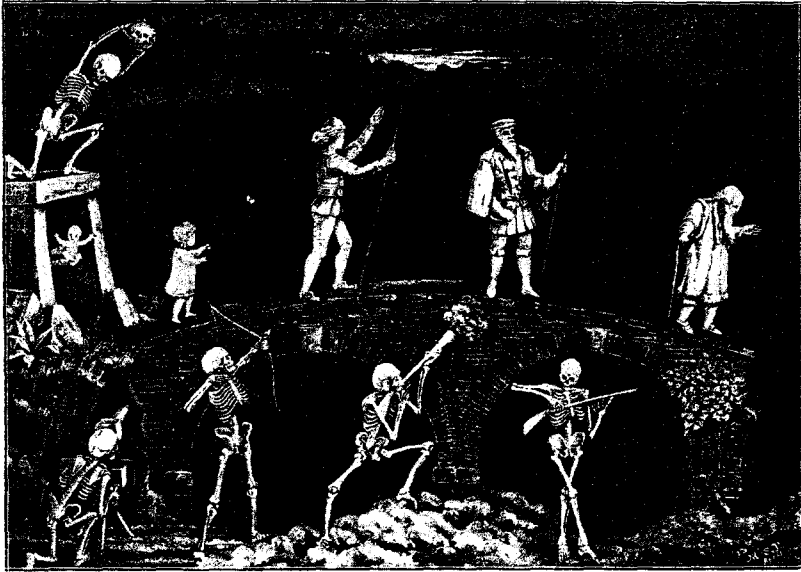


MODERN REPRESENTATIONS OF DEATH.

BY THE EDITOR.

THE SPIRIT of the present generation being decidedly scientific, it is natural that the conception of death and its chances should also become an object of scientific investigation. The idea



THE BRIDGE OF LIFE. By Mrs. Karl Pearson.
(Illustrating the Chances of Death.)

of a dance of death as a chaotic phenomenon that would be comparable to a play of dice yields to exact statistics accompanied by investigations of the causes of the rise and fall of mortality curves. Prof. Karl Pearson expresses the spirit of this view in his book on

the *Chances of Death* which is accompanied by a picture made at his suggestion by Mrs. Karl Pearson, showing the five (not seven) ages of man, viz., infancy, childhood, youth, maturity, and old age, passing over the bridge of life and exposed to five distinctively different marksmen, for statistics show a perfectly regular distribution of mortality centring around each period.

The chances of death in infancy are very great, and if we take into consideration antenatal mortality they are awful. Says Professor Pearson :

"Bad parentage, showing itself not only physically but mentally in the want of proper care of the young life, is the one possible cause of death continuous from the antenatal to the postnatal period. The marksman Death strikes down the young life with the bones of its ancestry."

The mortality-curve still shows a concentrated attack of death which reaches its maximum in the third and fourth year, the effects of which are like the fire of Maxim guns. In youth the range of the marksman centring in the twenty-third year shows a sudden decrease as if Death had in his hands a bow and arrows only. In the middle age of man there is another increase of mortality as though the next marksman employed a blunderbus and his aim centres round the forty-second year. The curve now rises slowly but constantly, mortality becoming like a steady rifle fire, and reaching its maximum in the seventy-second year.

Professor Pearson sums up his results as follows :

"Artistically, we no longer think of Death as striking chaotically; we regard his aim as perfectly regular in the mass, if unpredictable in the individual instance. It is no longer the Dance of Death which pictures for us Death carrying off indiscriminately the old and young, the rich and the poor, the toiler and the idler, the babe and its grandsire. We see something quite different, the cohort of a thousand tiny mites starting across the Bridge of Life, and growing in stature as they advance, till at the far end of the bridge we see only the gray-beard and the 'lean and slippered pantaloon.' As they pass along the causeway the throng is more and more thinned; five Deaths are posted at different stages of the route alongside the bridge, and with different skewness of aim and different weapons of precision they fire at the human target, till none remain to reach the end of the causeway—the limit to life."

Mrs. Karl Pearson's picture is interesting because expressive and at the same time exact in the lesson which it teaches. It is not a representation of death as viewed by the moralist or artist; it views death from the standpoint of the statistician, and therefore still retains the traditional picture of a skeleton, which of late has been rapidly disappearing from modern art productions.

Lessing's essay "on the personification of Death among the ancients," marks a decided change in the conception of Death among artists. He sums up his views on the subject in these words :

"Mr. Spence who most positively urges that the antique representation of death was a skeleton, bases his view upon the opinion that the pictures of death among the ancients cannot have been other than terrible because the ancients had much gloomier and sadder ideas of the nature of death than we have at present. And yet it is certain that that religion which teaches death to be the wages of sin could only greatly increase the terrors of death. There have been sages who regarded life as a punishment, but to any one who makes good use of his reason it was impossible to regard death (even the natural death) as a punishment, except on the basis of a revelation. On this account, accordingly, it was obviously our religion that banished the serene representation of death from the realm of art. But since this same religion did not reveal such a sad truth for the sake of giving us over to despair; for indeed it declares that death to the pious is easy and comforting: I cannot understand why our artists show no inclination to surrender the ugly symbol of a skeleton and return to the nobler representation of classic antiquity. The Scriptures speak of an angel of death, and what artist would not mould an angel in preference to a skeleton! Only a misconstrued religion banishes the beautiful, and it is an evidence of the true religion that everywhere it will bring back to us the beautiful."

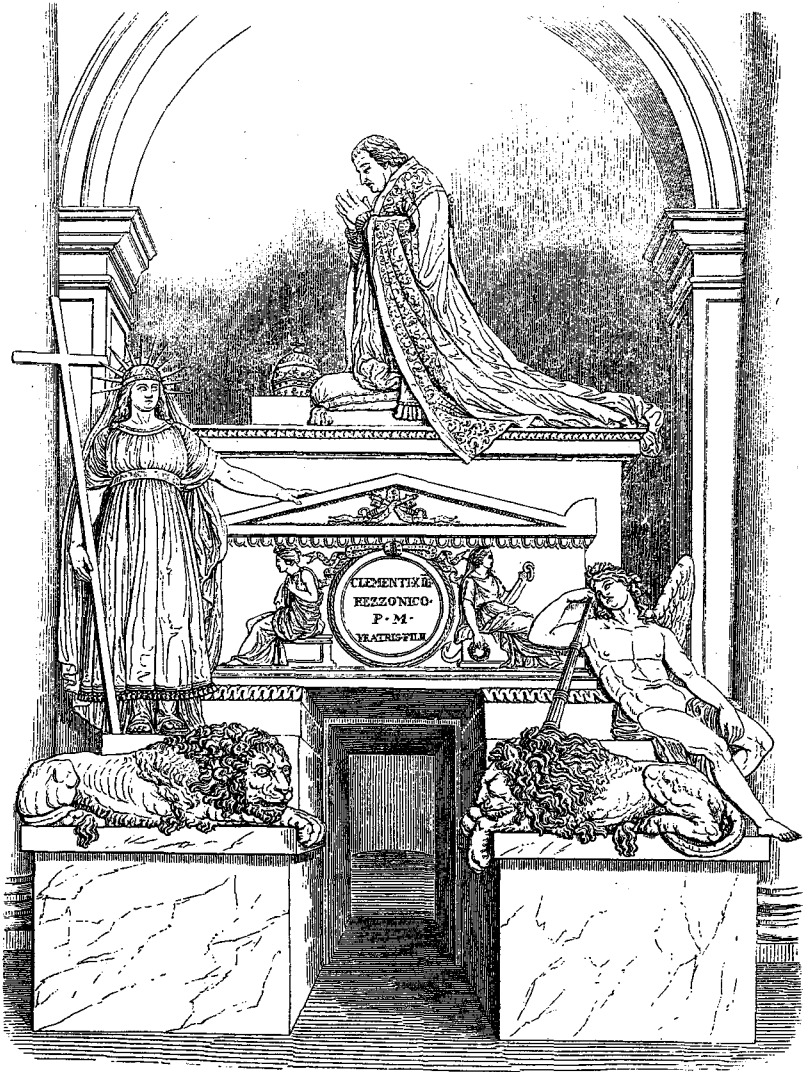
Lessing's words were not spoken in vain. Christian art has abandoned for good the representation of death as a skeleton; and our artists are now apt to look upon it as an aberration to which civilised mankind is not likely to turn again.

As illustrations of the modern conception of death, we select monuments of three artists, Antonio Canova, the famous Italian sculptor (1757-1822), A. Bartholomé, a Parisian artist of great ability, and our countryman Daniel C. French, well known on both sides of the Atlantic and at present engaged in modelling a statue of Washington to be erected in Paris by the American ladies that live in the French capital.

The tomb of Pope Clement XIII. in St. Peter's Cathedral at Rome is one of the most colossal monuments that have been erected in modern times. It is as grand as it is simple, showing the Pope, not as was customary in mediæval times as lying dead in the coffin, but in an attitude of prayer. Still it is a tomb, and the entrance below reminds one of the idea that the dead descend into the grave. The old conception of death is still lingering here.

The present generation is no longer given to the idea of building big mausoleums and grand sepulchres. The Milmore tombstone by Mr. French is not of an unusual size, and even the Bartholomé

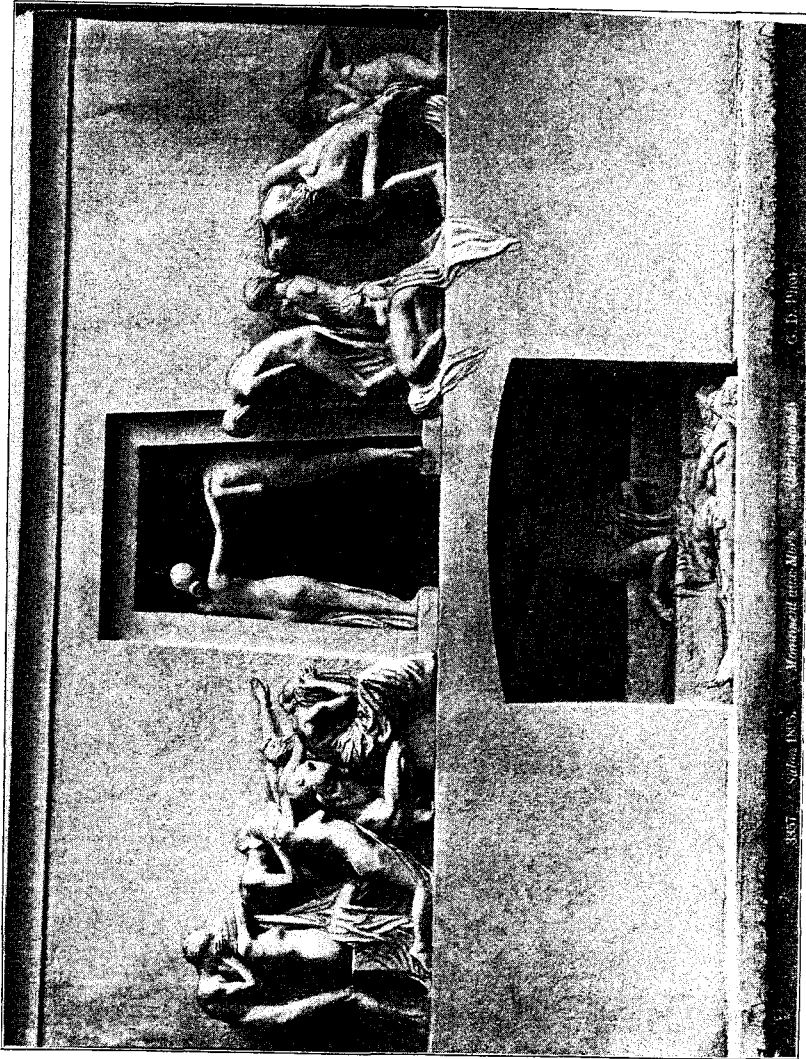
monument is small if compared e. g. to the grand tombs of Mohammedan sheiks of India. Whenever the people of to-day feel



THE TOMB OF CLEMENT VIII. IN ST. PETER'S. By Antonio Canova.

inclined to commemorate a great sovereign, they build a church that bears his name or make a foundation in his honor that serves some useful purpose. Thus the *Dôme des Invalides* is the imposing

tomb of the great Napoleon, and the *Friedenskirche* at Potsdam indicates the place where the remains of Frederic III. of Germany have been laid to rest.



M. BARTHOLOMÉ'S "MONUMENT AUX MORTS." (From a photograph sent by the artist.)

M. Bartholomé's monument in the cemetery at Père Lachaise embodies the agnostic idea of death as a door of which we do not know whither it leads. All beings that breathe and live must pass

through the portal of death, but beyond all is darkness. We cannot see whither it leads.

Mr. Daniel C. French in his beautiful Milmore monument in the cemetery of Forest Hill, Mass., represents death as the ceasing of the labors of life, while our work remains. An artist is busily



THE MILMORE MONUMENT. By Daniel C. French.

(With the permission of the artist.)

chiselling a sphinx, the symbol of the problem of life; and death, in the shape of a veiled woman, takes the chisel out of the artist's hands. Quite similar in conception is a beautiful German monument representing the old Emperor William under the shadow of death still busily engaged utilising the few moments left him, be-

cause as the venerable monarch expressed himself, "he had not the time to be tired."

While speaking of death as represented in art, we should not



forget the treatment which this sombre subject has received at the hands of musicians. The doleful dirges and the lamentations of professional wailers have been replaced by nobler compositions which are dignified and elevating. The most beautiful tone-pictures

on the subject of death are Mozart's Requiem, Beethoven's and Chopin's Funeral Marches, Händel's "Dead March in Saul," and Schubert's song "Death and the Maiden."

In concluding this meagre sketch¹ on the various representations of death, we have only to add that, upon a calm consideration of the simple facts, death as the discontinuance of individual life loses all its horrors. Death may be a misfortune according to circumstances; death may be sad if it cuts a valuable life prematurely short, if thereby children are deprived of their parents, or parents of the comfort of their age; but death in itself is not an evil.

Death is the great teacher of mankind who brings home to us the transiency of existence and makes us search for that which endures, that which alone when found will give a permanent value to the fleeting moment; death teaches us to work so long as it is day, for the night cometh in which nobody can work.

Death is not only not an evil, but a great blessing. Only think of an existence that would be one continuous life of uninterrupted recollections. How quickly we should become sick of the eternal rounds of life which are constant repetitions of the same experiences over and over again. Should we not soon turn away from life as from a most monotonous affair? Should we not loathe life as not worth while continuing? We should be as indifferent as the *blasé* to whom all joys have become objects of disgust. It would indeed be preferable to make a new start from time to time and to begin life over again, taking with us only the quintessence of former experiences in the shape of inherited tendencies, but without any conscious recollection. And such indeed is life as it really is.

In one sense we die constantly; every act of life is at the same time a decay with waste products. But as the waste products, which materially considered did the work, are not the life, so the dead body of a man is no longer the man. And as every thought continues in the memory-structure which it forms of the new material that replaces the waste products, so the soul of man continues in its personal identity as a living factor in the future life of mankind which it has helped to mould.

The continuity of man's personal identity is not based upon a continuity of either matter or energy, but upon a continuity of form. Matter and energy are constantly received in the organism

¹ The subject is very vast and could scarcely be exhaustively treated in a large-sized work of several volumes. The most complete collection of representations of death is, to our knowledge, that of Miss M. S. Minns, kept at the Art Museum at Boston.

and then discarded. They pass through as the water rushes through a whirl in the current. The form only remains, and the form alone constitutes a man's personal identity. Now the form of human souls is constantly renewed. The progress of the human race becomes possible only through the preservation of the life-work of the past; and every soul is treasured up for the benefit of the evolving ages. We no longer expect a resurrection of the dead, but we know that the form of our life-work is preserved; it continues as a living factor which shapes the destinies of the world. Man's life does not end with death, for, though the body dies, the soul is immortal.