"GIVE DAYROLLES A CHAIR."

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The last words of the dying are fraught with an interest which compensates for their brevity. There is a finality about a man's last speech which fixes it in the popular regard and not infrequently lights it through the centuries. "Krito," said Socrates, as he lay dying at the hands of his judges, "we owe a cock to Æsculapius; discharge the debt and by no means omit it." A compliment, certainly, to the healing art of that far-off day and one that speaks well for the happy relations between physician and philosopher.

Yet it is strange that such a trivial sentence should survive the generations which have forgotten more weighty utterances. We can recall the words of Wolsey to the brethren of Leicester Abbey, the "Et tu Brute" of the dying Caesar, and we hear Sidney at Zutphen gasp out, "Thy necessity is greater than mine," but few of us can remember anything else that the great Emperor, Prelate, or Courtier said in the heighday of life.

I think there is another reason for this. The last flicker of a dying fire will often light up and accentuate some object which has scarcely been noticed in the general illumination. And so in much the same way the words of a dying man will sometimes reveal a different side to his personality from that which the watchers by the bedside have known before. Dr. Johnson, his life ebbing away, asks for another pillow to be brought. "It will do all that a pillow can do," he says. A rather pathetic admission of impotence on the part of the domineering old lexicographer whose friends for years had come to regard him as a kind of Immortal. And I imagine that it must have been with no little astonishment that those who watched, by the bed of Lord Thurlow caught his last words: "I'm shot if I don't believe I'm dying," he said; and it was so.

Sir John Moore lying before Corunna gasps out, "Stanhope, remember me to your sister," and although here the eavesdropper seems to be guilty of an impertinence, yet for a moment we see the great soldier as we did not know him before, and we are glad to take leave of him thus.

It is not often that we can bring ourselves to smile at the humour of the dying. Yet none the less how many brave jests have been heard upon lips that were about to become silent for ever. Sir Thomas More, kneeling on the scaffold, carefully moves his beard from the block. "Pity that should be cut," he says with fine irony. "That has never committed Treason." And centuries after him Sidney Smith, wrapped round with a
huge plaster, according to the light of his generation, dies whispering, "What a lot of mustard for such a little lean!"

It is scarcely necessary to point out how often posterity has been indebted to the shrewd and accurate observation of the physician in this respect. Upon the morning of the death of the Earl of Chesterfield, "and about half an hour before it happened," says Maty, "Mr. Dayrolles called upon him to make his usual visit. When he had entered the room, the valet de chambre, opening the curtains of the bed, announced Mr. Dayrolles to his lordship. The earl just found strength in a faint voice to say, 'Give Dayrolles a chair.' These were the last words he was heard to speak. They were characteristic and were remarked by the very able and attentive physician then in the room. 'His good breeding,' said that gentleman, 'only quits him with life.'"

Forster tells us as Oliver Goldsmith lay dying, "It then occurred to Dr. Turton to put a very pregnant question to his patient. 'Your pulse,' he said, 'is in greater disorder than it should be from the degree of fever you have. Is your mind at ease?' 'No, it is not,' was Goldsmith's melancholy answer. They were the last words we are to hear him utter in this world."

And what of the physician himself when he reaches his appointed time? Few dying men can have uttered happier words than Dr. William Hunter. "If I had strength enough to hold a pen I would write how easy and pleasant a thing it is to die." Keats, not generally known as a medical man, was not so fortunate. Racked by consumption and heartbroken by adverse criticism of his poems he passed away whispering, "I feel the grass growing over me."

"Who killed John Keats?"
"I," says the Quarterly
So savage and Tarterly,
"I was one of my feats."

And three years after writing this Byron died at Missolonghi saying, "I must sleep now."

His great German contemporary and admirer Goethe was more tranquil in his death than the generality of poets have been, and his last words were characteristic of a happy and serene nature. He died while seated in his armchair with his daughter-in-law holding his hand in hers. Half an hour previously he had asked for the shutters to be opened that the day might enter, with the words, "Light! more light!"

Thomas Gainsborough passed away after an affecting reconciliation with Sir Joshua Reynolds. For years the two men had been on unfriendly terms, but when at last Reynolds came to stand by the side of the dying man, Gainsborough turned to him and whispered, "We are all going to Heaven, and Vandyke is of the company."

Less happy is the ending of their royal patron. After dissembling his way through life, the "First Gentleman in Europe" at length comes face to
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face with One whom he is unable to cajole or bluff. "Watty," he cries "what is this? It is Death, my boy; they have deceived me." We would rather have been present with the Merry Monarch when he apologized for taking "such an unconscionable time in dying," and ended his days with the request, "Look after poor Nell"—possibly the most unselfish prayer that he ever uttered.

Pages have been written as to the final charge which King Charles I laid upon Bishop Juxon, who accompanied his royal master to the scaffold. "Remember," was the single word that he said before the axe struck the head from his shoulders. It is unlikely now that the king's meaning will ever be solved, but there is very little doubt that more controversy has been occasioned by this one word than by any other dying utterance.

Some nine years later his great rival, Cromwell, passed away. "A storm," we read, "which tore roofs from houses and levelled huge trees in every forest, seemed a fit prelude to the passing away of his mighty spirit."

"Do not think I shall die," he burst forth to the physicians who gathered round him. "Say not I have lost my reason! I tell you the truth. I know it from better authority than any you can have from Galen or Hippocrates." Then, "But my work is done... It is not my design to drink or sleep, but my design is to make what haste I can to be gone."

We are reminded of the final moments of Bonaparte. He, too, passed away in a terrific storm, stammering out, "Mon Dieu, la Nation française, Tête d'Armée." "But," says Lamartine, "it could not be ascertained whether it was a dream, delirium, or adieu."

One cannot help thinking that the emperor's old-time enemy, had he been alive then, would have known a generous satisfaction at the freeing of so great a spirit. But the younger Pitt was long dead, killed, it is said, by the news of Austerlitz. "Roll up that map," he said, pointing to a map of Europe hanging on the wall, "it will not be wanted these ten years!"

And then, "My country! how I leave my country!"

And so, as we listen, straining to catch the last faint speech of innumerable lips which in life have stirred so many, we ask ourselves a question. Did ever dying words rouse men to great ends, or help to determine the issue of notable causes?

All France heard the voice of Madame Roland, as she stood in the shadow of the guillotine, and every thoughtful man found food for reflection in her last words: "Oh Liberty, Oh Liberty, what crimes have been committed in thy name."

Every English-speaking schoolboy remembers the ringing exhortation with which Latimer, dying at the stake, encouraged Ridley. Those noble words may well have played their part in helping to alter the course of our history. But it was not wholly due to men and women like these that such change was brought about.

John Richard Green would have us believe that it was in great measure upon the dying words of humble men and women that the edifice of the
English Reformation was reared. "Even the commonest lives," we read, "gleamed for a moment into poetry at the stake," and, to conclude, we cannot do better than remember the words of such a one.

"'Pray for me,' a boy, William Brown, who had been brought home to Brentwood to suffer, asked of the bystanders round. 'I will no more pray for thee,' one of them replied, 'than I will pray for a dog.' 'Then, said William, 'Son of God, shine on me,' and immediately the sun in the elements shone out of a dark cloud so full in his face that he was constrained to look another way; whereat the people mused, because it was so dark a little time before.'"