

A CHAPTER ON GRAVES.

"The depth of human reason must become
As deep as is the holy human heart,
Ere aught in written phrases can impart
The might and meaning of that ecstasy
To those low souls, who hold the mystery
Of the unseen universe for dark and dumb.

As men journeying along through the toilsome paths of life, perhaps there is nothing which has so much power in binding them together by those links to which we owe so much of our earthly happiness, as the knowledge of the fate that will, one day or other, fall upon us all. If there were in our life all the chances and changes which it at present possesses, except the certainty of its speedy termination, men would care little to connect themselves by any strong ties with those from whom, ere long, they would be almost sure to be separated. But now, knowing their stay in this world will be but for a short time, and knowing also that their stay will be terminated by the same dark and gloomy grave, they cling to each other, and form those ties of public society and private affection, by which they may best administer support, comfort, and consolation to each other, during their brief pilgrimage.

As to these institutions of society, springing from a sense of companionship in sorrow, that we owe most of our bodily comforts. But in these cold forms and ceremonies we should find but little comfort for our hearts. Man, possessing a soul, spiritual and unearthly in its nature, can find happiness only in a fellowship with beings also spiritual. And many are the spirits from the unseen world that haunt our minds, as we journey on our earthly course holding a strange and mysterious communion with our hearts, and causing us to live an inward and unseen life, without which our outward life would be poor indeed. Many and various are the forms in which they array themselves. Some come before us in vestures of glory, filling our hearts with high and holy thoughts, as they whisper to us strange tidings of the world whence they have come. Some come, the spirits of departed ages, calling up past scenes, and bringing examples of those who have lived and died before. Others come, the spirits of futurity, bringing to our minds' eye pictures of lovely sunny scenes, in which we fondly hope we may sometimes play our part; or bearing a darker or a more gloomy form, as they cast a shadow over our spirit, the dim forebodings of coming sorrow. Others are there,

"That haunt the steps of the lone and forsaken,
And the echoes of hours that are gone they awaken;
When the loved one is gone and all would be drear
To the heart in its loneliness, then come they near
They gather the flowers, the bluebell or rose,

Or they scorn not the meanest flower that grows.
And they weave them into a magic chain,—
Though the flowers may wither, the spell doth remain,—
And when they bind up the heart that's in pain,
And awaken the spirit to gladness again,
Then all around it they breathe through the trees,
And whisper a voice on the magic breeze;
A voice still and gentle, which yet can reveal
That name to the heart that its sadness can heal."

Of all these spirits, so many and so various in their nature, there is not one so constantly with us as the spirit of the grave. In our gayest scenes, when all is brightness and mirth and health around, that gaunt spirit raises his shrouded form among us. When we are alone, he is with us. When we are in the throng of life, he is with us. When we look upon the face of nature, in every chance and every change around, we see the impress of that spirit's form. The wild wind, as it scatters the leaves on their autumnal tomb, seems to whisper his name. If we gaze on the loveliest prospect that this world can afford, we see in the midst thereof a grave.

But this spirit, as he wanders with us in his daily walks, hath cast a veil over the fearfulness of his aspect, so that we look upon him with an unfearing eye: we dread not his presence.

"Is it not wonderful, the darkest day
Of all the days of life,—the hardest wretch
That tries the coward sense,—should mix itself
In all our gentlest and most joyous moods
A not unwelcome visitant? that thought,
In her quaint wanderings, may not reach a spot
Of lavish beauty, but the spectre form
Meets her with greeting, and she gives herself
To his mysterious converse?"

It is well to go to the "old kirkyard," and wander among the graves, to commune with death in his own domains; to see the noble and the self beside by side; the master and the slave. Nowhere do we see a fairer view of man than in their graves, for their faults lie buried with them. "Man wars not with the dead. It is a trait of human nature for which I love it." And is it not well to pass by the graves on our way to worship in the temple of that God whose eternal temple we must enter through the grave.

But there are graves of another kind. Is not each man's heart a grave, wherein lies buried many a sad and mournful memory? Many bright and glorious forms fill our youthful hearts, making all around us seem glad and merry with their presence. As in the healthful child of half-a-dozen years we see no symptoms of decay and death, so we deem that these visions and hopes of our youth will last forever. But time, as its years roll on, spares them not. One by one they fade, they die; and in our