William Farquhar, â??Death, a Poemâ?•

Description

WILLIAM FARQUHAR

â??Death, a Poemâ?•

To dignify the trifles of their brain,
The Muses heavenly aid whilst some invoke;
Be it my task, in solemn verse, to paint
The gloomy horrors which attendant wait
On Death, their king, whose still insatiate scythe,
The young, the gay, the rich, the wise, cuts off.
Young as I am, my breast has felt the shock
His direful stroke can give; my second sire,
The dear, dear guardian of my infant years,
Eâ??er yet his worth I knew, Deathâ??s ruthless arm
Snatchâ??d from my eager grasp, and ever hid
In dark recess of the gloomy grave.
Far, far away, amid the burning plains
Of Florida, while yet a child, my sire
From me, from his lovâ??d family, retirâ??d!
But while an Uncleâ??s fondness still remainâ??d,
Scarce could we feel our lossâ??Death! cruel Death!
How could you pierce that heart, where virtue joinâ??d
With mild benevolence, still smilâ??d to view
The peace, the pleasure, of his fellow men.
But hold, my Muse, the elegiac strain
Departed virtue scorns, her worth is gravâ??d
Deep in the memâ??ry of all human kind.
The pompous column, and the bust, She scorns,
And, conscious of her innate power to please,
For deathless fame leans on herself alone.
Death, thouâ??rt the touch-stone of all human Virtue!
If, with a cowardly, an unmanly fear
We fly thy stroke, then â??tis, alas! too certain
Some future ill our conscience bids us dread.
But if, with firmness, thy near approach
Unmovâ??d we can behold; then are we sure
Self-approbation can alone support us
In that dread awful moment! when thy dart
Has piercâ??d our panting breast, to separate

These dear companions, who so long have livâ??d
In perfect unity, in perfect peace.
Into the grave, as useless lumber, drops
Then senseless carcase; and the soul swift wings
Back to her great original, her flight.
Throâ?? lifeâ??s wild scenes whereâ??er I thoughtful turn
Far as my eye can reach, â??tis tumult all,
And maddest opposition; foe meets foe
With discord dire, and jarring interests clash
Loud as throâ?? heavenâ??s wide arch the thunders roar,
O man! vile man! how long deceivâ??d by vice,
With senseless folly wilt thou devious stray,
In paths unpleasing to thy Makerâ??s eye?
Hear how he calls, invites thee to his breast,
And offers endless pleasures to thy grasp.
Thus by his prophets spoke thâ?? Eternalâ??s voice:
â?? Come to my bosom, ye who loudly groan
Beneath the burthen which tyrannic sin
Has oâ??er you whelmâ??d, behold me ever glad,
The worst, the basest, of your race to save.â?•
And shall mankind the gracious offer spurn?
Forbid it, virtue, gratitude, and love!
Man, youngest child of heaven, full often needs
To feel his fatherâ??s kind afflictive rod,
Which wounds to heal, as the physicianâ??s probe
May pain the patient, while it aids his cure.
Did not afflictions, throâ?? lifeâ??s chequerd scene,
Walk with kind hand to warn us of our end;
Man would forget he were to die at all,
And scorn the terrors of the gloomy grave.
Hope, with contracted wing, no more would mount
To the empyrean heaven for endless bliss;
But, stooping, snatch the empty joys of sense,
And quick contracting all her broad desires,
Sit down, contented with the scanty joys
Which the vile empire of the brute confers.
See the warm youth, even in his rosy bloom,
When mounting blood and passion fire his breast,
Piercâ??d by thy dart, drops cold and lifeless down,
And moulders in the murky silent grave.
Behold the beauteous maid, whose rosy cheek
Charms and attracts the roving eye of youth;
While something whispers to her heaving breast,
That Nature gave not her these softening powers
Her crimson cheek, her ruby lip, in vain.
Even in the moment, when her rapturâ??d soul
Clings to the bosom of some darling youth,
Death, with one cruel stroke, forever blasts

Loveâ??s dawning bliss, and stretches her a corse,
A cold pale corse, amid her weeping friends!
    To grasp her much lovâ??d son, the mother spreads
Her anxious arms,â??behold! he faints, he dies!
And stiffens in the cold embrace of death!
See, how to heaven she sorrowing lifts her eyes!
See, how her bosom heaves, thick beats her heart
With anguish, with parental fondness torn!
    How vain, how fleeting, are the joys of time!
How idly foolish he who leans upon them
For steady comfort, or for endless bliss!
Behold, at one dire stroke of deathâ??s huge scythe,
Fathers and sisters, friends and lovers, fall!

NOTES:

14 *Florida* Reference to the territory of North America named after Spanish explorer Juan Ponce de Leonâ??s arrival in the area during the â??season of flowersâ?• (*Britannica*).

33 *Self-approbation* The feeling of self-satisfaction or â??approvalâ?• (*OED*).

62 *chequerd* â??Diversified in character; full of constant alternationâ?• (*OED*).

67 *empyrean* â??The highest or most exalted part or sphere of heavenâ?• (*OED*).

75 *moulders* â??To decay to dust; to rotâ?• (*OED*).

84 *corse* Archaic spelling of â??corpse,â?• â??a dead bodyâ?• (*OED*).

Source: William Farquhar, *Poems on Several Occasions* (Edinburgh, 1794), pp. 102-105. [Google Books]

Edited by Joshua Navarro