

THE LAST BOTTLE.

AN' if it be the last bottle, Death is quite welcome; for then Life hath run to very dregs and lees, and there is nothing more in it which can be called enjoyment. Ah, whither have ye sped, ye jovial Hours, which on bright-winged glasses, far different from yon sandy remembrancer, floated away so blissfully; as the bird poised high in air, the trouble of the ascent over, glides without effort or motion, through the brilliant pleasures of yielding space. How ye sparkled and ran on, like gay creatures of the element gifted with more than magic powers. Beautiful and slight ephemera, fragile as you seemed, what mighty loads of cares did you easily bear off in your aerial flight! Ponderous debts which might weigh nations down; the griefs of many loves, enow to drown a world; the falsehoods of friends, the malice of enemies;

anxieties, fears, troubles, sorrows—all vanished as drinking ye proceeded in your mystic dance! I picture ye in my fancy, now, ye Hours, as sparkling, joyous, and exquisite insects, flitting past with each a burden of man's miseries on his shoulders sufficient to break the back of a camel, and borne from the lightened hearts of your true worshippers. But, alas! alas! for all things mortal—we must come to the last at last.

Yet let the grim tyrant approach at any time, sith it must be so, and at what time can he approach when we should less regard his frown. Like the unconscious lamb, which “licks the hand just raised to shed its blood,” we play with his bony fingers as he presents the latest draught; and, let his dart be dipped in the rosy flood, we die feeling that wine gives to Death itself a pang of joy. Herodotus must have been wrong when he told us that the *Maneros* of the Egyptians was a mournful and wailing song; and Plutarch's is the best authority, for he says it was a joyous chant. So believed the merry party assembled in our faithful picture: their round of song, of

toast, of cheer, of laughter, and of shout, was such as Plutarch paints of the wisdom of antiquity, when the figure of a dead man was shown to the convivial souls, and they melodiously joined the chorus—

Behold that breathless corpse ;

You'll be like it when you die :

Therefore drink without remorse,

And be merry, merrily.

Ai-lun, Ai-lun, Ai-lun,* quo' he !

Our only night, no sky light, drink about,
quo' we,

Time, they tell us, waits for no man ;—

Time and Tide

For no man bids.

But here we can make Death himself a waiter, while the cup is drained and the jocund catch goes round. Hark, whose voice among the happy set is that which sings—

While here we meet, a jovial band,

No Son of Discord's impious hand

Dare fling the apple, fire the brand,

To mar our social joy :

* Literally in the Greek, " Behold that corpse ; you will resemble it after your death : drink now, therefore, and be merry."—(See Herodotus and Plutarch, on the Egyptian Manners, *passim*). The fine chorus of Ai-lun, " He is dwelling with the night," is, we trust, pathetically rendered.

Free, as our glorious country free,
 Prospering in her prosperity,
 With wine, and jest, and harmony,
 We Pleasure's hours employ.

But lo, he whose face is half concealed by that arm uplifted with the sparkling glass, he has drunk till the tender mood of philosophy steals over his melting soul. His maudlin eye would moisten with a tear at a tale of sorrow or a plaintive air; and it is thus he gives vent to his soothing melancholy sensations—

Death comes but once, the philosophers say,
 And 'tis true, my brave boys, but that once is a clencher :
 It takes us from drinking and loving away,
 And spoils at a blow the best tippler and wench.
 Sing Ai-lun, though to me very odd it is,
 Yet I sing it, too, as my friend quotes Herodotus.

And Death comes to all, so they tell us again,
 Which also I fear, my brave boys, is no fable ;
 Yet the moral it teaches, to me is quite plain :
 'Tis to love all we can and to drink all we're able.
 Sing, again, Ai-lun, though to me odd it is ;
 But 'tis Greek, very good I hope, and comes from
 Herodotus.

The old Trojan himself tucks his napkin under his arm, the whetting of his scythe is forgotten, and he wishes (miserable sinner), that, instead of

sand, his double glass were wetted full with burgundy. How it would refresh and revivify his dry ribs! how it would re-create and beautify his filthy skeleton form! but he must do his thankless office, while he listens to that third glee which he with the plumed bonnet trolls forth:—

Let the sparkling glass go round,
The sparkling glass where care is drowned;

For while we drink, we live, we live!

Let the joyous roof ring with the measure,

The sweetest of the muses' treasure

That Music's voice can give.

Thus crowned, the present beams with pleasure,

The memory of the past is lighter,

The prospect of the future brighter—

And while we drink, we live, we live.

CHORUS.—We live, we live, we live, we live,

For while we drink, we live, we live.

Another cork is drawn. At the smacking sound cares, fears, pains, fly from the unruffled soul of man, as wild fowl fly from the placid lake at the report of the fowler's gun. The undulating agitation of the instant,—the centric, concentric, elliptic, parabolic, and every imaginary shape into which its glancing bosom is broken, ripples and sparkles with light, and all then gently sub-

sides into smoothness and serenity.—The calm is delicious, and the bowl becomes more and more brimmed with inspiration as the flood within it ebbs. Whose turn is it now to entertain us? What, Square-cap! thou hast stood or rather sat the brunt of many a deep-drenched table; the words of discretion must flow from thy lips so often steeped in the fountains of truth and wisdom. Oracle of the holy well—the “Trinc, trinc, trinc,” of Rabelais drops from them as emphatically as upon the ear of the weary Panurge:—

Alexander and Cæsar have vanished away;
 And Plato and Cicero now are but clay;—
 The brave, and the learned, and the good, and the wise,
 All come to the same simple close of “Here lies.”

Then let us employ
 Our moments in joy—

And before the sure end make the best use of Time.

’Twere folly to pine
 O’er generous wine,

Since sadness is madness, and gloom is life’s crime,

“Trinc, trinc, trinc,”*—I speak,

French words and French wines are far better than
 Greek.

* When the oracle of the Holy Bottle was pronounced by the *trinkling* of the drops which fell from it, quoth Panurge, “Is this all that the Trismigistian Bottle’s words mean? In

Look along the bright board, like a river it flows
 With a liquid whose sparkling no water e'er knows ;
 While the banks are with friends in good fellowship crowned,
 Who bathe deep in the stream and ne'er fear being drowned,
 'Tis Bacchus' hour,
 So let him out-pour
 All his treasures, while we make the best use of Time ;
 Friendship and wine
 Are union divine,
 And when drunk, mortal drunk, mortal man is sublime !
 "Trinc, trinc, trinc,"—I speak,
 French words and French wines are far better than
 Greek.

Encore, encore—no more, no more : the last measure is full, the last verse is sung, the last cork has left the neck of the last bottle open. The gloomy assassin strikes—He who has been so often dead drunk, what is he now ? At the next meeting there was one chair empty, one jolly dog absent—Ai-lun. And what said his disconsolate companions—they missed him, they mourned, they lamented, no doubt:—aye, and they joked too. One said he had never paid any debt till

truth I like it extremely, it went down like mother's milk." —"Nothing more," returned Bacbuc (the high priest), "for TRINC is a Panomphean word, that is, a word understood, used, and celebrated by all nations, and signifies *Drink*.—See Rabelais for this adventure of Pantagruel and Panurge.

he paid the debt of Nature; another remarked that he was just wise enough to prefer a full to an empty bottle; and the third wrote his epitaph over the third bottle per man:—

HABEAS CORPUS! HIC JACET!

HERE lies William Wassail, cut down by *the Mower*;
None ever drank faster or paid their debts slower—

Now quiet he lies as he sleeps with *the Just*.

He has drank his *Last Bottle*, and fast, fast he sped it o'er,
And paid his great debt to his principal Creditor;

And *compounded* with all the rest, even with *Dust*.