

An excerpt from

***The Grave* by Robert Blair**

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A **LITERARY GOTHIC** etext.

WHILST some affect the Sun, and some the Shade,
Some flee the City, some the Hermitage;
Their Aims as various, as the Roads they take
In Journeying thro' Life; the Task be mine
To paint the gloomy Horrors of the *Tomb*;
Th' appointed Place of Rendezvous, where all
These Travellers meet. Thy Succours I implore,
Eternal King! whose potent Arm sustains
The Keys of Hell and Death. THE GRAVE, dread Thing!
Men shiver, when thou'rt nam'd: Nature appall'd 10
Shakes off her wonted Firmness. Ah! how dark
Thy long-extended Realms, and rueful Wastes!
Where nought but Silence reigns, and Night, dark Night,
Dark as was *Chaos*, 'ere the Infant Sun
Was roll'd together, or had try'd his Beams
Athwart the Gloom profound! The sickly Taper
By glimmering thro' thy low-brow'd misty Vaults,
(Furr'd round with mouldy Damps, and ropy Slime,)
Lets fall a supernumerary Horror,
And only serves to make thy Night more irksome. 20
Well do I know thee by thy trusty *Yew*,
Chearless, unsocial Plant! that loves to dwell
'Midst Sculls and Coffins, Epitaphs and Worms:
Where light-heel'd Ghosts, and visionary Shades,
Beneath the wan cold Moon (as Fame reports)
Embody'd thick, perform their mystick Rounds.
No other Merriment, Dull Tree! is thine.

See yonder Hallow'd Fane! the pious Work
Of Names once fam'd, now dubious or forgot,
And buried 'midst the Wreck of things which were: 30
There lie interr'd the more illustrious Dead.
The Wind is up: Hark! how it howls! Methinks
'Till now, I never heard a Sound so dreary:
Doors creak, and Windows clap, and Night's foul Bird
Rook'd in the Spire screams loud: The gloomy Isles
Black-plaster'd, and hung round with Shreds of 'Scutcheons

And tatter'd Coats of Arms, send back the Sound
Laden with heavier Airs, from the low Vaults
The Mansions of the Dead. Rous'd from their Slumbers
In grim Array the grizly Spectres rise, 40
Grin horrible, and obstinately sullen
Pass and repass, hush'd as the Foot of Night.
Again! the Screech-Owl shrieks: Ungracious Sound!
I'll hear no more, it makes one's Blood run chill.

Quite round the Pile, a Row of Reverend Elms,
Coæval near with that, all ragged shew,
Long lash'd by the rude Winds: Some rift half down
Their branchless Trunks: Others so thin a Top,
That scarce two Crows could lodge in the same Tree.
Strange Things, the Neighbours say, have happen'd here: 50
Wild Shrieks have issu'd from the hollow Tombs,
Dead Men have come again, and walk'd about,
And the Great Bell has toll'd, unring, untouch'd.
(Such Tales their Chear, at Wake or Gossiping,
When it draws near to Witching Time of Night.)

Oft, in the lone Church-yard at Night I've seen
By Glimpse of Moon-shine, chequering thro' the Trees,
The School-boy with his Satchel in his Hand,
Whistling aloud to bear his Courage up,
And lightly tripping o'er the long flat Stones 60
(With Nettles skirted, and with moss o'ergrown,)
That tell in homely Phrase who lie below;
Sudden! he starts, and hears, or thinks he hears
The Sound of something purring at his Heels:
Full fast he flies, and dares not look behind him,
'Till out of Breath he overtakes his Fellows;
Who gather round, and wonder at the Tale
Of horrid *Apparition*, tall and ghastly,
That walks at Dead of Night, or takes his Stand
O'er some new-open'd *Grave*; and, strange to tell! 70
Evanishes at Crowing of the Cock.

The new-made *Widow* too, I've sometimes spy'd,
Sad Sight! slow moving o'er the prostrate Dead:
Listless, she crawls along in doleful Black,
Whilst Bursts of Sorrow gush from either Eye,
Fast-falling down her now untasted Cheek.
Prone on the lowly Grave of the Dear Man
She drops; whilst busy-meddling Memory,
In barbarous Succession, musters up
The past Endearments of their softer Hours, 80
Tenacious of its Theme. Still, still she thinks

She sees him, and indulging the fond Thought,
Clings yet more closely to the senseless Turf,
Nor heeds the Passenger who looks that Way.

Invidious *Grave!* how do'st thou rend in sunder
Whom Love has knit, and Sympathy made one;
A Tie more stubborn far than Nature's Band!
Friendship! Mysterious Cement of the Soul!
Sweetner of Life! and Solder of Society!
I owe thee much. Thou hast deserv'd from me, 90
Far, far beyond what I can ever pay.
Oft have I prov'd the Labours of thy Love,
And the warm Efforts of the gentle Heart
Anxious to please. Oh! when my Friend and I
In some thick Wood have wander'd heedless on,
Hid from the vulgar Eye; and sat us down
Upon the sloping Cowslip-cover'd Bank,
Where the pure limpid Stream has slid along
In grateful Errors thro' the Under-wood
Sweet-murmuring: Methought! the shrill-tongu'd Thrush 100
Mended his Song of Love; the sooty Black-bird
Mellow'd his Pipe, and soften'd ev'ry Note:
The Eglantine smell'd sweeter, and the Rose
Assum'd a Dye more deep; whilst ev'ry Flower
Vy'd with its Fellow-Plant in Luxury
Of Dress. Oh! then the longest Summer's Day
Seem'd too too much in Haste: Still the full Heart
Had not imparted half: 'Twas Happiness
Too exquisite to last. Of Joys departed
Not to return, how painful the Remembrance! 110

Dull *Grave!* thou spoil'st the Dance of Youthful Blood,
Strik'st out the Dimple from the Cheek of Mirth,
And ev'ry smirking Feature from the Face;
Branding our *Laughter* with the Name of *Madness*.
Where are the *Jesters* now? the Men of Health
Complexionally pleasant? Where the *Droll!*
Whose ev'ry Look and Gesture was a Joke
To clapping Theatres and shouting Crouds,
And made even thick-lip'd musing Melancholy
To gather up her Face into a Smile 120
Before she was aware? Ah! Sullen now,
And Dumb, as the green Turf that covers them!

Where are the mighty Thunderbolts of War?
The *Roman Cæsars*, and the *Græcian Chiefs*,
The Boast of Story? Where the hot-brain'd Youth?

Who the *Tiara* at his Pleasure tore
 From Kings of all the then discover'd Globe;
 And cry'd forsooth, because his Arm was hamper'd,
 And had not Room enough to do its Work?
 Alas! how slim, dishonourably slim! 130
 And cramm'd into a Space we blush to name.
 Proud *Royalty!* how alter'd in thy Looks?
 How blank thy Features, and how wan thy Hue?
Son of the Morning! whither art thou gone?
 Where hast thou hid thy many-spangled Head,
 And the majestick Menace of thine Eyes
 Felt from afar? Pliant and powerless now,
 Like new-born Infant wound up in his Swathes,
 Or Victim tumbled flat upon its Back,
 That throbs beneath the Sacrificer's Knife: 140
 Mute, must thou bear the Strife of little Tongues,
 And coward Insults of the base-born Crowd;
 That grudge a Privilege, thou never hadst,
 But only hop'd for in the peaceful *Grave*,
 Of being unmolested and alone.
Arabia's Gums and odoriferous Drugs,
 And Honours by the *Heralds* duly paid
 In Mode and Form, ev'n to a very Scruple;
 Oh cruel *Irony!* These come too late;
 And only mock, whom they were meant to honour. 150
 Surely! There's not a Dungeon-Slave, that's bury'd
 In the High-way, unshrouded and uncoffin'd,
 But lies as soft, and sleeps as sound as He.
 Sorry Pre-eminence of high Descent
 Above the vulgar-born, to rot in State!

But see! the well-plum'd *Herse* comes nodding on,
 Stately and slow; and properly attended
 By the whole Sable Tribe, that painful watch
 The sick Man's Door, and live upon the Dead,
 By letting out their Persons by the Hour 160
 To mimick Sorrow, when the Heart's not sad.
 How rich the Trappings, now they're all unfurl'd,
 And glittering in the Sun! Triumphant Entrys
 Of Conquerors, and Coronation Poms,
 In Glory scarce exceed. Great Gluts of People
 Retard th' unweildy Show; whilst from the Casements
 And Houses Tops, Ranks behind Ranks close-wedg'd
 Hang belying o'er. But! tell us, Why this Waste?
 Why this ado in Earthing up a Carcase
 That's fall'n into Disgrace, and in the Nostril 170
 Smells horrible? Ye *Undertakers!* tell us,

'Midst all the gorgeous Figures you exhibit,
Why is the Principal conceal'd, for which
You make this mighty Stir? 'Tis wisely done:
What would offend the Eye in a good Picture
The Painter casts discreetly into Shades.

Proud *Lineage!* now how little thou appear'st!
Below the Envy of the Private Man!
Honour! that meddlesome officious Ill,
Pursues thee ev'n to Death; nor there stops short. 180
Strange Persecution! when the *Grave* itself
Is no Protection from rude Sufferance.

Absurd! to think to over-reach the *Grave*,
And from the Wreck of Names to rescue ours!
The best concerted Schemes Men lay for Fame
Die fast away: Only themselves die faster.
The far-fam'd *Sculptor*, and the lawrell'd *Bard*,
Those bold Insurancers of Deathless Fame,
Supply their little feeble Aids in vain.
The tap'ring *Pyramid!* th' *Egyptian's* Pride, 190
And Wonder of the World! whose spiky Top
Has wounded the thick Cloud, and long out-liv'd
The angry Shaking of the Winter's Storm;
Yet spent at last by th' Injuries of Heav'n,
Shatter'd with Age, and furrow'd o'er with Years,
The mystick Cone, with Hieroglyphicks crusted,
Gives Way. Oh! lamentable Sight! at once
The Labour of whole Ages lumbers down;
A hideous and mishapen Length of Ruins. 200
Sepulchral Columns wrestle but in vain
With all-subduing Time: Her cank'ring Hand
With calm deliberate Malice wasteth them:
Worn on the Edge of Days, the Brass consumes,
The Busto [*sic*] moulders, and the deep-cut Marble,
Unsteady to the Steel, gives up its Charge.
Ambition! half convicted of her Folly,
Hangs down the Head, and reddens at the Tale.

Here! all the mighty *Troublers of the Earth*,
Who swam to Sov'reign Rule thro' Seas of Blood;
Th' oppressive, sturdy, Man-destroying Villains! 210
Who ravag'd Kingdoms, and laid Empires waste,
And in a cruel Wantonness of Power
Thinn'd States of half their People, and gave up
To Want the rest: Now like a Storm that's spent,
Lye hush'd, and meanly sneak behind thy Covert.
Vain Thought! to hide them from the gen'ral Scorn,

That haunts and doggs them like an injur'd Ghost
Implacable. Here too the *petty Tyrant*
Of scant Domains *Geographer* ne'er notic'd,
And well for neighbouring Grounds, of Arm as short; 220
Who fix'd his Iron Talons on the Poor,
And grip'd them like some Lordly Beast of Prey;
Deaf to the forceful Cries of gnawing Hunger,
And piteous plaintive Voice of Misery:
(As if a *Slave* was not a Shred of Nature,
Of the same common Nature with his *Lord*!)
Now! tame and humble, like a Child that's whipp'd,
Shakes Hands with Dust, and calls the Worm his Kinsman;
Nor pleads his Rank and Birthright. Under Ground
Precedency's a Jest; Vassal and Lord 230
Grossly familiar, Side by Side consume.

When Self-Esteem, or others Adulation,
Would cunningly persuade us we were Something
Above the common Level of our Kind;
The *Grave* gainsays the smooth-complexion'd Flatt'ry,
And with blunt Truth acquaints us what we are.

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