

DEATH, THE SAGE, AND THE FOOL.*

I.

HENCE with thy rhapsodies—the world—the
world!—

Wends on his reckless course the gay—the
young—

Where Fashion hath her gonfalon unfurled,

And Beauty's Circe-lips have loudest sung!

What, though the roses which fond childhood flung

O'er his calm breast, are scorch'd by Passion's
flame,

And all is desolate where they blushing sprung;—

He seeks enjoyment, and loud laughs at
fame,—

He gains it—bitter gain : a mockery—but a name !

* *Vide* FRONTISPIECE.

II.

Yet, though—albeit, in his wild career,
 He join in midnight dance and revelry,—
 And doth, like tipsy pilot, madly steer
 His reeling bark through Passion's ruthless sea,—
 Uncheer'd, unlustred by bright Beauty's eye,
 Long wont to shine, and kindly guidance give—
 (A constant cynosure from laughing sky),
 Yet hath been his to some (sad) purpose live,
 And have a goal in life, though not a name survive!

III.

But 'tis not thus with cold and cloistered Sage,
 Wasting in calculating dreams his day;
 Till his shorn temples are besprent by age,
 And manhood's sunshine yields to evening gray!
 One constant task his rolling years display,—
 His task of visioned mystics; whilome health
 Fades like a morning mist away—away,—
 And grim Death stalks with solemn-pacing
 stealth,
 To mar his full-blown hopes,—his heart's long-
 hoarded wealth!

IV.

Then—then what boots the philosophic fire,
 That lit the sacred mansion of his breast?
 Freedom from Passion's thrall and young Desire,—
 And stern rebuke of Beauty's soft behest,
 Sighing and pining to be fond carest?
 Hath he enjoyed the loveliness of life,
 Alone by Reason's Prosper-wand confess'd?
 Alas! his feverish dreams and visions rife
 Have mildewed judgment,—thought,—though far re-
 moved from strife.

V.

Land of the storied brave,—though now the tread
 Of the dull slave unechoed walk the ground,
 Yet, glorious land, thine—thine the learned dead!
 There his wise saws the Citian* sage around
 To wondering crowds proclaimed; there—there
 was found
 The heaven-blest doctor of the Academe;
 Thence the Aristotelian thunder's sound
 Issued, and glow'd the philosophic beam;
 Yet light-spced it has pass'd, and all is but a dream!

* Zeno, the stoic.

VI.

Death and obstruction* now their empire hold
 Where once was angry jar and hot dispute;
 Fame, that would aye their endless praise have told!
 Hath silenced now her hoarse unheeded suit
 To hard posterity;—and all is mute,
 Save the loud jibes of envious Mockery's tongue,
 Such is of earthly Worth the bitter fruit;
 While o'er its tomb her scornful laugh hath rung,
 When pointing at the 'scutcheon Age would high
 have hung!

VII.

And thy lot, wisdom-scoffer, is the same,
 Though mock'st thou Cynic tub and Stoic school!
 Yea, Folly ne'er will fail her own to claim,—
 Her mark denounces thee, cold heartless fool,
 For wasting life without design or rule!
 Oh, foolishness! to gaze upon the land,
 And idly deem Creation but the tool
 To feed thy sluggishness with impious hand—
 And, for thee, wonders work, as erst on Egypt's
 strand!

* "To lie in cold obstruction and to rot."—SHAKESPEARE.

VIII.

Enthusiast—impious boaster,—think'st the earth
In gladness yields to summer's hot embrace,
Only to lengthen thy impassioned mirth ;
So thou, exalted in thy pride of place,
Deem thyself only favoured of thy race ?
The while, to waste is thine sole idle care,
In bubbled fancies, youth and manhood's grace ;
And, having dreamt of pleasure—new, bright, fair,
In rapture wild thou snatchest,—and Death's hand is
there !

IX.

Bold madman—fool,—save bauble, crest, and bell !
Nurtured hadst thou that seed kind Heaven hath
sown
Within thy bosom,—and who—who shall tell
But it to glowing vigour might have grown,
And yielded richer fruit than e'er hath blown
Within the Hesperian dragon-warded meads ?
But years on swallow-wings have rapid flown,
Whilst thou art yet to learn that there must needs,
To immortalize thy name, be bright immortal deeds !

X.

Read ye the page of history : Greece had sons
 Such as have never lived in other land !
 Think ye the glory which through ages runs
 In loud acclaim of that most glorious band,
 Who scorn'd to yield, and died with glaive in hand,
 Was but the work of chance?—No; Spartan
 laws,
 Which they were taught full well to understand,
 And Lacedemonian discipline—the cause !
 Persuasion only from his cell Perfection draws.

XI.

'Tis not for all, with honied words, to lull
 The storm-urged fury of the vulgar crew,—
 Nor Nature's gems from their dark mines to
 cull,—
 Nor drink at Inspiration's fount, where few
 Quaffed, and of old poetic phrenzy drew !
 'Tis not the child's from cradle forth to move,
 Prankt in the array of grace and wisdom true,
 Like Pallas springing from the head of Jove,
 Clad in the dazzling panoply of Heaven above !

XII.

Yet on, o'er spring-flowered earth, o'er wintry seas,
Reckless ye haste, with never-tarrying speed,
Clouded by Folly's thousand fantasies ;—
Shadows your aim,—and Death the well-earned
meed !
On—on ye pass,—and thousands quick succeed !
Such is the scope of human joys and fears !
Thrice blest in hope, and trebly cursed in deed !
Ye clutch the bow that high in Heaven appears,
As though some new delight,—ye clutch a bow of
tears !