

## CHANGING OUR MOURNING CUSTOMS

IT is very often in the things we are least apt to notice around us that we can find the most direct evidences of a broadening and more enlightened people. One of the surest indications that, as a people, we are tearing away from barbaric customs, is found in the changes which, slowly but surely, have come over our mourning customs and funeral emblems. The time is not so far back when the announcement in a funeral notice that "friends will please omit flowers" was an unheard-of thing. When this first appeared people wondered at it. "No flowers for the dead?" was the curious question. "Why not?" was asked. It was not that the bereaved family did not wish flowers to be strewn upon its dead; the request was simply to stem the practice of sending flowers indiscriminately and meaninglessly. There was not so much of a desire to stop the practice as there was to curb it, to modify it and place it within proper and fitting limitations. Now one meets the request in numerous cases, and the effect has been good. Only in exceptional instances, where the position of the deceased makes privacy of the funeral almost an impossibility, do we see a meaningless and wasteful display of flowers. "Gates Ajar" and similar vulgar floral monstrosities are being discarded, and the modest laurel wreath or cross, or sheaf of wheat have in good taste supplanted them. Flowers for the dead are not to be decried so long as they have a meaning or carry a message of tender sympathy to the living, or attest a love, reverence or respect for the dead. But when offered missionless, in profusion, jammed or crammed into every imaginable made-to-order-looking design or device, the custom (or habit) of thus remembering the dead becomes offensive and is best honored in its breach.

IT was only a step from a modification in the display of flowers at a funeral to less ostentation in the cortège itself. A few years ago it was not an uncommon sight to see an almost endless line of carriages and conveyances of all sorts following the funeral of some well-beloved and respected person to the grave. Interments were robbed of the strict privacy and seclusion properly belonging to them, and they became public displays. After awhile the polite suggestion of "interment private" became a part of death notices, and here, again, a salutary effect was had. The dead came to belong to its living during its last moments above the earth, and was not made the possession of a gaping, cosmopolite crowd of friends, good and indifferent. The rightful effort is now made when death enters into a home of the highest standard of men and women, not to debar friends from a last tribute, but to restrict the circle of sorrowing friends to the smallest limit—certainly in the final burial, in which, after all, none but the family and most personal friends of the mourned one have a proper place or part. So, too, have we seen the dismal black crape disappear from the bell or door-knob, and the wreath of roses or of laurel substituted—at once the most beautiful, the most welcome and appropriate change which could possibly have been instituted. Surely, if death is what most of us believe it to be, the passing into a happier state, so gruesome an emblem of the transition such as the crape is—or rather was—should be the last thing to employ. But at the same time nothing more beautiful than the wreath of roses or laurel or holly could have been devised as a substitute.

STILL another emblem of mourning in which we have improved and shown our saner judgment is in the relief from swathing our little children in the deepest black upon the loss of father or mother. Few things are more pitiable to see than a young child in the fresh dawn of happy childhood, gleeful in spirits, and romping at play, clad in habiliments of woe. Surely we could not have devised a surer or more effective manner of impressing upon the minds of the young the gruesomeness of death than by the methods once followed in their

wardrobe. But people of better judgment, and with a finer regard for the fitness of things, have changed all this. In some cases have the parents themselves refrained from affecting the deepest mourning for the sake of their children, and none should criticize so healthful an example. It is no disrespect to the dead when we do not clothe ourselves or our dear ones in the sombre garb of mourning which custom for so long a time decreed as the right thing to do. It is often an insincere grief which flaunts itself before the world with ostentatious emblems. The true grief for a lost companionship is frequently borne in the heart, and not carried on the shoulder. I never thoroughly understood until recently the depth of affection and the sure, sane judgment which prompted that member of my family, who, when he was dying, asked that his wife and children should refrain from wearing anything which savored of mourning at his passing. It was difficult to do; the heart seemed to prompt otherwise. But it was done, and the wisdom of my father's dying wish has often come home to his survivors when they have seen the custom followed which has made relatives and friends sombre just to look at each other. The passing away of one, however dear to us, should not be made the occasion of the deepest grief continued indefinitely. We should remember the dead, as it is easy for us to do when they have been much to us. But we should also think of the living, and not make our own lives and those around us more sombre. The death of one who has been dear to us can never be made other than a mournful occasion, no matter how strong may be our hopes of a reunion. The temporary loss of their companionship cannot make us other than sad. But the true man or woman is he or she who, while remembering the one passed away, is not forgetful of the living, which means ourselves and those around us. At no time of our lives is the cheerful smile, the bright-looking and bright-feeling friend so welcome as when the sombreness of a heavy gloom surrounds us. And as the bright and cheerful friend is life-giving to our spirits, so should we be to others, casting never a shadow of gloom around us, but ever a halo of fresh, bright sunshine, even when we are most sorely tried and perplexed.

I  
h  
t  
t  
n  
e  
s  
g  
h  
v  
v  
t  
v  
a  
l  
t  
  
l  
v  
h  
c  
t  
E

a  
k  
t  
  
f  
s  
J