

in death. And he wonders rather hopelessly if people will ever rise up against these damnable tradesmen who ruin our arts, make our lives costly and dismal, and advertise, advertise even on our graves.

## HOW I DIED

It is now ten years ago since I received my death warrant. All these ten years I have been, and I am, and shall be, I hope, for years yet, a Doomed Man. It only occurred to me yesterday that I had been dodging--missing rather than dodging--the common enemy for such a space of time. Then, I know, I respected him. It seemed he marched upon me, inexorable, irresistible; even at last I felt his grip upon me. I bowed in the shadow. And he passed. Ten years ago, and once since, he and I have been very near. But now he seems to me but a blind man, and we, with all our solemn folly of medicine and hygiene, but players in a game of Blind Man's Buff. The gaunt, familiar hand comes out suddenly, swiftly, this time surely? And it passes close to my shoulder; I hear someone near me cry, and it is over.... Another ream of paper; there is time at least for the Great Book still.

Very close to the tragedy of life is the comedy, brightest upon the very edge of the dark, and I remember now with a queer touch of sympathetic

amusement my dear departed self of the middle eighties. How the thing staggered me! I was full of the vast ambition of youth; I was still at the age when death is quite out of sight, when life is still an interminable vista of years; and then suddenly, with a gout of blood upon my knuckle, with a queer familiar taste in my mouth, that cough which had been a bother became a tragedy, and this world that had been so solid grew faint and thin. I saw through it; saw his face near to my own; suddenly found him beside me, when I had been dreaming he was far beyond there, far away over the hills.

My first phase was an immense sorrow for myself. It was a purely selfish emotion. You see I had been saving myself up, denying myself half the pride of life and most of its indulgence, drilling myself like a drill-sergeant, with my eyes on those now unattainable hills. Had I known it was to end so soon, I should have planned everything so differently. I lay in bed mourning my truncated existence. Then presently the sorrow broadened. They were so sorry, so genuinely sorry for me. And they considered me so much now. I had this and that they would never have given me before--the stateliest bedding, the costliest food. I could feel from my bed the suddenly disorganised house, the distressed friends, the new-born solicitude. Insensibly a realisation of enhanced importance came to temper my regrets for my neglected sins. The lost world, that had seemed so brilliant and attractive, dwindled steadily as the days of my illness wore on. I thought more of the world's loss, and less of my own.

Then came the long journey; the princely style of it! the sudden awakening on the part of external humanity, which had hitherto been wont to jostle me, to help itself before me, to turn its back upon me, to my importance. "He has a diseased lung--cannot live long"....

I was going into the dark and I was not afraid--with ostentation. I still regard that, though now with scarcely so much gravity as heretofore, as a very magnificent period in my life. For nearly four months I was dying with immense dignity. Plutarch might have recorded it. I wrote--in touchingly unsteady pencil--to all my intimate friends, and indeed to many other people. I saw the littleness of hate and ambition. I forgave my enemies, and they were subdued and owned to it. How they must regret these admissions! I made many memorable remarks. This lasted, I say, nearly four months.

The medical profession, which had pronounced my death sentence, reiterated it steadily--has, indeed, done so now this ten years. Towards the end of those four months, however, dying lost its freshness for me. I began to detect a certain habitual quality in my service. I had exhausted all my memorable remarks upon the subject, and the strain began to tell upon all of us.

One day in the spring-time I crawled out alone, carefully wrapped, and with a stick, to look once more--perhaps for the last time--on sky and earth, and the first scattered skirmishers of the coming army of flowers. It was a day of soft wind, when the shadows of the clouds go

sweeping over the hills. Quite casually I happened upon a girl clambering over a hedge, and her dress had caught in a bramble, and the chat was quite impromptu and most idyllic. I remember she had three or four wood anemones in her hand--"wind stars" she called them, and I thought it a pretty name. And we talked of this and that, with a light in our eyes, as young folks will.

I quite forgot I was a Doomed Man. I surprised myself walking home with a confident stride that jarred with the sudden recollection of my funereal circumstances. For a moment I tried in vain to think what it was had slipped my memory. Then it came, colourless and remote. "Oh! Death.... He's a Bore," I said; "I've done with him," and laughed to think of having done with him.

"And why not so?" said I.

THE END