

“Passing Away”
or
Visions of the Vale of Easton –
An Original Essay
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“Passing Away”
Or
The Vale of Easton.

It was on a mild summer afternoon that I was going from the summit of that precipitous mountain which the classical young Ladies of our place have denominated Mt. Ida. I was admiring the beautiful situation of our town, and my mind was fast swelling with that pride, perhaps pardonable, but be it as it may, inherent in every human breast. While thus musing, the melancholy sound of the tolling bell was borne upon the gentle gale, the sure token that another soul has sped its flight to the land of spirits. My thoughts were turned immediately upon the transitory things of this life, and I seemed to dream a dream, which was not a dream, but rather a vision of things that were.

Methought before me lay a lovely vale. At the foot of the craggy precipice, upon which I stood, rolled the dark waves of a broad river, which a short distance to the East emptied itself into a mightier stream. To the right in front there arose a gentle slope, which broke off in an abrupt declivity. Farther to the North-West arose a higher mount, which likewise terminated in a precipice, at whose base rolled a silver stream which finally lost itself in the larger stream in the East. This larger river first burst upon the view far in the mountains of the North, and was lost among the mountains of the South. The vale beneath me was of surpassing loveliness, and here and there beneath the shady branches of some wide spreading oak, might be seen the humble cottage of the shepherd, reflecting from its white surface the dazzling radiance of a meridian sun. The land as far as the eye could reach was pasture land, and in every direction could be seen the fleecy flock, and over and anon the wild shrill sounds of the shepherd's pipe fell meltingly upon the ear. The stillness that reigned over the lovely vale was subduing; its beauty rivaled the poetized Tempe of antiquity, and the shepherd of the Arcadian groves, and the worshipper of Elian plains, would have joyfully forsaken their native haunts, to feed their flock and worship here.

But suddenly the scene changed. True the same mountains were there. The same rivers were there, the hills, and the same vale. But all else had changed. The shepherd and his flock had disappeared. The wild notes of the shepherds pipe had passed away. His cottage and its wide spreading oak had passed away, His green pastures had passed away, and all that rendered that lovely vale lovely to the shepherds eye had passed away.

My vision had changed to scenes of another and later age. Beneath me were spread the broad streets of a populous city. Here might be seen the marble front of some idols temple. There rose the stately palace of the prince. Around might be seen the dwelling of the rich and the cottage of the poor. On the borders of the city, and as far as the eye could reach, the golden harvest was whitening in the suns warm rays, waiting for the reapers scythe.

“’Tis noon – the breezes oer the landscape play,
And kiss the rosy cheek of orient day –
A fresh perfume is on the summer air,
And all that greets the sense is sweet and fair –
The forest foliage wears its liveliest green,
The cloudless sky is tranquil and serene –
The rivers wander silently along,
Nor heed the echo of the sweet bird's song –
And the far mountains wear a misty hue,
As if they caught the tinge of heavens own blue.
Beauty is every where – she lingers by
In all that greets the ear or glads the eye –
And nature walks abroad in all her charms,
As if to win man to her gentle arms.”

The gates of the temples are opened, and as Aurora's first beams cast themselves across the azure sky, from every cottage, dwelling, and palace, issues the pious multitude. They hasten along the broad avenues, they fill the temples, and bow themselves before idols of their own making.

‘Tis noon, and the busy multitude throng the busy streets. The merchant brings forth his rich merchandise of purples, gems and fruits of distant climes, the mechanic displays the product of his ingenious mind, and the labourer groans under his wearisome task, all, all of them verifying the prediction of their slighted, and long forgotten God. “In the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat thy bread.”

‘Tis eve, and now the public walks and shady groves resound with the ringing laugh of children, just liberated from their guardians eye, and teachers rod. Here is a group basking in their parents' smile. Beneath some trysting tree, perhaps, the maiden and her lover whisper. Every shade of character and pursuit is visible. The whole city is seeking an antidote for the day's fatigue and ennui. “Some flock to the fanes of pleasure and mirth.” Some in “thoughtless revelry, weave the lightsome mazes of the airy dance.” Others seek their pastime amid the sacred pleasures of the social hearth-stone. All have their separate joys.

‘Tis night, and Morpheus has commenced his rule. Sweet Luna has reached her zenith, has passed away beneath the Western horizon. Deep darkness rest upon the city. A solemn and awful stillness pervades all nature. Not a breeze murmurs, not a leaf moves, not a sound is heard. A deathlike silence reigns around. But hark! what means that savage yell! A shriek! And now the cry, To arms, to arms, rends the air. The affrighted father, brother, husband, friend, spring from their sleepy couch, and grasp the sword. And now the clash of steel on steel breaks upon the stillness of the night, and the groans of the dying, the shrieks of the flying, the cries of the vanquished, and the fierce war-whoop of the conquering, commingle in the dread sound of blood and carnage, war and death. The red-man of the forest has broken upon the peaceful city.

Again the scene had changed. True the same mountains were there. The same rivers were there, the same hills and the same vale. But all else had passed away. The temples, their idols, their priests had passed away. The palace and its prince, the dwelling and its rich, the cottage and its poor, the merchant, the mechanic, the labourer had passed away. All had passed away. Not a vestige, not a solitary column remained to tell where the city was.

The scene had changed, and from the lowest level of the plain to the highest summit of the mountain, where once the husbandman had gathered his golden reward, now an interminable forest rose. Aye! Where the very city once stood, a dark forest now frowned. Where once the light laugh of the merry children rose, now the savage panther growled. Where once the temple in which thousands worshiped, stood, now the curling smoke ascends from the wig-wam of the savage, and the wild-child gambols along the forest-bound rivers, where once was heard the "echo of the boatmans song." The shepherd's vale, the city's site had become the red-mans home.

Again and for the last time the vision changed. True the same mountains were there. The same rivers were there, the same hills, and the same vale. But all else had passed away. The savage and his wigwam had vanished. The dark and boundless forest had passed away, and I once more gazed upon my native place. Beneath me rolled the dark waves of the Lehigh. Farther on rolled the rapid stream of the Bushkill, and far away to the North the Delaware was seen bursting through the romantic passes of the Wey-Gat, and, receiving the sister streams of the Bushkill and Lehigh, rolled away and was lost amid the mountains of the South. On every side rose our lovely hills and mounts, gilded by the dying rays of the expiring sun, and embosomed in their midst lay our beautiful town. The tall spires from the temples of the living. God pierced the blue sky, and from many a slender pole flowed on the gentle breeze the glorious "Stars and Stripes." I gazed upon the spot where once the shepherd, the idol-worshipper, and savage lived, and passed away.

To the sceptic these scenes which we have portrayed, may appear as the offspring of the wild imagination of the visionary. We do not say that these scenes have actually taken place within the bounds of the "Forks of the Delaware," but we do say, and the reader of American antiquities will join with us in saying, that these things may, aye! and undoubtedly, have taken place within the limits of the American continent.

Sceptick, go, visit the tombs, the mounds, and ruined cities of the valley of the Mississippi, and tell us, where are their builders and inhabitants? Have they not passed away? Go to the desolate places of the South. Visit the magnificent ruins of the cities Uxmal and Palenque, and tell us, whose were those altars, these idols, these fallen abodes. Have not their original possessors long since passed away, and are not the savage hordes, who rendered those places desolate, too passing away? Where are the savages who once possessed this land in which we now dwell? Passed away. What is becoming of the red-man on our western frontier? Passing away, and it is to be feared that his passing away will be an eternal curse upon our country.

But the history of the New World, involved in inexplicable doubt, and conjecture as it is, only corroborates that of the old, and in both we read passing away.

On every page of the annals of those nations that have gone before us, we read, that the world, its inhabitants, and the things of the world are passing away. Where is Babylon the great? Where are her temples, her gardens, her towers, and her palaces? Passed away, and "the abomination of desolation" now sits, where once the Queen of cities smiled in all her loveliness. For centuries she was the object of the worlds admiration. She was the worship of all lands, the pride of her children, the dread of her enemies. But where and what is she? Her princes, her

nobles, her children have passed away, her glory has departed, her beauty is faded, and the howling beast, and hissing reptile mark where Babylon was.

Where is Thebes, hundred-gated Thebes? Ask the wild wolf that flies affrighted from her ashes. Ask the shrieking owl that makes its home amid its smouldering ruins. Ask the dried and shriveled mummies the relics of a race long since dead. She has passed away; her brazen gates have seen the spoilers hand; and

“Now the token
Of temples once renowned,
Is but a pillar, broken,
With grass and wall-flowers around
And the lone serpent rears her young
Where the triumphant lyre hath sung.”

Where is Palmyra, the gem of the desert? Where is her proud queen, her gilded porticos, her stately palaces? They have passed away, and a few solitary and isolated columns on the desert waste, remain to tell of her former glory.

Thus the world has been the theatre of a series of continual changes. It was first astonished at the originality and success of the empire founded by Nimrod. This empire rose to a surprising pitch of glory and power, until the mighty trembled at its frown, and the weak crouched submissively beneath its rod. But its many successes taught its enemies prowess, and as rival kingdoms rose, it fell and passed away. Next the “Land of the Pyramids” arose, dazzled the world by its brightness, faded, and passed away. So with the Persian empire, the republics of Greece and Rome, the empires of Alexander, of the Ceasars, and of Charlemange. They had their day of glory, and have passed away.

The next that attracted the attention of mankind, was that brilliant meteor that flashed across the firmament of nations, and passed away amid a blaze of undying glory, the empire of Napoleon. Nations crumbled beneath its power, while others arose supported by its hand. And although many are yet living who have felt its sign, and although the nations of Europe have scarcely revived from its stunning effects, still it has passed away, and is now numbered among the things that were. To the eye of the close observer that, which is called the European Column, too is decaying and passing away.

Thus have we seen that the earth is naught but a grave, a vast sepulchre, filled with the remains of nations and people long since passed away; food for worms, and heaps of rubbish, amid which the diligent antiquarian searches for the curious relics of bye-gone years.

If then, passing away is written upon the works of art and the nations of the earth, what is the duty which every American citizen owes to his country? To preach and practice reform. We would not have the American citizen to mingle in those childish bickering, which the deep-thinking and profoundly investigating wise-acres of this day would fain call politics. We would not have him influenced by party strife. We would not have him listen to or have his opinions formed by, the vile, abusive, venal editor, or the smattering pedagogue. What! is the time come when the American mind is to be moulded by such as these, who, while our countries liberties are being undermined by the machinations of foreign tyrants, and the dark clouds of anarchy and civil war are hovering above us, are working, and for what? For self. Oh! if we had the concentrated essence of disgust and scorn we would think it too pure to pour upon vileness.

“We strive in vain to set their evil forth.

The words that should sufficiently accuse,

And execrate such reprobates, had need
Come glowing from the lips of eldest wo.”

Let the American youth, who are [^]soon to take the places of their fathers in ruling our land, gird on the impenetrable armour of morality and truth. Let them observe the signs of the times. Let them read the histories of the nations that have long since passed away, and they will be enabled to steer the “ship of state” through the rocks and shoals on which those nations split. That they may form their own opinions, let a good, plain and solid education, be the boast of “young America.” And since it be the inevitable destiny of America that she too must pass away, let her passing away, come when it will, be not like the passing away of a comet, beautiful, admired, passed away, and forgotten, but rather like that of the sun, if it would pass away, admired, loved, and revered for the benefits it bestowed, and regretted, and lamented for the loss which the world sustained by its passing away.

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