

THE MODE IN MONUMENTS

STRAY THOUGHTS IN HIGHGATE CEMETERY

On a sharp, sunlight morning, when the white clouds are drifting swiftly across the luminous blue sky, there is no finer walk about London than the Highgate ridge. One may stay awhile on the Archway looking down upon the innumerable roofs of London stretching southward into the haze, and shining here and there with the reflection of the rising sun, and then wander on along the picturesque road by the college of Saint Aloysius to the new Catholic church, and so through the Waterlow Park to the cemetery. The Waterlow Park is a pleasant place, full of children and aged persons in perambulators during the middle hours of the day, and in the summer evening time a haunt of young lovers; but your early wanderer finds it solitary save for Vertumnus, who, with L.C.C. on the front of him, is putting in crocuses. So we wander down to the little red lodge, whence a sinuous road runs to Hampstead, and presently into the close groves of monuments that whiten the opposite slope.

How tightly these white sepulchres are packed here! How different this congestion of sorrow from the mossy latitude of God's Acre in the country! The dead are crammed together as closely as the living seemed in that bird's-eye view from the Archway. There is no ample shadow of trees, no tangled corners where mother earth may weave flower garlands over her returning children. The monuments positively jostle and elbow

each other for frontage upon the footways. And they are so rawly clean and assertive. Most of them are conspicuously new whitened, with freshly-blackened or newly-gilt inscriptions, bare of lichen, moss, or mystery, and altogether so restless that it seems to the meditative man that the struggle for existence, for mere standing room and a show in the world, still rages among the dead. The unstable slope of the hill, with its bristling array of obelisks, crosses and urns, craning one above another, is as directly opposed to the restfulness of the village churchyard with its serene outspreading yews as midday Fleet Street to a Sabbath evening amidst the Sussex hills. This cemetery is, indeed, a veritable tumult of tombs.

Another thing that presently comes painfully home to one is the lack of individuality among all these dead. Not a necessary lack of individuality so much as a deliberate avoidance of it. As one wanders along the steep, narrow pathways one is more and more profoundly impressed by the wholesale flavour of the mourning, the stereotyping of the monuments. The place is too modern for memento mori and the hour-glass and the skull. Instead, Slap & Dash, that excellent firm of monumental masons, everywhere crave to be remembered. Truly, the firm of Slap & Dash have much to answer for among these graves, and they do not seem to be ashamed of it.

From one elevated point in this cemetery one can count more than a hundred urns, getting at last weary and confused with the receding multitude. The urn is not dissimilar to the domestic mantel ornament,

and always a stony piece of textile fabric is feigned to be thrown over its shoulder. At times it is wreathed in stony flowers. The only variety is in the form. Sometimes your urn is broad and squat, a Silenus among urns; sometimes fragile and high-shouldered, like a slender old maid; here an "out-size" in urns stalwart and strong, and there a dwarf peeping quaintly from its wrapping. The obelisks, too, run through a long scale of size and refinement. But the curious man finds no hidden connection between the carriage of the monument and the character of the dead. Messrs. Slap & Dash apparently take the urn or obelisk that comes readiest to hand. One wonders dimly why mourners have this overwhelming proclivity for Messrs. Slap & Dash and their obelisk and urn.

The reason why the firm produces these articles may be guessed at. They are probably easy to make, and require scarcely any skill. The contemplative man has a dim vision of a grimy shed in a back street, where a human being passes dismally through life the while he chips out an unending succession of these cheap urns and obelisks for his employers' retailing. But the question why numberless people will profane the memory of their departed by these public advertisements of Slap & Dash, and their evil trade, is a more difficult problem. For surely nothing could be more unmeaning or more ungainly than the monumental urn, unless it be the monumental obelisk. The plain cross, by contrast, has the tenderest meaning, and is a simple and fitting monument that no repetition can stale.

The artistic cowardice of the English is perhaps the clue to the

mystery. Your Englishman is always afraid to commit himself to criticism without the refuge of a tu quoque. He is covered dead, just as he is covered living, with the "correct thing." A respectable stock-in-trade is proffered him by the insinuating shopman, to whom it is our custom to go. He is told this is selling well, or that is much admired. Heaven defend that he should admire on his own account! He orders the stock urn or the stock slab because it is large and sufficiently expensive for his means and sorrow, and because he knows of nothing better. So we mourn as the stonemason decrees, or after the example and pattern of the Smiths next door. But some day it will dawn upon us that a little thought and a search after beauty are far more becoming than an order and a cheque to the nearest advertising tradesman. Or it may be we shall conclude that the anonymous peace of a grassy mould is better than his commercial brutalities, and so there will be an end of him.

One may go from end to end of this cemetery and find scarcely anything beautiful, appropriate, or tender. A lion, ill done, and yet to some degree impressive, lies complacently above a menagerie keeper, and near this is a tomb of some imagination, with reliefs of the life of Christ. In one place a grotesque horse, with a head disproportionately vast, is to be seen. Perhaps among all these monuments the one to Mrs. Blake is the most pleasing. It is a simply and quaintly executed kneeling figure, with a certain quiet and pathetic reverence of pose that is strangely restful against the serried vulgarity around it.

But the tradesman ghoul will not leave us; he follows us up and down,

indecently clamouring his name and address, and at last turns our meditation to despair. Certain stock devices become as painful as popular autotypes. There is the lily broken on its stalk; we meet it here on a cross and there on an obelisk, presently on the pedestal of an urn. There is the hand pointing upward, here balanced on the top of an obelisk and there upon a cross. The white-robed angel, free from the remotest shadow of expression, meets us again and again. "All this is mine," says the tradesman ghoul. "Behold the names of me--Slap & Dash here, the Ugliness Company there, and this the work of the Cheap and Elegant Funeral Association. This is where we slew the art of sculpture. These are our trophies that sculpture is no more. All this marble might have been beautiful, all this sorrow might have been expressive, had it not been for us. See, this is our border, No. A 5, and our pedestal No. E, and our second quality urn, along of a nice appropriate text--a pretty combination and a cheap one. Or we can do it you better in border A 3, and pedestal C, and a larger urn or a hangel----"

The meditative man is seized with a dismal horror, and retreats to the gates. Even there a wooden advertisement grins broadly at him in his discomfiture, and shouts a name athwart his route. And so down the winding road to the valley, and then up Parliament Hill towards Hampstead and its breeze-whipped ponds. And the mind of him is full of a dim vision of days that have been, when sculptor and stonemason were one, when the artist put his work in the porch for all the world to see, when people had leisure to think how things should be done and heart to do them well, when there was beauty in the business of life and dignity

in death. And he wonders rather hopelessly if people will ever rise up against these damnable tradesmen who ruin our arts, make our lives costly and dismal, and advertise, advertise even on our graves.

HOW I DIED

It is now ten years ago since I received my death warrant. All these ten years I have been, and I am, and shall be, I hope, for years yet, a Doomed Man. It only occurred to me yesterday that I had been dodging--missing rather than dodging--the common enemy for such a space of time. Then, I know, I respected him. It seemed he marched upon me, inexorable, irresistible; even at last I felt his grip upon me. I bowed in the shadow. And he passed. Ten years ago, and once since, he and I have been very near. But now he seems to me but a blind man, and we, with all our solemn folly of medicine and hygiene, but players in a game of Blind Man's Buff. The gaunt, familiar hand comes out suddenly, swiftly, this time surely? And it passes close to my shoulder; I hear someone near me cry, and it is over.... Another ream of paper; there is time at least for the Great Book still.

Very close to the tragedy of life is the comedy, brightest upon the very edge of the dark, and I remember now with a queer touch of sympathetic