

Stanzas on mortality : subjoined to the Northampton bills of mortality, for several years / by W. Cowper.

Contributors

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Stanzas on Mortality:

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SUBJOINED TO

THE NORTHAMPTON

BILLS OF MORTALITY,

FOR SEVERAL YEARS.

BY W. COWPER, Esq.

London:

Printed by J. Haddon, Finsbury.

For WILLIAMS and SON, Stationers' Court,
Ludgate Street.

350991 BULLS OF MORTALITY

suppl. P / cow

THE NORMANBY

BULLS OF MORTALITY

FOR BEVERLY HILLS



Dr. W. COOPER, M.D.

London

Printed by J. L. Smith, 10, Abchurch Lane, London, E.C. 4.

THE WILLIAMS AND SON, Stationers, London.

London, 1901.

STANZAS

Subjoined to a Bill of Mortality for the Parish

OF

ALL-SAINTS, NORTHAMPTON.

Anno Dom. 1787.

WHILE thirteen moons saw smoothly run
The Nen's barge-laden wave,
All these, Life's rambling journey done,
Have found their home—the grave.
Was man (frail always) made more frail
Than in foregoing years?
Did famine or did plague prevail,
That so much death appears?
No. These were vig'rous as their sires,
Nor plague nor famine came;
This annual tribute death requires,
And never waves his claim.
Like crowded forest trees we stand,
And some are mark'd to fall;
The axe will smite at God's command,
And soon shall smite us all.
Green as the bay-tree, ever green
With its new foliage on,
The gay, and thoughtless, I have seen,
I pass'd—and they were gone.

Read, ye that run! the solemn truth
 With which I charge my page;
 A worm is at the bud of youth,
 And at the root of age.
 No present health can health insure
 For yet an hour to come;
 No med'cine, though it often cure,
 Can always baulk the tomb.
 And oh! that humble as my lot,
 And scorn'd as is my strain,
 These truths, though known, too much forgot,
 I may not teach in vain.
 So prays your clerk with all his heart,
 And ere he quits his pen,
 Begs *you* for once to take *his* part,
 And answer all—Amen!

~~~~~  
 1788.

COULD I, from heav'n inspir'd, as sure presage  
 To whom the rising year shall prove his last;  
 As I can number in my punctual page,  
 And item down the victims of the past;  
 How each would trembling wait the mournful  
 sheet,  
 On which the press might stamp him next to die;  
 And, reading here his sentence, how replete  
 With anxious meaning, heav'n-ward turn his eye!  
 Time, then, would seem more precious than the  
 joys  
 In which he sports away the treasures now;  
 And pray'r more seasonable than the noise  
 Of drunkards, or the music-drawing bow.

Then, doubtless, many a trifier on the brink  
Of this world's hazardous and headlong shore,  
Forc'd to a pause, would feel it good to think,  
Told that his setting sun must rise no more.

Ah! self-deceived, could I, prophetic, say  
Who next is fated, and who next, to fall,  
'The rest might then seem privileg'd to play;  
But, naming *none*, the voice now speaks to ALL.

Observe the dappled foresters, how light  
They bound and airy o'er the sunny glade—  
One falls—the rest wide scatter'd with afright,  
Vanish at once into the darkest shade.

Had we their wisdom, should we often warn'd,  
Still need repeated warnings, and at last,  
A thousand awful admonitions scorn'd,  
Die self-accus'd of life run all to waste?

Sad *waste!* for which no after-thrift atones:  
The grave admits no cure for guilt or sin!  
Dew drops may deck the turf that hides the bones,  
But tears of godly grief ne'er flow within.

Learn then ye living! by the mouths be taught  
Of all these sepulchres, instructors true,  
That, soon or late, death also is *your* lot,  
And the next opening grave may yawn for *you*.

~~~~~  
1789.

“ Oh most delightful hour by man
“ Experienc'd here below
“ The hour which terminates his span,
“ His folly, and his woe!

“ Worlds should not bribe me back to tread,
“ Again life’s dreary waste,
“ To see again my day o’erspread
“ With all the gloomy past.
“ My home henceforth is in the skies,
“ Earth, seas, and sun adieu!
“ All heaven unfolded to my eyes,
“ I have no sight for you.”

So spoke Aspasio, firm possess’d
Of faith’s supporting rod,
Then breath’d his soul into its rest,
The bosom of his God.

He was a man among the few,
Sincere on virtue’s side;
And all his strength from scripture drew,
To hourly use apply’d.

That rule he priz’d, by what he fear’d,
He hated, hop’d, and lov’d;
Nor ever frown’d, or sad appear’d.
But when his heart had rov’d.

For he was frail as thou or I,
And evil felt within;
But when he felt, it heav’d a sigh,
And loath’d the thoughts of sin.

Such liv’d Aspasio; and, at last,
Call’d up from earth to heav’n,
The gulph of death triumphant pass’d,
By gales of blessings driv’n.

His joys be *mine*, each reader cries,
When my last hour arrives!
They shall be yours, my verse replies,
Such only be your lives.

1790.

HE who sits from day to day,
Where the prison'd lark is hung,
Heedless of his loudest lay,
Hardly knows that he has sung.

Where the watchman in his round
Nightly lifts his voice on high,
None, accustomed to the sound,
Wakes the sooner for his cry.

So your verse-man I, and clerk,
Yearly in my song proclaim
Death at hand—yourselves his mark—
And the foe's unerring aim.

Duly at my time I come,
Publishing to all aloud—
Soon the grave must be your home,
And your only suit a shroud.

But the monitory strain
Oft repeated in your ears,
Seems to sound too much in vain,
Wins no notice, wakes no fears.

Can a truth, by all confess'd,
Of such magnitude and weight,
Grow, by being oft express'd,
Trivial as a parrot's prate?

Pleasure's call attention wins,
Hear it often as we may;
New as ever seem our sins,
Though committed ev'ry day.

Death and judgment, heaven and hell,
 These alone so often heard,
 No more move us, than the bell
 When some stranger is interr'd.
 Oh then, ere the turf or tomb
 Cover us from ev'ry eye,
 Spirit of instruction, come,
 Make us learn that we must die!

1792.

THANKLESS for favours from on high,
 Man thinks he fades too soon;
 Tho' tis his privilege to die
 Would he improve the boon.
 But he not wise enough to scan
 His best concerns aright,
 Would gladly stretch life's little span
 To ages, if he might.
 To ages in a world of pain—
 To ages where he goes,
 Gall'd by affliction's heavy chain,
 And hopeless of repose.
 Strange fondness of the human heart,
 Enamour'd of its harm!
 Strange world, that costs it so much smart,
 And still has pow'r to charm.
 Whence has the world her magic pow'r?
 Why deem we death a foe?
 Recoil from weary life's best hour,
 And covet longer woe?

The cause is conscience—conscience oft
Her tale of guilt renews !
Her voice is terrible, though soft,
And dread of death ensues.
Then, anxious to be longer spar'd,
Man mourns his fleeting breath ;
All evils then seem light, compar'd
With the approach of death.
'Tis judgment shakes him ; there's the fear
That prompts the wish to stay ;
He has incurr'd a long arrear,
And must despair to pay.
Pay !—follow Christ and all is paid ;]
His death your peace ensures ;
Think on the grave where he was laid,
And calm descend to yours.

1793.

HE lives who lives to God alone,
And all are dead beside ;
For other names than God, is none
Whence life can be supplied.
To live to God, is to requite
His love as best we may :
To make his precepts our delight,
His promises our stay.
But live within a narrow ring
Of giddy joys compriz'd,
Is falsely named, and no such thing,
But rather death disguis'd.

Can life in them deserve the name,
Who only live, to prove
For what poor toys, they can disclaim
An endless life above?

Who, much diseased, yet nothing feel;
Much menac'd, nothing dread;
Have wounds which only God can heal,
Yet never ask his aid!

Who deem his house an useless place,
Faith, want of common sense;
And ardour in the Christian race,
A hypocrite's pretence!

Who trample order; and the day
Which God asserts his own,
Dishonour with unhallow'd play,
And worship *chance* alone!

If scorn of God's commands, impress'd
On word and deed, imply
The better part of man, unblest'd
With life that cannot die;

Such want it;—and that want uncur'd
Till man resigns his breath,
Speaks him a criminal, assur'd
Of everlasting death.

Sad period to a pleasant course!
Yet so will God repay
Sabbaths profan'd without remorse
And mercy cast away.

An Epitaph

ON

Mr. T. A. HAMILTON,

*In the Church-yard of Newport-Pagnel; who
died July 7, 1788, in the 32d year of his age.*

PAUSE here, and think. A monitory rhyme
Demands one moment of thy fleeting time.

Consult life's silent clock, thy bounding vein
Seems it to say—"Health here has long to reign."
Hast thou the vigour of thy youth?—an eye
That beams delight?—a heart untaught to sigh?
Yet fear. Youth, oftentimes healthful, and at ease,
Anticipates a day it never sees;
And many a tomb, like HAMILTON's, aloud
Exclaims, "Prepare thee for an early shroud."

A COMPARISON.

THE lapse of time and rivers is the same,
Both speed their journey with a restless stream;
The silent pace, with which they steal away,
No wealth can bribe, no prayers persuade to stay;
Alike irrevocable both when past,
And a wide ocean swallows both at last,
Though each resemble each in every part
A difference strikes at length the musing heart:
Streams never flow in vain; where streams abound
How laughs the land with various plenty crowned!
But time, that should enrich the nobler mind,
Neglected leaves a dreary waste behind.

In the Churchyard at St. Andrew's, London:
died July 8, 1768, in the 52d year of his age.

PASSE here, and think: A momentary rhyme
Demands one moment of thy fleeting time.
Consider! life's a slip of chalk, its bounding rein
Seems to say—"Halt! here we have our terminus."
Hast thou the vigour of thy youth?—an eye
That beams delight?—a heart unshackled to sigh?
I of fear: I count of time's uncertain end, and at once
A suppliant a day is never more;
And only a thought like a lightning flash
Exclaims, "Prepare! the term is now at hand!"

A CONCLUSION

THE lapse of time and river's flow
Both sped their journey with a ceaseless flow;
The silent pace, with which they glide away,
No wealth can bribe, no power can stay;
Like irrevocable bottomless seas,
And a wide ocean follows both at last;
Though each to some high destiny runs,
A distance stores at length the running hours;
Still as new flow in vain; where streambeds bound
How long the time, how plenty's ground!

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