

WHAT REVOLUTIONS, IN SUCCEEDING YEARS

A POEM BY ELIZABETH BATH

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What revolutions, in succeeding years

Musing on the changes that are observable in many of the scenes we contemplate, the circumstance of the spot on which now stands the Friends' Meeting House, in Bristol, called the Friars, having formerly been the scite of a Monastery, appeared a striking illustration of the revolutions of time; and under the impression of the superior purity of such a mode of Worship to one so encumbered with superstitious forms and ceremonies, the following Lines occurred and were committed to writing.

WHAT revolutions, in succeeding years,
Change all terrestrial things!—we stand amaz'd
When, leaping o'er the gulph of time, long pass'd,
On some far distant eminence, we pause;
Pause, to reflect, to wonder, to admire,
And view the miracles which time has wrought.

Time is the ground work of the great design;
Backward or forward, as we take our view,
We travel to the verge of time, but there
Memory, and fancy, and the varied powers,
That sketch the future or recal the past,
Shrink back appall'd, nor see the dark unknown.
Faith has indeed a telescopic eye;
She penetrates the future, else unseen;
She aids our mental vision, found too weak
To view the glories of eternity;
But thro' her friendly medium—there we see

Pure joy unclouded—pleasures, never known
While traversing this howling wilderness—
This barren desert of mortality:
Still she presents the image indistinct,
The end she points to, and the outline gives;
But how obtain'd, or how the soul shall live,
Man shall not comprehend till time shall cease.
Time is the theatre for every sense,
The stage on which they act their varied parts;
They journey with us to the verge of life,
But, with this frail corporeal tenement,
We lay them down to rest.—Memory surveys
The various windings of the road we trod,

Each eminence of hope,—each dire descent,
And, while we judge the future by the past,
We journey on with calm but weary step
Along the ever rugged paths of life.
Memory, that faithful friend who never tires,
Who with her oft-repeated histories
Amuses and instructs—has many an hour
Beguil'd, and many a present sorrow drown'd,
When with her ample page before us spread
We lose the present moment in the past.
And where the scenes by distance are obscured,

Imagination, active in design,
And prompt to execute when call'd to aid,
Closes the long perspective to our view:
Obedient to the call she now attends,
While musing on the changes that o'erturn,
What seem to man his most substantial works.
I view yon Edifice whose scite once bore
The Gothic mansion of monastic gloom:
So say the broken remnants which survive
The wasting power of time.—They loudly call
Imagination to possess her throne,
Since memory cannot trace their former greatness.
Ye ruin'd vestiges of ages past,

Whose broken grandeur only now remains
To tell your former hist'ry—ye proclaim
Yourselves the emblems of those shadowy rites
Now happily exchange'd for that more pure,
More glorious dispensation which becomes
The followers of a crucified Lord.
These worship him in spirit—not in form;
The substance gain'd—the semblance is renounc'd;
The veil remov'd—the spirit with its God
Holds sweet communion—claims instruction thence
From the pure fount whence living waters flow.
'Tis in the depths of silence that the stream

Descends—invigorates—enlivens—cheers.
Few know the awful import of that word,
That silence of all flesh, which clears the way
For God's pure spirit to possess the soul,
When all dependance on inferior aid
Is laid aside; and to a power supreme,
Yet condescending to his creature, man,
We look with confidence and stedfast hope.
This is that worship which ascends on high,
As incense offered to the Lord of life.
His precepts following none shall go astray,
For all may seek and find the way to life.

"I am the way."—This truth shall ever stand,
Tho' worlds should fail, and time should be no more.
He is the living witness in the soul,
And, ever faithful to the promise giv'n,
Sends the pure spirit of eternal truth
To comfort and to cheer. No erring guide
Now points the way, but God himself directs.
How changed these scenes! Imagination draws
The picture of the past—while holy light
Adorns the present, and the spirit cheers
With such a pleasing contrast; gradual change
From midnight darkness to that glorious dawn
Of everlasting light, which shall increase

And shine with greater splendor, till it reach
The cloudless glory of the perfect day.
The crowd of cloister'd Nuns now meet my view,
Who with an earnest tho' mistaken zeal
Forgot the social duties, lovely band!
And all the tender charities of life,
Which the great Pattern of the Christian world
By precept taught, and by his life enforc'd,
And, buried in a cheerless solitude,
Entomb'd the virtues in a living grave.
They, too, are gone—and charity, and love,

And pure religion, and benevolence,
No more by such false principles confin'd,
Walk thro' the earth by God and man approved.
Then let us raise the song of triumph here;
Let us rejoice that ruins only mark
The spot, and tell the hist'ry of the past,
While praise, that sweetest incense, shall ascend
From the pure altar of the human heart,
And rise accepted by the God of all.
These are the sacrifices he receives.
With him no outward off'ring shall avail;
Such are but types and shadows, now disown'd,
While God's own voice instructs us in his law,
And tells us, that the pure and humble soul
Shall ever find acceptance in his sight.

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