



Death smiles & seems his dart to hide :
When he beholds the suicide.

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THE
English Dance of Death.

The Suicide.

THE various ways, the various shapes,
By which imprison'd man escapes
From Life's enclosure, to the clime
That beams beyond the reach of time,
The narratives of every day
Do to reflection's eye display.
Naked we issue from the womb,
Naked we seek the destin'd tomb:
What troubles are we form'd to brave,
Between the cradle and the grave,
If 'tis the sacred will of Heaven
That years and length of days are given!

The new-born infant, with his breath,
Imbibes the mortal seeds of death ;
And ev'ry day and ev'ry hour
May yield him to the Tyrant's power.
While hanging on his mother's breast,
Nourish'd and fondled and carest,
How oft he mocks the tender care
That dotes as he is clinging there :
He scarce moans forth one feeble cry,
And his first morrow sees him die :
Nay, e'er his eyes behold the sun,
Perhaps his puny race is run.

If Death could feel, its stern decree
Would spare our prattling Infancy :
That age whose looks, whose words dispense
Th' attractive charms of Innocence ;
That April morn on which appears
The blended scene of smiles and tears,
Whose pantomimic grace affords
The meaning of half utter'd words :

But Infancy's enchanting smile
Does not th' un pitying power beguile;
For when the fatal arrow flies,
The prattler's dumb,—the Cherub dies.

Nor yet when Reason's dawning hour
Beams on the mind its rip'ning power,
And from the Nurs'ry goes the Boy,
His Father's Heir, his Mother's Joy,
To sink beneath the rigid rule
Of some learn'd Pedagogue at school;
Yet still he grieves not, as he views
The early flowers which Science strews
Around his path, while she bestows
The chaplet rude to deck his brows,
—What though his unform'd thoughts impart
The glowing virtues of his heart;
What though the lovliest bloom appears,
Fair promise of maturer years,
While Hyacinthine ringlets grace
The rosy honours of his face,

Death, in an unexpected hour,
 May crop at once the op'ning flower,
 So sweet, so pleasing to the eye;
 And, as its promis'd virtues die,
 Leave fond Affection, where they sleep,
 To rear the sculptur'd tomb, and weep.

The Age of Passion next succeeds:—
 Love wounds; the tender bosom bleeds;—
 Young Honour wakes the glowing fire;
 The eager ear to Pleasure's lyre
 Enraptur'd yields, nor thinks the strain
 Which Syrens sing can foster pain.
 Love's arrow rankling in the breast
 Not only robs each hour of rest,
 But, barb'd with hopeless passion, proves
 The dart of Death to her who loves.
 —How many an ardent warrior stains
 With his young blood, th' embattled plains;
 When the plum'd helm and pomp of war
 Are left to grace the funeral car:

And ah, too oft, in Life's gay bloom
Licentious pleasure finds a tomb.
Reason, that grave, and solemn sage,
In vain may ope th' instructive page,
To guide the ardent hopes of youth
In the unerring ways of truth ;
In vain with awful voice impart
Its sober warnings to the heart,
Where the warm passions claim controul,
O'er the best impulse of the soul.
—If Reason finds her efforts vain,
The Dance of Pleasure leads to pain ;
And all the gifts that Fortune pours
Prove poison, deck'd with fading flowers.
—If hurrying passion leads the way,
And governs with superior sway,
If it looks round for its delights
In fev'rish days and wanton nights,
'Tis not the mind alone that lies,
Depriv'd of its best energies ;
But Life itself may find its fate,
A painful end, a shorten'd date.

Then come the years, when other cares
 And other wants our nature shares;
 Ambition claims the anxious hour,
 And seeks the dang'rous road to power.
 —Perils surround the giddy heights,
 Whose sun-clad eminence invites
 The votaries of Pride to find
 The Rod by which to rule mankind;
 The art their rivals to subdue
 And gain the honours they pursue:
 But while the cringing croud below
 To the rais'd Idol humbly bow;
 The dark storm lowers, the summit shakes }
 Upon his head the tempest breaks, }
 And from his dream the proud man wakes; }
 Wakes, in amazement sad, to feel
 The sudden whirl of Fortune's wheel,
 Nor daring his disgrace to brave,
 Forsaken, sinks into the grave.
 —Wealth too, the busy wish employs,
 And added gold the mind enjoys.

How many, quitting health and ease,
'Mid storms and tempests plough the seas,
To distant climes delighted roam,
To bring the gainful venture home,
But oft upon some distant coast,
They and their treasures all are lost.

At length comes the concluding stage
Of Life's long, weary pilgrimage;
When Age has caught us in its clutch,
And the weak limbs demand the crutch;
When wrinkled brow and hoary head
Mark that so many years are fled,
Too blest, if Wisdom doth befriend
And teach our life to love its end.

But still unsung the various ills
Which man throughout Life's journey feels;
Or hanging daily o'er our head,
We all are doom'd to know, or dread,
And serve to checquer every scene,
Where casual pleasures intervene.

The noisome pestilence by day
That makes of crowds a sudden prey ;
The dart that in the darksome night
Swiftly wings its secret flight :
The slow disease and subtle pain
Which Nature's destin'd to sustain ;
The loud and agonising groan
That waits upon the racking stone ;
The shaking Ague's wasting power,
And the fierce Fever's raging hour :
The Paralytic's trembling hand
That its own Master's fond command
Refuses to obey ; the ear
That numb'd and deafen'd cannot hear :
When all the organs of the eye,
Darken'd, in dim suffusion lie ;
And every ray of cheering light
Is lost in everlasting night.

Such are among the evils sent
To plague our fleshly tenement ;
But there are others which we find
The busy Tort'ers of the mind.

Do we not see what numbers prove
The wounds of disappointed Love;
And all the jealous pangs that wait
Upon a favour'd rival's fate?
—What anxious cares disturb his breast,
Who early rises—late takes rest;
And, though borne on by Fortune's gale,
At length may find his prospects fail:
Just as he thinks the voyage o'er,
Resolv'd to risk and toil no more,
He may be wreck'd upon the shore.
—To-day a hated foe is seen,
With scornful air and haughty mien,
Enjoying all the prosp'rous state,
Which Chance has given to make him great:
To-morrow, weeping we attend
The Dirges of a faithful Friend.
—The loss of Honour's due reward;
By Vice the meed of Virtue shar'd,—
—The noblest feelings of the heart,
Become the Dupes of knavish art.

—Justice perverted, and the Laws
 Check'd in their course by quirks and flaws,
 Or, turn'd and twin'd, too often prove
 Worse than the wrongs they should remove.
 —Pretending Friendship's fair deceit;
 And false caresses of the great;
 The Courtier's Lie clad in grimace,
 Th' unfeeling heart, with smiling face,
 And Calumny, for ever wrong,
 With Aspic poison 'neath its tongue,
 An Angel's virtues will decry,
 By the shrewd hint or bare-fac'd lie,
 Which the apt world too well receives,
 And listens while the Falsehood lives.
 —Again,—what various trouble fills
 The Volume of domestic Ills,
 The wife weeps o'er the Husband's bier,
 A Husband dead demands the tear;
 A child with all its promis'd bloom,
 Sinks prematurely to the tomb,
 And various accidents befall
 The common progress of us all.

Such are the woes ordain'd by Fate,
 In which it seems our mortal state
 Must more, or less, participate:
 Though thanks to Heaven, while these annoy,
 We have a portion too of joy.
 But still, whate'er may be our share
 Of mortal pain and human care,
 'Tis Heaven inflicts, and man should bear.

What, though self-murd'ring Brutus bled,
 And Cato made the weapon red
 In his own blood, the Stoic's rage
 That shines upon th' Historic page,
 Must yield, in energy of mind,
 To him who, patient and resign'd
 To Heaven's high will and wise decree,
 Whate'er the heavy trial may be,
 Beneath it all lives bravely on,
 Till Nature's doubtful course is run.

Philosophy, in all its Pride,
 Cannot defend the Suicide,

By any Law, by any rule
 In Reason's or Religion's school:
 Life's the peculiar gift of Heav'n,
 And He alone by whom 'tis given,
 Can have alone the power to give
 The stroke by which we cease to live.
 Is Man to say—I've reach'd the goal,
 I'll now dismiss th' imprison'd soul;
 With my own hand I'll ope the way
 From its base tenement of clay;
 Tir'd of its suff'rings here below,
 I'll loose it from this scene of woe;
 I'll prune its wings and let it fly,
 To seek again its native sky:
 Yes, I will quench my mortal breath,
 I'll be the judge of Life and Death.—
 But should, in its immortal sphere,
 Say, should th' unsummon'd soul appear }
 What, what may be the sentence there!
 Stay then thy hand, e'er 'tis too late,
 Nor madly rush upon thy Fate!

Thou shudd'rest at the horrid mood,
When Murder drinks a brother's blood;
And dare you hope for Virtue's crown,
When your arm'd hand draws forth your own!

Does He the high behests fulfill,
Of Heav'nly power, of Heav'nly will,
Who, with a murm'ring tongue complains,
That he is charg'd with mortal pains,
More than his frame is form'd to bear?
Will he his Maker's Laws declare
Harsh and unjust;—shall he, weak man,
Through Passion's mist, presume to scan
The views mysterious that guide
Our passage o'er the tossing tide
Of chance and pain;—Say, shall he dare
To fly what he was born to bear,
Nor ask of Patience to supply
The strong and guardian panoply,
That, in each trial, will befriend
His warfare to th' appointed end.

The very structure of our frame
 Does Self-destruction's crime disclaim.
 Man may announce,—I'll move, I'll run,
 I'll speak, I'll gaze,—and it is done.
 The limbs are prone to his command :
 The nimble feet, the grasping hand,
 And every organic sense
 Submits to his Omnipotence :—
 But, if he idly says,—I'll die ;—
 Nature refuses to comply :
 Weak is his unassisted will ;
 And his mere wishes do not kill.
 But, if determin'd to succeed,
 And perpetrate the fatal deed,
 He must, alas, call to his aid,
 Th' exploding burst, the sharpen'd blade,
 Or poison'd cup,—or end the dream
 Of Horror in the troubled Stream.

Reason 'tis not, as some have said,
 By vain Philosophy betray'd,

To Life's apportion'd ills to yield,
And force Death to th' untimely field;
—'Tis the Disease that's sometimes seen,
With pallid look, and haggard mien,
Which its black visions doth impart
To sadden, and to chill the heart;
While Melancholy, silent maid,
Of its own gloomy thoughts afraid,
Refines the musings that supply
The wish, and the resolve to die.
—Or it is Passion's raging burst
That seeks the best and does the worst,
Whose impulse, to reflection blind,
Drives reason from the startled mind;
And aggravating, by its power,
The poignant suff'ring of the hour,
Hastes the dread comfort to prepare,
And finds the refuge of Despair.

Alas, I've, such a tale to tell
Of one who lov'd, but lov'd too well.

The Fair was grac'd with every charm
That can the coldest bosom warm ;
And Virtue's self was seen to shine
In the warm breast of Caroline.
The Youth, to whom her heart she gave,
Was noble, generous and brave ;
And that, which in return was given,
She thought the precious boon of Heaven.
Hymen was summon'd to adorn
His Altar on the following morn,
At that morn's dawning Henry 'woke,
Expected joys his slumbers broke :
He saunter'd forth to catch the breeze
That curl'd the bosom of the seas,
And while he pac'd along the shore,
Counting his future pleasures o'er,
He saw a shallop foundering nigh ;
He heard Despair's alarming cry,
And boldly plunging in the wave,
The sinking Mariner to save,
He found himself a wat'ry grave.

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—The tidings to the Bride were brought,
 In frantic haste the spot she sought;
 And viewing, from the heights above,
 All that remain'd for her to love,
 She darted headlong to the tide,
 And on her Henry's bosom died.

Their tomb is rais'd upon the shore,
 And round its base the billows roar:
 There oft the Seaman slacks the sail,
 And to the Stranger tells the tale.