

## ELIXIR VITÆ.

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“Wine does wonders every day.”

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FROM the time when the juice of the grape was first concocted into beverage, to the present day—the day of Charles Wright, of champagne celebrity—wine has ever been lauded as one of Nature’s most valuable gifts to man. It is the true *aurum potabile*, the genuine *elixir vitæ*, invigorating the heart, inspiring the fancy, and recalling to the veins of age the genial glow of youth. Accordingly, many, very many, are the excellent sayings that have been uttered in commendation of this generous liquor; and many, very many, too, are the good things, the bright thoughts, the flashes of wit and eloquence it has suggested; for when, indeed, has it ever proved ungrateful? Not unfrequently has the bottle been the Helicon whence bards have drawn inspira-

tion, if not exactly immortality: it has also been compared to the fountain of youth, or to that wonder-working cauldron in which Medea\* re-animated with fresh vigour and vitality the aged limbs of her parent, infusing into his veins a warmer, fuller current.

Nevertheless, although the bacchanalian be steeped in his all-potent liquor as deeply as possible, and although he be rendered proof against all the cares and anxieties that beset us in this mortal passage,—though he bear a “charmed life,” and daily inhale new vigour from “tired nature’s sweet restorer,” balmy wine; like him who was dipped in the waters of Styx, he is not all invulnerable, there being ever some little spot assailable by the fatal dart of the

\* Stripped of its allegorical veil, the fable of Medea is nothing more than the record of some of those magnificent achievements of certain of the medical profession, which we find so eloquently narrated in those pithy compositions, high advertisements, according to the unpoetical matter-of-fact spirit of modern times, so different from that of antiquity; not but there may be, and undoubtedly is, a considerable degree of both fancy and invention in those productions.

grisly spectre. Death, indeed, pays not much respect to the *bon vivant*; and, regardless of him as the professed toper may appear, or seldom as he sings a *memento mori* over his bowl, or utters one in the form of a toast, it must be acknowledged that he more often rehearses the final scene of life than his fellow mortals, by getting *dead-drunk*, thus anticipating, as it were, that state of insensibility, that utter oblivion of sublunary things, that characterizes Death.

As the bee extracts sweetness from the vilest plants, so does the moralist collect lessons of wisdom and deep reflection from scenes that seem capable of furnishing little instruction of this nature. We may be pardoned, therefore, if we *prose* a little on that truly poetical and classical subject, a bacchanalian\* group, when the

\* For the benefit of those who delight to indulge in bold etymological speculations, and supply the pedigree of words from conjecture, we will here record an anecdote that may elucidate the origin of this epithet:—"So, I hear, Mrs. Simkins, that your good man had quite a bacchanalian party the other evening," remarked an acquaintance to the spouse of a retired cheesemonger. "I would have you to know, sir,"



competitors having indulged in unsparing libations to the *genius loci*, the deity of the banqueting-room, sink in oblivious repose and death-like insensibility. Here the full tide of existence that so lately animated the joyous circle, and raised them above the ordinary pitch of mortality, is stopped; the jest, the repartee, the witticism, the quaint remark, the pun, the anecdote—the enthusiastic toast, and the rushing torrent of words supplied by the grape-god, whose bottle inspires louder eloquence than Pieria's fount;—all are now hushed, and succeeded by silent torpidity; so closely have the actors in this mystery or morality, adhered to the progressive course marked by Nature herself, who, from the midst of health

returned the lady, all her injured dignity lighting up her face in the most glowing, picturesque manner imaginable—quite in the style of a sunset, by Claude—"I would have you to know, sir, that Mr. Simkins is above such low doing. *Bacca and ale* party, indeed!—no, we can afford to treat our friends with wine, quite as well as our neighbours." This reminds us of an exceedingly whimsical dealer in the "Indian weed," who put up at his door, instead of the usual figure of a Highlander, one of Bacchus, as the god *Bacco*, and who always used the choice Italian oath *Corpo di Bacco*, which he said meant the fraternity or corps of tobacconists.

and life, prepares decay and dissolution. If we gaze on these fallen heroes of the bottle, we shall perceive that some have quite drained their glasses, while others have fallen victims to stupor and insensibility, the bright liquor still sparkling before their eyes. So far we might not seldom derive a moral lesson from a not particularly moral subject. But there are occasions when Death literally takes his place at the festive board, and mars the merriment of the hour devoted to joy, "with most admired disorder."

He does not stand upon the form of coming, well knowing that he cannot be denied. He is the dun that comes to demand the payment of the great debt of nature, and against him all subterfuges, however ingenious, are unavailing. Scorning and setting at naught all form and etiquette, he will intrude in spite of porter or groom of the chambers. Nevertheless, he will occasionally use a little finesse and stratagem, although certain of being able to gain forcible admission—*vi et armis*. Here he comes in the disguise of a boon companion, for a while to en-

tertain the company with his erudition in *oenology*; and descant most learnedly on the pedigrees of wines, showing himself deeply learned in the lore of a Henderson, and quite *au fait* in the science of the drawing-room,—that is, the room where they *draw* corks; which, by the by, in the opinion of a great many connoisseurs, is the finest style of drawing ever invented. But whether the liquor he proffers be claret or champagne,—“that might create a soul beneath the ribs of death,”—or whether it be *eau-de-vie* itself, it becomes a fatal poison, if Death takes upon himself to act the part of cup-bearer. If, however, wine do sometimes prove a poison, it must be acknowledged to be infinitely the most agreeable of any mentioned or not mentioned in any treatise on toxicology, and by far the most palatable and generous way of committing suicide yet discovered.

Many have declaimed vehemently, if not eloquently, against the “sweet poison of misused wine,” attributing to it the most pernicious effects on the human frame; forgetting that the mischief



is occasioned, not by the quality of the medicine, but by the excess of the dose. In other words, the fault lies in the patient himself, which is, we presume, invariably the case whenever any infallible nostrum works not the desired cure. If wine has hurried many out of the world sooner than they would otherwise have departed, so has physic, and more especially that sort of physic that has professed to accomplish the most miraculous effects, and remove all disorders. Indeed, to do these universal panaceas justice, they do most effectually remove every complaint by despatching the patient himself into the other world; and this is, perhaps, one reason why we hear of so few failures in those wonder-working drugs that promise to protract existence to an antediluvian length of days.

Life has been compared to a voyage, and hence many, interpreting the expression somewhat too literally, have actually steered their course through a Red Sea of port and claret; sailed across a Pacific Ocean of burgundy and champagne; navigated a Rhine whose stream

has been genuine Rhenish; and cruized up and down a gulf of choice Malaga; visiting alternately Madeira and the Cape; now touching at the Canaries and now at Oporto or Lisbon;—in short, circumnavigating the whole globe, and studying the geography of different regions, while their bottles circulated round the polished expanse of the mahogany dining-table, that reflected their sunny faces on its countenance. In wine they fancied they had discovered the nectar of the immortals—a Lethe for all the cares and anxieties of human existence. And most assuredly the liquor with which they deluged themselves was often not very dissimilar in its effect from that attributed to that fabled stream; for many have drank till they have forgotten their creditors, their families, and even themselves. It is not, therefore, surprising that they should not have recollected, that, let them steer with what skill they might,—however they might be favoured with fair breezes and prosperous gales, and escape tempests, gales, and squalls, they must finish their voyage in the Dead Sea.



When Death officiates as butler, as we here see him, and draws the cork, it is from the waters of that horrid lake he pours out the nauseous beverage that all are compelled to drain from his hand. At his bidding the wine-bibber must visit other SHADES\* than those whither he has

\* Having here alluded to the well-known *Shades* at the foot of London Bridge, and recollecting that a rhyming friend once put into my hands an extemporaneous effusion, which he wrote while we were enjoying ourselves in that *shady* retreat, and which I happened to preserve, I take the liberty of inserting it; particularly as every blow of the pile-driving *monkey* announces that ere long *these Shades* shall be sought in vain.

#### THE SHADES.

I sing not of SHADES which they tell of *below*,

Where Pluto and Proserpine reign;

But I sing of the SHADES whither wine-bibbers go,

Where a stream of Oporto doth constantly flow—

A Lethe to wash away pain.

The Lethe of Tartarus, poets declare,

Oblivious virtues possess'd;

But the Lethe *we* mean, metamorphoses care,—

It inspires us to love and to cherish the fair,

And warms e'en the Anchoret's breast.

Oh, haste to the SHADES, then, where wine-bibbers meet,

Oh, haste to that fav'rite resort,

Where, in wet or dry weather, in cold or in heat,

All care is forgot in a snug elbow seat,

When of port you have drank a full quart.

M.

often so willingly repaired to partake of the inspiring glass, heedless of the ominous name. The Shades!—what a *memento mori* in that awfully-sounding word, which is nevertheless daily uttered by so many with so much gaiety! Hardly do they seem to reflect that the grisly spectre will ere long summon them from the wine-vault to that narrow vault where, instead of finding a banquet for their thirsty palates, they must themselves afford a banquet to the worm; to those shades where they themselves will be as shadows, where their glass will be broken, their bottle emptied, no more to be replenished; and their revelry silenced for ever.

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