

DEATH AND THE ARTIST.

“THE pale-faced artist plies his sickly trade,” saith the poet. And what then? The daring genius will not be appalled in his pursuit of glory; the enthusiastic painter would yet spread the pigments on his palette, though the King of Terrors were at his elbow, playing the part of levigator. A fig for life, to gain a deathless fame!

Death, the everlasting bugbear to wights of common mould, hath no terror to the philosopher, whether he be poet, painter, sculptor, or other, bent on those scientific pursuits that lead to immortality. Let sordid souls tremble at his name—these mental heroes start not for worthless gold, but run the race for glory.

The poet takes his flight above the region of

terrestrial things; and, though allied to earth before the time allotted to baser souls, ere he quits his mortal tenement, leaves, in imagination, earth behind, and revels midst a world of spirits; and, but for the loud rapping of the dun, would not awaken from his reverie, till Death, reminding him of life, translates him to eternity.

So the sculptor chips the rude block, and labours on, inspired, heedless of sublunary things, until the cold marble breathes beneath his animating hand; and then that hand which gave it life is cold itself as marble. Glorious end! for, ere the enthusiast's tongue is mute, or eye is dim, he smiles on Death, and, dying, cries—Behold, I live for ever in that wondrous statue.

So with the happy hero in this piece: wrapped in his art, he heeds not him who is so close at hand, regardless of that hole that is about to open beneath his feet, deep as eternity. He labours on serene, and, having given the last finishing to Time, yields to him who is Time's vassal, and calmly receives that dart which finishes himself.

Yet, as he sinks beneath the blow, he points him at his handy-work in exultation, and, with his last breath, taunts the despot on his impotency, touching that living fame which never dies!

He is most wise who fears the despot least; for, grim sprite, all bones, as he was seen when Appelles hight his picture drew, or as this hero of the grave came forth of Phidias' chisel, some twenty centuries ago, or as we see the said dread spectre, Death, carved to the life, by Roubilliac, within the last hundred years—Immortal still—he is the same—and come he will, in his own time, when least expected: and, when he comes, it is well for those who stare him in the face—if face he has that flesh hath not, and greet him as your men of science have been wont to do, with—Well, ho! thou art come at last; then welcome, king!

Death!—What is he not? Assuming far more shapes than ever did Italian posture-master,—yea, more forms than Proteus himself!—So swift of foot, that even Mercury, were he a mortal, for all

his winged feet, could not outstrip the speed of this pursuer; so sudden in his movements, too, that even Argus, with his hundred eyes, might yet be pounced upon, with all his vigilance!

The wily enemy waylays the alderman in the last spoonful of turtle; he makes the gamester his own in a losing card; seizes the agile tumbler in the midst of his somerset; grasps the hand of the close-fisted miser, as he opens the iron-chest to add another guinea to his hoard: he defrauds the gaoler of his fee, by arresting the midnight burglar at the mouth of a blunderbuss; lays his never-erring hand alike upon the careless and the wary, and holds tight in his grasp the strong and the weak—the evil and the good—the wise man and the fool—the poor and the rich. Even gold cannot swerve this agent of the grave from his duty; for, though the chief of universal corruption, he is impartial in his office, and himself incorruptible.

Vain, indeed, were the attempt to elude this monarch of the grave; for who shall ken his hid-

ing-place? The soldier is sent to seek him in that field where murderous bullets fly in showers, as thick as hail, but meets him not in war: yet, when least expected, finds him lurking between the sheets, in a damp bed, beneath the roof of peace.

The sea-tossed mariner, with glaring eyes and hair erect,—with mournful oaths in lieu of prayers, looks for the spectre in each rolling wave, though thence he cometh not. Now safe on shore, all danger past, as it should seem, he tempts him with the cheerful bowl, and trips him up as he, with other jovial wights, is reeling home,—and there's an end of him.

Hogarth, who drew from the living that mortal drama which immortalized his genius and his name, having accomplished his great and multifarious works, took up his palette and his other painting tools to make that last study,—FINIS, which, with his usual fitness, being about to bid adieu to Life, he dedicates to Death. Where will you name the hero who met the mortal enemy like he?

A few months before this genius was seized with the malady which deprived society of one of its greatest ornaments, he proposed to his matchless pencil the work in question; the first idea of which is said to have been elicited in the midst of his friends, whilst the convivial glass was circulating round his own social board. "My next subject," said the moral painter, "shall be the END OF ALL THINGS."

"If that be your determination," said one, "your business will be finished; for then will be the end of the painter's self."

"Even so," returned the artist; "therefore, the sooner my work is done, so much the better." Accordingly, he began the next day, continuing his design with all diligence, seemingly with an apprehension that he should not live to complete the composition. This, however, he did, and in the most ingenious manner, by grouping every thing which could denote the *end of all things*: a broken bottle—an old broom worn to the stump—the butt-end of an old musket—a cracked bell—a bow unstrung—a crown tumbled

in pieces—towers in ruins—the *sign-post* of a tavern, called *The World's End*, tumbling—the moon in her wane—the map of the globe burning—a gibbet falling, the body gone, and the chain which held it dropping down—Phœbus and his horses dead in the clouds—a vessel wrecked—Time, with his hour-glass and scythe broken, a tobacco-pipe in his mouth, the last whiff of smoke going out—a play-book opened, with *exeunt omnes* stamped in the corner—an empty purse—and a statute of bankruptcy taken out against nature. “So far, so good,” exclaimed Hogarth; “nothing remains but this,”—taking his pencil in a sort of prophetic fury, and dashing off the similitude of a *painter's palette broken*,—“FINIS,” exclaimed the painter; “*the deed is done—all is over.*” It is remarkable, that he died within a month after the completion of this tail-piece. It is also well known, that he never again took the pencil in hand.

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