ARTICLE II.

JOHN FOSTER.

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EVERY great and original mind is the property of the world. Such men as have lived before us, and have now gone to adorn other spheres, have left behind them influences which we feel to-day. By personal impressions made on their contemporaries which have been transmitted to us; by the printed page, on which lie coiled up their great thoughts, and over which their emotions still glow, they live and act upon us, and their life circulates through our being. Age and country are of no account, if so be he was a man of great mind and heart, and with far-seeing vision; he is for us, for he had what we want, and saw what we want to see.

The subject of this article did not draw crowds by his eloquence, like Robert Hall and Thomas Chalmers; he was not a voluminous and brilliant talker like Coleridge; he had not an attractive and fascinating style of writing like Macaulay or Gibbon. But he was a full and ready talker in social life; his written sentences are weighty with thought; he had a strong imagination, and a native and highly cultivated taste; and a massiveness of character which impresses and ennobles. His essays and letters, and critical and miscellaneous writings, have an effect to broaden and deepen the mind, and act as a tonic to every mind put into communication with his. This author shows his greatness in part by making the reader feel his own greatness as an immortal being, the greatness of God, and of the universe, of which each man is an integral part; and he invests every object in

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nature, and every event in history which has a bearing upon our present and future well-being, with an importance commensurate with the destiny of the individual man.

John Foster was born in the parish of Halifax, England, September 17th, 1770. His parents were of strong understanding, strict integrity, and deep piety. His father followed the joint occupation of a farmer and a weaver. The son in his early years was employed at home a portion of the time in weaving; but his thoughts and imagination were so active that the manufacturer complained of the quality of his work, and threatened to employ him no more.

He was naturally reserved, and at twelve years of age his manners were as awkward as his observations of men and things were profound and mature. He had an extremely sensitive nature, overflowing with sentiment and emotion, yet held in by timidity and shyness. His imagination tyrannized over him, peopling the house with objects which his mind gathered in his reading, making the time of going to bed an "awful season of each day." He was very fond of natural scenery, and the very words "woods and forests" held for him a charm. He was fond of reading, and Young's "Night Thoughts" was a favorite book. His tastes were towards what is great in nature and in man, and the heroic in history affected him deeply, so that the very names of great heroes had a peculiar fascination to his forming mind.

His own aspirations and his father's ambition pointed to study and a profession. When his son was only five years old, the father would put his hand on his head and say, "This head will some day learn Greek." Although the advanced age of his parents, and the want of older brothers and sisters, fostered his natural reserve, yet the religious atmosphere of his home was very salutary. A neighborhood meeting was held weekly at his father's house, which deeply impressed his mind. At the age of fourteen he passed through a period of great anxiety on account of sin, and found

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peace in trusting alone in Jesus. At seventeen he became a member of a Baptist church at Hebden Bridge. Rev. Dr. Fawcett, his pastor, and others, observing his decided talents, urged him to study for the ministry, and he was "set apart" by special religious services to the work of the ministry.

Up to this time his studies had been pursued at home. He now entered Brearley Hall, and enjoyed the instruction of Dr. Fawcett. Part of each day was spent in assisting his parents, and the rest devoted to diligent study. He acquired slowly and with labor, but thus early showed the care in composition which was afterward rewarded with such distinguished success. One method employed was to take paragraphs from different authors, and put them into as many forms as he possibly could. He read favorite authors with great care and attention. In general literature, voyages and travels delighted him most, as they afforded full play for his lively imagination. He loved through life to review such books for the press, and admitted a weakness for such works expensively illustrated, and chided himself for yielding so much to his love of the romantic and marvellous.

While at Brearley Hall almost his only recreation was rambling in the surrounding woodlands. This harmonized with his peculiar temperament. He once persuaded a friend to walk with him by the river-side all night that he might see the evening change into night, and the night into morn. He once went off in a heavy shower to see a waterfall in the neighborhood, saying in his rapture, "I now understand the thing, and have got some ideas on the subject with which I should not like to part."

His habitual characteristic was that of decision, and thus he was from early youth being qualified to write so powerfully in his famous essay "On Decision of Character." His spiritual graces were largely quickened by his frequent visits to the poor, the sick, and the afflicted, with whom he conversed and prayed.

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He entered the Baptist College at Bristol, under the presidency of Rev. Joseph Hughes, the founder and secretary of the "British and Foreign Bible Society." He was nearly of the same age as Foster, and the relation of teacher and pupil soon merged into that of intimate friends, who during life were congenial spirits, each enjoying and improving the other.

It was Foster's ambition to associate as much as possible with those who were superior to himself. A day spent with Hannah More, who lived with her four sisters about two miles from Bristol, he very much enjoyed. Her piety and beneficence outshone even her poetical abilities. Her time was mostly spent in devising and executing plans of doing good, some of which were so remarkable as to have the air of romance.

Foster spent, at this period, the first two hours and a half in the morning in devotional reading and prayer. He thought a diligent and pious frame of mind the best preparation for an understanding of the Bible. With all his dignity of mind, and aspirations after the great and sublime in character and attainment, he was eminently democratic and humble.

After leaving Bristol, he was first engaged as a preacher to a small Baptist congregation at Newcastle-on-Tyne. He afterwards preached in Dublin. In both instances the congregations were small, and of such a character as not to inspire any enthusiasm in the new work of stated preaching. His mind and temperament seemed much more adapted to authorship, and plans began to form for writing, that usefulness might be reached in a way more congenial to him than public utterances.

Being himself so self-dependent, and feeling little the need of uniting with others in order to kindle the fire on his altar, which his own thoughts lighted and fed, he undervalued the relations of church-membership, and felt averse to any-

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thing institutional in religion, except public worship and the Lord's Supper. This feeling was strengthened by observing the clashing of parties in contests and divisions within the local churches, and different divisions of the great church at large. While not lacking the highest qualities of a friend and Christian brother, yet he was not one to have his dear five hundred friends.

In 1797 he became the minister of a Baptist church at Chichester, where he preached for two and a half years. His favorite place of meditation was in the chapel, and here, by moonlight, he paced to and fro, wearing the bricks perceptibly into a path of thought. Notwithstanding his reserve, he set himself resolutely to learn the art of conversation, and became to friends a lively, versatile, and instructive talker.

In 1800 he began to preach in a small village near Bristol. It was while here he met for the first time Robert Hall. He would make long excursions across the country for forty or fifty miles, to visit objects of interest. Indolent by nature, he spurred his mind to activity, and tried to attain a uniform energy. He was fond of meditation in which the pensive and sublime mingled.

On recommendation of Robert Hall, he obtained a settlement at Frome in 1804. It was while he resided here that the "Essays" which have made his name great were published. They originated in conversations with Miss Maria Snook,—the lady whom he afterwards married,—and they were addressed to her as letters. Notwithstanding the care and slowness of the original composition, when he prepared his manuscript for the press, every paragraph, and almost every sentence, needed remodelling, and he tells us that the revision cost about as much mental labor as the original writing. "A great many needless words, and some that were too fine, have been sent about their business." These essays attracted wide attention, and second and third editions were called for and published. Of Robert Hall's review of

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them, he says that he praised too much, though he by no means omitted to censure. In 1805 he began an essay on the "Improvement of Time," which was afterwards published.

On account of a disease of the throat, he was obliged to resign his office at Frome, but continued to reside there, and devote himself to literary labor, writing review articles for the *Eclectic*.

Mr. Foster was married in 1808 to Miss Maria Snook, a very amiable and accomplished lady, to whom his essays had been addressed. They were admirably adapted to each other. He resumed occasional preaching after his marriage, in addition to his literary work. He loved to labor in destitute districts and preach the gospel to the poor. In 1815 he visited Bristol, and heard Robert Hall preach several times. Notwithstanding his somewhat recluse habits before marriage, when he had a family of children around him his warm heart seemed to burst its natural and scholarly cerements.

In 1820 his essay "On Popular Ignorance" was published. A few months after, he revised it, with great labor, for a second edition. He contributed frequently to the *Eclectic Review*, and wrote an introduction to Doddridge's "Rise and Progress," which, in religious effect, has not been surpassed by any of his writings.

To students of excessive fancy, ardent sentiments, roaming thoughts, and romantic propensities, he recommended mathematics; and to those whose imagination and sentiments are not developed, the classics. He enjoyed social converse chiefly as a means of mental excitement. "A long, stout, evening's talk, in which was duly intermingled the animated No!"

He took great interest in political questions, and felt strongly. The Catholic Emancipation Bill enlisted his strong sympathies, not because he thought the papists could demand it as a right,—for he held that popery was a deadly enemy to the state,—but on account of the peculiar state of Ire-

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land, it was in the highest degree expedient to give them the freedom proposed. The Reform Bill of 1831 he thought was to do great good, though his highest expectations concerning it were not realized. While admitting the great good accomplished by the established church, he held that making religion a part of the state was anti-Christian in theory, and noxious in practice.

In 1832 Mr. Foster met the great affliction of his life in the death of his wife. For nearly twenty-five years enjoying her society in uninterrupted happiness, and feeling largely indebted to her for his mental improvement as well as social happiness, this separation was very painful. Her intellect was strong and correct, and for refined perception and depth of reflective feeling, he never knew her equal. At her unexpected departure he was absent from her, thinking she would survive several weeks longer. On his arrival home, he found two unopened letters of his own to her. He was not sure he should ever open them. If conventional usage had not come in the way, his preference would have been that the last office should be performed at the midnight hour, in perfect silence, and with no attendance beside the parties immediately interested. There was a weight on his heart which the most friendly human hand could not remove.

About this time he wrote a series of letters to the *Morning Chronicle* on the ballot, advocating its adoption, and showing that all the objections urged against it bear against the old method of voting, and that its advantages far outweigh its defects.

In 1833 he made a second journey into North Wales. The loss of three intimate friends—Hall, Anderson, and Hughes—deeply affected his mind. For nine years he prepared nothing for the press except "Observations on Mr. Hall as a Preacher," a new edition of his "Essays," and a few letters to the *Morning Chronicle*. In 1837 his name stood on the list of contributors to the *Eclectic Review*, but

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he wrote for it only occasionally. He closed his literary labors in 1839. His last appearance in public was in June, 1843, at the annual meeting of the Bristol Baptist College. On September 24th, 1843, he took to his room, which he never left.

During his last illness, Mr. Foster exhibited his peculiar traits of character, in his patient resignation to God's will, his unselfish regard for the comfort of others, and his unwillingness that his sickness should tax the care and strength of his friends except in a moderate degree. He impressively addressed those who came to see him, and seemed supported and comforted by a firm trust in Christ, and him alone. He enjoyed hearing the Bible and some other books read, and for the last few days, the Bible alone, principally from the Psalms, was listened to. He was unwilling to have any one watch with him, and on the day before his death he requested to be left alone during the afternoon and evening. At the hour of rest, some of the family requested the privilege of sitting with him during the night, but he declined. The aged servant who had lived with him for thirty years went to his door at four o'clock the next morning and listened, and being satisfied from his breathing that he was asleep, did not go in. At six o'clock she went again, and hearing no sound, went in, and found that he had passed away. His arms were gently extended, and his countenance was as tranquil as that of a person in a peaceful sleep. He had gone into that state of which he said: "The nearer I approach by advancing age to the grand experiment, the more inquisitive—I might say, the more restlessly inquisitive—I become respecting that other place and state of our existence."

When a great thinker and writer passes away, a deep interest attaches to the place where he lived and wrought, and we like to reproduce as far as possible his surroundings when he thought and wrote. We have a description of Mr. Foster's study in his own words:—

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"I am sitting alone in my long garret, in which I spend a considerable part of every day, excepting the days on which I go out to preach. Here I have a little fire, and, excepting along the middle of the floor, the room is crowded and loaded with papers and books, intermingled with dust that is never swept away. Along this middle space of the floor I walk backward and forward as much as several hours every day, for I cannot make much of thinking and composing without walking about, a habit that I learnt early in my musing life. Formerly I used to walk about the fields for hours together, indulging imaginations and reflections. . . . Since I came to this village, I walked in the fields in this way comparatively but little: this garret has served me instead. I have been more in habits of such kind of study as required to have books and pens at hand. But, nevertheless, I probably walk not much less than I did when I was in the open air. It would be a marvellous number of miles if it could be computed how far I have walked on this floor. It would be a length that would reach to the other side of the globe. If all my musing walks since I was twenty years old could be computed together, it would not unlikely be a length that would go several times around the globe."

Of authorship, style, and books, he says:—

"How little a reader can do justice to the labors of an author unless himself also were an author. How often I have spent the whole day in adjusting two or three sentences amidst a perplexity about niceties which would be far too impalpable to be ever comprehended by the greatest number of readers. All my considerations about language have resulted in an aversion to the formal, square-built style so different from the easy and admirable style of Bolingbroke. Once more I tell you to become a reviewer. It will fling your diction into variety and freedom. It is the best writing discipline in the world. You must not think of leaving this dusty planet without first writing a valuable and fine book or two, but in order to do this you must get more freedom of diction, and this reviewing is the very thing. That excellence which you praised in Hall's style, and which he has in a very high degree, of making brief, strong sentences, completing the sense in each, is sometimes carried to a fault. In this quality of writing we are all beaten hollow by the old workmen, such as Hooker, and Jeremy Taylor. He makes, in some places, laconic propositions in succession which are quite independent of one another, but which ought to have been contrived into a texture. I am strongly inclined to think this said Jeremy is the most completely eloquent writer in our language. There is a most manly and graceful ease and freedom in his composition, while a strong intellect is working logically through every paragraph, while all manner of beautiful images continually fall in as by felicitous accident. Reading such authors tends to make one shrink from the thought of printing. I literally never write a letter, or a page, or paragraph, for printing, without an effort which I feel a pointed repugnance to make. My principle of proceeding was to treat not a page, sentence, or word, with the smallest ceremony; but to hack, twist, split, turn, pull up by the roots, or practise any other severity on whatever I did not like. I dare say I could point out scores

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of sentences, each one of which has cost me several hours of the utmost exertion of my mind to put it in the state in which it now stands. Pascal's style is an admirable example for a simple, direct, vital, manner of expression."

"Are the powers of human language limited by any other bonds than those which limit the mind's powers of conception?"

"Few have been sufficiently sensible of the importance of that economy in reading which selects almost exclusively the very first order of books. Why should a man, except for some special reason, read a very inferior book, at the very time when he might be reading one of the highest order? A man of ability, for the chief of his reading, should select such works as he feels beyond his own power to have produced. What can other books do for him but waste his time, and augment his vanity? Reading books of travel supplies the most valuable assistance to thought, and the most striking and useful illustrations to religious and moral teachers, whether in preaching or writing. Remarkable facts pertinently introduced will sometimes produce a striking effect: they awaken attention, which is itself no small matter."

"The thing most in my mind at this instant is, chagrin, vexation, mortification, self-accusation, for a chief folly of my life, having bought so many books, which are looking insultingly at me from their crowded shelves all around the room."

Mr. Foster had a very high appreciation of the gifts of other men, and looked up with admiration to those who were his superiors. He writes thus:—

"I was two or three times in Robert Hall's company, and heard him preach once. I am any one's rival in admiring him. In some remarkable manner, everything about him, everything he does or says, is *instinct with power*. Jupiter seems to emanate in his attitude, gesture, look, and tone of voice. Even a common sentence, when he utters one, seems to tell how much more he can do. His intellect is peculiarly potential, and his imagination robes, without obscuring, the colossal form of his mind.

"The last sermon I heard him preach, which dwelt much on the topic of *living in vain*, made a more powerful impression on my mind than, I think, any one I ever heard. And this was not simply from its being the most eloquent sermon unquestionably that I ever heard, or probably ever shall hear; but from the solemn and alarming truth which it urged and pressed on the conscience, with the force of a tempest. I suppose every intelligent person has the impression in hearing him that he surpasses every other preacher probably in the whole world. In the largest congregation there is an inconceivable stillness and silence while he is preaching, partly indeed owing to his having a weak, low voice, though he is a strong, large-built man, but very much owing to that commanding power of his mind which holds all other minds in captivity while within reach of his voice. He has no tricks of art and oratory, no studied gesticulations, no ranting, no pompous declamation. His eloquence is the mighty power of spirit, throwing out a rapid series of

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thoughts,—explanatory, argumentative, brilliant, pathetic, or sublime,—sometimes all of them together,—and the whole manner is simple, rational, grave, sometimes cool, often impetuous and ardent. He seems always to have a complete dominion over the subject on which he is dwelling, and over the subjects on every side to which he adverts for illustration. He has the same pre-eminent power in his ordinary conversation as in his preaching. What a very deplorable thing it is that he has not written a great number of volumes; he would then have instructed and delighted to the end of time. Does he ever intend to write anything? He will have been one of the greatest sinners of his time if he do not."

"Here one recollects that prince of magicians, Coleridge, whose mind is clearly more original and illimitable than Hall's. Coleridge is indeed sometimes less perspicuous and impressive by the *distance* at which his mental operations are carried on. Hall works his enginery *close by you*, so as to endanger your being caught and torn by some of the wheels. The eloquent Coleridge sometimes retires into a sublime mysticism of thought: he robes himself in moonlight. In Coleridge you saw one of the highest class of human beings with respect to combination of talent. I could not conveniently hear more than one of his lectures, but it was a still higher luxury to hear him talk as much as would have been two or three lectures. One is forced often to undergo severe labor in the endeavor to understand him, his thinking is of so surpassingly original and abstracted a kind. This is the case often, even in his recital of facts, as that recital is continually mixed with some subtile speculation. His mind contains an astonishing mass of all sorts of knowledge, while in his power and manner of putting it to use, he displays more of what we mean by the term genius than any mortal I ever saw, or ever expected to see."

"Burke's sentences are pointed at the end,—instinct with pungent sense to the last syllable."

"Brougham stands forth the foremost man in all the world for fierce, vengeful, irresistible, assault."

"The work of Gibbon excites my utmost admiration; not so much by the immense learning and industry which it displays, as by the commanding intellect, the keen sagacity, apparent on almost every page. The admiration of his ability extends even to his manner of showing his hatred of Christianity, which is exquisitely subtle and acute, and adapted to do very great mischief, even where there is not the smallest avowal of hostility."

"From what I have seen thus far of Charles Leslie, I doubt if there be in our language a theological writer of greater talents in the field of argument. I am gratified in the extreme degree by his most decisive reasonings against the deists."

In common with all great minds, Mr. Foster had high aspirations from early life, and his estimation of what the mind might become and accomplish, is lofty and noble:—

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"I cannot doubt the possibility of becoming greatly wise and greatly good. I despise mediocrity. I wish to kindle with the ardor of genius. Heaven is the proper region of sublimity. Intimate communion with the Deity will invest us, like Moses, with a celestial radiance. My object shall be through life the *greatest good*, and I hold myself at liberty to seek it in any line that appears most promising, and so to change one line for another, when another more advantageous presents itself. Reason dictates not that superstitious notion that when you have applied yourself to one engagement you must at all events adhere to it in life and death. I resolve to *merit* respect wherever I am, and then I shall at least possess *my own*. I have lost all taste for the light and gay; rather I never had any such taste. I turn disgusted and contemptuous from insipid and shallow folly, to lave in the stream, the tide of deeper sentiments. How enviable the situation,—to feel the transition from the surrounding world into one's own capacious mind, like quitting a narrow, confined valley, and entering on diversified, and almost boundless plains. If this felicity were mine, I might be equally unconcerned to obtain or recollect the news of the time. Nothing can so effectually expand the mind as the views which religion presents; for the views of religion partake of the magnitude and glory of that Being from whom religion proceeds. Oh! I pant for a grand revolution in all my soul and character. I wish for a sacred zeal, for devotional habits, and a useful life. I fervently invoke the influences of heaven that the whole spirit of the gospel may take possession of all my soul, and give a new and powerful impulse to my practical exertions in the cause of the Messiah. One of the strongest characteristics of genius is, the *power of lighting its own fire*. Genius hails its few brothers with a most fraternal warmth. How much it takes to grow how little! Millions of valuable thoughts, I suppose, have passed through my mind. How often has my conscience admonished me! How many thousands of pious resolutions! How all nature has preached to me! How day and night, and solitude and the social scenes, and the books and the Bible, and the omnipresent God, have all concurred to instruct me! And behold the miserable result of all. I am endeavoring to examine every object with the keenest investigation, conscious that this is the best of all methods for obtaining knowledge fresh and original."

"One is not one's genuine self; one does not disclose all one's self to those with whom one has no intimate sympathy. One is therefore several successive, and apparently different, characters according to the gradation of the faculties and qualities of those one associates with. I am like one of those boxes I have seen enclosing several other boxes of similar form, though lessening size. The person with whom I have least congeniality sees only the outermost; another person has something more interesting in his character, he sees the next box; another sees still an inner one; but the friend of my heart alone, with whom I have a full sympathy, sees disclosed the inmost of all."

A characteristic of original minds is that so many of their thoughts are quotable. Being terse and pithy, they are

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easily used, and interpret the unexpressed thoughts of a multitude of men. Our author was eminently one of this class:—

"Whenever a man prays aright, he forgets the philosophy of it, and feels as if his supplications really would make a difference in the determination and conduct of the Deity."

"One short, pathetic supplication to Him, will be of more value to the mind than all the rhapsodies that the enthusiasts of nature ever uttered, and the reveries that poets ever dreamed."

"Music powerfully re-enforces *any* passion which the mind is at the time indulging, or to which it is predisposed."

"The Being that gives beauty to the earth and grandeur to the sky, is well able to sustain those souls that are more estimable in his regard than the whole material creation."

"But sweet Nature! I have communed with her with inexpressive luxury; I have almost worshipped her. A flower, a tree, a bird, a fly, has been enough to kindle a delightful train of ideas and emotions, and sometimes to elevate the mind to sublime conceptions."

"May we consider each night as the tomb of the departed day, and, seriously leaning over it, read the inscription written by conscience, of its character and exit."

"The heaven of stars seems the grand portico into that infinity in which the incomprehensible Being resides."

[To one out of health he wishes] "the brilliance of the morning, and the solemnity of the evening, the beauties of the field, and the songs of the grove, bring you their whole tribute of luxury, which tribute they bring only to health."

"Bird, 't is pity such a delicious note should be silenced by winter, death, and above all, annihilation. I do not, and I cannot believe that all those little spirits of melody are but the snuff of the grand taper of life, the mere vapor of existence to vanish forever."

"Whenever we appear as if we thought ourselves too dignified or too wise to converse and be familiar, occasionally at least, with the meanest and most ignorant, we shall betray ourselves into the enemy's hands."

"The fundamental principle of dissent is, that the religion of Christ ought to be left to make its way among mankind in the greatest possible simplicity, by its own truth and excellence, and that it cannot, without fatal injury to that pure simplicity, that character of being a kingdom not of this world, be taken into the schemes and political arrangements of monarchs and statesmen, and implicated with all the secular interests, intrigues, and passions."

"Some people's sensibilities are a mere bundle of *aversions*."

"Fine sensibilities are, like woodbines, delightful luxuries of beauty to twine round a solid, upright stem of understanding."

"I have noticed the curious fact of the difference of the effect of what other people's children do, and one's own. In the situation I have formerly

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been in, any great noise and racket of children would have extremely incommoded me, if I wanted to read, think, or write; but I never mind as to any such matter of convenience *how much* din is made by *these* brats, if it is not absolutely in the room where I am at work. When I am with them, I am apt to make them, and join in making them, make a still bigger tumult, and noise, so that their mother sometimes complains that we all want whipping together."

[Concerning an extremely depraved child he says:] "I never saw so much *essence of devil* put in so small a vessel."

"Nature has no gales, no beauties, no influences, to transform the depraved mind. The benignant skies, the living verdure, the hues of flowers, the notes of birds, have no power on selfish and malignant passions, on inveterate evil habits, on ingratitude and hostility against God."

"All pleasure must be *bought* at the price of pain; the difference between false pleasure and true is just this: for the *true*, the price is paid *before* you enjoy it; for the *false*, *after* you enjoy it."

"It appears to me that little is accomplished, because but little is vigorously attempted; and that but little is attempted, because difficulties are magnified. Perhaps perseverance has been the radical principle of every truly great character."

[He describes a happy man thus:] "Is pleasure willing to keep her assignations with thee, equally in an open cow house and a decorated parlor? Dost thou behold goodness, though accompanied with vulgarity, with complaisance; and baseness, though arrayed in elegance, with disgust? Dost thou behold inferior talents without vanity, and superior ones without envy? Whilst thou art diffusing gay pleasure through thy social circle, and receiving pleasure from it, is thy cheerfulness undamped when thou observest Death drawing a chair, and taking a place among the company? Let the windows of thy soul, like the windows of a house, not disclose everything *within*, but at the same time, admit notices of everything *without*."

"One object of life should be to accumulate a great number of grand questions to be asked and resolved in eternity. We now ask the sage, the genius, the philosopher, the divine,—none can tell; but we will open our series to other respondents,—we will ask angels—God."

"When we were remarking that vanity was confined to no station, Mr. H. told me he knew a man who used to break stones in the road, who was vain in a very high degree of his excellence in this department: 'he would break a load of stones with any man in England.' A chimney sweeper indulged in the same boast of superiority, with great self-complacency."

"God is sure to take especial care of those who are comparatively soon to be with him in heaven."

"What a superlatively grand and consoling idea is that of Death! Without this radiant idea, this delightful morning star, indicating that the luminary of eternity is going to rise, life would, to my view, darken into midnight melancholy. Thanks to that gospel which opens the vision of an endless life, and thanks above all, to that Saviour-Friend who has promised to conduct all

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the faithful through the sacred trance of death into scenes of paradise and everlasting delight."

"If we had the full, deliberate consciousness of a due preparation for the other life, there would require an effort, a repressive effort of submission to the divine disposal, to prevent a rising impatience of the soul to escape from this dark and sinful world, and go out on the sublime adventure."

Of all Mr. Foster's letters, none have attracted so much attention, and elicited so much controversy, as the one written to a young minister on "Future Punishment." Although Mr. Foster, in his early ministerial life, was inclined strongly to Arianism, he afterward settled down into a deeper experience of divine grace, and a clear and scriptural apprehension of the truths of the evangelical system. On depravity, regeneration, divinity of Christ, and the atonement, his views were clear and strong, and his piety deep and unquestionable; but on future eternal punishment he had long cherished doubts.

These doubts did not arise from the want of scriptural proof of the doctrine, for he tells us in the letter that "the language of Scripture is formidably strong; so strong, that it must be an argument of extreme cogency that would authorize a limited interpretation."

He lays no stress at all on dubious passages which are often quoted as favoring restoration; but rests solely on what he calls the "moral argument," that which comes in the stupendous idea of eternity. He had an extremely sensitive nature, and a peculiar shrinking from suffering, even in an animal or insect, and a temperament inclining him to dwell morbidly on the darker shades of human life. With such a nature, and with his tremendous power of reflection directed to this subject, the ages of eternity as they rolled in upon him interminably, the brevity of an earthly life, the comparative insignificance of a sinner compared with the Being against whom he sinned, the infinite benevolence of the Creator and Redeemer, and the comparatively few out of the millions of earth who were practically reached by the gospel,—all this formed to his mind a moral argument which blunted the force of the con-

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siderations which at other times he deeply felt, viz., the evil of sin, the sense of justice which demands a commensurate punishment; and the plain declarations of God in the Bible.

From all we know of Mr. Foster's belief and experience, we incline to think he only strongly *hoped* that God would find some way of restoring all men to holiness and happiness, while against that hope were arrayed most formidable obstacles which it was impossible for him to remove.

This letter on eternal punishment is very fairly considered and answered by Rev. Dr. Leonard Woods.[1]

Mr. Foster's domestic life was of the happiest kind, and the loss of his wife brings out to view the wealth of appreciation and affection which he entertained for her, the expression of which is very touching, and will find a response in many an afflicted heart.

"Cold as you pronounce me, I should prefer the deep, animated affection of one person whom I could entirely love, to all the tribute fame could levy within the amplest circuit of her flight. You know who is the centre of that circle; near enough to her I have constantly felt as if I could pass an age away without ever being tired."

"I most entirely believe that no man on earth has a wife more fondly affectionate, more anxious to promote his happiness, or more dependent for her own on his tenderness for her. In the greatest number of opinions, feelings, and concerns, we find ourselves perfectly agreed; and when anything occurs on which our judgments and dispositions differ, we find we can discuss the subject without violating tenderness, or in the least losing each other's esteem, even for a moment."

"I have returned *hither*, but have an utter repugnance to say returned *home;* that name is applicable no longer. The melancholy fact is, that my beloved, inestimable, companion has left me. It comes upon me—in evidence, how varied and sad! And yet, for a moment, sometimes I feel as if I could not realize it as true. There is something that seems to say, Can it be that I shall see her no more, that I shall still, one day after another, find she is not here, that her affectionate voice and look will never accost me; the kind grasp of her hand never more be felt; that when I would be glad to consult her, make an observation to her, address to her some expression of love, call her 'my dear wife,' as I have done so many thousand times, it will be in vain, she is not here? Several times a momentary suggestion of thought has been, as one and another circumstance has occurred, 'I will tell Maria of this.' Even this

[1] See his Works, Vol. iii. pp. 279–307.

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very day as I parted with Dr. Stetson, who out of pure kindness accompanied me a long stage on the road, there was actually for a transient instant a lapse of mind into the idea of telling her how very kind he had been. I have not suffered, nor expect to feel, any overwhelming emotions, any violent excesses of grief; what I expect to feel is, a long repetition of pensive monitions of my irreparable loss; that the painful truth will speak itself to me again, and still again, in long succession, often in solitary reflection (in which I feel the most), and often as objects come in my sight, or circumstances arise, which have some association with her who is gone. The things which belonged to her with a personal appropriation; things which she used or particularly valued; things which she had given me, or I had given her; her letters or my own to her; the corner of the chamber where I knew she used to pray; her absence—unalterable absence—at the hour of family worship, of social reading, of the domestic table; her no more being in her place to receive me on my return home from occasional absence; the thought of what she would have said, or how she would have acted, on subjects or occasions that came in question; the remembrance how she did speak or act in similar instances;—all such things as these will renew the pensive emotions, and tell me still again what I have lost,—what that was, and how great its value, which the sovereign Disposer has in his unerring wisdom taken away. I should, and would be, thankful for having been indulged with the possession so long. Certainly, neither of us would, if such an exception *might* be made to an eternal law, recall our dear departed companions from their possession of that triumph over sin, and sorrow, and death, to which they have been exalted. However great our deprivation, how transcendently greater is their advancement in the condition of existence! And we should be unworthy to be loved by them still, as I trust that even at this very hour we are, if we could for a moment entertain such a wish."

No one can rise from the appreciative study of the life and character of John Foster without becoming a better and stronger man. He has seen a luminary whose light shall not dim, nor its power wane.

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