

STRANGE FASHIONS IN BURIAL ROBES

How the Whims of Various Eccentric People as to How They Should Be Clothed in Death Are Carried Out

I ALWAYS have maintained that every man ought to go to his own funeral looking like a gentleman," said the undertaker with artistic tastes. "No matter how many hard knocks he has had to stand through life, no matter if he has had to shift along with only one suit to his back, and that a hand-me-down, when the struggle is all over and done with he ought, I say, to make his last appearance dressed in the fashion. The world owes every man at least one good suit of clothes, and if it doesn't pay its debt before his death it ought to see to it that the account is squared afterward.

"The thing that very often prevents an undertaker from carrying out his own safe and sane ideas is the whimsical notions of the deceased. Women are more given to freak burial clothes than men. Sentiment is largely responsible for their fantastic ideas.

"They have a special predilection for wedding gowns. I have known women who have been married thirty or forty years to cherish that one precious dress through all the ups and downs of life, that they might wear it again on the last great occasion. These gowns look awfully old-fashioned and have a musty odor appropriately suggestive of the grave, after having been done up in lavender and tissue paper for so many years, but vanity no longer plays a part in the scheme of the old ladies' existence, and style is to them a small matter compared with the gratification of sentiment.

"'It brings good luck to be buried in wedding clothes,' one woman told me shortly before she died.

"'Good luck to whom?' I asked. 'How can that possibly benefit anybody? It certainly cannot be much of a mascot for the mourners, and the deceased is done with luck, both good and bad.'

"My answer puzzled her a good deal.

"'I am sure I don't know for whom,' she said, 'but I do know that it brings good luck.'

"She evidently believed it, too, for when her time came she was laid away in a wedding outfit that was complete, even to the bonnet and slippers. The incon-

gruity of the headgear as an accessory to a burial toilet was enough to make an angel weep. It was an enormous, high-crowned, white silk affair, fully fifty years old, and was fearfully unbecoming to her emaciated face, but her relatives had promised that she should wear it, and they were courageous enough to keep their word.

"I buried another woman not long ago dressed in a complete set of furs. Spite, not sentiment, was at the bottom of that exhibition of bad taste.

"The furs were very costly, and there had long been a bitter dispute among the female members of the old lady's family as to who should wear them after she was done with them. As the time of her departure drew near the quarrel over the prospective ownership waxed hotter.

"The old lady herself was sorely perplexed over the merits of the various

claimants. Now she inclined toward this one, now toward that. Finally she concluded that since the coveted furs were bound to create discord so long as they were above ground nobody should have them, but that she would settle the rivalry and spite the whole brood of scheming nieces and cousins by wearing the furs herself to the end of the chapter.

"The relations fumed and fussed over this dictum, and if they had had their way probably they would have refused to carry out her instructions. But the old lady had foreseen this tempest in the family teapot, and had taken the precaution to intrust her post-mortem toilet to a disinterested outsider, who had nothing to gain by disregarding her wishes. Threats and adjurations had no effect upon that hard-hearted sartorial executor, so we put her ladyship away on the hottest day of Summer bundled up in enough

furs to keep her comfortable on a voyage to the north pole.

"One of the oddest whims I have ever been called upon to humor was that of the man who insisted on going to his grave wrapped in the traditional sheet. He sent for me several days before he died and explained his fancy.

"I misunderstood him at first. I thought he meant an ordinary white shroud. I could remember the time, away back in my childhood days, when it was the custom to clothe both men and women in those flowing white robes, and I took it that he was simply a little old-fashioned and wished a reversal to primitive customs. But he quickly corrected that impression.

"'I don't mean anything of the kind,' he said. 'I want to be buried in a sheet—a plain, every-day white sheet.'

"For once my curiosity got the better of my good manners.

"'I will do as you ask, of course,' I said, 'but will you kindly tell me why you want to be dressed in that peculiar style?'

"The old fellow's answer fairly staggered me.

"'Because I am going to do a good deal of haunting when I'm through with the flesh,' he said, 'and I'm going to take the sheet along with me, so there will be no delay about getting down to business. I'm going to leave lots of people behind who have been playing me mean tricks all their lives. I have never been able to get back at them in my present state, but just wait till I get clear of these fetters, and if I don't haunt them good and hard and make them wish they'd done the square thing by me when they had a chance it won't be my fault.'

"I couldn't make out then, and I have not been able to make out since, whether the old chap was downright crazy or just eccentric," concluded the undertaker. "Any way, it was not my business to investigate his mental condition. My business was to bury him in a sheet, so long as he asked me to and was willing to pay for it, and I performed my part of the transaction, to the letter."