



THE TOILET.

## DEATH AT THE TOILET.

---

(By the Author of "The Lollards," "Witchfinder," &c. &c.)

---

It seems that every bard, or clown, or lord,  
 Finds Death a striking subject to talk o'er,  
 He who counts syllables, in each long word,  
 With rhyme, his hapless relatives to bore,  
 And he who strikes the highest-bounding chord,  
 Who with immortal eloquence can soar;  
 Yet nothing make of *Death*, with all this fuss,  
 But, that he nothing means to make of us.

And some appear intolerably grieved,  
 While dolefully lamenting earthly woes,  
 To think that they must one day be relieved,  
 And gain through *him*, a season of repose.  
 But I, thank Heaven! have never yet perceived  
 That I am likely to be one of those:  
 For, gratefully admiring Nature's plan,  
*Death* seems to me the comforter of man.

From this folks may presume that I am heir  
 To some old gentleman of property,  
 Or ancient dame, who to assuage my care  
 Has been sufficiently polite to die;  
 Or else a widower, whose *black* despair  
 Has after six long mourning weeks gone by,  
 But *I*, though Death is certainly my pet,  
 Have to acknowledge no such favours yet.

I like him for the lesson he gives pride,  
 And those we 'groundlings' call 'of high degree.'  
 The heartless rich, by him laid side by side,  
 Are fairly levelled with poor rogues like me.  
 Thus feeling, sometimes I have almost cried,  
 Death's circumstances so reduced to see,  
 For vaccination—stomach-pumps—and peace,  
 I thought would make mortality decrease.

“ Great king of terrors! I commiserate  
 Thy lot severe, for deeply thou must feel,  
 Through peace, the long postponement of the fate  
 Of thousands, whom the grave would else conceal.  
 No longer used for stocking thy estate  
 Are powder, conflagration, lead, and steel;  
 Whilst undertakers in the general joy  
 Turn suicides, their workmen to employ!”



Thus I exclaimed, when lo ! before me stood  
 Grim Death himself. I must confess this hurt  
 My feelings rather, but his civil mood  
 Restored composure, nay, I soon grew pert,  
 Though to my blushing face, up rushed the blood,  
 At being thus with one who wore no shirt ;  
 With one indeed, it may be said, who owns  
 Not even a skin to hide his naked bones.

Yet skeletons I like to view, because  
 No veil there screens a mean perfidious heart ;  
 No vertebræ inclines, to feign applause  
 Where scorn is felt, but finished life's brief part  
 The limbs with seeming dignity can pause,  
 Nor shake with terror nor with fury start ;  
 And Death as seen by me, was I must own  
 A very gentlemanly skeleton.

We spoke of various matters—of Life's ills  
 Of sportive subjects now, and now of grave ;  
 I, (thinking of my aunt's and grannam's wills)  
 Lamented cooking Kitchener should save,  
 Or Abernethy with his d—ns and pills  
 So many, whom of right Death ought to have ;  
 And still, to give discourse a friendly turn,  
 On his account expressed sincere concern.

“ Your love I thank,” said he, and grinn’d a smile ;  
“ I will explain, but must be brief and free,  
For I to-night shall journey many a mile,  
And you would hardly wish to go with me.  
Rightly you have imagined that my toil  
Makes life a little like what it should be.  
Few, very few, would care on earth to stay,  
Were I for one whole century away.

“ For how terrific were the tyrant’s rod,  
Had he no dread that Death might be at hand!  
And how relentlessly would Avarice plod,  
How domineering would be all the grand,  
If me they could forget, as they do God,  
And hope to live for ever in the land !  
I make proud affluence the poor befriend,  
Or bring its sordid projects to an end.

“ This, my vocation, sternly I pursue,  
In peace or war, submission I compel,  
The latter, ’twill sound wonderful to you,  
My lists, perceptibly could never swell ;  
Nay, joined with steam, balloons, *safe* coaches too,  
Ne’er furnished out a half per-centage knell.  
My blows are most repeated, are most sure—  
Where wealth and comfort whisper ‘ all’s secure.’

“ I choose not for my arms, the beggar’s meals,  
His tatters, or his lodging on the ground ;  
No ; but magnificence my arrow feels,  
Where pomp presides and luxuries abound :  
In dainty viands, to life’s source it steals ;  
And costly wines, my instruments are found.  
These—these to Death far richer harvest yield,  
Than all the slaughter of the battle-field.

“ More would you learn, to Beauty’s toilet go  
And see my weapons, in the fair array  
Which all around her careful hand may throw,  
To decorate her for the festive day.  
There, in her gauzes, nets, and muslins know,  
My formidable host in ambush s ay.  
But hast thou seen a nymph, both young, and fair,  
For conquest, and for revelry prepare ?”

“ Yes,” I replied, and transport at the thought  
Prompted unwonted energy of speech,  
“ But yesterday, a blissful glimpse I caught  
Of that which mortal excellence may reach ;  
And this idea to my mind it brought,  
However eloquently churchmen preach,  
Though with it strange extravagance breaks loose,  
Yet’s love’s idolatry, claims some excuse.



" I gaz'd on all that's fragrant, gay, and bright,  
     In Heaven above, on earth, or in the sea,  
 Celestial blue in Chloe's orbs of sight,  
     And starry lustre there enchanted me.  
 The blushing rose, and lily, now delight  
     With pearl and coral, in soft unity.  
 It was a picture, radiant!—glorious!—rare!  
 Divine epitome of all that's fair!

" Superb embellisher of human life!  
     How dear the joy thy influence can impart!  
 Blest recompense for scenes of care and strife!  
     Loved tyrant of the subjugated heart!  
 Beauty! resistless still in maid or wife!  
     Through being's course—but here you almost start  
 Afraid that I shall covet when I die,  
 O Mahomet! thy sweetly peopled sky!

" Source of our bliss! but fountain of our sighs!  
     The poor for beauty pant—the rich adore;  
 The madman's vows, the homage of the wise,  
     In every age are thine, on every shore.  
 Thy smile inspires our noblest energies,  
     The warrior's prowess, and the poet's lore;  
 And our sublimest deeds confess thy sway,  
 As flowers and fruits date from the sun of May!"

“ But saw'st thou,” Death inquired, “ altho' so fair  
And almost more than mortal to behold,  
How Chloe, dressing, to her aid called there  
Wreaths, toys and gewgaws, more than can be told?”

“ I did, and marvelled at the fruitless care,  
Thus whitening snow, or gilding purest gold,  
And still, when all as I thought had been tried,  
Her milliner, new finery supplied.”

“ And while you leisurely could this descry,”  
Said Death, “ who waited on her did you ask ?  
Know the attendant you beheld—was I !  
’Twas I who wore the officious servant's mask !  
The fair was destined in life's bloom to die ;  
To hand the fatal trappings was my task :  
Wholly superfluous I deemed open force,  
And let the thoughtless beauty take her course.

“ ’Tis thus that Death accomplishes his aim :  
Most human beings sigh for what destroys ;  
Mirth, Vanity, and Pleasure, play my game,  
And crush life's hopes beneath deluding joys.  
More perish from caprice, and Fashion's whim,  
Than by the cannon, battle's rage employs—  
But I must hence,—another glass is out,  
And I am going to my lady's rout.”