

THE  
MONTHLY VISITANT;

OR

Something Old.

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“NO MAN HAVING DRUNK OLD WINE, STRAIGHTWAY  
DESIRETH NEW; FOR HE SAITH, THE OLD IS  
BETTER.”

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## The Visitant, &c.

### TO THE YOUNG.

“YET LACKEST THOU ONE THING.”

IT is a thousand pities, when, among many qualities, valuable in themselves and useful to society, a pernicious one, like the dead fly in the Apothecary's Ointment, should spoil the whole. This is too common, and was exemplified in the character of him to whom the great Teacher of mankind addressed these words.

He was a *young man*. Youth is a promising season: it is spring; the season of hope, followed by the showers of summer, the abundance of autumn, and by what cheers the gloom of winter. Our youth had great possessions, being very rich; on the principles found in scripture, these are not to be sought after, nor confided in, but considered as a trust committed to some, whereby they may become eminently useful. The advantages which they afford are neither to be neglected nor despised. Besides, he was a ruler or young magistrate with whom our Lord now conversed, worthy of the trust committed to his charge, and of the chair of justice, to which he was advanced.

Having heard of the fame of Jesus, and believing him to be a teacher sent from God, he was determined to profit by his instruction. Eager for his company, he ran to meet him; and in his presence, he kneeled before him; habituated to high life, he used a phraseology, respectful indeed, but too often unmeaning: “*Good Master*, what good thing shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?” Jesus, intending to censure an unmeaning phraseology, and to encourage simplicity in our intercourse with fellow-men, demanded, “Why callest thou

## NEW YEAR'S DAY.

*The following discourse delivered at the Presbyterian church on the 1st day of January, A. D. 1817, by MR. ELIAS HARRISON, Principal of the Alexandria Academy, arrested attention when delivered, and will no doubt be now read with pleasure and profit.*

## GENESIS, XLVII, 8.

“And Pharaoh said unto Jacob, how old art thou?”

THE lives of the ancient Patriarchs, are full of the most important, the most interesting instruction. The names of the founders of a nation, an empire, a colony, a city, or a temple, are not unfrequently heard to drop from the lisping lips of an artless infant, even before its opening mind is capable of comprehending what is attached to the names which it articulates. The mighty conqueror, glittering on the throne of earthly empire, to which he has made his way, through the blood of slaughtered thousands of his race is frequently chanted, in the song of the savage the simple and the wise. And though followed at a distance, in his desolating track, by the deep toned execrations of the widow, the father and the orphan; he is still enrolled as mighty, on the records of history, and will probably go down the lapse of time in the recollection of the world till the sun shall go out, and the stars shall cease to glitter on the mantle of night. But if the annals of these splendid butchers of humanity—these harbingers of death and desolation to the inhabitants of the earth are sought for with avidity, and read with attention—if the names of those whose nod was once terror, and whose frown was death—whose bloody march to empire was followed by the besom of destruction:—if those who have once roused,

convulsed, and desolated nations, are deeply imprinted in the recollection of the great, and chaunted in the song of the unmeaning infant. with how much more propriety, and with how much greater avidity, ought we to treasure up in recollection the characters and incidents of the venerable fathers of the church of God? Though like the potentates of the earth, they are now in the land of silence, mouldering and mingling with their kindred dust, their characters and actions, on the unerring records of inspiration are still unfolding to us, lessons full of interest and practical wisdom. Before these eminent servants of the most high, the proudest and the most exalted earthly monarch must wither and sink into comparative insignificance. In them we behold the connecting links of that chain which united the antediluvian and the Jewish church. In them we behold as it were the favorites of Heaven, and the repositories of the will of the Omnipotent Jehovah—in their characters, and lives, a lively image of that pilgrimage which every child of God, ought to consider himself as performing. But what is of infinitely more value, through them, we behold the glimmerings of that light, which, was one day to enlighten and resuscitate the world. That Almighty Saviour, whose peaceful advent the seraphic choirs of Heaven announced, and at whose humble manger the eastern sages bowed with reverence, was through this Patriarchal line to come, and bless the world. In the life of the Patriarch Jacob, the subject of the interrogatory in the text, we find much to charm, to animate, to soften and to chill the soul. In the fullest sense of the word, he was a stranger and a pilgrim on the earth.

At one time we behold him artful, cunning and insidious supplanting his brother in the birthright, and wresting from him the primary prophetic blessing of an aged father; at another, we behold him at Bethel wrapped in the visions of the night—the favourite of heaven—attended by its celestial throngs, and listening with solemn silence to the benediction of the Omnipotent; the God of his fathers Abraham and Isaac. Transported to the land of his progenitors, we follow him through the tardy years of his servitude—behold him in his return, wrestling and prevailing with the angel of the covenant,—the Fear of his father Isaac. Again we witness the clouds of calamity and affliction and sorrow, gathering around him, and mantling his before joyous countenance, with the thickening gloom of despair. Joseph, his beloved, darling Jo-

soph, is numbered in imagination among the multitudes of the dead.

Twenty years of sorrow, during which time, the snows of age must have gathered thick around his head, and the prospect again begins to brighten. A messenger arrives; mighty God! How mutable the lot, how fruitful the incidents of human life! Joseph lives;—and Jacob too, lives. Revived by the cheering intelligence, the years of his life, seem to roll back to the animating sprightliness of youth. In glancing over this inimitable portion of sacred history, so deeply interested do we become, that the mind fluttering with a tumult of sensations, for which it is hardly able to account, frequently outstrips the pen of inspiration, and anticipates the result. In almost the same moment we behold the patriarch pressing eagerly on his journey, locked in the fond embrace of his long lost, his beloved Joseph—and standing venerable, and unintimidated before the regal authority of Egypt. Struck with the dignified aspect of this eminent servant of the most High. Methinks I see the monarch of Egypt filled with wondering interest as the incidents of the patriarch's life are unfolding before him; till at length amazed, and astonished at their numbers, he is constrained to interrupt the narrative, by the interrogatory in the text. "How old art thou?" How full of artless simplicity is the answer! And Jacob said unto Pharaoh, the days of the years of my pilgrimage, are a hundred and thirty years: few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers, in the days of their pilgrimage. Age is a relative term; and has respect, not so much to the intervening space between life and death, or to the time which may have passed from our birth to the present; as to the number of incidents, and afflictive providential dispensations, through which we may have been called to pass. The smallest insect that floats in the sunbeams, or is borne down the impetuous torrent into the ocean, has probably suffered as much, undergone as many changes, and is in fact as old as any human being who now treads the surface of creation. And could the events of a century be crowded into the compass of a day, the man who had experienced them would probably be as old as the one who has lived an hundred years. Thus, though Jacob, had not equalled in days the years of his fathers, still from the complicated, and multiplied incidents which he had experienced, he was probably as old as any of them.

Philip! thou art mortal: was the daily exclamation of one,

whom the king of Macedon had stationed at his door, to remind him, that he must die. And my brethren seizing the opportunity which this day affords, I with the same design address you in the language of the text, "How old art thou?" The life of man at best, is short, fluctuating, and uncertain. No sooner do we begin to live, than it may also be said of us we begin to die. Generation after generation, like the successive billows of the mighty deep, pass in rapid review before us, and are soon embosomed in the vast ocean of eternity. And those who we now behold, fluttering on the busy stage of life, attracting the admiring gaze of the infatuated multitude, they too must soon sink into the land of forgetfulness, to give place to another which is to follow. So that taking our stand at the present point of time, and looking down through succeeding ages, we may behold one generation after another, rising up in rapid succession, acting the same parts, and running the same rounds, which we are now doing. How solemn, how impressive is the prospect! a few years, and not a single solitary individual that now exists will then be found remaining, to tell our story or satisfy the inquiries of posterity. Numbered with the cold tenants of the grave, our bodies must mingle with their native dust, till the echoing trumpet of the archangel, shall summon them to judgment; while our immortal parts must mingle with the spirits of eternity; enchained in the blackness of darkness, or glittering in ineffable glory. Seeing then that, time, swift as the volitions of the soul, is passing away—seeing that finite beings like ourselves, are unable to protract its movements, and that every successive moment advances us nearer to the grave, and nearer to the judgment bar of Omnipotence; what can be more rational, than, for beings who profess to be candidates for eternity, to stop occasionally, as they are floating down the stream, and glancing over the incidents of the parsed, ask themselves, seriously, the important question in the text, "How old art thou?"

"Every moment of a thinking man's life, says an eminent writer, may be considered as a point of prospect, or a point of reflection. We are ever reviewing the passed, or diving into futurity. Like travellers, we avail ourselves of every little eminence on the road, to measure with our eyes, the track we have been pursuing, or the space which is yet extended before us. The present moment continually disappears at the moment: just as the spot on which we stand to

review a landscape, disappears, though it be the centre and focus of all that we behold.

My beloved brethren, our situation at the present moment is peculiarly interesting. We are floating as it were upon the confines of the year that is passed, and the year that is to come. A flood of ideas painful, and pleasant, almost involuntarily rush in upon the soul. The lapse of time is rapid and unceasing—the present moment is all which we are able with any propriety to call our own. This too will soon be gone, and we shall find ourselves one stage in advance of the year that is to come, let us then improve the present, being all that we possess,—let us fill up the fleeting moments as they pass with those reflections, which the text, as well as the occasion is so well calculated to excite.

“How old art thou?” is the language of the text, and reflection excited by the occasion of our meeting seems to whisper as it rises, thou art one year nearer the world of spirits. In throwing a hasty retrospect over that which is now to us as the years of eternity, we shall probably, if seriously viewed, find much cause of mourning and lamentation; and some of perhaps, much cause for joy and rejoicing. Many, whose prospects, at the commencement of the year, were bright and flattering as ours—many, who were united to us by the strongest earthly ties—whom we had fondly pressed to our throbbing bosoms; and in whose society we had often taken sweet council, have probably been swept away into the land of silence and are now reaping the retributions of eternity. Many a budding blossom, just beginning to unfold its latent charms upon the world, has doubtless been withered by the chilling blasts of death, and suffered to fade and moulder in the cheerless mansions of the tomb. Many, who at the commencement of the passed year, alarmed at the rapid flight of time had resolved to devote themselves to God, and live in constant reference to eternity; have gone back in the world, taken to themselves seven other spirits worse than the former, and have now become fitter fuel for that fire which never can be quenched. Others again, who were apparently fit subjects for almighty vengeance, now assured of an interest in redeeming love, are, waiting the summons which shall call them to their rest. That blissful hour in which Immanuel, spoke peace to their troubled consciences, is now no more. Those blissful seasons which it occasioned, and, in which the heart, the fancy, and the understanding, all participated,

have already passed away as the visions of the night, and the year that afforded them, is now numbered with the years which are beyond the flood.

“The life of man is not merely a current, flowing incessantly downward, with uniform speed; in a channel throughout of the same depth and wideness: but a stream undergoing every instant unexpected variations. Now, precipitated over the rock, again, slumbering through the plain—here confined within barriers, which hardly afford a passage, and there spreading into an ocean. To day, swoln above its banks by the torrent from the mountain, to-morrow drunk up by the fervent heat of the vertical sun.” He must have been a very short time in the world, or life must have flowed in a very even tenor indeed, or else he must be a person little given to observation, who is not conscious of something more than the mere lapse of time, of the transition from one measurement of human life to another. Who among us so young, as not to have felt, or so forgetful as not to recollect during the year that is passed, the sad transition from health to sickness, from ease to pain, from joy to sorrow? Are there not seasons and situations, in which we needed a councillor, a comforter, a supporter: when we looked for them but found them not?

But as to the passed, whether improved, or misimproved, is gone from our possession; and as the passed can never be recalled for our enjoyment, let us my brethren, direct our meditations for a moment, to the present and the future. We are all of us moral agents living and acting for eternity. Here all is fluctuating, as the billows of the ocean, daily reminding us that we have here no permanent habitation. And as this is the day in which mankind generally close their accounts with their fellow men, the solemn and interesting question, ought to fly from heart to heart, how stand my accounts with the Omnipotent Jehovah? Have I so adjusted and regulated these matters, which ought to be considered of primary, of eternal moment, as to enter in safety on the ensuing year? I am sensible my beloved brethren, that we are too apt to pass lightly over this important matter; too apt to let go the heart without probing it to the bottom. I am sensible, that while we are solicitous to settle our accounts with our fellow mortals, we are too much disposed to let them run on with God, till the mass becomes so great, and their appearance so complicated, as effectually to frighten us from the experiment. Day after day, and year after year frequently passes away without finding us pre-

pared to enter upon the solemn scrutiny. A more convenient season is uniformly anticipated: and thus the account is permitted to run on, till the sword of divine justice is at the heart.

Christian! How is this matter with you? Have you balanced your accounts, and come up hither this day solemnly to renew your covenant with God, and commit yourself to his disposal for the ensuing year? If you have, happy are you. You are one year nearer your everlasting home. With your anchor, hope, fast fixed within the veil, you shall outride the storm, the hurricane and the tempest, and be landed safely on the shores of the heavenly Jerusalem. Yes, christian, to you, the lapse of time brings no alarm, the advance of death, no chilling terrors. For you to live, is Christ, but to die is gain. Encircled in the everlasting love of your gracious redeemer, you may again go out into the world, be engaged in its concerns, and participate in the blessings of a benificent Providence. Go on my beloved christian brethren, and may the God of everlasting peace and mercy shed his blessings on you.

But O sinner, what encouragement have we to offer to you! Instead of that peace of God, which passeth all understanding, the return of this day, if rightly considered, would plant daggers in your bosom, while out of Christ, the passed year, has wafted you much nearer the world of torment. Could you have a clear perception of your awful situation, instead of that tumult of sensual pleasure, which you have probably been accustomed to anticipate from an occasion like the present, you would experience, in your bosoms, a tumult of anguish, and despair, unutterable.

How much longer God will bear with you is not for weak short sighted man to determine. He has however assured us, that his spirit shall not always strive with man. There is a time when forbearance on the part of God will cease; and when the sinners hope shall be blasted to eternity. My beloved friends, it is far from my design to give you unnecessary pain on this day in which you expected joy. But when I

look around me and behold my fellow mortals, daily dropping into eternity ; some of them probably into hell, I cannot hold my peace. And when I see others floating carelessly down the stream of time unconscious of their danger without God, and without hope in the world, I cannot, I dare not be silent. In faithfulness to my God, and master, in faithfulness to my own soul, and to your souls, I must speak—I must warn you of your danger. This may be the last warning you will ever receive:—the last year you will ever enjoy. I therefore entreat you, by the mercies of God, by the blood of your Redeemer, and by the value of your immortal souls, to fly instantly to the Saviour. Before you leave this house come to the unalterable resolution, that the next year shall be a year for God. Come to this, and you are safe—do this and your salvation is secure. Death cannot hurt you—hell shall not swallow you up.

But when I cast my eyes around upon this respected audience, I behold here and there a solitary individual like the patriarch Jacob, white with the snows of years, and trembling apparently on the brink of the grave. My beloved friends, “how old art thou?” The king of terrors with one mighty sweep, has borne down almost all your generation, and you alone are left to tell their story. Bending over the habitations of the dead, your race is almost run ; your mortal career is nearly terminated. And while now floating as it were, on the confines of time and eternity, I with the tenderest regard to your feelings, as well to your eternal interests, put to you these solemn questions, hast thou this day settled thine accounts with God ? Art thou prepared to meet thy God in judgment ? These are solemn and momentous questions ; and as this will, in all human probability, be your last year, demand your solemn your most immediate attention. To your own reflections, to God, and to the riches of his grace I commit you.

And my beloved fellow youth, fellow companions, and fellow travellers to eternity, to you too, I put the solemn interrogatory in this text, “how old art thou?” Methinks I hear some of you whispering the answer, we are young : true, you are young, but not too young for the chilling grasp of the king of terrors. Busy with the pencil of imagination, you are probably sketching out scenes of pleasure and gratification for the year which is just commencing. Be not deceived ; the pleasures of this world are indeed fascinating, for a moment, but

always in the end, delusive and destructive. They will ultimately bite like a serpent and sting like an adder. My dear young friends, my heart's desire and prayer to God for you all is, that you may be saved. That devoting yourselves to him in early life, you may walk together, hand in hand along its rugged paths, and all, finally meet together, in those blissful realms, where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest: and could I, ah! blissful thought! could I indulge the pleasing hope, of meeting some of you in those happy regions, who from this day's service, had been induced to give yourselves to God, how amply compensated should I feel myself for the feeble effort which I am now making.

Brethren I have done. From my soul, I wish you all a happy New-Year:—and that this may be the lot of each individual of us, may God of his mercy grant, for Christ's sake.  
**AMEN.**