DEATH AT THE END.

Would I were dead and lying in my grave,
  At rest from fretting doubts and carking cares!
Be kind, O Heaven, and listen to my prayers;
Grant me the only favor that I crave—
  Six feet by three of earth to hide my dust.
I ask no tombstone or memorial bust;
I ask for death; what is beyond I'll brave.

Little of good or evil have I wrought:
  No happiness or pleasure have I known
  But it hath been with sorrow interwown;
All hath slipt from my grasp that I most sought.
  My life, though short in years, is long in grief:
  Night follows day, but brings me no relief.
And passing years have only sorrow brought

There is one goal to which our courses tend;
  The way lies over mountains, torrents, plains,
  Through velvet pastures and quiet country lanes.
To some the pleasant scenes enjoyment lend,
  While others weary toil up rocky slopes
  Dejectedly, and almost void of hopes.
But one fate waits for all—Death at the End.

—Chambers' Journal.

VAN BIBBER'S WAGER.

Mr. Van Bibber and the other men of his particular set were grouped around the club window after luncheon, or breakfast, as it happened to be, when Van Bibber said he thought seriously of entering upon a career of crime. Van Bibber was given to making disturbing statements of this sort, which required one to think, even if one did not reply to them, and the other men rather wished he would not.

"For instance," said young Van Bibber, "I went to a dance last night, and the room where you were to put your hat was filled with old silver, little bits of it—snuff boxes and spectacle cases and bonbon boxes and buckles and girdles. The chap had made a collection of them, and had them all lying around loose. I had a good mind to fill my overcoat with half of 'em, and then I thought it would be much more fun to fill every other man's pockets, and wait and see the row, but some one came in, and I couldn't do it. Now, there are these teas and receptions and days and all that sort of thing that women go to. Why shouldn't I start out some afternoon and sweep the places bare, and melt the silver down and get rich? I might become a sort of 'Jack the Ripper' or 'Louis the Lifter.' I'll bet," exclaimed Van Bibber, becoming more interested in his idea, "that I can go out this afternoon and bring back more than five hundred dollars' worth of silver and bric-a-brac, and I'll do it, too, if any of you have any sporting blood." There was no question as to the men having sporting blood. They jumped at the chance. Van Bibber found not the least difficulty in dividing up his wager among them all.

"But wait," said Travers; "how do we know that Van Bibber won't fix it with the people in the house? Even if his friends did see him handling the bric-a-brac or even if he put a fork down his coat sleeve, they'd not say anything. They'd think he was joking. Or he may let them into it beforehand."

"Well, I must say I appreciate your confidence," growled Van Bibber; "I'll play fair, of course, and I'll tell you what I'll do; to make sure, I'll only go to houses where they don't know me, and I'll bring back spoons marked with the people's initials."

This recklessness delighted his friends. "You are a sport, Van Bibber," they cried with admiration, "and you'll be in jail before 5 o'clock."

The servant brought them a society paper that made a feature of printing the announcements of coming social events and Van Bibber carefully selected the names of five estimable ladies who were giving receptions that afternoon, and who were making a desperate fight to get into society, as the proper people to rob. At 4 he ordered a hansom, put his list inside his hat, placed a fresh chrysanthemum in his coat, and started smilingly forth on his career of crime. His friends watched him from the window with keen delight and with much excitement.

"Now, then," said Travers promptly and decidedly, "the thing for us to do is to send a detective after him and have him arrested."

"Exactly," said the rest.

Mr. Van Bibber alighted first at a very handsome brown stone house, just a few doors off the avenue on Forty-third street. There was an awning over the door, and a line of carriages on either side of the street. The name of the lady who was paying for this he discovered, by referring to his slip, to be Nobles. The man saw him through the door and opened it, saying, "Third floor, front."

Mr. Van Bibber pushed his way through the crowd of women and girls and old men and pots of chrysanthemums, and threw his overcoat in a corner. There was no one in the room, and Van Bibber, while adjusting his cravat, cast a wandering eye over the dressing table. It was littered with silver toilet articles. He picked some of these up and bit them, in a most professional manner. "Plated," he remarked, with some disgust; "lady probably gets her silver from a caterer. Hardly worth while to try down stairs. Guess I'll move on to next place."

He picked up his overcoat and hat again, and went out without having gazed upon Mrs. Nobles. The next place was on the avenue itself, and was very crowded. Van Bibber pushed his way slowly up stairs to the second floor, and, without a moment's hesitation, gathered up four silver photograph frames, a complete manicure set of silver, a gold watch, which hung in a slipper at the side of a bed, and a pair of silver backed hair brushes. He placed these carefully in his overcoat, and went down stairs in a stately and dignified manner. He avoided the first door, where he guessed the hostess was stationed, and made his way toward the rear. There was a terrible crush, and yet he saw no one he knew.

In the rear room there was a long table overloaded with things to eat. He gathered up three or four spoons, one at a time, after examining them carefully, and stored them away back of a bit of china on a sideboard, then he went back after more spoons. Nobody paid any attention to him, and he paid no attention to any one else. He carried a plate with some salad on it in his hand, and picked at this daintily with the spoons as he transferred them from the table to the sideboard. When he had a dozen he covered them with his handkerchief and slipped them into his coattail pocket. Then he put on his greatcoat, and went out as calmly as he had come in. He found the stolen articles somewhat heavy, so as soon as he was in the hansom he took them out and put them under the seat.

Mrs. Charles T. Van Dyke was the name of the hostess at the next place. Van Bibber shot quickly up stairs and opened two or three bureau drawers, a writing desk and a secretary, but found nothing of value. There was an immense silver water pitcher in one corner with two goblets, which he thought of taking, but he could think of no way of getting it out unobserved unless he lowered it down the elevator shaft with a rope. In the dining room, however, the spoons were undisturbed as yet, and lay in cozy little rows on the white cloth. Van Bibber placed a dozen of these in each of his trousers pockets and told the servants as he turned from the tea urn, over which he had been bending, that he would take two lumps and lemon.

A large, heavily mustached stranger, with a cup in his hand, nodded pleasantly to Van Bibber, and asked him, with a glance at the tea, if he had got what he wanted.

"Yes, thank you," said Van Bibber cheerfully. "I think I have."

At the next place he was somewhat surprised to see the same stranger drinking more tea and apparently watching him. But Van Bibber put this down to the fact that he was unduly suspicious, and that his imagination was excited. He was just going out without having made any seizures, when a fat, pompous gentleman, who he was sure must be the host, took pity on his apparently neglected condition and said: "I see you are looking over my bric-a-brac, sir. It is not much of a collection, and I have not had time lately to give it the attention it needs." Then he proceeded, at great length and with evident satisfaction to himself, to describe each separate piece of crockery on the wall. Van Bibber was greatly bored, but he was too polite to say so, and was rewarded when the gentleman said, "This piece of Satsuma cost me five hundred dollars." Van Bibber kept his eye on the plate, and, when his host turned to greet a new arrival, slipped it into his coattail pocket and bowed himself out.

He placed it under the seat of the hansom very carefully, and drove on to the next place quite assured that he had won his bet, but anxious to settle it without a question or doubt. He did not see the stranger with the heavy mustache pass him in a close cab and dart into the house to which he was going just a minute before him. Van Bibber elbowed his way, with many apologies, to the third floor. There was a dressing table covered with silver trifles, and Van Bibber smiled complacently.

There was a bed in the room, and he could see this as he looked in the mirror. But he could not see under the bed. His overcoat was on a chair, and he made several trips to it and filled the pockets with silver backed brushes and combs. But on the third of these trips his heart stood still, for out from under the bed came the big stranger with the heavy mustache. He came very leisurely and determinedly. "Don't make a row," he said; "you're under arrest."

At that moment two young men came into the room, pulling off their overcoats.

"Help!" screamed Van Bibber: "look!" he shouted, pointing at the detective. "There's a sneak thief under the bed." Then he fell on the officer's head just as relentlessly as he would have dropped on a football, and banged his nose into the carpet and sat on his shoulders. The two young men got out of their coats much more quickly than they had intended doing and fell with their knees on each of the detective's arms, and while they thus pinned him to the floor they punched him vigorously in the ribs and yelled.

"Look at this!" said Van Bibber, catching up his overcoat by the tail and spilling all the silver over the floor. "Look at what he had stored away! Hold him, will you? while I get a policeman."

Every one was running up the front stairs, so he could not go down that way, and so ran to the back and went down the kitchen stairs and on into the dining room, whence all the waiters had fled. He was quite unobserved in the confusion, and accordingly took time to fill his pockets with spoons and forks of heavy silver. Then he walked out through the excited women, and stepped into his hansom, and told the driver to go to the club.

"That detective of yours," he said calmly, as he produced his treasures from the bottom of the hansom, "will probably be around here when he gets his nose patched up. In the mean while I will ask you to value these articles roughly and ring for some messenger boys."

An authority said the lot was worth $700, and the separate exhibits were promptly returned to where they belonged by messenger boys, who were instructed to leave them at the door and run. The detective was pacified by some of the club's best brandy and a twenty dollar bill. But whenever Van Bibber enters the club now the men feel nervously for their watches and the waiters count the forks. — New York Sun.

Christmas Figuring.

Biffers—I'm a pretty good hand at figures, but there's one thing I can't understand about Christmas.

Wiffers—What's that?

Biffers—How is it that everybody gives more than he gets, and yet nobody gets as much as he gives? Hang me if I can see what becomes of the surplus!—New York Weekly.

Explicit.

Exasperated Property Owner (to organ grinder)—What'll you take to clear out?

Organ Grinder (coolly)—Me takka me time.—Epoch.

ON AN OSTRICH FARM.

AN AFRICAN INDUSTRY TRANSPLANTED TO CALIFORNIA.

Ostriches Are Profitable Birds to Raise. Something About the Business—Popular Superstitions Exploded — Hatched by Means of Incubators.

There are at least half a dozen ostrich farms in southern California. They have ceased to be a curiosity there, and each now represents a commercial enterprise. Americans buy one-half the millions of ostrich feathers produced annually. It is estimated that this country expends $3,000,000 a year for these ornaments. Each ostrich when full grown yields a feather income of from $200 to $300 per annum. The elegant, long black and white plumes sell for $5 each at the farms, and readily bring $10 each at retail in New York or Chicago.

Every feather has a value. If it is sufficiently large for use it is worth at least 10 cents. The very small ones, otherwise useless, make up into cheap souvenirs and are eagerly purchased by visiting tourists at prices varying from 10 cents to $1. The plumes produced in southern California are fully as valuable as those from the far away Cape Colony.

The eggs, if fertile, sell for $25 each, and generally from 75 to 80 per cent. of all eggs produced will hatch. If not fertile the shells are in demand at from $2 to $5 each as curios and ornaments. A young ostrich just out of the shell is considered equivalent to $50, and his value increases until he is full grown, when $500 is a low market price.

The expense of maintaining an ostrich farm is comparatively slight. The birds in this country are usually healthy. Their appetites are appalling, but they are satisfied with alfalfa, cabbage and crushed bones for a regular diet. On occasions they expect large and small pebbles, bits of iron, old shoes, tin cans and such delicacies. A hungry ostrich is not particular about his food. It is merely a question of deglutition with him. If what he eats will go down—or rather up—his somewhat elastic throat (for he eats and drinks head downward), he feels safe to trust his digestive organs to do the rest.

The ostrich has long been maligned. In our schoolboy days natural history taught us to despise the ostrich, first, because of its lack of sense, and second, for its want of parental instincts. We were told that this great, ungainly bird, when chased by a native South African upon the back of a fleet horse or a tame ostrich, would hide his weary head in the sand, under the impression that if he could not see his pursuer the pursuer could not see him. This fable is no more true, at least of the domesticated bird, than the other, which actually says that the mother ostrich lays her eggs in the hot sand and leaves them to the tender care of the sun and the Hottentot.

The ostrich egg shell is sometimes one-sixteenth of an inch thick. It is fully twenty-four times the size of an ordinary hen's egg. Incubation requires forty days, during which period the male and female alternate in the domestic duty of keeping the eggs warm. Most of the hatching is now done by incubators. A 300 egg incubator has a capacity for but 27 ostrich eggs.

At the farm near Santa Monica I saw the birds on the nest, however, and the young ostriches after they were removed from the nest. The eggs at this sitting nearly all hatched, and as I visited the farm frequently I grew very much interested in both parents and children. The nest consisted of a pile of sand in the center of the field assigned to the two breeders. The male bird manifested the utmost interest in the business in hand, and devoted more than fifteen hours a day to the maternal duty of sitting on the eggs.

When his mate was on the nest he would shield her from the excessive heat of that semi-tropical sun by extending his ample wings over her. The two ostriches were models of parental affection. The exemplary conduct of the male specially won my admiration, for he was ever on the alert to render assistance to his patient spouse, and when the little fellows pecked their way through the hard shell he kept vigilant watch over them. The old story of neglect of its offspring is clearly disproved. There are no feathered animals more dutiful.

The old birds are not awkward, but the young ones have no sense whatever, and so it is necessary to remove the latter as soon as possible after they escape from the shell to prevent them from wandering into danger. It requires skillful coaxing and no little maneuvering to entice the fond parents from the nest, but this accomplished the young ostriches are transferred to a sand box in the sun, where they must have close attention all day long to keep them from mishaps which their utter lack of discretion and extreme awkwardness would certainly bring upon them.

At night they are placed in an incubator. Until they are several months old the absurdly headless and tender things require very great care. After they pass from infancy, however, they generally thrive. The losses usually occur within the first month.

When the birds are seven months old the first plucking occurs, and from that time forward they give up their feathers twice a year. The females begin laying eggs at three years of age, and produce from thirty to ninety eggs each annually.

In South Africa, until about thirty years ago, the natives killed the ostrich for his plumes. Since that date the domesticated birds have furnished most of the feathers of commerce.

Each bird when fully grown has twenty-five plumes on each wing, with two rows of floss feathers underneath. Above the white plumes are a row of long feathers and under them are a smaller size. In the male these are black and in the female drab. The tail has also a tuft of feathers similarly arranged. The first feathers are not usually as fine in quality, as large in size or as great in quantity as those of subsequent pluckings. — Cor. Chicago News.