

DEATH-BED SCENES

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Death-bed scenes by Alexander Moody Stuart

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ALEXANDER MOODY STUART

**DEATH-BED
SCENES**

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"The wicked man shall die in his iniquity."—EZEK. xxxiii. 8.

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PREFACE.

THE Death-Bed Scenes narrated in the following pages appeared originally in a periodical publication. The interest which they then excited has induced the Publisher to issue them in a more permanent form ; and he earnestly hopes that in this shape they will, under the Divine blessing, still continue to be the means of doing good.

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DEATH-BED SCENES.

THE ANTINOMIAN.

As men live, so do men die.—We remember having heard a shrewd observer of mankind remark, that the views which he had previously formed of human nature, were forcibly overturned by the following incident:—He was following a band of reapers in the field, and overheard their conversation. One of them, who herself made a zealous, but most inconsistent profession of religion, was sister to a woman who had just been sentenced to death for a daring murder. The approaching execution formed the topic of discussion; and the individual from whom, most of all, silence might have been expected on such a subject, was kindly entertaining her companions with a minute and detailed account of the part which the criminal was preparing to act at the closing scene,—that after death the world might

adjudge her innocent ! This was human nature displaying itself under extraordinary circumstances, yet not in any extraordinary manner, but just as we see it developed every day. It has been said that men may live hypocrites, but that hypocrites they cannot die. The remark may be true to a certain extent, but we are deceived if it hold good universally, or even generally. In by far the greater number of cases men are found to die very much the same as they have lived. And if a man have wickedness enough to practise hypocrisy during life, he will easily find hardihood enough to persist in that hypocrisy in death.

Many have no opportunity of seeing death but in the departure of their own relatives and friends, when it is to be expected, and almost to be desired, that the judgment should be biassed, if not blinded, by the affections ; and that the feelings wrought in the hearts of the living should prevent any accurate and impartial observation of the feelings that are at work in the dying. In other instances, the observer, if a stranger, and therefore unbiassed, may be without the means of bringing the past life into comparison with the scene before him ; or again, the sufferer may belong to those classes of society in which the feelings, if not disguised, are, however, habitually concealed

from the knowledge of others. Having had occasion to witness various scenes of death, under circumstances which presented none of these impediments to observation, we have thought it might prove beneficial to narrate a few cases out of many, not with the idea of presenting any other view of the subject than must have been suggested to any other observer, but for the sake of furnishing those who may not have enjoyed a similar opportunity with materials, by which they may be assisted in forming their judgment on this the most solemn of all sublunary scenes.

In illustration of the remark, that men usually die as they have lived, we have referred to an instance of hypocrisy in a situation peculiarly awful; and we go on to record other cases explanatory of the same truth, in reference to various other features of character. Before proceeding, however, we shall illustrate the observation in a different light; for while men, for the most part, die in the same habits of thought which they have previously cherished, it is likewise seen that the outward manner of their death often bears a striking correspondence to the manner of their lives.

We knew an Antinomian. He was a man of considerable acuteness of mind; subtle, specula-

tive, metaphysical; and, considering his station in life, might be reckoned a man of reading and information. Next to the Bible, his right-hand book, was Cudworth's Intellectual System; and the ancient systems of Heathen philosophy and divinity were favourite topics of discourse. When reminded of the comparative uselessness of such inquiries, and of the vital importance of fixing the eye steadily on the true light which now shineth, he would reply,—“That may be very true, but for my part I like to look at THEM.” He seemed, however, to dwell on Pagan ignorance chiefly for the sake of triumphing in the clearer knowledge now enjoyed; for the Scriptures were his principal study, and he appeared to be both fully persuaded of their truth as a divine revelation, and to be thoroughly conversant with their contents. Of a winter evening, we have lifted the latch of his cottage door, when he could have no expectation of any one calling, and have found him poring over his large family Bible, which he would read for hours together. We took the Bible as it lay open, and made some practical remarks on what he had been reading; but of these he was evidently very impatient, and was uneasy till he found opportunity for turning aside to “foolish questions” and “perverse disputings.”