

### *Post-Mortem Poetry*

In Philadelphia they have a custom which it would be pleasant to see adopted throughout the land. It is that of appending to published death-notices a little verse or two of comforting poetry. Any one who is in the habit of reading the daily Philadelphia "Ledger," must frequently be touched by these plaintive tributes to extinguished worth. In Philadelphia, the departure of a child is a circumstance which is not more surely followed by a burial than by the accustomed so-lacing poesy in the "Public Ledger." In that city death loses half its terror because the knowledge of its presence comes thus disguised in the sweet drapery of verse. For instance, in a late "Ledger" I find the following (I change the surname):

DIED.

HAWKS.—On the 17th inst., CLARA, the daughter of Ephraim and Laura Hawks, aged 21 months and 2 days.

That merry shout no more I hear,  
No laughing child I see,  
No little arms are round my neck,  
No feet upon my knee;  
No kisses drop upon my cheek,  
These lips are sealed to me.  
Dear Lord, how could I give Clara up  
To any but to Thee?

A child thus mourned could not die wholly discontented. From the "Ledger" of the same date I make the following extract, merely changing the surname, as before:

BECKET.—On Sunday morning, 19th inst., JOHN P., infant son of George and Julia Becket, aged 1 year, 6 months, and 15 days.

That merry shout no more I hear,  
No laughing child I see,  
No little arms are round my neck,  
No feet upon my knee;  
No kisses drop upon my cheek,  
These lips are sealed to me.  
Dear Lord, how could I give Johnnie up  
To any but to Thee?

The similarity of the emotions produced in the mourners in these two instances is remarkably evidenced by the singular similarity of thought which they experienced, and the surprising coincidence of language used by them to give it expression.

In the same journal, of the same date, I find the following (surname suppressed, as before):

WAGNER.—On the 10th inst., FERGUSON G., the son of William L. and Martha Theresa Wagner, aged 4 weeks and 1 day.

That merry shout no more I hear,  
No laughing child I see,  
No little arms are round my neck,  
No feet upon my knee;  
No kisses drop upon my cheek,  
These lips are sealed to me.  
Dear Lord, how could I give Ferguson up  
To any but to Thee?

It is strange what power the reiteration of an essentially poetical thought has upon one's feelings. When we take up the "Ledger" and read the poetry about little Clara, we feel an unaccountable depression of the spirits. When we drift further down the column and read the poetry about little Johnnie, the depression of spirits acquires an added emphasis, and we experience tangible suffering. When we saunter along down the column further still and read the poetry about little Ferguson, the word torture but vaguely suggests the anguish that rends us.

In the "Ledger" (same copy referred to above), I find the following (I alter surname as usual):

WELCH.—On the 5th inst., MARY C. WELCH, wife of William B. Welch, and daughter of Catharine and George W. Markland, in the 29th year of her age.

A mother dear, a mother kind,  
Has gone, and left us all behind.  
Cease to weep, for tears are vain,  
Mother dear is out of pain.  
Farewell, husband, children dear,  
Serve thy God with filial fear,  
And meet me in the land above,  
Where all is peace, and joy, and love.

What could be sweeter than that? No collection of salient facts (without reduction to tabular form) could be more succinctly stated than is done in the first stanza by the surviving relatives, and no more concise and comprehensive programme of farewells, post-mortuary general orders, etc., could be framed in any form than is done in verse by deceased in the last stanza. These things insensibly make us wiser, and tenderer, and better. Another extract:

BALL.—On the morning of the 15th inst., MARY E., daughter of John and Sarah F. Ball.

'Tis sweet to rest in lively hope  
That when my change shall come  
Angels will hover round my bed,  
To waft my spirit home.

The following is apparently the customary form for heads of families:

BURNS.—On the 20th instant, MICHAEL BURNS, aged 40 years.

Dearest father, thou hast left us,  
Here thy loss we deeply feel;  
But 'tis God that has bereft us,  
He can all our sorrows heal.

Funeral at 2 o'clock sharp.

There is something very simple and pleasant about the following, which, in Philadelphia, seems to be the usual form for consumptives of long standing. (It deplores four distinct cases in the single copy of the "Ledger" which lies on the MEMORANDA editorial table):

BROMLEY.—On the 29th inst., of consumption, PHILIP BROMLEY, in the 50th year of his age.

Affliction sore long time he bore,  
Physicians were in vain—  
Till God at last did hear him mourn,  
And eased him of his pain.  
The friend whom death from us has torn,  
We did not think so soon to part;  
An anxious care now sinks the thorn  
Still deeper in our bleeding heart.

This beautiful creation loses nothing by repetition. On the contrary, the oftener one sees it in the "Ledger," the more grand and awe-inspiring it seems.

With one more extract I will close:

DOBLE.—On the 4th inst., SAMUEL PEVERIL WORTHINGTON DOBLE, aged 4 days.

Our little Sammy's gone,  
His tiny spirit's fled;  
Our little boy we loved so dear  
Lies sleeping with the dead.  
A tear within a father's eye,  
A mother's aching heart,  
Can only tell the agony  
How hard it is to part.

Could anything be more intimate than that, without requiring further concessions of grammar? Could anything be likely to do more toward reconciling deceased to circumstances, and making him willing to go? Perhaps not. The power of song can hardly be estimated. There is an element about some poetry which is able to make even physical suffering and death cheerful things to contemplate and consummations to be desired. This element is present in the mortuary poetry of Philadelphia, and in a noticeable degree of development.

The custom I have been treating of is one that should be adopted in all the cities of the land.

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