

THE LIVING PULPIT,

OR

EIGHTEEN SERMONS

BY EMINENT LIVING DIVINES

OF

THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH.

WITH

A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF THE EDITOR,

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FAITH AND SIGHT CONTRASTED.

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For we walk by faith, not by sight.—2 Cor. 5—7.

It is a singular fact, in the history of redemption, that the faculty in man, which deceived him to his ruin at the first, is never restored to perfect confidence this side of heaven. That faculty is sense, in the widest acceptation of the term, which we here extend to internal emotion as well as external perception. While, in the direction of ordinary life, the most simple and unerring of all evidence is that of the senses, in the great duty of dealing with God, in reference to the conduct, acceptance, and everlasting welfare of the soul, it is the most imperfect and fallacious of all reliances. Through this avenue sin entered, and God seems to have closed it indignantly against all further intercourse with him, while we continue in this evil tenement. As if it were some facile door, through which thieves and robbers once entered, and would still enter, to mar and spoil the house, the glorious Builder will have it opened no more, in spiritual communication with himself, until the whole building shall be taken

down, and reconstructed on the model of a glorious immortality.

Through the senses it was that the tempter first invaded the soul; "when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof and did eat, and gave also to her husband with her, and he did eat." Now that eye, that ear, that touch, that taste, that sense of every kind is all disparaged in the remedial dealing of God; and faith is the eye, the ear, the touch, the taste, the one all engrossing faculty by which grace renovates and rules the soul. Religion and the senses are divorced. These are degraded to the rank of handmaiden; and never will the soul repose with confidence upon them more, until error and frailty shall have been for ever removed. The apostle intimates, in this connection, that we shall hereafter walk by sight. When appearances will no longer deceive us; when the highest good will be for ever present to the soul; when the senses will be gloriously transformed, and made perfect in heaven, we shall walk by what we do see and know. But, for the present, wherever there is spiritual life,

I. We walk by faith, and not by *carnal* sight.

II. We walk by faith, and not by *spiritual* sight.

III. We walk by faith, and not by *glorified* sight.

I. "All men have not faith." There is all the difference between those who have this grace, and those who have it not, that another sense would make in the range of man's power and enjoyment. How immeasurably wider the perceptions of a blind man, when suddenly admitted or restored to the

window of the eye. Where he had groped along, and stumbled with faltering footsteps, a wide, and distant, and adorned horizon bursts upon his view. More extended, more enchanting, more important unspeakably, is the enlargement when God restores the eye of faith to the soul. It sees a guide, a chart, a destination, which the spiritually blind can never perceive. It spreads another hue on all it scans; inspires new emotions, new estimations, and animates to incomparably greater speed the career on which it enters the soul.

1. Sight regards only things which are seen; but faith, things which are not seen. (2 Cor. iv. 18.) It could not be otherwise with maimed and defective nature than to seek those things only which its powers are fitted to perceive. We may crowd assurances of divine realities upon the natural man, and compel his assent to the evidence that they are realities of momentous import, and yet he is no more actuated by them, in his conduct, than is the deaf man by all the harmonies of music. There may be a notional apprehension entertained with zeal. Men, from what they read in the Word of God, and what they see in the conduct of others, and what they love by the dint of habit, and what they fear by the force of conscience and superstition, may seem to walk at times as though divine realities were believed, when all the while it is but sight that actuates them. Every thing short of the faith, which fixes a clear, and calm, and steadfast, and *transforming* reliance on the Lord Jesus Christ, "whom, having not seen, we love; in whom, though now we see him not, yet believing, we rejoice with joy unspeak-

able and full of glory;" every thing short of the faith which "endures as seeing him who is invisible," is sight; which gathers all its motives and activity from what is visible and palpable.

2. Sight regards what is present, faith what is future. It is "the substance of things hoped for," as well as "the evidence of things not seen." It is its great peculiarity, not only to displace palpable things in their power on the heart, by things of purely fiducial realization, but to grasp these as they lie in futurity also. It is not only impossible that the natural man be influenced by what is unseen, more than what is seen and felt, but still more, that he be influenced by unseen realities, in anticipation, more than by what is in present and actual contact with his feelings and desires. Without true faith, to fill up the void with animating hopes of the future, religion, which sweeps from the soul its temporal gratifications, would be an agonizing emptiness—the most intolerable of all conditions. All men would forsake it, like Demas, through love of this present world. Sight is always spreading enchantment over the present scene. Fast as experience detects the mockery of one illusion, she spreads another and a fresh attraction, persuading the soul, in spite of its sober convictions, to live as though its inward thought were, "this house shall continue for ever, this dwelling place to all generations." But faith unmasks the charm, and however faintly done, holds the future with steady and constraining influence before us; all is disenchanting at her touch; the world is a wilderness; the soul is made to come up from it, leaning on none of its pleasures, repos-

ing on none of its confidences—leaning on “the beloved” alone. “But now they desire a better country, that is an heavenly; wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he hath prepared for them a city.” While the companions of a believer, like the children of Reuben, are always choosing their inheritance on this side of Jordan, his eye is onward and over to Canaan itself. While one takes up with this, and another with that earthly portion, “God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified to me, and I unto the world.”

3. Sight regards what is pleasant; faith what is good. It is pleasant to choose a broad and downward way through this rugged and inhospitable world; and to crowd the way with as large a company as possible, where we have so many mutual wants and dependencies—pleasant to incur the reproach or disfavour of no one in the journey, but go hand in hand with the multitude, who “measure themselves by themselves, and compare themselves among themselves.” It is pleasant to avoid every high hill and threatening danger on the road; and to turn away backward, or wind circuitously onward, rather than encounter hardships and perils in the straightest course. But faith gives other counsel. “Enter in at the straight gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be that go in thereat.” “Be not conformed to this world.” “The fear of man bringeth a snare; but whoso putteth his trust in the Lord shall be safe.” “Cursed is the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart

departeth from the Lord." "Woe to them that call evil good and good evil, that put darkness for light and light for darkness, bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter." Through every gilded pleasure, faith perceives the poison and the sting; through every kiss of kind profession, faith detects a dagger for the heart; through every green and flowery resting place, faith discerns bowels of burning lava underneath, ready to engulf the soul, and drown it in destruction and perdition. "Come," says sight, "I have decked my bed with coverings of tapestry, with carved works, with fine linen from Egypt; I have perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon;" and, "as a bird hasteth to the snare of the fowler, and knoweth not it is for his life," we would go after her, but for the guardian counsel of faith; "the dead are there, her guests are in the depths of hell." "Come with me from Lebanon, my spouse, with me from Lebanon; look from the top of Amena and Shenir, from the lions' dens, from the mountains of the leopards."

4. Sight recoils from present evil as eagerly as it embraces present good; while faith welcomes present evil as cordially as it rejects the present gilded good. "Therefore I take pleasure," says the apostle, "in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then am I strong." Affliction, which sight considers heavy, too heavy for us to bear, faith considers "light;" affliction, which sight will reckon to be long as life, and for ever, faith considers to be but "for a small moment;" affliction, which sight and sense regard as deadly, baleful to

every fond hope of the future, faith discovers to work "a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." He hates me, says sense, and therefore chastises me; "whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth," says faith, "and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." She is never ashamed or confounded, world without end. The darkest hour of night is to her the harbinger of brilliant morning. "When clouds and darkness are round about him," she sees that "righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne."

II. We walk by faith, and not by *spiritual* sight. Besides that carnal sight, which believers retain, to some extent, in common with other men, and which, although subdued by grace, and subordinated by the power of faith, is ever beclouding and enfeebling the exercise of this heavenly grace, there is in the renewed man a consciousness of spiritual life and power, which impels him to the duties and enjoyments of religious experience, in a manner that is clearly distinguishable from the controlling power of faith. This principle of walking is known by various names in theological parlance—the religion of feeling, sensible assurance, spiritual affection, &c. But, however delightful and animating this impulsion may be to the soul, it is not the great principle by which we walk; it is not the means of our daily strength and comfort in the service of God. Faith, as even distinguished from this sensible experience, constitutes the mainspring of all our present obedience and enjoyment.

Faith is duty—sight or sense of grace is privilege
Duty is ever incumbent and invariable—privilege is,

for the most part, occasional, and granted or withheld according to the sovereign pleasure of God. "Trust in the Lord at all times," says the Psalmist; "Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness and hath no light, let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God." All believers have faith in God; but all have not sensible joy in the light of his countenance. This, like every other privilege, is granted only where He sees it to be for our good. It would be of no benefit to some believers to enjoy full assurance in themselves, that they stand firm and safe in the everlasting covenant. Some servants of the world are such prodigals in living that their wages must be kept from them until the season of working is over; some children of God have so much pride and self-confidence besetting their spiritual life, that glimpses of sensible delight are withheld from them for a lifetime, in order to develop the most needful graces and give them appropriate culture. Mortification and self-abasement peculiarly befit their constitutional weakness, and every disclosure of divine love, which this weakness might readily pervert, must be in mercy withheld; so that the very same love of God which imparts to humble believers transporting demonstrations of covenanted favour, denies them to the proud through a long probation, which may be lasting as life. You are as safely held in the securities of the great salvation without one gleam of absolute assurance, through all the course of your pilgrimage, if faith be following hard after God, as if you could see and feel the certainty of this salva-

tion at every step of your journey; although, indeed, a sad deprivation of heaven upon earth must be the loss of such a diversity in your spiritual lot.

Faith is direct—sense is reflex. It is only in the way of exercising faith—it is only after faith has journeyed onward for a distance, that we can look back and see that our pathway is certainly right and heavenward. They who would walk by a sight of grace in their hearts, and hesitate in the exercise of faith upon Christ, because they do not first feel and know that he is gracious, are about as reasonable as men who would try to know how far they have travelled towards their destination before they take a step in the journey. Faith is the hand which opens the fountain of every blessing; and long must a fountain flow into a broken cistern before it is full enough to reflect the image of Jesus from the calm surface of a bosom replenished with graces. Faith is precious seed, which contains the germ of sensible assurance as one of its fruits or developments; and while other fruits must be put forth, more or less, under all circumstances of the present life, here is one which we may expect only in soil peculiarly cultivated with the graces of humility and meekness. And for us to falter and hesitate in believing, because we do not already enjoy this sensible experience, is about as reasonable as to expect fruit before we have planted the germ, and to decline all ordinary fruits because we do not first enjoy one of rare and extraordinary production.

This sensible experience of grace in the heart is not necessary, even as an evidence that we do believe; the fruits exhibited in our life and conduct

are such evidence. Be this all your concern—to prove your faith by your works, and be assured that joy in the Holy Ghost, “joy unspeakable and full of glory,” will be vouchsafed, so far as it is needful, to help you on the way to heaven.

Faith gives more glory to God than does sensible delight. Thomas would not believe unless he saw the object of faith in every particular of sensible demonstration; and it was then said, with an emphasis for ever memorable: “Blessed are they who have not seen, and yet have believed.” It gives God but little glory when we can trust him only as we trust our fellow men, on whom we must lean by the help of something beyond their simple words—when we cannot venture the soul upon a promise without some feeling that it will be fulfilled. Abraham was “strong in faith, giving glory to God,” because, “against hope he believed in hope;” against all probabilities for the fulfilment of a promise, and even mountain impossibilities to the eye of sense, he reposed, with unshaken trust, upon the truth and faithfulness of God. This, indeed, is to honour his word. And until our faith is schooled in the art of clinging to the naked truth of Jehovah in his promise, without a ray of visible demonstration, within us or without us, it is not schooled enough for heaven.

Faith is uniform—sense is fluctuating. The Christian career is called a walk, a race, a fight; without discharge for a moment. If we travelled on shoes which are not “iron and brass” in durability—on wheels of agitation, which are ever and anon rolling off from us; or the ebbing and flowing of a tide,

which tosses us to heaven to-day, and leaves us dragging on a rock to-morrow—could we ever make the destination sure? Must we not have a principle of progress that is uniform in acting, and always ready; that will pierce the heavens for light when they are embossed in thickest darkness, and make even the lightning flash of God's anger help along the way of duty when his face is hidden with impenetrable gloom?

Faith is indubitable—sense may deceive the soul with innumerable counterfeits. The object of faith is the Lord Jesus Christ—the warrant of faith is his true and faithful word; and while ever it holds this object, by the strength of this warrant, heaven and earth may fail, and your very existence prove a delusion before such a faith can fail or deceive the soul. But we know how miserably fallacious may be the religion of feeling, and how false a joy may pervade even the breast of a true believer. “Where is then the blessedness ye spake of?” may be the reproachful query, after many a season of mistaken delight. “My mountain stands strong, I shall never be moved,” said the Psalmist, in a season of high feeling and emotion; but how quickly afterwards does he exclaim, “Thou didst hide thy face, and I was troubled.”

Faith will triumph in death, when the religion of feeling may be all overwhelmed. When all the powers of darkness are summoned to their last efforts of hostility and rage; when fiery darts of doubt, disquietude, and fear, are hurled by a thousand practised arms of temptation; when our natural strength is all abated and sunk to the feeblest infancy; when

memory itself has failed, and not one Bethel of happy communion, not one anointed pillar in the way, can be recalled for comfort, what shall be the refuge of the soul, or what its armour? What we see and feel of grace in the heart, or demonstration in the life which is now passing away? Ah, here may be the source of direst terror and dismay in that critical hour! What can it be, but that shield of heavenly temper with which alone we can now "quench the fiery darts of the wicked?" Faith only can make us fearless then; faith only can repulse the enemy and proclaim the victory. The rod and staff of the promise, grasped by a present faith in Jesus, can vanquish every evil in the valley and shadow of death. "My flesh and my heart faileth, but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever."

III. But we advance to another contrast, between faith and sight, essentially different from any that we have noticed; when the scale is turned, and faith is dropped in vision; when the home is reached, and the talisman is laid by as necessary no more; when the battle is ended, and the "shield" is hung high in the temple of God, where we shall endure as pillars, "to go no more out." Here sight and sense cannot be trusted. Without faith they lead us to perdition; and even with faith in the heart, culturing and refining them with experience of grace, they cannot be trusted. But the day is coming when this miserable crazy tenement of folly and mistake shall stand a glorious and unerring medium, through which the soul will for ever drink blessedness at the fountain of life. Faith will then

be superseded, as a principle of walking, and cease to shine as the star in heaven ceases when the sun is risen to meridian splendour; cease to flow in "the desire of our soul to his name, and the remembrance of him," as the majestic river ceases when its waters mingle with the ocean.

1. The object of faith is obscure and reflected; the object of sight will be direct and resplendent. Now "we see through a glass darkly." We see not the very person of the Saviour, but, as it were, his image reflected from a mirror; and we see not this image with a direct and simple eye, but, as it were, through many reflections in a telescope. The Word of God is not dark in itself; it contains as bright a manifestation of Jehovah Jesus as the present condition of humanity could bear. Subdued emotions, and mitigated transports, are all that mercy intends, for the frailty on which he looks from "behind our wall," and "through the lattice" of means and ordinances. But in the heavenly vision, "we shall see him as he is," admitted to his own immediate presence, for ever "to behold his glory."

Incomparably brighter is the revelation we enjoy than that of our fathers, under the cloud of Old Testament figures and shadows. In eager longing for our time, when "the day would break, and the shadows flee away," how did they rejoice to catch even a glimpse of Gospel resplendence. Their time was that of the shadow—ours is that of the image; between the shadow and the image there may be comparison, but between the image and the substantial and present reality, there can be none.

2. Faith's object is unseen at times; vision's ob-

ject will be for ever unclouded before us. Between the telescope and the mirror, the "star of Bethlehem" is often hidden from our sight. "My beloved had withdrawn himself and was gone." "Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him; on the left hand where he doth work, but I cannot behold him; he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him." But there "we shall be ever with the Lord." "The Lord shall be to thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory." No darkness nor desertion can be there indeed, where there is "no need of the sun, neither of the moon to shine in it; but God doth lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof."

3. Faith itself is imperfect in its operations; vision will be perfect and complete. In the very nature of the thing there must be imperfection with the use of an instrument, whose materials are altogether imperfect. How much does the exercise of faith depend on the knowledge of God and of Christ; how much on the memory of his promises; how much on diligence in spiritual reflection and contemplation; and how deplorably defective are all these, in the present life of lapse and corruption! Add to these the interruption of the world and Satan. Even if the object of faith were ever before us, with steady twinkling, and without a cloud; if no film of error shaded the eye, nor tremor of weakness agitated the arm; and we could hold the glass of faith, in all its realizing power, unshaken by any inherent debility of our own; yet would the jostle of the world and the rage of hell turn, ever and anon, the telescope aside. But vision on high will be

sound and energetic in itself, rich and perfect in every material, and for ever sustained by surrounding influences there.

Witness the amazing acuteness and perfection of Stephen's vision, as he was just advancing to the portals of "the excellent glory." One beam of it burst through the canopy of heaven and lighted on his face, and counsellors of even bloodshot eye "looking steadfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel." And such was the effect on his own vision, of this initial ray from the paradise of God, that through all the incalculable distance between this earth and the home of the blessed in heaven; through clouds, through planets, through suns, through depths of unfathomable ether, his piercing eye beheld "the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God!" If eyes of mortal flesh can be empowered so by one beam of that celestial glory, what will not the effulgence of noontide produce? If eyes of mortal flesh, by one blink of heavenly vision, can descry at a distance which no tongue can tell and no imagination compute, ineffable and transporting glory, what will not eyes of glorified humanity discover when admitted to the very throne of God and centre of its brilliance?

4. Faith is slow, and gradual, and successive, in making up the image of her contemplation; sight will comprehend at once, with glance of intuition. Here we glean one lineament of Jesus in this chapter, and another in that, of his holy Word; sometimes we see him in the vision; sometimes in the allegory; sometimes in the plain description. Sometimes we see him as a prophet, then a priest, then a

king; and thus, culling a flower here, and another there, one grace of his person in the Old Testament and another in the New, faith makes up her aggregate at length, and exclaims with delighted conclusion, "He is altogether lovely!" It could not be otherwise at present. A sight like that of Isaiah, in vision, of the Lord, "sitting on his throne, high and lifted up," would strike us down with terror; "Woe is me, I am undone!" Even the beloved disciple, who had reclined on his bosom familiarly in the days of his flesh, could not enjoy a glimpse of the glorified Redeemer without falling as dead at his feet.

If all the luminaries in heaven were converged into one brilliant centre, it would destroy these eyes with its flood of burning light; but distributed along the firmament, in sun, moon and stars, we drink in the mild radiance with pleasure wherever we direct the eye. If all the glories of Jesus Christ were converged into one direct and intense description, even by words, it would overwhelm and crush these feeble powers of the soul; but, diffused over the whole firmament of Old and New Testament Scripture, we survey with pleasing contemplation the truth as it is in Jesus, studded and proportioned, as one star differeth from another star in glory. But the heavenly vision will scan, with steady rapture, all that is bright in Jesus, blended and centered in one blazing sea of glory.

5. Faith, in her highest exercise on earth, must groan, being burdened; but sight, in her lowest range of felicity in heaven, will shout with hallelujahs. "In this tabernacle we groan, being burdened."

When wings of faith and love would rise with fervor to the mount of God, a leaden body drags them down. This frame work is too narrow for the compass of faith when she reaches to Christ and swells with foretaste of his glory. "Ourselves also, which have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body." As the man whose soul is fired with enthusiastic zeal to read the starry heavens must groan impatiently, if some low vaulted prison ever prevents him from lifting his longest telescope on high; so, and more, infinitely, groans the believer, when faith lies checked and disappointed in this environed and contracted tabernacle. But the frame work of immortal life will be spacious and spiritual as its inmate; the shouts of glory in the highest will be loud, as the conceptions of the soul are grand; pure and unfailing, and inseparable, will be the powers of eye, and hand, and heart, when "we shall see him as he is," and our vile bodies will be "fashioned like unto his glorious body."

We learn from this subject how ennobling faith is, and how much dignity and excellence it stamps on human nature. Men of the world look on faith as weakness, and fancy a disparagement of reason a debility of intellectual force, an easy, erring credulity, when we speak of living by faith, walking, and fighting, and dying by faith. But so did not the Spirit of inspiration estimate the worth of human character, when beginning the notice of each Old Testament worthy, with emphatic mention of his faith. Heb. xi. So does not common sense estimate

the worth of human character, when we behold a poor, short sighted, trembling worm of the dust, quailing at every change, deceived by every show, blind to the present, blind to the future, and a wretched victim of ignoble sense, suddenly stand triumphant over weakness, superior to time and change, able to value present things as they are and future things as they will be; able to comprehend eternity better than he understood one day before. Such a transformation is vastly more noble and sublime than any deification of man that heathen idolatry ever imagined. Superstition never gave to the gods an attribute so godlike as the faith of an humble believer. And if we had no other and nobler motive, the favour of God, to please whom "without faith it is impossible," peace of conscience, victory over sin and Satan, over the world and death, and an everlasting inheritance of glory—all of which are sealed to the soul the moment faith is in exercise; if we had none of these unspeakable benefits, the very enlargement of soul which it brings, empowering the human mind to see invisible things, and future things, and things substantially good, and things in all their eventful consequences, were motive enough to impel men to plead with God day and night that he would "give it to them, on the behalf of Christ, to believe in his name;" and that he would "fulfil in them the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power."

We learn again, from this subject, how to test religion in ourselves and others, most truly; where alone is the lively oracle which gives certain responses on this all important interest. Not our

frames and feelings; not our present enjoyments; not all our experience, past and present; but the exercise of faith on Jesus Christ, the reality and power of which are evinced by holy living. How many a precious hour of time have we lost; how many a pang of unnecessary anguish have we felt in standing upon bubbles which burst, in attempting to trace our hope of glory on a surface of excited feeling, which is fluctuating as the sands of the sea, shifting as the winds of heaven. It is true, indeed, that our religion is one of mighty emotion, and no man ever felt its power without feeling the most powerful of all excitement; and it is equally true that our prayers and devout endeavours must always be exercised to stir emotion and revive the power of feeling, as well as to learn its precious truths, and imbibe its sanctifying efficacy. But let us never forget, that all excitement is spurious which is not the offspring of faith, and that all faith is spurious which does not vividly apprehend the word of God, in its supreme authority and power; that faith may exist where there is but little outward manifestation of feeling, and that a conversation becoming the gospel is worth ten thousand gusts of delighted feeling; and no kind of feeling should ever be cherished for a moment which will not correspond with the soberness of a life of faith upon the Son of God. Vast inequality in the tide of religious emotion has done more to arm the power of infidelity in the world, than all the logic besides which unbelief could ever command. "The spirit of power and of love," is the spirit of "a sound mind."

Finally, we learn from this subject to anticipate

gladly the joys of that eternal world, where all the faculties of mortal and immortal man, set free from frailty and sin, restored from the debasement of the present life, and the widowed sleep of a long germination in the grave, shall become not only perfect in use, to be honoured and trusted always, but immeasurably enhanced in the original adaptation to minister happiness; by a new creation in Christ Jesus, a resurrection through the power of his life, and translation to the immediate presence of his Father and ours. "It doth not yet appear what we shall be." The pleasure of the senses, which divine goodness spared, in some degree, from the ruins of the curse, to make the present life a happy one for temperance and virtue, must rise with this identical body, which will have "slept in Jesus," not only repaired, refined, exalted, indestructible; not only re-admitted to communion with God in his direct and constant manifestation, but also advanced to the inconceivable felicity which is implied in being "partakers of the divine nature;" a destination of superlative dignity and joy, whose range of perfect happiness must be all that the glorious Creator would confer on any creature.