

1849

## The Instability of Human Greatness

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## THE INSTABILITY OF HUMAN GREATNESS.

THERE is nothing that is so well calculated to inspire us with correct and elevated thoughts, as to consider upon our own littleness and insignificance. And it seems to have been the special design of Providence that we should ever keep in view the true position we hold in the scale of existence, and the destiny that awaits us in the future. For everything around us, from the withered oak in the forest to the crumbling marble, reminds us that the glory of man passeth away as grass and the flower of the field.

And when we survey the ruins of sixty centuries, and looking back through the long lapse of ages, mark the nations and empires that have from time to time appeared upon the disk of this world's renown; and then look upon their decline and the few sad remains of their glory, with what power and sublimity are we impressed with the instability of human greatness!

We have seen Egypt crowded with magnificent cities that teemed with countless millions; we have seen Greece, the land of science—her philosophers unrivaled for their learning, and her warriors unequaled for their daring; we have seen Rome elevated to such a pitch of grandeur as almost to dazzle the mind, and stagger the imagination, when contemplating the dizzy height which she had reached. But what now is Egypt compared to what she once was? Where is the city of a hundred gates? and where the mighty multitude that once thronged her shores? Alas! but a few dusty heaps, covered with undistinguishable characters, remain the sepulchre of her departed greatness. And what of Greece and Rome!

They have fallen! and the crumbling column,  
The deserted temple, and the deep silence  
That pervades around, a dreary tale unfold.

And well had it been for humanity if the mighty conquerors—those who were dazzled by the splendid baubles of fame, and who sought to enrol their names among the great ones of earth—well had it been if they had perceived the great truths here set forth.

Napoleon, as he gazed from the summit of the Alps upon the wrecks that lay around him, might have learned that he was following in the footsteps of an Alexander or a Cæsar, and, like them, he would find that the foundation upon which he was rearing his greatness must yield to the overwhelming flood of a world's indignation.

And thus in the solitude of Helena, a little isle amidst ocean's dreary waste, Napoleon was forced to establish his kingdom, which he vainly hoped to erect upon the broad expanse of a continent. And there he met his final doom—there he lay unwept, save by the misty cloud which, at morn and eve, shed its tears over him, fit emblems of those he wrung from the millions that were crushed beneath his iron heel.