

FOUR

OUR DAYS ON THE EARTH¹

Ye are strangers and sojourners with Me.²

All ancient peoples were pre-Victorian, and the Bible shares with Homer an untainted vision of the miseries of the human state. Yet if it is the part of wisdom to make this recognition a basis of our view of life, it is not, as the next Section will show, the sole basis; and the very existence of the spirit of revolt suggests that there is something to revolt for and even someone to appeal to.

For we needs must die, and are as water spilt on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again.³

I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me.⁴

Few and evil have been the days of the years of my life.⁵

For we are strangers before thee, and sojourners, as all our fathers were: our days on the earth are as a shadow, and there is no abiding.⁶

And he remembered that they were but flesh;
A wind that passeth away, and cometh not again.⁷

Man that is born of woman
Is of few days, and full of trouble.

¹1 Chron. 29: 15.
²Lev. 25: 23.

³2 Sam. 14:14.
⁴2 Sam. 12: 23.

⁵Gen. 47: 9.
⁶1 Chron. 29: 15.

⁷Ps. 78: 39.

He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down:
He fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not.¹

Is there not a warfare to man upon earth?
And are not his days like the days of an hireling?
As a servant that earnestly desireth the shadow,
And as an hireling that looketh for his wages:
So am I made to possess months of vanity,
And wearisome nights are appointed to me.
When I lie down, I say,
When shall I arise? but the night is long;
And I am full of tossings to and fro unto the dawning
of the day.

My flesh is clothed with worms and clods of dust;
My skin closeth up and breaketh out afresh.
My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle,
And are spent without hope.
Oh remember that my life is wind:
Mine eye shall no more see good.
The eye of him that seeth me shall behold me no more:
Thine eyes shall be upon me, but I shall not be.
As the cloud is consumed and vanisheth away,
So he that goeth down to Sheol shall come up no more.
He shall return no more to his house,
Neither shall his place know him any more.

Therefore I will not refrain my mouth;
I will speak in the anguish of my spirit;
I will complain in the bitterness of my soul.
Am I a sea, or a sea-monster,
That thou settest a watch over me?
When I say, My bed shall comfort me,
My couch shall ease my complaint;
Then thou scarest me with dreams,
And terrifiest me through visions:

¹Job 14: 1-2.

So that my soul chooseth strangling,
And death rather than these my bones.

I loathe my life; I would not live alway;
Let me alone; for my days are vanity.

What is man, that thou shouldest magnify him,
And that thou shouldest set thine heart upon him,
And that thou shouldest visit him every morning,
And try him every moment?

How long wilt thou not look away from me,
Nor let me alone till I swallow down my spittle?

If I have sinned, what do I unto thee, O thou watcher
of men?

Why hast thou set me as a mark for thee,
So that I am a burden to myself?

And why dost thou not pardon my transgressions and
take away mine iniquity?

For now shall I lie down in the dust;

And thou shalt seek me diligently, but I shall not be.¹

For the living know that they shall die: but the dead
know not any thing, neither have they any more a
reward; for the memory of them is forgotten. As well
their love, as their hatred and their envy, is now
perished; neither have they any more a portion for
ever in any thing that is done under the sun.²

Lord, make me to know mine end,

And the measure of my days, what it is;

Let me know how frail I am.

Behold, thou hast made my days as handbreadths;

And mine age is as nothing before thee:

Surely every man at his best estate is altogether vanity.

Surely every man walketh in a vain shew: [Selah

¹Job 7.

²Eccles. 9: 5-6.

Surely they are disquieted in vain:
He heapeth up riches, and knoweth not who shall gather
them.

And now, Lord, what wait I for?
My hope is in thee.
Deliver me from all my transgressions:
Make me not the reproach of the foolish.
I was dumb, I opened not my mouth;
Because thou didst it.
Remove thy stroke away from me:
I am consumed by the blow of thine hand.
When thou with rebukes dost correct man for iniquity,
Thou makest his beauty to consume away like a moth:
Surely every man is vanity. [Selah

Hear my prayer, O Lord, and give ear unto my cry;
Hold not thy peace at my tears:
For I am a stranger with thee,
A sojourner, as all my fathers were.
O spare me, that I may recover strength,
Before I go hence, and be no more.¹

Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth: and let thy heart
cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways
of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know
thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into
judgement. Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart,
and put away evil from thy flesh: for youth and the
prime of life are vanity.

Remember also thy Creator in the days of thy youth,
or ever the evil days come, and the years draw nigh,
when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them; or
ever the sun, and the light, and the moon, and the
stars, be darkened, and the clouds return after the

¹Ps. 39: 5-14.

rain: in the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble, and the strong men shall bow themselves, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those that look out of the windows be darkened, and the doors shall be shut in the street; when the sound of the grinding is low, and one shall rise up at the voice of a bird, and all the daughters of music shall be brought low; yea, they shall be afraid of that which is high, and terrors shall be in the way; and the almond tree shall blossom, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and the caper-berry shall fail: because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets:

Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern; and the dust return to the earth as it was, and the spirit return unto God who gave it.

Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher; all is vanity.¹

As for man, his days are as grass;
As a flower of the field, so he flourisheth.
For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone;
And the place thereof shall know it no more.

But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him,
And his righteousness unto children's children.²

The voice of one saying, Cry. And one said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field:

The grass withereth, the flower fadeth; because the breath of the Lord bloweth upon it; surely the people is grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever.³

¹Eccles. 11: 9-12: 8.

²Ps. 103: 15-17.

³Isa. 40: 6-8.

But God will redeem my soul from the power of Sheol:
For he shall receive me. [Selah

Be thou not afraid when one is made rich,
When the glory of his house is increased:
For when he dieth he shall carry nothing away;
His glory shall not descend after him.
Though while he lived he blessed his soul,
And men praise thee, when thou doest well to thyself,
He shall go to the generation of his fathers;
They shall never see the light.

Man that is in honour, and understandeth not,
Is like the beasts that perish.¹

O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me.
Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising,
'Thou understandest my thought afar off.
Thou searchest out my path and my lying down,
And art acquainted with all my ways.
For there is not a word in my tongue,
But, lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether.
Thou hast beset me behind and before,
And laid thine hand upon me.
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
It is high, I cannot attain unto it.

Whither shall I go from thy spirit?
Or whither shall I flee from thy presence?
If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there:
If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, thou art there.
If I take the wings of the morning,
And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea;
Even there shall thy hand lead me,
And thy right hand shall hold me.
If I say, Surely the darkness shall overwhelm me,
And the light about me shall be night;

¹Ps. 49: 15-20.

Even the darkness hideth not from thee,
But the night shineth as the day:
The darkness and the light are both alike to thee.

For thou hast possessed my reins:
Thou hast covered me in my mother's womb.
I will give thanks unto thee; for I am fearfully and
wonderfully made:
Wonderful are thy works;
And that my soul knoweth right well.¹

The Lord is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will
I hope in him.

The Lord is good unto them that wait for him, to the
soul that seeketh him.

It is good that a man should hope and quietly wait for
the salvation of the Lord.

It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth.
Let him sit alone and keep silence, because he hath
laid it upon him.

Let him put his mouth in the dust; if so be there may
be hope.

Let him give his cheek to him that smiteth him; let
him be filled full with reproach.

For the Lord will not cast off for ever.

For though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion
according to the multitude of his mercies.

For he doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children
of men.

To crush under foot all the prisoners of the earth,
To turn aside the right of a man before the face of the
Most High,

To subvert a man in his cause, the Lord approveth not.
Who is he that saith, and it cometh to pass, when the
Lord commandeth it not?

¹Ps. 139: 1-14.

Out of the mouth of the Most High cometh there not
evil and good?

Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the
punishment of his sins?

Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to
the Lord.

Let us lift up our heart with our hands unto God in
the heavens.¹

Lord, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty;
Neither do I exercise myself in great matters,
Or in things too wonderful for me.
Surely I have stilled and quieted my soul;
Like a weaned child with his mother,
My soul is with me like a weaned child.²

¹Lam. 3: 24-41.

²Ps. 131: 1-2.