

Ancient Graveyards

As I was pondering the other day I began to consider the place of old things in our lives, There is something about old things that appeal to me somehow—but then, just looking in the mirror is enough to remind me of old things now. But when I grasp a rusty sickle that bounced across the rutted plains in a handcart, or touch the sweat-smoothed bottom of the old stove-heated-flat-iron that grandma used to use, I feel a sense of history—of belonging. The Tabernacle on Temple Square is high on my list of the antiquities that stir my soul. Its recent restoration stirred memories of the prophetic voices that have echoed through its vaulted dome, and the honorable men and women who wore away the varnish from narrow pioneer-pine benches with so little room to sit. Add to that the strains of the Tabernacle Choir and organ that fill my soul with the music of angels. I pay tribute to the builders and the musicians who have made the grand old tabernacle famous throughout the world.

It is odd, perhaps; but ancient graveyards appeal to me, too. You know the kind, the ones where plucky fences keep hungry animals at bay; where tilted headstones point bravely to the sky---what's left, that is, after lichen, and moss, and wind and rain have had their way with them. The graveyards where calloused pioneers sobbed lost love into rough-hewn coffins built by their own hands. The kind where wooden grave markers—crumbling, splintered and age-gray—point somewhat upward as though searching for heaven; though as the names of the occupants fade beyond recognition, sheer anonymity holds them tighter to the earth. A place where the grass is close-cropped only where occasional deer come from the foothills for a nervous snack; and where the chill wind is the only visitor for years on end.

Actually, I saw such a graveyard just yesterday. It wasn't at all tidy; the weeds poked up in stubby patches, and the grass, where it wasn't burned by wind and draught, struggled fervently just to survive. But it's not the grass that draws me to aging graveyards; or the wrought iron fences or the headstones. It's . . . well . . . It's what I feel. For as I wander amidst the chaos I feel the presence of greatness. Like the spirit of George Washington I felt while visiting Valley Forge, or the spirit of God that enriched my soul as I stood alone in the Sacred Grove. Great folks lie beneath this sod. Though perhaps not in the way that the world thinks of greatness. None of them were wealthy, and none famous; not one of them was known for more than a few miles out of town. They were all just common folks that scratched a meager living out of baked earth; but in a puzzling way their very hardship seemed to bring out greatness in them. A lot like iron that's burned cherry-

red in a hot fire and then made useful by the brutal pounding of a sledge, they faced the pounding that life dished out to them; and faced it squarely, too. As hardships came, they faced them—no complaints, no excuses, no subsidies—just a plodding kind of 'keeping-on' over obstacles and under duress, allowing God to shape them as he wished. And they loved him for it. They loved each other, too, not just with words, mind you; these were folks who loved each other in an open-hearted, deep-calloused way: and showed it by what they did.

Yes . . . I guess that's what I like best as I explore these ancient graveyards and ageless tabernacles and artifacts—it's the sense of lingering greatness that I feel there—and the hope that just a little of what they had will rub off on me. Helping me to notice my hardships less and my blessings more. I get a deep sense of pleasure, too. That those who lie here have finally won out—over themselves, mostly.