

to see men who had been celebrated as authors, wits or statesmen, two or three centuries before, in order to see how they wore their accumulated honors, and in what degree of personal veneration they were held. These problems, and a hundred more, I should now have the opportunity of solving, and I determined to take time enough to do it.

The first family I got thoroughly acquainted with, was that of my friend the Doctor. His expression about "having a large family to support," when I asked him to be my surety, had struck me at the time unfavorably. I thought it a mere *excuse* to evade an unpleasant act.

What was my surprise to find that, although he had but two children, of the respective ages of five and two, his family consisted, exclusive of servants, of no fewer than eighteen! The oldest person in his house was three hundred and forty years old—a maternal male ancestor. This old gentleman had documents in his possession to prove that he had been a celebrated surgeon in his day—a wit and a man of fashion—he had fought a duel about a duchess—and been reckoned one of the handsomest men of his time. I was desirous of seeing him. The Doctor did not accompany me to his room. He was seated in a low easy chair, in a dressing-gown of thick brown flannel; his face and hands were walnut-colored, wrinkled beyond any power of adequate description. His skin, which seemed as dry as parchment, clung so fast to his bones, that the tendons seemed to have no room to act, and his joints were almost useless. It took him full thirty seconds to turn his head to an angle of about forty degrees from his former position. His eyes were sunken in to the very rear of the cavity of the eyeball. I, who profess no knowledge of anatomy, was astonished at the depth to which they had sunken. The upper and

lower eyelids had followed them, making a funnel, at the bottom of which two shrunken and bleary orbs looked out as from some interminable cavern. He had ceased reading for one hundred and fifty years; his eyes, no matter with what artificial aids, would serve him no longer. For more than that time he had been unable to walk; not that he was really too weak, but his limbs were too rigid, and he had too little command over his joints. He was like a skeleton without the wires—ready to collapse in a moment. He could still talk; but did so without moving his jaws. But as his pronunciation, even if distinct, was that of three centuries ago, it was almost impossible to understand a single word. So difficult indeed was it, that the Doctor had given orders to pay no attention to his mutterings, but to treat him as a child, keep him warm, his room clean, and give him plenty to eat and drink—"and that was all!" I looked at him, therefore, as I would at a curious wild beast. He said something which I could not understand. It seemed to be a *question*, from the tone with which it ended. I paid him a few compliments, speaking very slowly and distinctly, and bending down to his ear. He started: at least he *prepared* to start, but it took some time for the motion to become visible. Then his hands slowly rose, with a motion as slow and toilsome, apparently, as the minute-hand of a clock. I took his hand; it was cold: at least it had that sensation to me, but it was also hard and dry; the fleshy portions of his hand had shrunken away, and there the brown (almost black) skin stood in hard ridges, almost as hard as wood. Over the fingers the skin was smooth and shining; the nails were long pointed. The ancient scowled at me when I took his hand, and said something. I could not dis-