatever it be which the great Providence prepares for us, it must be something large and generous, and in the great style of his works. The future must be up to the style of our faculties,—of memory, of hope, of imagination, of reason. I have a house, a closet which holds my books, a table, a garden, a field; are these, any or all, a reason for refusing the angel who beckons me away,—as if there were no room or skill elsewhere that could reproduce for me as my like or my enlarging wants may require? We wish to live for what is great, not for what is mean. I do not wish to live for the sake of my warm house, my orchard, or my pictures.¹

Of immortality, the soul, when well employed, is incurious. It is so well that it is sure it will be well. It asks no questions of the Supreme Power. The son of Antiochus asked his father when he would join battle? “Dost thou fear,” replied the King, “that thou only in all the army wilt not hear the trumpet?” ’Tis a higher thing to confide, that, if it is best we should live, we shall live,—’tis higher to have this con-

¹ From essay on “Immortality.”

viction than to have the lease of indefinite centuries and millenniums and æons. Higher than the question of our duration is the question of our deserving. Immortality will come to such as are fit for it, and he who would be a great soul in future must be a great soul now. It is a doctrine too great to rest on any legend, that is, on any man's experience but our own. It must be proved, if at all, from our own activity and designs, which imply an interminable future for their play.¹

As the bird trims her to the gale,
 I trim myself to the storm of time,
 I man the rudder, reef the sail,
 Obey the voice at eve obeyed at prime :
 "Lowly, faithful, banish fear,
 Right onward drive unharmed ;
 The port, well worth the cruise, is near,
 And every wave is charmed." ²

NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE

(1804-1864)

[Hawthorne's imagination was touched by the announcement that an Italian had discovered some chemical means of petrifying the dead, converting them as it were into statues (Conway).]

BUT never may we—the writer—stand amid that marble crowd! In God's own time we would fain be buried as our fathers were. We desire to give

¹ From essay on "Worship."

² From "Terminus."

mortality its own. Our clay must not be balked of its repose. We are willing to let it moulder beneath the little hillock, and that the sods should gradually settle down and leave no traces of our grave. We have no yearnings for the grossness of this earthly immortality. If somewhat of our soul and intellect might live in the memory of men, we should be glad. It would be an image of the ethereal and indestructible. But what belongs to earth, let the earth take it.¹

Here I sit in my old accustomed chamber, where I used to sit in days gone by. . . . Here I have written many tales,—many that have been burned to ashes, many that have doubtless deserved the same fate. This claims to be called a haunted chamber, for thousands upon thousands of visions have appeared to me in it, and some few of them have become visible to the world. . . . So much of my lonely youth was wasted here, and here my mind and character were formed; and here I have been glad and hopeful, and here I have been despondent. And here I sat a long, long time waiting patiently for the world to know me, and sometimes wondering why it did not know me sooner, or whether it would ever know me at all,—at least till I were in my grave. And sometimes it seemed as if I were already in the grave, with only life enough to be chilled and benumbed. But oftener I was happy,—at least as happy as I then knew how to be, or was aware of the possibility of being. By and by, the world found me out in my lonely chamber, and called me forth,—not, indeed, with a loud roar of acclamation, but rather with a still small voice,—and forth I went,

¹ From the *American Magazine of Useful Knowledge*, 1836.

but found nothing in the world I thought preferable to my solitude till now. . . . And now I begin to understand why I was imprisoned so many years in this lonely chamber, and why I could never break through the viewless bolts and bars; for if I had sooner made my escape into the world, I should have grown hard and rough, and been covered with earthly dust, and my heart might have become callous by rude encounters with the multitude. . . . But living in solitude till the fulness of time was come, I still kept the dew of my youth and the freshness of my heart. . . . I used to think I could imagine all passions, all feelings, and states of the heart and mind; but how little did I know! . . . Indeed, we are but shadows; we are not endowed with real life, and all that seems most real about us is but the thinnest substance of a dream,—till the heart be touched. That touch creates us,—then we begin to be,—thereby we are beings of reality and inheritors of eternity.¹

I cannot finish it [the *Dolliver Romance*] unless a great change comes over me, and if I make too great an effort to do so, it will be my death; not that I should care much for that if I could fight the battle through and win it, thus ending a life of much smoulder and a scanty fire in a blaze of glory. . . . I am not low-spirited, nor fanciful, nor freakish, but look what seems to me realities in the face, and am ready to take whatever may come.²

¹ From *American Note-Books*, October 4, 1840.

² From letter written to Mr. Fields about three months before his death.

GEORGE SAND . . (1804–1876)

(MME. DUDEVANT)

LIKE yourself, I am not anxious for death. Being convinced that life does not end, that it is not even interrupted, that all is but passage and function, I go on with the most entire confidence in the unknown. I henceforth abstain from seeking to divine or to define that unknown; I see great danger in those efforts of imagination which render us systematic and intolerant, and close our minds against progress, whose breath is always blowing from all points of the horizon. But I have the idea of the never-ceasing and everlasting future state (*le devenir incessant et éternel*), and, whatever it may be, its being logical, and consequently noble and good, is inwardly demonstrated to me by an invincible sentiment. It is enough to live in the love of good and in relative calm, in the degree of serenity fatally limited and transient which our relation with the universe and with our fellow-creatures permits us to enjoy.¹

We must not advance the hour when it will please God to unite us to those we have loved; and when that time comes, we will also leave something of ourselves in the hearts that shall have been devoted to us. We do not die altogether in this world, and yet we live more fully elsewhere. In the bosom of God there is neither vengeance nor torment, there is only justice and goodness; in that bosom we shall live for ever, under whatever form, and whatever may be our titles to that

¹ From letter to M. Armand Barbès, January 1867.

eternal life. What that life will be we do not know; and it is precisely our ignorance of the fate He reserves for us that causes the sweetness and the merit of our confidence in Him. Rest assured that they who believed in damnation will alone be damned; yet that damnation, which we consider as eternal and terrible, can only be a new, transient, and not unbearable ordeal. God exists; He must be *good*. All religions whose aim is not confidence teach us the fear of God—that is, hatred of truth.¹

How life worries and affects you! For all that you complain of constitutes life. It never was at any time better for any one else. We feel it, we understand it, and therefore suffer from it more or less, and the more we are in advance of the times we live in, the more we suffer. We pass like shadows on a cloudy sky, through which the sun scarcely and seldom breaks, and we are ever inveighing against that sun, though it is not its fault. It is we who should get rid of our clouds.

You are too fond of literature; it will kill you, but you will not succeed in stamping out human folly. Poor dear folly! As for myself, I do not hate it. I look upon it with motherly eyes; for it is that of childhood, and childhood should always be sacred. . . . You forget there is something above art, viz., wisdom, of which art at its climax is but the expression. Wisdom comprises all that is beautiful, true, and good, and, of course, enthusiasm too. It teaches us to notice outside of us something loftier than what is in us, and to assimilate it gradually through contemplation and admiration.

¹ From letter to Mdle. Leroyer de Chantepie, January 1873.

But I shall never succeed to make you understand the way I look upon and secure *happiness*—that is, resignation to life, whatever it may be!¹

I do not say that mankind is on the road to the loftiest regions of good. Yet, I believe it in spite of all; but I do not discuss the point; it is useless, because we all judge after our own personal sight, and the general appearance is momentarily wretched and unpromising. Besides, it is not indispensable that I should believe in the salvation of the planet and of its inhabitants to credit the necessity of what is good and beautiful; if the planet rejects that law, it will perish; if its inhabitants refuse to accept it, they will be destroyed. Other stars will take the place of our planet, other beings replace its inhabitants; it will serve them both right! As for me, I wish to gravitate until my last breath, not because I hope or demand to be sent to a *better place* hereafter, but because my sole delight is to preserve myself and my family in the rising path. . . . Life is perhaps eternal, in which case toil must also be so. If so, let us bravely achieve our task. If otherwise, if the *self* perishes in its eternity, let us have the honour of having performed our ungrateful labour; it is our duty, for we have obvious duties to perform only towards ourselves and towards our fellow-creatures. What we destroy in ourselves is thereby destroyed in them too. Our degradation degrades them, and our falls precipitate their own; it is our duty to them to stand up so as to prevent their falling down. To wish for near death or for a long life is a weakness in either case.²

¹ From letter to M. Gustave Flaubert, December 1874.

² From letter to same, January 1876.

SIR RICHARD OWEN

(1804–1892)

WHEREVER you contemplate Nature you see renewal prepared for wearing out and passing away.

How narrow, how selfish, how akin to Egyptian darkness of thought seemed it then to repine that life must end—to deem of death only as an evil! Whereas, therein is the necessary stipulation for that succession which involves the purest pleasures of life—the reverential love of parents, the sweet affection for children, the closest union of hearts, as of husband and wife. Furthermore, add the assurance that all ends not here, that powers of work are entrusted gifts, with the glorious hope of a higher sphere of action, if they have been used as intended by our beneficent Creator.¹

FREDERICK DENISON

MAURICE . . . (1805–1872)

I NEVER dreamed of merging time in eternity. The phrases which suggest such a thought belong to the popular theology and seem to me most unsatisfactory.

I maintain that *time and eternity co-exist here*. The difficulty is to recognise the eternal state under our temporal conditions; not to lose eternity in time. . . .

¹ From lecture, “Wayside Gatherings and their Teachings,” 1867.

We must some day know that we are living and moving and having our being in God; we cannot always act upon the strange lie that the things which we see are those that determine what we are. But though I may speak of death as bringing us acquainted with eternity, face to face with it, I have no business, as far as I see at present, to speak of death as ending time. I do not exactly understand what that means. The eternal state I apprehend is the state of a spiritual being, out of time, living in spiritual relations, enjoying or suffering a spiritual inheritance. Its actual conditions will be determined by these, so at least I gather from Scripture, not the inward by the outward, as they seem to be (though they are not really) here.¹

Respecting the future state, I would try (1st) always to connect it with the unveiling or manifestation of Jesus Christ, as St. Paul and St. John do; (2nd) to connect it, as they do, with the restoration of the earth, and its deliverance from whatever hinders it from being the kingdom of God and of His Christ; (3rd) to connect it with the manifestation of Christ in the flesh as the Lord of Man, as his deliverer from all that degrades him from being the image of God and the member of a kind, into the slave of the world he is set to rule, and a self-seeker; (4th) to connect it with all our actual and present pursuits, occupations, duties, enjoyments, sufferings, so that the full fruit and result and consummation of these shall be what we look forward to, as the effect of their being restored to their obedience to Christ, and saved from all that is base or merely accidental; (5th) to connect it with continuous, though

¹ From letter written December 1853.

free and joyful labour, so that no redeemed spirit shall ever be imagined to be the possessor of a certain felicity, and not the warrior with Christ's enemies, so long as there are any to be put down; the ruler and judge of some province of His empire, the seeker and discoverer of the secrets of God's truth and glory, which He has hidden, that His children may search them out.¹

HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN . (1805-1875)

LIFE, after all, is the most lovely of fairy tales, and I often ask myself, with heart-felt emotion, Why does God grant me so much happiness? Where all is given one cannot be proud, one can only bow the head in humility and thankfulness.

If I could only go back to thirty, and yet retain all my experience, I would turn somersaults all the way down to Ostergade.²

Oh, how happy I am! How beautiful the world is! Life is so beautiful! It is just as if I were sailing into a land far, far away, where there is no pain, no sorrow.³

¹ From letter written September 1854.

² Written in his seventieth year.

³ Spoken a few weeks before his death.

JAMES MARTINEAU

(1805-1900)

IT is not from the persistence in itself of a meta-physical essence, but from the movement of *spiritual growth* and the experience of personal relations characteristic of an expanding nature, that all religious insight comes. And the unquenchable thirst that sends men (and surely the Christlike most of all) age after age to the Eternal Fountain for *more life* than can be found here, is due to their consciousness of capacities and affections that are an over-match for the conditions and the limits of the mortal lot, and are plainly equal to claims of larger scope and love deeper in intensity and diviner in its aims. Who does not know that he is made for more than he now is and does, and has to *climb* so long as he has a footing on this world? and see the higher steps he might yet take beyond the last, had he but the grant of *time*? We live by aspiration, hope, and worship; and unless the ideals which transcend the present reveal the realities of the future, death falls as the lightning flash and blights the promise of our being. How is it possible for one who is conscious of his relation to the "Father of Spirits" to believe himself thus flung off the ladder of ascent inviting him from earth to heaven?¹

JOHN STERLING (1806-1844)

I HAVE for many months been leading a dream life, fruitful in no result. For a long part of the time

¹ From letter to a friend.

I was lying in bed very ill, and indeed, as it seemed, near to death. The prospect was indistinct enough, but far from frightful, and at the worst of the disease it never occurred to me as possible that one's thoughts would terminate with one's pulse.¹

I fear nothing, and hope much.²

JOHN STUART MILL

(1806-1873)

I NEVER, indeed, wavered in the conviction that happiness is the test of all rules of conduct, and the end of life. But I now thought [about 1827] that this end was only to be attained by not making it the direct end. Those only are happy (I thought) who have their minds fixed on some object other than their own happiness; on the happiness of others, on the improvement of mankind, even on some art or pursuit, followed not as a means, but as itself an ideal end. Aiming thus at something else, they find happiness by the way. The enjoyments of life (such was now my theory) are sufficient to make it a pleasant thing, when they are taken *en passant*, without being made a principal object. Once make them so, and they are immediately felt to be insufficient. They will not bear a scrutinising examination. Ask yourself whether you are happy, and you cease to be so. The only chance is to treat, not happiness, but some end external to it, as the purpose of life. Let your self-consciousness, your

¹ From letter to Emerson, March 1843.

² From letter to the same, 1844.

scrutiny, your self-interrogation, exhaust themselves on that; and if otherwise fortunately circumstanced you will inhale happiness with the air you breathe, without dwelling on it or thinking about it, without either forestalling it in imagination, or putting it to flight by fatal questioning. This theory now became the basis of my philosophy of life. And I still [1861-70] hold to it as the best theory for all those who have but a moderate degree of sensibility and of capacity for enjoyment—that is, for the great majority of mankind.¹

Whatever else may be taken away from us by rational criticism, Christ is still left; a unique figure, not more unlike all his precursors than all his followers, even those who had the direct benefit of his personal teaching. It is of no use to say that Christ, as exhibited in the Gospels, is not historical, and that we know not how much of what is admirable has been superadded by the tradition of his followers. The tradition of followers suffices to insert any number of marvels. . . . But who among his disciples or among their proselytes was capable of inventing the sayings ascribed to Jesus, or of imagining the life and character revealed in the Gospels? . . . About the life and sayings of Jesus there is a stamp of personal originality, combined with profundity of insight, which, if we abandon the idle expectation of finding scientific precision where something very different was aimed at, must place the Prophet of Nazareth, even in the estimation of those who have no belief in his inspiration, in the very first rank of the men of sublime genius of whom our species can boast. When this pre-eminent genius is combined

¹ From *Autobiography*.

with the qualities of probably the greatest moral reformer and martyr to that mission who ever existed upon earth, religion cannot be said to have made a bad choice in pitching on this man as the ideal representative and guide of humanity; nor, even now, would it be easy, even for an unbeliever, to find a better translation of the rule of virtue from the abstract into the concrete, than to endeavour so to live that Christ would approve our life. When to this we add that, to the conception of the rational sceptic, it remains a possibility that Christ actually was what he supposed himself to be—not God, for he never made the smallest pretension to that character, and would probably have thought such a pretension as blasphemous as it seemed to the men who condemned him—but a man charged with a special, express, and unique commission from God to lead mankind to truth and virtue; we may well conclude that the influences of religion on the character, which will remain after rational criticism has done its utmost against the evidences of religion, are well worth preserving, and that what they lack in direct strength, as compared with those of a firmer belief, is more than compensated by the greater truth and rectitude of the morality they sanction.¹

JOHN GREENLEAF WHITTIER

(1807–1892)

I HAVE no longer youth and strength, and I have not much to hope for, as far as this life is concerned; but I enjoy life: “It is a pleasant thing to behold the sun.” I love Nature in her varied aspects;

¹ From *Essay on Theism* (written 1868-70).

and, as I grow older, I find much to love in my fellow-creatures, and also more to pity. I have the instinct of immortality, but the conditions of that life are unknown. I cannot conceive what my own identity, and that of dear ones gone before me, will be. And then the inescapable sense of sin in thought and deed, and doubtless some misconception of the character of God, makes the boldest of us cowards. Does thee remember the epitaph-prayer of Martin Elginbrod?—

Here lie I, Martin Elginbrod ;
Have pity on my soul, Lord God,
As I wad do were I Lord God
An' ye were Martin Elginbrod.

I think there is a volume of comfort in that verse. We Christians seem less brave and tranquil, in view of death, than the old Stoic sages. Witness Marcus Antoninus. I wonder if the creed of Christendom is really the "glad tidings of great joy to all people" which the angels sang of? For myself, I believe in God as Justice, Goodness, Tenderness—in one word, Love; and yet my trust in Him is not strong enough to overcome the natural shrinking from the law of death. Even our Master prayed that that cup might pass from Him, "if it were possible."¹

MRS. AUGUSTUS CRAVEN

(1808-1891)

WHEN life is quite over, and we have no children in whom to see it recommence, perhaps in a fairer because less egotistical form than before, the

¹ From letter to Charlotte Fiske Bates, 1879.

sight of these crystallising destinies, of these circles which disperse or grow closer, the large store of interest and hope and confidence with which all in their turn embark on their voyage towards the future, causes me strong emotion. I feel at once sad and satisfied—sad from the natural feeling which dislikes privation, and which would rather bear the anxieties accompanying the goods of this world, counting children and wealth among them, than be without them; satisfied according to the truer sentiment which is glad to be free of ties that bind us to the earth which we shall quit so soon, and to which we still cling too closely, even when we have been deprived of what most strengthens those ties.¹

Life is a weary burden, and no man tries to endure it without some help.

At first the world's remedies seem to succeed for those who try them. Men learn to forget, and years may pass without any event that can recall them to themselves. Yet during those years the weight that has been treacherously lifted for a time grows and grows, until the moment comes when the world's power is at an end. It comes long before the close of life, and when it comes, the effeminate soul, weakened by the world's pleasure, will find itself forced to resume, in its full weight, the burden of life. . . .

In men's lives, and even in happy lives, there are many sorrows, and each of us finds those sorrows precisely such as are hardest to bear. To accept them and take the life that is before us without struggle, is to bear our burdens as we are meant to do. And this is

¹ From her *Journal*, 1879.

very difficult ; yet the result of our efforts will be peace to our souls and happiness in this life. All other means are useless to secure it, for no human power can relieve the true weight of existence.¹

ELIZABETH BARRETT

BROWNING . (1809-1861)

I THINK we are too ready with complaint
 In this fair world of God's. Had we no hope
 Indeed beyond the zenith and the slope
 Of yon grey blank of sky, we might grow faint
 To muse upon eternity's constraint
 Round our aspirant souls ; but since the scope
 Must widen early, is it well to droop,
 For a few days consumed in loss and taint ?
 O pusillanimous Heart, be comforted
 And, like a cheerful traveller, take the road,
 Singing beside the hedge. What if the bread
 Be bitter in thine inn, and thou unshod
 To meet the flints ? At least it may be said
 "Because the way is *short*, I thank thee, God." ²

God keeps a niche
 In Heaven to hold our idols ; and albeit
 He brake them to our faces and denied
 That our close kisses should impair their white,
 I know we shall behold them raised, complete,

¹ From *A Year's Meditations*.

² "Cheerfulness Taught by Reason" (published 1844).

And dust swept from their beauty,—glorified
New Memnons singing in the great God-light.¹

The truth, as God sees it, must be something so different from these opinions about truth—these systems which fit different classes of men like their coats, and wear brown at the elbows always! I believe in what is divine and floats at highest, in all these different theologies; and because the really Divine draws together souls, and tends so to a unity, I could pray anywhere and with all sorts of worshippers, from the Sistine Chapel to Mr. Fox's, those kneeling and those standing. Wherever you go, in all religious societies, there is a little to revolt, and a good deal to bear with—but it is not otherwise in the world without; and, *within*, you are especially reminded that God has to be more patient than yourself after all.²

We sow the glebe, we reap the corn,
We build the house where we may rest,
And then, at moments, suddenly
We look up to the great wide sky,
Inquiring wherefore we were born,
For earnest or for jest?

The senses folding thick and dark
About the stifled soul within,
We guess diviner things beyond,
And yearn to them with yearning fond;
We strike out blindly to a mark
Believed in, but not seen.

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¹ From "Futurity" (published 1844).

² From letter to Robert Browning, August 15, 1846.

God keeps His holy mysteries
 Just on the outside of man's dream ;
 In diapason slow, we think
 To hear their pinions rise and sink,
 While they float pure beneath His eyes
 Like swans adown a stream.

Abstractions, are they, from the forms
 Of His great beauty?—exaltations
 From His great glory?—strong previsions
 Of what we shall be?—intuitions
 Of what we are—in calms and storms
 Beyond our peace and passions?

And sometimes horror chills our blood
 To be so near such mystic Things,
 And we wrap round us for defence
 Our purple manners, moods of sense—
 As angels from the face of God
 Stand hidden in their wings.

And sometimes through life's heavy swound
 We grope for them ; with strangled breath
 We stretch our hands abroad and try
 To reach them in our agony,
 And widen, so, the broad life-wound
 Soon large enough for death.¹

I have been long convinced that what we call death is a mere incident in life—perhaps scarcely a greater one than the occurrence of puberty, or the revolution which comes with any new emotion or influx of new know-

¹ From "Human Life's Mystery" (published 1850).

ledge. . . . I believe that the body of flesh is a mere husk which drops off at death, while the spiritual body (see St. Paul) emerges in glorious resurrection at once. Swedenborg says, some persons do not immediately realise that they have passed death, and this seems to me highly probable. . . . I believe in an active, *human* life, beyond death as before it, an uninterrupted human life. I believe in no waiting in the grave, and in no vague effluence of spirit in a formless vapour.¹

JOSEPH MAZZINI . (1809–1872)

FROM the idea of God I descended to the conception of progress; from the conception of progress to a true conception of life; to faith in a mission and its logical consequence—duty the supreme rule of life; and having reached that faith, I swore to myself that nothing in this world should again make me doubt or forsake it. It was, as Dante says, passing through martyrdom to peace; for I fraternised with sorrow, and enwrapped myself in it as a mantle; but yet it was peace, for I learned to suffer without rebellion, and to live calmly, and in harmony with my own spirit. I bade a long, sad farewell to all individual hopes for me on earth. I dug with my own hands the grave, not of my affections—God is my witness that now, gray-headed, I feel them yet as in the days of my earliest youth,—but to all the desires, exigencies, and ineffable comforts of affection; and I covered the earth over that grave, so that none might ever know the *ego* buried beneath. From reasons—some of them apparent, some of them unknown—

¹ From letter to Miss Mitford, October 19, 1854.

my life was, is, and were it not near the end, would remain unhappy; but never since that time have I for an instant allowed myself to think that my own unhappiness could in any way influence my actions. I reverently bless God the Father for what consolations of affection—I can conceive of no other—he has vouchsafed to me in my later years; and in them I gather strength to struggle with the occasional returns of weariness of existence. But even were these consolations denied me, I believe I should still be what I am. Whether the sun shine with the serene splendour of an Italian morn, or the leaden corpse-like hue of the northern mist above us, I cannot see that it changes our duty. God dwells above the earthly heaven, and the holy stars of faith and the future still shine within our own souls, even though their light consume itself unreflected as the sepulchral lamp.¹

CHARLES ROBERT DARWIN

(1809–1882)

I MAY say that the impossibility of conceiving that this grand and wondrous universe, with our conscious selves, arose through chance, seems to me the chief argument for the existence of God; but whether this is an argument of real value I have never been able to decide. I am aware that if we admit a first cause, the mind still craves to know whence it came, and how it arose. Nor can I overlook the difficulty from the immense amount of suffering through the world. I am also induced to defer to a certain extent to the

¹ From *Life and Writings*, vol. iii.

judgment of the many able men who have fully believed in God; but here again I see how poor an argument this is. The safest conclusion seems to me that the whole subject is beyond the scope of man's intellect; but man can do his duty.¹

Although I did not think much about the existence of a personal God until a considerably later period of my life, I will here give the vague conclusions to which I have been driven. The old argument from design in Nature, as given by Paley, which formerly seemed to me so conclusive, fails, now that the law of natural selection has been discovered. We can no longer argue that, for instance, the beautiful hinge of a bivalve shell must have been made by an intelligent being, like the hinge of a door by man. There seems to be no more design in the variability of organic beings and in the action of natural selection than in the course which the wind blows. But I have discussed this subject at the end of my book on the *Variation of Domesticated Animals and Plants*, and the argument there given has never, as far as I can see, been answered.

But passing over the endless beautiful adaptations which we everywhere meet with, it may be asked how can the generally beneficent arrangement of the world be accounted for? Some writers indeed are so much impressed with the amount of suffering in the world, that they doubt, if we look to all sentient beings, whether there is more of misery or of happiness; whether the world as a whole is a good or bad one. According to my judgment happiness decidedly prevails, though this would be very difficult to prove. If the

¹ From letter written April 2, 1873.

truth of this conclusion be granted, it harmonises well with the effects which we might expect from natural selection. If all the individuals of any species were habitually to suffer to an extreme degree, they would neglect to propagate their kind; but we have no reason to believe that this has ever, or at least often, occurred. Some other considerations, moreover, lead to the belief that all sentient beings have been formed so as to enjoy, as a general rule, happiness. . . .

With respect to immortality, nothing shows me [so clearly] how strong and almost instinctive a belief it is as the consideration of the view now held by most physicists, namely, that the sun with all the planets will in time grow too cold for life, unless indeed some great body dashes into the sun, and thus gives it fresh life. Believing as I do that man in the distant future will be a far more perfect creature than he now is, it is an intolerable thought that he and all other sentient beings are doomed to complete annihilation after such long-continued slow progress. To those who fully admit the immortality of the human soul, the destruction of our world will not appear so dreadful.

Another source of conviction in the existence of God, connected with the reason and not with the feelings, impresses me as having much more weight. This follows from the extreme difficulty or rather impossibility of conceiving this immense and wonderful universe, including man with his capacity of looking far backwards and far into futurity, as the result of blind chance or necessity. When thus reflecting I feel compelled to look to a First Cause having an intelligent mind in some degree analogous to that of man; and I deserve to be called a Theist. This conclusion was

strong in my mind about the time, as far as I can remember, when I wrote the *Origin of Species*; and it is since that time that it has very gradually, with many fluctuations, become weaker. But then arises the doubt, can the mind of man, which has, as I fully believe, been developed from a mind as low as that possessed by the lowest animals, be trusted when it draws such grand conclusions?

I cannot pretend to throw the least light on such abstruse problems. The mystery of the beginning of all things is insoluble by us; and I for one must be content to remain an Agnostic.¹

JOHN STUART BLACKIE

(1809–1895)

SHOW me Christ as he lived and moved,
 The wonder of all men;
 In word and deed all perfect proved,
 Thou mak'st me Christian then;
 But lace him in a cramping creed,
 As many creeds there be:
 Thank God if thus he serves *your* need,
 No Christ he is for me.²

My rule of life is with sure plan to work,
 To trust in God and sing a cheerful song;
 To search what gem in each cold day may lurk,
 And catch a side-advantage from a wrong.³

¹ From part of *Autobiography*, written in 1876.

² From the *Day-Book of John Stuart Blackie* ("Christ").

³ *Ibid.* ("Rules of Life").

Not death is evil, but the way to death,
Through dim divinings and with scantied breath,
A length of deedless days and sleepless nights
Sown with all sorrows, shorn of all delights.
Teach me, O God, in might and mercy sure,
Teach me, the child of joyance to endure.
Endure, in truth no easy thing to learn,
But how to learn it be thy main concern ;
Though now thou canst not march with rattling speed,
Thy soul shall shape thy thought into a deed ;
Look round and find some useful thing to do,
And God will make it pleasant work for you.¹

ALFRED, LORD TENNYSON

(1809–1892)

STRONG Son of God, immortal Love,
Whom we, that have not seen thy face,
By faith, and faith alone, embrace,
Believing where we cannot prove ; . . .

Thou wilt not leave us in the dust :
Thou madest man, he knows not why,
He thinks he was not made to die ;
And Thou hast made him : thou art just. . . .

We have but faith : we cannot know ;
For knowledge is of things we see ;
And yet we trust it comes from thee,
A beam in darkness : let it grow.²

¹ From the *Day-Book of John Stuart Blackie* ("Death"), written in 1894, shortly before his death.

² From *In Memoriam*, which was written between 1833 and 1850. The above stanzas are dated 1849.

My own dim life should teach me this,
 That life shall live for evermore,
 Else earth is darkness at the core,
 And dust and ashes all that is.¹ . . .

Oh yet we trust that somehow good
 Will be the final goal of ill,
 To pangs of nature, sins of will,
 Defects of doubt, and taints of blood ;
 That nothing walks with aimless feet ;
 That not one life shall be destroy'd,
 Or cast as rubbish to the void,
 When God hath made the pile complete ;

That not a worm is cloven in vain ;
 That not a moth with vain desire
 Is shrivell'd in a fruitless fire,
 Or but subserves another's gain.

Behold, we know not anything ;
 I can but trust that good shall fall
 At last—far off—at last, to all,
 And every winter change to spring.

So runs my dream : but what am I ?
 An infant crying in the night :
 An infant crying for the light :
 And with no language but a cry.²

The wish, that of the living whole
 No life may fail beyond the grave,
 Derives it not from what we have
 The likest God within the soul ?

¹ From *In Memoriam*, section xxxiv.

² *Ibid.* section liv.

Are God and Nature then at strife,
That Nature lends such evil dreams?
So careful of the type she seems,
So careless of the single life;

That I, considering everywhere
Her secret meaning in her deeds,
And finding that of fifty seeds
She often brings but one to bear,

I falter where I firmly trod,
And falling with my weight of cares
Upon the great world's altar-stairs
That slope thro' darkness up to God,

I stretch lame hands of faith, and grope,
And gather dust and chaff, and call
To what I feel is Lord of all,
And faintly trust the larger hope.¹

O living will that shall endure
When all that seems shall suffer shock,
Rise in the spiritual rock,
Flow thro' our deeds and make them pure,

That we may lift from out of dust
A voice as unto him that hears,
A cry above the conquer'd years
To one that with us works, and trust,

With faith that comes of self-control,
The truths that never can be proved
Until we close with all we loved,
And all we flow from, soul in soul.²

¹ From *In Memoriam*, section lv.

² *Ibid.* section cxxxii.

[The present Lord Tennyson, in his *Memoir* of his father, remarks: "When questions were written to him about Christ, he would say, 'Answer for me that I have given my belief in *In Memoriam*.'" Reference may, however, be made to certain utterances of the poet, on *This Life and the Next*, published in later volumes. Thus, in the poem called "Vastness," written in 1887, we have the following:—

"What the philosophies, all the sciences, poesy, varying
voices of prayer?

All that is noblest, all that is basest, all that is filthy
with all that is fair?

What is it all, if we all of us end but in being our own
corpse-coffins at last,
Swallow'd in Vastness, lost in Silence, drown'd in the
deeps of a meaningless Past?

What but a murmur of gnats in the gloom, or a
moment's anger of bees in their hive?"

Again, in "An Evolutionist," written in 1888, we read:—

"If my body come from brutes, tho' somewhat finer than
their own,

I am heir, and this my kingdom. Shall the royal
voice be mute?

No, but if the rebel subject seek to drag me from the
throne,

Hold the sceptre, Human Soul, and rule thy Province
of the brute.

I have climb'd to the snows of Age, and I gaze at a
field in the Past,
Where I sank with the body at times in the sloughs
of a low desire,
But I hear no yelp of the beast, and the Man is quiet
at last
As he stands on the heights of his life with a glimpse
of a height that is higher."

It is not necessary to do more than allude to the familiar "Crossing the Bar" (written in October 1890) with its concluding declaration:—

"For tho' from out our bourne of Time and Place
The flood may bear me far,
I hope to see my Pilot face to face
When I have crost the bar."

The poet died in October 1892. In the summer of that year (his son records in the *Memoir*) he said in the course of conversation:—

"God *is* love, transcendent, all-pervading! We do not get *this* faith from Nature or the world. If we look at Nature alone, full of perfection and imperfection, she tells us that God is disease, murder, and rapine. We get this faith from ourselves, from what is highest within us, which recognises that there is not one fruitless pang, just as there is not one lost good."

A week before his death the poet said:—

"I should infinitely rather feel myself the most miserable wretch on the face of the earth with a God above than the highest type of man standing alone."

At other times, Tennyson remarked :—

“I can hardly understand how any great, imaginative man, who has deeply lived, suffered, thought, and wrought, can doubt of the Soul’s continuous progress in the after-life.

“If you allow a God, and God allows this strong instinct and universal yearning for another life, surely that is in a measure a presumption of its truth. We cannot give up the mighty hopes that make us men.”¹]

FRANCES ANNE KEMBLE

(1809–1893)

THE faint outlines of ideas that have at any time visited my brain about this tremendous mystery of human life have all been sad and dreary, and most bitterly and oppressively unsatisfactory; and therefore I rejoice that no mental fascination rivets my thoughts to the brink of this dark and unfathomable abyss, but that it is on the contrary the tendency of my nature to rest in hope, or rather in faith in God’s mercy and power, and, moreover, to think that the perception we have (or, as you would say, imagine we have) of duty, of right to be done and wrong to be avoided, gives significance enough to our existence to make it worth both love and honour, though it should consist of but one conscious day in which that noble perception might be sincerely followed, and though absolute annihilation were its termination. The whole value and meaning of life, to me, lies in the single sense of conscience—duty; and that is here, present, now,

¹ *Alfred Lord Tennyson: a Memoir by his Son* (1897).

enough for the best of us—God knows how much too much for me.¹

I believe in the progress of the human race, as I do in its immortality; and the barbarous conception of the Divinity, of the least advanced of that race, confirms me in this faith, as much as the purest Christianity of its foremost nations and individuals. . . . I believe all God's creatures have known Him, in such proportion as He and *they* have chosen; *i.e.* to none hath He left Himself utterly without witness; to some that witness has been the perfect life and doctrine of Jesus Christ, the most complete revelation of God that the world has known.

All have known Him, by His great grace, in some mode and measure; and therefore I believe all are immortal: none have known Him as He is, and but few in any age of the world have known Him as they might; and an eternity of progress holds forth, to my mind, the only hope large enough to compensate for the difference of advantages here, and to atone for the inadequate use of those advantages.²

OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES

(1809–1894)

I SHOULD prefer to say that I *trust* there will be a righting of this world's evils for each and all of us in a future state, than say that I share the unquestioning certainty of many of those about me.

¹ From letter written November 19, 1847.

² From letter written December 2, 1847.

The natural argument seems to me against the supposition. In the year 1800 I was not, to the best of my knowledge. Since that time my consciousness has been evoked and my experiences have been accumulated. I do not see that I have any natural ground for claiming the future any more than the past,—other than my conviction that it is or ought to be so—a conviction which is sometimes strong and at other times weak, as in the experience of many others.

I have seen many human consciousnesses put together, like my own. They were at one time represented by the unconscious life of *ova*. By and by they got sense, intellect, will, conscience, experience.

But I have seen many consciousnesses taken to pieces also; they lost the senses to a great extent; the intellect and of course the conscience, with the will, were enfeebled, almost lost, and the experiences of life so erased that the wife forgot her husband, the mother her children.

The natural conclusion would be that this gradual decay ends in extinction. The question might well be asked, whether the individuality, so nearly lost in this world, is likely to be restored by the destruction of the organism. I *hope* and *trust* that my feelings are right, which tell me that this world demands a complement. . . .

One thing is certain: it is impossible to disprove the reality of a future life, and we have all the right to cherish the hope that we may live again under more favourable circumstances, and be able to account for these preliminary arrangements, which, as a finality, are certainly unsatisfactory.¹

¹ From letter to John Lindley, 1867.

Life is never monotonous, absolutely, to me. I am a series of surprises to myself in the changes that years and repining, and it may be a still further process which I need not name, bring about. The movement onward is like changing place in a picture gallery—the light fades from this picture and falls on that, so that you wonder where the first has gone to and see all at once the meaning of the other. Not that I am so different from other people—there may be a dozen of me, *minus* my accidents, for aught I know—say rather ten thousand. But what a strange thing life is when you have waded in up to your neck and remember the shelving sands you have trodden!¹

I, like you, am an optimist—not quite so confident, perhaps, but still living in the habitual trust that this life is a school, the seemingly harsh discipline of which will be explained when we get into one of the higher classes. I dare not say that we are sure of this, but it is the only belief which makes life worth living. Some, I think, will say that they are as sure of a future life as of this—but many good people speak more modestly and hesitatingly. They hope; they trust; they encourage the belief; live in it and die in it. . . . As to the terrible disadvantages—bad blood—neglected education, evil example, etc., to which so large a fraction of mankind are submitted, all that is a reason to demand, as well as expect, a future state, if the world has a moral Governor.²

My creed, as I said in my book of ten years ago, is

¹ From letter to J. R. Lowell, 1877.

² From letter to J. W. Kemball, 1879.

to be found in the first two words of the Pater Noster. I know that there is a great deal to shake it in the natural order of things, but my faith is strong enough to stand against all the untowardness of the blind elements amidst which we are placed here, and out of which our earthly tabernacles are shaped.

I see no corner of the Universe which the Father has wholly deserted. The forces of Nature bruise and wound our bodies, but an artery no sooner bleeds than the Divine hand is placed upon it to stay the flow. A wound is no sooner made than the healing process is set on foot. Pain reaches a certain point, and insensibility comes on—for fainting is the natural anodyne of incurable griefs, as death is the remedy of those which are intolerable. . . . I have got just as far in my creed as I had ten years ago; namely, as far as those first two words of the Pater Noster. There are difficulties, I know; but it appears to me on the whole:—

1. That the Deity must be as good as the best conscious being he makes.
2. That it is more consonant with our ideas of what is best to suppose that suffering, which is often obviously disciplinary and benevolent in its aim, is to be temporary rather than eternal.
3. That if the Deity expects the genuine love and respect of independent, thinking creatures, he must in the long-run treat them as a good father would treat them.
4. That to suppose this world a mere trap, baited with temptations of sense, which only Divine ingenuity could have imagined, with the certainty that the larger part of the race would fall into it, and that to the tortures of a very helpless, ignorant, ill-educated being

is to be added the cruellest sting of all, that he brought it on himself, does not seem a probable course of action on the part of "Our Father."

5. When I, as an erring mortal, am confronted with Infinite purity, it appears to me an absurdity to talk of judging me by that standard.

God made the sun too strong for my eyes, but he took care to give me eyelids. He let the burning all-devouring oxygen into my system, but He took care to dilute it with four-fifths of nitrogen. And a fellow-creature tells me that after this world, where all these provisions are made, where all accidents are repaired, or attempted, at least, to be repaired, there is to be another, where there are eyes without lids, flame to breathe instead of air, wounds that never heal, and an army of experts in torture in the place of that ever-present God whom I used to call "My Father." I only say it does not seem probable to me.¹

DR. JOHN BROWN (1810-1882)

IN these days nearness to God is getting rarer and rarer; and unless we are near, unless we are in God, we are without Him, we are far from Him,—away in darkness and cold, feeling less and less the attraction of His infinite Godhead. . . . Go on expressing yourself regarding the mystery of evil and misery, evolving the mystery of goodness, and happiness,—of God in Christ reconciling a whole world to Himself, and therefore to itself. I have been thinking

¹ From letter to Harriet Beecher Stowe.

much lately of Jacob's wrestling with the angel till the dawning of the day, and being blessed and gaining the unutterable Name only when touched in the hollow of the thigh and made to feel his own nothingness: "when I am weak, then am I strong."¹

All true morality merges in and runs up into religion; all true religion blossoms and breathes out into morality, and practical and immediate goodness and love. What is the whole duty of man but his entire special morality; and what is man's whole duty?—love to God and love to man, not excluding himself as being a man.²

WILLIAM MAKEPEACE

THACKERAY . . . (1811–1863)

I WAS thinking about Joseph Bullar's doctrine after I went to bed, founded on what I cannot but think a blasphemous asceticism, which has obtained in the world ever so long, and which is disposed to curse, hate, and undervalue the world altogether. Why should we? What we see here of this world is but an expression of God's will, so to speak—a beautiful earth and sky and sea, beautiful affections and sorrows, wonderful changes and developments of creation, suns rising, stars shining, birds singing, clouds and shadows changing and fading, people loving each other, smiling and crying, the multiplied phenomena of Nature, multiplied in fact and fancy, in Art and Science, in every way that a man's intellect, or education, or imagination can

¹ From letter to a friend, May 6, 1864.

² From letter to Principal Shairp.

be brought to bear.—And who is to say that we are to ignore all this, or not value them and love them, because there is another unknown world yet to come? Why, that unknown future world is but a manifestation of God Almighty's will, and a development of Nature, neither more nor less than this in which we are, and an angel glorified or a sparrow on a gutter are equally parts of His creation. The light upon all the saints in Heaven is just as much and no more God's work, as the sun which shall shine to-morrow upon this infinitesimal speck of creation. . . . About my future state I don't know; I leave it in the disposal of the awful Father,—but for to-day I thank God that I can love you, and that you yonder and others besides are thinking of me with a tender regard. Hallelujah may be greater in degree than this, but not in kind, and countless ages of stars may be blazing infinitely, but you and I have a right to rejoice and believe in our little part and to trust in to-day as in to-morrow.¹

I don't pity anybody who leaves the world I pity those remaining. . . . Out of our stormy life, and brought nearer the Divine light and warmth, there must be a serene climate. Can't you fancy sailing into the calm? Would you care about going on the voyage, only for the dear souls left on the other shore? But we shan't be parted from them no doubt though they are from us. Add a little more intelligence to that which we possess even as we are, and why shouldn't we be with our friends though ever so far off? . . . Why presently, the body removed, shouldn't we personally be anywhere at will—properties of Creation, like

¹ From letter to Mrs. Brookfield, November 1848.

the electric something (spark is it?) that thrills all round the globe simultaneously? and if round the globe why not *Uberall*? and the body being removed or elsewhere disposed of and developed, sorrow and its opposite, crime and the reverse, ease and disease, desire and dislike, etc., go along with the body—a lucid Intelligence remains, a Perception ubiquitous.¹

I am not sorry for most people, certainly not for those old and in pain, for whom sleep must be a consoler after the fitful fever . . . in yonder vast next world. When we talked about it last, I said I thought it seemed lonely there. Thinking of it is thinking of God inscrutable, immeasurable, endless, beginningless, supreme, awfully solitary. Little children step off this earth into the infinite, and we tear our hearts out over their sweet cold hands and smiling faces, that drop indifferent when you cease holding them, and smile as the lid is closing over them. I don't think we deplore the old who have had enough of living and striving and have buried so many others, and must be weary of living—it seems time for them to go—for where's the pleasure of staying when the feast is over, and the flowers withered, and the guests gone? Isn't it better to blow the light out than sit on among the broken meats and collapsed jellies and vapid heeltaps? I go—to what I don't know—but to God's next world, which is His and He made it. One paces up and down the shore yet awhile—and looks towards the unknown ocean, and thinks of the traveller whose boat sailed yesterday. Those we love can but walk down to the pier with us—the voyage we must make alone. Except

¹ From letter to Miss Perry, February 1853.

for the young or very happy I can't say I am sorry for any one who dies.¹

SIR JAMES YOUNG SIMPSON

(1811-1867)

I HAVE not lived so near to Christ as I desired to do. I have had a busy life, but have not given so much time to eternal things as I should have sought. Yet I know it is not my merit I am to trust to for eternal life. Christ is all. . . . I like the plain, simple Gospel truth, and don't care to go into questions beyond that.

It has happily come to this—I am a sinner needing a Saviour, and Jesus is the Saviour I need. . . . I have mixed a great deal with men of all shades of opinion. I have heard men of science and philosophy raise doubts and objections to the Gospel of Christ, but I have never for one moment had a doubt myself since I believed.²

HARRIET BEECHER STOWE

(1811-1896)

Each new morning ray
Brings no sigh for yesterday.

THIS is my idea of heaven—a land where we can recall nothing to sigh for; the present overpays the past.³

¹ From letter to Mrs. Procter, November 26, 1856.

² From *Memoir*, by Dr. Duns. Spoken a few hours before his death.

³ From letter written in 1872.

I have been looking over and arranging my papers. . . . My own letters, too, full of bygone scenes in my early life and the childish days of my children. It is affecting to me to recall things that strongly moved me years ago, that filled my thoughts and made me anxious when the occasion and emotion have wholly vanished from my mind. But I thank God there is *one* thing running through all of them from the time I was thirteen years old, and that is the intense unwavering sense of Christ's educating, guiding presence and care. It is *all* that remains now.¹

In a sense our lives are irreparable. If we shrink, if we fail, if we choose the fleeting instead of the eternal, God may forgive us; but there must be eternal regret.²

I have thought much lately of the possibility of my leaving you all and going home. I am come to that stage of my pilgrimage that is within sight of the River of Death, and I feel that now I must have all in readiness day and night for the messenger of the King. I have sometimes had in my sleep strange perceptions of a vivid spiritual life near to and with Christ, and multitudes of holy ones, and the joy of it is like no other joy—it cannot be told in the language of the world. What I have, then, I *know* with absolute certainty, yet it is so unlike and above anything we conceive of in this world that it is difficult to put it into words. The inconceivable loveliness of Christ! It seems that about Him there is a sphere where the

¹ From letter to her son Charles, Sept. 30, 1880.

² From letter written in 1882.

enthusiasm of love is the calm habit of the soul, that without words, without the necessity of demonstrations of affection, heart beats to heart, soul answers soul, we respond to the Infinite Love, and we feel His answer in us, and there is no need of words. All seemed to be busy coming and going on ministries of good, and passing each gave a thrill of joy to each as Jesus, the directing soul, the centre of all, "over all, in all, and through all," was working His beautiful and merciful will to redeem and save. I was saying as I awoke—

'Tis joy enough, my all in all,
At Thy dear feet to lie.
Thou wilt not let me lower fall,
And none can higher fly.

This was but a glimpse; but it has left a strange sweetness in my mind.¹

CHARLES DICKENS (1812-1870)

IN this world there is no stay but the hope of a better, no reliance but on the mercy and goodness of God.²

You know that you have never been hampered with religious forms of restraint, and that with mere unmeaning forms I have no sympathy. But I most strongly and affectionately impress upon you the priceless value of the New Testament, and the study of that book as the one unfailing guide in life. Deeply respecting it, and bowing down before the character of

¹ From letter written in 1887.

² From letter to Mrs. Henry Austin, October 1862.

our Saviour, as separated from the vain constructions and inventions of men, you cannot go very far wrong, and will always preserve at heart a true spirit of veneration and humility. Similarly, I impress upon you the habit of saying a Christian prayer every night and morning. These things have stood by me all through my life . . . and so God bless you.¹

ROBERT BROWNING

(1812-1889)

I WAS ever a fighter, so—one fight more,
 The best and the last!
 I would hate that death bandaged my eyes, and forbore,
 And bade me creep past.
 No! let me taste the whole of it, fare like my peers
 The heroes of old,
 Bear the brunt, in a minute pay glad life's arrears
 Of pain, darkness, and cold.
 For sudden the worst turns the best to the brave,
 The black minute's at end,
 And the elements' rage, the fiend-voices that rave,
 Shall dwindle, shall blend,
 Shall change, shall become first a peace out of pain,
 Then a light, then thy breast,
 O thou soul of my soul! I shall clasp thee again,
 And with God be the rest!²

Somewhere, below, above,
 Shall a day dawn—this I know—

¹ From letter to his son, H. F. Dickens, October 15, 1868.

² From "Prospice."

When Power, which vainly strove
 My weakness to o'erthrow,
 Shall triumph. I breathe, I move,

I truly am, at last !

For a veil is rent between
 Me and the truth which passed
 Fitful, half-guessed, half-seen,
 Grasped at—not gained, held fast. . . .

Then life is—to wake not sleep,
 Rise and not rest, but press
 From earth's level where blindly creep
 Things perfected, more or less,
 To the heaven's height, far and steep,

Where, amid what strifes and storms
 May wait the adventurous quest,
 Power is Love—transports, transforms
 Who aspired from worst to best,
 Sought the soul's world, spurned the worms?

I have faith such end shall be :

From the first, Power was—I knew.
 Life has made clear to me
 That, strive but for closer view,
 Love were as plain to see.

When see ? When there dawns a day,
 If not on the homely earth,
 Then yonder, worlds away,
 Where the strange and new have birth,
 And Power comes full in play.¹

¹ From "Reverie."

What had I on earth to do
 With the slothful, with the mawkish, the unmanly?
 Like the aimless, helpless, hopeless, did I drivel
 —Being—who?

One who never turned his back but marched breast
 forward,
 Never doubted clouds would break,
 Never dreamed, though right were worsted, wrong
 would triumph,
 Held we fall to rise, are baffled to fight better,
 Sleep to wake.

No, at noonday in the bustle of man's work-time
 Greet the unseen with a cheer!
 Bid him forward, breast and back as either should be,
 "Strive and thrive!" cry "Speed,—fight on, fare ever
 There as here!"¹

JEAN LOUIS ERNEST

MEISSONIER (About 1812–1891)

AT my age, seventy-two, I cannot take an hour's rest. And, unlike my friend Chenavard, I cannot find comfort in a philosophic resignation, and indifference to worldly things. I am almost despairing, but my thoughts rise heavenwards, turning more and more to God. I have come to the end of all things, life among the number. How bitterly I regret that I was unable to say what I felt and wished while I was still young and vigorous. . . .

¹ From "Epilogue."

I care for nothing but my art. I have lived for nothing else. It has been my ideal and my whole happiness. How grimly the sorrows, and the difficulties, and the impossibilities of life rise up within one's soul! The time comes at last when every morning brings a heavy wakening and every day is one long weariness. . . .

Ah! life with all its memories is like grapes in the wine-press. The piled-up clusters overflow the vat, but the wine expressed is little enough! Life!—how little it really comes to, after all, in the bottom of the glass!¹

DAVID LIVINGSTONE

(1813–1873)

I HAVE been thinking a great deal since the departure of my beloved one [his wife] about the regions whither she has gone, and imagine from the manner the Bible describes it we have got too much monkery in our ideas. There will be work there as well as here, and possibly not such a vast difference in our being as is expected. But a short time there will give more insight than a thousand musings. We shall see Him by whose inexpressible love and mercy we get there, and all whom we loved, and all the loveable.²

I rejoice to think it is now your portion, after working nobly, to play. May you have a long spell of it! I am differently situated; I shall never be

¹ From *His Life and Art*.

² From letter to Sir T. Maclear, 1862.

able to play. . . . To me it seems to be said, "If thou forbear to deliver them that are drawn unto death, and those that be ready to be slain; if thou sayest, Behold we knew it not, doth not He that pondereth the heart consider, and He that keepeth thy soul doth He not know, and shall He not give to every one according to his works?" I have been led, unwittingly, into the slaving field of the Banians and Arabs in Central Africa. I have seen the woes inflicted, and I must still work and do all I can to expose and mitigate the evils. Though hard work is still to be my lot, I look genially on others more favoured in their lot. I would not be a member of the "International," for I love to see and think of others enjoying life.¹

JEAN FRANÇOIS MILLET

(1814-1875)

ART is not a pleasure trip; it is a battle, a mill that grinds. I am no philosopher. I do not pretend to do away with pain, or to find a formula which will make me a Stoic, and indifferent to evil. Suffering is, perhaps, the one thing that gives an artist power to express himself clearly.²

You are right: life is very sad. There are few cities of refuge; and in the end you understand those who sighed after a *place of refreshment, of light and peace*. And you understand, too, why Dante makes

¹ From letter to an old friend, Mr. J. Young, about 1872-73.

² Said to Alfred Sensier about 1847.

some of his personages say, in speaking of the days which they spent on earth, "*the time of my debt.*" Ah, well! let us hold out as long as we can.¹

Always evil! When will the good come? Ah, life! life! how hard it sometimes is; and how much we need our friends, and yonder heaven to help us to come back to it!²

They call me a Socialist. . . . Is it, then, impossible simply to accept the ideas that come into one's mind at the sight of the man who "eats bread by the sweat of his brow"? There are people who say that I see no charms in the country. I see much more than charms there—infinite splendours. I see, as well as they do, the little flowers of which Christ said, "I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these."

I see very well the *auréoles* of the dandelions, and the sun spreading his glory in the clouds over the distant worlds. But none the less I see down there in the plain the steaming horses leading the plough, and in a rocky corner a man, quite worn-out, whose *han* has been heard since morning, and who tries to straighten himself and take breath for a moment. The drama is surrounded with splendour.³

¹ From letter to Rousseau, 1856.

² From letter written in 1862.

³ From letter written in 1863.

SIR JAMES PAGET (1814-1899)

IT could not be without interest to watch the changes of the body as life naturally ebbs; changes by which all is undone that the formative process in development achieved; by which all that was gathered from the inorganic world, impressed with life, and fashioned to organic form, is restored to the masses of dead matter; to trace how life gives back to death the elements on which it had subsisted; the progress of that decay through which, as by a common path, the brutes pass to their annihilation, and man to immortality.¹

We that can read in memory the history of half a century might look back with shame and deep regret at the imperfections of our early knowledge, if we might not be sure that we held, and sometimes helped onward, the best things that were, in their time, possible, and that they were necessary steps to the better present, even as the present is to the still better future. Yes—to the far better future; for there is no course of nature more certain than is the upward progress of science. We may seem to move in circles, but they are the circles of a constantly ascending spiral; we may seem to sway from side to side, but it is only as on a steep ascent, which must be climbed in zig-zag.² . . .

How hard it is to give up, or to find examples of

¹ From *Lectures*, published 1853.

² From the Inaugural Address, Congress of London, August 3, 1881.

happy retreat. I suppose it is best to go on—unless one could be sure that the time taken from the business of this life would be well spent in preparing for the next, or that one had not even now time enough for this if only one would use it well. May God help us. He can make us safe in either work or rest.¹

ANTHONY TROLLOPE

(1815–1882)

IF the rustle of a woman's petticoat has ever stirred my blood; if a cup of wine has been a joy to me; if I have thought tobacco at midnight in pleasant company to be one of the elements of an earthly paradise; if now and again I have somewhat recklessly fluttered a £5 note over a card-table;—of what matter is that to any reader? I have betrayed no woman. Wine has brought me to no sorrow. It has been the companionship of smoking that I have loved, rather than the habit. I have never desired to win money, and I have lost none. To enjoy the excitement of pleasure, but to be free from its vices and ill effects—to have the sweet, and leave the bitter untasted,—that has been my study. The preachers tell us that this is impossible. It seems to me that hitherto I have succeeded fairly well. I will not say that I have never scorched a finger—but I carry no ugly wounds.

For what remains to me of life I trust for my happiness still chiefly to my work—hoping that when the power of work be over with me, God may be pleased to take me from a world in which, according to my

¹ From letter to Sir Henry Acland, December 1891.

view, there can be no joy; secondly, to the love of those who love me; and then to my books.¹

PRINCE BISMARCK

(1815-1898)

IF I were not a Christian, I would not continue to serve the King another hour. Did I not obey my God and count upon Him, I should certainly take no account of earthly masters. I should have enough to live upon, and occupy a sufficiently distinguished position. Why should I incessantly worry myself and labour in this world, exposing myself to embarrassments, annoyances, and evil treatment, if I did not feel bound to do my duty on behalf of God? Did I not believe in a Divine ordinance, which had destined this German nation to become good and great, I had never taken to the diplomatic trade; or, having done so, I would long since have given it up. I know not whence I should derive my sense of duty if not from God. Orders and titles have no charms for me; I firmly believe in a life after death, and that is why I am a Royalist; by nature I am disposed to be a Republican. To my steadfast faith alone do I owe the power of resisting all manner of absurdities which I have displayed throughout the past ten years. Deprive me of this faith and you rob me of my Fatherland. Were I not a staunch Christian, did I not stand upon the miraculous basis of religion, you would never have possessed a Federal Chancellor in my person.²

¹ From *Autobiography*.

² From Bismarck's *Table-Talk*, spoken during the Franco-Prussian War.

I have never lived on principles. When I have had to act, I never first asked myself on what principles I was going to act, but I went at it, and did what I thought good. I have often been reproached for want of principles. In my youth I often talked with a lady cousin of mine who had a tincture of philosophy, and who wanted to play the aunt with me about the question whether I must adopt principles or not. At last I put an end to further dispute by remarking, "If I am to go through life with principles, it seems to me just the same as if I had to pass along a narrow forest path with a long pole in my mouth."¹

For him who does not believe—as I do, *from the bottom of my heart*—that death is a transition from one existence to another, . . . the joys of this life must possess so high a value that I could almost envy him the sensations they must procure him. His occupations must appear to him so teeming with promise of reward that I cannot realise to myself what his state of feeling must be if, believing that his personal existence terminates for ever with his bodily demise, he considers it worth while to go on living at all.²

I live a life of great activity, and occupy a lucrative post; but all this could offer me no inducement to live one day longer did I not, as the poet [Schiller] says, "believe in God and a better future."³

¹ From Bismarck's *Table-Talk*, spoken during the Franco-Prussian War.

² In the Reichstag, 1870.

³ *Ibid.* 1878.

FREDERICK WILLIAM

ROBERTSON . (1816-1853)

(OF BRIGHTON)

A YEAR has passed, nearly, since I resolved to live above this world. O God! how little has been done! High, bright, enthusiastic hopes of things impossible, and of things possible still, how they teemed in my imagination! The ideal, of course, always transcends the actual, and now experience of life again, with its manifold struggles, "fallings from us, vanishings," has left a sobered, saddened, but unconquerable resolve to live in earnest. . . . Farewell, all visions and wishes of distinction—farewell to them for ever! But not farewell to something holier and better, far holier, and more worthy of beings whose divine spark is mixed with clay. I can hear in my heart the "still sad music of humanity," and selfishness seems to me even more contemptible than it did, now that I am more distinctly conscious of an end to live for. *My* career is done. And yet I do not look on life with any bitter or disappointed feeling, but gently and even gratefully. . . .

Though nothing can bring back the hour
Of splendour in the grass, or glory in the flower, etc.

I am not sorry that the wild throb of romantic, boyish anticipation of a future can never be felt again. I know the realities of a world of error now, but whose Maker's name I am profoundly convinced is Love. I

feel its grand, sad laws, and I bow myself to them submissively, not wishing them other than they are.¹

Be assured that there is little to be known here; much to be borne; something to be done. What you are, and what your life means, you do not know. God only knows. You must be content with twilight, except when contrast with darkness makes the twilight seem, as it really is in comparison, a blaze of light.²

As to what our being in a future state shall be, what its enjoyments, or whether the affections here shall be those there, and whether they shall be, as here, mutable or progressive, I confess myself utterly without a clue to decide. To my mind and heart, the most satisfactory things that have been ever said on the future state are contained in the *In Memoriam*.³

Except in this conviction, the first and simplest, on which we have ever to fall back from more artificial and complicated theories—God is, and God is Love,—I can see nothing in this life but a hideous, waste, howling wilderness, with siroccos and sand-pillars, overwhelming everything, and scorching up everything.⁴ . . .

The life of Christ and His death, after all, are the only true solution of the mystery of human life; to that, after all, all the discords of this world's wild music must be attuned at last. . . . With God I cannot

¹ Written February 1850.

² From letter to a friend, May 21, 1851.

³ From letter written in 1851.

⁴ From letter written January 1852.

quarrel, for I recognise the beauty and justice of His conditions. It is a grand comfort to feel that God is right, whatever and whoever else may be wrong. I *feel* St. Paul's words, "Let God be true, and every man a liar."¹

The truest view of life has always seemed to me to be that which shows that we are here not to enjoy but to learn.²

CHARLOTTE BRONTË (1816–1855)

I SMILE at you for supposing that I could be annoyed by what you say respecting your religious and philosophical views; that I could blame you for not being able, when you look amongst sects and creeds, to discover any one which you can exclusively and implicitly adopt as yours. I perceive myself that some light falls on earth from Heaven—that some rays from the shrine of truth pierce the darkness of this life and world; but they are few, faint, and scattered, and who without presumption can assert that he has found the *only* true path upwards? Yet ignorance, weakness, or indiscretion must have their creeds and forms; they must have their props; they cannot walk alone. Let them hold by what is purest in doctrine and simplest in ritual; *something*, they *must* have.³

Believe all men, and women too, to be dust and ashes—a spark of the divinity now and then kindling

¹ 1852.

² From letter written July 2, 1853.

³ From letter to W. S. Williams, July 31, 1848.

in the dull heap—that is all. When I looked on the noble face and forehead of my dead brother . . . and asked myself what had made him go ever wrong, tend ever downwards, when he had so many gifts to induce to, and aid in, an upward course, I seemed to receive an oppressive revelation of the feebleness of humanity—of the inadequacy of even genius to lead to true greatness if unaided by religion and principle. In the value, or even the reality, of these two things he would never believe till within a few days of his end; and then all at once he seemed to open his heart to a conviction of their existence and worth. . . .

When the struggle was over, and a marble calm began to succeed the last dread agony, I felt, as I had never felt before, that there was peace and forgiveness for him in heaven. All his errors—to speak plainly, all his vices—seemed nothing to me in that moment; every wrong he had done, every pain he had caused, vanished; his sufferings only were remembered; the wrench to the natural affections only was left. If man can thus experience total oblivion of his fellow’s imperfections, how much more can the Eternal Being, who made man, forgive His creature? Had his sins been scarlet in their dye, I believe now they are white as wool.¹

Man, as he now is, can no more do without creeds and forms in religion than he can do without laws and rules in social intercourse. You and Emerson judge others by yourselves; all mankind are not like you, any more than every Israelite was like Nathaniel. “Is there a human being,” you ask, “so depraved that an act of kindness will not touch—nay, a word melt him?”

¹ From letter to W. S. Williams, October 6, 1848.

There are hundreds of human beings who trample on acts of kindness and mock at words of affection. I know this though I have seen but little of the world. I suppose I have something harsher in my nature than you have, something which every now and then tells me dreary secrets about my race, and I cannot believe the voice of the Optimist, charm he never so wisely.¹

We saw Emily torn from the midst of us when our hearts clung to her with intense attachment. . . . She was scarce buried when Anne's health failed. . . . These things would be too much, if reason, unsupported by religion, were condemned to bear them alone. . . . The crisis of bereavement has an acute pang which goads to exertion; the desolate after-feeling sometimes paralyzes. I have learnt that we are not to find solace in our own strength; we must seek it in God's omnipotence. Fortitude is good, but fortitude itself must be shaken under us, to teach us how weak we are.²

The two human beings who understood me, and whom I understood, are gone; I have some that love me yet, and whom I love, without expecting, or having a right to expect, that they shall perfectly understand me. I am satisfied; but I must have my own way in the matter of writing. The loss of what we possess nearest and dearest to us in this world, produces an effect upon the character; we search out what we have yet left that can support, and, when found, we cling to it with a hold of new-strung tenacity. The faculty of imagination lifted me when I was sinking, three months

¹ From letter to W. S. Williams, October 18, 1848.

² From letter written March 24, 1849.

ago; its active exercise has kept my head above water since; its results cheer me now, for I feel they have enabled me to give pleasures to others. I am thankful to God, who gave me the faculty; and it is for me a part of my religion to defend this gift, and to profit by its possession.¹

LADY EASTLAKE (1816–1892)

THE weeks come round at a tremendous speed; I suppose it is my advanced age. The mind meditates, but has few novel impressions to mark the time and prolong it, as in young days. I am content, and rather like to note the gradual changes in myself, as God's loving plan for us all. I have had my life, and have had more blessings and what is called success than most people; I have also drunk to the bottom of a very bitter cup, for which, perhaps, I ought to be thankful. At all events, it is a mercy to be weaned from life when one is about to leave it. It took me many years to be practically convinced that God chastens those He loves, and *vice versâ*, but now there is nothing I more deeply believe. It is a peculiar feeling to grow old and to meet it rightly; I study it, I hope, in the right way. It is strange that human beings should come into the world only all to die. Perhaps all worlds are not so, and without the account of the Fall of Man and the Sacrifice of Christ—without, I mean, believing these—I don't know how mankind could bear the certainty of death. That certainty can only be met by the equal certainty of everlasting life.²

¹ From letter written September 21, 1849.

² Written at the end of 1892.

HENRY DAVID THOREAU

(1817-1862)

I WENT to the woods [1845] because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. I did not wish to live what was not life, living is so dear; nor did I wish to practise resignation, unless it was quite necessary. I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life, to live so sturdily and Spartan-like as to put to rout all that was not life, to cut a broad swath and shave close, to drive life into a corner and reduce it to its lowest terms, and, if it proved to be mean, why then to get the whole and genuine meanness of it, and publish its meanness to the world; or if it were sublime, to know it by experience, and be able to give a true account of it in my next excursion. . . . Our life is frittered away by detail. . . . Simplicity, simplicity, simplicity! I say, let your affairs be as two or three, and not a hundred or a thousand; instead of a million count half a dozen, and keep your accounts on your thumb-nail.¹

I had this advantage, at least, in my mode of life, over those who were obliged to look abroad for amusement, to society and the theatre, that my life itself was become my amusement and never ceased to be novel. It was a drama of many scenes and without an end. If we were always indeed getting our living and regulating

¹ From *Walden*.

our lives according to the last and best mode we had learned, we should never be troubled with *ennui*.¹

I learned this, at least, by my experiment: that if one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavours to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours. He will put some things behind, will pass an invisible boundary; new, universal, and more liberal laws will begin to establish themselves around and within him; or the old laws be expanded, and interpreted in his favour in a more liberal sense, and he will live with the license of a higher order of beings. In proportion as he simplifies his life, the laws of the universe will appear less complex, and solitude will not be solitude, nor poverty poverty, nor weakness weakness.²

However mean your life is, meet it and live it; do not shun it and call it hard names. It is not so bad as you are. It looks poorest when you are richest. The fault-finder will find faults even in paradise. Love your life, poor as it is. You may perhaps have some pleasant, thrilling, glorious hours even in a poor-house. The setting sun is reflected from the windows of the almshouse as brightly as from the rich man's abode; the snow melts before its door as early in the spring.³

If you take this life to be simply what old religious folks pretend (I mean the effete, gone to seed in a drought, mere human galls stung by the devil once), then all your joy and serenity is reduced to grinning and bearing it. The fact is, you have got to take the world on your shoulders like Atlas, and put along with

¹ From *Walden*.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

it. You will do this for an idea's sake, and your success will be in proportion to your devotion to ideas. It may make your back ache occasionally, but you will have the satisfaction of hanging it or twirling it to suit yourself. Cowards suffer, heroes enjoy. After a long day's walk with it, pitch it into a hollow place, sit down and eat your luncheon. Unexpectedly, by some immortal thoughts, you will be compensated. The bank whereon you sit will be a fragrant and flowery one, and your world in the hollow a sleek and light gazelle.¹

My life is like a stroll upon the beach,
 As near the ocean's edge as I can go ;
 My tardy steps its waves sometimes o'erreach,
 Sometimes I stay to let them overflow.

My sole employment is, and scrupulous care,
 To place my gains beyond the reach of tides,
 Each smoother pebble, and each shell more rare,
 Which Ocean kindly to my hand confides.

I have but few companions on the shore :
 They scorn the strand who sail upon the sea ;
 Yet oft I think the ocean they've sailed o'er
 Is deeper known upon the strand to me.

The middle sea contains no crimson dulse,
 Its deeper waves cast up no pearls to view ;
 Along the shore my hand is on its pulse,
 And I converse with many a shipwrecked crew.²

You ask particularly after my health. I *suppose* that I have not many months to live ; but, of course, I know

¹ From letter written May 20, 1860.

² Written at Staten Island in 1843.

nothing about it. I may add that I am enjoying existence as much as ever, and regret nothing.¹

BENJAMIN JOWETT (1817-1893)
(MASTER OF BALLIOL)

I WILL ask you not to think it an affectation if I say that the later years of life appear to me from a certain point of view to be the best. They are less disturbed by care and the world; we begin to understand that things never did really matter so much as we supposed, and we are able to see them more in the true proportion, instead of being overwhelmed by them. We are more resigned to the will of God, neither afraid to depart nor over-anxious to stay. There are some things which, perhaps, we can set right because we are no longer actors in them. We cannot see into another life, but we believe with an inextinguishable hope that there is something still reserved for us. We are able also to regard not in a temper of alarm the changes of opinion which we see going on around us, and which have been greater in our time than in any other, and to know that they are a part of a natural growth or change, which it would be childish to complain of.²

Though I am growing old I maintain that the best part is still to come—the time when one may see things more dispassionately and know oneself and others more truly, and perhaps be able to do more, and in religion

¹ From letter written March 1862, less than three months before his death.

² From letter to Lady Stanley, September 27, 1890.

rest centred in a very few simple truths. I do not want to ignore the other side, that one will not be able to see so well, or walk so far, or read so much. But there may be more peace within, more communion with God, more real light instead of distraction about many things, better relations with others, fewer mistakes. The quality of human life does not consist in bustle or activity, but in stillness and in the heart. Therefore I will never look upon the years that are before me as a time of decay. I mean to fight the battle out as well as I can, and fill up some of the shortcomings of youth and middle life.¹

EMILY BRONTË . . (1818-1848)

NO coward soul is mine,
 No trembler in the world's storm-troubled sphere :
 I see Heaven's glories shine,
 And faith shines equal, arming me from fear.

O God within my breast,
 Almighty, ever-present Deity !
 Life—that in me has rest,
 As I—undying Life—have power in Thee !

Vain are the thousand creeds
 That move men's hearts : unutterably vain,
 Worthless as withered weeds,
 Or idlest froth amid the boundless main,

¹ From letter to the Countess of Wemyss, December 17, 1890.

To waken doubt in one
Holding so fast by Thine infinity,
So surely anchored on
The steadfast rock of immortality.

With wide-embracing love
Thy spirit animates eternal years,
Pervades and broods above,
Changes, sustains, dissolves, creates, and rears.

Though earth and man were gone,
And suns and universes ceased to be,
And Thou wert left alone,
Every existence would exist in Thee.

There is no room for Death,
Nor atom that his might could render void :
Thou—Thou art Being and Breath,
And what Thou art may never be destroyed.¹

IVAN TURGÉNEV (1818–1883)

I WONDER what I shall think when I come to die
—in case I shall be in a condition to think of
anything?

Shall I think to what bad account I have turned
my life, how I have slept and dreamt it away, how un-
fitted I have been to enjoy its gifts?

“How? Surely this is not death? So soon! Im-
possible! Why, I have as yet accomplished nothing in
life. . . . I am only now really beginning to think of
accomplishing something!”

¹ “Last Lines.”

Shall I think on the past,—and linger in spirit with the few bright moments of my life—with the forms and persons that were dear to me?

Will my evil deeds intrude themselves on my memory—and will my soul feel the burning pain of a too late repentance?

Shall I think on that which awaits me beyond the grave? . . . Yes, and *does* anything await me there?

No! . . . I believe I shall try not to think at all, and shall occupy myself eagerly with some trifle or other, in order to divert my attention from the threatening darkness, the darkness—ever blacker and blacker—encompassing me.

I was present once when a dying man complained that they would not give him any nuts to eat! . . . and only in the depths of his sad eyes something trembled and quivered—something which reminded one of the shattered wings of a bird wounded to death.¹

JAMES ANTHONY FROUDE

(1818–1894)

WHEN the weather is bad the wounds of old sins and follies, long forgotten too, begin to ache again. It were much better never to have been. Perhaps we are responsible even for having been born. It may have been the penalty of some delinquency in a past existence. *El mayor delito es haber nacido*. . . . The great alteration I find in myself is the disappearance of hope. I don't mean as regards another life, or that one has grown despondent. Not the least that,

¹ From *Senilia* ("What Shall I Think?" . . .), 1879.

but simply that one has so short a future in this world that it is no longer worth while to think about it. Thus the personal element is taken out of every equation, and one looks at things without the twist from personal interest or emotion.¹

MRS. OLIPHANT (About 1818-1897)

LIFE, though it is short, is very long, and contains so much. . . . I have had trials which—I say it with full knowledge of all the ways of mental suffering—have been harder than sorrow. I have lived a laborious life—incessant work, incessant anxiety,—and yet so strange, so capricious is this human being, that I would not say I have had an unhappy life. . . . Sometimes I am miserable—always there is in me the sense that I may have active cause to be so at any moment—always the gnawing pangs of anxiety, and deep, deep dissatisfaction beyond words, and the sense of helplessness, which of itself is despair. And yet there are times when my heart jumps up in the old unreasonable way, and I am—yes, happy—though the word seems so inappropriate—without any cause for it, with so many causes the other way.²

I made on the whole a large income—and spent it, taking no thought of the morrow. Yes, taking a great deal of thought of the morrow in the way of constant work and constant undertaking of whatever kind of work came to my hand. . . . I pay the penalty in that I shall not leave anything behind me that will live.

¹ From a letter (undated).

² From *Autobiography*.

What does it matter? Nothing at all now—never anything to speak of. At my most ambitious of times I would rather my children had remembered me as their mother than in any other way, and my friends as their friend. I never cared for anything else. And now that there are no children to whom to leave any memory, and the friends drop day by day, what is the reputation of a circulating library to me? Nothing, and less than nothing—a thing the thought of which now makes me angry, that any one should for a moment imagine I cared for that, or that it made up for any loss.¹

I try to realise heaven to myself, and I cannot do it. The more I think of it the less I am able to feel that those who have left us can start up at once in a heartless beatitude without caring for our sorrow. Do they sleep until the great day? Or does time so cease for them that it seems but a matter of hours and minutes till we meet again? God who is Love cannot give immortality and annihilate affection; that surely, at least, we must take for granted—as sure as they live they live to love us. Human nature in the flesh cannot be more faithful, more tender, than the purified human soul in heaven. Where, then, are they, those who have gone before us? Some people say around us, still knowing all that occupies us; but that is an idea I cannot entertain either. It would not be happiness but pain to be beside those we love, yet unable to communicate with them, unable to make ourselves known.²

¹ From *Autobiography*.

² *Ibid.* Written at Rome in 1864, after the death of her daughter.

ARTHUR HUGH CLOUGH

(1819-1860)

IT may be that indeed and not in fancy,
A hand that is not ours upstays our steps,
A voice that is not ours commands the waves ;
Commands the waves, and whispers in our ear,
O thou of little faith, why didst thou doubt ?
At any rate,
That there are beings above us, I believe,
And when we lift up holy hands of prayer
I will not say they will not give us aid.¹

O may we for assurance' sake,
Some arbitrary judgment take,
And wilfully pronounce it clear,
For this or that 'tis we are here ?

Or is it right, and will it do,
To pace the sad confusion through,
And say :—It doth not yet appear,
What we shall be, what we are here ?

Ah yet, when all is thought and said,
The heart still overrules the head ;
Still what we hope we must believe,
And what is given us receive ;

Must still believe, for still we hope
That in a world of larger scope,
What here is faithfully begun
Will be completed, not undone.

¹ From "O Thou of Little Faith."

My child, we still must think, when we
 That ampler life together see,
 Some true result will yet appear
 Of what we are, together, here.¹

O life descending into death,
 Our waking eyes behold,
 Parent and friend thy lapse attend,
 Companions young and old.

Strong purposes our minds possess,
 Our hearts affections fill,
 We toil and earn, we seek and learn,
 And thou descendest still.

O end to which our currents tend,
 Inevitable sea,
 To which we flow, what do we know,
 What shall we guess of thee?

A roar we hear upon thy shore,
 As we our course fulfil;
 Scarce we divine a sun will shine
 And be above us still.²

Come home, come home! and where is home for me,
 Whose ship is driving o'er the trackless sea?
 To the frail bark here plunging on its way,
 To the wild waters, shall I turn and say
 To the plunging bark, or to the salt sea foam,
 You are my home.

¹ From "Through a Glass Darkly."

² From "The Stream of Life."

Come home, come home ! and where a home hath he
Whose ship is driving o'er the driving sea ?
Through clouds that mutter, and o'er waves that roar,
Say, shall we find, or shall we not, a shore
That is, as is not ship or ocean foam,
Indeed our home ? ¹

Say not, the struggle nought availeth,
The labour and the wounds are vain,
The enemy faints not, nor faileth,
And as things have been they remain.

If hopes were dupes, fears may be liars ;
It may be, in yon smoke concealed,
Your comrades chase e'en now the fliers,
And, but for you, possess the field.

For while the tired waves, vainly breaking,
Seem here no painful inch to gain,
Far back, through creeks and inlets making,
Comes silent, flooding in, the main.

And not by eastern windows only,
When daylight comes, comes in the light,
In front, the sun climbs slow, how slowly,
But westward, look, the land is bright.

CHARLES KINGSLEY

(1819-1875)

AFTER all, the problem of life is not a difficult one,
for it solves itself so very soon at best—by death.
Do what is right the best way you can, and wait to the

¹ Written in 1852.

end to *know*. Only we priests confuse it with our formulæ, and bind heavy burdens. How many have I bound in my time, God forgive me! But for that, too, I shall receive my punishment, which is to me the most comforting of thoughts. . . . Yes—

'Tis life, whereof our nerves are scant,
Oh life, not death for which we pant,
More life, and fuller, that I want.

You are right—that longing to get rid of walls and roofs and all the chrysalis case of humanity is the earnest of a higher, richer state of existence. That instinct which the very child has to get rid of clothes, and cuddle to flesh—what is it but the longing for fuller union with those it loves? But see again (I always take the bright side),—If, in spite of wars and fevers, and accidents, and the strokes of chance, this world be as rich and fair and green as we have found it, what must the coming world be like? Let us comfort ourselves as St. Paul did (in infinitely worse times), that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed.¹

As to “What is the Good?” I suppose the only answer is, “God Himself is the Good.” But of Him we can form no intellectual conception; and it is this, in addition to a thousand things, which makes me feel the absolute certainty of a resurrection, and a hope that this, our present life, instead of being an ultimate one, which is to decide our fate for ever, is merely some sort of chrysalis state, in which man’s faculties are so

¹ From letter to his wife, July 16, 1855.

narrow and cramped, his chances (I speak of the millions, not the units) of knowing the good so few, that he may have chances hereafter, perhaps continually fresh ones to all eternity.

What does God require of thee but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with Him?—is nearly all I know; sin, *ἁμαρτία*, is literally, as it signifies, the missing of a mark, the falling short of an ideal, and not the transgression of an arbitrary decree; and that each miss brings a penalty, or rather is itself the penalty (for I do not believe in arbitrary rewards and punishments), is to me the best of news, and gives me hope for myself, and every human being, past, present, and future, for it makes me look on them all as children under a paternal education, who are being taught to become aware of and use their own powers in God's house, the universe, and for God's work in it; and in proportion as they learn to do that, they attain salvation, *σωτηρία*, literally *health* and *wholeness* of spirit, "soul," which is, like health of body, its own reward—one great part of that reward being not to know that they have a soul—as health of body makes one unconscious of one's body.¹

One of the kind wishes expressed for me is a long life. Let anything be asked for me except that. Let us live hard, work hard, go a good pace, get to our journey's end as soon as possible—then let the post-horse get his shoulder out of the collar. . . . I have lived long enough to feel, like the old post-horse, very thankful as the end draws near. . . . Long life is the last thing that I desire. It may be that, as one grows

¹ From letter written in 1856.

older, one acquires more and more the painful consciousness of the difference between what *ought* to be done and what *can* be done, and sits down more quietly when one gets the wrong side of fifty, to let others start up to do for us things we cannot do for ourselves.¹

JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL

(1819–1891)

I DON'T think a view of the universe from the stocks of any creed a very satisfactory one. But I continue to shut my eyes resolutely in certain speculative directions, and am willing to find solace in certain intimations that seem to me from a region higher than my reason. When they tell me that I can't *know* certain things, I am apt to wonder how *they* can be sure of that, and whether there may not be things which they *can't* know. . . . As I can't be certain, I won't be positive, and wouldn't drop some chapters of the Old Testament, even, for all the science that ever undertook to tell me what it doesn't know. They go about to prove to me from a lot of nasty savages that conscience is a purely artificial product, as if that wasn't the very wonder of it. What odds whether it is the thing or the aptitude that is innate? What race of beasts ever got one up in all their leisurely æons?²

. . . Life does seem sometimes a hard thing to bear, and all that makes it bearable is to occupy the mind with the nobler moods of contemplation—not shutting

¹ From speech at the Lotus Club, New York, February 1874.

² From letter to Leslie Stephen, May 15, 1876.

our eyes to what is mean and ugly, but striving to interpret it rightly. However we explain it, whether as implanted by God or the result of long and laborious evolution, there is something in the flesh that is superior to the flesh, something that can in finer moments abolish matter and pain, and it is to this we must cleave. I do not see how even loss of mind tells against a belief in this superior thing—for is the mind really dying in the same way as the body dies? or is it only that the tools it works with are worn out or bent or broken?¹ . . .

I think the evolutionists will have to make a fetich of their protoplasm before long. Such a mush seems to me a poor substitute for the Rock of Ages—by which I understand a certain set of higher instincts which mankind have found solid under their feet in all weathers.²

. . . Alas! in this world we do not cast off our hair shirts. At best we turn them or put on clean ones that haven't lost their bite by wear. . . . If one is good for anything, the world is not a place to be happy in—though, thank God, there are better things than being happy.³ . . .

. . . Thank God, I am as young as ever. There is an exhaustless fund of inexperience somewhere about me, a Fortunatus-purse that keeps me so. I have had my share of bitter experiences like the rest, but they have left no black drop behind them in my blood—*pour me faire envisager la vie en noir.*⁴

¹ From letter to Miss Grace Norton, August 16, 1879.

² From letter to same, September 12, 1879.

³ From letter to Mrs. E. Burnett, November 12, 1888.

⁴ From letter to R. W. Gilder, October 9, 1890.

WALT WHITMAN (1819-1892)

WEAVE in, weave in, my hardy life,
 Weave yet a soldier strong and full for great
 campaigns to come,
 Weave in red blood, weave sinews in like ropes, the
 senses, sight, weave in,
 Weave lasting sure, weave day and night the weft, the
 warp, incessant weave, tire not,
 (We know not what the use, O Life, nor know the aim,
 the end, nor really ought we know,
 But know the work, the need goes on, and shall go on,
 the death-envelop'd march of peace as well as
 war goes on),
 For great campaigns of peace the same the wiry threads
 to weave,
 We know not why or what, yet weave, forever weave.¹

Thanks in old age—thanks ere I go,
 For health, the mid-day sun, the impalpable air—for
 life, mere life,
 For precious ever-lingering memories (of you, my
 mother dear—you, father—you, brothers, sisters,
 friends),
 For all my days—not those of peace alone—the days
 of war the same,
 For gentle words, caresses, gifts from foreign lands,
 For shelter, wine, and meat—for sweet appreciation,

¹ "Weave in, my Hardy Life."

(You distant, dim unknown—or young or old—count-
less, unspecified, readers belov'd,
We never met, and ne'er shall meet—and yet our souls
embrace, long, close and long);
For beings, groups, love, deeds, words, books—for
colours, forms,
For all brave, strong men—devoted, hardy men—
who've forward sprung in freedom's help, all
years, all lands,
For braver, stronger, more devoted men—(a special
laurel ere I go, to life's war's chosen ones,
The cannoneers of song and thought—the great artil-
lerists—the foremost leaders, captains of the
soul):
As soldier from an ended war return'd—as traveller
out of myriads, to the long procession retro-
spective,
Thanks—joyful thanks!—a soldier's, traveller's thanks.¹

The two old, simple problems ever intertwined,
Close home, elusive, present, baffled, grappled.
By each successive age insoluble, pass'd on,
To ours to-day—and we pass on the same.²

JOHN RUSKIN . . (1819-1900)

THERE is no wealth but life. Life, including all
its powers of love, of joy, and of admiration.
That country is the richest which nourishes the greatest

¹ "Thanks in Old Age."

² "Love and Death."

number of noble and happy human beings; that man is the richest who, having perfected the functions of his own life to the utmost, has also the widest helpful influence, both personal, and by means of his possessions, over the lives of others.¹

Other symbols have been given often to show the evanescence and slightness of our lives—the foam upon the water, the grass on the housetop, the vapour that vanishes away; yet none of these are images of true human life. That life, when it is real, is *not* evanescent; is *not* slight; does *not* vanish away. Every noble life leaves the fibre of it interwoven for ever in the work of the world; by so much, evermore, the strength of the human race has gained; more stubborn in the root, higher towards heaven in the branch; and “as a teel tree, and as an oak—whose substance is in them when they cast their leaves—so the holy seed is in the midst thereof.”²

I do not at all understand the feelings of religious people about death. *All* my own sorrow is absolutely infidel, and part of the general failure and meanness of my heart.—Were I a Catholic, I do not think I should ever feel sorrow in any deep sense—but only a constant brightening of days as I drew nearer companionship—perhaps not with those I had cared for in this world—and certainly with others besides them. My own longing, and what trust I have, is only for my own people. But I have been putting chords of music lately, such as I can, to Herrick’s “Comfort”—

¹ From *Unto this Last* (“Ad Valorem”).

² From *Proserpina*, chap. iii.

In endless mirth
She thinks not on
What's said or done
In earth.
Nor doth she mind
Or think on't now
That ever thou
Wast kind.

—fearing only that it is too true.¹

GEORGE ELIOT (1819–1880)

(MARY ANN CROSS)

I DON'T know whether you strongly share, as I do, the old belief that made men say the gods loved those who died young. It seems to me truer than ever, now life has become more complex, and more and more difficult problems have to be worked out. Life, though a good to men on the whole, is a doubtful good to many, and to some not a good at all. To my thought, it is a source of constant mental distortion to make the denial of this a part of religion—to go on pretending things are better than they are. To me early death takes the aspect of salvation; though I feel, too, that those who live and suffer may sometimes have the greater blessedness of *being* a salvation.²

All the great religions of the world, historically considered, are rightly the objects of deep reverence and sympathy—they are the record of spiritual struggles, which are the types of our own. This is to

¹ From letter to Coventry Patmore, April 20, 1880.

² From letter written March 18, 1865.

me pre-eminently true of Hebrewism and Christianity, on which my own youth was nourished. And in this sense I have no antagonism towards any religious belief, but a strong outflow of sympathy. Every community met to worship the highest Good (which is understood to be expressed by God) carries me along in its main current; and if there were not reasons against my following such an inclination, I should go to church or chapel, constantly, for the sake of the delightful emotions of fellowship which come over me in religious assemblies—the very nature of such assemblies being the recognition of a binding belief or spiritual law, which is to lift us into willing obedience, and save us from the slavery of unregulated passion or impulse. And with regard to other people, it seems to me that those who have no definite conviction which constitutes a protesting faith, may often more beneficially cherish the good within them and be better members of society by a conformity, based on the recognised good in the public belief, than by a non-conformity which has nothing but negatives to utter.¹

O may I join the choir invisible
 Of those immortal dead who live again
 In minds made better by their presence: live
 In pulses stirred to generosity,
 In deeds of daring rectitude, in scorn
 For miserable aims that end with self,
 In thoughts sublime that pierce the night like stars,
 And with their mild persistence urge man's search
 To vaster issues.

¹ From letter to J. W. Cross, October 20, 1873.

This is life to come,
Which martyred men have made more glorious
For us who strive to follow. May I reach
That purest heaven, be to other souls
The cup of strength in some great agony,
Enkindle generous ardour, feed pure love,
Beget the smiles that have no cruelty—
Be the sweet presence of a good diffused,
And in diffusion ever more intense.
So shall I join the choir invisible
Whose music is the gladness of the world.¹

HENRY THOMAS BUCKLE

(1822–1862)

“PHILOSOPHERS tell us that there is no future punishment, and that is a great comfort. Society could not exist if it were not to punish crime; but we have no right to blame the criminal who has become what he is through a series of events over which he has had no real control. Knowing this, how can we believe that the Great Causer of all these events can at last punish His creature?” “How do we know that there is a future state?” I inquired. “Know it we do not,” he answered, “for it is transcendental; but our instincts lead us to believe.” “And what do you think on the question of personality in a future state?” I asked. . . . “I believe that what we have done here will not be lost to us, but also that the mind of the philosopher and that of the idiot will be equal after death. The

¹ From “O may I join the Choir Invisible.”

difference we now see in them is owing to the material through which the intellect filters. If mind is immortal it cannot really be diseased.¹

Where we have garnered up our hearts, and where our treasure is, thieves break in and spoil. Methinks, that in that moment of desolation the best of us would succumb but for the deep conviction that all is not really over; that we have as yet seen only a part; and that something remains behind. Something behind; something which the eye of reason cannot discern, but on which the eye of affection is fixed. What is that which, passing over us like a shadow, strains the aching vision as we gaze at it? Whence comes that sense of mysterious companionship in the midst of solitude; that ineffable feeling which cheers the afflicted? Why is it that at these times our minds are thrown back on themselves, and, being so thrown, have a forecast of another and a higher state? If this be a delusion, it is one which the affections have themselves created, and we must believe that the purest and noblest elements of our nature conspire to deceive us. So surely as we lose what we love, so surely does hope mingle with grief.²

MATTHEW ARNOLD

(1822-1888)

AND though we wear out life, alas!
 Distracted as a homeless wind,
 In beating where we must not pass,
 In seeking what we shall not find;

¹ From *Life and Writings*, by Alfred Henry Huth (Conversations with Mrs. Huth.)

² Written after his mother's death, April 1859.

Yet we shall one day gain, life past,
Clear prospect o'er our being's whole ;
Shall see ourselves, and learn at last
Our true affinities of soul. . . .

Then we shall know our friends !—though much
Will have been lost—the help in strife,
The thousand sweet, still joys of such
As hand in hand face earthly life—

Though these be lost, there will be yet
A sympathy august and pure ;
Ennobled by a vast regret,
And by contrition seal'd thrice sure.

And we, whose ways were unlike here,
May then more neighbouring courses ply ;
May to each other be brought near,
And greet across infinity. . . .

How sweet to feel, on the boon air,
All our unquiet pulses cease !
To feel that nothing can impair
The gentleness, the thirst for peace—

The gentleness too rudely hurl'd
On this wild earth of hate and fear ;
The thirst for peace a raving world
Would never let us satiate here.¹

. . . Long we try in vain to speak and act
Our hidden self, and what we say and do
Is eloquent, is well—but 'tis not true !

¹ From "A Farewell" (to his sister).

And then we will no more be rack'd
 With inward striving, and demand
 Of all the thousand nothings of the hour
 Their stupefying power ;
 Ah yes, and they benumb us at our call !
 Yet still, from time to time, vague and forlorn,
 From the soul's subterranean depth upborne
 As from an infinitely distant land,
 Come airs, and floating echoes, and convey
 A melancholy into all our day.

Only—but this is rare—
 When a belovèd hand is laid in ours,
 When, jaded with the rush and glare
 Of the interminable hours,
 Our eyes can in another's eyes read clear,
 When our world-deafen'd ear
 Is by the tones of a loved voice caress'd—
 A bolt is shot back somewhere in our breast,
 And a lost pulse of feeling stirs again.
 The eye sinks inward, and the heart lies plain,
 And what we mean, we say, and what we would,
 we know.

A man becomes aware of his life's flow,
 And hears its winding murmur ; and he sees
 The meadows where it glides, the sun, the
 breeze.

And there arrives a lull in the hot race
 Wherein he doth for ever chase
 That flying and elusive shadow, rest.
 An air of coolness plays upon his face,
 And an unwonted calm pervades his breast.
 And then he thinks he knows

The hills where his life rose,
And the sea where it goes.¹

. . . What was before us we know not,
And we know not what shall succeed.

Haply, the river of Time—
As it grows, as the towns on its marge
Fling their wavering lights
On a wider, statelier stream—
May acquire, if not the calm
Of its early mountainous shore,
Yet a solemn peace of its own.

And the width of the waters, the hush
Of the grey expanse where he floats,
Freshening its current and spotted with foam
As it draws to the Ocean, may strike
Peace to the soul of the man on its breast—
As the pale waste widens around him,
As the banks fade dimmer away,
As the stars come out, and the night-wind
Brings up the stream
Murmurs and scents of the infinite sea.²

Ye heavens, whose pure dark regions have no sign
Of languor, though so calm, and, though so great,
Are yet untroubled and unpassionate ;
Who, though so noble, share in the world's toil,
And, though so task'd, keep free from dust and soil!
I will not say that your mild deeps retain
A tinge, it may be, of their silent pain
Who have long'd deeply once, and long'd in vain—

¹ From "The Buried Life."

² From "The Future."

But I will rather say that you remain
 A world above man's head, to let him see
 How boundless might his soul's horizons be,
 How vast, yet of what clear transparency !
 How it were good to abide there, and breathe free ;
 How fair a lot to fill
 Is left to each man still !¹

What mortal, when he saw,
 Life's voyage done, his heavenly Friend,
 Could ever yet dare tell him fearlessly :
 "I have kept unfringed my nature's law ;
 The inly-written chart thou gavest me,
 To guide me, I have steer'd by to the end " ?

Ah ! let us make no claim,
 On life's incognisable sea,
 To too exact a steering of our way ;
 Let us not fret and fear to miss our aim,
 If some fair coast have lured us to make stay,
 Or some friend hail'd us to keep company.

Ay ! we would each fain drive
 At random, and not steer by rule.
 Weakness ! and worse, weakness bestow'd in vain
 Winds from our side the unsuiting consort rive,
 We rush by coasts where we had lief remain ;
 Man cannot, though he would, live chance's fool.

No ! as the foaming swath
 Of torn-up water, on the main,
 Falls heavily away with long-drawn roar

¹ From "A Summer Night."

On either side the black deep-furrow'd path
Cut by an onward-labouring vessel's prore,
And never touches the ship-side again ;

Even so we leave behind,
As, charter'd by some unknown Powers,
We stem across the sea of life by night,
The joys which were not for our use design'd ;—
The friends to whom we had no natural right,
The homes that were not destined to be ours.¹

Foil'd by our fellow-men, depress'd, outworn,
We leave the brutal world to take its way,
And, *Patience ! in another life*, we say,
The world shall be thrust down, and we up-borne.
And will not, then, the immortal armies scorn
The world's poor, routed leavings ? or will they,
Who fail'd under the heat of this life's day,
Support the fervours of the heavenly morn ?
No, no ! the energy of life may be
Kept on after the grave, but not begun ;
And he who flagg'd not in the earthly strife,
From strength to strength advancing—only he,
His soul well-knit, and all his battles won,
Mounts, and that hardly, to eternal life.²

Long fed on boundless hopes, O race of man,
How angrily thou spurn'st all simpler fare !
“ Christ,” some one says, “ was human as we are ;
No judge eyes us from Heaven, our sin to scan ;
“ We live no more, when we have done our span.”—

¹ “ Human Life.”

² “ Immortality.”

“ Well, then, for Christ,” thou answerest, “ who can care ?

From sin, which Heaven records not, why forbear ?
Live we like brutes our life without a plan ! ”

So answerest thou ; but why not rather say :

“ Hath man no second life ?—*Pitch this one high !*

Sits there no judge in Heaven, our sin to see ?—

“ *More strictly, then, the inward judge obey !*

Was Christ a man like us ? *Ah ! let us try*

*If we then, too, can be such men as he ! ”*¹

Whether one lives long or not, to be less and less *personal* in one’s desires and workings is the great matter, and this too I feel, I am glad to say, more deeply than I did, but for progress in the direction of the “ seeketh not her own ” there is always room, up to the very end, or, at least, near it.²

And so this loss comes to me just after my forty-fifth birthday . . . to remind me that *the time past of our life may suffice us !*—words which have haunted me for the last year or two, and that we “ should no longer live the rest of our time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God.” However different the interpretation we put on much of the facts and history of Christianity, we may unite in the bond of this call, which is true for all of us, and for me, above all, how full of meaning and warning.³

¹ “ The Better Part.”

² From letter to his mother, December 27, 1866.

³ From letter to Mrs. Forster, January 4, 1868.

HENRI PASTEUR (1822-1895)

MY philosophy is of the heart and not of the mind, and I give myself up, for instance, to those feelings about eternity which come naturally at the bedside of a cherished child drawing its last breath. At those supreme moments there is something in the depths of our souls which tells us that the world may be more than a mere combination of phenomena proper to a mechanical equilibrium brought out of the chaos of the elements simply through the gradual action of the forces of matter. I admire them all, our philosophers! We have experiments to straighten and modify our ideas, and we constantly find that nature is other than we had imagined. They, who are always guessing, how can they know!¹ . . .

There are two men in each one of us: the scientist, he who starts with a clear field and desires to rise to the knowledge of Nature through observation, experimentation, and reasoning, and the man of sentiment, the man of belief, the man who mourns his dead children and who cannot, alas, prove that he will see them again, but who believes that he will, and lives in that hope; the man who will not die like a vibrio, but who feels that the force that is within him cannot die. The two domains are distinct, and woe to him who tries to let them trespass on each other in the so imperfect state of human knowledge.²

¹ From letter to Sainte-Beuve, 1865.

² Said at the sitting of the Académie de Médecine, 1875.

WILLIAM (JOHNSON) CORY

(1823-1892)

YOU promise heavens free from strife,
 Pure truth, and perfect change of will ;
 But sweet, sweet is this human life,
 So sweet, I fain would breathe it still ;
 Your chilly stars I can forego,
 This warm kind world is all I know.

You say there is no substance here,
 One great reality above :
 Back from that void I shrink in fear,
 And child-like hide myself in love :
 Show me what angels feel. Till then,
 I cling, a mere weak man, to men.

You bid me lift my mean desires
 From faltering lips and fitful veins
 To sexless souls, ideal quires,
 Unwearied voices, worldless strains :
 My mind with fonder welcome owns
 One dear dead friend's remembered tones.

Forsooth the present we must give
 To that which cannot pass away ;
 All beauteous things for which we live
 By laws of time and space decay.
 But oh, the very reason why
 I clasp them, is because they die.¹

¹ "Mimnermus in Church."

ERNEST RENAN (1823-1892)

MY experience of life has . . . been very pleasant, and I do not think that there are many human beings happier than I am. I have a keen liking for the universe. There may have been moments when subjective scepticism has gained a hold upon me, but it never made me seriously doubt of the reality, and the objections which it has evoked are sequestered by me as it were within an inclosure of forgetfulness; I never give them any thought, my peace of mind is undisturbed. Then, again, I have found a fund of goodness in nature and in society. Thanks to the remarkable good luck which has attended me all my life, and always thrown me into communication with very worthy men, I have never had to make sudden changes in my attitudes. Thanks, also, to an almost unchangeable good temper, the result of moral healthiness, which is itself the result of a well-balanced mind, and of tolerably good bodily health, I have been able to indulge in a quiet philosophy, which finds expression either in grateful optimism or playful irony. . . .

The infinite goodness which I have experienced in this world inspires me with the conviction that eternity is pervaded by a goodness not less infinite, in which I repose unlimited trust.

All that I have now to ask of the good genius which has so often guided, advised, and consoled me is a calm and sudden death at my appointed hour, be it near or distant. . . . Suffering degrades, humiliates, and leads to blasphemy. . . .

God's will be done! I have little chance of adding much to my store of knowledge; I have a pretty accurate idea of the amount of truth which the human mind can, in the present stage of its development, discern. I should be very grieved to have to go through one of those periods of enfeeblement during which the man once endowed with strength and virtue is but the shadow and ruin of his former self, and often, to the delight of the ignorant, sets himself to demolish the life which he has so laboriously constructed. Such an old age is the worst gift which the gods can give to man. . . .

The existence which was given me without my having asked for it has been a beneficent one for me. Were it offered to me, I would gladly accept it over again. The age in which I have lived will not probably count as the greatest, but it will doubtless be regarded as the most amusing. Unless my closing years have some very cruel trials in store, I shall have, in bidding farewell to life, to thank the cause of all good for the delightful excursion through reality which I have been enabled to make.¹

COVENTRY PATMORE

(1823-1896)

AS usual I have to congratulate myself, every birthday, on finding myself happier than I was on the last. The more *unnecessary* everything becomes to one, the more one's capacity for enjoying everything is increased, and the more one returns to a childish pleasure in life. At sixty-seven I begin again to see

¹ From *Recollections of My Youth* (conclusion).

the daisies as I saw them sixty years ago. But besides this increase of capacity for happiness, I have more circumstantial blessings than ever I had—better health, freedom from worldly anxieties, two or three friends—yourself not least—whose dearness grows with time, innocent and loving wife and children, with plenty of leisure to enjoy them, and innumerable other blessings,—all doubled by a readiness to part with them all, when the unknown season comes.¹

. . . Life, with the happiest of us, unless we get out of it early, is a deep tragedy, or a succession of tragedies, and the end of each of us is to be the subject of a tragedy. There is nothing so consoling about such evils as their inevitability.²

FREDERICK MAX MÜLLER

(1823–1890)

MY practical religion was what I had learnt from my mother; that remained unshaken in all storms, and in its extreme simplicity and childishness answered all the purposes for which religion is meant. Then followed, in the Universities of Leipzig and Berlin, the purely historical and scientific treatment of religion, which, while it explained many things and destroyed many things, never interfered with my early ideas of right and wrong, never disturbed my life with God and in God, and seemed to satisfy all my religious wants. I never was frightened or shaken by the critical

¹ From letter to Mrs. Jackson, July 25, 1890.

² From letter to Robert Bridges, March 4, 1891.

writings of Strauss or Ewald, of Renan or Colenso. If what they said had an honest ring, I was delighted, for I felt quite certain that they could never deprive me of the little I really wanted. That little could never be little enough; it was like a stronghold with no fortifications, no trenches, and no walls around it. . . . I had little to carry, no learned impedimenta to safeguard my faith. If a man possesses this one pearl of great price, he may save himself and his treasure, but neither the tinselled vestments of a Cardinal, nor the triple tiara that crowns the Head of the Church, will serve as life-belts in the gales of doubt and controversy.¹

Much as I admired Ruskin when I saw him with his spade and wheel-barrow, encouraging and helping his undergraduate friends to make a new road from one village to another, I never myself took to digging, and shovelling, and carting. Nor could I quite agree with him, happy as I always felt in listening to him, when he said: "What we think, or what we know, or what we believe, is in the end of little consequence. The only thing of consequence is what we do." My view of life has always been the very opposite! What we do, or what we build up, has always seemed to me of little consequence. Even Nineveh is now a mere desert of sand, and Ruskin's new road also has long since been worn away. The only thing of consequence, to my mind, is what we think, what we know, what we believe!²

Our soul here may be said to have risen without any recollection of itself and of the circumstances of

¹ From *My Autobiography: A Fragment*, chap. viii.

² *Ibid.*, chap. ix.

its former existence. It may not even recollect the circumstances of its first days on earth, but it has within it the consciousness of its eternity, and the conception of a beginning is as impossible for it as that of an end, and if souls were to meet again hereafter as they met in this life, as they loved in this life, without knowing that they had met and loved before, would the next life be so very different from what this life has been here on earth—would it be so utterly intolerable and really not worth living? Personally I must confess to one small weakness. I cannot help thinking that the souls towards whom we feel drawn in this life are the very souls whom we knew and loved in a former life, and that the souls who repel us here, we do not know why, are the souls that earned our disapproval, the souls from which we kept aloof, in a former life. But let that pass as what others have a perfect right to call it—a mere fancy. Only let us remember that if our love is the love of what is merely phenomenal, the love of the body, the kindness of the heart, the vigour and wisdom of the intellect, our love is the love of changing and perishable things, and our soul may have to grope in vain among the shadows of the dead. But if our love, under all its earthly aspects, was the love of the true soul, of what is immortal and divine in every man and woman, that love cannot die, but will find once more what seems beautiful, true, and lovable in worlds to come as in worlds that have passed. This is very old wisdom, but we have forgotten it. Thousands of years ago an Indian sage, when parting from his wife, told her in plain words: “We do not love the husband in the husband, nor the wife in the wife, nor the children in the children. What we love in them, what we

truly love in everything, is the eternal âtman, the immortal self," and, as we should add, the immortal God, for the immortal self and the immortal God must be one.¹

THOMAS HENRY HUXLEY

(1825–1895)

I NEITHER deny nor affirm the immortality of man. I see no reason for believing in it, but, on the other hand, I have no means of disproving it. Pray understand that I have no *à priori* objections to the doctrine. No man who has to deal daily and hourly with nature can trouble himself about *à priori* difficulties. Give me such evidence as would justify me in believing anything else, and I will believe that. Why should I not? It is not half so wonderful as the conservation of force or the indestructibility of matter. Whoso clearly appreciates all that is implied in the falling of a stone can have no difficulty about any doctrine simply on account of its marvellousness. . . .

Science warns me to be careful how I adopt a view which jumps with my preconceptions. . . . My business is to teach my aspirations to conform themselves to fact, not to try and make facts harmonise with my aspirations. . . . Sit down before fact as a little child, be prepared to give up every preconceived notion, follow humbly wherever and to whatever abysses nature leads, or you shall learn nothing. I have only begun to learn content and peace of mind since I have resolved at all risks to do this. . . .

¹ From "Is Man Immortal?" (*Last Essays*).

I have the firmest belief that the Divine government (if we may use such a phrase to express the sum of the "customs of matter") is wholly just. The more I know intimately of the lives of other men (to say nothing of my own), the more obvious it is to me that the wicked does *not* flourish, nor is the righteous punished. But for this to be clear we must bear in mind what almost all forget, that the rewards of life are contingent upon obedience to the *whole* law—physical as well as moral—and that moral obedience will not atone for physical sin, or *vice versa*. . . . The ledger of the Almighty is strictly kept, and every one of us has the balance of his operations paid over to him at the end of every minute of his existence. . . .

Kicked into the world a boy without guide or training, or with worse than none, I confess to my shame that few men have drunk deeper of all kinds of sin than I. Happily, my course was arrested in time—before I had earned absolute destruction—and for long years I have been slowly and painfully climbing, with many a fall, towards better things. And when I look back, what do I find to have been the agents of my redemption? The hope of immortality or of future reward? I can honestly say that for these fourteen years such a consideration has not entered my head. No, I can tell you exactly what has been at work. *Sartor Resartus* led me to know that a deep sense of religion was compatible with the entire absence of theology. Secondly, science and her methods gave me a resting-place independent of authority and tradition. Thirdly, love opened up to me a view of the sanctity of human nature, and impressed me with a deep sense of responsibility.

If at this moment I am not a worn-out, debauched, useless carcass of a man, if it has been or will be my fate to advance the cause of science, if I feel that I have a shadow of a claim on the love of those about me, if in the supreme moment when I looked down into my boy's grave my sorrow was full of submission and without bitterness, it is because these agencies have worked upon me, and not because I have ever cared whether my poor personality shall remain distinct for ever from the All from whence it came and whither it goes.¹

It is a curious thing that I find my dislike to the thought of extinction increasing as I get older and nearer the goal.²

I am a very strong believer in the punishment of certain kinds of actions, not only in the present, but in all the future a man can have, be it long or short. Therefore in hell, for I suppose that all men with a clear sense of right and wrong (and I am not sure that any others deserve such punishment) have now and then "descended into hell," and stopped there quite long enough to know what infinite punishment means. And if a genuine, not merely subjective, immortality awaits us, I conceive that, without some such change as that depicted in the fifteenth chapter of the first Epistle to the Corinthians, immortality must be eternal misery. The fate of Swift's Struldbrugs seems to me not more horrible than that of a mind imprisoned for ever within the *flammanitia moenia* of inextinguishable memories.³

¹ From letter to Charles Kingsley, September 23, 1860.

² From letter to J. Morley, December 1883.

³ From *An Apologetic Irenicon*, 1892.

DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI

(1828-1882)

I believe in a future life. Have I not had evidence of that often enough? Have I not heard and seen those that died long years ago? ¹

[Mr. W. M. Rossetti writes:—"As to my brother's reported assertion, 'I believe in a future life,' this was partially true at all periods of his career, and was entirely true in his closing years. It depended partly upon what we call 'Spiritualism,' on many of whose manifestations he relied, while ready to admit that some others have been mere juggling. . . . I cannot say with any accuracy what he supposed immortality to consist of. . . . I cannot recollect having myself ever heard my brother allege that he had *seen* a spiritual appearance, or what we term a ghost" (*Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, 1895).]

The lost days of my life until to-day,
What were they, could I see them on the street
Lie as they fell? Would they be ears of wheat
Sown once for food but trodden into clay?
Or golden coins squandered and still to pay?
Or drops of blood dabbling the guilty feet?
Or such spilt water as in dreams must cheat
The undying throats of Hell, athirst alway?

¹ Said in November 1881 (see *Autobiography* of W. B. Scott).

I do not see them here ; but after death
 God knows I know the faces I shall see,
 Each one a murdered self, with low last breath.
 "I am thyself,—what hast thou done to me?"
 "And I—and I—thyself" (lo ! each one saith),
 "And thou thyself to all eternity !" ¹

And thou, O Life, the lady of all bliss,
 With whom, when our first heart beat full and fast,
 I wandered till the haunts of men were pass'd,
 And in fair places found all bowers amiss
 Till only woods and waves might hear our kiss,
 While to the winds all thought of Death we cast :—
 Ah, Life ! and must I have from thee at last
 No smile to greet me and no babe but this ?

Lo ! Love, the child once ours ; and Song, whose hair
 Blew like a flame and blossomed like a wreath ;
 And Art, whose eyes were worlds by God found fair :
 These o'er the book of Nature mixed their breath
 With neck-twined arms, as oft we watched them there ;
 And did these die that thou mightst bear me Death ? ²

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI (1830–1894)

LIFE is not sweet. One day it will be sweet
 To shut our eyes and die :
 Nor feel the wild flowers blow, nor birds dart by
 With flitting butterfly,
 Nor grass grow long above our heads and feet,

¹ From *The House of Life*, Sonnet lxxxvi. ("Lost Days").

² *Ibid.* Sonnet c. ("Newborn Death").

Nor hear the happy lark that soars sky high,
Nor sigh that spring is fleet and summer fleet,
Nor mark the waxing wheat,
Nor know who sits in our accustomed seat.

Life is not good. One day it will be good
To die, then live again ;
To sleep meanwhile : so not to feel the wane
Of shrunk leaves dropping in the wood,
Nor hear the foamy lashing of the main,
Nor mark the blackened bean-fields, nor where
stood
Rich ranks of golden grain
Only dead refuse stubble clothe the plain :
Asleep from risk, asleep from pain.¹

The wise do send their hearts before them to
Dear blessed Heaven, despite the veil between ;
The foolish nurse their hearts within the screen
Of this familiar world, where all we do
Or have is old, for there is nothing new :
Yet elder far that world we have not seen ;
God's Presence antedates what else hath been :
Many the foolish seem, the wise seem few.
Oh foolishest fond folly of a heart
Divided, neither here nor there at rest !
That hankers after Heaven, but clings to earth ;
That neither here nor there knows thorough
mirth,
Half-choosing, wholly missing, the good part :—
Oh fool among the foolish, in thy quest.²

¹ "Life and Death."

² "Later Life," Sonnet xxiv.

This Life is full of numbness and of balk,
 Of haltingness and baffled short-coming,
 Of promise unfulfilled, of everything
 That is puffed vanity and empty talk :
 Its very bud hangs cankered on the stalk,
 Its very song-bird trails a broken wing,
 Its very Spring is not indeed like Spring,
 But sighs like Autumn round an aimless walk.
 This Life we live is dead for all its breath ;
 Death's self it is, set off on pilgrimage,
 Travelling with tottering steps the first short stage :
 The second stage is one mere desert dust
 Where Death sits veiled amid creation's rust :—
 Unveil thy face, O Death who art not Death.¹

In life our absent friend is far away :
 But death may bring our friend exceeding near,
 Show him familiar faces long so dear
 And lead him back in reach of words we say.
 He only cannot utter yea or nay
 In any voice accustomed to our ear ;
 He only cannot make his face appear
 And turn the sun back on our shadowed day.
 The dead may be around us, dear and dead ;
 The unforgotten dearest dead may be
 Watching us with unslumbering eyes and heart
 Brimful of words which cannot yet be said,
 Brimful of knowledge they may not impart,
 Brimful of love for you and love for me.²

When all the overwork of life
 Is finished once, and fallen asleep

¹ "Later Life," Sonnet xxvi.

² *Ibid.* Sonnet xxviii.

We shrink no more beneath the knife,
 But having sown prepare to reap,
 Delivered from the crossway rough,
 Delivered from the thorny scourge,
 Delivered from the tossing surge,
 Then shall we find—(please God!)—it is enough?

Not in this world of hope deferred,
 This world of perishable stuff;
 Eye hath not seen, nor ear hath heard,
 Nor heart conceived that full “enough”:
 Here moans the separating sea,
 Here harvests fail, here breaks the heart;
 Here God shall join and no man part,
 All one in Christ, so one—(please God!)—with me.¹

Is it worth while to live,
 Rejoice and grieve,
 Hope, fear and die?
 Man with man, truth with lie,
 The slow show dwindles by:
 At last what shall we have
 Besides a grave?
 Lies and shows no more,
 No fear, no pain,
 But after hope and sleep
 Dear joys again.
 Those who sowed shall reap:
 Those who bore
 The Cross shall wear the Crown:
 Those who clomb the steep

¹ From “Time Flies,” August 17.

There shall sit down.
 The Shepherd of the sheep
 Feeds His flock there,
 In watered pastures fair
 They rest and leap.
 "Is it worth while to live?"
 Be of good cheer :
 Love casts out fear :
 Rise up, achieve.¹

JEAN INGELOW (1830-1897)

I LIVE by hope and in hope ; and I find hope sweet enough to give a meaning to my life, to console me for the loss of youth, and to make the fear of death fade to little more than wonder over the long-desired change.²

THOMAS EDWARD BROWN (1830-1897)

I AM not at all sure that immortality will not turn out to be a conditional thing, the conditions being in no way theological, but natural, almost mechanical. A soul that has got weight and momentum will naturally tend to go on. A light-textured paper-bag sort of soul will be blown by "a violent cross-wind . . . transverse . . . into the devious air." . . . We don't know—a force of persistence may be generated by the *nisus* of progression, and, morally, we may be worth going on

¹ From "Time Flies," December 12.

² From letter to a friend in 1872.

with. But if the *prochain numéro* is never to be issued, and our story breaks off quite suddenly and incomplete, I am quite satisfied; I would not trouble the "Omnipotens et Sempiterna" about such a trifle.¹

My plan always was to recognise two lives as necessary—the one the outer kapelistic life of drudgery, the other the inner and cherished life of the spirit. It is true that the one has a tendency to kill the other, but it must not, and you must see that it does not.²

In my life I have been so much alone, it cannot be helped. Where is the comrade? I never had one. The absolute self is far within, and no one can reach it. I will not cant, but God reaches it, and He only. I used to envy the surface people, obviously happy, and in their happiness *all there*, so to speak, the full complete presence of one being to another—no, it is not for men of a certain temperament. Yet we love candour, sincerity, thoroughness, and would fain saturate ourselves with free communication. Poor old Emerson and his over and under soul, he was not far wrong. His friend Carlyle broke down the division habitually—smashed the two souls into one great smudge of discontent. I would not do this. Keep them both going separately. A strong man has strength enough to do this, and all his surroundings benefit thereby. Moreover, in a sweet ancillary way they reflect upon us their sunshine.³

You say you don't believe in a future state, but you

¹ From letter written February 1892.

² From letter written September 21, 1893.

³ From letter written September 21, 1895.

have "gleams of hope." We are all much in the same plight. . . . "The gleams" are blessed things, just caught at our noblest throbs and in our most ecstatic moods. That they are ecstatic, as apprehended by us, does not disprove their essential permanence. Rather it suggests the contrary. Metaphysically the balance is in favour of a future state. To a sceptical nature like mine, the *balance* is everything. That is what I get from my own reflections, or rather, what I got ages ago, helped by Plato, confirmed by Butler. It was done once for all; you can't reopen these metaphysical problems. Let sleeping dogs lie. I invite no one to go back into them with me. To those who have no aptness for metaphysical speculations I would say, "Stop where you are! Accept the opinion of the majority. The greatest thinkers of all ages have believed in the future state. They have thought it out for you, be content. In a hundred difficult matters you act upon similar testimony." Rest assured it is not parsons and such folk that have passed through the region of shadows into the light of the eternal day; no, but the great fixed stars of the human race, pondering, reflecting, judicious. If, at the end of their great communings, somewhat of a rapture of intoxication has seized them, what wonder? They have seen the King in His beauty. Give them credit for honesty, for intelligence, for a sympathy with human wants, for absolute fairness, for burning love. That is how I think of them and feel towards them. With tottering steps I have accompanied them. But that was years ago. Now I don't want to totter, but to walk steadily. Therefore I say, unhesitatingly, "I believe."¹

¹ From letter written June 15, 1897.

As in a theatre the amusèd sense
 Beholds the strange vicissitudes of things,
 Young Damon's loves, the fates of clowns and kings,
 And all the motley of the gay pretence—
 Beholds, and on an acme of suspense
 Stands vibrant till the curtain falls, door swings,
 Lights gutter, and the weary murmurings
 Of o'er-watched varlets intimate us thence :
 Even so we gaze not on the things that are,
 Nor aught behold but what is adumbrate.
 The show is specious, and we laugh and weep
 At what is only meant spectacular ;
 And when the curtain falls, we may not wait :
 Death takes the lights, and we go home to sleep.¹

GUSTAVE DORÉ (1832-1883)

YOU know that I am not without religion, and I sometimes think that if trials and sorrows are a law imposed upon us by Providence, an end to them is vouchsafed to those who without weakness have drained the bitter cup to the dregs.²

I have read . . . what you say of our old recollections (in this I am always English) of Boulogne, and of our gambols with Ingram on the sands. *O nos vingt-ans ! O les beaux vingt-ans !* Neither you nor I thought, in those days, of days of mourning, of failures, of sorrows. Only many years later did we reflect that we must learn a little philosophy ; and we were ignorant of the maxim

¹ From *Collected Poems* ("At the Play").

² Written 1873.

of the ancient sage of the East, "To live is to see others die," or of the other, "Suffering is the end of all science."¹

LOUISA MAY ALCOTT

(1832-1888)

WHEN I had the youth I had no money; now I have the money I have no time; and when I get the time, if I ever do, I shall have no health to enjoy life. I suppose it's the discipline I need; but it's rather hard to love the things I do and see them go by because duty chains me to my galley. If I come into port at last with all sail set, that will be reward perhaps.

Life always was a puzzle to me, and gets more mysterious as I go on. I shall find it out by and by and see that it's all right, if I can only keep brave and patient to the end.²

LEWIS CARROLL (1832-1898)

(CHARLES LUTWIDGE DODGSON)

ONE subject you touch on—"the Resurrection of the Body"—is very interesting to me, and I have given it much thought (I mean long ago). *My* conclusion was to give up the *literal* meaning of the material body altogether. *Identity*, in some mysterious way, there evidently is; but there is no resisting the

¹ From letter written in 1882.

² From *Journal*, January 1874.

scientific fact that the actual *material* usable for physical bodies has been used over and over again—so that each atom would have several owners. The mere solitary fact of the existence of *cannibalism* is to my mind a sufficient *reductio ad absurdum* of the theory that the particular set of atoms I shall happen to own at death (changed every seven years, they say) will be mine in the next life—and all the other insuperable difficulties (such as people born with bodily defects) are swept away at once if we accept St. Paul's "spiritual body," and his simile of the grain of corn.¹

I find that as life slips away (I am over fifty now), and the life on the other side of the great river becomes more and more the reality, of which *this* is only a shadow, that the petty distinctions of the many creeds of Christendom tend to slip away as well—leaving only the great truths which all Christians believe alike. More and more, as I read of the Christian religion, as Christ preached it, I stand amazed at the forms men have given to it, and the fictitious barriers they have built up between themselves and their brethren. I believe that when you and I come to lie down for the last time, if only we can keep firm hold of the great truths Christ taught us—our own utter worthlessness and His infinite worth, and that He has brought us back to our one Father, and made us His brethren, and so brethren to one another—we shall have all we need to guide us through the shadows.²

¹ From letter written September 25, 1885.

² From letter to a friend (no date).

GENERAL CHARLES GEORGE GORDON (1833–1885)

I AM of a much more material mind than you are. I think much more of the risen flesh as material. I think I am right, for else, why is so much said of the inheritance of the earth (by earth, I think universe)? This is why I have even a carnal desire for departure from this world. I am in a hut, I want to go to a palace; now a palace is only a superior style of a hut, but it is of the same nature—namely, a dwelling-place. I cannot, with my mind, desire a state of existence altogether different from this; I mean *different* in the way of our being shadowy spirits. Everything seems to me to point to a material spiritual body; we are miracles in our formation, and it can scarcely be that we were so created only for this earth.¹

I have had many enjoyable things after the world's estimation, but there is nothing in any way to be compared to the study of God's Word. How wonderfully it fits in with the various events of life! . . .

It is a delightful thing to be a fatalist, not as that word is generally employed, but to accept that, *when things happen* and *not* before, God has for some wise reason so ordained them; *all* things, not only the great things, but all the circumstances of life—that is what to me is meant by the words, "ye are dead." We have nothing further to do, when the scroll of events is unrolled, than to accept them as being for the best;

¹ From letter to his sister, November 1833.

but *before it is unrolled* it is a different matter, for you would not say, "I sat still and let things happen." With this belief all I can say is, that amidst troubles and worries no one can have peace until he thus stays upon his God—*that* gives a superhuman strength.

You are aware I look on death as being life. The end of our term on earth is much to be desired, for at the best it is a groaning life. I do earnestly desire that I were *ripe*. . . . I believe we have no more pain in leaving the world than we had in entering it, yet, to the eye, the body seems in pain; how odd also it is that for years we know nothing, though we live and give plenty of trouble. I do not believe we die—we sleep; and the opening of our eyes in the next world will not be in a world which is a new scene to us, for I believe in our pre-existence, and that we are only put into the flesh to teach us how bitter a thing it is to be separate from God, and to know Him more than we otherwise could have done. . . . I for my part feel caged on this earth, for the Bible has such very comforting promises, which all fit in so beautifully, that one longs to realise the future.¹

JAMES THOMSON (1834–1882)
("B. V.")

O ANTIQUE fables! beautiful and bright,
And joyous with the joyous youth of yore;
O antique fables! for a little light
Of that which shineth in you evermore,

¹ From letter to his sister (date unknown).

To cleanse the dimness from our weary eyes,
And bathe our old world with a new surprise
Of golden dawn entrancing sea and shore.

We stagger under the enormous weight
Of all the heavy ages piled on us,
With all their grievous wrongs inveterate,
And all their disenchantments dolorous,
And all the monstrous tasks they have bequeathed ;
And we are stifled with the airs they breathed,
And read in theirs our dooms calamitous.

Our world is all stript naked of their dreams ;
No deities in sky or sun or moon,
No nymphs in woods and hills and seas and streams ;
Mere earth and water, air and fire, their boon ;
No God in all our universe we trace,
No heaven in the infinitude of space,
No life beyond death—coming not too soon.

Our souls are stript of their illusions sweet,
Our hopes at best in some far future years
For others, not ourselves, whose bleeding feet
Wander this rocky waste where broken spears
And bleaching bones lie scattered on the sand ;
Who know *we* shall not reach the Promised Land,
Perhaps a mirage glistening through our tears.

And if there be this Promised Land indeed,
Our children's children's children's heritage,
Oh, what a prodigal waste of precious seed,
Of myriad myriad lives from age to age,
Of woes and agonies and blank despairs,
Through countless cycles, that some fortunate heirs
May enter, and conclude the pilgrimage !

But if it prove a mirage after all !
 Our last illusion leaves us wholly bare,
 To bruise against Fate's adamant wall,
 Consumed or frozen in the pitiless air ;
 In all our world, beneath, around, above,
 One only refuge, solace, triumph—Love,
 Sole star of light in infinite black despair.

O antique fables ! beautiful and bright,
 And joyous with the joyous youth of yore ;
 O antique fables ! for a little light
 Of that which shineth in you evermore,
 To cleanse the dimness from our weary eyes,
 And bathe our old world with a new surprise
 Of golden dawn entrancing sea and shore.¹

WILLIAM MORRIS (1834–1896)

DEATH have we hated, knowing not what it meant ;
 Life have we loved, through green leaf and
 through sere,

Though still the less we knew of its intent :
 The Earth and Heaven through countless year on year,
 Slow changing, were to us but curtains fair,
 Hung round about a little room, where play
 Weeping and laughter of man's empty day.²

PHILLIPS BROOKS (1835–1893)

DEATH, while not the end of Life, must certainly
 be a very significant event *in* Life, and therefore

¹ " Proem. "

² From the *Earthly Paradise* (" L'Envoi ").

there may well be a criticalness in it which will make it a true time of judgment.

There is no possibility of logically denying the eternal continuance of sin and suffering. It is bound up with the continuance for ever of free will. On the other hand, there is no possibility of asserting it, for that, too, assumes a determination of men's free wills which has not yet been made, and which nobody can know.

This life is probationary, but only as every period of existence is probationary with reference to the times which follow it. It is not ended in a fixed decree, but in a more strongly assured character. Heaven is the soul finding its own perfect personality in God. The activity of the Eternal Life must be intense. Stated philosophically, it will be the soul working without resistance or reluctance in perfect harmony with its surroundings. Stated religiously, it will be the child reconciled in perfect love to the Father, and serving Him in the delight of love forever.¹

It has seemed to me that these last years have had a peace and fulness which there did not use to be. I say it in deep reverence and humility. I do not think it is the mere quietness of advancing age. I am sure it is not indifference to anything which I used to care for. I am sure that it is a deeper knowledge and truer love of Christ.

And it seems to me impossible that this should have come in any way except by the experience of life. I find myself pitying the friends of my youth who died when we were twenty-five years old, because whatever

¹ From his Journal ("Eternity"), 1882.

may be the richness of the life to which they have gone, and in which they have been living ever since, they never can know that particular manifestation of Christ which He makes to us here on earth, at each successive period of our human life. All experience comes to be but more and more of pressure of His life on ours. It cannot come by one flash of light or one great convulsive event. It comes without haste and without rest in this perpetual living of our life with Him. And all the history of outer or inner life, of the changes of circumstances, or the changes of thought, gets its meaning and value from this constantly growing relation to Christ.

I cannot tell you how personal this grows to me. He is here. He knows me and I know Him. It is no figure of speech. It is the reallest thing in the world. And every day makes it realler. And one wonders with delight what it will grow to as the years go on.¹

How sure one grows of a few things as he grows older—of God and Christ and his best friends, and the great end of all in good! Everything else may grow uncertain, but these things are surer every day.²

LORD BOWEN (1835-1894)

A SINCERE wish to learn what is true, however much it may conflict with any of one's cherished ideas, and a resolution, at all costs, to follow what seems to one (after hearing as much of all sides as one

¹ From letter written June 30, 1891.

² From letter written December 17, 1892.

can) to be true, is to my mind the one thing to be aimed at in life. . . . I think that, if people, who are hurt and grieved by finding those they care for following any path of thought they dislike, would reflect on it, they would see that loyalty to the cause of what one soberly (after weighing all sides to the best of one's judgment) believes to represent truth, is the first thing needful. . . . Life is too short for the world's ways or opinions or distinctions to be of much consequence to any one.¹

I think life is very well worth living. I have no cynical views about it, but I do not think so very many things are worth having.²

Life and new life—give me the cup once more.
 No need to crown for me its rim with flowers—
 These would but bring again the scent of hours
 Too sweet to scorn, too fleeting to deplore.
 Youth's triumphs—revel—joys in golden store—
 Rich love itself hath brought me poor content,
 For the grey thought that, ere the wine be spent,
 Night comes apace to close the festal door.
 Let boys wreath fate with lilies ; I, aflame
 To do what yet I know not, strive a strife,
 Smite once in thunder at all doors of fame,
 And make dull worlds re-echo ; ask but life,
 To slake this thirst, and be what men have been,
 Ere I go hence, and am no longer seen.³

I could have sung, had life been clear
 From thoughts too sad for mortal ear,

¹ From letter to his cousin, Miss F. S. Graves, 1868.

² From letter written 1834.

³ 1879-94.

And visions full of human wrong.
 But doubt and tumult in the brain
 Confused the dream and spoiled the strain :
 And now—the wild winds sing my song.

I could have loved, had love's repast
 Been as the mortal passion vast,
 Or matched the longing of the soul.
 But larger love than earth can know
 Would leave our deepest fires aglow—
 Now—o'er my heart the waters roll.

I could have wept, had any tears
 Been as enduring as the years
 That make and mar our mortal span.
 But hearts grow cold as seasons fly,
 Life leaves us but the power to sigh,
 And takes the strength to weep from man.

I could have striven, had trumpets blown,
 Had but some battle banner shown,
 Some feat been named, to do or die.
 But the ignoble grooves of life
 Were all remote from hero strife,
 And down we drifted—Time and I.

O winds, eternal mountain choir,
 More passionate than mortal lyre !
 O waves, more loud than trumpet-tongue !
 Ye chant the wild regrets of man ;
 His fever since the world began—
 Ye know the songs my heart had sung.¹

¹ "Manqué (1879-94)."

JOHN RICHARD GREEN

(1837-1883)

THE Sermon on the Mount is a succession of "impossible precepts." They are all summed up in a precept still more impossible: "Be ye perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect." And so it must ever keep ahead of man. If there be any truth in our veriest instincts, God must ever be beyond us, beyond our power, our knowledge, our virtue. And it is to that "beyond" that Christianity points—it is thither it bids man march. Hence life becomes, not the dead, contented indolence of the Moslem, but a vivid activity. Think of St. Paul's images: the race, the fight—or of that nobler passage—the sum of Christian philosophy—where he pictures the growth "together" of the Christian Church, of the Christian world, "unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (see passage, Eph. iv. 16).¹

Remember my theory of life is no mere indolence theory. I have worked hard and mean to work hard on things which have a worthy end and use. What I protest against is mere asceticism, a blindness to what is really beautiful and pleasurable in life, a preference for the disagreeable, as if it were in *itself* better than the agreeable, above all a parting of life into this element and that, and a contempt of half the life we have to live, as if it were something which hindered us from living the other half. Mind and soul and body—I

¹ From letter to W. Boyd Dawkins, March 24, 1863.

would have all harmoniously develop together—neither intellectualism nor spiritualism nor sensualism, but a broad humanity.¹

I do not vex myself as I used with questions that I cannot answer. I do not strive to bring my thoughts to rule and measure—but new life brings with it new hopes, new cravings after belief, new faith that we will know what is true. Vague, dim hopes; vague, dim faith it may be—but I am not impatient of vagueness and dimness as I used to be. I see now that to know we must live, that to know the right we must live the right.²

What seems to grow fairer to me as life goes by is the love and peace and tenderness of it; not its wit and cleverness and grandeur of knowledge, grand as knowledge is, but just the laughter of little children and the friendship of friends and the cosy talk by the fireside and the sight of the flowers and the sound of music.³

JOHN ADDINGTON SYMONDS

(1840–1893)

EXPERIENCE of life, often extremely bitter, at times unexpectedly blissful, has taught me that there is nothing extraordinarily great in the greatest of achievements, nothing mean in the meanest of occupations; briefly, that human life is not to be estimated by what men perform, but by what they are.⁴

¹ From letter to Miss Stopford, March 24, 1877.

² From letter to Miss S., May 27, 1877.

³ From letter to Mrs. Creighton.

⁴ From *Autobiography* (written about 1871).

I should call my own attitude a spiritualised stoicism rather than Calvinism ; the latter assumed *inequality* in the divine dealings with man. All my notions about law and the homogeneity of the universe lead me to expect absolute equality. I am therefore in the peculiar position of an optimist who is prepared to accept extinction. This enables me to feel a really passionate interest in the spectacle of the universe, and a firm conviction that its apparent injustice and inequalities must have a meaning, imply a *good in process*. At the back of my thought lie two perceptions : (1) our incapacity to formulate the future and what we want in it ; (2) our right to assume that manly acquiescence, combined with continued effort to get the utmost out of our lives by work in our own way, is the best preparation for any grace that may be granted to us.¹

The pain of losing Janet was very great, and the *desiderium* will remain permanent. . . . Such a word as "despair," the counterpart of hope in personal immortality, does not exist in my vocabulary. This fact I have tested while sitting by my daughter's corpse, while consigning it to the earth. And I want to utter this now, because, as you observe, "the perplexities of theory have strangely entwined themselves with the inexorabilities of life in our correspondence."

The net result of my present experience is to corroborate my previous opinions. It has roused in me no new longings, no new regrets, laid its finger on no lurking hope and no concealed despair. Only it has confirmed my conviction that the main point in the whole position is that of Euripides, τοὺς ζῶντας εἶδ' ἀρᾶν.

¹ *Autobiography*. From letter to Roden Noel, about 1887.

Upon this point I have only the purest satisfaction with regard to Janet. She attained to spiritual perfection in her life. What troubles me about myself is the sense of shortcomings, rendering the part I play in life less worthy of man's station in the world.¹

I deeply feel it to be the duty of a man to make the best of himself, to use his talents, to make his very defects serve as talents, and to be something for God's sake who made him. In other words, to play his own note in the universal symphony. We have not to ask whether other people will be affected by our written views of this or that. . . . The point for us is to bring all parts of ourselves into vital correlation, so that we shall think nothing, write nothing, love nothing, but in relation to the central personality, the bringing of which into prominence is what is our destiny and duty in this short life. And my conclusion is that, in this one life, given to him on earth, it is the man's duty, as recompense to God who placed him here, or Nature, mother of us all—and the man's highest pleasure, as a potent individuality—to bring all factors of his being into correspondence for the presentation of himself in something. Whether the world regards that final self-presentation of the man or not, seems to me just no matter. As Jenny Lind once said to me, "I sing to God," so, I say, let us sing to God. And for this end let us not allow ourselves to be submerged in passion, or our love to lapse in grubbery; but let us be human beings, horribly imperfect certainly, living for the best effectuation of themselves which they find possible. If

¹ *Autobiography*. From letter to Henry Sedgwick, April 14, 1887, after the death of his eldest daughter.

all men and women lived like this, the symphony of humanity would be a splendid thing to listen to.¹

ALPHONSE DAUDET (1840-1897)

WHEN I look at life I do not find it banal, and just because it is not banal it interests me, and I observe it, and I like to live it and put it in my books. I adore life because it is beautiful, because it is full of poetry and mystery, of seduction and fascination. All is interesting in life, but all depends on the way in which one looks at it. For example, there are people who reprove me for having a too vivid and poetic impression of men and things, of giving to these an intensity which they do not possess. Is it my fault if I find things are beautiful, men good, and life a poem? Ah! if we ought to nourish in our hearts a hatred of all that surrounds us, if we ought to find life a hell, or only worthy of our indifference—better blow out our brains! I pity such people. We are all immersed in life up to our necks, and they say that life is not interesting! That makes me doubt of them and of their brains! They detest life because they don't comprehend it, because they don't even know how to look at it.²

¹ *Autobiography*. From letter to H. F. Brown, July 2, 1891.

² Spoken a few days before his death.

ROBERT BUCHANAN

(1841-1901)

I END as I began,
I think as first I thought ;
Woe worth the world, if Man
Only of dust is wrought,
Only to dust must go
After his life's brief span ;—
I think so still, and so
I end as I began.

When first I learnt to know
The common strife of all,
My boy's heart shared the woe
Of those who fail and fall,
For all the weak and poor
My tears of pity ran,—
And still they flow, ev'n more
Than when my life began !

I revered from the first
The Woman-Soul divine,
(Mother, that faith was nurst
On that brave breast of thine !)
Pointing the heavenward way,
The angel-guide of man,
She seems to me to-day
As when my faith began !

Revolter, sword in hand,
Friend of the weak and worn,

A boy, I took my stand
 Among the Knights forlorn ;
 Eager against the Strong
 To lead the martyr'd van,
 I strive 'gainst Lust and Wrong
 As when the fight began !

Never to bow and kneel
 To any brazen Lie,—
 To love the worst, to feel
 The least is ev'n as I,—
 To hold all fame unblest
 That helps no struggling man,—
 In this, as in the rest,
 I end as I began !

The creeds I've cast away
 Like husks of garner'd grain,
 And of them all this day
 Does never a creed remain ;
 Save *this*, blind faith that God
 Evolves thro' martyr'd Man :
 Thus, the long journey trod,
 I end as I began !

I dream'd when I began
 I was not born to die,
 And in my dreams I ran
 From shining sky to sky ;—
 And still, now life grows cold
 And I am grey and wan,
 That infant's Dream I hold,
 And end as I began !¹

¹ " L'Envoi."

NIETZSCHE . . . (1844-1890)

NO! Life has not disappointed me! On the contrary, from year to year I find it richer, more desirable, more enigmatical—from the day on which the great emancipator came to me, the thought that life can be an experiment for the enlightened man, and not a duty, not a destiny, not a deceit!—And knowledge itself: it may be for others something different; for example, a couch of repose, or the way to a couch of repose, or an entertainment, or an idling—for me it is a world of perils and triumphs, in which the heroic sentiments also have their arena and dancing-ground. “*Life as a means to knowledge*”—with this principle in one’s heart one can not only be brave, but can even *live joyfully and laugh joyfully!* And who could understand how to laugh well and live well, who did not first of all understand war and triumph well?¹

RICHARD LEWIS

NETTLESHIP . . . (1846-1892)

I DO believe that the “eternal now” is the thing to live for really, and then the future settles itself; but somehow or other it seems possible to live for the day without really living in it—I mean, to secure the disadvantages both of the star-gazer and of the earth-grubber.²

¹ From *The Gay Science*, § 324.

² From letter written January 1880.

I am quite sure of one thing—however far I may be at present from living up to it—that the only strength for me is to be found in the sense of a personal presence everywhere, it scarcely matters whether it be called human or divine; a presence which only makes itself felt at first in this and that particular form and feature, not because it is not itself personal and individual, but because our capacity of personal and individual feeling is so limited and weak. Into this presence we come, not by leaving behind what are usually called earthly things, or by loving them less, but by living more intensely in them, and loving more what is really lovable in them; for it is literally true that this world *is* everything to us, if only we choose to make it so, if only we “live in the present” *because* it is eternity.¹

The more one thinks of the way in which the great men have spoken of life, the more one sees that by eternity they have meant the present fact. It is frightfully hard to realise, though I believe the hardness comes mainly from one’s inability to take things simply, like a child. One is always “striving and crying,” instead of letting the wind of the world carry one “where it listeth.”²

GEORGE JOHN ROMANES

(1848–1894)

FOR my own part I have always felt that the two most precious things in life are faith and love, and more and more the older that I grow. Ambition

¹ From letter written July 1883.

² From letter written December 1889.

and achievement are a long way behind in my experience, in fact out of the running altogether. The disappointments are many and the prizes few, and by the time they are attained seem small.

The whole thing is vanity and vexation of spirit without faith and love.¹

I have come to see that cleverness, success, attainment count for little; that goodness or . . . *character* is the important factor in life.²

Amen, now lettest Thou Thy servant, Lord,
Depart in peace, according to Thy word :
Although mine eyes may not have fully seen
Thy great salvation, surely there have been
Enough of sorrow and enough of sight
To show the way from darkness into light ;
And thou hast brought me through a wilderness of pain,
To love the sorest paths if soonest they attain.

Enough of sorrow for the heart to cry—
“Not for myself, nor for my kind, am I ;”
Enough of sight for Reason to disclose,
“The more I learn the less my knowledge grows.”
Ah ! not as citizens of this our sphere,
But aliens militant we sojourn here,
Invested by the hosts of Evil and of Wrong,
Till Thou shalt come again with all Thine angel throng.

As Thou hast found me ready to Thy call,
Which stationed me to watch the outer wall,

¹ From letter written January 31, 1893.

² Spoken later in 1893.

And, quitting joys and hopes that once were mine,
 To pace with patient steps this narrow line,
 Oh! may it be that, coming soon or late,
 Thou still shalt find Thy soldier at the gate,
 Who then may follow Thee till sight needs not to prove,
 And faith will be dissolved in knowledge of Thy love.¹

[Later in 1894 Romanes said, "I have now come to see that faith is intellectually justifiable. . . . It is Christianity or nothing. . . . I as yet have not that real inward assurance; it is with me as that text says, 'I am not able to look up.'"]

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

(1850-1894)

THE sufferings of life may be handled by the very greatest in their hours of insight; it is of its pleasures that our common poems should be formed; these are the experiences that we should seek to recall or to provoke; and I say with Thoreau, "What right have I to complain, who have not ceased to wonder?" and, to add a rider of my own, who have no remedy to offer?²

That which we suffer ourselves has no longer the same air of monstrous injustice and wanton cruelty that suffering wears when we see it in the case of others. So we begin gradually to see that things are not black, but have their strange compensations; and

¹ "Hebrews xi. 10 (or ii. 10)," written on Easter Day 1894.

² From letter to William Archer, March 29, 1885.

when they draw towards their worst, the idea of death is like a bed to lie on. I should bear false witness if I did not declare life happy. . . . I feel kindly to the powers that be; I marvel they should use me so well; and when I think of the case of others, I wonder too, but in another vein, whether they may not, whether they must not, be like me, still with some compensation, some delight. To have suffered, nay, to suffer, sets a keen edge on what remains of the agreeable. This is a great truth, and has to be learned in the fire.¹

Not only do I believe that literature should give joy, but I see a universe, I suppose, eternally different from yours; a solemn, a terrible, but a very joyous and noble universe, where suffering is not at least wantonly inflicted, though it falls with dispassionate partiality, but where it may be and generally is nobly borne; where above all (this I believe; probably you don't: I think he may, with cancer) *any brave man may make* out a life which shall be happy for himself, and, by so being, beneficent to those about him. And if he fails, why should I hear him weeping? I mean if I fail, why should I weep? why should *you* hear *me*? Then to me morals, the conscience, the affections, and the passions are, I will own frankly and sweepingly, so infinitely more important than the other parts of life, that I conceive men rather triflers who become immersed in the latter; and I will always think the man who keeps his lip stiff, and makes "a happy fire-side clime," and carries a pleasant face about to friends and neighbours, infinitely greater (in the abstract) than

¹ From letter to William Archer, October 30, 1885.

an atrabilious Shakespeare or a backbiting Kant or Darwin.¹

Yes, if I could believe in the immortality business, the world would indeed be too good to be true; but we were put here to do what service we can, for honour and not for hire; the sods cover us, and the worm that never dies, the conscience, sleeps well at last; these are the wages, besides what we receive so lavishly day by day; and they are enough for a man who knows his own frailty and sees all things in the proportion of reality. The soul of piety was killed long ago by that idea of reward. Nor is happiness, whether eternal or temporal, the reward that mankind seeks. Happinesses are but his wayside campings; his soul is in the journey; he was born for the struggle, and only tastes his life in effort and on the condition that he is opposed. How, then, is such a creature, so fiery, so pugnacious, so made up of discontent and aspiration, and such noble and uneasy passions—how can he be rewarded but by rest? I would not say it aloud; for man's cherished belief is that he loves that happiness which he continually spurns and passes by; and this belief in some ulterior happiness exactly fits him. He does not require to stop and taste it; he can be about the rugged and bitter business where his heart lies; and yet he can tell himself this fairy tale of an eternal tea-party, and enjoy the notion that he is both himself and something else; and that his friends will yet meet him, all ironed out and emasculate, and still be lovable—as if love did not live in the faults of the beloved only, and draw its breath in an unbroken round of

¹ From letter to William Archer, November 1, 1885.

forgiveness! But the truth is, we must fight until we die; and when we die there can be no quiet for mankind but complete resumption into—what?—God, let us say—when all these desperate tricks will lie spell-bound at last.¹

Life is not all Beer and Skittles. The inherent tragedy of things works itself out from white to black and blacker, and the poor things of a day look ruefully on. Does it shake my cast-iron faith? I cannot say it does. I believe in an ultimate decency of things; ay, and if I woke in hell, should still believe it!²

I have trod the upward and the downward slope;
I have endured and done in days before;
I have longed for all, and bid farewell to hope;
And I have lived and loved, and closed the door.³

¹ From letter to Edmund Gosse, January 2, 1886.

² From letter to Sidney Colvin, August 23, 1893.

³ From *Songs of Travel*.

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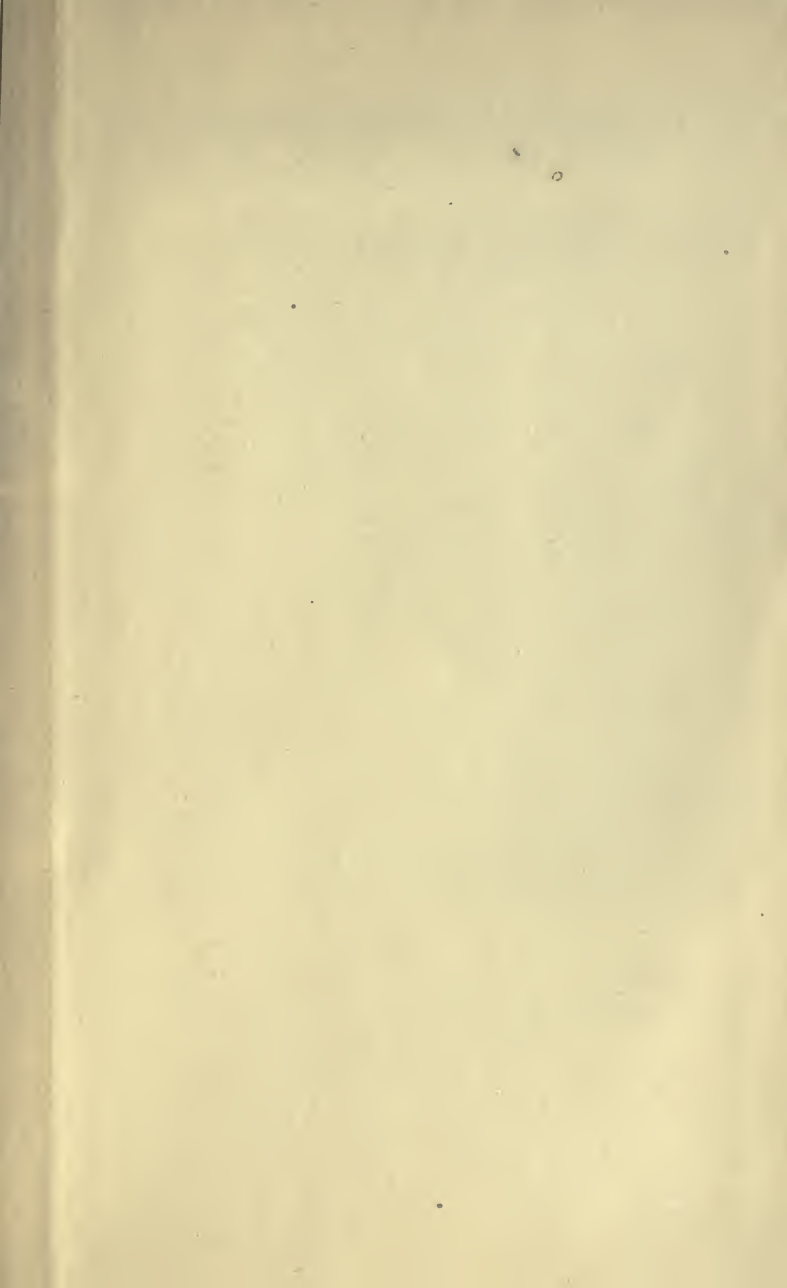
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