

THE THREE BEQUESTS.

THE hour of death has come upon Nathan Radley, as it comes to all—as it must come to you who read and to us who write. The summons which ascends from every grave has entered his ears and his resistance, if any, can avail him nothing. He has had his week of human life, a full six days, nothing abbreviated by sickness, idiocy, or accidents of serious sort. It is “the close of the sixth day” to him, and his Master calls him to come and receive his wages. He has lived full three score years and ten, and now the fiat has gone forth, he can live no longer.

It is nearly noon. The family physician, a man honest and meek, has bid him farewell, first frankly informing him that the sun, now so near the meridian, will not set until his life’s sun shall have gone down forever. He knows that he must die, and he is preparing for the end.

But it is not the ordinary preparation for departure to which his mind is turned. This has been long since made. The will, which will be found to-morrow by his executor, has been this ten years written, signed, sealed and attested. The spiritual preparation, of which the venerable pastor will speak to-morrow over his coffin, has been made twice fifteen years. His account books are well made up; his debts are few; his business is compact, and all his temporal affairs are in good condition.

It must be something strange, then, and out of the way that induces him now to order the room cleared of all those friendly, sympathizing guests, whose attentions have been so grateful to him through all his days of sickness. The untiring nurse, the venerable pastor, the faithful attorney, the honest overseer, all are requested to give way for he says; “I wish to see Brother Jourdan alone.” Brother Jourdan is Master of his Lodge, and it is rightly conjectured that the business between them is of a Masonic cast. Therefore Brother Jourdan takes a place by his bedside, and the room is cleared.

A period of some fifteen or twenty minutes elapses, when Brother Jourdan passes into the ante-room with the message: Brother Radley wishes to see Brother Elliott alone.

Brother Elliott, being the Senior Warden of the Lodge, a whisper passes around the group in the ante-room, “some other Masonic business is in the course of consideration.” Whatever this may be, it occupies but a few moments, when Brother Elliott returns, and to the astonishment of all, says: “Brother Radley desires that Brother Harrison be sent for as soon as possible, as he wishes to see him alone. As Brother Harrison is Junior Warden of the Lodge, and withal the sexton of the community, it is not strange that the company now concur in the opinion that “this matter surely relates to his burial.

Brother Harrison living but a stone’s throw off, but little time is consumed in doing the errand.

He comes in haste, receives his message, whatever it was, and then the friends are summoned, one and all, to the chamber of death. It is a short strife with Nathan now, and ere the hour of one, the leaden weights are on his eyelids, and the spirit has gone to the God who gave it.

A large attendance conveyed and accompanied Nathan Radley on the following day to the house appointed for all the living. It was an interesting occasion, and the Masonic ceremony made more than an ordinary impression upon the minds of those who witnessed it. “A good man had gone to rest,” and one burial service, properly considered, was applicable to him.

But the dying messages to the Master and Wardens, what were they? Brother Jourdan asked Brother Elliott for his. Brother Harrison asked Brother Jourdan, and Brother Elliott asked them both for theirs, but the answer of each was surd and the same: “I will tell you at some future period.”

During the succeeding year the inquisitive men and the vigilant women of the settlement marked it as an unusual thing that each of these three Lodge officers made a long journey from home about the same time, giving no rational explanations of their business, and what was, perhaps, more remarkable, neither of the three was aware of each other’s movements. Thus it occurred that Sustitia Lodge No. 88, for two successive months, having no officers present, had no meeting. Brother Elliott meeting Brother Harrison in a distant city, could only restrain his astonishment by observing the still greater astonishment of his friend.

A year, however, rolled around. The grave of Nathan Radley lay as yet unmarked by a stone. Gossips had reflected somewhat harshly upon this neglect, and the good old pastor hinted more than once to his church that “so good a man deserved a burial stone.” It was on the anniversary of his death, and the earth had settled firmly about his coffin, when, to the unbounded astonishment of each other, the Master and the