

one of the joyous twelve had slipped out of this little festive circle.

The months rolled on, and cold December came with all its cheering round of kindly greetings and merry hospitalities; and with it came a softened recollection of the fate of poor Fortescue. Eleven of the twelve assembled on the last day of the year, and it was impossible not to feel their loss as they sat down to dinner. The very irregularity of the table, five on one side and six on the other, forced the melancholy event upon their memory.

A decorous sigh or two, a low, becoming ejaculation, and an instructive observation upon the uncertainty of life, made up the sum of tender posthumous "offering to the names of poor George Fortescue," as they proceeded to discharge the more important duties for which they had met. By the time the third glass of champagne had gone round, in addition to the potations of fine old hock and "capital Madeira," they had ceased to discover any thing so very pathetic in the inequality of the two sides of the table, or so melancholy in their crippled number of eleven.

Several years had elapsed, and our eleven friends kept up their double anniversaries as they might aptly enough be called, with scarcely any perceptible change. But, alas! there came one dinner at last, which was darkened by a calamity they never expected to witness; for on that day, their friend, companion, brother almost, was banded! Yes, Stephen Rowland, the wit, the oracle, the life of their circle, had, on the morning of that day, forfeited his life upon a public scaffold, for having made one single stroke of his pen in a wrong place.—In other words, a bill of exchange which passed into his hands for £700, passed out of it for £1,700.

It would be injustice to the ten to say, that even wine, friendship and a merry season, could dispel the gloom which pervaded this dinner. It was agreed beforehand, that they should not allude to the distressing and melancholy theme; and having thus interdicted the only things which really occupied all their thoughts, the natural consequence was, that silent contemplation took the place of dismal discourse; and they separated long before midnight.

Some fifteen years had now glided away since the fate of Rowland, and the ten remained; but the stealing hand of time had written sundry changes in most legible characters. Raven locks had become grizzled, two or three heads had not as many locks altogether as may be reckoned in a walk of half a mile along the Regent's Canal—one was actually covered with a brown wig, the crow's feet were visible in the corner of the eye—good old port and warm Madeira carried it against hock, claret, and red burgundy; and champagne stews, hashes, and ragouts, grew in favor—crusts were rarely called for to relish the cheese after dinner—conversation grew less boisterous, and it turned chiefly on politics and the state of the funds, or the value of landed property—apologies were made for coming in thick shoes and warm stockings—the doors and Windows were most carefully provided with list and sand bag—the fire more in request—and a quiet game of whist filled up the hours that were wont to be devoted to drinking, singing and riotous merriment. The rubbers, a cup of coffee, and at home by 11 o'clock, was the usual cry, when the fifth on six glass had gone round after the removal of the cloth. At parting, too, there was a long ceremony in the hall, buttoning up great coats, tying on woollen comforters, fixing silk handkerchiefs over the mouth and up to the ears, grasping sturdy walking canes to support unsteady feet.

Their fiftieth anniversary came, and death had indeed been busy.

Four little old men of withered appearance and decrepit walk, with cracked voices and dim, rayless eyes, sat down, by the mercy of Heaven, (as they themselves tremulously declared,) to celebrate, for the fiftieth time, the first day of the year, to observe the frolic compact which, half a century before they had entered into at the Star and Garter at Richmond. Eight were in their graves! The four that remained stood upon its confines. Yet they chirped cheerily over their glass, though they could scarcely carry it to their lips,

not more than half full; and cracked their jokes, though they articulated their words with difficulty, and heard each other with still greater difficulty. They mumbled, they chattered, they laughed, if a sort of strange wheezing might be called a laugh; and when the wines sent their icy blood in warmer pulses through their veins, they talked of the past as if it were but yesterday that had slipped by them—and of the future as if it were a busy century that lay before them.

They were just the number for a quiet rubber of whist; and for three successive years they sat down to one. The fourth came, and then their rubber was played with an open dummy; a fifth, and whist was no longer practicable; two only could play at cribbage, and cribbage was the game. But it was little more than the mockery of play. Their palsied hands could hardly hold, their fading sight distinguish, the cards, while their torpid faculties made them doze each deal.

At length came the last dinner; and the survivor of the twelve, upon whose head fourscore and ten winters had showered their snow, ate his solitary meal. It so chanced that it was in his house and at his table, they had celebrated the first. In his cellar, too, had remained for eight and fifty years, the bottle they had uncorked, recorked, and which he was that day to uncork again. It stood beside him; with a feeble and reluctant grasp, he took the frail memorial of a youthful vow and for a moment memory was faithful to her office.—She threw open her long vista of buried years; and his heart travelled through them all. Their lusty and blithesome spring, their bright and fervid summer—their ripe and temperate autumn—their chill but not too frozen winter. He saw, as in a mirror, how one by one, the laughing companions of the merry hour, at Richmond, had dropped into eternity. He felt all the loneliness of his condition, (for he had eschewed marriage, and in the veins of no living creature ran a drop of blood whose source was in his own); and as he drained a glass which he filled, "to the memory of those who were gone," the tears slowly trickled down the deep furrows of his aged face.

He had thus fulfilled one part of his vow, and he prepared himself to discharge the other, by sitting the usual number of hours at his desolate table. With a heavy heart he resigned himself to the gloom of his own thoughts—a lethargic sleep stole over him—his head fell upon his bosom—confused images crowded into his mind—he babbled by himself—was silent—and when his servant entered the room, alarmed by a noise which he heard, he found his master stretched upon the carpet at the foot of the easy chair, and out of which her had slipped in an apoplectic fit. He never spoke again, nor once opened his eyes, though the vital spark was not still extinct till the following day. And this was the LAST DINNER.

Human nature is evidently endowed with a variety of appetites and desires, adapted to the various objects which are capable of supplying its wants, or of furnishing it with pleasures. The body stands in need of constant support, which is not to be procured without considerable art and labour. This art and labour must be greatly increased, if not only the necessities, but also the conveniences and elegancies of life are desired, and the refinements of sense considered as objects of pursuit. The senses are not only inlets of pleasures merely corporeal but of others, also, of a more refined and delicate kind, of which the mind, under the influence of fancy, is of the chief precipient. Hence they open a very extensive field of human enjoyment, and claim the whole compass of nature to administer materials for the fine arts. The mind of man is eagerly desirous of knowledge, and wishes to discover the relations, the causes, and the effects of the various objects that are presented to it. Not only corporeal wants and appetites, the senses of beauty, of harmony, and of magnificence, and the love of knowledge, subject men to necessities which must be supplied, or offer to him pleasures which he cannot but desire; he is also actuated by various affections, some selfish, and some benevolent, which serve as constant spurs to action, and impel him into various tracks, according to the different complexions of their objects.