

*Deceased People whom we meet Daily.*

117

Earth! with thy pageants ever new and bright,  
Thy woods and waters, hills and dales,  
How dead must be the soul that fails  
To see and bless thy beauties infinite!

Man! whose high intellect supplies  
A never-failing Paradise  
Of holy and enrapturing pursuits,  
Whose heart's a fount of fresh delight,  
Pity the cynics who would blight  
Thy godlike gifts, and rank thee with the brutes.

Oh, Woman! who from realms above  
Hast brought to earth the heaven of love,  
Terrestrial angel, beautiful as pure!  
No pains, no penalties dispense  
On thy traducers—their offence  
Is its own punishment most sharp and sure.

Father and God! whose love and might,  
To every sense are blazon'd bright,  
On the vast three-leaved Bible—earth—sea—sky.  
Pardon th' impugners of thy laws,  
Expand their hearts, and give them cause  
To bless th' exhaustless grace they now deny.

---

DECEASED PEOPLE WHOM WE MEET DAILY.

BY LAMAN BLANCHARD, ESQ.

AN Irish gentleman of our acquaintance, when his new suit of mourning came home, began to moralize on the uncertainty of life. "Mortality," said he, "is more fleeting than the fashion of a coat. Who can say that his spirit may not cast off its garment of flesh, even before the gloss has departed from his new waistcoat. Alas! I ordered this mourning for my friend, and may yet be destined to wear it for myself!"

We often laugh in the wrong place, and create the bulls we fancy we discover. It was easy to see, by the aid of a minute's reflection, that this was no blunder at all, except in sound. On the surface it is merely a ludicrous absurdity; beneath that, lies a world of grave meaning, and lessons of the profoundest and most melancholy truth. The provocation to laugh is checked by a philosophic sigh.

It is not, to be sure, the custom in civilized countries for men to go into mourning for their own loss; they only put on the suit of sorrow and solemnity when royalty, consanguinity, or friendship that leaves a legacy, expires; but if it were the fashion for honest people in this world, to do by themselves as they do by others, what thousands who are now flashing in coats of many-colours would suddenly appear before us clad in deep mourning! How would the delicacy of peach-

blossom and the flush of crimson subside into dreary sable, satins and velvets change to sad crape, and the harlequinade of life become as a funeral procession. A nigrification almost universal would ensue, like swarms of fire-flies darkening into black-beetles.

Admit but the principle of adopting the same ceremonies in our own case which we observe towards our next of kin, and where is the conscientious man who might not be called upon to put on black as a slight tribute of respect to his departed self! Yea, hundreds who now dazzle the eye of the wondering multitude by the gaudiness of their equipages, would be compelled to change their green and crimson liveries for a crow-colour; and we should see the footman, shorn of his finery, swinging behind the carriage in deep mourning for his deceased master grinning inside.

Not a day passes (who will deny this?) that any man of common experience may not converse with a dozen defunct people. In a great city like London it is impossible to stir out on a fine day when the town is full, without seeing numbers of departed persons of one's acquaintance sauntering up and down in the sunshine;—without stopping here and there at the corners of streets to chat with the lamented dead, or nodding carelessly to them on the other side of the way. The people who have gone to their long homes years ago are very much abroad in this gay metropolis. We dined the other day in a party of fourteen merry-makers, well acquainted with each other; but to our certain knowledge nine of them were no more, and had been so for various periods of time, dating from the different circumstances of their career.

It is very easy to object that all these deceased persons appear to be as much as ever in existence; and, indeed, furnish evidence of their being actually alive by dining, walking, laughing, cheating, and the like. In all these respects, and forty others, they are living to the full as much as though they had never departed this life at all. Nevertheless they are all dead, and will so continue, until vitality is discovered in door-nails.

The phrase which has long been current wherever the English language is spoken, "dead and buried," was not circulated without a necessity for it. "Poor Bob is dead and buried," is an assertion wonderfully differing from "Poor Bob is dead." There is a warranty conveyed in the additional words which is much wanting in numbers of instances, and without it the fact may be moonshine. The burial is a clencher. The popular existence of the phrase is a proof that the demise is not usually held to be a settled thing until it is associated with interment.

This very day were we discussing the three per cents with a city man, when on a sudden, memory turned back into old days, to trace the form and lineaments of an early chum. He was once the merriest little winged bird-like soul that ever sang songs half way between earth and heaven. Such assuredly was Little Piper. It was necessary to get up into the sky before you could catch him, but when caught he was your own. So was all he had. He never knew the meaning of the word grasping, except when he had hold of a friend's hand, or jumped into a river (as he once did) to drag out a drowning lad three times his own weight and size.

When he became a man, he was the boy as before. He called nothing his own but his faults, and never forgot anybody but himself, a person whom Little Piper rarely bestowed a thought upon. As he had emptied his pockets at school in making presents, and giving sixpences (in spite of lectures against such immoral practices) to begging mothers with hungry children crying and clinging about them; so now on a larger scale he pursued the same plan, and was seldom without a happy face, save when he witnessed misery he could not relieve. Lucky was it for him that he could not give away the eyes out of his head; for as loan or gift they would certainly have gone to some blind wanderer, and he would have contented himself with a pair of spectacles.

And was it Little Piper with whom we this morning discoursed concerning the three per cents? Let no discreet heart think it. This was Thomas Piper, Esq., of Upper-breeches-pocket-buildings, City. The Piper beloved of us, remembered, venerated, mourned—though not per coat and hat-band—died in 1830 on the Stock-exchange. He went there innocently enough one morning, and was never seen alive afterwards. And here is another Piper calling himself the same!

As well pretend that the rising rocket and the descending stick are the same; or that the Dick Withers of last year is the Dick Withers of this year.

Last year's Dick was the most social, generous, and enjoying of bachelors; surrounded by troops of gay friends, and as delighted to give them welcome as they were to seek it. He looked care in the face and laughed. When a pack of scowling, prowling, rascally thoughts wandered into his mind and would have settled there, he packed them all off, like an ill-conditioned troop of gipsy plunderers from his pleasant fields and hedges. Nothing that was not honest and good-tempered had its abode with him. He was the first to enter into a frolic, and the last to get tired of it. He found out the right end of life—he lived and was jolly. A joke in those days never came amiss to him; but a few months ago he tried his hand at a practical one, and married. Alas! he died on his wedding day.

There is, however, a Dick Withers lurking somewhere or other in the holes and corners of domesticity, with a soul too narrow to be tenanted by more than a single sentiment—with a sterile heart that has but food for one passion at a time. He could only persuade himself that he was in love, by utterly abjuring friendship. He at once substituted uxoriousness for universal philanthropy, and cared in fact for the one human being merely because she had become part of himself.

All his friends he dropped quietly; as well the sharers of his secret thoughts, as the partners in his social enjoyments. All his doors he securely bolted; and hospitality peeped through the keyhole to see who was coming, and to cry "not at home" to the visiter. No spree, no cigar, no whist; he forgot or abandoned all his old ideas of dances, concerts, and theatres; he changed his side in politics, or had no politics at all; and turning love's temple into a mausoleum, deliberately buried himself alive.

Sheer insanity might attempt to discover some lurking resemblance between the two Dicks, and believe them to be one; but reason rejects the proposition with scorn. True, the first Dick Withers did take a wife—he was always so full of his fun; he just lived to wear his

wedding-suit ; but his name should have appeared on the same day, and in the same paper, among the Deaths and the Marriages.

That all the signs and evidences of life capable of meeting together in one human specimen of vitality, afford no proof that death has not been there before them, is perfectly well known to every one who happens to be acquainted with our friend Rattleby. That his eyes are the fiercest in their frolicsome and extravagant glee of any in company, and his laugh always the loudest, however noisy and numerous the party, is an everywhere admitted fact ; but is all that wonderful and overwhelming display of life any evidence that Rattleby is still living ? Are those boisterous spirits, that constant and rapid flow of humour, by which he makes all around him "certain they shall die of laughter," ten times in the hour, a testimony that Rattleby himself is not yet dead ? Is the elasticity of the lungs an argument against the dead-weight of the heart, and are spasms health ? If the real Rattleby be not deceased, death is a poetic fable. He still may go on to shout, caper, and toss off bumpers ; but live as fast as he may he can never be alive again. As Dick Withers must be said to have finally quitted this life when he entered the state of matrimony, so may another man be as fatally cut off by being left out of a wedding. This was the lot of the royster now in view. Poor Rattleby, who appears to have such quantities of existence to spare, died—beyond mistake, poor fellow !—on the day Kate Fisher was married.

His fate, varied by circumstances, is the fate of thousands surrounding him. When we say that they are not themselves, their story is but half told ; they are not so much as the semblance of themselves. It is impossible to regard them even as their own ghosts, so opposite in character, habit, and disposition, was the original now in the tomb to the living substance bearing the name of the deceased.

Hear this lecturer upon humanity, whose charity and tenderness of heart is an affair of precept only, a subject to descant upon for personal objects. He died soon after he had taken his seat in Parliament, where he is still to be seen "as large as life."

Look at this hoary gambler ; you cannot call his spasmodic mode of living an existence ; the truth is, that he was brought down from an honourable station years ago, by the misconduct of a beloved son, and perished in his prime.

Here is a mother, childless now, but not seeming in outward show otherwise than living. She makes rational replies whenever she is addressed, smiles calmly when kindness shown to her appears to ask a smile, and bends her brow over a book of which she is not reading a single word. Hers is not a life. She died when the last of her children, a fair daughter in her sweet and early youth, was laid within the family grave.

Go to the next public assembly, no matter for what object it may be called together ; or, what will serve the purpose as well, look from your window upon the passers-by. The unfortunate deceased are as two to one, and if they were to take it into their heads (skulls rather) to revolt, might at one fell swoop drive the living minority into their graves.

Here comes an author, with an intense consciousness of his own existence—assured, with an emphasis beyond the force of myriads of

affidavits, not only that he is living now, but that posterity, until time itself shall be no more, will be a witness of his glorious longevity. The delusion, if ludicrous, is sad too; the immortal has been dead ever since the night on which his tragedy was damned.

Yet the *prima donna* who sweeps past him, shooting onward like a star, and seeming to breathe empyreal air, is surely living in every atom of the bright dust whereof she is formed. So indeed it would appear, for to the eye she is life all over, the personification of whatever can be comprehended in the idea of existence. But what a bad judge of visible facts the eye is, and how necessary is it sometimes to see with the heart. Viewed through that medium, sympathy proclaims her to have been some time deceased. When her darling sister, cleverer, younger, and handsomer than herself came out with such brilliant success at the other house, the vital spark fled. All talk of life after that, had about as much meaning in it as the song she excels in. She still gives, it must be admitted, the most startling tokens of an active and indestructible animation; but these are only the mock-heroic contortions of the eel, after it has been neatly skinned, and cut carefully into inches.

There is another popular phrase which clearly implies that death is not at all incompatible with a protracted stay within the precincts of existence. Poor So-and-so, say the commentators on mortality, "is dead *and gone*," intimating that to die is not necessarily to go, and that the defunct are not always the departed—"dead and gone" describes the double event, whenever that takes place—the exception and not the rule. The currency of the phrase strengthens our argument that dying and going are not synonymous terms, and that we may long continue to have crowds of the deceased for our intimate acquaintances.

It is interesting to remark how varied are the periods of demise among the classes referred to, and how opposite are the causes which have rendered the obituary of the living so extensive. One who professes to be sixty-five, and vows that he has lived all those years, died at the age of forty, in consequence of his success in a duel with a near relative. Another, who conceives himself to have attained to middle age was in reality cut off in the very flower of his youth, by a shilling delicately introduced in his father's will. A third, a maiden, antiquated and thinner than all her tribe, by virtue of taking nothing but tea and cribbage, breathed her last—in spite of her hushed sigh, or her small sarcasm, that may seem to say she still survives—a long time ago, on the day when the gallant adventurer, who had twice danced with her after she was six-and-twenty, sailed for India without making the fondly expected offer.

For a pair of positive existences, as far as first appearances go, we need look no further than to this old sweeper at the crossing, and the occupant of the carriage rolling over it. Whosoever should conceive them to be actually living would decide wholly in the dark, and pronounce upon a case without a fact to judge it by. Sudden death overtook the unhappy cross-sweeper at the age of thirty, when he lost every sixpence of his large fortune; and the loller in the carriage expired in as sudden a manner at a later age, when he came quite unex-

pectedly into a fine estate. One lost a tin-mine, and the other found a canal; both perished prematurely.

Prosperity and adversity, satiated appetite, defeated ambition, brilliant success, wounded honour, blighted affection, filial ingratitude—the hundred incidents, dark or bright, which make up in their confused and yet consistent combination, the history of every human life—each of these, occurring at a critical moment, may bring the real *finis* long before the story appears to have arrived at its conclusion. The cold, formal, appointed ending, is simply an affair for the apothecary and the gravedigger.

The sentiment which first suggested the wearing of mourning was beautiful and holy; but custom strips it of this sanctity; its poetry has become a common-place; and in the adoption of the ceremony the heart silently heaving with sorrow and honour for the dead, has no concern. Still, if the fashion is to be continued, it may at least be turned to a higher use, and be made to serve sincerer ends. The suit of mourning is in few cases put on *soon enough*! If we would invest the custom with grace and dignity, elevating it with moral sentiment, we should sometimes wear the black dress while the mourned is yet amongst us. Letters to old friends must then be written, often perhaps on black-bordered paper, indicating our regret for their loss; and the crape upon the hat we touch to a former companion, as we pass him by, might be worn, poor moral skeleton! for himself.

It is painful, after an absence of a few years to return to a family circle in which we had stored up a thousand friendly and affectionate memories—where we expected to find the bright deep well-spring of sympathy, bright, deep, and clear as of old—and see nothing there but dry sand; Time's glass pouring out its contents over and over again, only to increase the heap and make a desert of the garden, every hour adding a little handful to the disappointing, the desolate, the hideous waste.

What a mockery of the heart, as we stand in the midst and look mournfully around, to attempt to persuade ourselves that we are amongst the living—merely because they all regularly breathe and wear no shroud! Count the faces there; in number, but in number only, they are the same; look into them for the old recognition, and the death's head is grinning. We feel that we have just shaken hands with the late Mr. Jones, who has forgotten to get himself buried. The act of friendship—in this case the ceremonial,—has sent a chill to the soul. The momentary contact with that cold nature was freezing; at the bare touch of his hand, we feel horrid rheumatism running up the right arm.

It is the same as we proceed round the circle. The friends and companions of our youth are no more. The eldest son perished of a scarlet coat on obtaining a cornetcy, and the eldest daughter died a sadder death when she joined the saints. The remainder became defunct in succession, each in his own favourite way. When we take our leave, it is bidding adieu to the dead. The ordinary courtesies there would be anomalous and absurd to the last degree; for they must come in the form of inquiries concerning the departed—"How is your late lamented father?" or, "I hope your deceased sisters will go to the opera on Tuesday."