

to the small square door through which the body is taken. The top of the tower, which is the platform where are laid the bodies, is quite hidden by a parapet that completely surrounds it, on which, in one close, unbroken rank, the vultures perch, motionless themselves as stone, with their bare heads half sunk in their bodies. Facing inwards, there they rest, silent and still as all around them, till the white-robed bearers of the dead place the corpse upon the floor below them. Then all swoop down.

All the Parsees that I have ever talked with upon this subject have expressed a strongly affectionate feeling for their mode of sepulture. Nor is there anything more painful to the feelings of the survivors in this manner of burial than in ours. They do not see the sudden downflight of the birds upon the corpse, for they are then devoutly bowed in prayer in the temple near at hand. But half an hour elapses from the time the corpse is laid reverently upon the platform till these winged assistants have ended the work that takes, perhaps, months with us; a fortnight later the same men that carried in the corpse visit once more the tower, and with a kind of tongs place the dry and separated bones in the central well.

The impression that the whole place gives is very far from repulsive; there is little to shock one, and much to admire, in this the Parsee mode of burial, and in the place of their sepulture. The air is sweet and pure thus high upon the hill; the constant sun, archetype of their deity, shines bright and clear, and the flame-rayed bed of crimson roses in their garden is a promise as well as a present joy; and as the calm, white-robed old Parsee said as he gave me a bunch of the glowing blossoms when I left, "This life is not the end of all things."  
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