

VARIOUS

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Содержание

| | |
|-----------------------------------|----|
| TO LIVE TO A HUNDRED | 5 |
| THE LAST OF THE HADDONS | 10 |
| Конец ознакомительного фрагмента. | 12 |

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TO LIVE TO A HUNDRED

That is what most people would like, if it could be easily managed. All know that they must throw off 'this mortal coil' some time, but there are innumerable and plausible reasons why they wish to avoid throwing it off as long as possible. They have important affairs on hand which require attention. They have children to educate and see out into the world. They are interested in certain public movements with which the newspapers are rife, and would like to see how these stirring events terminate. They are engaged in some important scientific investigations which they are anxious to complete. They have realised a small fortune, and would like to see it grow something larger, so that they might make a decent flourish with their bequests. And so on without end. They have often declared that the weather has become so bad that life is not worth having. But on second thoughts, when things are looking serious, they come to the conclusion that the weather may be endured, and that the world is not such a bad world after all. Dying, who speaks of dying? The idea of such a thing is ridiculous.

There is a clever book of old date full of pictorial illustrations called the *Dance of Death*. Each picture represents a pleasant scene in social life, into which Death, in the form of a skeleton, impertinently intrudes himself, and beckons a particular individual to come away; which individual, considerably surprised and disgusted at the summons, is obliged to go off, very much against his will. The moral suggested is the total unexpectedness of the visit – the uncertainty of human life. Such books amuse people. They laugh at seeing a self-complacent person sitting at a table stuffing and enjoying himself with good things, and who, on chancing to look a little aside, perceives to his consternation a skeleton bowing respectfully, and beckoning with its bony finger to walk off. He is wanted, and must march – not a moment to stay. The very glass just poured out must be left untasted. Very droll, very suggestive such pictures, only nobody is ever benefited by them. 'All men think all men mortal but themselves,' says the poet. Men perhaps do not exactly think so. But what comes pretty much to the same thing, they flatter themselves they will have a 'long day.' No doubt they will live a good while yet, and it is as well to be jolly in the meantime.

It is a curious fact, disclosed by physiologists who think deeply on the subject, that society is very much to blame for the comparative shortness of life. This was not well understood when the *Dance of Death* was written. It is understood now. Inquiries into the laws of health and disease, along with statistics, make it plain that premature decease is owing to a variety of preventable causes. We are gravely informed by Dr Farr, in his letter¹ to the Registrar-general of England, that the natural lifetime of man is a century! To die earlier than a hundred years of age is all a mistake. It is the fault of something or somebody or other that people die young. With a good constitution to start with, and due care in ordinary circumstances, life may be protracted to eighty, to ninety, or to a hundred. If that be what most people like, why don't they try? It is very certain, as is observable by the newspaper obituaries, that latterly many persons, whether they have tried or not, lived to be upwards of a hundred years of age. We have just seen a death reported at a hundred and six, and a month or two ago one at a hundred and ten. Some of these long-lived individuals were of a humble rank in life. One or two were

¹ This letter is appended to the Supplement to the Thirty-fifth Annual Report concerning Births, Deaths, and Marriages in England, 1875.

parish paupers. Occasionally we hear of negroes in the United States dying at a hundred and ten or a hundred and twelve years old, whose early life was spent in slavery. Among the aristocracy, deaths are pretty frequently reported at about eighty or ninety, but rarely at a hundred and above it. From these circumstances it may be inferred that fine living does not particularly contribute to extreme longevity.

The number of children who die young is immense. Bad nursing, neglect, whooping-cough, croup, measles, scarlet fever, small-pox, dosing with soporifics, carry off a large proportion. Bad air in close stuffy dwellings, and insufficient food, likewise destroy great numbers of children, particularly in old ill-contrived towns. Only by a kind of good-luck and natural strength of fibre do they get beyond five years of age. That is the first clearance; after which ensue the casualties of youth, too often brought about by carelessness. Latterly, Death has played great havoc among young and old through new developments of what are called zymotic diseases; or in plain English, diseases which originate in the fermentation of putrefying substances. These diseases are by no means new. They were known in ancient times. But in our own day they have sprung into enormous vigour, through the influence of modern domestic arrangements; and generally speaking, the finer the houses the worse have matters grown.

In his operations, Death has wonderfully potent auxiliaries in house-builders; or at least those who get up houses to sell regardless of sanitary arrangements. Pipes to carry off refuse are scamped, everything is scamped. The pipes are ill put together and badly laid; foul air, the result of festering fermentation, escapes into the dwelling. Diphtheria and typhoid fever are the probable consequence. Much that is curious has been written concerning these zymotic diseases. It is now generally believed that the poisonous gases arising from imperfect pipeage in houses consist intrinsically of fungoid germs, which are unconsciously swallowed by the luckless inhabitants of the houses so affected. Whether this Germ theory be correct or not, the result is the same. By inhaling the vitiated air, we drink a kind of poison, which produces the most fatal disorders. In our own small way, we could speak from experience of this bad pipeage system, which has obviously become one of the scandals of the age. It is enough for us to advise every purchaser of a house to look strictly to the condition of pipes and drains. If he cannot do it himself, let him procure the assistance of experts. What a thing to say of some modern improvements, that they have ended in giving us two of the greatest evils in life – foul air in our houses, and foul water to drink! One would almost think that these so-called improvements had been ingeniously devised in the interest of the undertakers.

People as we see are slain right and left by ailments which seize upon them insidiously when least expected. The weakest of course come off worst. This brings us to the fact that considerable numbers possess but a feeble stamina, and are unable to ward off disease, even with all the appliances of art. They come of a weakly parentage perhaps through several generations. Being by inheritance little better than an incarnation of beer and gin, they are absolutely born with a tendency to succumb to disorders which others would escape. Dr Farr makes the remark, that our very philanthropic schemes for rendering succour to the afflicted tend to raise crops of people of inferior organisation. 'The imbecile, the drunkard, the lunatic, the criminal, the idle, and all tainted natures, were once allowed to perish in fields, asylums, or jails, if they were not directly put to death; but these classes and their offspring now figure in large numbers in the population.'

From one cause and another, it is not surprising that so comparatively few reach extreme old age. The average of human life has been extended through the resources of modern science, but not to such an extent as might be expected, for the average still does not range higher than forty-five to fifty. Some reasons for this comparatively low average have been alluded to. To these may be added the frightful deterioration of health from intemperance. Drinking, once a fashionable vice, has become a prevalent evil in the lower departments of society, and the evil is conspicuously increased in proportion to an advancement in the gains of labour. Alcohol! In that single word we have no end of premature deaths accounted for. The most correctly logical definition, as far as we have seen, of the physical and mental ills inflicted through the agency of alcohol, is that given by Dr B. W.

Richardson in his work on the *Diseases of Modern Life*. There can be no doubt that the reckless abuse of this stimulant, always growing the more reckless, as has been said, as means are increased for its indulgence, has a terrible effect on the increase of pauperism and death-rates. According to Dr Richardson, alcohol has a tendency to throw life off its balance – 'A balance at the best of times finely set is broken in favour of death. A mental shock, a mechanical injury, an exposure to cold, a strain, a deprivation of food beyond the usual time of taking food; – any of these causes, and others similar, are sufficient to cause an organic wreck, which, left to its own fate, would soon break up from progressive internal failure of vital power.' Much that follows on this subject we commend to general attention – without, however, expecting that what the learned writer says will be of any practical avail.

Another cause for the undue shortening of life which has not been yet referred to, is the intense mental strain prevalent among literary men, artists, statesmen, judges, and some other classes. If not a new feature in society, this mental strain is at least more conspicuous than it was formerly, because the struggle to attain high rewards is greater, and more dependent on individual exertion than it seems to have been in past and less exacting times. In short, in derangement of the nervous system, leading to no end of functional derangements in the heart, stomach, and so on, in all which are found reasons why so many of our most eminent notabilities are removed ere they reach fourscore. They fall victims to a heedless, certainly unfortunate, overtasking of the brain. Medical men in high practice, though well aware of the dangers of professional exhaustion, are not always exempt from the charge of being careless of their own health. The wiser among them endeavour to limit their hours of work, and at the proper season retreat to the country, for the sake of invigorating rural sports. But for these precautions, the death-rate among London physicians would be very much greater than it is. The late Sir Henry Holland is known to have greatly lengthened his days by habitually making long autumnal tours over the globe; always returning invigorated for fresh work. The very common practice among people in business of taking a month's holiday at the sea-side, or some inland healthful resort – a practice immensely facilitated by railways and steamboats – has the same beneficial tendency. As regards the salutary results of checking the mental strain in literary labour, we could speak from a degree of personal experience. We have for the last forty years – whether in town or country, whether in winter or summer – never written a line after nine o'clock at night. When that hour strikes, the ink-glass is shut up, the pen and paper laid aside, and the mind is allowed to calm down before retiring to rest. The rule is peremptorily followed with the best consequences.

In the varied pressure of inexorable circumstances it may not be possible to be so extremely guarded. Lives are abruptly lost, the most precious in the community. He, however, who falls in the fair fight of life, though mistaken has been his eagerness, may be said to fall nobly. It is a considerably different thing when men shorten their days through luxurious indulgences, in wanton disregard of the rules essential to the preservation of bodily health. Up till fifty years of age, it perhaps signifies little how some of these rules are neglected, because the constitution originally vigorous resists or overcomes various deteriorating influences. At all events, there may be no immediate mischief. After fifty, and more particularly sixty, a change has taken place. The breathing, the digestive, the circulatory processes are less able to endure tear and wear. A little indiscretion may derange the whole machine, and bring it prematurely to a dead stop.

It is wonderful how much may be done to protract existence by the habitual restorative of sound sleep. Late hours, under mental strain, are of course incompatible with this solacement. On this topic Dr Richardson says it has been painful for him to trace the beginnings of pulmonary consumption to late hours at 'unearthly balls and evening parties,' by which rest is broken, and encroachments made on the constitution. But, he adds, 'If in middle age the habit of taking deficient and irregular sleep be still maintained, every source of depression, every latent form of disease, is quickened and intensified. The sleepless exhaustion allies itself with all other processes of exhaustion, or it kills imperceptibly, by a rapid introduction of premature old age, which leads directly to premature dissolution.' There, at once, is an explanation why many people die earlier than they ought to do. They violate the primary

principle of taking a regular night's rest. If they sleep, it is disturbed. They dream all sorts of nonsense. That is to say, they do not sleep soundly or for any useful purpose; for dreaming is nothing more than wild, imaginative notions passing through the brain while half sleeping or dozing. In dreaming, there is no proper or restorative rest.

It is a pity that Dr Richardson, as in the case of other medical writers, has refrained from stating that the practice of late dining, always growing later and later, to suit fashionable fancies, is quite incompatible with that tranquil and wholesome night's rest which contributes materially to a healthy and protracted old age. How can any one who inconsiderately sits eating and drinking till within an hour or two of midnight, so as to render refreshing sleep pretty nearly impossible, expect to reach eighty, ninety, or a hundred years of age? Narcotics are taken to procure the much-coveted sleep. They give no natural repose, besides otherwise doing harm. It is customary to say of sentiments of remorse that they 'murdered sleep.' So at least said Macbeth, and, as is known, he spoke from very unpleasant experience. But as things go, sleeplessness arises less from remorse and other mental affections than from physical causes connected with digestion. The stomach, to use a familiar phrase, is out of sorts. And in a vast number of cases it would be wonderful if it were otherwise. Just think of the habitual overtaking of the digestive functions and corresponding secretions, from the practice of late eating and drinking – late ceremonious dinners, which, from their tiresome sameness, their simpering platitudes, their dull insincerity, their waste of food, waste of time, and waste of health and comfort, can scarcely be said to claim a single redeeming feature. If that be called social intercourse, it is a downright sham – poor outcome indeed of the accumulated intelligence and inventiveness of the nineteenth century. One of the dangers of dining out in winter arises from exposure to cold and damp night-air. The excuse usually made is, that of being well wrapped up. But although that is right in its way, the fact is well known to medical practitioners that grievous mischief may be done in an instant of time. By a single gulp of cold air, or by a chill to the feet, in stepping from the door to a carriage, a deed may be done beyond the power of science to undo. Our belief is, that cold caught at late dinners and other late entertainments is a prolific source of disorders that prove fatal. With what a thrill of sorrow have we lately attended the funerals of aged and estimable persons who gave promise of living other ten or twenty years, but were said to have died after a three days' illness, in consequence of having one evening when they were out 'caught a little cold.'

It is tolerably evident that, setting aside the masses who die young and in middle life, from ailments that are difficult to be warded off, length of days is considerably dependent on individual effort as regards a graceful sacrifice to the rules of health. The explicit statement of Dr Farr, that the natural span of human life is a century, will to many appear startling. But calmly considered, a century is but a small fraction in the vast expanse of time. Years pass away imperceptibly. The man of seventy or eighty can hardly realise that so many years have slipped over his head. In his own condition he feels little to impress him with the fact. The past has vanished like a dream. The evidence of advanced years consists mainly in the recollection of events, recollection of places visited, recollection of the friends and acquaintances we have lost. The past is a vista strewn with memories, some agreeable, others saddening. We have worked our way as it were into a new world, yet with everything going on very much as it did long ago, *plus* a happy diminution in the number of Torturations.

The estimate formed of age ought not properly to depend on years. One man at seventy may be in constitution not older than another at forty-five or fifty. All depends on the original strength of frame, and the way it has been treated. Hence are seen lively old men, who, from their manners and activity, you would say were like men of thirty. The bloom on their cheeks, their tasteful toilet, their dancing, their singing, are a kind of marvel. The explanation of the phenomenon is, that besides having been careful as regards temperate habits and attention to air and exercise, they have all along cultivated a cheerful view of human affairs. 'A merry heart doeth good like a medicine, but grief drieth the bones.' They have studied that text to some practical purpose. At fifty, at sixty, at seventy, they have been steadily qualifying for a hundred, and it seems not unlikely (if kept free from worry)

that they will reach that desirable epoch – at all events, under a moderate discount of ten per cent., they may get as far as ninety, and on the morning after their decease have something handsomely said of them in the newspapers.

Keeping steadily in view Dr Farr's comforting view of the matter, we shall be glad if anything we have cheerfully ventured to suggest, has led people to reflect that with a reasonable degree of care they may have themselves to blame if they do not 'Live to a Hundred.'

W. C.

THE LAST OF THE HADDONS

CHAPTER X. – MARIAN

As I had expected, the neighbourhood through which we were driven did not appear to be inhabited by the most prosperous class of people. We presently found ourselves in Green Street; and when the cabman drew up before a retail shoemaker's shop, we saw at once that there could be no doubt about its being the place we wanted. The name of Pratt ran up and down, and across the house, in every direction, backwards and forwards, and sideways and lengthways; to say nothing of a large blue boot swinging over the pavement, conveying the information that this was the veritable Pratt's, and there was no other in the three kingdoms who sold boots and shoes so good and cheap, and beautiful to behold, as did Jonathan Pratt. Telling the cabman to wait, I entered a sort of bower of boots and shoes (they hung all round the doorway, and were ticketed 'Great Bargains,' 'Alarming Sacrifices,' 'The Princesses' Favourite,' and so forth), closely followed by Lilian.

'I'll attend to you in half a moment, ladies,' said a stout, brisk, good-tempered-looking man, as he put some small shoes into a parcel, and counted out the change to a customer at the counter, adding to her: 'You've got the best of me again, Mrs Gooch, by a good threepence, that you have! There, take 'em away quick, before I change my mind!'

'Oh, you always say that, Mr Pratt,' laughed the good woman, gathering up her parcel and change, and pleasantly wishing him good-day.

Evidently Mr Pratt was a favourite with his customers. I afterwards heard that he was famous for his jokes and good-nature, as well as a keen eye to business.

'Now, ladies,' he went on, turning smilingly towards us, as the good woman left the shop, and rubbing his hands briskly together; 'here I am ready to go through it all again, though you ladies always get the best of me in a bargain, you know you do. Eh' – Falling back a little as Lilian put up her veil; and even in that somewhat obscured light seeing that she was very different from the generality of 'ladies' he had to deal with, he added: 'I beg your pardon, Miss, I'm sure. What may I have the pleasure of shewing you?' For Mr Pratt prided himself upon his ability to suit his manners to his customers.

'You are Mr Pratt?' she began hesitatingly.

'Yes, Miss; that's me for certain.'

Lilian looked towards me, and I said: 'Will you allow us to speak with Mrs Pratt? Our business is with her, if she will kindly see us for a few minutes.'

'Mrs Pratt! *To* be sure, ladies; *to* be sure. Please to step this way.' We followed him into a small back-shop; and after putting two chairs for us, and – I suppose from force of habit – placing two little squares of carpet at our feet, he opened a side-door, and called out: 'Mother, you're wanted.'

Lilian, who looked very white and agitated, slipped her hand into mine; I clasped it firmly, waiting not a little anxiously for her sake.

A slight little woman, with a gentle good face, and soft dark eyes, looking very neat in a clean lilac print gown and large white apron, came hesitatingly into the room. One glance at her shewed us that it was not she whom we were seeking. Though her slight figure made her perhaps appear younger than she really was, she could not have been much less than fifty. We were for the moment both too much absorbed in the one thought to speak; and after glancing timidly first towards her husband and then at us, she asked: 'Is it change wanted, Jonathan?'

'These ladies want to speak to you, Susan,' he replied, looking a little surprised at our silence. Lilian flushed up, glancing pleadingly towards me again. It was certainly rather embarrassing. I was casting about in my mind to find some way of approaching the subject without committing ourselves,

in the event of their not being in the secret, when fortunately Mr Pratt's attention was called towards the shop-door, where commenced a brisk patter of words with reference to some of the bargains. With this gentle-looking woman it would be much easier to say what we wanted to say than with her husband, more accustomed to gauge the worth of words. So I plucked up my courage, and began: 'We have come to you, Mrs Pratt, in the hope of obtaining some information' – I suddenly thought of new tactics, and said: 'Is the name of Farrar known to you?'

'Farrar!' She put her hand to her side, and sank down on to the nearest chair, gazing at me without a word.

Seeing that I was at anyrate so far correct as to be speaking to the right Mrs Pratt, I went on: 'Perhaps you know that Mr Farrar has been ill for some time?'

'Yes, Miss; I know that.'

'Do you also know that his illness terminated in death ten days ago?' I said, speaking slowly, and carefully separating my words, in order to in some measure break the shock; for though she was not the 'Marian' we were seeking, her agitation shewed me that they were in some way connected.

'Dead!' she murmured – 'dead!' as she sat gazing at us, or rather at some vision which the words seemed to have called up before her mental eyes.

I thought it best now to go straight to the point, and said: 'Before his death, Mr Farrar expressed a wish that this packet should be delivered to the person to whom it is addressed; and therefore we thought it best to bring it ourselves to you, Mrs Pratt.'

She mechanically took it from my hand, looking down at it as though she were in a dream.

'But,' eagerly began Lilian, 'you see it is written above, "For Marian;" and before he died, dear papa told me' —

'You are Miss Farrar!' ejaculated Mrs Pratt, turning towards Lilian with a strange expression in her eyes: a mixture of curiosity and surprise, it appeared to me.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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