"Comparison of Puritan and Grecian Monumental Art"

In *The Monumental News*, Vol. 6, No. 5
May 1893, pp. 229

This article, which begins on the next page,
is presented on the Stone Quarries and Beyond web site.
http://quarriesandbeyond.org/

Peggy B. Perazzo
Email: pbperazzo@comcast.net
December 2013

A Comparison of Puritan and Grecian Monumental Art.

A TOMBSTONE AT MARBLEHEAD, MASS.

A friend of mine, while summering on the shores of Massachusetts Bay last season, made a photograph of the gravestone of which a sketch is here given. It stands on a bluff overlooking the bay in the old Marblehead burying ground, and is quite modern as times go in the Massachusetts Colony. The date upon the stone is 1776, and the memory of one dear to him who raised it is perpetuated by the following inscription:

"Deposited beneath this stone, the mortal part of Mrs. Susanna Jayne, the amiable wife of Mr. Peter Jayne. She lived beloved and died universally lamented on August 8th, 1776, in the 45th year of her age."

The especial interest that this stone has to the student of monumental art is the exhibition of the state of taste in such matters in the colony of Massachusetts in the year 1776. I have seen some of the same sort in the burying ground at Stonington, Conn.,—slabs with an ornamental deaths head, which was simply paralyzing in its artistic effect. Now it seems singular that in this year 1776, a year of advanced political ideas of thoroughly artistic effort in other directions, this stone should be considered the proper thing. The people of that day conceived and executed architectural works which are considered worthy of study, development, and even reproduction in our own day. The domestic articles, the furniture, were not only good, but thoroughly good, and so valuable for our study that drawings and measurements of the same are to be found in our current architectural journals. Why does not this humble memorial occupy the same high plane? I'll tell you.

If there is one art more than another that staggers under the weight of arbitrary custom it is that of mortuary art. The humble statuary who so carefully finished the well arranged ornament upon this stone was influenced by many more causes than he dreamed of. But he, of all the artisans of the time, was the one who was last to be freed from the bondage of custom. While other men in other lines were freely exercising their intellect encouraged by the patronage of the cultivated, he worked on neglected, feebly portraying conventional views and worn out ideas. These carved horrors came down to him from the dreary time of the Puritan, when life was crushed out of art, and the veil of beauty was stripped from nature, and all the enchantments of poetry and revery eschewed. Omnipotent death, holding in his fleshless hands the earth and the sun; dead men's bones and emblems of fleeting time! Such was the philosophy of the time which filled the world with an insane gloom, and crippled the skill of our tombstone maker.

Now I want to show you another tombstone raised to a woman 2000 years earlier than the above, a sketch of which will be found at the bottom of this column. This one was found in the Street of Tombs at Athens, marked "To Hegeso." Note the difference between the Greek and the Puritan. Hegeso is attended by a handmaid who holds her casket of gems. Here as ever in Greek art, there are no carved horrors of death, no skeletons, no cross-bones, only a slight indescribable tinge of sadness in the pose, as where friends grasp hands for the last time. Greek taste avoided depicting the extravagance of grief, and covered all death's terrors with a veil of subtle reserve. Contrasted with it the Puritan is grotesque.

ORA COLTMAN.

IN THE STREET OF TOMBS, ATHENS.

The Davenport (Ia.) *Democrat*, whose editor is a member of the Iowa State Monument Commission, states the preliminary preparations for the erection of the monument provided for by the last general assembly, have progressed so far that there is a probability that bids will be asked for within the next ninety days. Scale drawings have been prepared and approximate estimates secured. The drawings follow closely upon the design furnished by Mrs. Ketcham, who, it will be remembered, died soon after the acceptance of her design. They show a structure 133 feet in height. The approach by six granite steps to the platform shows an extreme measurement of sixty feet square. The height of the entire base from grade line to base of shaft is 33 feet. The shaft or column—13 feet in diameter at base. 7 feet 9 inches at top, surmounted by an ornate capital 12 feet high by 13 extreme diameter—stands, with its bronze figure of fame, 100 feet in height.

Captions shown in the article on the previous page:

(top left engraving) "A tombstone at Marblehead, Mass."

Inscription on engraving of tombstone show above this caption:

> "Deposited beneath this stone, the mortal part of Mrs. Susanna Jayne, the amiable wife of Mr. Peter Jayne. She lived beloved and died universally lamented on August 8th, 1776, in the 45th year of her age."

(bottom right engraving) "In the street of Tombs, Athens." Engraved: "To Hegoso"