What is to be thought of sudden death? It is remarkable that, in different conditions of society it has been variously regarded as the consummation of an earthly career most fervently to be desired, and, on the other hand, as that consummation which is most of all to be deprecated. Caesar the Dictator, at his last dinner party, ( _coena_,) and the very evening before his assassination, being questioned as to the mode of death which, in _his_ opinion, might seem the most eligible, replied--"That which should be most sudden." On the other hand, the divine Litany of our English Church, when breathing forth supplications, as if in some representative character for the whole human race prostrate before God, places such a death in the very van of horrors. "From lightning and tempest; from plague, pestilence, and famine; from battle and murder, and from sudden death,--_Good Lord, deliver us_." Sudden death is here made to crown the climax in a grand ascent of calamities; it is the last of curses; and yet, by the noblest of Romans, it was treated as the first of blessings. In that difference, most readers will see little more than the difference between Christianity and Paganism. But there I hesitate. The Christian church may be right in its estimate of sudden death; and it is a natural feeling, though after all it may also be an infirm one, to wish for a quiet dismissal from life--as that which seems most reconcilable with meditation, with penitential retrospects, and with the humilities of farewell prayer. There does not, however, occur to me any direct scriptural warrant for this earnest petition of the English Litany. It seems rather a petition indulged to human infirmity, than exacted from human piety. And, however _that_ may be, two remarks suggest themselves as prudent restraints upon a doctrine, which else _may_ wander, and _has_ wandered, into an uncharitable superstition. The first is this: that many people are likely to exaggerate the horror of a sudden death, (I mean the _objective_ horror to him who contemplates such a death, not the _subjective_ horror to him who suffers it,) from the false disposition to lay a stress upon words or acts, simply because by an accident they have become words or acts. If a man dies, for instance, by some sudden death when he happens to be intoxicated, such a death is falsely regarded with peculiar horror; as though the intoxication were suddenly exalted into a blasphemy. But _that_ is unphilosophic. The man was, or he was not, _habitually_ a drunkard. If not, if his intoxication were a solitary accident,
there can be no reason at all for allowing special emphasis to this act, simply because through misfortune it became his final act. Nor, on the other hand, if it were no accident, but one of his _habitual_ transgressions, will it be the more habitual or the more a transgression, because some sudden calamity, surprising him, has caused this habitual transgression to be also a final one? Could the man have had any reason even dimly to foresee his own sudden death, there would have been a new feature in his act of intemperance--a feature of presumption and irreverence, as in one that by possibility felt himself drawing near to the presence of God. But this is no part of the case supposed. And the only new element in the man's act is not any element of extra immorality, but simply of extra misfortune.

The other remark has reference to the meaning of the word _sudden_. And it is a strong illustration of the duty which for ever calls us to the stern valuation of words--that very possibly Caesear and the Christian church do not differ in the way supposed; that is, do not differ by any difference of doctrine as between Pagan and Christian views of the moral temper appropriate to death, but that they are contemplating different cases. Both contemplate a violent death; a (Greek: biathanatos)--death that is (Greek: biaios): but the difference is--that the Roman by the word "sudden" means an _unlingering_ death: whereas the Christian Litany by "sudden" means a death _without warning_, consequently without any available summons to religious preparation. The poor mutineer, who kneels down to gather into his heart the bullets from twelve firelocks of his pitying comrades, dies by a most sudden death in Caesar's sense: one shock, one mighty spasm, one (possibly _not_ one) groan, and all is over. But, in the sense of the Litany, his death is far from sudden; his offence, originally, his imprisonment, his trial, the interval between his sentence and its execution, having all furnished him with separate warnings of his fate--having all summoned him to meet it with solemn preparation.

Meantime, whatever may be thought of a sudden death as a mere variety in the modes of dying, where death in some shape is inevitable--a question which, equally in the Roman and the Christian sense, will be variously answered according to each man's variety of temperamental--certainly, upon one aspect of sudden death there can be no opening for doubt, that of all agonies incident to man it is the most frightful, that of all martyrdoms it is the most freezing to human sensibilities--namely, where it surprises a man under circumstances which offer (or which seem to offer) some hurried and inappreciable chance of evading it. Any effort, by which such an evasion can be accomplished, must be as sudden as the danger which it affronts. Even _that_, even the sickening necessity for hurrying in extremity where all hurry seems destined to be vain, self-baffled, and where the dreadful knell of _too_ late is already sounding in the ears by anticipation--even that anguish is liable to a hideous exasperation in one particular case, namely, where the agonising appeal is made not exclusively to the instinct of self-preservation, but to the conscience, on behalf of another life besides your own, accidentally cast upon _your_ protection. To fail, to collapse in a service merely your own, might seem comparatively venial; though, in fact, it is far from venial. But to fail in a case where Providence has suddenly thrown into your hands the final interests of another--of a fellow-creature shuddering between the gates of life and death; this, to a man of apprehensive conscience, would mingle the misery of an atrocious criminality with the misery of a bloody calamity. The man is called upon, too probably, to die; but to die at the very moment when, by any momentary collapse, he is self-denounced as a murderer. He had but the twinkling of an eye for his effort, and that effort might, at the best, have been unavailing; but from this shadow of a chance, small or great, how if he has recoiled by a treasonable _lachete_? The effort _might_ have been without hope; but to have risen to the level of that effort, would have rescued him, though not from dying, yet from dying as a traitor to his duties.

The situation here contemplated exposes a dreadful ulcer, lurking far down in the depths of human nature. It is not that men generally are summoned to face such awful trials. But potentially, and in shadowy outline, such a trial is moving subterraneously in perhaps all men's natures--muttering under ground in one world, to be realized perhaps in some other. Upon the secret mirror of our dreams such a trial is darkly projected at intervals, perhaps, to every one of us. That dream, so familiar to childhood, of meeting a lion, and, from languishing prostration in hope and vital energy, that constant sequel of lying down before him, publishes the secret frailty of human nature--reveals its deep-seated Pariah falsehood to itself--records its abysmal treachery. Perhaps not one of us escapes that dream; perhaps, as by some sorrowful doom of man, that dream repeats for every one of us, through every generation, the original temptation in Eden. Every one of us, in this dream, has a bait offered to the infirm places of his own individual will; once again a snare is made ready for leading him into captivity to a luxury of ruin; again, as in aboriginal Paradise, the man falls from innocence; once again, by infinite iteration, the ancient Earth groans to God, through her secret caves, over the
weakness of her child; "Nature, from her seat, sighing through all her works," again "gives signs of woe that all is lost;" and again the counter sigh is repeated to the sorrowing heavens of the endless rebellion against God. Many people think that one man, the patriarch of our race, could not in his single person execute this rebellion for all his race. Perhaps they are wrong. But, even if not, perhaps in the world of dreams every one of us ratifies for himself the original act. Our English rite of "Confirmation," by which, in years of awakened reason, we take upon us the engagements contracted for us in our slumbering infancy.--how sublime a rite is that! The little postern gate, through which the baby in its cradle had been silently placed for a time within the glory of God's countenance, suddenly rises to the clouds as a triumphal arch, through which, with banners displayed and martial poms, we make our second entry as crusading soldiers militant for God, by personal choice and by sacramental oath. Each man says in effect--"Lo! I rebaptise myself; and that which once was sworn on my behalf, now I swear for myself." Even so in dreams, perhaps, under some secret conflict of the midnight sleeper, lighted up to the consciousness at the time, but darkened to the memory as soon as all is finished, each several child of our mysterious race completes for himself the aboriginal fall.

As I drew near to the Manchester post office, I found that it was considerably past midnight; but to my great relief, as it was important for me to be in Westmorland by the morning, I saw by the huge saucer eyes of the mail, blazing through the gloom of overhanging houses, that my chance was not yet lost. Past the time it was; but by some luck, very unusual in my experience, the mail was not even yet ready to start. I ascended to my seat on the box, where my cloak was still lying as it had lain at the Bridgewater Arms. I had left it there in imitation of a nautical discoverer, who leaves a bit of bunting on the shore of his discovery, by way of warning off the ground the whole human race, and signalising to the Christian and the heathen worlds, with his best compliments, that he has planted his throne for ever upon that virgin soil: henceforward claiming the _jus domini_ to the top of the atmosphere above it, and also the right of driving shafts to the centre of the earth below it; so that all people found after this warning, either aloft in the atmosphere, or in the shafts, or squatting on the soil, will be treated as trespassers—that is, decapitated by their very faithful and obedient servant, the owner of the said bunting. Possibly my cloak might not have been respected, and the _jus gentium_ might have been cruelly violated in my person—for, in the dark, people commit deeds of darkness, gas being a great ally of morality—but it so happened that, on this night, there was no other outside passenger; and the crime, which else was but too probable, missed fire for want of a criminal. By the way, I may as well mention at this point, since a circumstantial accuracy is essential to the effect of my narrative, that there was no other person of any description whatever about the mail—the guard, the coachman, and myself being allowed for—except only one—a horrid creature of the class known to the world as insiders, but whom young Oxford called sometimes "Trojans," in opposition to our Grecian selves, and sometimes "vermin." A Turkish Effendi, who piques himself on good breeding, will never mention by name a pig. Yet it is but too often that he has reason to mention this animal; since constantly, in the streets of Stamboul, he has his trousers deranged or polluted by this vile creature running between his legs. But under any excess of hurry he is always careful, out of respect to the company he is dining with, to suppress the odious name, and to call the wretch "that other creature," as though all animal life beside formed one group, and this odious beast (to whom, as Chrysippus observed, salt serves as an apology for a soul) formed another and alien group on the outside of creation. Now I, who am an English Effendi, that think myself to understand good-breeding as well as any son of Othman, beg my reader's pardon for having mentioned an insider by his gross natural name. I shall do so no more; and, if I should have occasion to glance at so painful a subject, I shall always call him "that other creature." Let us hope, however, that no such distressing occasion will arise. But, by the way, an occasion arises at this moment; for the reader will be sure to ask, when we come to the story, "Was this other creature present?" He was _not_; or more correctly, perhaps, _it_ was not. We dropped the creature—or the creature, by natural imbecility, dropped itself—within the first ten miles from Manchester. In the latter case, I wish to make a philosophic remark of a moral tendency. When I die, or when the reader dies, and by repute suppose of fever, it will never be known whether we died in reality of the fever or of the doctor. But this other creature, in the case of dropping out of the coach, will enjoy a coroner's inquest; consequently he will enjoy an epitaph. For I insist upon it, that the verdict of a coroner's jury makes the best of epitaphs. It is brief, so that the public all find time to read; it is pithy, so that the surviving friends (if any _can_ survive such a loss) remember it without fatigue; it is upon oath, so that rascals and Dr. Johnsons cannot pick holes in it. "Died through the visitation of intense stupidity, by impinging on a moonlight night against the off hind wheel of the Glasgow mail! Deodand upon the said wheel--two-pence." What a simple lapidary inscription! Nobody much in the wrong but an off-wheel; and with few acquaintances; and if it were but rendered into choice Latin, though there would be a little bother in finding a
Ciceronian word for "off-wheel," Marcellus himself, that great master of sepulchral eloquence, could not show a better. Why I call this little remark _moral_, is, from the compensation it points out. Here, by the supposition, is that other creature on the one side, the beast of the world; and he (or it) gets an epitaph. You and I, on the contrary, the pride of our friends, get none.

But why linger on the subject of vermin? Having mounted the box, I took a small quantity of laudanum, having already travelled two hundred and fifty miles--viz., from a point seventy miles beyond London, upon a simple breakfast. In the taking of laudanum there was nothing extraordinary. But by accident it drew upon me the special attention of my assessor on the box, the coachman. And in _that_ there was nothing extraordinary. But by accident, and with great delight, it drew my attention to the fact that this coachman was a monster in point of size, and that he had but one eye. In fact he had been foretold by Virgil as--

"Monstrum. horrendum, informe, ingens cui lumen adempium."

He answered in every point--a monster he was--dreadful, shapeless, huge, who had lost an eye. But why should _that_ delight me? Had he been one of the Calendars in the Arabian Nights, and had paid down his eye as the price of his criminal curiosity, what right had I to exult in his misfortune? I did _not_ exult: I delighted in no man's punishment, though it were even merited. But these personal distinctions identified in an instant an old friend of mine, whom I had known in the south for some years as the most masterly of mail-coachmen. He was the man in all Europe that could best have undertaken to drive six-in-hand full gallop over _Al Sirat_,--that famous bridge of Mahomet across the bottomless gulf, backing himself against the Prophet and twenty such fellows. I used to call him _Cyclops mastigophorus_. Cyclops the whip-bearer, until I observed that his skill made whips useless, except to fetch off an impertinent fly from a leader's head; upon which I changed his Grecian name to Cyclops _diphrelates_ (Cyclops the charioteer.) I, and others known to me, studied under him the diphrelatic art. Excuse, reader, a word too elegant to be pedantic. And also take this remark from me, as a _gage d'amitie_--that no word ever was or _can_ be pedantic which, by supporting a distinction, supports the accuracy of logic; or which fills up a chasm for the understanding. As a pupil, though I paid extra fees, I cannot say that I stood high in his esteem. It showed his dogged honesty, (though, observe, not his discernment,) that he could not see my merits. Perhaps we ought to excuse his absurdity in this particular by remembering his want of an eye. _That_ made him blind to my merits. Irritating as this blindness was, (surely it could not be envy?) he always courted my conversation, in which art I certainly had the whip-hand of him. On this occasion, great joy was at our meeting. But what was Cyclops doing here? Had the medical men recommended northern air, or how? I collected, from such explanations as he volunteered, that he had an interest at stake in a suit-at-law pending at Lancaster; so that probably he had got himself transferred to this station, for the purpose of connecting with his professional pursuits an instant readiness for the calls of his lawsuit.

Meantime, what are we stopping for? Surely, we've been waiting long enough. Oh, this procrastinating mail, and oh this procrastinating post-office! Can't they take a lesson upon that subject from _me_? Some people have called _me_ procrastinating. Now you are witness, reader, that I was in time for _them_. But can _they_ lay their hands on their hearts, and say that they were in time for me? I, during my life, have often had to wait for the post-office; the post-office never waited a minute for me. What are they about? The guard tells me that there is a large extra accumulation of foreign mails this night, owing to irregularities caused by war and by the packet service, when as yet nothing is done by steam. For an _extra_ hour, it seems, the post-office has been engaged in threshing out the pure wheaten correspondence of Glasgow, and winnowing it from the chaff of all baser intermediate towns. We can hear the flails going at this moment. But at last all is finished. Sound your horn, guard. Manchester, good bye; we've lost an hour by your criminal conduct at the post-office; which, however, though I do not mean to part with a serviceable ground of complaint, and one which really is such for the horses, to me secretly is an advantage, since it compels us to recover this last hour amongst the next eight or nine. Off we are at last, and at eleven miles an hour; and at first I detect no changes in the energy or in the skill of Cyclops.

From Manchester to Kendal, which virtually (though not in law) is the capital of Westmoreland, were at this time seven stages of eleven miles each. The first five of these, dated from Manchester, terminated in Lancaster, which was therefore fifty-five miles north of Manchester, and the same distance exactly from Liverpool. The first three terminated
transparency. Except the feet of our own horses, which, running on a sandy margin of the road, made little disturbance,
of unity, by a slight silvery mist, motionless and dreamy, that covered the woods and fields, but with a veil of equable
first timid tremblings of the dawn, were now blending: and the blendings were brought into a still more exquisite state
of halcyon repose. The sea, the atmosphere, the light, bore an orchestral part in this universal lull. Moonlight, in the
we were nearing the sea upon our left, which also must, under the present circumstances, be repeating the general state
wards which, as to their secret haven, the profounder aspirations of man's heart are continually travelling. Obliquely
regularly subsiding about sunset, united with the permanent distinction of Lancashire as the very metropolis and citadel
have seemed to a stranger, that swept to and from Lancaster all day long, hunting the county up and down, and
put forth daily. At this particular season also of the assizes, that dreadful hurricane of flight and pursuit, as it might
working through the fiery will. Upon no equal space of earth, was, or ever had been, the same energy of human power
curse of labour in its heaviest form, not mastering the bodies of men only as of slaves, or criminals in mines, but
which, in its southern section, more than upon any equal area known to man past or present, had descended the original
every thoughtful man suggesting solemn and often sigh-born thoughts.(1) The county was my own native county--upon
solemnity and peace. I myself, though slightly alive to the possibilities of peril, had so far yielded to the influence of
the fiftieth or sixtieth time, without any invitation from Cyclops or myself, and without applause for his poor labors,
seemed resting upon him; and, to consummate the case, our worthy guard, after singing "Love amongst the Roses," for
the fiftieth or sixtieth time, without any invitation from Cyclops or myself, and without applause for his poor labors,
common use to the tribunal of Lilliputian Lancaster. To break up
this old traditional usage required a conflict with powerful established interests, a large system of new arrangements,
and a new parliamentary statute. As things were at present, twice in the year so vast a body of business rolled
northwards, from the southern quarter of the county, that a fortnight at least occupied the severe exertions of two judges
for its dispatch. The consequence of this was--that every horse available for such a service, along the whole line of
road, was exhausted in carrying down the multitudes of people who were parties to the different suits. By sunset,
therefore, it usually happened that, through utter exhaustion amongst men and horses, the roads were all silent. Except
exhaustion in the vast adjacent county of York from a contested election, nothing like it was ordinarily witnessed in
England.

On this occasion, the usual silence and solitude prevailed along the road. Not a hoof nor a wheel was to be heard. And
to strengthen this false luxurious confidence in the noiseless roads, it happened also that the night was one of peculiar
solemnity and peace. I myself, though slightly alive to the possibilities of peril, had so far yielded to the influence of
the mighty calm as to sink into a profound reverie. The month was August, in which lay my own birth-day; a festival to
every thoughtful man suggesting solemn and often sigh-born thoughts.(1) The county was my own native county--upon
which, in its southern section, more than upon any equal area known to man past or present, had descended the original
curse of labour in its heaviest form, not mastering the bodies of men only as of slaves, or criminals in mines, but
working through the fiery will. Upon no equal space of earth, was, or ever had been, the same energy of human power
put forth daily. At this particular season also of the assizes, that dreadful hurricane of flight and pursuit, as it might
have seemed to a stranger, that swept to and from Lancaster all day long, hunting the county up and down, and
regularly subsiding about sunset, united with the permanent distinction of Lancashire as the very metropolis and citadel
of labour, to point the thoughts pathetically upon that counter vision of rest, of saintly repose from strife and sorrow,
towards which, as to their secret haven, the profounder aspirations of man's heart are continually travelling. Obliquely
we were nearing the sea upon our left, which also must, under the present circumstances, be repeating the general state
of halcyon repose. The sea, the atmosphere, the light, bore an orchestral part in this universal lull. Moonlight, in the
first timid tremblings of the dawn, were now blending: and the blendings were brought into a still more exquisite state
of unity, by a slight silvery mist, motionless and dreamy, that covered the woods and fields, but with a veil of equable
transparency. Except the feet of our own horses, which, running on a sandy margin of the road, made little disturbance,
there was no sound abroad. In the clouds, and on the earth, prevailed the same majestic peace; and in spite of all that
the villain of a schoolmaster has done for the ruin of our sublimer thoughts, which are the thoughts of our infancy, we
still believe in no such nonsense as a limited atmosphere. Whatever we may swear with our false feigning lips, in our
faithful hearts we still believe, and must for ever believe, in fields of air traversing the total gulf between earth and the
central heavens. Still, in the confidence of children that tread without fear every chamber in their father's house, and to
whom no door is closed, we, in that Sabbatic vision which sometimes is revealed for an hour upon nights like this,
ascend with easy steps from the sorrow-stricken fields of earth, upwards to the sandals of God.

(Footnote 1: "Sigh-born:" I owe the suggestion of this word to an obscure remembrance of a beautiful phrase in
Giraldus Gambrensis, viz., _suspiriosae cogitationes_.)

Suddenly from thoughts like these, I was awakened to a sullen sound, as of some motion on the distant road. It stole
upon the air for a moment; I listened in awe; but then it died away. Once roused, however, I could not but observe with
alarm the quickened motion of our horses. Ten years' experience had made my eye learned in the valuing of motion;
and I saw that we were now running thirteen miles an hour. I pretend to no presence of mind. On the contrary, my fear
is, that I am miserably and shamefully deficient in that quality as regards action. The palsy of doubt and distraction
hangs like some guilty weight of dark unfathomed remembrances upon my energies, when the signal is flying for
_action_. But, on the other hand, this accursed gift I have, as regards_thought_, that in the first step towards the
possibility of a misfortune, I see its total evolution: in the radix I see too certainly and too instantly its entire expansion;
in the first syllable of the dreadful sentence, I read already the last. It was not that I feared for ourselves. What could
injure_us_? Our bulk and impetus charmed us against peril in any collision. And I had rode through too many
hundreds of perils that were frightful to approach, that were matter of laughter as we looked back upon them, for any
anxiety to rest upon_our_interests. The mail was not built, I felt assured, nor bespoke, that could betray_me_ who
trusted to its protection. But any carriage that we could meet would be frail and light in comparison of ourselves. And I
remarked this ominous accident of our situation. We were on the wrong side of the road. But then the other party, if
other there was, might also be on the wrong side; and two wrongs might make a right._That_ was not likely. The same
motive which had drawn_us_to the right-hand side of the road, viz., the soft beaten sand, as contrasted with the paved
centre, would prove attractive to others. Our lamps, still lighted, would give the impression of vigilance on our part.
And every creature that met us, would rely upon_us_for quartering.(1) All this, and if the separate links of the
anticipation had been a thousand times more, I saw--not discursively or by effort--but as by one flash of horrid
intuition.

(Footnote 1: "_Quartering_"--this is the technical word; and, I presume derived from the French_carlayer_, to evade a
rut or any obstacle.)

Under this steady though rapid anticipation of the evil which_might_be gathering ahead, ah, reader! what a sullen
mystery of fear, what a sigh of woe, seemed to steal upon the air, as again the far-off sound of a wheel was heard! A
whisper it was--a whisper from, perhaps, four miles off--secretly announcing a ruin that, being foreseen, was not the
less inevitable. What could be done--who was it that could do it--to check the storm-flight of these maniacal horses?
What! could I not seize the reins from the grasp of the slumbering coachman? You, reader, think that it would have
been in_your_power to do so. And I quarrel not with your estimate of yourself. But, from the way in which the
coachman's hand was viced between his upper and lower thigh, this was impossible. The guard subsequently found it
impossible, after this danger had passed. Not the grasp only, but also the position of this Polyphemus, made the attempt
impossible. You still think otherwise. See, then, that bronze equestrian statue. The cruel rider has kept the bit in his
horse's mouth for two centuries. Unbridle him, for a minute, if you please, and wash his mouth with water. Or stay,
reader, unhorse me that marble emperor; knock me those marble feet from those marble stirrups of Charlemagne.

The sounds ahead strengthened, and were now too clearly the sounds of wheels. Who and what could it be? Was it
industry in a taxed cart? Was it youthful gaiety in a gig? Whoever it was, something must be attempted to warn them.
Upon the other party rests the active responsibility, but upon_us_and, woe is me! that_us_was my single self--rest
the responsibility of warning. Yet, how should this be accomplished? Might I not seize the guard's horn? Already, on
the first thought, I was making my way over the roof to the guard's seat. But this, from the foreign mails being piled
upon the roof, was a difficult, and even dangerous attempt, to one cramped by nearly three hundred miles of outside travelling. And, fortunately, before I had lost much time in the attempt, our frantic horses swept round an angle of the road, which opened upon us the stage where the collision must be accomplished, the parties that seemed summoned to the trial, and the impossibility of saving them by any communication with the guard.

Before us lay an avenue, straight as an arrow, six hundred yards, perhaps, in length; and the umbrageous trees, which rose in a regular line from either side, meeting high overhead, gave to it the character of a cathedral aisle. These trees lent a deeper solemnity to the early light; but there was still light enough to perceive, at the further end of this gothic aisle, a light, reedy gig, in which were seated a young man, and, by his side, a young lady. Ah, young sir! what are you about? If it is necessary that you should whisper your communications to this young lady--though really I see nobody at this hour, and on this solitary road, likely to overhear your conversation--is it, therefore, necessary that you should carry your lips forward to hers? The little carriage is creeping on at one mile an hour; and the parties within it, being thus tenderly engaged, are naturally bending down their heads. Between them and eternity, to all human calculation, there is but a minute and a half. What is it that I shall do? Strange it is, and to a mere auditor of the tale, might seem laughable, that I should need a suggestion from the _Iliad_ to prompt the sole recourse that remained. But so it was. Suddenly I remembered the shout of Achilles, and its effect. But could I pretend to shout like the son of Peleus, aided by Pallas? No, certainly: but then I needed not the shout that should alarm all Asia militant; a shout would suffice, such as should carry terror into the hearts of two thoughtless young people, and one gig horse. I shouted--and the young man heard me not. A second time I shouted--and now he heard me, for now he raised his head.

Here, then, all had been done that, by me, _could_ be done: more on _my_ part was not possible. Mine had been the first step: the second was for the young man: the third was for God. If, said I, the stranger is a brave man, and if, indeed, he loves the young girl at his side--or, loving her not, if he feels the obligation pressing upon every man worthy to be called a man, of doing his utmost for a woman confided to his protection--he will at least make some effort to save her. If _that_ fails, he will not perish the more, or by a death more cruel, for having made it; and he will die as a brave man should, with his face to the danger, and with his arm about the woman that he sought in vain to save. But if he makes no effort, shrinking, without a struggle, from his duty, he himself will not the less certainly perish for this baseness of poltroonery. He will die no less: and why not? Wherefore should we grieve that there is one craven less in the world? No; _let_ him perish, without a pitying thought of ours wasted upon him; and, in that case, all our grief will be reserved for the fate of the helpless girl, who now, upon the least shadow of failure in _him_, must, by the fiercest of translations--must, without time for a prayer--must, within seventy seconds, stand before the judgment-seat of God.

But craven he was not: sudden had been the call upon him, and sudden was his answer to the call. He saw, he heard, he comprehended, the ruin that was coming down: already its gloomy shadow darkened above him; and already he was measuring his strength to deal with it. Ah! what a vulgar thing does courage seem, when we see nations buying it and selling it for a shilling a day: ah! what a sublime thing does courage seem, when some fearful crisis on the great deeps of life carries a man, as if running before a hurricane, up to the giddy crest of some mountainous wave, from which accordingly as he chooses his course, he describes two courses, and a voice says to him audibly, "This way lies hope; take the other way and mourn for ever!" Yet, even then, amidst the raving of the seas and the frenzy of the danger, the man is able to confront his situation--is able to retire for a moment into solitude with God, and to seek all his counsel from _him_! For seven seconds, it might be, of his seventy, the stranger settled his countenance steadfastly upon us, as if to search and value every element in the conflict before him. For five seconds more he sate immovably, like one that prayed in sorrow, under some extremity of doubt, for wisdom to guide him towards the better choice. Then suddenly he rose; stood upright; and, by a sudden strain upon the reins, raising his horse's forefeet from the ground, he slewed him round on the pivot of his hind legs, so as to plant the little equipage in a position nearly at right angles to ours. Thus far his condition was not improved; except as a first step had been taken towards the possibility of a second. If no more were done, nothing was done; for the little carriage still occupied the very centre of our path, though in an altered direction. Yet even now it may not be too late: fifteen of the twenty seconds may still be unexhausted; and one almighty bound forward may avail to clear the ground. Hurry then; hurry! for the flying moments--_they_ hurry! Oh hurry, hurry, my brave young man! for the cruel hoofs of our horses--_they_ also hurry! Fast are the flying moments, faster are the hoofs of our horses. Fear not for
_him_, if human energy can suffice: faithful was he that drove, to his terrific duty; faithful was the horse to _his_ command. One blow, one impulse given with voice and hand by the stranger, one rush from the horse, one bound as if in the act of rising to a fence, landed the docile creature's forefeet upon the crown or arching centre of the road. The larger half of the little equipage had then cleared our over-towering shadow: _that_ was evident even to my own agitated sight. But it mattered little that one wreck should float off in safety, if upon the wreck that perished were embarked the human freighting. The rear part of the carriage--was _that_ certainly beyond the line of absolute ruin? What power could answer the question? Glance of eye, thought of man, wing of angel, which of these had speed enough to sweep between the question and the answer, and divide the one from the other? Light does not tread upon the steps of light more indivisibly, than did our all-conquering arrival upon the escaping efforts of the gig. _That_ must the young man have felt too plainly. His back was now turned to us; not by sight could he any longer communicate with the peril; but by the dreadful rattle of our harness, too truly had his ear been instructed--that all was finished as regarded any further effort of _his_. Already in resignation he had rested from his struggle; and perhaps, in his heart he was whispering--"Father, which art above, do thou finish in heaven what I on earth have attempted." We ran past them faster than ever mill-race in our inexorable flight. Oh, raving of hurricanes that must have sounded in their young ears at the moment of our transit! Either with the swingle-bar, or with the haunch of our near leader, we had struck the off-wheel of the little gig, which stood rather obliquely and not quite so far advanced as to be accurately parallel with the near wheel. The blow, from the fury of our passage, resounded terrifically. I rose in horror, to look upon the ruins we might have caused. From my elevated station I looked down, and looked back upon the scene, which in a moment told its tale, and wrote all its records on my heart for ever.

The horse was planted immovably, with his fore-feet upon the paved crest of the central road. He of the whole party was alone untouched by the passion of death. The little cany carriage--partly perhaps from the dreadful torsion of the wheels in its recent movement, partly from the thundering blow we had given to it--as if it sympathized with human horror, was all alive with tremblings and shiverings. The young man sat like a rock. He stirred not at all. But _his_ was the steadiness of agitation frozen into rest by horror. As yet he dared not to look round; for he knew that, if anything remained to do, by him it could no longer be done. And as yet he knew not for certain if their safety were accomplished. But the lady--

But the lady--! Oh heavens! will that spectacle ever depart from my dreams, as she rose and sank upon her seat, sank and rose, threw up her arms wildly to heaven, clutched at some visionary object in the air, fainting, praying, raving, despairing! Figure to yourself, reader, the elements of the case; suffer me to recall before your mind the circumstances of the unparalleled situation. From the silence and deep peace of this saintly summer night--from the pathetic blending of this sweet moonlight, dawnlight, dreamlight--from the manly tenderness of this flattering, whispering, murmuring love--suddenly as from the woods and fields--suddenly as from the chambers of the air opening in revelation--suddenly as from the ground yawning at her feet, leaped upon her, with the flashing of cataracts, Death the crowned phantom, with all the equipage of his terrors, and the tiger roar of his voice.

The moments were numbered. In the twinkling of an eye our flying horses had carried us to the termination of the umbrageous aisle; at right angles we wheeled into our former direction; the turn of the road carried the scene out of my eyes in an instant, and swept it into my dreams for ever.

DREAM-FUGUE.

ON THE ABOVE THEME OF SUDDEN DEATH.

"Whence the sound
Of instruments, that made melodious chime,
Was heard, of harp and organ; and who mov'd
Their stops and chords, was seen; his volant touch
Instinct through all proportions, low and high,
Fled and pursued transverse the resonant fugue."

_Par. Lost, B. XL_

_Tumultuosissimamente_.

Passion of Sudden Death! that once in youth I read and interpreted by the shadows of thy averted(1) signs;--Rapture of panic taking the shape which amongst tombs in churches I have seen, of woman bursting her sepulchral bonds--of woman's Ionic form bending forward from the ruins of her grave with arching foot, with eyes upraised, with clasped adoring hands--waiting, watching, trembling, praying, for the trumpet's call to rise from dust for ever!--Ah, vision too fearful of shuddering humanity on the brink of abysses! vision that didst start back--that didst reel away--like a shrivelling scroll from before the wrath of fire racing on the wings of the wind! Epilepsy so brief of horror--wherefore is it that thou canst not die? Passing so suddenly into darkness, wherefore is it that still thou sheddest thy sad funeral blights upon the gorgeous mosaics of dreams? Fragment of music too stern, heard once and heard no more, what aileth thee that thy deep rolling chords come up at intervals through all the worlds of sleep, and after thirty years have lost no element of horror?

(Footnote 1: "_Averted signs_."--I read the course and changes of the lady's agony in the succession of her involuntary gestures; but let it be remembered that I read all this from the rear, never once catching the lady's full face, and even her profile imperfectly.)

1.

Lo, it is summer, almighty summer! The everlasting gates of life and summer are thrown open wide; and on the ocean, tranquil and verdant as a savanna, the unknown lady from the dreadful vision and I myself are floating: she upon a fairy pinnace, and I upon an English three-decker. But both of us are wooing gales of festal happiness within the domain of our common country--within that ancient watery park--within that pathless chase where England takes her pleasure as a huntress through winter and summer, and which stretches from the rising to the setting sun. Ah! what a wilderness of floral beauty was hidden, or was suddenly revealed, upon the tropic islands, through which the pinnace moved. And upon her deck what a bevy of human flowers--young women how lovely, young men how noble, that were dancing together, and slowly drifting towards _us_ amidst music and incense, amidst blossoms from forests and gorgeous corymbi from vintages, amidst natural caroling and the echoes of sweet girlish laughter. Slowly the pinnace nears us, gaily she hails us, and slowly she disappears beneath the shadow of our mighty bows. But then, as at some signal from heaven, the music and the carols, and the sweet echoing of girlish laughter--all are hushed. What evil has smitten the pinnace, meeting or overtaken her? Did ruin to our friends couch within our own dreadful shadow? Was our shadow the shadow of death? I looked over the bow for an answer; and, behold! the pinnace was dismantled; the revel and the revellers were found no more; the glory of the vintage was dust; and the forest was left without a witness to its beauty upon the seas. "But where," and I turned to our own crew--"Where are the lovely women that danced beneath the awning of flowers and clustering corymbi? Whither have fled the noble young men that danced with _them_?" Answer there was none. But suddenly the man at the mast-head, whose countenance darkened with alarm, cried out--"Sail on the weather beam! Down she comes upon us: in seventy seconds she will founder!"

2.

I looked to the weather side, and the summer had departed. The sea was rocking, and shaken with gathering wrath. Upon its surface sate mighty mists, which grouped themselves into arches and long cathedral aisles. Down one of these, with the fiery pace of a quarrel from a cross-bow, ran a frigate right athwart our course. "Are they mad?" some voice exclaimed from our deck. "Are they blind? Do they woo their ruin?" But in a moment, as she was close upon us, some impulse of a heady current or sudden vortex gave a wheeling bias to her course, and off she forged without a shock. As she ran past us, high aloft amongst the shrouds stood the lady of the pinnace. The deeps opened ahead in malice to receive her, towering surges of foam ran after her, the billows were fierce to catch her. But far away she was borne into
desert spaces of the sea: whilst still by sight I followed her, as she ran before the howling gale, chased by angry seabirds and by maddening billows; still I saw her, as at the moment when she ran past us, amongst the shrouds, with her white draperies streaming before the wind. There she stood with hair dishevelled, one hand clutched amongst the tackling--rising, sinking, fluttering, trembling, praying--there for leagues I saw her as she stood, raising at intervals one hand to heaven, amidst the fiery crests of the pursuing waves and the raving of the storm; until at last, upon a sound from afar of malicious laughter and mockery, all was hidden for ever in driving showers; and afterwards, but when I know not, and how I know not.

3.

Sweet funeral bells from some incalculable distance, wailing over the dead that die before the dawn, awakened me as I slept in a boat moored to some familiar shore. The morning twilight even then was breaking; and, by the dusky revelations which it spread, I saw a girl adorned with a garland of white roses about her head for some great festival, running along the solitary strand with extremity of haste. Her running was the running of panic; and often she looked back as to some dreadful enemy in the rear. But when I leaped ashore, and followed on her steps to warn her of a peril in front, alas! from me she fled as from another peril; and vainly I shouted to her of quicksands that lay ahead. Faster and faster she ran; round a promontory of rocks she wheeled out of sight; in an instant I also wheeled round it, but only to see the treacherous sands gathering above her head. Already her person was buried; only the fair young head and the diadem of white roses around it were still visible to the pitying heavens; and, last of all, was visible one marble arm. I saw by the early twilight this fair young head, as it was sinking down to darkness--saw this marble arm, as it rose above her head and her treacherous grave, tossing, falttering, rising, clutching as at some false deceiving hand stretched out from the clouds--saw this marble arm uttering her dying hope, and then her dying despair. The head, the diadem, the arm,--these all had sunk; at last over these also the cruel quicksand had closed; and no memorial of the fair young girl remained on earth, except my own solitary tears, and the funeral bells from the desert seas, that, rising again more softly, sang a requiem over the grave of the buried child, and over her blighted dawn.

I sate, and wept in secret the tears that men have ever given to the memory of those that died before the dawn, and by the treachery of earth, our mother. But the tears and funeral bells were hushed suddenly by a shout as of many nations, and by a roar as from some great king's artillery advancing rapidly along the valleys, and heard afar by its echoes among the mountains. "Hush!" I said, as I bent my ear earthwards to listen--"hush!--this either is the very anarchy of strife, or else"--and then I listened more profoundly, and said as I raised my head--"or else, oh heavens! it is _victory_ that swallows up all strife."

4.

Immediately, in trance, I was carried over land and sea to some distant kingdom, and placed upon a triumphal car, amongst companions crowned with laurel. The darkness of gathering midnight, brooding over all the land, hid from us the mighty crowds that were weaving restlessly about our carriage as a centre--we heard them, but we saw them not. Tidings had arrived, within an hour, of a grandeur that measured itself against centuries; too full of pathos they were, too full of joy that acknowledged no fountain but God, to utter themselves by other language than by tears, by restles anthems, by reverberations rising from every choir, of the _Gloria in excelsis_. These tidings we that sate upon the laurelled car had it for our privilege to publish amongst all nations. And already, by signs audible through the darkness, by snortings and tramplings, our angry horses, that knew no fear of fleshly weariness, upbraided us with delay. Wherefore _was_ it that we delayed? We waited for a secret word, that should bear witness to the hope of nations, as now accomplished for ever. At midnight the secret word arrived; which word was--Waterloo and Recovered Christendom! The dreadful word shone by its own light; before us it went; high above our leaders' heads it rode, and spread a golden light over the paths which we traversed. Every city, at the presence of the secret word, threw open its gates to receive us. The rivers were silent as we crossed. All the infinite forests, as we ran along their margins, shivered in homage to the secret word. And the darkness comprehended it.
Two hours after midnight we reached a mighty minster. Its gates, which rose to the clouds, were closed. But when the
dreadful word, that rode before us, reached them with its golden light, silently they moved back upon their hinges; and
at a flying gallop our equipage entered the grand aisle of the cathedral. Headlong was our pace; and at every altar, in
the little chapels and oratories to the right hand and left of our course, the lamps, dying or sickening, kindled anew in
sympathy with the secret word that was flying past. Forty leagues we might have run in the cathedral, and as yet no
strength of morning light had reached us, when we saw before us the aerial galleries of the organ and the choir. Every
pinnacle of the fretwork, every station of advantage amongst the traceries, was crested by white-robed choristers, that
sang deliverance; that wept no more tears, as once their fathers had wept; but at intervals that sang together to the
generations, saying--

"Chaunt the deliverer's praise in every tongue,"

and receiving answers from afar,

"such as once in heaven and earth were sung."

And of their chaunting was no end; of our headlong pace was neither pause nor remission.

Thus, as we ran like torrents--thus, as we swept with bridal rapture over the Campo Santo(1) of the cathedral graves--
suddenly we became aware of a vast necropolis rising upon the far-off horizon--a city of sepulchres, built within the
saintly cathedral for the warrior dead that rested from their feuds on earth. Of purple granite was the necropolis; yet, in
the first minute, it lay like a purple stain upon the horizon--so mighty was the distance. In the second minute it trembled
through many changes, growing into terraces and towers of wondrous altitude, so mighty was the pace. In the third
minute already, with our dreadful gallop, we were entering its suburbs. Vast sarcophagi rose on every side, having
towers and turrets that, upon the limits of the central aisle, strode forward with haughty intrusion, that ran back with
mighty shadows into answering recesses. Every sarcophagus showed many bas-reliefs--bas-reliefs of battles--bas-
reliefs of battle-fields; of battles from forgotten ages--of battles from yesterday--of battle-fields that, long since, nature
had healed and reconciled to herself with the sweet oblivion of flowers--of battle-fields that were yet angry and crimson
with carnage. Where the terraces ran, there did we run; where the towers curved, there did we curve. With the
flight of swallows our horses swept round every angle. Like rivers in flood, wheeling round headlands; like hurricanes
that side into the secrets of forests; faster than ever light unwove the mazes of darkness, our flying equipage carried
earthly passions--kindled warrior instincts--amongst the dust that lay around us; dust oftentimes of our noble fathers
that had slept in God from Créci to Trafalgar. And now had we reached the last sarcophagus, now were we abreast of
the last bas-relief, already had we recovered the arrow-like flight of the illimitable central aisle, when coming up this
aisle to meet us we beheld a female infant that rode in a carriage as frail as flowers. The mists, which went before her,
id hid the fawns that drew her, but could not hide the shells and tropic flowers with which she played--but could not hide
the lovely smiles by which she uttered her trust in the mighty cathedral, and in the cherubim that looked down upon her
from the topmast shafts of its pillars. Face to face she was meeting us; face to face she rode, as if danger there were
none. "Oh, baby!" I exclaimed, "shalt thou be the ransom for Waterloo? Must we, that carry tidings of great joy to
every people, be messengers of ruin to thee?" In horror I rose at the thought; but then also, in horror at the thought, rose
one that was sculptured on the bas-relief--a dying trumpeter. Solemnly from the field of battle he rose to his feet; and,
unslinging his stony trumpet, carried it, in his dying anguish, to his stony lips--sounding once, and yet once again;
proclamation that, in thy ears, oh baby! must have spoken from the battlements of death. Immediately deep shadows
fell between us, and aboriginal silence. The choir had ceased to sing. The hoofs of our horses, the rattling of our
harness, alarmed the graves no more. By horror the bas-relief had been unlocked into life. By horror we, that were so
full of life, we men and our horses, with their fiery fore-legs rising in mid air to their everlasting gallop, were frozen to
a bas-relief. Then a third time the trumpet sounded; the seals were taken off all pulses; life, and the frenzy of life, tore
into their channels again; again the choir burst forth in sunny grandeur, as from the muffling of storms and darkness;
again the thunderings of our horses carried temptation into the graves. One cry burst from our lips as the clouds,
drawing off from the aisle, showed it empty before us--"Whither has the infant fled?--is the young child caught up to
God?" Lo! afar off, in a vast recess, rose three mighty windows to the clouds: and on a level with their summits, at
height insuperable to man, rose an altar of purest alabaster. On its eastern face was trembling a crimson glory. Whence
came _that_? Was it from the reddening dawn that now streamed _through_ the windows? Was it from the crimson robes of the martyrs that were painted _on_ the windows? Was it from the bloody bas-reliefs of earth? Whencesoever it were--there, within that crimson radiance, suddenly appeared a female head, and then a female figure. It was the child--now grown up to woman's height. Clinging to the horns of the altar, there she stood--sinking, rising, trembling, fainting--raving, despairing; and behind the volume of incense that, night and day, streamed upwards from the altar, was seen the fiery font, and dimly was descried the outline of the dreadful being that should baptize her with the baptism of death. But by her side was kneeling her better angel, that hid his face with wings; that wept and pleaded for _her_; that prayed when _she_ could _not_; that fought with heaven by tears for _her_ deliverance; which also, as he raised his immortal countenance from his wings, I saw, by the glory in his eye, that he had won at last.

(Footnote 1: _Campo Santo_.--It is probable that most of my readers will be acquainted with the history of the Campo Santo at Pisa--composed of earth brought from Jerusalem for a bed of sanctity, as the highest prize which the noble piety of crusaders could ask or imagine. There is another Campo Santo at Naples, formed, however, (I presume,) on the example given by Pisa. Possibly the idea may have been more extensively copied. To readers who are unacquainted with England, or who (being English) are yet unacquainted with the cathedral cities of England, it may be right to mention that the graves within-side the cathedrals often form a flat pavement over which carriages and horses might roll; and perhaps a boyish remembrance of one particular cathedral, across which I had seen passengers walk and burdens carried, may have assisted my dream.)

5.

Then rose the agitation, spreading through the infinite cathedral, to its agony; then was completed the passion of the mighty fugue. The golden tubes of the organ, which as yet had but sobbed and muttered at intervals--gleaming amongst clouds and surges of incense--threw up, as from fountains unfathomable, columns of heart-shattering music. Choir and anti-choir were filling fast with unknown voices. Thou also, Dying Trumpeter!--with thy love that was victorious, and thy anguish that was finishing, didst enter the tumult: trumpet and echo--farewell love, and farewell anguish--rang through the dreadful _sanctus_. We, that spread flight before us, heard the tumult, as of flight, mustering behind us. In fear we looked round for the unknown steps that, in flight or in pursuit, were gathering upon our own. Who were these that followed? The faces, which no man could count--whence were _they_? "Oh, darkness of the grave!" I exclaimed, "that from the crimson altar and from the fiery font wert visited with secret light--that wert searched by the effulgence in the angel's eye--were these indeed thy children? Pomp of life, that, from the burials of centuries, rose again to the voice of perfect joy, could it be _ye_ that had wrapped me in the reflux of panic?" What ailed me, that I should fear when the triumphs of earth were advancing? Ah! Pariah heart within me, that couldst never hear the sound of joy without sullen whispers of treachery in ambush; that, from six years old, didst never hear the promise of perfect love, without seeing aloft amongst the stars fingers as of a man's hand, writing the secret legend--"_Ashes to ashes, dust to dust_!"--wherefore shouldst _thou_ not fear, though all men should rejoice? Lo! as I looked back for seventy leagues through the mighty cathedral, and saw the quick and the dead that sang together to God, together that sang to the generations of man--ah! raving, as of torrents that opened on every side: trepidation, as of female and infant steps that fled--ah! rushing, as of wings that chase! But I heard a voice from heaven, which said--"Let there be no reflux of panic--let there be no more fear, and no more sudden death! Cover them with joy as the tides cover the shore!" _That_ heard the children of the choir, _that_ heard the children of the grave. All the hosts of jubilation made ready to move. Like armies that ride in pursuit, they moved with one step. Us, that, with laurelled heads, were passing from the cathedral through its eastern gates, they overtook, and, as with a garment, they wrapped us round with thunders that overpowered our own. As brothers we moved together; to the skies we rose--to the dawn that advanced--to the stars that fled; rendering thanks to God in the highest--that, having hid his face through one generation behind thick clouds of War, once again was ascending--was ascending from Waterloo--in the visions of Peace; rendering thanks for thee, young girl! whom having overshadowed with his ineffable passion of death--suddenly did God relent; suffered thy angel to turn aside his arm; and even in thee, sister unknown! shown to me for a moment only to be hidden for ever, found an occasion to glorify his goodness. A thousand times, amongst the phantoms of sleep, has he shown thee to me, standing before the golden dawn, and ready to enter its gates--with the dreadful word going before thee--with the armies of the grave behind thee; shown thee to me, sinking, rising, fluttering, fainting, but then suddenly reconciled, adoring; a
thousand times has he followed thee in the worlds of sleep--through storms; through desert seas; through the darkness of quicksands; through fugues and the persecution of fugues; through dreams, and the dreadful resurrections that are in dreams--only that at the last, with one motion of his victorious arm, he might record and emblazon the endless resurrections of his love!

(The end)
Thomas De Quincey's essay: Vision Of Sudden Death

By Thomas De Quincey