

with manly fortitude descended to the repose of the grave. In their battles they fought with desperate valor, for they dreaded not to wander among the mysteries of eternity. Some of the ancient nations even rejoiced at the funerals of their friends; for they believed that the palace of the gods would be opened to triumphant virtue, and that, after the revolutions of ages, they would meet again in the everlasting mansions of light. "I am transported," said an ancient sage, "with the bare name of eternity! for what will be the joy of the soul when released from the fetters of the clay, and it draw nearer to the Father of the world." "I am filled with hope, O Judges," said the virtuous Socrates, when doomed unjustly to a felon's death—"I am filled with hope. It has happened fortunately for me that I am sentenced to die. Death transports us to regions inhabited by those who have departed from life. Can such a change of scene appear a small privilege to you? Or can you esteem it a slight advantage that I may hold discourse with Orpheus, Homer and Hesiod? Indeed, if it were possible, I could wish to die often, to enjoy the circle I have mentioned. With what a glow of delight should I make the acquaintance of Palamedes, of Ajax, and others whose throats have felt the knife of iniquitous judgment!"

So with the old Hebrews, we find the same contempt of death—the same noble confidence and sublime faith at its approach. They were wont to speak of the grave as a place of repose, "where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest." And when a Jew yielded up the spirit, and was laid by his friends in the tomb, they did not speak of him as dead, but they said, "He is gathered to his fathers." Death was called a sleep, and no dark forebodings or childish fears gloomed over the hour of its approach. "Yea," says the greatest of the Hebrew poets—the illustrious father of the greatest masonic light of antiquity—"though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me."

During the first ages of the Christian church, too, and even down to a very late period, we see the same heroic fortitude and earnest faith. Funeral rites and emblems, and the religious observances regarding the dead, were beautiful, hopeful, tranquillizing to the mind, and soothing to the sorrowing heart. They presented the future life to the thought in a most definite and tangible form—made it a real and palpable fact, not a thing of shadow and mist—a world where the lost would be found, where hearts which had been separated here by death would be reunited, to be divided no more, and where the soul would find and embrace those idols of good, of truth and love so ardently worshipped and fruitlessly sought on earth.

In this respect, "Sorrow Lodges" would be found eminently useful; for, while they would call us to the contemplation of the "coffin," and the "grave," and the mortality they represent, they would also display that divine branch, the heavenly "Acacia," "the emblem of the immortal part of man," and which teaches that "when the cold winter of death shall have passed, and the bright summer's morn of the resurrection appears, the Son of Righteousness shall descend, and send forth his angels to collect our ransomed dust; then, if we are found worthy, we shall, by his password, enter the celestial lodge above, where the Supreme Architect of the Universe himself presides."

It is usual, when Sorrow Lodges are held, to decorate the room not only with mourning weeds, but with wreaths of foliage and flowers—Nature's glorious types of Truth, Love and Immortality—and thus death itself is made radiant with beauty, and the odor of the grave is lost in the immortal fragrance of the ever-blooming Acacia. And thus we learn to thrust aside our old and dreary views of death, and associate it with what is lovely and beautiful. "Cover me with flowers, and let me die to the sound of music," was the dying exclamation of an illustrious mason, who had knelt before our mystic altar in company with Franklin and Voltaire.

The grand truth connected with the masonic use of the Acacia branch is rapidly extending. A few years ago, except now and then on a masonic

tomb, a cheerful emblem, representing death or the grave, was never met with.

Nothing could possibly exceed the dreary and desolate aspect of many of our older burial-grounds. They seem to have been selected with exclusive reference to their barrenness and solitariness, as if our only object was to bury the dead from our sight, and forget them as soon as possible. There was nothing inviting or agreeable about them. Cold, melancholy and sad, with their terrific emblems—death's heads, skeletons, cross-bones and doleful epitaphs—they were objects of dread to all, of love and reverence to none. Frightened children ran faster as they passed, and even grown men, at times, would turn away their eyes, as if half afraid that some awful vision would rise before them.

It is gratifying, however, to know that a great change is now taking place in regard to our sepulchral rites and our places of burial. The rural cemeteries that are now becoming so numerous, and which are daily springing up in all parts of our country—selected with so much care, arranged with so much taste, and embellished with the most beautiful creations of art and nature—show that we are approaching an age of faith. They indicate that men think more of a future life, and cherish with a tenderer solicitude the memory of their departed friends. Emblems of hope, and trust, and love, invest every grave. Flowers in endless variety, and of surpassing beauty, stand as sentinels around every tomb, as if guarding the repose of the loved one that sleeps within. The waving Acacia, glorious with masonic memories—the mysterious pine, whose wondrous murmurs, never ceasing, resound like a perpetual song—the fir-tree, the type of unwavering confidence, and the drooping elm and weeping willow, emblems of a tender grief and everlasting sympathy—adorn these places sacred to the dead. Thus, on every returning spring, each swelling bud and opening flower will seem to declare that the night of death is past, "and beauty immortal awakes from the tomb." Thus every wind which softly breathes through the green foliage, and fans the verdant coverings of the dead, sounds as the voice of God or the archangel's trump, commanding the dead to rise. Thus every grave becomes an altar, consecrated by tears and sighs, and holy affections, and the flowers that bloom thereon are the offerings which an unforgetting love presents to the cherished being who slumbers below.

The tranquil beauty which reigns in these places takes away half the fear of death. And if there be a spot in the world where, without a fear or regret, one could lay himself down in the sleep of death, it is in one of these modern cemeteries, where the released spirit would unite itself with that spirit of beauty which seems to have enshrined itself in every flower and every tree, and where the everlasting song of nature, the mysterious hymn of the winds and trees, distant reverberations of that mighty canticle—which ascendeth forever before the Eternal Throne, would swell around his grave forever! Sceptics and utilitarians may scoff at our pious endeavors to embellish our sepulchres, and denounce as futile or superstitious the care and sympathy with which we surround the graves of the loved and lost; but they can only excite our pity. For he who has no faith in the invisible, nor reverence for departed virtue, nor affection for his departed friends, is an object most pitiful to behold.

"Why do we deck these graves with flowers?
And hast thou ever lost a friend,
Nor sought that with thy future hours
Remembrance fond should closely blend?
'Tis thus untired we cherish ours;
'Tis thus we cherish ours;
These living monuments commend
That zeal, which never can forget
Friend, once beloved, as living yet."

Gems sparkling life, whose fragrant breath
Revives the sense to pleasure there,
And garlands crown the place of death,
Which joyous life and youth could wear.
That friend's good name who rests beneath,
As odorous flowers in sunny air
To us shall sweet and lovely be
In everlasting memory."

Charge not with superstitious thought
The kind, the pious deed we do;
Greeks, Romans, Celts, alike, have brought
The fairest flowers, the grave to strew;

And not alone by custom taught,
But native feeling strong and true,
The Christian and the heathen come,
To deck with flowers the honored tomb."

The mourner tam would read around
Her grief inscribed on earth and sky,
And fondly loves each floweret found
With saddening marks of sympathy,
'Tis such bestrew this sacred ground,
Emblems of woe, of purity,
The drooping head, the dewy tear,
The pallid hue to sorrow dear."

Nor gift, nor word, nor kind caress,
Affection's seal may now declare,
And love, assiduous once to bless,
Through faithful years of daily care,
Casts all its waste of tenderness
In flowers and tears profusely there,
Invents a duty to fulfil,
And seems to render service still."

'Types, Truth selects, appropriate,
Fair, fading creations of a day,
Of human life to indicate
The fragile state and swift decay,
Now in prosperity elate,
And then for ever passed away,
Bedecking thus the mortal cell,
Our tale impressively they tell."

Are richly now that spring's soft breath
Wakes latent energies below,
Leaves, buds and blossoms bursting forth,
With gratitude and beauty glow,
Symbols of triumph over death.
The Resurrection hope they show;
The Grave her tenants shall restore,
And Death of victory boast no more."

It is well for us, at particular times and on particular occasions, to recall the past, and especially those with whom we have been associated, and who now slumber beneath the Acacia boughs! Every lodge has lost its members by death, some having fallen in life's early bloom and promise, and others in the maturity of their powers and the full experience of age. It will be a salutary exercise of our thoughts, and a wise employ of time to pause for a little and hold communion with our departed companions. Their bodies have faded from our view, and mouldered to dust; but the lives they have lived, and the examples they have given to the world, can never perish. These will live through the immemorial future! Have our deceased brethren been virtuous, wise and great, in their fidelity to duty, generous sympathies, lofty and confiding friendships, sincere faith in God, man and justice? Let us emulate their excellencies, their perfections, and by frequent communion reproduce them in our own lives. Have their frailties disordered our beloved order and made our hearts sad? This invocation of their memory will still be useful—useful as a warning, as an admonition.

The Creator has furnished no means of moral improvement more important, or more effectual, than this communion with, this invocation of, the dead; for of the dead we may speak with freedom. Of their virtues, of the heavenly beauty of their lives, we may speak without being suspected of insincere flattery; and of their frailties we may speak with mingled justice and charity, without laying ourselves liable to the charge of ulterior purposes of a selfish and interested character.

In truth, the influence of the departed upon us is far greater than we have been in the habit of thinking. It is not in vain that our brothers deceased have lived in our midst—it is not in vain they have died. They have left, as we just said, their works behind them; their remembrances remain in the lodge-room, and in the community in which they were known. Although dead and in their graves, they still live, and their lives and examples, were they divine and holy, go about among us as ever, continuing those works of goodness which here commenced. Let us pray that they may watch over us as guardian geniuses, and preserve us from all selfishness, injustice and impurity.

Sorrow Lodges, then, are of the highest moral utility. They are there, calling to mind the departed worthies of our order, we come to feel that the fraternal ties of our institution are more powerful than death, and more enduring than the grave. Our brothers, departed, are not lost to us. Their sympathy surrounds us still, and we feel their