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Hogarth moralized

Hogarth, William

London, 1831

The Undertakers Arms.

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THE UNDERTAKERS ARMS.

THIS is designed with much humour, according to the rules of heraldry, and is called The Undertaker's Arms, to shew us the connection between death and a quack-doctor, as are also those cross-bones on the outside of the escutcheon. When an undertaker is in want of business, he cannot better apply than to some of those gentlemen of the faculty, who are for the most part so charitably disposed as to supply the necessities of these sable death-hunters, and keep them from starving in a healthy time. By the tenor of this piece, Mr. Hogarth would intimate the general ignorance of such of the medical tribe, and teach us, that the little knowledge they possess resides in their voluminous wigs and golden-headed canes. They are represented in deep consultation, upon the contents of a urinal. Of the three figures above, that with the divided face was intended for Dr. Ward,* one of whose cheeks was marked with claret; the other, on the opposite side, was designed for the elder Taylor, the noted oculist. The head of this man's cane being painted with an eye, and one of his as closed, tells us that both are to be understood as equally concerned in the consultation.† The middle one is a mountebank's merry-andrew, (having in his hand an oaken towel, with a head of the second magnitude)

* A late celebrated quack.

† [Intended for Mrs. Mapp, the bone-setter, who was vindicated by many, as Mr. Ireland informs us—from the unkind things said of her by her medical brethren, for “not more than nineteen out of twenty of her patients died under her hands.”]

here placed, to shew us the great judgment of these men in physical debates whose knowledge in medicine, we are to suppose, in no respect greater than that of him who deals out physic on a public stage, taking advantage of a credulous multitude, to vend his pernicious drugs under a specious pretence of their being specific. But as our author's own illustration of this coat of arms, engraved at the bottom of the plate, may give a greater insight into the subject, it is added, as follows: "The company of undertakers beareth, sable, a urinal, proper, between twelve quack-heads of the second, and twelve cane-heads, or, consultant. On a Chief,* Nebulæ,† ermine, one complete doctor, issuant, checkie, sustaining in his right hand a baton of the second. On his dexter and sinister sides two demi-doctors, issuant, of the second, and two cane-heads issuant, of the third; the first having one eye, couchant, towards the dexter side of the escutcheon; the second, faced, per pale, proper, and, gules, guardant.—With this motto,—*Et plurima mortis imago.*"‡

* "A chief betokeneth a senator, or honourable personage, borrowed from the Greeks, and is a word signifying a Head; and as the head is the chief part in a man, so the chief in the escutcheon should be a reward of such, only, whose high merits have procured them chief place, esteem, or love amongst men. Guillim."

† "The bearing of clouds, in arms, (saith Upton) doth import some excellencie."

‡ The general image of death.