

DEATH THE SUPPORT OF LIFE.

[Prize Composition, by Miss ANN J. LANSING, of the Second Department of the Albany Female Academy, for which a gold medal was awarded.]

"There is neither waste nor ruin in nature :—" for the smallest particle of matter in the vast universe around us, is composed of an infinite number of atoms which can never be destroyed, but being united with other atoms, constitute a new combination. One plant decays, scatters its seed, and another springs up, perhaps more beautiful, in the place which it occupied. Even that which we look upon with disgust and horror "is a step in the progress of life." "The tiniest thing that moves—we behold decay moving through its veins, and its corruption, unconscious to itself, engenders new tribes of life. There is not such a thing as beauty, there is not such a thing as life, that does not generate from its own corruption, a loathsome life for others." The dust which we tread under foot, has become a beautiful rose-bud, filling the air with its fragrance; or a lofty oak, imparting its shade to every thing around. It may have formed a part of the winged eagle, who hovers in regions of space, or the gigantic elephant who treads the earth with majesty. It may have tended to the formation of the human frame. How strange that the dust of the earth should give to the lip of loveliness its richest glow! to the ear its innumerable and exquisitely minute cavities! and to the eye its floating humors and its brilliant colorings! How strange that it should form the inclosure to the "divine spark" itself, the soul! That it should form the tenement of the fancy, that loves to soar in unknown regions! The memory, that treasurer of the soul!—The reason, that weighs and balances, that guides and determines and proves.

Changes are continually going on among all living bodies. The drop of water that to-day sparkles in the diamond, and to-morrow gives its calm quiet beauty to the pearl, soon becomes the fleecy, heavy cloud, floating in the blue sky, and again descending gives freshness and health to the humble night-flower, or the burning blush to the cheek of the early rose. "The snow-flake of winter revives when the sun-beams are yellow and warm, and forms a gem for the spotless cup of the lily, or is restored in the blossom of the jessamine."

Although change and decay are stamped upon all animated nature—although the flower which buds and blossoms in the morning, in the evening lies withered and dead—although the frame of youth which glowed with health and strength and beauty lies in the cold, dark sepulchre—yet there is one thing earthly, which mocks death and decay—the never dying soul—that which alone attests man's divine origin—alone renders him superior to the brute creation. The soul is immortal, eternal. It undergoes no change, suffers no decomposition; but when decay has fixed its signet upon the human frame, it rises, like a brilliant Phoenix, from the funeral pile. Free and unveiled, it embraces its divine destiny. The torch of death renews its youth.

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THE HOME-SICK WIFE AND CONSOLING HUSBAND.

It is generally, if not universally the case, that the wives and daughters of settlers from Britain, who seek with the axe independence in the woods of Canada, are woefully afflicted upon their first entrance into the forest with the disease called *Home-sickness*. The complaint, however, abates in proportion as their clearings enlarge, and their comforts increase. The dulcet warbling of the tuneful birds of Albion is in time forgotten, and the homesick wife ultimately believes that there is no music on earth like—the music of the axe. These considerations suggested the following dialogue:

JENNY.

Why is the gloamin, tell me, Georgie,
Aye the time when wooers meet;
An' mony a kind an' coultie wordie,
Baith said—an sealed wi' kisses sweet?

GEORDIE.

'Tis 'cause its dim soft light conceals
The blush on modest maiden's cheek;
An' night, that treads on gloamin's heels,
Aye favours trysts, that wooers seek.

JENNY.

What hae we got or gain'd by comin'
Ower the deep and roarin' sea?
Dark drearie days withouten gloamin',*
An' naething blythe to cheer the e'e,

GEORDIE.

Be cherrie, Jenny, aye be cantie,
I'm sure that better days are comin';
I've mak' ye cosie in the shanty,†
And dawt ye weel my bonnie woman.

JENNY.

Nae mair weel hear the kirk-bell ringin',
Nor the burie's ripplin' din;

Nae mair weel hear the mavis singin'
On the bush ower Cawdor Lynn.

GEORDIE.

What though ye hear nae kirk bell ringin',
Gads Hlawkie's† bell aye glads your ear;
Wha at your ca', comes loupin', flingin'
Her auld daft legs high in the air.

JENNY.

Nae laverocks here sing in the lift,
Nor linties on the whinnie brae;
O' what for Georgie, di we shift,
An' change for gloom—blythe scenes like thae?

GEORDIE.

Weel could ye sing when first I kent ye,
Then let's gie canker care the rout;
If ye'll be laverock—I'll be lintie,
Sae wile we'll sing sang about.

JENNY.

The thochts aye set my breast a thrabbin',
In troth my heart is nearly broke,
To leave the laverocks—linties warblin',
An' come to hear the puddocks croak.

GEORDIE.

'Tis true nae birds sing here sae weel,
Yet wiles ye hear the paitrick's drum,‡
An the wee bird singin'—whup her wheel,§
When drouthie puddocks ca' for rum.¶

JENNY.

Noo nae kind friends will e'er come near us,
On auld yule night or halloween;
Though mony a weel-kent face wad cheer us,
But for the sea that rows atween.

GEORDIE.

Let nae sic dowie thochts oppress ye,
But clear your sweet an' tuneful throat,
When hogles black or blue distress ye,
Aye fleg them wi' a merry note.

JENNY.

Weel I will strive to be contentit,
For ye've been gude and kind to me;
Forbye our love's the mair cementit,
By the dear bairnies roun' my knee.

GEORDIE.

Thae words expresst—my sorrow ends—
Wi' mair delight the axe I'll swing;
An' sure that lounies laugh portends
That he'll yet gar the forest ring.

* Gloamin', in Scotland, as twilight in England and the Emerald Isle, is of considerable duration, whereas in Canada, immediately as the sun goes down, we are shrouded in total darkness.

† Shanty, a small hut made of logs, covered with cloven hollow timber; usually the first residence of settlers when they take up their abode in the woods.

‡ In new settlements where the cattle browse in the woods, a bell is appended to the neck of the oldest cow, which leads the others in ranging for food. Its sound is heard at a considerable distance, and directs those in quest of their cattle to the spot where they may be found.

§ The cock partridge, during the season of incubation, is heard in a still morning at a great distance, drumming with his wings on the limb of a dead tree, from which the sportsman learns where partridges may be found in the proper season.

¶ The distinctness with which this small bird pronounces—*Whip poor will*—is evident to all who have heard its note.

¶ The note of the bull-frog is familiar to every Canadian ear—such as *marche-donc—De Meuron—rum-more-rum*. It is alleged that during the last war, in every place where the De Meuron Regiment was quartered, the frogs gradually disappeared. The Canadians affirm that the frogs, when engaged in their musical soirees, planted videttes to give notice of the approach of the enemy, and that whenever *De Meuron* was sung, or sounded, the whole of the performers instantly dived, to seek for shelter in their rushy and muddy fastnesses. The De Meurons, it appears, had a peculiar mode of cooking these little songsters.

The prize of 3,000 francs for Virtuous Actions has been awarded by the French Academy, this year, to Francis Poyer, cabriolet driver, for the following well-attested conduct:—Poyer has earned his bread by keeping a hack cabriolet for the last ten years. He has a wife and four children. In 1829, a lady entrusted her newly born infant to Poyer's wife, paid for the first 3 months, and then did not make her appearance for two years. She claimed the child, and obtained it, without paying for its keeping. In a few weeks after, Poyer learned that the infant had been again deserted, and sent to the Foundling Hospital. He went to claim it, and found it suffering, and even menaced with loss of sight. The establishment, however, could not give up the child, unless he who took it would lodge the sum of £10, to be given to the child on its majority. The amount was large for poor Poyer, with four children of his own; but he raised it, paid it

on the 14th of September, 1829, and brought the child as his adopted again home. After ten years the facts came to the knowledge of an academician, and the prize of 3,000 francs was voted to this poor cabriolet driver.

THE UNDERTAKER.

"No man (that is, no tradesman) has a more exquisite notion of the outward proprieties of life—of all its external dencencies, luxuries, and holiday show-making,—than your Undertaker. With him, death is not death, but on the contrary, a something to be handsomely appointed and provided for; to be approached with the deference paid by the trader to the buyer, and treated with an attention, a courtesy, commensurate with the probability of profit. To the Undertaker, death is not a ghastly, noisome thing; a hideous object to be thrust into the earth; the companion of corruption; the fellow of the worm: not it! Death comes to the Undertaker, especially if he bury in high life, a melancholy coxcomb, curious in the web of his winding-sheet, in the softness of his last pillow, in the crimson or purple velvet that shall cover his oaken couch, and in more than all, particular in the silver-gilt nails, the plates, and handles, that shall decorate it. A sense of profit in the Undertaker wholly neutralises the terrible properties of death; for, to him, what is another corpse but another customer?"

THE RICH MAN'S FUNERAL.

"Of course, sir," says Mandrake, taking orders for a funeral,—"Of course, sir, you'll have feathers?"

"Indeed, I—I see no use in feathers," replies the bereaved party, whose means are scarcely sufficient for the daily necessities of the living; "no use at all."

"No feathers, Sir!" says Mandrake, with a look of pitying wonder. "Why, excuse me sir, but—really—you would bury a servant without feathers."

"Well, if you think them necessary,"—

"Necessary! No respectable person can be buried without feathers," says Mandrake; and [wise dealer!] he touches the chord of worldly pride, and feathers make part of the solemnity. "Then, sir, for mutes; you have mutes, doubtless?"

"I never could understand what service they were," is the answer.

"Oh, dear sir!"—cries Mandrake; "not understand! Consider the look of the thing! You would bury a pauper, sir, without mutes."

"I merely want a plain, respectable funeral, Mr. Mandrake."

"Very true, sir; therefore, you must have mutes. What is the expense, sir? Nothing, in comparison with the look of the thing."

"I always thought it worse than useless to lavish money upon the dead; so everything very plain, Mr. Mandrake."

"I shall take care, sir; depend upon me, sir: everything shall be of the most comfortable kind, sir. And now, sir, for the choice of ground;" and hereupon, Mr. Mandrake lays upon the table a plan of the churchyard, probably divided into three separate parts for the accommodation of the different ranks of the dead. "Now, sir, for the ground."

"Is there any choice?"

"Decidedly, sir. This is what we call the first ground; a charming, dry, gravelly soil: you may go any depth in it, sir,—any depth, sir; dry, sir, dry as a bed. This is the second ground: a little damper than the first, certainly; but still, some respectable persons do bury there." On this, Mr. Mandrake folds up the plan.

"Well, but the third ground. That is, I suppose, the cheapest?"

"Clay, sir; clay! Very damp, indeed;—you wouldn't like it;—in winter extremely wet."

"Still, if the price be much lower than either of the others,"—

"Very true, sir, it is, and properly so! or how would the very poor people be able to bury at all? You may, of course, sir, do as you please; but nearly all respectable families bury in the first ground. If it were my own case, I should say the first ground—such gravel, sir!"

"Well, I suppose it must be so."

"You wouldn't like any other; depend upon it, sir, you wouldn't. The first ground, then, sir;" and Mr. Mandrake departs, self-satisfied that, for the look of the thing,—for merely the sake of his customer's respectability,—he has induced him to order feathers, mutes, and the first ground.

And in all this dealing what part of it has Death? Alack! the feathers are not borne before his cold, white face; the mutes march not with solemn step to do him reverence; the fine, dry, gravelly bed is not for the ease of death's pithless bones; they would rest as well in the third ground as the first. No; the trappings of the defunct are but the outward dressings of the pride of the living: the Undertaker, in all his melancholy pomp, his dingy bravery, waits upon the quick, and not the dead. It is the living who crave for plumes, for nails double gilt,—for all the outward show of wealth and finery. Pride takes death, and, for its especial purpose, tricks it out in the frippery of life. "Man,"