

GENERAL LITERATURE.

THE DEAD ALIVE.

A POWERFUL SKETCH.

(From Hood's Magazine.)

It was four o'clock; and I had not yet prepared myself to give my lecture. The heat was oppressive, the air heavy, the sky tempestuous, and I felt a sensation of restlessness and nervous irritability quite unusual to me. During the last week I had not enjoyed one hour's tranquillity: several persons, dangerously ill and requiring my attention, had called for me. One in particular (the only support in a large family) gave me great anxiety; and excited in my mind extreme sympathy. In this state I got into the carriage to go to the University. At that moment an unsealed note was put into my hand. I opened it immediately, and found it to announce the death of poor H—for whom I was so much interested; and this news affected me deeply.

The stroke was the more severe as I had not foreseen the event, and, consequently, had not the consolation of having been able to prepare the family of my patient for so great a misfortune. Hitherto the chair of declamation had always been to me rather a pleasure than a labour; the abstract theories of the science had amused my mind; but this evening I felt a degree of uneasiness on my spirits for which I could not account. The events of the day had so deeply affected me that I felt an almost insurmountable inclination to repose. When I reached the entry of the hall, I cast a look around at the unusually full audience, and as I passed through the crowd I heard the name of a celebrated doctor, spoken of as being among the hearers. At another time these were circumstances that would have given me pleasure, but now they increased my confusion, which was indeed complete when I discovered that I had left my notes in the carriage, which I had dismissed at the door, intending to walk home. It was too late to send for them; and as I was now in great perplexity I opened my portfolio, and hastily ran through a number of remarks that I had thrown in there without arranging them; happily, I fell upon some novel observations upon insanity, and I then determined to make that the subject of my off-hand lecture.

I have but a confused idea of what then followed: but I remember the applause which saluted my entrance, & which became still louder when my confusion was observed. As soon as there was silence I summoned all my courage and began. The first words cost me infinite pains: I hesitated and stopped continually; but by degrees I recovered myself, and the great attention paid to me gave me confidence. I soon found the cloud that overspread my senses, clearing off; my ideas became less confused; the words came readily, and comparisons and expressions crowded upon me. I had only to choose them. As I went on my observations became more striking, and my demonstrations more clear and comprehensive. I was astonished at the fluency with which I expressed myself. I found great facility in treating several difficult subjects, which at another time I should hardly have dared attempt. They seemed to me clear and simple, and I got through them as trifles. Still greater became my surprise to find that my memory, which had hitherto been slow and imperfect, was suddenly become miraculously faithful, and brought back the most trifling circumstances of my long career. I cited one author, and with so much exactitude, that one might have imagined that I held the book in my hand; facts and anecdotes came to elucidate my theories and demonstrations; the cases of insanity that I had witnessed in my youth and which I thought were effaced from my memory, rushed back upon it as if they had recently happened. I became every moment more at ease, the promptness with which one idea followed another exciting every faculty; and words came to give them expression. At that moment great terror took possession of my mind. It seemed to me that some unknown danger, which it was not in my power to avoid hung over me.

The supernatural power that had hitherto supported me began to sink; my thoughts became confused: strange faces and fantastic images flitted before my eyes. The objects of which I had been speaking came to life, and I seemed like a magician who, by a word, rendered visible

the living and the dead. I stopped! The most perfect silence reigned in the hall, and every eye was turned towards me. All at once a horrible thought seized me, a convulsive laugh broke from me, and I exclaimed, "I also am mad!" All the assembly rose instantaneously like one body. Every voice raised a cry of surprise and terror; and of what afterwards happened I knew nothing.

When I recovered my senses I was in bed. I looked around—I knew every object in the room. The sun shone upon the window curtains, which were half closed: I was sensible that it was evening; I saw nobody in the room; and when I endeavoured to comprehend who I was, and why there, a faintness came over me: I shut my eyes, and tried to sleep, when some one entering the room awakened me; it was my friend Doctor G—, who approached the bed and attentively examined me for the space of a few moments. Whilst he thus looked at me I perceived that he changed color, his hand trembled whilst feeling my pulse, and in a low and melancholy whisper he said, "My God, how he is changed!" I then heard a voice at the door say, "May I come in?" The doctor did not answer, and my wife came gently into the room. She looked pale and sorrowful; her eyes were wet, and, as she bent anxiously over me burning tears fell upon my face. She took my hands in hers, bent her lips close to my ear, and said, "William, do you know me?" A long silence followed this question. I tried to answer, but was incapable of pronouncing one word. I wished to show by some sign that I was sensible of her presence. I fixed my eyes upon her; but I heard her say, amidst deep sobs and tears, "Alas! he does not know me!"—And thus I perceived that my efforts had been vain. The doctor now took my wife by the hand to lead her from the room. "Not yet, not yet," she said, withdrawing her hand, and I relapsed into delirium. When again I became sensible, I felt as if I had awakened from a long and deep sleep. I still suffered, but less severely; extreme weakness had succeeded to fever; my eyes were painful, and a mist was over them; at first, I was not sensible that any one was in the room, but gradually objects became more distinct, and I saw the doctor seated by my bed. He said, "Are you better, William?" Hitherto my ineffectual attempts to make myself understood had not given me pain; but now the impossibility of doing so was a martyrdom. I soon became aware that my strength of mind was leaving me, and that death approached. The efforts that I made to rouse myself from this sort of death like slumber must have been very violent, for a cold sweat came all over me. I heard a rushing as if my ears were full of water, and my limbs were convulsed. I seized the doctor's hand, which I pressed with all my strength. I rose in my bed and looked wildly at him. This did not last long; I soon fell again into weakness: I dropped the hand which I had grasped, my eyes closed, and I fell on my bed. All that I remember at that moment were the words of poor Doctor G—, who, thinking me dead, exclaimed, "At last his sufferings are over!"

Many hours passed before I recovered my senses. The first sensation of which I became sensible was the coldness of the air, which felt like ice upon my face; it seemed as if an enormous weight was on it; my arms were stretched against my body, and though I was lying in a most convenient position, yet it was impossible to change it; I tried to speak, but had not the power.—Some time afterwards I heard the steps of many people walking in the room, something heavy was set down, and a hoarse voice pronounced these words: "William H—, aged thirty eight: I thought him older!" These words recalled to my mind all the circumstances of my illness; I understood that I had ceased to live, and that preparations were making for my interment. Was I then dead?—The body was indeed cold and inanimate; but *thought* was not extinct. How could it be that all traces of life had disappeared exteriorly, and that sentiment still existed in the chilly frame that was now going to be conveyed to the grave?—What a horrible idea! My God! is this a dream? No; all was real; I recalled to my mind the last words of the doctor; he knew too well the signs of death to allow himself to be deceived by false appearances. No hope! None! I felt myself being placed in the

coffin. What language can describe all the horror of that moment?

I knew not how long I remained in this situation. The silence that reigned in the room was again broken, and I was sensible that many of my friends came to look at me for the last time. My mind was awake to all the horrors of my situation; in a moment my heart became sensible of acute suffering. But what! thought I to myself, is everything within me dead? Is the soul, as well as the body, inanimate? My *thought* nevertheless was proof to the contrary. What has become of my will to speak, to see, to live? Everything within me sleeps, and is as inactive as if I had never existed! Are the nerves disobedient to the commands of the brain? Why do those swift messengers refuse to obey the soul? I recalled to mind the almost miraculous instances of the power of the mind directed to one purpose and urged by strong impulse. I knew the history of the Indian who, after the death of his wife, had offered his breast to her infant, and had nourished it with milk. Was not this miracle the effect of a strong will? I had seen life and motion restored to a palsied limb by a mighty effort of the mind, which had awakened the dormant nerves. I knew a man whose heart beat slow or quick as he pleased. Yes, thought I, in a transport of joy, the will to live remains. It is only when this faculty has yielded that Death can become master of us. I felt a hope of reviving, as I may express it, by the vigour of my will; but alas! I cannot even now think of it without fear! The moments were speeding fast away, and by the noise around me I comprehended that preparations were making to close my coffin. What is to be done? If the will has really the power attributed to it, how shall I direct it? During all my illness I often strongly desired to speak and move, but could not do so. As the wrestler puts forth the utmost strength of every muscle to rise up his antagonist, so I employed all that my will could command, and endeavoured to impart to my nerves the impulse of that energetic volition, my last hope! *It was in vain.*—In vain did I try to raise one breath within my breast—to utter one sigh. And oh, what increase of horror! I heard the nails applied to my coffin! Despair was in the sound.

At that very instant E—, my oldest, my dearest friend, came into my room. He had performed a long journey to see me once more, to bid an eternal farewell to the companion of his childhood. They made way for him. He rushed forward and laid his hand, his faithful, fond hand upon my bosom. Oh, the warmth of that friend's hand! It touched the inmost fibres of my heart, and it sprang to meet him. That emotion acted upon my whole system; the blood was agitated; it began to flow, my nerves trembled, and a convulsive sigh burst from my disenchanted lungs; every fibre moved with a sudden bound, like the cordage of a vessel struggling against a mighty sea. I breathed again! But so sudden and so unexpected was the change in my frame, that no idea came into my mind that it could not be real—that I was again deprived of reason. Happily this doubt soon ceased. A cry of terror, and these words, "he lives!" uttered distinctly enough for me to hear, put all beyond doubt. The noise and bustle became general, and some voice exclaimed, "E— has fainted; raise him up, carry him hence that he may not, when he opens his eyes, first behold his friend." Orders, exclamations, cries of joy and surprise, increased every instant; all that I now recall is, that I was lifted out of my coffin, and, before a good fire, was completely brought to life, and found myself surrounded by friends. After some weeks I was restored to health: I had seen death, as nearly as possible, and my lips had touched the bitter portion which one day I must drink to the last drop.

SCRIPTURE ILLUSTRATIONS.

ILLUSTRATION OF MARK V. 39.

"Why make ye this ado, and weep? the damsel is not dead, but sleepeth."

"The assembling together of multitudes," Mr. Harmer observes, "at the place where persons have lately expired, and bewailing them in a noisy manner, is a custom still retained in the East, and seems to be considered as an honour done to the deceased."