THE CELEBRATED

HANS HOLBEIN'S

ALPHABET OF DEATH

PARIS
PRINTED FOR EDWIN TROSS
Rue des Bons-Enfants, 28
M DCCC LVI

THE CELEBRATED

HANS HOLBEIN'S

ALPHABET OF DEATH

ILLUSTRATED WITH OLD BORDERS ENGRAVED ON WOOD
WITH LATIN SENTENCES AND ENGLISH QUATRAINS

selected by

ANATOLE DE MONTAIGLON

PARIS

PRINTED FOR EDWIN TROSS

28, Rue des Bons - Enfants

M DCCC LVI

TO

THOMAS WRIGHT, ESQ., M.A., F.S.A.,

this edition of the Alphabet of Death

is respectfuly dedicated

by

the Editor

The life and works of the great German painter, Hans Holbein, and the question of the Dance of Death are, for historical inquirers, an admirable subject, on which nothing has yet been said that can be held really satisfactory; but the limits of this note are necessarily so confined as to leave no space even for a view of them.

For the artist, it is only necessary to refer the reader to Sandrart, to the latin catalogue written by Charles Patin as an introduction to his edition of the *Encomium Moriæ*, to Fuessli, to Walpole's *Anecdotes of Painting in England*, and to J. P. Mariette's remarks on this last work, recently printed in his *Abcdario*. It is said that Mr Passavant has been many years occupied in collecting materials for a complete monography of Holbein; so that, as the attempt is worthy of him, and he is fit for the task, we may hope to have the long-wanted life and catalogue

executed in a superior manner. On the Dance of Death, several interesting books have been published, among which it is almost unnecessary to name those of Gabriel Peignot, Francis Douce, and Hyacinthe Langlois. Here we have only to speak of the Alphabet itself.

Engraved by Hans Lutzelburger, as now thought by the most competent critics, it was first used at Basle about the year 1530 by the famous printers Bebelius and Cratander, and we refer to Douce's remarks (p. 214-18) on the question for the titles of the books in which it was employed, and for the numerous copies and imitations made of it. We will only repeat with him that these initial letters, « in elegance of design and delicacy of engraving, have scarcely ever been equalled, and certainly never surpassed. They may in every point of view be regarded as the chef-d'œuvre of ancient block engraving. »

Seven years ago, in 1849, the whole series was anew elegantly copied on wood by Professor H. Lödel of Göttingen, and published in a little 8vo volume, with George Osterwald's lithographed borders, by I. M. Heberle at Cologne, Bonn and Brussels. Our new edition gives the same letters, real gems of engraving on wood, but, as a worthy illustration, accompanies them with the two Dances of Death, the one more Gothic in form, the other more coarsely engraved, but yet perhaps more artistical, which are

found in the well known Simon Vostre's *Horæ*. These two Dances, as well as the ornamental borders, all taken from different books, are engraved with a fidelity and elegance on which our readers may pronounce, by Mr Leon Le Maire, of Paris, who has also copied on the title Holbein's Escutcheon of Death from the *Imagines Mortis*.

On these letters we will now add a curious remark, which, we believe, has not yet been made. In the eleven first letters we find the subjects in the traditional order without any relation between them. So we see, as in all the series, the Dance begun by the Death the musician, and followed, in order of rank, by the Pope, the Emperor, the King, the Cardinal, the Empress, the Bishop, the Nobleman, the Burgess or Merchant, and the Priest. But, from the letter M to the end, it may be remarked, and I owe this hint to Mr Henry Bordier, that each letter is the beginning of the Latin name of the character represented.

So, at M we see the *Medicus;* at N the banker, *Numerarius;* at O a fat monk, *Obesus monachus;* at P a fighting soldier, *Prœliator*. The Q is less clear; the obedient nun who quietly follows Death, might however be called in Latin : *Quieta, quassata,* or *queribunda monacha*. But the R is quite certain, for we find in it : *Ridens* or *ridiculus fatuus*. In the S we have the luxurious woman, *Scortum*. The T is

somewhat troublesome; yet in the minstrel driven to the ground and urged to drink by a facetious skeleton, we may read *Titubans homo*. At V the galloping horseman is perhaps *Velox homo;* at W the ancient hermit is *Wetustissimus homo,* the superlative being marked by the repetition of the same letter. At X we have deceitful gamesters, *Xycophantes*, and this change of S into X is not at all inadmissible, since in the subsequent letter the artist has used *Ynfans,* when the ordinary form is *infans*. As to Z, it is used like the Greek Ω to import the idea of the end, and consequently the artist has put in it the last judgment, the end of this earthly world, as Z is the end of the Alphabet. Some of these interpretations may certainly be modified and improved, but we hold as undisputable the idea of seeking in the last thirteen letters the beginning of the Latin name of the intended characters.

One word more, and I close this note. A literary selector of Latin sentences on Death might be able to choose from Greek, Roman and old Christian authors, most magnificent extracts; but such a thing was quite impossible for us. Here we had to give twenty-four sentences, of a limited extent, each beginning by a different letter; and only long enough to surround and support the letter in conformity with typographical exigencies.— As to the quatrains, we might reprint the translation written in 1794 by Hawkins for his edition of a copy of Holbein's *Imagines Mortis;* but we have chosen to have them made for the most part with the stanzas of the old translation of the Macabre's Dance by John Lydgate, and some new-written in the same style, so that each may be indicative of the subject in the letter. That is all that can be said on them.

A. DE M.

Paris, 12th July, 1856.

DEATH CAM DRYVYNG AFTER,
AND AL TO DUSTE PASSHED,
KYNGES AND KNYGHTES,
KAYSERS AND POPES,
LERED AND LEWED,
HE LET NO MAN STONDE
THAT HE HITTE EVENE,
THAT EVERE STIRRED AFTER.
MANYE A LOVELY LADY,
AND LEMMANS OF KNYGHTES,
SWOWNED AND SWELTED
FOR SORWE OF HIS DYNTES.

(PIERS PLOUGHMAN, Passus XX.)

APUD mortem non est acceptio personarum. Nec miseretur pupillo, nec defert seniori, nec timet potentem, nec veretur nobilem, nec horret pauperem aut ignobilem, nec dimittit divitem aut potentem, nec contemnit infirmem aut debilem, nec evitat fortem, nec parcit sapienti, nec insipienti.

S. ANTONINUS.

O creatures, ye that ben resonable,
Who alle shalle trace the daunce of Macabré,
Ye may here lern doctrine ful notable,
How dethe ne spareth high ne low degré.

A 1

BONORUM mors non est nisi acceleratio glorificationis, diruptio carceris, finis peregrinationis, portus navigationis, contritio laquei, depositio vetustæ vestis, induitio novæ, depositio ponderis, dejectio atrocissimi hostis, solutio debiti naturalis.

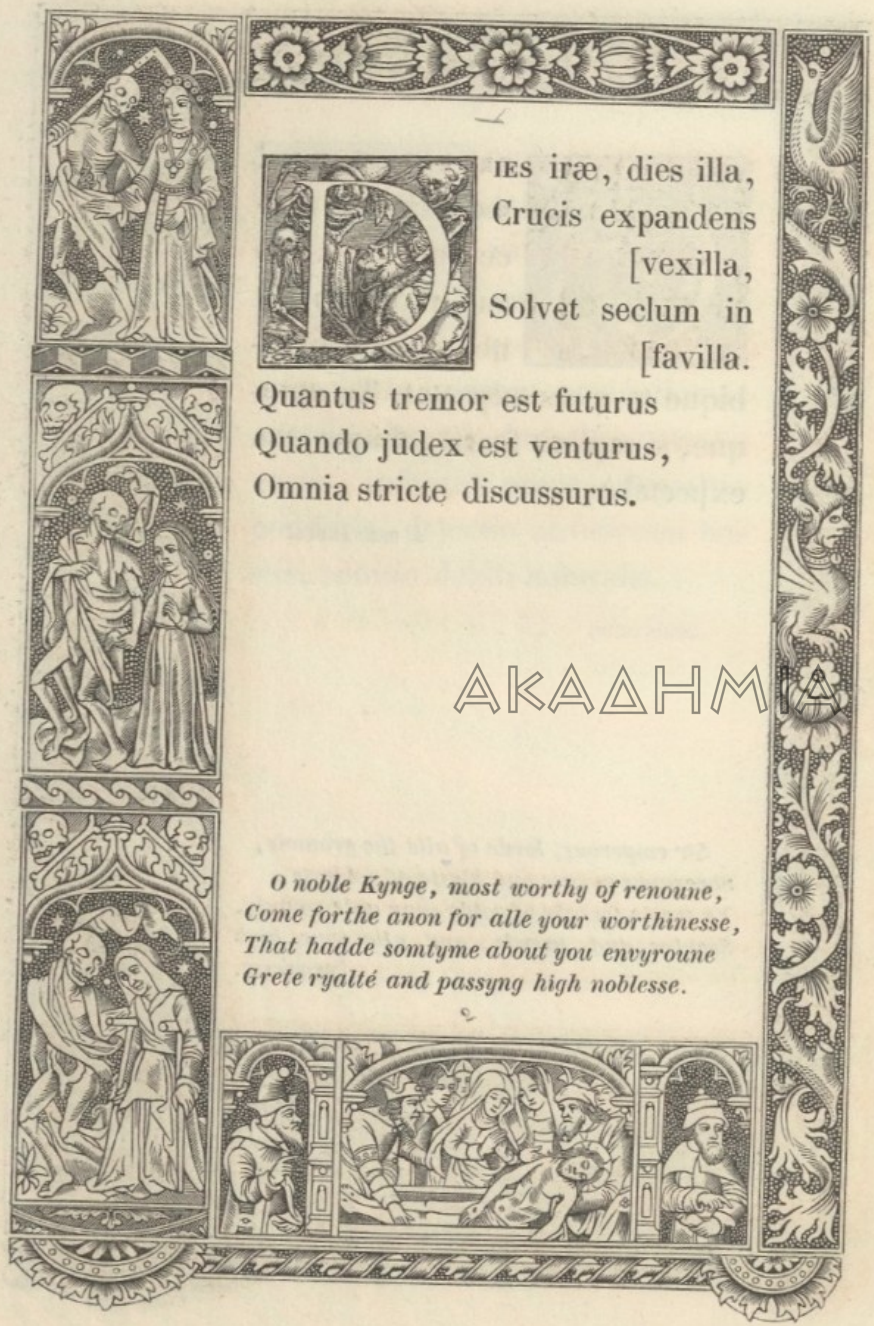
HUGO CARD.

O thou that of alle estates spiritualle
In erthe art set moste high in dignité
Upon this daunce firste begynne thou shalle,
As moste worthy by thy soverainté.

CERTUM est quod morieris, et incertum quando aut quomodo aut ubi, quoniam ubique te mors expectat. Tu quoque, si sapiens fueris, ubique eam expectabis.

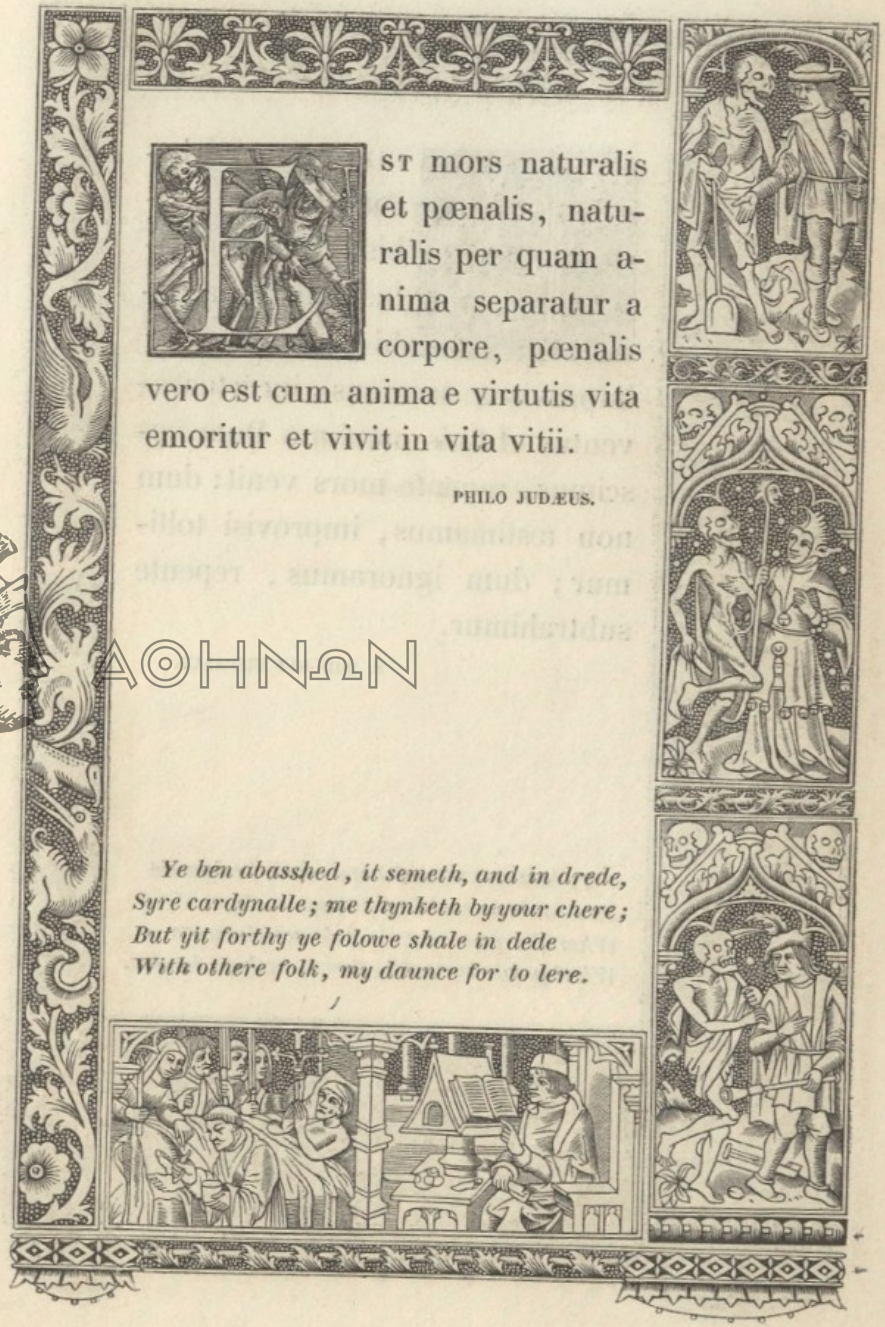
S. BERNARDUS.

Sir emperour, lorde of alle the grounde,
Soverayne prynce and hieste of noblesse,
Ye moste forsake of golde your aple rounde,
Sceptre and swerde, and alle your high [prowesse.



DIES iræ, dies illa,
Crucis expandens [vexilla,
Solvet seclum in [favilla.
Quantus tremor est futurus
Quando judex est venturus,
Omnia stricte discussurus.

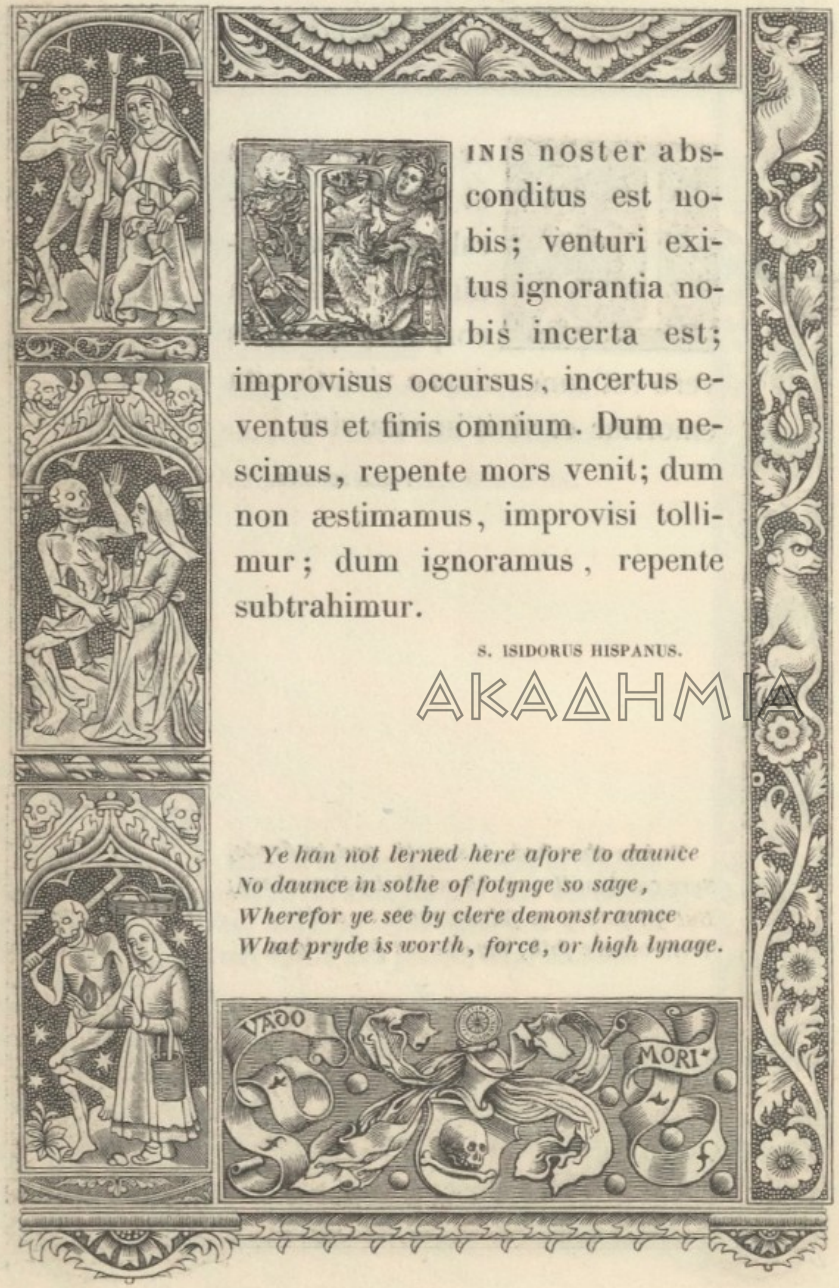
O noble Kynge, most worthy of renoune,
Come forthe anon for alle your worthinesse,
That hadde somtyme about you envyroune
Grete ryalté and passyng high noblesse.



EST mors naturalis et pœnalis, naturalis per quam anima separatur a corpore, pœnalis vero est cum anima e virtutis vita emoritur et vivit in vita vitii.

PHILO JUDÆUS.

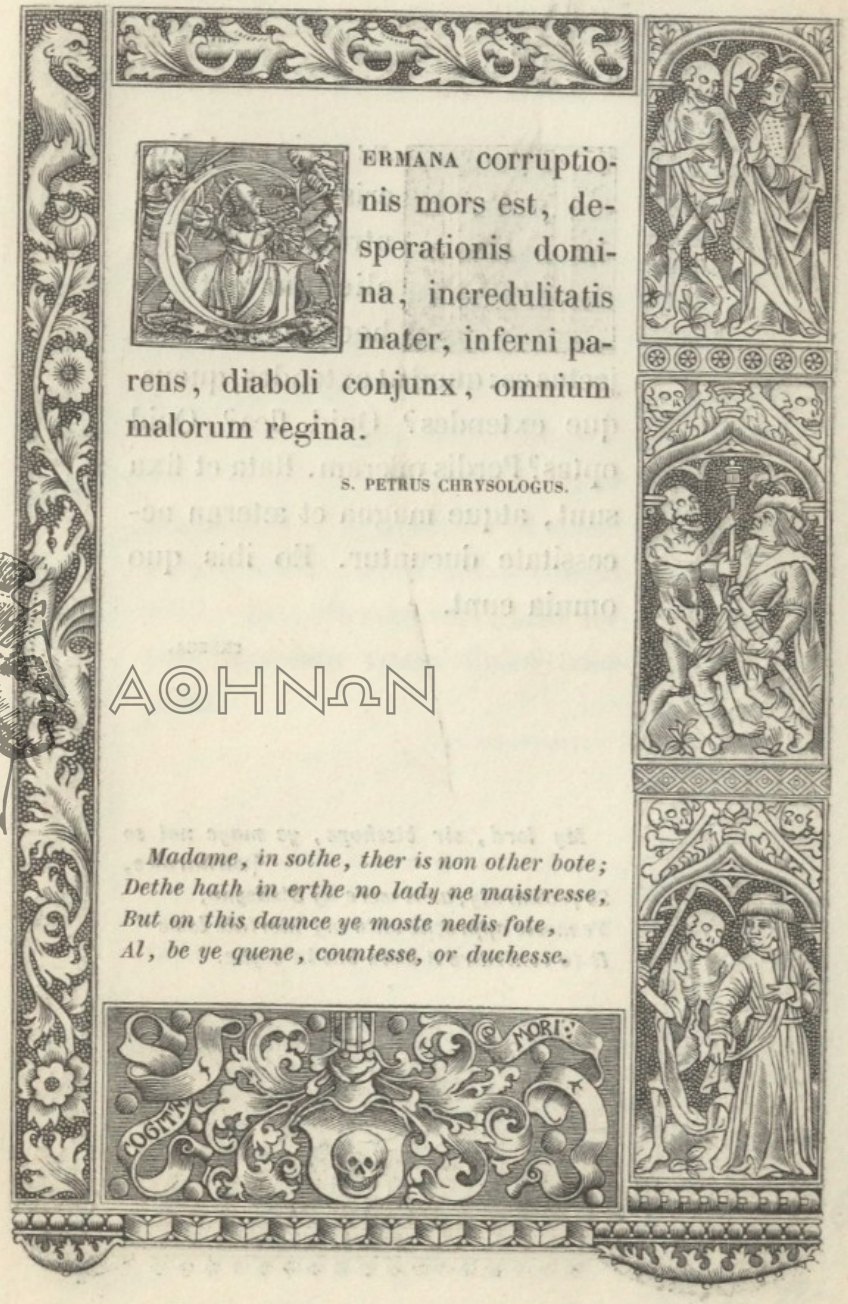
Ye ben abasshed, it semeth, and in drede,
Syre cardynalle; me thynketh by your chere;
But yit forthy ye folowe shale in dede
With othere folk, my daunce for to lere.



FINIS noster absconditus est nobis; venturi exitus ignorantia nobis incerta est; improvisus occursus, incertus eventus et finis omnium. Dum nescimus, repente mors venit; dum non æstimamus, improvisi tollimur; dum ignoramus, repente subtrahimur.

S. ISIDORUS HISPANUS.

Ye han not lerned here afore to daunce
No daunce in sothe of folynge so sage,
Wherefor ye see by clere demonstraunce
What pryde is worth, force, or high lynage.



GERMANA corruptionis mors est, desperationis domina, incredulitatis mater, inferni parens, diaboli conjunx, omnium malorum regina.

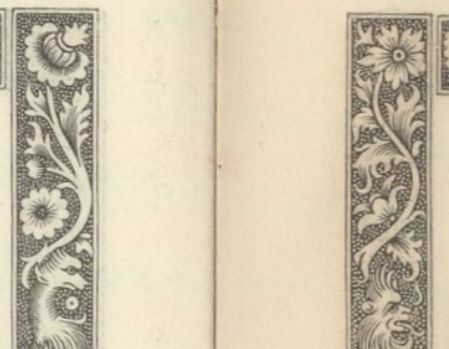
S. PETRUS CHRYSOLOGUS.

Madame, in sothe, ther is non other bote;
Dethe hath in erthe no lady ne maistresse,
But on this daunce ye moste nedis fote,
Al, be ye quene, countesse, or duchesse.

Æc paria sunt. Non eris, nec fuisti, utrumque tempus alienum est. In hoc punctum conjectus es: quod ut extendas, quousque extendes? Quid fles? Quid optas? Perdis operam. Rata et fixa sunt, atque magna et æterna necessitate ducuntur. Eo ibis quo omnia eunt.

SENECA.

My lord, sir bisshope, ye maye not so [withdrawe,
Se frowardly, as it were by disdeyne,
Ye moste approche unto my mortale lawe
It to contraire it were but in veyne.



Mportuna mors mille modis quotidie miseros homines rapit; hunc necat febribus, hunc opprimit doloribus, hunc consumit fame, illum siti extinguit, hunc suffocat aquis, illum interimit laqueo, illum perimit flammis, hunc trucidat ferro, illum veneno corrumpit, alterum repentino terrore miseram vitam finire compellit.

S. AUGUSTINUS.

Right nowe, sir prince, for alle your highnesse,
The pompe of wordely honoure ye shalle lete;
Who moste haboundeth here in gret richesse,
Shalle bere with hym but a single shete.

KATHERINA virgo cum decollata fuisset, de ejus corpore lac emanavit. Angeli autem corpus ejus accipientes ab illo loco ad montem Sinay itinere plus quam viginti deduxerunt, et ibidem honorifice sepelierunt. Ex cujus ossibus indesinenter oleum emanat, quod cunctorum debilium membra sanat. Passa est sub Maxentio sive Maximiano tyranno.

JACOBUS DE VORAGINE.

Ye that so longe worshipe and renoun
Have had amonges ladies and barons,
Now moste ye from your highnesse come adoun,
Forgettyng youre trompettes and clarions.

2

LAUDANS invocabo Dominum et ab inimicis meis salvus ero. Circumdederunt me dolores mortis, et torrentes iniquitatis conturbaverunt me. Dolores inferni circumdederunt me; præoccupaverunt me laquei mortis.

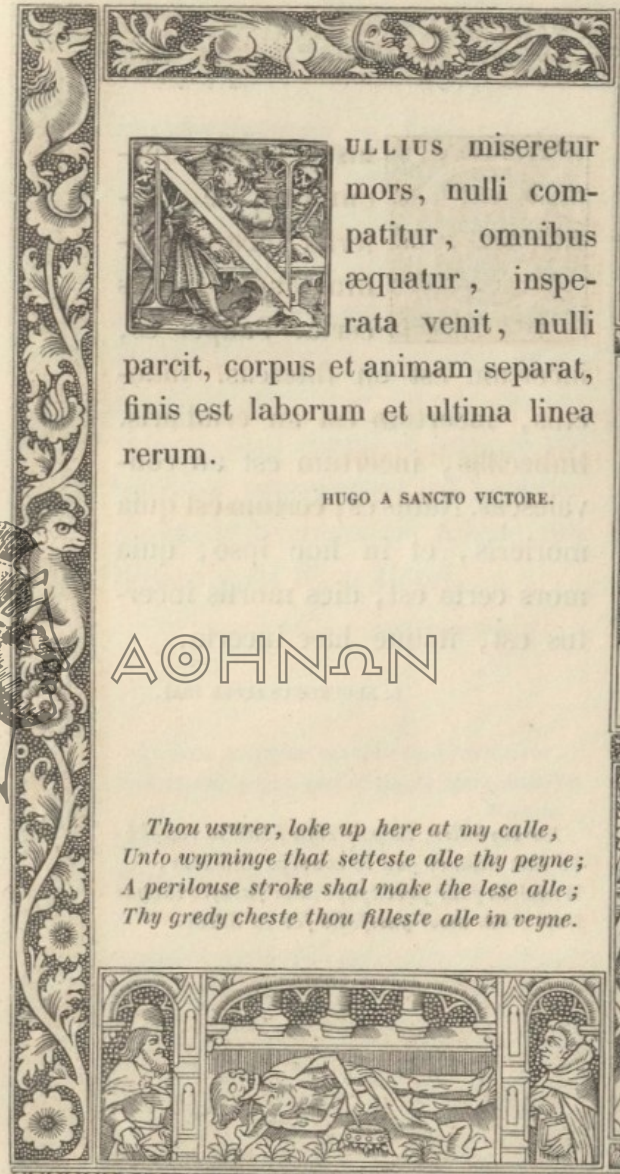
PSALM. XVII.

Farwelle, my tythes, farwelle, myne offe-
[rynge;
I most go compte in ordre by and by,
And for my shepe make a juste reckonynge;
Whom God acquiteth, I hold hym happy.

MORS nihil aliud est quam peregrinationis terminus, finis miseriæ, laborum meta, exilii limes, janua patriæ, nativitas vitæ, principium beatitudinis, primitiæ primitiorum.

PETRUS BLESENSIS.

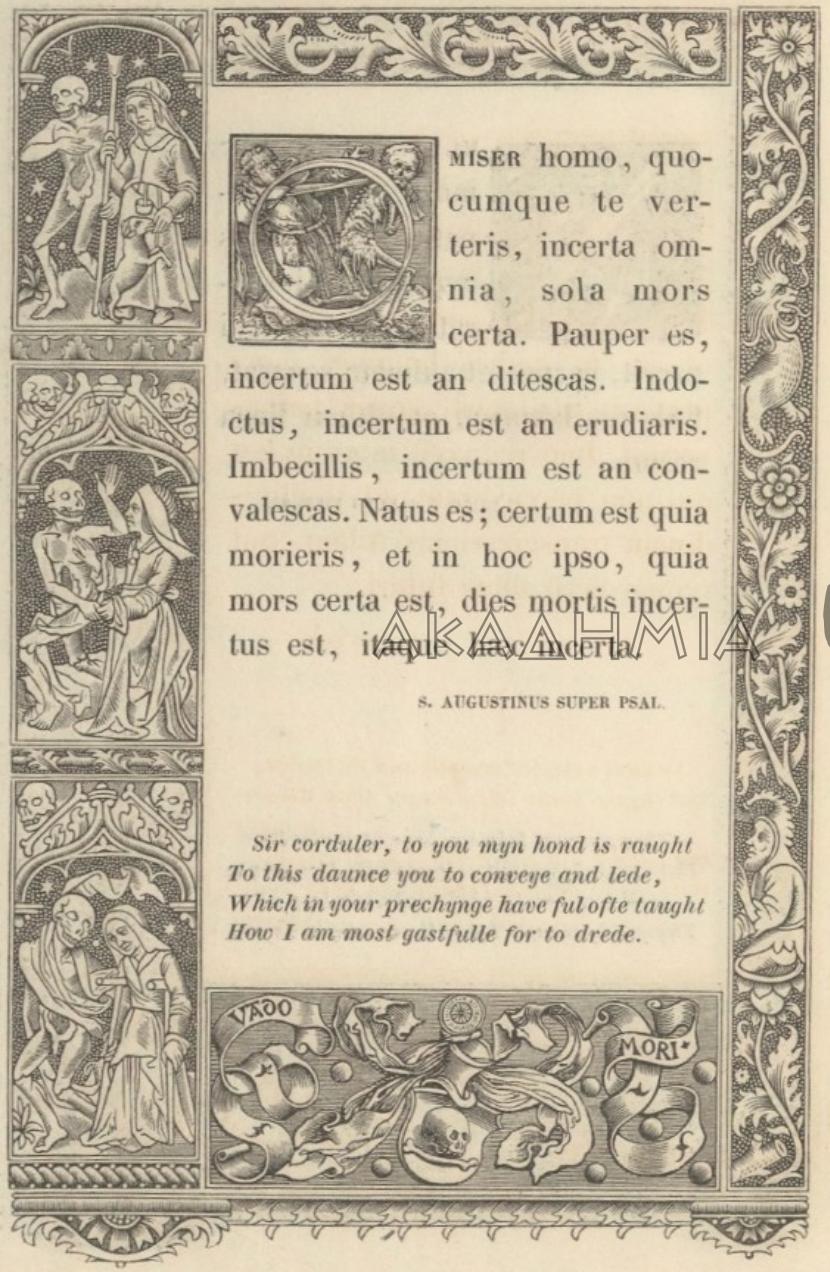
Maister of phisike, werketh not in veyne;
Ayenste my mygth your skylle may not endure,
For alle your crafte and study of medycine,
Leche though ye be, youre self ye can not cure.



NULLIUS miseretur mors, nulli compatitur, omnibus æquatur, insperata venit, nulli parcit, corpus et animam separat, finis est laborum et ultima linea rerum.

HUGO A SANCTO VICTORE.

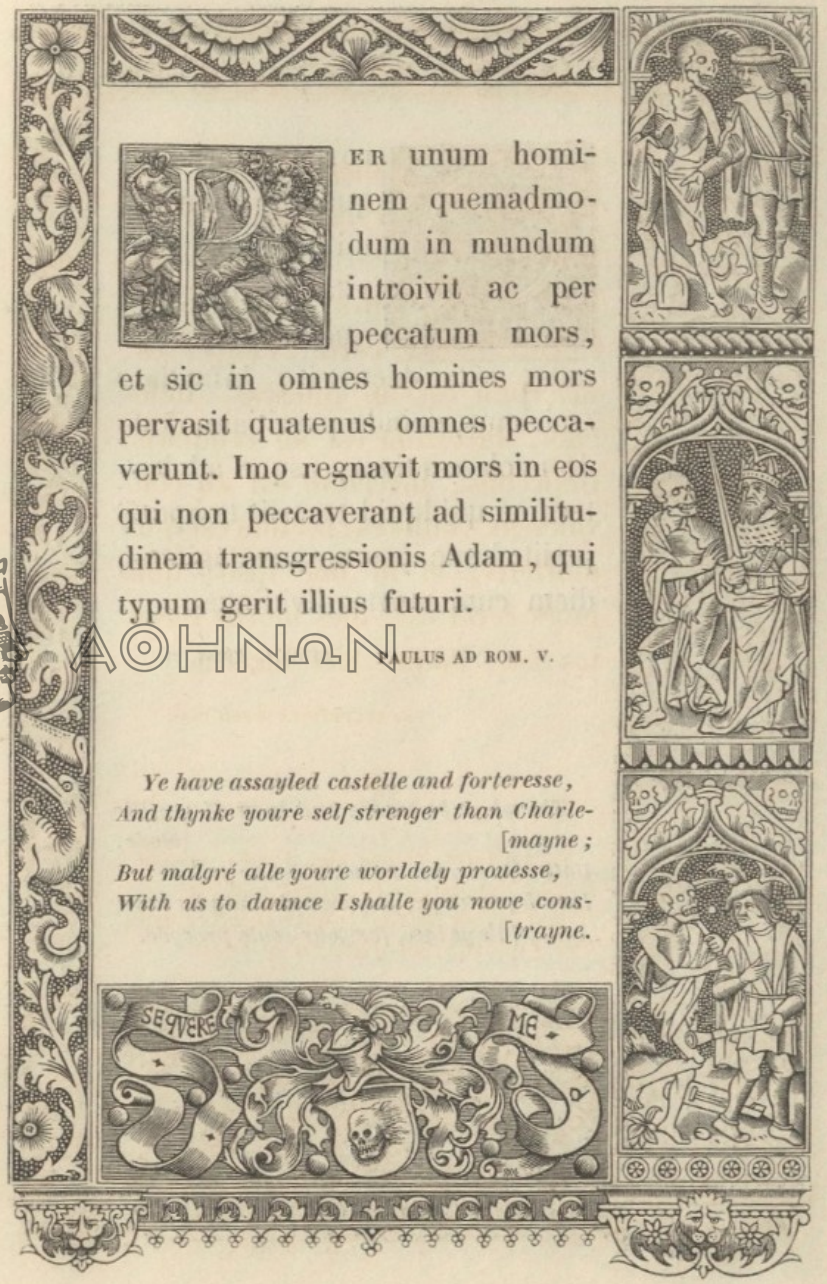
Thou usurer, loke up here at my calle,
Unto wynninge that setteste alle thy peyne;
A perilouse stroke shal make the lese alle;
Thy gredy cheste thou filleste alle in veyne.



O MISER homo, quocumque te verteris, incerta omnia, sola mors certa. Pauper es, incertum est an ditescas. Indoctus, incertum est an erudiaris. Imbecillis, incertum est an convalescas. Natus es; certum est quia morieris, et in hoc ipso, quia mors certa est, dies mortis incertus est, itaque hæc incerta.

S. AUGUSTINUS SUPER PSAL.

Sir corduler, to you myn hond is raught
To this daunce you to conveye and lede,
Which in your prechynge have ful ofte taught
How I am most gastfulle for to drede.



PER unum hominem quemadmodum in mundum introivit ac per peccatum mors, et sic in omnes homines mors pervasit quatenus omnes peccaverunt. Imo regnavit mors in eos qui non peccaverant ad similitudinem transgressionis Adam, qui typum gerit illius futuri.

PAULUS AD ROM. V.

Ye have assayled castelle and forteresse,
And thynke youre self strenger than Charle-
[mayne;
But malgré alle youre worldely prouesse,
With us to daunce I shalle you nowe cons-
[trayne.

QUOTIDIE morimur; quotidie enim demitur aliqua pars vitæ, et, tunc quoque cum crescimus, vita decrescit; infantiam amisimus, deinde pueritiam, deinde adolescentiam; usque ad hesternum quidquid transiit temporis periit; hunc ipsum, quem agimus, diem cum morte dividimus.

SENECA EPIST. 24.

Though ye be tendre and born of gentille [blode,
Unto this daunce I moste be your gyde;
Leveth your vayle, your wymple and your hode,
And, while ye lyve, for your soule provyde.

REMEDIUM mors est, studiorum et curarum ad vitam pertinentium vacuitas. Mori non est malum, sed male mori pessimum.

S. JOANNES CHRYSOSTOMUS.

Thou that hast lyved ful ofte in jolyfté,
Come forthe, sir fole, wyth baubel and wyth [cappe;
For no man maye escape his destyne;
But, wyse or fole, deth muste be thyne happe.

A 3

SUBITÆ necessitati mortis vana spes non præjudicat ætatis; quippe quæ infantes, pueros, adolescentes pari ut senes sorte præcipit.

JOANNES CASS.

O thou that many a man hast allurede,
And made hym waste hys youthe in false ple-
[saunce,
Though in youre beauté ye ben moche assurede,
Yit shalle ye atte laste joyne my daunce.

TENEAMUS nullum esse malum quod sit a natura datum hominibus, intelligamusque, si mors malum sit, esse malum sempiternum; nam vitæ miseræ non finis esse videtur. Mors si est misera, finis nullus esse potest.

M. TULLIUS CICERO.

Wel ofte thou in fulle bole and kan
Hast swynked for to drynke and to swylle;
Nowe here, wyth thyne hewe pale et van,
Thou shalt daunce maugré thy wylle.

UBICUMQUE desines, si bene desinis, sed et fortiter desinendum. Non est res magna vivere, omnes servi tui vivunt, omnia animalia, sed magnum est honeste mori, prudenter, fortiter.

SENECA.

Allas! Syre galaunte, nowe most thou saunz [socoure
Abate thy veyne glorie and thy pryde,
And leve byhynde al worldely honoure,
For agenst dethe no thynge may abide.

VLNERA mea ecce non abscondo; medicus es; æger sum. — Mors, sicut nec sibi a quoquam sponte, nec cuiquam sponte inferenda est, ita, Deo jubente, recusanda non est, cujus institutione quocumque tempore obeunda est.

S. AUGUSTINUS.

Thou that hast lyved longe in wyldernesse,
Must nowe take leve of thyne ermytage;
For yche man knowethe welle this sentence,
That in this lyfe is no sure heritage.

ANTHIPPÆ uxori Socrates, cum forti animo et constanti vultu potionem veneni e manu carnificis accepisset, admoto jam labris poculo, inter fletum et lamentationem vociferanti innocentem eum perimi : « Quid ergo? inquit. Nocenti mihi satius esse duxisti? » O immensam illam sapientiam quæ ne in ipso quidem vitæ excessu oblivisci sui potuit!

VALERIUS MAXIMUS.

Al youre passetyme has ben to shaken the [dyce;
But throwe no more, for nowe it is youre [chaunce,
Maugré youre grete othes and wordes nyce,
To folowe me bothe in the dedely daunce.

YSAIAS filius Amos propheta introivit ad Ezechiam ægrotantem usque ad mortem et dixit ei : « Dispone domui tuæ, quia morieris tu et non vives. » Et dixit Ezechias : « Non videbo Dominum Deum in terra viventium. Generatio mea ablata est et convoluta est a me, sicut tabernaculum pastorum. Præcissa velut a texente anima mea ; dum adhuc ordirer, incudit me. »

YSAIAS.

Lytel enfaunt, that were but late borne,
Schaped in this worlde to have no plesaunce,
Thou moste wyth othere that are gone to forne
Be led in haste by fatal ordynaunce.

ALPHABETI ultima littera est, ut dies mortis ultimus vitæ. Ideo prima et ultima Græcorum, A atque Ω, omnis cursus vitæ comprehensus significandusque præbetur.

Remember alle there is no better victorie
In this lyfe here than sle synne at leste,
Thanne shalle ye regne in Paradys with glorie;
Happy is he in hevene that makethe his feste.

OUR TERM OF LIFE DEPENDS NOT ON OUR DEED.
BEFORE OUR BIRTH OUR FUNERAL WAS DECREED;
NOR AW'D BY FORESIGHT, NOR MISLED BY CHANCE,
IMPERIOUS DEATH DIRECTS THE EBON'S LANCE,
PEOPLES GREAT HENRY'S TUMBS, AND LEADS UP HOLBEIN'S DANCE.

(PRIOR.)

LA MORT NY MORD

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M DCCC LVI

ŒUVRES

VICTOR HUGO

NOUVELLE ÉDITION

DONT

LES VOIX INTÉRIEURES

LES RAYONS ET LES OMBRES

PARIS