

A Seeker's Journal

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SCOURING TOMBSTONES

By
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IT IS SPRING here in Wisconsin; snow is gone and we are bored, so have been grabbing our putty knives, wire brushes, and fungicide in a spray bottle and off we go to visit our relatives and friends resting under the sod for all eternity at various cemeteries.

For some reason we cannot reckon, mildew, lichen, mold and fungus grows on certain types of tombstones and monuments. The gray shiny granite markers seem to be the worst. This crust-like scaly fungi and algae covers the complete markings, digging deep into the creases, obliterating names and dates.

Early spring seems to work best, before new growth. The putty knife for scraping off the hard crusts; the wire brush for fine work; and finally a good dousing of fungicide which destroys and inhibits growth. This seems to last for about three years.

Have at least four cemeteries to visit; good entertainment for two old people. Who will scrape the lichen off our tombstones when the time comes?

All these were honored in their generations, and were the glory of their times.

--The Apocrypha

THE VANISHING TOMBSTONE

WHEN I WAS a child, a visit to any cemetery was an adventure worth having. I could spend hours going from one tombstone to another just to read the epitaphs. The monuments were varied and most were beautiful, and those of the wealthiest families were almost always surrounded by wrought iron fences—a sure sign of importance. Now, just three generations later the cemetery as I loved it is changing drastically.

The popular trend today is toward those cemeteries designated “perpetual care”, where acres of green grass tend to hide the flat, bronze markers that are recessed so that mowers may pass over them, making maintenance of the grass expanses an easier task. There usually are a few statues of religious significance scattered throughout the cemetery; these often mark certain dedicated “gardens.”

There is an undeniable symmetry to these manicured green spaces where the graves of the wealthy are not usually distinguishable from those of other inhabitants. Perhaps some measure of equality in death is apparent here.

As my own mortality demanded a more careful consideration of such matters as a final resting place and preparations for getting there, I went back in my family's history and reviewed the events of my life as they related to funerals and also to cemeteries. Families became widely scattered and less inclined to unite in the traditional family cemetery lots of earlier years, and the care of those lots was no longer a common interest.

My decision was to be cremated and to have my ashes returned to the earth. I do not want a crypt for my ashes, nor any marker left in a cemetery. I choose to let memory of me remain only in the minds of those who care to remember.