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HOLBEIN AND THE DANCE OF DEATH

At the northwest corner of Switzerland, just on the turn of the Rhine from its westward course between Germany and Switzerland, to run northward between Germany and France, stands the old town of Bâle. It is nominally Swiss; but its situation on the borders of three countries, and almost in them all, has given to the place itself and to its inhabitants a somewhat heterogeneous air. "It looks," says one traveller, "like a stranger lately arrived in a new colony, who, although he may have copied the dress and the manner of those with whom he has come to reside, wears still too much of his old costume to pass for a native, and too little to be received as a stranger." Perhaps we may get a better idea of the mixed nationality of the place by imagining a

Swiss who speaks French with a German accent.

Bâle is an ancient city; though Rome was bending under the weight of more than a thousand years when the Emperor Valentinian built at this angle of the river a fortress which was called the Basilia. Houses soon began to cluster round it upon the ruins of an old Helvetian town, and thus Basel or Bâle obtained its existence and its name. Bâle suffered many calamities. War, pestilence, and earthquake alternately made it desolate. Whether we must enumerate among its misfortunes a Grand Ecclesiastical Council which assembled there in 1431, and sat for seventeen years, deposing one infallible Pope, and making another equally infallible, let theological disputants decide. But the assembling of this Council was of some service to us; for its Secretary, Aeneas Sylvius, (who, like the saucy little *prima donna*, was one of the noble and powerful Italian family, the Piccolomini, and afterward, as Pope Pius II., wore the triple crown which St. Peter did not wear,) in his Latin dedication of a history of the transactions of that body to the Cardinal St. Angeli, has left a description of Bâle as it was in 1436.

After telling us that the town is situated upon that "excellent river, the Rhine, which divides it into two parts, called Great Bâle and Little Bâle, and that these are connected by a bridge which the river rising from its bed sometimes carries off," he, naturally enough for an ecclesiastic and a future Pope, goes on to say, that in Great Bâle, which is far more beautiful and magnificent than Little Bâle, there are handsome and commodious churches;

and he naively adds, that, "*although* these are not adorned with marble, and are built of common stone, they are much frequented by the people." The women of Bâle, following the devotional instincts of their sex, were the most assiduous attendants upon these churches; and they consoled themselves for the absence of marble, which the good Aeneas Sylvius seems to imply would partly have excused them for staying away, by an arrangement in itself as odd as in Roman Catholic places of worship—to their honor—it is, and ever was, unusual. Each of them performed her devotions in a kind of inclosed bench or solitary pew. By most of these the occupant was concealed only to the waist when she stood up at the reading of the Gospel; some allowed only their heads to appear; and others of the fair owners were at once so devout, so cruel, and so self-denying as to shut out the eyes of the world entirely and at all times. But instances of this remorseless mortification of the flesh, seem to have been exceedingly rare. Queer enough these structures were, and sufficiently gratifying to the pride and provocative of the envy which the beauties of Bâle (avowedly) went to churches in which there was no marble to mortify. For they were of different heights, according to the rank of the occupant. A simple burgher's wife took but a step toward heaven when she went to pray; a magistrate's of the lower house, we must suppose, took two; a magistrate's of the upper house, three; a lady, four; a baroness, five; a countess, six; and what a duchess, if one ever appeared there, did to maintain her dignity in the eyes of God and man, unless she mounted into the

pulpit, it is quite impossible to conjecture. Aeneas Sylvius gives it as his opinion that these things were used as a protection against the cold, which to his Italian blood seemed very great. But that notion was surely instilled into the courtly churchman by some fair, demure Bâloise; for had it been well-founded, the sentry-boxes would have risen and fallen with the thermometer, and not with the rank of the occupant.

The walls of the churches were hung around with the emblazoned shields of knights and noblemen, and the roofs were richly painted in various colors, and glowed with splendor when the rays of the sun fell upon them. Storks built their nests upon these roofs, and hatched their young there unmolested; for the Bâlois believed, that, if the birds were disturbed, they would fire the houses.

The dwellings of men of any wealth or rank were very curiously planned, elaborately ornamented, richly painted, and adorned with magnificent tapestry. The tables were covered with vessels of wrought silver, in which Sylvius confesses that the Bâlois surpassed even the skilful and profuse Italians. Fountains, those sources of fantastic and ever-changing beauty, were numerous,—so numerous, says our afterward-to-be-infallible authority, that the town of Viterbo, in Tuscany, had not so many, —and Viterbo was noted for its beauty, and for being surrounded with the villas of wealthy Italians, who have always used water freely in the way of fountains.

Bâle, although it then—four hundred and twenty years ago—

acknowledged the Emperor for its sovereign, was a free town, as it is now; that is, it had no local lord to favor or oppress it at his pleasure, but was governed by laws enacted by representatives of the people. The spirit of a noble independence pervaded the little Canton of which it was and is the capital. Though it was fortified, its stone defences were not strong; but when Sylvius tells us that the Bâlois thought that the strength of their city consisted in the union of its inhabitants, who preferred death to loss of liberty, we see what stuff its men were made of, and why the town was free.

Among its peculiarities, Bâle had no lawyers,—this happy and united Bâle. The Bâlois did not trouble themselves about the Imperial law, says Sylvius; but when disputes or accusations were brought before the magistrates, they were decided according to custom and the equity of each case. They were nevertheless inexorably severe in administering justice. A criminal could not be saved either by gold, or by intercession, or by the authority and influence of his family. He who was guilty must be punished; and the punishments were terrible. Criminals were banished, hung, beheaded, broken on the wheel, drowned in the Rhine, (a bad use to which to put that "excellent river,") left to starve on a gradually diminished supply of bread and water. To compel confessions, tortures inconceivably horrible were used, to which the alternative of death would have been a boon; and yet there were not wanting those among the Bâlois who would endure these torments rather than utter their own condemnation.

They were devoted to religion, and held in great reverence

the pictures and images of the Saints; but not on account of any admiration of the skill of painter or sculptor; for they cared little for the arts, and were so ignorant of literature that "no one of them had ever heard of Cicero or of any other orator."

The men of Bâle were of noble presence, and dressed well, although they avoided magnificence. Only those of knightly rank wore purple; the wealthy burghers confined themselves to black velvet; but their wives, on fête-days, blazed in splendid silk and satin and jewels. The boys went with naked feet, and, adds the reverend divine, the women wore upon their white legs only shoes. There was no distinction of age by costume, among the women,—a very great singularity in those days, when every stage and rank of life was marked by some peculiar style of dress; but in Bâle the face alone distinguished the young girl from the matron of mature years. It may, however, be doubted by some, whether this is peculiar to the town of Bâle or to the time of Sylvius. The men were addicted to voluptuous pleasures; they lived sumptuously, and passed a long time at table. In the words of our churchman, "They were too much devoted to Father Bacchus and Dame Venus,"—faults which they deemed venial. But he adds, that they were jealous of their honor, and held to what they promised; they would rather be upright than merely seem to be so. Though provident, they were content, unless very poor.

Another peculiarity of Bâle: its clocks were one hour ahead of all others, and so continued at least till the middle of the

last century. This of course depended on no difference of time; it was merely that when, for instance, at mid-day, the clocks of neighboring towns struck twelve, the clocks of Bâle struck one. The origin of this seeming effort to hasten him who usually moves rapidly enough for us all is lost in obscurity.

And now why is it that, we have gone back four hundred years and more, to linger thus long with the Secretary of the Great Ecclesiastical Council of Bâle, in that quaint and queer old town, with its half French, half German look, its grand, grotesque old churches, hung round with knightly shields and filled with women, each in a pulpit of her own, its stork-crowned roofs, its houses blazing with wrought gold and silver, its threescore fountains, and the magnificence in which, without a court, it rivalled the richest capitals of Italy, its noble-spirited and pleasure-loving, but simple-minded and unlearned burghers, its white-limbed beauties, and its deceitful clocks? It is not because that town is now one of the principal ribbon-factories of the world, and exports to this country alone over $1,200,000 worth yearly; although some fair readers may suppose that an all-sufficient reason,—and some of their admirers and protectors, too, for that matter. Think of it! nearly one million two hundred and fifty thousand dollars' worth of ribbons coming to us every year from a single town in Switzerland! The statement is enough to carry horror and dismay to the heart and the pocket of every father and brother, and above all, of every husband, actual or possible, who hears of it. It is a godsend to the protectionists,

who might reëdify their party on the basis of a prohibitory tariff against ribbons. If they were successful, their success would be brilliant; for if our fair tyrants could not get ribbons—those necessaries of life—from Bâle in Switzerland, they would tease and coax us to build them a Bâle in America; and we should do it.

We have gone back to the old Bâle of four hundred and twenty years ago, because there, and not long after that time, —about 1498,—according to general belief, Hans Holbein was born; because these were the surroundings under the influence of which he grew to manhood; and because there, about sixty years before his birth, a Dance of Death was painted, the most ancient and important of which we have any remaining memorial. This Dance was painted upon the wall of the churchyard of the Dominican Convent in Great Bâle, by order of the very Ecclesiastical Council of which our Aeneas Sylvius was Secretary, and in commemoration of a plague which visited the town during the sitting of that Council, and carried off many of its members.

What is a Dance of Death? and why should Death be painted dancing? Some readers may think of it as a frantic revel of grim skeletons, or perhaps—like me in my boyish musings—imagine nameless shapes with Death and Hell gleaming in their faces, each clasping a mortal beguiled to its embrace, all flitting and floating round and round to unearthly music, and gradually receding through vast mysterious gloom till they are lost in its horrible obscurity.

But neither of these notions is near the truth. The Dance of Death is not a revel, and in it Death does not dance at all. A Dance of Death, or a Dance Macabre, as it was called, is a succession of isolated pictures, all informed with the same motive, it is true, but each independent of the others, and consisting of a group, generally of but two figures, one of which is the representative of Death. The second always represents a class; and in this figure every rank, from the very highest to the lowest, finds its type. The number of these groups or pictures varies considerably in the different dances, according to the caprice of the artist, or, perhaps, to the expense of his time and labor which he thought warranted by the payment he was to receive. But all express, with sufficient fulness, the idea that Death is the common lot of humanity, and that he enters with impartial feet the palace and the cottage, neither pitying youth nor respecting age, and waiting no convenient season.

The figure of Death in these strange religious works of Art, —for they were as purely religious in their origin as the Holy Families and Madonnas of the same and a subsequent period,— this figure of Death is not always a skeleton. It is so in but one of the forty groups in the Dance at Bâle, which was the germ of Holbein's, and which, indeed, until very recently, was attributed to him, although it was painted more than half a century before he was born. It is generally assumed that a skeleton has always been the representative of Death, but erroneously; for, in fact, Holbein was the first to fix upon a mere skeleton for the

embodiment of that idea.

The Hebrew Scriptures, which furnish us with the earliest extant allusion to Death as a personage, designate him as an angel or messenger of God,—as, for instance, in the record of the destruction of the Assyrian host in the Second Book of Kings (xix. 35). The ancient Egyptians, too, in whose strange system of symbolism may be found the germ, at least, of most of the types used in the religion and the arts of more modern nations, had no representation of Death as an individual agent. They expressed the extinction of life very naturally and simply by the figure of a mummy. Such a figure it was their custom to pass round among the guests at their feasts; and the Greeks and Romans imitated them, with slight modifications, in the form of the image and the manner of the ceremony. Some scholars have found in this custom a deep moral and religious significance, akin to that which certainly attached to the custom of placing a slave in the chariot of a Roman conquering general to say to him at intervals, as his triumphal procession moved with pomp and splendor through the swarming streets, "Remember that thou art a man." But this is too subtile a conjecture. The ceremony was but a silent way of saying, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die," which, as Paul's solemn irony makes but too plain, must be the philosophy of life to those who believe that the dead rise not, which was the case with the Egyptians and the Greeks, and the Hebrews also. An old French epitaph expresses to the full this philosophy:—

"Ce que j'ai mangé,
Ce que j'ai bu,
Ce que j'ai dissipé,
Je l'ai maintenant avec moi.
Ce que j'ai laissé,
Je l'ai perdu,"

What I ate,
What I drank,
What I dissipated,
I have with me.
That which I left
I lost.

The figure of the sad youth leaning upon an inverted torch, in which the Greeks embodied their idea of Death, is familiar to all who have examined ancient Art. The Etruscan Death was a female, with wings upon the shoulders, head, and feet, hideous countenance, terrible fangs and talons, and a black skin. No example of the form attributed to him by the early Christians has come down to us, that I can discover; but we know that they, as well as the later Hebrews, considered Death as the emissary of the Evil One, if not identical with him, and called him impious, unholy. It was in the Dark Ages, that the figure of a dead body or a skull was first used as a symbol of Death; but even then its office appears to have been purely symbolic, and not representative;—that is, these figures served to remind men

of their mortality, or to mark a place of sepulture, and were not the embodiment of an idea, not the creation of a personage,—Death. It is not until the thirteenth or fourteenth century that we find this embodiment clearly defined and generally recognized; and even then the figure used was not a skeleton, but a cadaverous and emaciated body.

Among the remains of Greek and Roman Art, only two groups are known in which a skeleton appears; and it is remarkable that in both of these the skeletons are dancing. In one group of three, the middle figure is a female. Its comparative breadth at the shoulders and narrowness at the hips make at first a contrary impression; but the position of the body and limbs is, oddly enough, too like that of a female dancer of the modern French school to leave the question in more than a moment's doubt. Thus the artists who did not embody their idea of death in a skeleton were the first to conceive and execute a real Dance of Death. In both the groups referred to, the motive is manifestly comic; and neither of them has any similarity to the Dances of Death of which Holbein's has become the grand representative. These had their origin, we can hardly tell with certainty how, or when, or where; although the subject has enlisted the investigating labors of such accomplished scholars and profound antiquaries as Douce and Ottley in England, and Peignot and Langlois in France. But a story with which they are intimately connected, even if it is not their germ, has been discovered; ancient customs which must have aided in their development are familiar to

all investigators of ancient manners, and especially of ancient amusements; and the motives which inform them all, and the moral condition of Christendom of which they were the result, are plain enough.

We have seen before, that this Dance consisted of several groups of two or more figures, one of which was always Death in the act of claiming a victim; and for the clear comprehension of what follows, it is necessary to anticipate a little, and remark, that there is no doubt that the Dance was first represented by living performers. Strange as this seems to us, it was but in keeping with the spirit of the time, which we call, perhaps with some presumption, the Dark Ages.

The story which is probably the germ of this Dance was called *Les Trois Morts et les Trois Vifs*,—"The Three Dead and the Three Living." It is of indefinable antiquity and uncertain origin. It is said, that three noble youths, as they returned from hunting, were met in the gloom of the forest by three hideous spectres, in the form of decaying human corpses; and that, as they stood rooted to the ground by this appalling sight, the figures addressed them solemnly upon the vanity of worldly grandeur and pleasure, and admonished them, that, although in the heyday of youth, they must soon become as they (the spectres) were. This story, or *dit*, "saying," as it was called in French, was exceedingly popular through-out Europe five or six hundred years ago. It is found in the language of every Christian nation of the period, and, extended by means of accessory incidents and much moralizing,

is made to cover several pages in more than one old illuminated manuscript. In the Arundel MSS., in England, there is one of the many versions of the legend written in French so old that it is quite as difficult for Frenchmen as for Englishmen to read it. But over an illuminated picture of the incident, in which three kings are shown meeting the three skeletons, are these lines in English, as old, but less obsolete:—

Over the Kings.

"Ich am afert
Lo whet ich see
Methinketh hit be develes thre."

Over the Skeletons.

"Ich wes wel fair
Such schel tou be
For Godes love be wer by me."

In these rude lines is the whole moral of the legend, and of the Dance of Death which grew out of it. That growth was simple, gradual, and natural. In the versions and in the pictorial representations of the legend there soon began to be much variety in the persons who met the spectres. At first three noble youths, they became three kings, three noble ladies, a king, a queen, and their son or daughter, and so on,—the rank of the persons, however, being always high. For, as we shall have occasion to

notice hereafter more particularly, the mystery of the Dance had a democratic as well as a religious significance; and it served to bring to mind, not only the irresistible nature of Death's summons, but the real equality of all men; and this it did in a manner to which those of high condition could not object.

The legend was made the subject of a fresco, painted about 1350, by the eminent Italian painter and architect, Orcagna, upon the walls of the Campo Santo at Pisa,—which some readers may be glad to be reminded was a cemetery, so called because it was covered with earth brought from the Holy Land. It is remarkable, however, that in this work the artist embodied Death not in the form commonly used in his day, but in the old Etruscan figure before mentioned. Orcagna's Death is a female, winged like a bat, and with terrible claws. Armed with a scythe, she swoops down upon the earth and reaps a promiscuous harvest of popes, emperors, kings, queens, churchmen, and noblemen. In the rude manner of the time, Orcagna has divided his picture into compartments. In one of these we see St. Macarius, one of the first Christian hermits, an Egyptian, sitting at the foot of a mountain; before him are three kings, who have returned from the chase accompanied by a gay train of attendants. The Saint calls the attention of the kings to three sepulchres in which lie the bodies of three other kings, one of which is much decomposed. The three living kings are struck with horror; but the painter has much diminished the moral effect of his work, for this century, at least, by making one of them hold his nose;—which

is regarded by Mr. Ruskin as an evidence of Orcagna's devotion to the truth; but in this case that brilliant writer, but most unsafe critical guide, commits an error of a kind not uncommon with him. The representation of so homely an action, in such a composition, merely shows that the painter had not arrived at a just appreciation of the relative value of the actual,—and that he failed to see that by introducing this unessential incident he diverted attention from his higher purpose, dragged his picture from a moral to a material plane, and went at a bound far over the narrow limit between the horrible and the ludicrous.

St. Macarius is frequently introduced in the pictures of this subject; and some antiquaries suppose that hence the Dance of Death derived the name, Dance Macabre, by which it used to be generally known. Others derive it from the Arabic *mac-bourah*, —a cemetery. Neither derivation is improbable; but it is of little consequence to us which is correct.

It may seem strange that such a legend as this of "The Three Dead and the Three Living," with such a moral, should become the origin of a dance. But we should remember that in many countries dancing has been a religious ceremony. It was so with the Greeks and Romans, and also with the Hebrews, among whom, however, saltatory worship seems, on most occasions, to have been performed spontaneously, and by volunteers. All will remember the case of Miriam, who thus danced to the sound of her timbrel after the passage of the Red Sea; and who that has read it can forget the account of the dance which King

David executed before the ark, dancing with all his might, and girded only with a linen ephod? Dancing has always seemed to us to be an essentially ridiculous transaction,—for a man, at least; and we confess that we sympathize with David's wife, Michal, who, seeing this extraordinary *pas seul* from her window, "despised David in her heart," and treated him to a little conjugal irony when he came home. What would the lovely Eugénie have thought, if, after the fall of Sebastopol, she had seen his Majesty, the Emperor of the French, "cutting it down," in broad daylight, before the towers of Notre Dame, girded only with a linen ephod, —though that's not exactly the name we give the garment now-a-days? But David was master, not only in Israel, but in his own household, (which is not the case with all kings and great men,) and he said to Michal,—"It was before the Lord, which chose me before thy father and before all his house;.... therefore will I play before the Lord;.... and of the maid-servants which thou hast spoken of, of them shall I be had in honor." And Michal all her life repented bitterly the offence that she had given her husband.

But dancing was not one of the regular ceremonies of the Christian Church, even in its corruptest days; and yet dances were performed four hundred years ago in the churches and in church-yards, as a part of, or an appendage to, entertainments of a religious character. These were the Mysteries and Moralities, which are the origin of our drama;—and it is remarkable that in all countries the drama has been at first a religious ceremony. These Mysteries and Moralities were religious plays of the rudest

kind: the Mysteries being a representation, partly by dumb show and partly by words, of some well-known incident related in the Bible; and the Moralities, a kind of discussion and enforcement of religious doctrine or moral truth by allegorical personages. They were performed at first almost entirely in the churches, upon scaffolds erected for the purpose.

In a Mystery called "Candlemas Day, or the Killing of the Children of Israel," which represented the Massacre of the Innocents, and in which Herod, Simeon, Joseph, the Virgin Mary, Watkin, a comic character, and Anna the Prophetess, appeared, there was a general dance of all the characters after the Prologue; and at the close of the play, there is a stage-direction for another, in response to a command of Anna the Prophetess, who says,—

> "Shewe ye sume plesur as ye can
> In the worship of Jesu, our Lady, and St. Anne."

And thereupon King Herod, Simeon, Joseph, the Virgin Mary, Watkin the funny man, and the Prophetess well stricken in years, proceed to forward four, and end with a promenade all around. Indeed, our ancestors seem to have found it edifying, not to say entertaining, to go to a cathedral to see Satan and an Archbishop dance a hornpipe with the Seven Deadly Sins and the Five Cardinal Virtues.

A Morality called "Every Man," written about 1450, has a

direct connection with the subject which we are considering. Every Man, the principal personage of the piece, is an allegorical representation of all mankind; and the purpose of the play is told in this sentence, which introduces it:—

"Here begynneth a Treatyse how the Hye Fader of Heven sendeth Dethe to somon every creature to come & gyve a count of theyr lyves in this worlde, & is in maner of a Morall Playe."

On the title-page of an edition printed in 1500, only one copy of which exists, is a very rude wood-cut, in which an individual, who is labelled "Every Man," is startled at the sight of Death standing at the door of a church and summoning him. In this Moral Play, Fellowship, Good Deeds, Worldly Goods, Knowledge, Beauty, Strength, Discretion, and Five Wittes are characters; and they cannot interpose between Every Man and the summons of Death, nor will any of them, except Good Deeds, go with him. The representation of this play was a kind of Dance of Death, and from the acting of "Every Man" to the execution of that Dance was but a short step.

But the Dance of Death had been performed before "Every Man" was written; and dances in churches and churchyards were of yet greater antiquity. For, by an order of a Roman council under Pope Pius II. in the tenth century, priests were directed "to admonish men and women not to dance and sing in the churches on feast-days, like Pagans." The evil increased, however, until, according to the old chroniclers, a terrible punishment fell upon a party of dancers. One of them, Ubert, tells the story. It was

on Christmas Eve, in the time of the Emperor Henry II., who assumed the imperial diadem in the year 1002, that a company of eighteen men and women amused themselves by dancing and singing in the churchyard of St. Magnus, in the diocese of Magdeburg, to the annoyance of a priest who was saying mass in the church. He ordered them to desist; but they danced on in reckless mirth. The holy father then invoked God and St. Magnus to keep them dancing for a whole year; and not in vain. For twelve months they danced in spite of themselves. Neither dew nor rain fell upon them; and their shoes and their clothes were not worn away, although by their dancing they buried themselves waist-high. Yet, fatigued and famished beyond human endurance, they danced on, unable to stop an instant for rest or food. The priest's own daughter was among the dancers; and, unable to undo what the Saint had done, he sent his son to drag her out of the dance. But when her brother pulls her by the arm it comes off in his hand, and he in horror takes it to his father. No blood flows from the wound. The priest buries the arm, and the next morning he finds it upon the top of the grave. He repeats the burial, and with the same result. He makes a third attempt, and the grave casts out the limb with violence before his eyes. Meanwhile the girl and her companions continue dancing, and the Emperor, having heard of this strange occurrence, travels from Rome to see so sad a sight. He orders carpenters to inclose the dancers in a building, but in vain; for that which is built in the day falls down in the night. The dancers have neither rest nor mitigation of their curse until the

expiration of the year, when they all rush into the church and fall before the altar in a swoon, from which they are not recovered for three days. Then they immediately flee each other's faces, and wander solitary through the world, still dancing at times in spite of themselves. In the olden time this was believed to be the origin of St. Vitus's dance; but we can now see that the dance is the origin of the story.

The Dance of Death was performed by a large company dressed in the costumes of various classes of society, which were then very marked in their difference. One by one the dancers suddenly and silently slipped off, thus typifying the departure of all mankind at Death's summons. That this Dance was performed, not only with the consent, but by the procurement of the clergy, is made certain by the discovery, in the archives of the Cathedral of Besançon, of the account of the payment of four measures of wine by the seneschal to those persons who performed the Dance Macabre on the 10th of July, 1453.

The moral lesson conveyed by this strange pastime or ceremony seems hardly calculated to secure for it a noteworthy popularity in any age; but for a long time it was, either as a ceremony or as a picture, very popular throughout Europe. We know of forty-four places in which it was painted or sculptured in some large public building, the oldest example being that at Little Bâle, which was painted in 1312. This, like that in Great Bâle, and most of the others, has been destroyed by time or violence. The Dance was made the ornament of books of

devotion, and the subject of ornamental initial-letters; groups from it were engraved repeatedly by those fantastic designers and exquisite workmen known as the Little Masters of Germany; a single group was assumed as a device, or trademark, by more than one printer; and it was sung in popular ballads. There is now at Aix-la-Chapelle a huge state-bed-stead, on the posts, sides, and footboards of which it is elaborately carved, in the manner of the sixteenth century; and it was even made the ornament of ladies' fans.

The reasons for this popularity were a certain strange fascination in the subject,—yet not so strange at a time when women would crowd to see men burned or hanged and quartered; —but chiefly, the grand democratic significance of the dance. Death has ever been, and ever will be, the greatest leveller; and at a time when rank had an importance and bestowed advantages of which we can form little idea, while at the same time men had begun to ask why this should be, such a satire as this Dance of Death, sanctioned by the Church, that great protector of established rights and dignities, and yet sparing neither noble nor hierarch, not even the Pope himself, satisfied an eager craving in the breast of poor, envious, self-asserting human nature. In one of those ornamental initial-letters above mentioned, the date of which was some years prior to the execution of Holbein's Dance, Death appears as a grave-digger, and lifts on his spade, out of the grave which he is making, two skulls, one crowned, the other covered with a peasant's hat. He grins with savage glee at seeing

these remnants of the two extremes of society side by side; and underneath them, on the shovel, is written *Idem*,—"The Same." In this word is the key to the popularity of the Dance.

The most important and interesting of these pictured Dances of Death were those at Bâle, at Strasbourg, and at Rouen. That at Bâle consisted of thirty-nine groups, in the first three of which appear a Pope, an Emperor, and a King. These were portraits of Pope Felix V., the Emperor Sigismund, and King Albert II., of Rome, all of whom were present at the Council, by whose order, as we have seen, the Dance was painted. The last group of this Dance shows the seizure of the painter's child by Death. It having been almost destroyed by time, the wall on which it was painted was torn down about a hundred years ago; but engravings had been made of it in the latter part of the seventeenth century. The Dance at Strasbourg, like that at Bâle, and many others, was on the wall of a Dominican convent. It was painted in arched compartments, and is peculiar in that its groups consist of many figures, among whom Death intrudes, and carries off one, generally the principal personage of the company. It was painted about 1450, and probably by the eminent German painter, Martin Schongauer; but having been utterly neglected and forgotten, it was finally plastered over, no one knows when. In repairing the church in 1824, it was accidentally discovered, and carefully exposed; but it was so much injured that it fell into decay soon after drawings had been made from it.

The Dance at Rouen was in the still existing Cemetery of

St. Maclou, and was not a painting, but a sculpture. It was not entirely completed until 1526. The cemetery is surrounded by a covered gallery open on the inside, where it was supported by thirty-nine columns, distant about eleven feet from each other. Thirty-one of these still exist; and upon the shaft of all but four of them, on the side facing the court of the cemetery, is sculptured, in high relief, a group of two figures,—one a living personage, and the other the cadaverous body by which Death was represented. On the remainder were sculptured the Christian Virtues and the Fates,—two on each column. The capitals of these columns are decorated with figures quite in another manner. Cupids, naked female figures, grotesque masks, and shapes—human and bestial—are ingeniously substituted for the foliage usually found on that part of a column. The execution of these figures is of quite a high order. They have all been sadly mutilated; but, fortunately, that which has suffered least is a beautiful figure of Eve. Her head is gone; but the flowing lines of the lovely torso are unbroken, and the round and graceful limbs are almost as perfect as when they came from the sculptor's chisel. This figure is so like the Venus de Medici that it might have been copied from it.

But what is Eve doing in a Dance of Death? Alas! she took the first step of that dance in Paradise, and the artists of the olden time did not deprive her of her due precedence. She leads the Dance, but with this difference from those who follow her:—they, cowering and muffled, go off the scene with Death; she,

upright in her naked innocence and beauty, brings him on. Poor Eve! she had her punishment and made her atonement to man for leading him to death, in becoming the source and the joy and solace of his life; but it was not for the artists of the Dance of Death to embody this phase of her existence. So essential a part of the Dance is the temptation of Eve, that the whole subject was concentrated into the representation of that event by a German engraver, in this singular manner:—Adam and Eve stand by the Tree of Knowledge, around which twines the serpent, from whom Eve is receiving the apple; but the trunk of the tree is formed by the twisted legs and the ribs of a skeleton, from the head and the outstretched arms of which spring the branches and the foliage. It is worthy of remark, that many painters, the greatest of them (Raphael) at their head, have represented the tempter of Eden as a beautiful woman, whose body terminates in a serpent. It was a mistake on their part to do so. They knew how much of the Devil a woman might have in her, and how irresistible a temptress she is; but they forgot, that, on this occasion, woman, not man, was tempted.

There was a Dance of Death in Old St. Paul's Church, in London,—the one burned down in the Great Fire; and another in the beautiful little parish church of Stratford-on-Avon,—but this, too, has disappeared. It is interesting to know that they were there, and that Shakspeare saw them; for he has woven some of the thoughts that they awakened in his mind into a noble passage in one of his historical plays. We shall recur to it in examining

Holbein's Dance.

The Dance was represented, and still exists, in one very singular place. At Lucerne, in Switzerland, it appears upon a covered bridge, in the triangles formed by the beams which support the roof. The groups, of which there are thirty-six, are double, looking away from each other, and are so arranged, that the passenger, on entering the bridge, has before him a long array of these grotesque and gloomy pictures. The motive for placing the Dance in such a place is unknown, and it is difficult to conjecture what it was. It could hardly have been to enforce the old adage,—Speak well of the bridge that carries you over.

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While we have been thus endeavoring to discover the origin of the Dance of Death, what it was, and what it meant, Holbein has been waiting more patiently than he was wont, for us to see who he was, and why the Dance, which was known three hundred years at least before he was born, is now universally spoken of as his.

Hans Holbein, the greatest painter of the German school, came honestly by his talent and his name. He was the son of Hans Holbein, a painter, who was the son of another Hans Holbein, also a painter. The first Hans was a poor painter; the second a good one; and the third so great, that the world, when it speaks their common name, means only him. The father and

grandfather were born at Augsburg, in Bavaria, and of late years it has been asserted by mousing antiquaries that the grandson was born there too; but this, perhaps, is not quite certain; and it is much pleasanter to adhere to the ancient faith, and believe that he was born at that strange old Bâle, in sight of that great Dance, the reproduction, or rather recreation, of which was to make so great a part of his fame,—especially as he was quite surely an inhabitant of the town at such tender years, that the veriest Know-Nothing in the place would not have deprived him of his citizenship.

Of Holbein's life we unfortunately know very little. He showed his talent early, as all the great painters have done. Conscious of his abilities, he devoted himself eagerly to the study of the profession to which his genius urged him. He learned not only painting, but engraving, the sculpture of metals, and architecture; and of all these, it will be remembered, Bâle offered him facilities for study, in examples which must have stimulated both his imagination and his ambition. He did not lack encouragement; for the nobles and burghers of Bâle had begun to acquire a taste for the arts, which their ruder fathers contemned; and they had, at this time, a university in their city, which made them acquainted with Cicero and the orators, of whom Aeneas Sylvius found them so ignorant.

But Holbein, although eminent and well employed, did not thrive. He had some Bâlois failings, and, as Aeneas Sylvius would have said, worshipped Father Bacchus and Dame Venus with too

much devotion;—not that he was a drunkard or a debauchee; but he sought in conviviality with men of talent, and in the company of beautiful women, too happy in the caresses of the great painter, who was generous with his florins, that happiness which he could not find at home. For poor Hans was afflicted with what has been the moral and social ruin of many a better, if not greater man than he—a froward, shrill-tongued wife. Luckily, however, the great scholar and philosopher, Erasmus, went into retirement at Bâle, in 1521; and he soon recognized the genius of Holbein, and became his admirer and friend. By his advice, and at the solicitation of an English nobleman, and, poor fellow, seeking refuge from the temper of his wife, whom even the sweet cares of maternity could not mollify, Holbein determined to leave Bâle for England. What was the great cause of Frau Holbein's tantrums,—whether Hans's ears were pierced with conjugal clamors, as poor Albert Dürer's, the other great German painter's, were, because he could not supply all his wife's demands for money, to enable her, perhaps, to exhibit herself at church on holy days in one of those precious pulpits, splendid in velvet and jewels, to the discomfiture of the other painters' wives,—we do not know; but whatever was the cause of her oft-recurring outbreaks, they made him not unwilling to put France and the English Channel between himself and her, his children, and the home of his childhood.

He gave out, at first, that his absence from Bâle would be temporary,—only for the purpose of raising the value of his

works, by making them more difficult to obtain. Before he went, he finished and sent home a portrait on which he was engaged. It was one of his best pictures; and the person for whom it was painted, lost for a while in admiration of its beauty, noticed at last that a fly, which had settled upon the forehead, remained there motionless. He stepped up to brush the insect away, and found that it was a part of the picture. This story has, since Holbein's time, been told of many painters,—among others, of Benjamin West. Such a piece of mere imitation should have added nothing to the reputation of a painter of Holbein's powers; but the story was soon told all over Bâle, and orders were given to prevent the loss to the city of so great an artist. But Holbein had quietly gone off, furnished with letters of introduction from Erasmus, who wrote in one of them that in Bâle the arts were chilled; which might well be true of a place where so much ado was made about the painting of a fly.

In England, Holbein found a friend and patron in Sir Thomas More,—Henry the Eighth's great Lord Chancellor; and a sight of some of his works won him, ere long, the favor of the King himself. He was appointed Court Painter, with apartments at the palace, and a yearly salary of two hundred florins, (or thirty pounds, equal to about two hundred pounds now,) which he received in addition to the price of his pictures. After about three years of prosperity he went home to his wife and children; but as he soon returned to England, we may safely conclude that his visit was to provide for the latter, and with no hope of living

with the former. Some years after, in 1538, when his fame was still increasing, the city of Bâle, proud of its son, offered him a handsome annuity, in the hope that that might induce him to return to his country, his children, and his wife. But he could not be tempted. Though not the wisest of men, he was Solomon enough to know that "it is better to dwell in a corner of the house-top than with a brawling woman and in a wide house"; and as he was successful and held in honor in England as well as Bâle, he contented himself with a corner of King Henry's palace.

But although he fled from his wife, he painted her portrait; and we need no testimony to warrant the likeness. She is the very type of one of those meek shrews, alternately a martyr and a fury, that drive a man to madness when they speak and to despair when they are silent. We might reasonably wonder that he would paint so vivid a representation of that which he so sedulously shunned. But poor Hans, who probably had some lingering remains of his early love, knew, that, although he should make a speaking likeness, it would be a silent one, and that this Frau Holbein must keep the look which he chose to summon to her face. That, indeed, was knowledge that was power! How he must have chuckled as he saw his wife looking at him more natural than life and yet without the power to worry him! His own portrait shows us a broad, good-natured, ruddy face, in which we see marks of talent when we know that it is Holbein's. But in spite of its strength, its bronze, and its beard, it has a somewhat sad and subdued air; and its heavy-lidded, pensive eyes look

deprecatingly at a Frau Holbein in the distance.

While he lived at Greenwich palace, an incident occurred which may not be known to all our readers, and which is a striking illustration of the esteem in which he was held by Henry. It is not a little to the honor of that monarch, who, arbitrary and sensual as he was, had some noble traits of character. One day, as Holbein was painting a lady's portrait in his private studio, a nobleman intruded upon him rudely. Holbein resented the discourtesy, and, as it was doggedly persisted in, finally threw my lord downstairs. There was an outcry; and the painter, bolting his door on the inside, escaped from his window along the eaves of the roof, and, making his way directly to the King, threw himself before him and begged a pardon, without telling his offence. Henry promised forgiveness on condition of a full confession, which the painter began. But meantime the nobleman arrived, and Henry, in deference to his rank, gave him precedence, and stepped into another apartment to hear his story. He accused Holbein of the violence, but suppressed the provocation; whereat Henry broke into a towering Tudor rage, and, after reproaching the nobleman for his prevarication, said, "You have to do with me, Sir. I tell you, that of seven peasants I could make seven earls like you; but of seven earls I could not make one Holbein. Do not molest him, if you value your head." And as second-hand heads, though plentiful about those days, were found to be of no value, even to the original owner, Holbein remained unmolested.

Holbein is known chiefly by his portraits. He painted some

historical and sacred pictures; but though they all bear witness to his genius, it can hardly be denied that they also show that that genius was not suited to such works. Holbein had an objective perception;—that is, his mind received impressions entirely uninfluenced by its own character or condition; and his pictures, therefore, seem like literal transcripts of what was before his eyes. He nowhere shows that he had an idea of abstract beauty, or the power of generalizing from individuals, or that he was at all discontented with the subjects which he painted; so that his works leave an impression of absolute faithfulness. But to suppose, therefore, that his portraits have merely the merit of reproducing the external facts of Nature, like photographs, would do him wrong; for he was faithful to expression as well as form, and has perpetuated upon his canvas the voluptuous sweetness of Anne Boleyn, the courtliness and manly grace of Wyatt, and the severity, the energy, and the penetrating judgment of Sir Thomas More. His portrait of the last is one of the greatest portraits ever painted. Some competent critics consider it the greatest. It is so real, so human, that we might be well content, if one in twenty of the actual men we meet were half as real and human; and it expresses, with equal strength and subtilty, the large and noble nature of the man. Holbein was a great colorist, and imitated all the rich and tender hues of Nature, in their delicate and almost imperceptible gradations, with a minute truthfulness which is quite marvellous.

This being the character of his mind, it would hardly be

supposed that he could produce such a work as the great Dance of Death, which has caused all others to be forgotten, except by antiquarians. For this Dance is the most remarkable embodiment in Art of that fantastic and grotesque idealism which has found its best expression in the works of German poets and painters; and the preëminence of Holbein's over all the other representations of the same subject consists in this,—that, while they are but a dull and formal succession of mere costumed figures seized by a corpse and shrinking away from its touch, Holbein's groups are instinct with life, character, and emotion. In particular is this true of the figure of Death, although it is a mere skeleton,—the face without a muscle, and for the eye but a rayless cavern. Death is not one whom "a limner would love to paint or a lady to look upon"; but Holbein has given a strange and fascinating interest to the figure, which in all other hands is merely repulsive. The grim monarch sat to a painter who not only added to the truthfulness of his portrait the charm of poetic feeling, but the magic touch of whose pencil made his dry bones live.

The insignificance of the material in which the painter worked, when compared with the effect which he produced, is also remarkable in this unique work of Art. For Holbein's Dance of Death is not, like the others, either a great fresco painting, or a series of sculptures; it is not a painting at all,—but merely a series of very small woodcuts, fifty-three in number, forty-six of which were published at Lyons in 1538, and the whole afterwards at Bâle in 1554, under the title, *Simulachres de la Mort, Icones*

Mortis: that is, in French and Latin, "Images of Death,"—for the title "Dance of Death" is of recent origin. The leaves on which the cuts are printed make but part of a little book not so large as a child's primer; but a copy of it is now worth ten times its weight in gold. It was copied and republished in numberless editions, as a popular book, merely for the sake of the subject, and the great lesson taught by it,—each print being accompanied by an admonitory stanza, and a quotation from the Bible. Beside these editions, endeavors have been made of later years to imitate it satisfactorily as a work of Art,—but in vain. Great as we think our advancement in the arts has been,—the mechanical part of them, at least,—all the efforts of the lithographer, the wood-cutter, and even the line-engraver, to reproduce the spirit or the very lines of this work, have been but partially successful. There is as much difference between the most carefully-executed and costliest copies and good impressions of the original wood-cuts, made three hundred years ago, and sold for a franc or two, as there is between pinchbeck and gold.

Any attempt to reproduce the effect of those groups in words can hardly fail to fall equally short of the mark; but we will tell our readers what they are, and endeavor to give some notion of their purpose and spirit.

The first shows the Creation of Woman;—we have seen before why she is made thus prominent in the Dance. The composition is crowded with the denizens of the earth, the air, and the water; the sun, the moon, and the stars all appear; the

four winds of heaven issue from the laboring cheeks of figures that impersonate them. The Creator, in the form of an aged man in royal robes, and wearing the imperial crown, lifts Eve bodily from the side of the sleeping Adam.

The second represents the Temptation. Eve reclines upon the ground, and shows Adam the fruit which she has plucked. Adam stands grasping the tree with his left hand, and raises his right to gather for himself. The serpent, who looks down upon Eve, has the face and body of a woman. The forms in this group are fine; Adam's is remarkable for its symmetry and grace; but Eve's face is ignoble. Indeed, Holbein, like Rembrandt, seems to have been incapable of an idea of female beauty.

In the third we see the Expulsion from Paradise; and here the Dance begins. Our guilty parents fly before the flaming sword,—poor Eve cowering, and her hair streaming in a wavy flood upon the wind; and before them, but unseen, Death leaps and curvets to the sound of a vielle or rote,—an old musical stringed instrument,—which he has hung about his neck. His glee, as he leads forth his victims into the valley where his shadow lies, is perceptible in every line of his angular anatomy; his very toes curl up like those of a baby in its merriment.

In the fourth, Adam has begun to till the ground. The pioneer of his race, he is uprooting a huge tree, all unconscious that another figure is laboring at his side. It is not Eve, who sits in the background with her first-born at her breast and her distaff by her side,—but Death, who, with a huge lever in his bony gripe,

goes at his work with a fierce energy which puts the efforts of his muscular companion to shame. The people of Holbein's day not only saw in this subject the beginning of that toil which is the lot of humankind, but, as they looked upon the common ancestors of all men, laboring for the means of life, they asked, in the words of an old distich,—

> "When Adam delved and Eve span,
> Where was then the gentleman?"

The fifth composition seems to represent a general rejoicing over the Triumph of Death. It shows a churchyard and porch filled with skeletons, who blow trumpets of all sorts and sizes; one beats frantically upon a pair of kettle-drums, and another, wearing a woman's nightcap, with a broad frill border, plays the hurdy-gurdy.

In the sixth, a Pope, the highest earthly potentate, is in the act of crowning an Emperor, who kneels to kiss his toe. But the successor of St. Peter does not see, as he sits upon his throne, giving authority and sanction to the ruler of an empire, that a skeleton leans from behind that throne, and grins in his face, and that another in a cardinal's hat mingles with the throng before him.

The seventh is one of the finest of the series. An Emperor is enthroned, with his courtiers round him. He is threatening one with his sword for some act of injustice from which a poor

peasant who kneels before him has suffered. But, unseen by all, a skeleton bestrides the shoulders of the monarch and lays his hand upon his very crown. There can be no doubt that Shakspeare had this subject in his mind when he wrote that fine passage in "King Richard the Second,"—

> "Within the hollow crown
> That rounds the mortal temples of a king
> Keeps Death his court; and there the antic sits,
> Scoffing his state and grinning at his pomp;
> Allowing him a breath, a little scene
> To monarchize, be feared, and kill with looks;
> Infusing him with self and vain conceit,
> As if this flesh which walls about our life
> Were brass impregnable; and humored thus,
> Comes at the last, and with a little pin
> Bores through his castle wall, and—farewell, King!"

In the eighth we see a King (it is unmistakably Francis I.) dining under a canopy, and served by a splendid retinue. He stretches out his hand to receive a wine-cup; for he does not see that Death is filling it.

A Cardinal appears in the ninth, selling an indulgence for a heavy bribe; and we all rejoice to see that Death has laid hands upon his hat,—the symbol of his rank,—and is about to tear it from his head.

In the tenth, an Empress, passing through her palace-yard,

attended by her ladies, is led by the favorite on whom she leans, and who she does not see is Death, into an open grave.

Death, in the next, has assumed the guise of a Court Fool, and has seized a Queen at the very gate of her palace. She recognizes him, and struggles, shrieking, to free herself from his grasp; but in vain. With a grin of fierce delight, he lifts up his hour-glass before her, and, in spite of her resistance and that of a gentleman who attends her, is about to bear her off. Every line of this composition is instinct with life.

In the twelfth, Death carries off a Bishop from his flock.

In the thirteenth, an Elector of the Empire, surrounded by his retinue, is approached by a poor woman, who begs his aid in behalf of herself and her child; he repulses her scornfully; for he does not see that Death, the avenger of the oppressed poor, and who is here crowned with oak-leaves, has laid his gripe upon him. Holbein has put such an expression of power into the arm and of wrath into the face of this skeleton, that we expect to see his victim haled off into the air before our very eyes.

The Abbot and the Abbess are the subjects of the next two cuts. In the former, Death has assumed the mitre and the crosier of his victim, and drags him off with such an expression of fun and burlesque pomp as we sometimes see in the face of a mischievous boy who mocks his betters. In the companion group his look is that of a demon; and with his head fantastically dressed, he drags the Abbess off by the scapulary which hangs from her neck.

A Nobleman and a Canon are his prey in the sixteenth and seventeenth groups. We lack space to describe any but the most remarkable with particularity.

The satire of the next three is levelled against the Lawyers, who were held in such little respect in Bâle. They show a Judge who takes a bribe from a rich to wrong a poor suitor, and a Counsellor and an Advocate who lend their talents to wealthy clients, but turn their backs upon the poor victims of "the oppressor's wrong." In one, a demon is blowing suggestions into the Counsellor's ear from a pair of bellows, which he has doubtless used elsewhere for other purposes; in all, Death stands ready to avenge the poor.

In the twenty-first, a Preacher addresses a Congregation, whose interested attention the painter has portrayed with great skill, knowledge of character, and consequent variety and truth of expression. Behind the Preacher stands Death, and, with a kind of grotesque practical pun, holds the jaw of a skeleton over his head, as far more eloquent than his own.

A Priest and a Mendicant Friar are the subjects of the twenty-second and twenty-third.

The twenty-fourth is of peculiar interest. In it we see a youthful Nun, who, it is clear, has taken her vows too hastily, kneeling before the oratory in her cell. But her heart is not in her devotions; for the lover whom she abandoned has made his way into the apartment, and sits on her bed singing to his lute. Her hands are clasped, not in prayer, but in an agony of love and

apprehension. She turns from the crucifix to gaze at him; and we see how the interview will end: for an aged female attendant, in coif and scapulary, leans over to extinguish the candles. We see, too, what its consequence will be; for that attendant is Death.

Among the remaining subjects, which we cannot examine particularly, or in their order, are those of the Old Man and Old Woman led by Death, each to the sound of a dulcimer;—the Physician, to whom in mockery Death himself brings a patient;—the Astronomer, to whom the skeleton offers a skull in place of a celestial globe;—the Miser, from whom Death snatches his hoarded gold; and the Merchant, whom the same inexorable hand tears away from his ships and his merchandise;—the storm-tossed ship, with Death snapping the mast;—a Count, dressed in the extreme of courtly splendor, who recognizes Death in the disguise of a peasant who has flung down his flail to seize his lordship's emblazoned shield and dash it to pieces;—a Duchess, whom one skeleton drags rudely from her canopied bed, while another scrapes upon a violin;—a Peddler;—a Ploughman, of whose four-horse team Death is the driver;—Gamblers, Drunkards, and Robbers, all interrupted in their wickedness by Death;—a Wagoner, whose wagon, horse, and load have been tumbled in a ruinous heap by a pair of skeletons;—a Blind Beggar, who stumbles over a stony path after Death, who is his deceitful leader, and who turns back with a look of malicious glee to see his bewilderment and suffering;—and a Court Fool, whom Death, playing on bagpipes, and dancing,

approaches, and, plucking him by the garment, wins him, with a coaxing leer, to join his pastime.

A few others claim our more particular attention. Among them is a Knight, armed cap-a-pie, who is run through and through, from back to front, by Death, himself half armed in mockery. There is a concentrated vigor in the thrust of the lance, and a cool venom in the countenance of the assailant, that we may seek in vain in the works of famous battle-painters; and it must always be remembered that Holbein's figure is entirely without those indications of muscular movement by which we express our feelings,—in fact, a mere bare-boned skeleton.

A Bride at her wedding-toilet, whom Holbein has contrived to make almost beautiful, receives a robe from one attendant; another clasps round her neck a collar—of gold and jewels? No, —of bones, and with bony fingers. And the next cut to this shows us the Bridegroom and Bride walking through an apartment hung with arras, while before them dances Death, beating a tabor, like a child beside himself with joy.

One of the finest and most touching conceptions in the whole series represents a dilapidated Cottage,—a mere shanty, so wretched that the love of those who live in it is all their happiness,—nay, all their comfort. The mother is preparing for two little children the simplest and poorest of meals, at a fire made of a few small sticks. She finds consolation in the very pranks that hinder her humble task. Death enters,—there is no door to keep him out,—and, seizing the hand of the younger

child, who turns and stretches out the other imploringly to his mother, carries him off, remorseless and exulting, leaving her frantic with grief. We may look with comparative indifference, and sometimes even with sympathy, upon his other feats,—but who is there that does not hate that grinning skeleton?—And yet, perhaps, he exults that he has saved one soul, yet pure, from misery and crime.

For vigor of movement the group of Death and the Soldier is preëminent. The field is covered with the wounded and the slain, in the midst of which the soldier encounters his last enemy. The man is armed in panoply, and wields a huge two-handed sword with a vigor unabated by former struggles. Death has caught a shield from the arm of some previous victim; but his only offensive weapon is a huge thigh-bone, which we plainly see will bear down all before it. In the distance another figure of Death flies madly over the hills, beating a drum which summons other soldiers to the field. It is impossible to convey in words the fierce eagerness of this figure, minute as it is, and composed of a few lines.

The forty-seventh composition is one which has puzzled the critics and antiquaries; but it is not easy to conjecture why. It shows us a wretched Beggar, naked, sick, lame,—utterly destitute, miserable, and forsaken,—suffering at once all the ills that flesh is heir to. He sits huddled together on some straw, near a large building, and lifts his hands and face up piteously to heaven. Death is not there; and the antiquaries ask in wonder,

Why is the subject introduced? Why, but to show that to him alone who would gladly welcome Death, Death will not come?

The work ends, as a connected series, with the Last Judgment, where Christ, who conquered Death, appears seated on the bow of promise,—with his feet resting on a celestial sphere, attended by angels, and showing to a throng of those who have risen from the grave the wounds by which he redeemed them from its power.

To this is added an ornamental tail-piece called Death's Arms. It shows a skull in a battered shield, which has for a crest a regal helmet surmounted by an hour-glass and two bony arms grasping a stone. The supporters to the shield are a gentleman and lady richly dressed,—said to represent Holbein and his wife.

It is not known, positively, when Holbein drew these designs upon the blocks (for of course he did not engrave them); and it has even been disputed by one or two eminent antiquarian critics, that he designed them at all. But there does not appear to be a single valid reason for thus diminishing his fame. He probably was engaged on them between 1531, the date of his first return to Bâle, and 1538, when they were published,—the year in which he refused the solicitation of his townsmen to return to the home of his childhood and the bosom of his family.

Holbein continued to live in London until the year 1554, when that city suffered a visitation of the plague, similar to that which was the occasion of the painting of the Great Dance of Death at Bâle. Holbein was struck by the disease; and Death, knowing gratitude as little as remorse, triumphed over him who

had blazoned his triumphs. Upon the painter's fame, however, and that of his great work, Death could not lay his hand; but so long as the grim tyrant shall claim his victims, so long will he perpetuate the memory of Hans Holbein.

Though he was a royal favorite, it is not known where he died; and the place where lie the ashes of him who, on a king's word, was greater than seven earls, is equally unknown; there is not a line or a stone to mark it. So soon after his death as in the reign of Charles I., (within one hundred years,) a nobleman—noble by nature as well as by birth—desirous of erecting a monument to him, sought his grave, but in vain, and was compelled to abandon his design. And thus was Holbein driven to live among strangers, to die without a wife to console or children to mourn him, and to lay his bones in a nameless grave in a foreign land.

Such is an imperfect and brief account of the origin, the various forms, and the meaning of the Dance of Death, and of the life and character of him whose genius has caused it to be called by his name. It may smell too much of mortality and antiquity for this fast-living and forward-looking age; for it is not only a monument of the past, but an exponent of its spirit. We can look back at it, through the mellowing mist of centuries, with curiosity not unmixed with admiration; but we should turn with aversion from such a work, coming from the hands of an artist of our own day. We think, and with some reason, that we do not need its teachings; for we are freed from the thraldom that gave edge to its democratic satire; and we have learned to look with

greater calmness, if not with higher hope, upon the future, to which the grave is but the ever-open portal. But we may yet profit by a thoughtful consideration of the eternal truths embodied by Holbein in his Dance of Death; and in the story of his life there is a lesson for every man, and every woman too, if they will but find it.

LIZZY GRISWOLD'S THANKSGIVING

"So John a'n't a-comin', Miss Gris'ld," squeaked Polly Mariner, entering the great kitchen, where Mrs. Griswold was paring apples and Lizzy straining squash.

"Isn't he?" quietly replied the lady addressed, as the tailoress sat down in the flag-bottomed rocking-chair, and began rocking vehemently, all the time eyeing Lizzy from the depths of her poke-bonnet with patient scrutiny.

"No, he a'n't,—so Mr. Gris'ld says," went on Polly. "You see, I was a-comin' up here from the Centre, so's to see if Sam couldn't wait for his roundabout till arter Thanksgivin'; for Keziah Perkins, she 't was my sister's husband's fust wife's darter, 'n' finally married sister's fust husband's son, she's a real likely woman, and she's wrote over from Taunton to ask me to go there to Thanksgivin'; 'n' to-day's Monday; 'n' I was a-comin' here Tuesday so's to make Sam's roundabout; 'n' yesterday Miss Luken's boy Simon, he 't a'n't but three year old, he got my press-board, when he was a-crawlin' round, 'n' laid it right onto the cookin'-stove, and fust thing Miss Lukens know'd it blazed right up, 'n' I can't get another fixed afore Wednesday, and then I'd ought to be to Taunton, 'cause there a'n't no stage runs Thursday, and there hadn't oughter, of course"–

"We have got a press-board," said Mrs. Griswold, quietly.

"Yes, and I a'n't goin' to grandfather's in my old jacket, Miss Poll," interposed Sam, one of the "terrible" children who are scattered here and there through this world. "Catch me where all the folks are, in that old butternut suit!" added Sam.

But here his father stepped in at the door,—a fine, sturdy, handsome farmer, one of New England's model men, whose honesty was a proverb, and whose goodness a reliance to every creature in Greenfield.

"John isn't coming, wife," said Mr. Griswold, in a steady, sober tone. "He says business will delay him, so that he can only get to Coventry just as we do."

"So you had a letter," said Mrs. Griswold, carefully avoiding a look at Lizzy.

"Yes," said Mr. Griswold, in a very abrupt way.—"Are you ready to go back, Miss Polly? for I've got to go down to the Centre again with a load of wheat."

"Well, yes, I don't know but I be. I ken stay over, if you want help, Miss Gris'ld. I'm a-goin' to the minister's to help Miss Fletcher a little mite this afternoon, but I guess she don't lot on it none; 'n' seein' it's you, I ken stay, if you want help."

Lizzy looked quickly across the kitchen at her mother.

"Oh! no, thank you, Miss Polly, I know Mrs. Fletcher would feel very badly to lose your help, and I really don't need it until to-morrow."

"Then I'll come round to the door as quick as I've loaded up," said Mr. Griswold; and Miss Polly settled back in her

chair to wait comfortably; a process much intensified by a large piece of Mrs. Griswold's gingerbread and a glass of new cider, both brought her by Lizzy's hospitable hands,—readier even than usual just now, in the vain hope of stopping Polly Mariner's clattering tongue. But neither gingerbread nor cider was a specific to that end: Polly talked while she ate, and ate while she talked. But while she finishes her luncheon, let us make known to the patient reader whom and what the tailoress discusses.

John Boynton was a step-cousin of Lizzy Griswold's. Her youngest aunt had married a widower, with one son, some five years older than Lizzy, and had always lived in the old homestead at Coventry, with her father; while the other daughters and sons, six in number, were scattered over the State, returning once a year, at Thanksgiving, to visit their birthplace, and bring their children into acquaintance with each other. Eben Griswold, who lived at Greenfield, was nearer home than any of the others, and Lizzy, consequently, oftener at her grandfather's house than her cousins. She and John Boynton were playmates from childhood, and it was not strange that John, who had never known a pleasure unshared by Lizzy, or suffered a pain without her consolation, should grow up in the idea that he could not possibly live without her, an idea also entertained half-consciously by Miss Lizzy, though neither of them ever yet had expressed it; for John was poor, and had no home to offer any woman, much less the petted child of a rich farmer. So Mr. Boynton, Jr., left home

to teach school in Roxbury, five years before the date of our story, without making any confidences on the subject of his hopes and fears to Miss Griswold; and she knit him stockings and hemmed pocket-handkerchiefs for him with the most cold-blooded perseverance, and nobody but the yarn and the needles knew whether she dropped any tears on them or not.

Now it had always been John Boynton's custom to give his school Thanksgiving-week as a vacation,—to take the train on Monday for Greenfield, and stay there till Wednesday, when the whole family set off together for Coventry, to spend the next day, according to time-honored precedent.

Whatever John and Lizzy did in those two dull November days, it never has been made known to the present chronicler; it is only understood that no point-blank love-making went on; yet the days always ran away, instead of creeping; and neither of the twain could believe it was Wednesday when Wednesday came. But this year those forty-eight hours were destined to drag past, for John wasn't coming; why, we shall discover,—for Polly Mariner has finished the cider, and the gingerbread is as much subject of inquiry as "The Indians,—where are they?"

"So John Boynton a'n't a-comin'? Well! Hetty Maria Clapp's jest got home from Bunkertown, that's tew mile from Roxbury, 'n' she told Miss Lucas that Miss Perrit, whose sister's son keeps a grocer's store to Roxbury, told that Mr. Boynton, their teacher to the 'Cademy, was waitin' on Miss Roxany Sharp's cousin, a dreadful pretty gal, who'd come down from Boston to see

Roxany, an' liked it so well she staid to Roxbury all through October. I do'no's I should ha' remembered it, only 't I hed the dredfullest jumpin' toothache that ever you did, 'n' Miss Lucas, she'd jest come in to our house, an' she run an' got the lodlum an' was a-puttin' some on't onto some cotton so's to plug the hole, while she was tellin'; 'n' I remember I forgot all about the jumpin' while 't she was talkin', so I ses, ses I, 'Miss Lucas, I guess your talkin's as good as lodlum'; 'n' she bu'st out larfin', 'n' ses she, 'Polly Mariner, I declare for't, you do beat all!' 'Well,' ses I, 'I'd die content, ef I could beat John Boynton; fur ef ever I see a feller payin' attention to a gal, he's been payin' on't to Lizzy Gris'ld this four year; and 'ta'n't no wonder 't I think hard on't, for there never was a prettier-behaved gal than her on Greenfield Hill'; an' I ses"–

Lizzy was on the point of "freeing her mind" just at this juncture, when Mrs. Griswold interposed her quiet voice,—

"Don't trouble yourself to defend Lizzy, Miss Mariner; you know John Boynton is her cousin, and he has been here a good deal. Folks will talk, I suppose, always; but if John Boynton marries well, I don't think anybody 'll be more forward to shake hands with him than our Lizzy."

"Of course I shall," said the young lady, with a most indignant toss of her head. "Pray, keep your pity, Miss Polly, for somebody else. I don't need it."

"H'm," sniffed the sagacious Polly. "Well, I didn't suppose you'd allow 't you felt put out about it; and I wouldn't, if I was

you. Besides, there's as good fish in the sea as–I declare for 't! there's Mr. Gris'ld! I'll come round early to-morrer. Good-day, all on ye!"

So Polly departed.

"I don't care, if he is!" said Lizzy, flinging herself down on the settle, when the door closed behind Polly's blue cloak.

Mrs. Griswold said nothing, but Sam looked up from his whittling, and coolly remarked,—

"It looks as if you did, though!"

"Sam!" said his mother, with—emphasis.

Sam whistled, and, with his hands in his pockets, having shut his jack-knife with a click, and kicked his shavings into the fire, muttered something about feeding the pigs, and beat an ignominious retreat,—snubbed, as the race of Adam daily are, and daily will be, let us hope, for telling "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth."

For Lizzy certainly did look as if she cared. A pretty enough picture she made, too, flung down on the old black settle, one well-shaped hand pinching the arm as if it had been—John Boynton's!—the other as vigorously clenched on a harmless check-apron that showed no disposition to get away; her bright red lips trembling a little, and her gray eyes suspiciously shiny about the lashes, while her soft black hair had fallen from part of its restraints on to the gay calico dress she wore, and her foot beat time to some quick step that she didn't sing!

Mrs. Griswold did not care for the picturesque, just then;

she cared much more for Lizzy, and her acute feminine instinct helped her to the right word.

"I don't believe it, dear!" said she; "you'd better finish straining that squash, or Widow Peters won't have her pies for Thursday."

Lizzy went to work,—work is a grand panacea, even for sentimental troubles,—and in doing battle with the obstinate squash,—which was not as well cooked as it might have been,—Lizzy, for the moment, looked quite bright, and forgot John, till her father came in to dinner.

Somebody once said that Mrs. Griswold was "a lesser Providence," and Lizzy thought so now; for scarce were they all seated at dinner, when she remarked, in a very unconcerned and natural way,—

"What keeps John in Roxbury so long, father?"

"He has business in Boston," curtly answered Mr. Griswold. —"Sam, did you go over to the Corners, yesterday, about those sheep?"

Sam answered, and the conversation went on, but John's name did not enter it, nor did Mr. Griswold offer to show his letter either to mother or Lizzy.

Now the latter lady, not being a perfect woman, had sundry small faults; she was proud, after a certain fashion of her own; slightly sentimental, which is rather a failing than a fault; but her worst trait was a brooding, fault-seeing, persevering tact at making herself miserable, scarce ever equalled. The smallest bit of vantage-ground was enough for a start, and on that foundation

Lizzy took but a few hours of suspicion and imagination to build up a whole Castle Doubting. The cause she had to-day was even greater than was necessary; it was peculiar that her father should be so reserved; it was more strange that he so perseveringly withheld John's letter; and certainly he watched Lizzy at her work with unusually tender eyes, that sometimes filled with a sort of mist. All these things heaped up evidence for the poor girl; she brooded over each separate item all night, and added to the sum Polly Mariner's gossip, and looked forward to the day when everybody in Greenfield should say, "Lizzy Griswold's had a disapp'intment of John Boynton!" Poor, dear, Lizzy! as if that were an unheard-of pang! as if nine-tenths of her accusers were not "disapp'inted" themselves,—some before, some after marriage,—some in themselves, some in their children, some in their wretched, dreary lives! But there was only one John and only one heart-break present to her vision.

Polly Mariner came to breakfast next day, and pervaded the kitchen like a daily paper. Horrible murders, barn-burnings, failures, deaths, births, marriages, separations, lawsuits, slanders, and petty larcenies outran each other in her glib speech, and her fingers flew as fast on Sam's blue jacket as her tongue clappered above it.

Lizzy's pride kept her up before the old woman; she was in and out and everywhere, a pretty spot of crimson on either fair cheek, her eyes as sparkling and her step as light as any belle's in a ballroom, and her whole manner so gay and charming that Polly

inwardly pronounced John Boynton a mighty fool, if he dodged such a pretty girl as that, and one with "means."

But night came, and Polly went. Lizzy went to bed with a bad headache,—convenient synonyme for aches of soul or body that one does not care to christen! Sleep she certainly did that night, for she dreamed John was married to a rich Boston girl with red hair and a yellow flannel dress, and that Polly Mariner was bridesmaid in the peculiar costume of a blue roundabout and pantaloons! But sleep with such dreams was scarcely a restorer; and Wednesday morning, when Mrs. Griswold asked Lizzy if she had put up her carpet-bag to go to Coventry, she received for answer a flood of tears, and a very earnest petition to be left at home.

"Leave you, Lizzy! Why, grandfather couldn't have Thanksgiving without you! And Uncle Boynton! And Aunt Lizzy is coming up from Stonington with the new baby;—and—John, too! You must go, Lizzy, dear!"

"I can't, mother! I can't!" said the poor girl, sobbing after every word; "please don't ask me. I can't! I've got a headache; oh, dear!" Here a fresh burst of tears followed, as Lizzy buried her head in her mother's lap.

Mrs. Griswold was both grieved and astonished; she sat speechless, stroking the soft hair that swept over her knee, till Lizzy's sobs quieted, and then said,—

"Well, dear, if you're set on staying at home, I won't oppose it, if your father thinks best; but I must ask him; only what will

you do, Lizzy, here alone all night?"

"Chloe and Peter will be here, mother; and I'll make Chloe sleep in Sam's room, and leave the door open; and when they go down to Dinah's, I'll lock up, and I shan't feel afraid in broad day."

Mrs. Griswold shook her head doubtfully.

"I'll see what father says," said she. So Lizzy lifted her head, and smoothed her hair, while her mother went out to the barn to consult "father."

Here she was, if anything, more puzzled. Mr. Griswold heard the proposal with a rather misty look, as if he didn't see why, and when his wife finished, said, gravely,—

"What is it, Susan? Anybody 't has lived as long as I have knows pretty well that a woman's headache stands for a whole dictionary."

"Why, you see," said Mrs. Griswold, twisting a little lock of hay in her fingers, and faintly blushing, as if the question had been of herself rather than Lizzy, "she—well, the fact is, husband, she's kind of riled about John's not coming; you see we haven't been real particular about the children, and so"–

"You needn't spell it, Susan," said Mr. Griswold, with a half smile; "Polly Mariner's tongue helped on, I guess. You let Lizzy stay, if she wants to; 'twon't hurt her; when folks want to sulk, I generally let 'em. She can stay."

He began to whistle "Yankee Doodle" and pitch hay energetically, while "Susan" was within hearing; but how would

that dear woman's soul have floundered deeper and deeper in the fog that clouded it now, had she seen her grave husband sit down on one end of the hay-mow and laugh till the tears stood in his keen eyes, and then, drawing his coat-sleeve across the shaggy lashes, say to himself, "Poor child!" and begin his work with fresh strength!

So matters were all arranged. After dinner, the rusty, dusty, old carriage appeared at the door, with the farm-horses harnessed thereto, jingling, and creaking, and snapping, as if oil and use were strange to its dry joints and stiff straps. Mrs. Griswold mounted to the back seat, after kissing Lizzy with hearty regret and tenderness,—her old gray pelisse and green winter bonnet harmonizing with the useful age of her conveyance. "Father," in a sturdy great-coat and buckskin mittens, took the reins; and Sam, whose blue jacket was at that moment crushing his mother's Sunday cap in a bandbox that sat where Lizzy should have been, clambered over the front wheel, to the great detriment of the despised butternut suit, and, seizing the whip, applied it so suddenly to Tom and Jerry that they started off down the Coventry road at a pace that threatened a solution of continuity to bones and sinews, as well as wood and leather.

Lizzy turned away sadly from the door. Who can say that just at that minute she did not wish she had gone, too? But nobody heard her say so. She went up-stairs to her room, and tried to read, but couldn't attach any ideas to the words; she was half an hour over a page of a very good book, and then flung it

upon the bed with an expression of disgust, as if it were the book's fault. Poor authors! toil your fingers off, and spin your brains out! be as wise as Solomon, or witty as Sheridan! your work is vanity and vexation of spirit, unless the reader's brain choose to receive and vivify the hieroglyphs of your ideas; think yourselves successful because a great man praises you, and to-morrow that man is twisted with dyspepsia, or some woman passes him without a smile, and your sparkling sketch, your pathetic poem are declared trash! Such is fame! Of which little homily the moral is,—Write for money! What a thing it is to be worldly-wise! So was not Lizzy; if she had been, she would now be at Coventry, kissed and caressed by grandfather, aunts, uncles, cousins, and–But we won't anticipate.

Lizzy flung down the book, and went to her closet for another; but it was as good (or as bad) as Bluebeard's closet, for there hung the pretty crimson merino, with delicate lace at the throat and round the short sleeves, in which Miss Lizzy Griswold once intended to electrify Mr. John Boynton this very evening. True it is that short sleeves are not the most sensible things for November; but Lizzy was twenty, and had such round, white arms, that she liked to wear short sleeves, as any girl would; and who is going to blame her? Not I! A girl doesn't know her privileges who was never just a little vain,—just a little glad to be pretty when John is by. Lizzy looked at the crimson merino, and at the smart slippers on the door with a shining black bow on each instep. There, too, on a little low table, was a green box;

somebody had left it open,—mother, perhaps,—so she saw on its cotton bed a red coral bracelet, that came from Roxbury, or thereabout, last year at this time. Lizzy shut up the box, and went down-stairs to get tea.

Chloe was indignant to think "Miss 'Lisbeth" thought she couldn't get supper without help, and Miss 'Lisbeth was vexed with Chloe for being cross. And then, when supper came, the tea seemed to be very unwilling to be swallowed, and the new bread was full of large lumps that choked a person, and the lamps didn't burn clearly at all,—and—and—when Chloe, still sulky, had cleared the table, Lizzy sat down on a low cricket beside her mother's stuffed rocking-chair, and had as good a cry as ever she had in her life, and felt much better for it.

So she sat there, with her head on the arm of the chair, rather tired with the cry, rather downhearted for want of the supper she hadn't eaten, and making pictures in the fire, when all of a sudden it came into her head to wonder what they were doing at Coventry. There was grandfather, no doubt, in the keeping-room, telling his never-tiring stories of Little Robby, and Old Bose, and the Babes in the Wood; of singing the ever-new ditty of

"Did you ever, ever, ever, ever, ever, ever, ever,"—

and so on, *ad infinitum*, till you got to—

"See a man eat a whale?"

to some half dozen children; while sweet Aunt Lizzy, serenely smiling, rocked the fair little baby that fifteen cousins had kissed for welcome that day; and Uncle Boynton trotted the baby's

brother on his knee, inviting him persistently to go to Boston and buy a penny-cake, greatly to little Eben's aggravation, who would end, Lizzy knew, by crying for the cake, and being sent to bed. Then there were Sam, and Lucy Peters, and Jim Boynton, up to all sorts of mischief in the kitchen,—Susan Boynton and Nelly James cracking nuts and their fingers on the hearth,—father and mother up-stairs in grandmother's room; for grandmother was bedridden, but kindly, and good, and humorous, and patient, even in her hopeless bed, and nobody was dearer to the whole family than she. Then, of course, there was a fire in the best parlor, and there were all the older cousins, telling conundrums and stories, and playing grown-up games, and some two, or four, may-be, looking out in couples at the moonshine, from behind the curtains,—Sue James, perhaps, and John. Sue was so pretty!

Lizzy's head bent lower on the arm of the chair; her thoughts travelled back over a great many Thanksgivings,—years ago, when she wore short frocks, and used to go with John to see the turkeys fed, and be so scared when they gobbled and strutted with rage at her scarlet bombazette;—how they used to pick up frozen apples and thaw them in the dish-kettle; how she pounded her thumb, cracking butternuts with a flat-iron, and John kissed it to make it well,—only it didn't! And then how they slid down-hill before church, and sat a long two hours thereafter in the square pew, smelling of "meetin'-seed," and dinted with the kicks of weary boys in new boots; and finally, after the first anthem and the two hymns and the three prayers and the long sermon were

over, came home to dinner, where the children had their own table at the end of the grown people's board, and Lizzy always took the head and John the foot,—till, exhausted by the good things they had eaten, and tantalized by the good things they couldn't eat, they crept away to the fire and their picture-books for a quiet hour, winding up the day with all the plays that country and city children alike delight in.

Then came recollections of later days, when John was a young man, and Lizzy still a little girl,—when long talks banished turkeys and apples and sliding,—when new books or sleigh-rides crowded out the old games,—when the two days of John's yearly visit were half-spent in the leafless, sunny woods, gathering mosses and acorn-cups, delicate fern leaves, and clusters of fire-moss, and red winter-green berries, for the pretty frames and baskets Lizzy's skilful fingers fabricated,—when he shook hands at coming and going, instead of kissing her;—but it seemed just the same, somehow. Dear me! those days were all gone! John didn't care about her any more! he was in love with a beautiful Boston lady. Why should he care about a homely little country cousin? He would go to live in Boston in a great big house, and he'd be a great man, and people would talk about him, and she should see his name in the papers, but he never would come to Coventry any more! And he'd acted as if he did love her, too!—that was men's way,—heartless things! If John had a good time, what did he care if Lizzy did grow into a gray-haired, puckered-up old maid, like Miss Case, with nobody to love her, or take care

of her, or ask about her, or—or—kiss her?—The climax was too much for Lizzy; great big tears ran down on the arm of the stuffed chair, and she would have sobbed out loud, only Chloe opened the door, to put up the tea-things, I suppose, and Lizzy wouldn't cry before her. But, for all that, she didn't hear Chloe come to the fireplace; she only felt her sit down in the big chair, and, simultaneously, a pair of strong arms lifted Miss Lizzy on to John Boynton's knee, and held her there. It wasn't Chloe.

I declare, one gets out of patience with these men! they do astonish a person so sometimes, one doesn't know what to do or say. Lizzy had been thinking to herself, not two minutes ago, with what cool and smiling reserve she should meet John Boynton, how dignified and kindly distant she would be to him,—and now,—well! it was so sudden,—and then, as I said before, these men do get round one so,—if you happen to love them.—Lizzy forgot, I suppose; at any rate, she wasn't dignified, or reserved, or proper, or anything of the kind, for she just hid her pretty head on his square shoulder, and said, "Oh, John!"—"slowly, and nothing more,"—as Mr. Tennyson remarks about cutting Iphigenia's head off with a sharp knife.

I don't know that John talked much, either. I rather think Lizzy got over the climax that had troubled her a little while ago. Presently, she raised her head and gathered up her hair that had fallen down, and became painfully aware that she had on only a blue calico! John never knew it; he knew somebody had a very sweet face, full of cloudy blushes and sunshiny smiles, and, not

being a Pre-Raphaelite, the foreground was of no consequence to him.

So, after a time, Lizzy slipped down to her cricket again, still leaning on the arm—of the chair,—and John expounded to her the excellent reason that had delayed his coming home. He had been offered a large salary to take the head of a public school in Boston, and those two days had been devoted to arranging the affair; he had satisfied the school-committee as to his capacity, and made up his mind on several points of minor importance to them,—but, perhaps, greater to him. Among others, he had found a house, a tiny house, with a little yard behind, and a view of Boston Harbor from the upper windows, all at a reasonable rent, prospect thrown in; this house he had hired, and now—he had come to Greenfield for a housekeeper.

Lizzy suddenly discovered that she was hungry, and invited John into the kitchen to get a piece of pie; but, after all, instead of eating hers while he was eating his, she went up-stairs, brushed out her hair and coiled it up with a coral-topped comb, that came to light, very strangely, just in time,—put on her merino frock, her bracelet, and her slippers,—rolled herself up in shawls and hoods and mittens, and was lifted into John's buggy, to old Chloe's great delight, who held the lamp, grinning like a lantern herself, and tucking "Mr. John's" fox-skin round his feet, as if he had been ten years old.

So Lizzy Griswold did get to Coventry the night before Thanksgiving, after all; and when Uncle Boynton met her at the

door, he called her "my dear daughter." Perhaps, as John had told Lizzy, on the drive over, that her father had heard all about his business and his intentions, in that letter she did not see, the young lady had decided to disinherit him, and adopt Uncle Boynton in his place; rather an unfair proceeding, it is true, since the letter was withheld by John's special request; and, indeed, Lizzy didn't act like a "cruel parient" to her father, when he came, after uncle, to give her a welcome.

They had a merry time at Coventry that Thanksgiving,—even merrier than another smaller assemblage, that took place at Greenfield about Christmas, when Polly Mariner came over a week before-hand to make Sam a new suit throughout, and Lizzy looked prettier than anybody ever did before, in a fresh white dress, and a white rose, off grandmother's tea-rose-bush, in her hair. It is on record, that she behaved no better than she did that evening when somebody found her crying in a blue calico; for Sam was overheard to say, as Polly hustled him off to bed, that, "if ever he was married, he guessed they wouldn't catch him makin' a fool of himself by kissin' a girl right before the minister! —if he'd have been Lizzy, John Boynton's ears would have sung for one while; but girls *were* fools!"

So John Boynton got a housekeeper; and Lizzy had more than one Thanksgiving-day in her life, beside the Governor's appointments.

* * * * *

ACHMED AND HIS MARE

An old Arabian tale the truth conveys,
That, honor's passion avarice outweighs.

* * * * *

Brave Achmed owned a mare of wondrous speed;
He prized her much above his wife or creed.

And lest some one should steal that precious mare,
He guarded her with unremitting care.

He tied her every night before his tent;
The fastening-cord then round his pillow went.

When all in slumber lay, the robber crept,
Unloosed the cord, and on the courser leapt.

"Wake up!" he cries,—"'tis I, the thief, who call;

See now if she in flight is chief of all!"

Mount Achmed and his tribe in wrath and shame,
And chase him as a tempest chases flame.

Hot Achmed nearly to the robber came,
When thus he thought: "My mare will lose her fame.

"If I o'ertake her, she is then outrun;
But if I reach her not, I am undone.

"Oh, better she were stolen before my face
Than have her vanquished in this desperate race!"

One secret sign his mare was taught to heed,
Whenever she must try her utmost speed.

He to the robber screamed, "Quick, pinch her ear!"
The sign she felt with answering love and fear.

As like a level thunderbolt she flew,
All chase was vain, the vexed pursuers knew.

Before this self-betrayal blank surprise
Fills Achmed's comrades, and their wondering cries

Demand, "How shall thy foolish act be named?"—
"My mare is lost, her glory is not shamed."

He says: "I knew, that, if her ear he nipped,
The darling prize could never be outstripped."

CHARLES LAMB AND SYDNEY SMITH

There were in Great Britain, soon after the commencement of the present century, three remarkable groups of young men. Distinct schools of thought, like the philosophic schools of Greece, each of the groups was marked by peculiar ideas, tastes, and sympathies. The French Revolution, with its menace of fundamental changes, clashing with sentiments and convictions which ages had rendered habitual and dear, called for an inquiry into great principles and the grounds of things. The Napoleonic age had the terrific formlessness of chaos. Did it premonish the passing away of old things, and herald the birth of a new order and a new social state? or did the trouble spring from innate madness in the "younger strengths" which were trying to overthrow the world's kingdoms? Should venerable Royalty, after howling in the wilderness and storm, be again enthroned? or should men attempt to realize the fair ideals which the word Republic suggested? Should religion be supplanted? should Protestantism be confirmed? or should, perchance, the crosier of the Old Church be again waved over Europe? These were the questions that were mooted, and they aroused unwonted activity and vigor of thought as well in literature as in politics.

The old century left in England few celebrated names to take part in the literature of the new. The men who made the poems,

romances, dramas, reviews, and criticisms for the first quarter of our century had almost all been in youth contemporaries of the Reign of Terror, and had been tried in that unparalleled period as by a fiery furnace, while their opinions were in a formative state. Crabbe and Rogers were traditions of the time of Goldsmith and Johnson; Gilford wrote with a virulence and ability which he might have learned in boyhood from Junius; but with these exceptions, English literature fifty years ago was represented by young men.

We mention, as the first group of young thinkers, the founders of the "Edinburgh Review,"—Sydney Smith, Francis Jeffrey, Francis Horner, and Henry Brougham,—whose united ages, when the first number of that review appeared in 1802, made one hundred and seven years. Members of the Whig party, possessing much learning and more vivacity and earnestness, and having among them, if not severally, abundance both of daring and prudence, they startled conservative people, evoked the best efforts of authors by their brilliant castigations, and inaugurated the discussion of measures of reform which it took thirty years to get through Parliament. The critic of the company was Francis Jeffrey, whose happiness it was to live just when he was needed. Without capacity to excel either in the realm of ideas or of facts, he was unrivalled in the power of discovering the relations between the two. He was neither a statesman, philosopher, nor poet; but while the heavens and the earth threatened to rush in confusion together, he was an admirable *cicerone* to the troubled

and wandering wits of men. He had no inherent qualities, and, if other people had not existed, would not have been alive himself; his faculty was simply an eye for relations, and his mental life began when some one threw a series of thoughts across his line of vision. He could tell all about those thoughts, —how large each was, what complexion they had, how they stood in order with each other, and how they compared with other thoughts which he remembered having seen before. Such a mind might have achieved success among the technicalities of the law, but nowhere else, had not the "Edinburgh Review" been created. Jeffrey's critical articles have little value when regarded according to their aim and as integral compositions; the arguments which they contain are often insufficient, and the literary judgments wrong. But they are full of the scattered elements of thought. Many of the best ideas of the books and men of which they treat are stated in them with admirable clearness and piquancy, and they are, therefore, pleasant secondary sources of information.

Francis Horner died of consumption in Italy before he was forty years of age, and there is nothing of surpassing brilliancy or power in any of his writings. Yet he made a most extraordinary impression upon his contemporaries. His name is never mentioned by his associates except with unusual respect. Brougham, when he alludes to him, even in a letter, seems to check his pen into soberness, and to be as cautious as if he were speaking on a religious subject. Search through the published

correspondence of Jeffrey, Sydney Smith, and Mackintosh, and Horner is found uniformly mentioned, not with peculiar affection or kindness, not with any intention of doing him honor, but as a man whose qualities were quite superior to those of other men, and whose destiny it was to be the first statesman of his country. Lord Cockburn, who was a schoolmate of Horner, relates that the latter was at one time selected by his class to present a book to the master, and adds: "As he stepped forward at the close of a recitation, and delivered the short Latin presentation-address, I thought him to be a god." This fascination is hard to be explained. The great seriousness of Horner's character may in part account for it. He could not bear trifling on important subjects, and could not help frowning on all jests which were not more wise than witty. The calm determination, the unvarying earnestness of his character, may aid in explaining it. From a boy, he never swerved from great purposes, pursued the most useful though difficult knowledge, and cultivated with equal zeal the ornaments of taste and those recondite historical and statistical studies which are the roots of political science. He was as far from being flighty as Immanuel Kant. Everything that he did was marked both by temperance and sagacity. Philosophically speaking, a personality, any personal being, is undoubtedly the most mysterious thing in the universe. How abstract ideas come together to grow and bloom in a young bosom is wholly past the comprehension of philosophy. As personality in the abstract fascinates a philosopher by its mystery, so a personality of

uncommon purity, intensity, and completeness fascinates all men, and thus, perhaps, is explained the high estimation in which Horner was held. He was regarded by those who knew him, as Pythagoras was by his disciples, with the deference commanded by a superior person.

The indefatigable character of Lord Brougham, the only survivor of this group, cannot yet be sketched in a paragraph. To Sydney Smith we shall presently return.

The second group of young men was formed fifteen years later. They were the antagonists of the Edinburgh reviewers, the authors of the "Noctes Ambrosianae," the main support of "Blackwood's Magazine," almost from its beginning. Their names were John Wilson, J.G. Lockhart, James Hogg, and, for a time, William Maginn. These were very high, as well as, excepting Hogg, very young Tories. It would be an apotheosis of loyalty to say that they were also eminently religious, though they drank many bumpers to their religion. When they meet in the third of the "Noctes" and have taken their places at the table, North proposes: "A bumper! The King! God bless him!" and three times three are given. Then Tickler proposes: "A bumper! The Kirk of Scotland!" and the rounds of cheers are repeated. These indispensable ceremonies being over, the Blackwood council proceeds to discuss men and things over nectar and ambrosia.

Wilson was the centre and best representative of this group. At Oxford, he had been so democratic that he blacked his own

boots on principle. On leaving Oxford, he had roamed for a time as a wild man in a band of gypsies. He next took a cottage in the lake district in the North of England, where he associated with Wordsworth, and occupied himself alternately with desperate gymnastic exercises and composing slight descriptive poems. Even after connecting himself with the magazine and becoming the symposiarch of the "Noctes," and perhaps the greatest Tory in all broad Scotland, he did not renounce his home among the lakes. He was a lover of scenery, and an enthusiast and master in manly sports. He is said to have fished in every trout-brook north of the Clyde, and he wandered every season over the Highlands. In his sportsman's accomplishments he took a truly English pride, and made fun of the Edinburgh Whigs by representing a company of them as getting by chance into the same room with himself and his associates, and then, pipes and tobacco being brought, as being fairly smoked out, sickened, and obliged to retreat by the superior smoking capacities of the Tories. He ridiculed Leigh Hunt for fancying in one of his poems that he should like a splendid life on a great estate, when (as Wilson says) he couldn't even ride without being thrown. Yet, of all the men of this time, there was probably no one who had wider sympathies or more delightful prejudices than Professor Wilson, or who made more sagacious reflections. The centre of a literary clique, he loved to associate with all the other cliques, and was one of the first to recognize and proclaim the great merits of Wordsworth.

The third group was larger than either of the preceding, retained its *esprit de corps* longer, and may be most conveniently defined as the associates of Charles Lamb. Beside Lamb, there were Coleridge, Southey, Lovel, Dyer, Lloyd, and Wordsworth, among the earlier members of it,—and Hazlitt, Talfourd, Godwin, De Quincy, Bernard Barton, Procter, Leigh Hunt, Gary, and Hood, among the later. This group, unlike the others, did not make politics, but literature, its leading object. It was composed of literary men,—a title of doubtful import, but which certainly in civilized society will always designate a class. Political life has more of outward importance, religious life is holier, but literary life is the most humane of all the avocations. It is to the professions what pastoral occupations are to the trades. Politics and religion both have something to do with institutions. A mechanical man can play a part in them not very well, but passably well. But the literary man is sheer humanity, with nothing to help him but his thoughtfulness and sensibility. He is the unfelled tree, not the timber framed into the ship of state or carved into ecclesiastic grace. He lives as Nature lives, putting on the splendor of green when the air is sunny, and of crystal when the blasts sweep by; and while his roots reach down into the earth, there rises nothing above him but the heavens. Past experience shows that he may be harsh, prejudiced, and unhappy; but it shows also that the richest human juices are within him, and that not only the most peculiar and most sensitive, but also the most highly-endowed characters are named in the list of

authors. The central and most admirable figure in this particular group of literary men is Charles Lamb; and as each of the other groups clustered around an organ, so at a later period Lamb and his associates supported the "London Magazine," in which the "Essays of Elia" first appeared.

If it be asked what gave that strong coherence to these associates which constituted them groups, a wise man would answer,—congeniality of character. A wiser man, however, would not overlook the element of *suppers*. The "Edinburgh Review" seems to have been first suggested over a quiet bottle of wine; and at a later day the Edinburgh reviewers, increased in number by the accession of Mackintosh and one or two others, formed an honored clique by themselves in the splendid society of Holland House. The "Noctes Ambrosianae" is the enduring monument of the way in which the Blackwood men passed their nights, and not the less so from the fact that they were for the most part written out by Wilson in sober solitude. Charles Lamb began his career of suppers with Coleridge, as the latter came up to London from the University to visit him, and the famous Wednesday-evening parties given by him and his sister Mary would occupy a large space in the literary history of this epoch. It is a true proverb, that people are but distant acquaintances till they have eaten salt together.

The sketches which we have thus given will indicate the leading tendencies that were operating in English literature, though the groups themselves did not include all the eminent

literary men. Campbell, Shelley, and Byron were single lights, and did not form constellations,—unless, perhaps, Shelley and Byron may be regarded as a wayward and quickly-disappearing Gemini. Sir Walter Scott, and, in their later years, Southey, Wordsworth, and Coleridge, were of a cosmopolitan character, and served as links between different parties. And it may be added, that diplomatic relations and frequent intercommunication existed between all the groups.

Passing from the general schedule to the characters and careers of Charles Lamb and Sydney Smith, it will be our aim to show how these two most witty men were also intensely serious and dutiful,—how they were both disciplined by a great sorrow, and obedient to a noble purpose,—and thus to relieve wit from the charge of having any natural alliance with frivolity.

A thorn, it needs not a sage to say, vexes the side of every human being. Poetry laments the inadequacy of men to their ideals, philosophy declares an error in the figures which sum up life, religion reveals the fall of the race. The thorn is known which pierced the matchless joyousness of Charles Lamb. His family, highly gifted with wit, tenderness of feeling, and mutual love, had a tinge of madness in the blood. At twenty years of age he was himself shut up six weeks in a madhouse, his imagination in a vagary. He was not again affected; but the poison had sunk deeper into the veins of his sister. The shadow of a deed done in the dark ever pursued her. Charles devoted his life to her whose life was an intermittent madness, yet who, in her months

of sanity, was a worthy sister of such a brother. His kindness to her knew no bounds. It was strange that she had premonition of the recurring fits of her disorder; and when the ghost of unreason beckoned, Charles took her by the hand and led her to the appointed home. Charles Lloyd relates, that, at dusk one evening, he met them crossing the field together on their melancholy way toward the asylum, both of them in tears. In the smiles of Charles Lamb, and they were many, his friends always remarked a prevailing expression of sadness. The "fair-haired maid," who had been the theme of his first poetizing, appears not again in his verses or in his life. He and Mary lived together, received evening visitors together, went to the theatre and picture-gallery together, visited the lakes and the poets together; and if he was ever seen in public without her, his friends knew there could be but one reason for it, and did not ask. When he left the India House, he had reserved from his income a considerable sum for her support; though the liberality of his employers, as it proved, rendered this precaution unnecessary. She was his partner in writing the Shakspearian tales, and he always affirmed that hers were better done than his own. To her he dedicated the first poems that he published; and she, too, was a poetess, excellent in her simple way. Thus was Charles Lamb's life saddened by a great affliction ever impending over it, and sanctified by a great duty which he never for a moment forgot.

It was his good-fortune, while at school at Christ's Hospital, to become acquainted with Samuel Taylor Coleridge. A timid boy,

creeping around among his boisterous companions like a little monk, it was that soaring spirit which first taught him to look up. Two men whose intellects more strongly contrasted could not be found. Coleridge suffered throughout life from over-much speculation. Could he have had his eye less upon the heavens and more upon the earth, could he have been concentrated upon some human duty, he would have been a much wiser and better man. Even in his youth he was the rhapsodist of old philosophies, had resolved social life into its elements, and dreamed of putting it together again to suit himself on the banks of the Susquehannah. Though Lamb wondered at the speculations of Coleridge, and, loving him, loved the metaphysics which were a part of him, yet it was without changing his own essentially opposite disposition. Lamb clung to the earth. He cultivated the excellency of this life. He was concrete, and hugged the world as he did his sister. He reverently followed the discourses of Coleridge, admiring, perhaps, "the beauty of the words, but not the words themselves"; but when the Opium-Eater also began to take speculative flights before Lamb, the latter stopped him at once by jangling his metaphysics into jokes. It was in conversation with Coleridge, begun at school and continued afterward at frequent meetings, that Lamb first ventured to try his own powers and was prompted to literary activity. But for a slight defect in his speech, he would probably have followed Coleridge to the University with the intention of going into the Church. A delightful clergyman he would have been, if he had duly undertaken the office, and one

would have walked far to see him in the priestly robe, to hear him chant the service, to receive pastoral advice from him; yet we fear the "Essays of Elia" would have been less admirable than now. He was roused by Coleridge; and though he could not put the aureole of the latter about his own head, he began to do the best he could in his own way.

Life is a play between accident and purpose. Why was it, that, of all the books in the world, Charles Lamb should have fixed his affections chiefly on the old English dramatists? He might have turned to old Greece, admired the fruits of the classic ages, and become one of those sparkling artistic Hellenists that are occasionally seen in modern times. He might have turned to the mediaeval period. He had an eye for cloisters and nuns. His fancy would have been struck with the grotesqueness of many of the ideas and institutions of those times. He would have got on finely with Gurth the swineherd and Burgundy the tusk-toothed, and one of his masterly witticisms would have upset Duns Scotus. Perhaps, of all the mediaeval characters, he would have been most smitten with the court fool, and, if he could have been seated at a princely table of the twelfth century, the bowl surely would not have been round many times before he and the fool would have had a few passes at each other. There was enough in the Middle Ages to have fascinated him; and could he, like some romantic Novalis, have once penetrated thither, and tasted the fruit, he would have found it a lotus, and would have wished never to depart. His soul would have clung

to church architecture,—under which term may be included all the religious, political, poetical, moral, and practical life of the Middle Ages. The accident in the case, however, was, that his uncle's library did not contain the Greeks, nor the Middle Ages, but did contain the old English authors. These he mastered; and out of these he created his ideals. In the affluent vigor of the Elizabethan age, in the buoyant *négligé* of the times of merry Charles, he found people that he liked. To every reflective and slightly scholastic mind, there is a charm in looking at things in the distance. The perspective fits the eye. This may have helped the enthusiasm with which he looked upon the writers and heroes of the old English literature; but its principal cause was their open-heartedness, their informality, their stout and free humanity underneath laces and uniform.

Having thus found his place in literature, he began also to be rich in friends, and his life was devoted every moment to thought and affection. The time that he passed at the desk of the India House was time in which he did not live; or perhaps, while he autographed the mercantile books, there was a higher half-conscious life of the fancy which lightly flitted round and round the steady course of his pen. He thus exults, after his emancipation from his clerkship upon a pension:—"I came home FOREVER on Tuesday in last week. The incomprehensibleness of my condition overwhelmed me. It was like passing from life into eternity. Every year to be as long as three; that is, to have three times as much time that is real time—time that is

my own—in it. I wandered about thinking I was happy, but feeling I was not. But the tumultuousness is passing off, and I begin to understand the nature of the gift." For this one-third of his waking time, to have and to hold unhampered by any dependence, he had most willingly consigned the rest to drudgery. The value which he set upon it appears from the following answer which he made to Bernard Barton, who thought of abandoning his place in a bank and of relying upon literary labor for support:—"Throw yourself on the world without any rational plan of support beyond what the chance employ of booksellers would afford you! Throw yourself, rather, my dear Sir, from the steep Tarpeian rock, slap-dash, headlong, upon iron spikes. If you have but five consolatory minutes between the desk and the bed, make much of them, and live a century in them, rather than turn slave to the booksellers. Hitherto you have been at arm's length from them,—come not within their grasp. I have known many authors want for bread,—some repining, others enjoying the blessed security of a counting-house, all agreeing that they would rather have been tailors, weavers,—what not? —rather than the things they were. I have known some starved, some go mad, one dear friend literally dying in a madhouse. Oh! you know not—may you never know!—the miseries of subsisting by authorship." Thus he esteemed of priceless worth honestly-earned independent time for the pursuits that were dearest to him.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.