

The year was dying fast, and for his funeral obsequies earth wrapped herself in white, and the winds, howling wildly, drove black clouds across the sky, and shut out the bright glance of moon and star.

Hush ! let the blast be heard ; let no sound else disturb the chamber where the young impetuous life, which the year found so earnest in its greeting, is ebbing fast away ; let tears fall, and let hearts make bitter moan—but ever noiselessly ; and let the last stern foe find solemn silence as he claims his prey. For here in presence of the wife, the sister, and the Lome which he had called his *gods*, the gay, and rich, and prosperous Herbert Arnsby lies within the arms of Death.

No warning had been given, no lengthened illness came to cast its boding shadow on the hearth. In one brief eventide the stroke fell on them all ; and almost ere they knew that there was danger—he was DEAD.

His brother, all unconscious, came that night to end the one year and begin another. He found the loved companion of his boyhood prostrate and insensible amidst the tasteful and luxurious comforts which he had prized so much, but which were powerless now to cheer and to revive. Then, for a moment, the hearts' anguish found an utterance, and the sick room was startled by the brother's agonising cry.

Hush ! the old year is dying—not alone ; for he who promised so much for the future which is now so near at hand, he who, “ young, strong, and ardent,” had still “ many a year to live,” he too is hastening to that world where time shall be unknown.

Ah, what a year it was—and what an end ! Abandoning himself with all the ardour of his nature to the pleasures of this world's thoughtless life, and to the professional ambition which had become his second nature, the young physician had experienced a success even beyond his hopes, and had found the twelve months through which he had lately passed only too short for his life's earnest toil. The “ nobler fate” which he had chosen had won the world's applause ; his heart was satisfied with earthly good ; he was prepared, with thousands who have trodden the same path, to say to his gladdened heart, “ Soul take thine ease !” and still, as ever, the devotion of his brother's life had been the object of his pity and his scorn. But to-night the end had come, and from the sky a voice—the voice of the Eternal God whom he utterly despised broke on the awful stillness with a sound that spoke his doom. “ Thou fool ! this night thy soul shall be required of thee ; then, whose shall these things be ?”

They knelt around the bed, and he of the ignoble fate prayed with his own simplicity and pathos for the departing spirit, and for the pale and weeping ones beside him. And as they rose, they marked a sudden movement, a shudder, a quick breath, and Herbert Arnsby, entered on the awful mystery that lies beyond the threshold of eternity.

Hark ! the clock strikes the hour ; and the New Year is born. Where now is he who could delay his preparation for the life to come until his plans for worldly aggrandisement had been carried into action ? Where he who madly chose to be a lover of pleasure rather than a lover of God ?

Alas, that thousands like him, cry, “ Next Year,” “ To-morrow,” when each one knows not what *to-day* may bring ! Alas, that *thou*, my reader hast full many a year put off thy duty to a future that has not yet come to thee ; yea, that shall never come ! For be it that thou art “ wise unto salvation,” or yet in the bonds of iniquity, I know that this “ thief of time,” procrastination, hath been thy frequent guest. And, by the value of thy soul (if thou belongest to the yet unsaved), and by thy love for perishing immortals, (if thou hast chosen Christ and his pure service), I would conjure thee now, I would conjure myself, to trifle with time no longer ; but *this-year*, yea, this day and hour—“ Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might ; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave, WHITHER THOU GOEST.”

What words more stirring for the day that brings, it may be, thy life's last New Year ?—*The Freeman*.