

is often much impaired, while the judgment remains in full vigour. The next faculties which usually suffer from the effects of age are the external senses, and the failure of sight and of hearing still farther contributes to the decline of the intellectual powers, by withdrawing many of the occasions for their exercise. The actual demolition of the fabric commences whenever there is a considerable failure in the functions of assimilation; but the more immediate cause of the rapid extinction of life is usually the impediment which the loss of the sensorial power, necessary for maintaining the movements of the chest, creates to respiration. The heart, whose pulsations gave the first indications of life in the embryo, generally retains its vitality longer than any other organ; but its powers being dependent on the constant oxidation of the blood in the lungs, cannot survive the interruption of this function; and on the heart ceasing to throb, death may then be considered as complete in every part of the system.

It is an important consideration, with reference to final causes, that generally long before the commencement of this

“Last scene of all,  
That ends this strange eventful history,”

the power of feeling has wholly ceased, and the physical struggle is carried on by the vital powers alone, in the absence of all consciousness of the sentient being, whose death may be said to precede, for some time, that of the body. In this, as well as in the gradual decline of the sensorial faculties, and the consequent diminution both of mental and of physical sensibility in advanced age, we cannot fail to recognise the wise ordinances of a superintending and beneficent Providence, kindly smoothing the path along which we descend the vale of life, spreading a narcotic mantle over the bed of death, and giving to the last moments of departing sensation the tranquillity of approaching sleep.