

## Literature, &amp;c.

## THE SPIRIT OF THE MAGAZINES.

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## THE CHORIST'S FUNERAL.

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To one accustomed from his youth to the solemn ceremonies peculiar to the burial in a country village, nothing seems more displeasing and unsatisfactory than the hurried funeral of one who has, unfortunately for himself, been called to death in a crowded city. He misses the countenances of the sympathizing neighbours and friends who gather near the church yard at home. He listens in vain, and with a painful sense of something lacking for the solemn tolling of the bell. The heavy hearse, draped in its costly folds, the train of rich, hired carriages, the beauty of Greenwood, Mount Auburn, and Laurel Hill may catch his eye more with their splendour; but when his heart is in sorrow, it longs for the less showy, but, to him, far more welcome associations of the New England village. Life may choose the tireless flow of activity and energy in a bustling city for its home; but Death always calls the mourner to the country burial ground, and to its funeral scenes.

There is something in the long train that moves on foot from the house of mourning—the file of men who silently step from their ranks two on each side, to take their turn in bearing the bier on their shoulders—the muffled tread of those who mourn in sympathy with the friends of the dead—the hushed gaze of the children, who turn their curious eyes into the deep grave before them—the scattering of the straw on the coffin-lid, by the old sexton, and his silently and respectfully uncovering his white hair and powdered forehead, to give the pastor signal that all is now ready for the benediction—the following slowly of many friends back to the house of affliction, that the mourners might not seem to themselves to be so utterly alone—in all these there is something of such peculiar interest, that one can know and understand it only by feeling it when his eyes have been filled with the mourner's tears.

Besides this general superior appropriateness of country funerals, there are often those of unusual interest, that strike even those accustomed to such scenes with their solemnity. There is a great difference between dying when all around know it, and many are sorrowful, and going to one's grave where not a man in a thousand who are hurrying by in the busy ebb and flow of life, knows whose funeral train is passing.

It is to a scene of this kind we would lead you in our simple tale. Our village lies in the Green Mountain State, it never has been notable for anything in particular, and a description of it would not be likely to interest you much. The burial-ground faces on the highway, close beside the church. Its white slabs tell most of our village history in their simple records of the men who have lived in it, and have now passed away. The Church is of the old form, built very high within. The columns which support the roof branch out in enormous arched capitals, whose curves so run into each other that there are no plain spaces left in the ceiling. The voice of the preacher reverberates grandly on the ear from among the deep galleries. Two rows of Gothic windows open on each side, through which, in summer, comes the hum of the wind, rustling through the willows by the graves. They have lately frescoed and painted it within, and the effect is certainly very strange, though, I suppose, more beautiful. It seems awkward, however, for the present so to twine garlands around the dusty columns of the past. It would make one laugh if a young traveller should fling flowers and wreaths on the venerable sepulchre of Aaron; yet all this profusion of ornament with which the present generation cover the grandeur of the little antiquity which is left, is scarcely less ridiculous. The scene to be related, however, transpired before this alteration, though not many years ago.

Deacon Samuel Burton lay on his dying bed. He was an old, gray-haired man, and was to be gathered to his fathers, so far as mortal eyes could see or read the future, before the rising of another sun.

Mr Burton had been an active and influential man in the days of his life of action. One of the firmest pillars of the church and of society at large, he was loved and respected by all who knew him. He was one of those old-fashioned men whose associations are all in the past; whose ray of life seems to be brightened by memory rather than hope—with the twilight radiance of joys long past, rather than with

the dawning of others yet to come. His disposition was not, however, tintured so much with the spirit of conversation as to render him morose and churlish, when old things were quietly suffered to pass away, in order to make room for new; not so, by any means; but his heartstrings were closely twined around the associations that hallowed the remembrances of his earliest years. Prominent among other things in his mind, was a deep affection for the old style of church music. If you would wake that old man to newer life, if you would see a brighter light flash from his faded eye, if you would bring a happier and more joyous expression over his roughened countenance, you had only to strike, in his hearing, such tunes as old 'Ocean,' 'Mortality,' or 'Amanda.' The old man would rise with the music; till his bent form almost straightened again; and the tears would start in your eyes as you saw his efforts to join the strain which his cracked voice could not follow. And up to his latest hour that chord of feeling within him never ceased to thrill.

He had himself been leader of the village choir for thirty years; and his voice had led the songs of Zion many sabbaths before the light of life had dawned on the present generation. But another company had occupied their seats, and part had flown since the old choir had lifted their voices together in their wonted song of praise. Yet long after they had quietly withdrawn from the gallery, they sang at communion seasons with the congregation, and at funerals. At such times would Deacon Burton's voice lead off in the old music. But even this passed by; and with the course of time, they had become old, and many had gone forever to their rest.

Time's years fell heavily on the old man. Youth's hopes and fancies, manhood's efforts of ambition—all had been crushed beneath them, until now his time had come to die. Worn, and shattered by the conflicts of life, the old soldier of the Cross was now passing from the field of his glory, victorious, yet not unscarred.

The evening sun was just throwing its last rays abroad, and they poured through the open casement upon the dying man's bed, a flood of light, covering him with what seemed like drops of golden dew.

The white hair was combed carefully back from his forehead, and the pale line that ran across showed plainly that his life had been one of exposure and of toil, that had darkened and embrowned the complexion of his youth. Beside him stood his only son and daughter. They had long before bid adieu to the mother of their love, and he was all that bound them to the past. The finger of affection was slowly turning from loved ones behind—the friends of their infancy and childhood—as they had fallen, one by one, and it was soon to point to loved ones before them, and to scenes yet to come, as the only object of their care and solicitude.

The old man had been told that he was soon to die, and a solemn stillness had succeeded the announcement, while they were waiting tearfully and anxiously to know the thoughts that were fitting through his mind. At length he addressed his children each by name. He was ready to die—his race was run. Why should he fear? He had fought the good fight, he had kept the faith.

"And yet, my children," said he; "I find my heart going out for you still. Forty years ago, William, I carried you in my arms. I watched over your youth; you, in turn, have been the protector and supporter of my old age. We have trod the path of life a good way on together. It might have been otherwise, William, but I am going home first. It is all well; I am a dry and withered tree, and it is meet that I should be cut down now. May the God of my youth, my beloved son, be the God of your age!"

"You are your mother's own child, Annie; I see in your face the same kind look of her whose name you bear, when she was the stay and comfort of my manhood. She is gone; and I am soon to follow her. You have taken her place since she died, my daughter, and have borne long with my complaining years. My own Annie, I doubt not, will be the first to welcome me among the glorified ones.

The old man fastened his gaze upward, as if he was thinking of the scenes he was soon to enter. Ere long, his eye rested sadly on his children, and he said, in a low voice—

"Oh, my children, I may be sinning to cling to earth, when heaven is before me, but few fathers have ever such children to leave. May God forgive me, for the flesh is very weak!"

He paused, and while the tears silently fell from the eyes of the strong man by his side, and the face of his daughter was buried in the coverlet, his thoughts were with his God, in prayer. Silence rested

for a few moments on the scene, broken, at last, by the murmured words of the dying Christian:

"It is only—good night—only good night; we shall meet again when the dawning comes."

So hours passed on. Now there was a word of love, of exhortation, of advice to his children, and again the silent communion of the heart with heaven. The pulse grew fainter, and the heart's throbbing was almost imperceptible; his last hour drew visibly nigh. In the course of the night, his son asked him if he had any wishes to express as to arrangements at his funeral.

"No, my son; no. I would be laid by your mother; and the same tree was planted there, years ago, for her, can shade my resting place also. Reynolds will take care of my poor body. I have followed him years and years, as he has led the funeral trains to that dear old church, and he will follow me now, and bury me peacefully."

The old chorister was silent for a few moments; he was thinking of that last scene. A strange and peculiar expression crept over his countenance, as he spoke again:—

"I am foolish, perhaps, William; but I do want one thing. It may seem simple and weak; but an old man may be pardoned in his last wish. When my father died, they sang the old 'Farewell Anthem' at his funeral; when your mother was taken from me, we sang it again, and I felt happy as I sang the words—

God grant that we may meet again,  
In that world above, in that world above!"

I would have the old choir sing that, just before I am carried to the grave. These young singers do not know it; it has been lost a good many years. But no matter, William; no matter if it is not just right."

Midnight passed by, and the early dawn reddened the east; but before the sun rose, the sun of the old chorister's life had set. He slept with his fathers; and, when the day broke, and the busy hum of industry was heard in our village streets, the solemn tones of the church bell broke on the morning air, and the children counted the age by the number of strokes—eighty-seven years.

Two days passed away, and on Saturday afternoon the funeral was to be attended at the church. Known widely and favorably for years, as Deacon Burton had been, there was an immense concourse at his burial. The good old minister, who had long been superannuated, was invited to resume his place for the occasion. Oh! the solemnity of that funeral sermon! Years have flown by me since then, but the impression it made upon my mind has never been forgotten.

Slowly and mournfully the procession passed up the broad aisle; and the six white-haired men, who walked by the side of their fallen companion, bowed their heads in sadness as the solemn pall dropped heavily over their lifeless burden. At the head walked the aged pastor, leaning on the arm of his young successor. The house was densely filled with young and old; but the services went on amidst an unbroken silence, fit for the presence of death. A prayer, a song of praise that mourned out its sorrows in the midst of its thanksgiving, and the old veteran rose more upon the field of his former glory; and the words of inspiration fell with singular power from his trembling lips:—

"I have been young, and now am old, yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken nor his seed begging bread."

From this text the preacher went on, and his voice trembled anew with the unwonted exertion. He reviewed, briefly, the life of the deceased. Deacon Burton had lived a godly life. Unceasing effort for its advancement had shown his attachment to the cause of the risen Redeemer. He was emphatically one of the 'righteous,' that are never 'forsaken.' Misfortune had at times fallen heavily upon him, and the flower of his youth had been crushed by the blow; but it seemed only to give forth new perfume to the praise of God.

The speaker warmed with his subject; and, anon, the old fire glowed in his eye, and his voice was raised with the clear tones of his manhood's strength, as he spoke of the scenes they passed through together. Few were there among the audience that had journeyed with him so long, but close by the pulpit were gathered the little number, and the tears trickled down their furrowed cheeks as that voice of days gone by rang through the assembly.

"I have come to my last days, my old friends," said the preacher; "I know my sands are almost run. The old man will not weary you long. Yonder graveyard, whither we all are tending, is just before me. The wife of my youth lies there—my children lie there. To-day we follow

another of those who started in life with me, to his narrow home. A few more days will pass, and you will then lay this feeble body there. This hand will be cold; this heart will cease to throb kindly for you, my own people; and these limbs will be moveless and still. The narrow house is my home, and it is near by now; but, with him who lies in death before you, I can say—

"I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that in the latter days he shall stand upon the earth; and, though after my skin worms shall destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God!"

The old man paused for a moment, as if lost in silent retrospection, then turned his eye slowly to the side of the old church, and gazed meaningly through the open windows on the still, white monuments of the dead, as if to call them to witness his sincerity.

"Your fathers! where are they?" he asked, in trembling tones. And his long finger pointed to the burial-ground, as his answer fell from his lips: "There; and yet not there!"

Oh how new and strange does immortality seem to us, when beyond its veil there is an eye that looks lovingly on us, and a well-known voice is heard to whisper—'Come!'

The sermon was closed with a most affecting appeal to the youth who were present, to whom he appeared like some prophet of old. When he sat down, a universal sob was heard throughout the building—that voice had sounded there for the last time.

The coffin was opened that all might once more look upon the pale countenance within; and, while the congregation passed slowly by, a few old men and women were seen making their way noiselessly among the aisles, until ten or twelve stood silently around the head of the coffin—the last remnants of the old choir. All fell back away from the scene, and they stood alone by the dead; slowly gathering around the body of their once-loved leader, they commenced the music of the old 'Farewell Anthem.' The voices were old, and lost the sweetness of former years, but the excitement of the occasion in a measure renewed their vigor, and with a most unearthly sweetness the tones of the now forgotten music rolled up among the arches of the roof.

"I am going on a long and tedious journey,  
Never to return—never to return;  
Fare ye well, my friends; fare ye well!  
I am going where the prison doors are opened,  
And the prisoners are set free—are set free."

But they could not go on. Choked with feelings, and blinded with tears, they hushed their singing, one by one, as the voices fell away. That anthem never was finished till they met their old companion in the upper world.

The tide of feeling was too strong to be stemmed. Associations, inseparable linked with life, and hope, the youth, were called up, and the floodgates of sorrow were opened. There stood those who had joined together when the first blush of manhood had mantled on their cheeks. Side by side had they stood while life was flowing joyously on. There was one, bowed new with years, from whose eyes the fire of energy had once flashed—now, low and sinken, it was soon to be withdrawn from its earthly shrine. There was another, who had for years quietly worn her widow's weeds, upon whose countenance the smile of youth and of joy had once rested—now, weary and worn, she drew her veil closely to hide the tears that fell slowly from one wrinkle to another, on her aged face.

And so it was with all—once a band of youth and manhood, full of grace and energy, and of life—now, bent, and bowed, and gray, and trembling with years.

They stood like vanquished soldiers of the past, humbly and mournfully surrendering their arms to the victorious army of the present, that marched exultingly by their shattered ranks, and flaunted the banner of triumph in their faces, and over the body of their leader fallen.

They could not sing that anthem; they had met in the freshness of their youth to sing it together. They had mingled their voices in the heat of life's eager conflict of manhood; and it was hard now for them to acknowledge the weakness of age which had settled upon them. Times were changed; and, as each now turned a saddened look upon his altered companion, over their spirits swept the full tide of feeling that waked every chord to life, and the voice of song was hushed before the voice of nature; and the old choir bowed their heads, in the consciousness of their own decay, in solemn stillness around the coffin of their fallen leader.

The whole assembly swayed to and fro like reeds in the summer wind. Sobs broke on the stillness from every side. Tears fell like rain from eyes unused to weeping, and it was long before they start-