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THE MUFFLED DRUM.

“We should count Time by heart throbs. He most lives
Who thinks most, feels the noblest, acts the best.”

“Art is long, and time is fleeting,
And our hearts though stout and brave,
Still, like muffled drums are beating
Funeral marches to the grave.”

So writes a living poet. I know few verses which contain, in so short a space, words and thoughts so simple, yet so grand—so solemn, yet so true!

“*The Muffled Drum!*” — “*The Funeral March!*” There is no spectacle more imposing or impressive than a SOLDIER’S FUNERAL. The slow and silent procession—the reversed arms—the drums covered over with crape, giving out their deep, running, murmuring sound—relieved only at times by a sharper and louder beat; this, mingling with the shrill and plaintive notes of the fife, as it seems to speak a tale of tearful sorrow for the dead. Nothing else is heard but the dull, heavy, measured tramp of the mourners, as they bear their comrade to his “narrow home!” The coffin, with its sable covering, is carried on their shoulders. The military cap, with its plume, the musket, and sword, and bayonet, lie there in silent state! It passes by, moving slowly and solemnly on; and, if the churchyard be not far off, you may, ere long, listen to the “farewell shots” discharged over the dead man’s grave—the last record of his earthly history; proclaiming that “dust has returned to dust,” “ashes to ashes,” “earth to earth!”

“THE MUFFLED DRUM—THE FUNERAL MARCH!” Reader! Life is such. Nay, the world in which we live is made up of one vast funeral procession! Within your own bosom there is beating “a muffled drum.” As pulsation follows pulsation in your beating heart, it proclaims, “You are nearer your grave.” “The march of existence will be soon ended.”

There are stated pauses in a soldier’s funeral procession, when the music is silenced, and the passing crowd can get a fuller view of the solemn *cortege*. These pauses are to allow those who have been supporting the coffin to be relieved by others, who take their turn in

carrying the bier. When the change is made, once more the muffled drums give out their funeral beat, and the procession is again heard in motion.

And are there no similar pauses and changes in life's onward funeral march? Who or what are our bearers to the grave? Are they not the revolving seasons? We are borne on the shoulders of TIME—days, and weeks, and months, and years. Every *New Year*, especially, seems to arrest the procession; to hush the music, and call on the thoughtless crowd and the thoughtless heart to listen. My friend! this vast world-procession, in which you and I bear a part, has reached a new pausing-place. The *Old Year* is to be released from its burden, a *New Year* is to take its place.

As the drums are silent, and the *cortege* for a moment comes to a stand, let us avail ourselves of the solemn stillness to make a few seasonable reflections.

Recall for a moment the simplest and plainest, but, alas, the most forgotten of all truths, that *you are on a "march to the grave!"*—"It is appointed unto all men once to die!"

Think of the many stout and brave hearts in this procession of life which have beat since the beginning of the world. Where are they now? All—all in THE GRAVE!

Solomon was the wisest man that ever lived: but all his wisdom could not preserve him from—THE GRAVE!

Cræsus was the richest man that ever lived; but all his gold could not purchase exemption from—THE GRAVE!

Alexander was one of the greatest warriors that ever lived. He could weep that he had no more worlds to conquer; but in the very world he *had* conquered, he found—HIS GRAVE!

Methuselah was the oldest man that ever lived. Life's march was longer to him than any other; but it was a funeral procession after all: it ended in—THE GRAVE!

Young and old, rich and poor, savage and civilized, warrior and statesman, monarch and peasant, and beggar; whether it be the path of poverty or the "path of glory," it "leads but to—THE GRAVE!"

Aye, and every moment is bringing *you* nearer! since you began to read this little book, the "muffled drum"

has been beating fast—the procession has been moving—with some the grave may be in sight!

But it is not on the certainty of death I want to dwell. This of itself would do little good. While the procession has stopped, I should like to address to you a few words of solemn counsel. It may be the last I can give, or the last you can receive. Your grave or mine may be reached ere the *cortege* again passes.

I shall begin what I am going to say with another verse, which occurs in the same beautiful piece of poetry from which I have already quoted :

“Life is real, life is earnest,
And the grave is not its goal;
‘Dust thou art, to dust returnest,’
Was not spoken of the soul!”

Solemn truths! Would that the “march of existence” were always set to such music! Would that our hearts and affections would always beat time to these monitory words! The *body's* earthly history is soon and easily told. A single line here reads it; a word does so—DUST. But the *soul's* history is not so soon nor so easily “spoken.” Its “lifetime” is ETERNITY!

Do you ask what *is* spoken of the soul? Let me answer this in the words of no earthly writer—let me give you a reply in the words of the Great God himself:

This is spoken of the soul: “The soul that sinneth, it shall die!” Ezek. xviii, 20.

This is spoken of the soul: “Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.” Gal. vi, 7.

This is spoken of the soul: “Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live!” Isa. lv, 3.

This is spoken of the soul: “What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?” Matt. xvi, 26

This is spoken of the soul: “How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?” Heb. ii, 3.

This is spoken of the soul: “Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave whither thou goest.” Eccles. ix, 10.

You may be ready to say, in looking back on the

past, "I have not been considering these solemn averments. I have been trifling away my soul's best interests. I have been forgetful that every beat of this heart within me is bringing me nearer eternity. I have not been prizing my golden moments. I have been in reality and earnest about everything but 'the one thing needful.' I have been taken up with the trappings in life's procession — its pomp and pageantry—but I have seldom seriously pondered the thought, 'When this march of Time is done, shall I be prepared to meet my God?'"

Reader! I would like you to pause and think of these things. Surely, your present is, or ought to be, a searching season. It should not pass without its solemn resolutions. There are many who are in the habit of beginning the year with a motto for their guidance and encouragement throughout its course. You cannot do better than take as yours the first line of the scriptural and practical words I have just quoted: "LIFE IS REAL, LIFE IS EARNEST."

Inquire, in the sight of God, and with Eternity before you, how you can best make existence a "real" and "earnest" matter.

1. *Make "real" work of fleeing to the Lord Jesus Christ as your Saviour.* This lies at the foundation of all. "Am I personally and savingly interested in the finished work of Jesus? Am I at peace with God? Can I look up to the Great Being, who is soon to be my judge, and call Him 'my Father?' Have I come, 'just as I am,' a sinner, and the 'chief of sinners,' to the blood of atonement, and have I heard Him saying unto me, 'Thy sins are all forgiven thee?'" Oh! my friend, make real work, and sure work of this. It is no matter to be trifled with. It is no question of indifference. *In Jesus you are safe—without Jesus you perish!* "neither is there salvation in any other." You have been moving on in this life-procession. I ask, Have you met Him on the way, and has He addressed you in words which He spake in the midst of another funeral crowd when he was on earth, "I am the resurrection and the life; he that liveth and believeth on me, shall never die."

2. *Make "real" work in hating sin.* Sin, and all sin,

and your own besetting sin, must be crucified. If you wish to have a "happy New Year"—*be holy*. Has not the indulgence of known sin been the great cause and secret of past unhappiness? Bring out this Dagon, whatever it may be, from the altar of your heart, and break it in a thousand pieces before the ark of God! Turn the precept into a resolution: "Sin shall no longer have dominion over me." Riches may be poured this year into your lap; but I am bold to say that thousands of gold and silver will not, *cannot*, make you happy, if you will ruin your peace by continuing in sin, "making shipwreck of faith and a good conscience."

3. *Make "real" work in doing God's will.* Life ought to be "real" in nothing so much as in serving God. This is the great end for which being and existence were given us. Ask, with inquiring sincerity, the question, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" Commence this life-earnest work with your own heart. Strive, by the help of God's grace and Spirit, to get it made holier and better, more sin-hating, and Saviour-loving and heaven-seeking. If you have, in past years, been indulging in any angry passions, or evil tempers, or unholy affections, seek this year to get the better of them. If you have been unkind and unamiable, and jealous, and envious, seek to get these "roots of bitterness" cut down. It is the saying of a great man, on whom the grave has but lately closed, "The great business of life is to please God."* For this purpose, begin and end each day with *prayer*. Let it leaven and brighten, let it sanctify and sweeten all the day's work. Make it not a duty, but a privilege. Go always to your knees with the earnest feeling, "I want to be better and holier." Set out on each day with the desire to do something for God before you end it!

4. *Make "real" work in doing what good you can for others.* As a Christian, you are a member of a "Royal priesthood." There is some assigned work for you in God's temple. Whatever your rank, or station, or circumstances, you may, in some humble way, be of service to your fellow-men. You ought not to live to your-

* Arnold.

self, or to die to yourself—You must not be a cypher in the world, or like the men of Meroz, “*doing nothing.*” There is, as in the rebuilding of the temple of old, “to every man his work.” You can do something by your money, or by your influence, or by your words, or by your prayers; or, if in no other way, you can do more than all by your example. A holy life is a living sermon—no preacher is half so impressive. The talk *about* God has no eloquence to be compared to the walk *with* God.

5. Make “*real*” work in living as if this hour were to be your last.

It may be so. You cannot tell. Many hearts, as “stout and brave” as yours, at the beginning of that year which is now hastening along, little dreamt that ere its close their “funeral march” would be over, and the words would be pronounced over the grave-sods of the churchyard—“Dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return!”

This, at all events, we *do* know, that, be your life long or short, you cannot better begin to serve God than *now*. The longest life is short enough to prepare for eternity. Ah, may we not affirm that, when the hour of death does come, this will be one among the many other of its sayings—“Would that I had made life *more* ‘real’ and *more* ‘earnest!’—that I had listened to the solemn beat of the muffled monitor within me, as it proclaimed during many neglected years, that time was wasting and eternity was hastening!”

Flee to Jesus *now*, as your only Saviour. Get your guilty heart sprinkled with His blood, and your naked soul covered with His righteousness! Make the aim of existence a holy conformity to His will. Whatever your station in life is—whatever your age and character, and business, and occupation, seek thus to reason: “In *this* condition I can honor my God and serve and glorify Him: He has placed me here: and it is His wish that in this I should ‘walk so as to please Him.’”

Reader! if such be the case, you have a “happy life and death year” before you. The procession may again move on; but it is not a “funeral one,” with the emblems of sadness and gloom. True, you are marching to “the grave;” but being at peace with God, the

funeral notes are changed into joyful ones: "Oh, death, where is thy sting! Oh, grave, where is thy victory?" "Thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!"

THE PULSE.

"WHAT art thou? mysterious beating,
Still thy little strokes repeating,
Night by night, and day by day,
Fluttering with perpetual play
Through the arteries, when the veins
Thrill with joy or throb with pains;
Striking measured signals now—
Silent movement!—What art thou?"

"Moments were to me confided,
Still to count them as they glided;
From the Maker of thy frame
First my living impulse came.
Thou, the Dial of His power,
Wilt thou never strike the hour?
'As for me, I still must play
Till I number out the day.

"And that day is fast declining,
Soon the sun withdraws his shining;
Time departs on rapid wing.
Night, disease and death to bring;
Then I rest—my work is done,
And the round of life is run;
But, till then, I make no stay—
Press me not—away, away!"

"What is this upon me stealing?
Strange variety of feeling!
Icy coldness! then, by turns,
Fevered touch, like fire that burns,
Hurrying now with headlong force—
Staying now my languid course?
'T is the sign by Nature given,
Answering to the call of Heaven.

"Mark, then, mark the faint vibration,
Hastening to its termination!
Slowly, slowly turns the wheel,
While for me thy fingers feel.
Soon my duty will be o'er,
And I meet the touch no more.
Trifler! wilt thou yet delay?
Warning take—away, away!"

THE HOURS.

THE hours are viewless angels,
That still go gliding by,
And bear each minute's record up
To Him who sits on high.

And we who walk among them,
As one by one departs,
See not that they are hovering
For ever round our hearts.

Like summer bees that hover
Around the idle flowers,
They gather every act and thought,
Those viewless angel-hours.

The poison or the nectar
The heart's deep flower-cups yield ;
A sample still they gather swift,
And leave us in the field.

And some flit by on pinions
Of joyous gold and blue,
And some flag on with drooping wings
Of sorrow's darker hue.

But still they steal the record,
And bear it far away ;
Their mission-flight, by day or night,
No magic power can stay.

And as we spend each minute
Which God to us hath given,
The deeds are known before His throne,
The tale is told in heaven.

These bee-like hours we see not,
Nor hear their noiseless wings ;
We only feel too oft when flown,
That they have left their stings.

So teach me, heavenly Father,
To meet each flying hour,
That as they go they may not show
My heart a poison-flower.

So, when death brings its shadows,
The hours that linger last
Shall bear my hopes on angel's wings,
Unfetter'd by the past.

“SO TEACH US TO NUMBER OUR DAYS, THAT WE MAY APPLY
OUR HEARTS UNTO WISDOM.”

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