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FENIMORE COOPER'S GRAVE
AND CHRIST CHURCHYARD

RALPH BIRDSALL



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FENIMORE COOPER'S GRAVE
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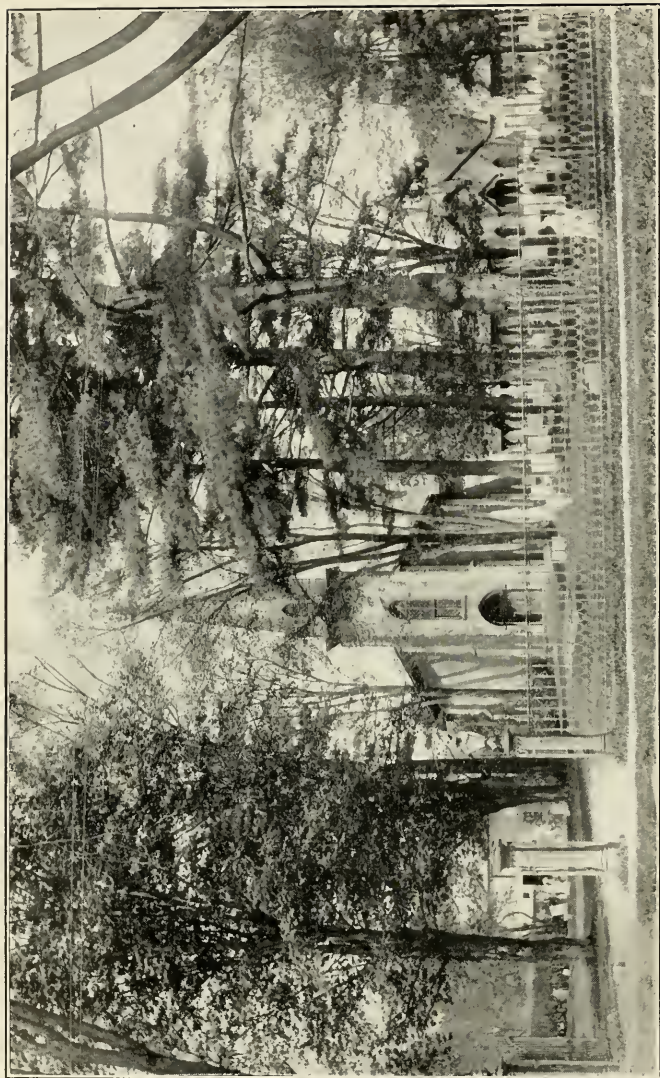


Photo by Telfer

“The stranger, entering the gate of Christ churchyard, looks about him
for some conspicuous signal of Cooper’s sepulchre”

FENIMORE COOPER'S GRAVE
AND CHRIST CHURCHYARD

BY

RALPH BIRDSALL

Rector of Christ Church, Cooperstown

*Illustrated from photographs
by A. J. Telfer, J. B. Slete, and
W. H. Yates, of Cooperstown*

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Photo by Telfer

“Stands at Cooper’s Grave”

Fenimore Cooper's Tomb

No other famous tomb is quite like Cooper's grave in the quality of surprise which it excites in

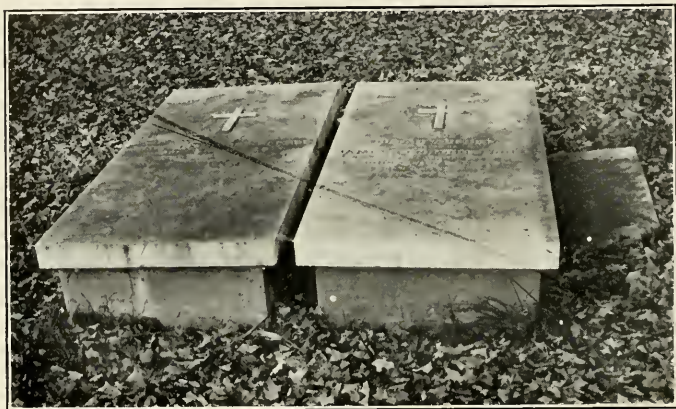


Photo by Telfer

“The path well worn by the feet of pilgrims”

every visitor. The stranger, entering the gate of Christ churchyard in Cooperstown, looks about him for some conspicuous signal of Cooper's sepulchre.

He anticipates some boastful monument, commensurate with the author's fame, standing high above all else, flaunting its claim for homage. But this he seeks in vain. An obelisk standing on the margin of the driveway commemorates a more homely celebrity, the pioneer priest of



"A marble that bears upon its surface no
tribute to fame"

Otsego forests. Toppling gravestones everywhere are inscribed with unknown and long-forgotten names.

But when the stranger chances upon the path well worn by the feet of pilgrims, and stands at Cooper's grave, he divines that the expectation is rightly disappointed. It is far more impressive

and affecting to find it so. It is not the simple tomb which is at fault, but the expectancy of its being otherwise. No proudly glittering monument marks the grave of Cooper, but a plain, recumbent slab of stone. It is a marble that bears upon its surface no tribute to the fame or virtues of the dead; only his name, with the dates of birth and death. No insignia of the author's craft are carved thereon, nor Indian emblems suggestive of his famous tales; only a small and simple cross, the symbol of the faith in which he lived and died and found assurance of immortality. It is a grave that claims for its charge no higher place than any among the dead. He does not eclipse the soldier, lying near, who died for his country upon the field of war. The tomb of the aged slave, beneath the same sod asleep, is not less notable. Old neighbors who exchanged the friendly nod with him in life are not less honored now. Hands lie still beneath the sward that gripped the axe in mighty strokes of pioneering enterprise. So rests, in like obscurity, the hand that with a pen blazed trails in a new continent of romance.

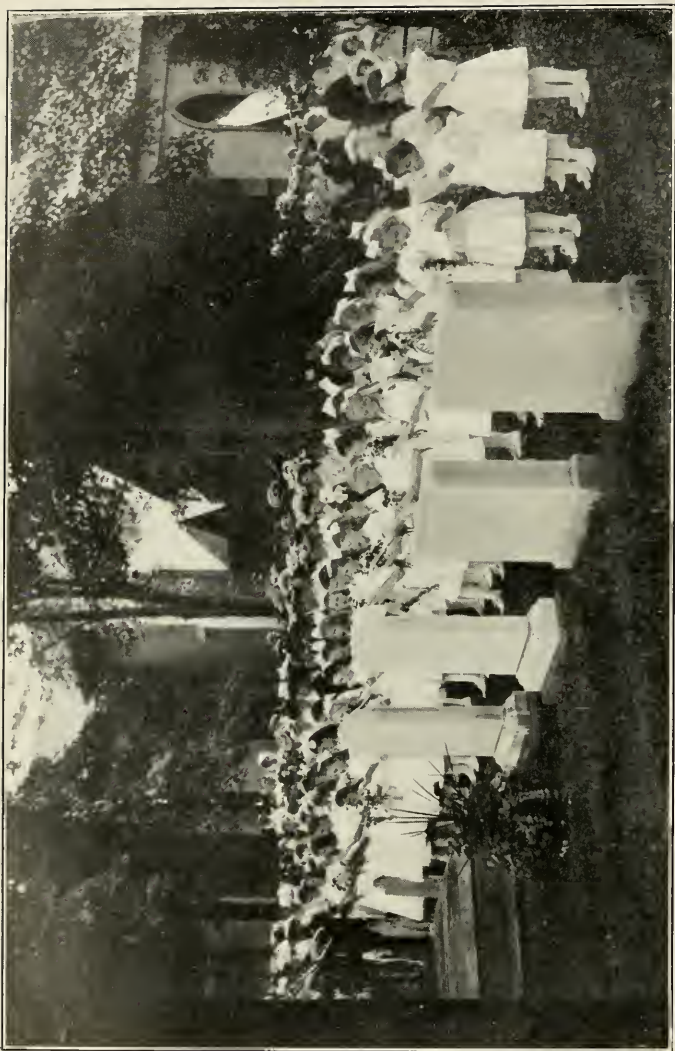


Photo by Slatte

The Cooperstown Centennial—Children singing the lyric at Cooper's grave

At Cooper's Grave

Poem written for the Cooperstown Centennial by the Rev. Walton W. Battershall, D. D., rector of St. Peter's church, Albany, and read by the author at the tomb of the novelist.

Around the marble, sculptured with the name
That gave long echoes from the mantled hills,
Which frame the glittering mirror of the lake,
Throng presences of olden time and type,
Plastic with life, shot through with mortal blood,
Living for evermore in that vast hall
Of Imagery, beyond the touch of death.

Above the grave of Cooper, stalwart soul
And clean, that fought his fight with trenchant blade
For faith and ruth, and died, marked with the Cross,
No fairy footfalls twinkle in the grass,
As in the great magician's Summer Night
Of impish frolic and bewitched sleep:
The creatures of his brain that haunt the spot,
And hail the wizard of the tangled wood
And fretted wave, were men, carved in the flesh,
Borne on, or underneath, the wheel of life,
With love or guile or dedicated vow
Sweeping their spirits like a harper's hand.

Of those who told the stories of the world,
There are, who pushed their caravels across
Forgotten or uncharted seas of time,
Discovering new continents of thought
And phantasy. Of such art thou, the seer
And recreator of the vanished life
Of the primeval forest of the West,
Where, in the brooding silence and the shades
Pierced by uncertain glimmers, thou didst see,
Or seem to see with visionary eye,
Ulysses in high council with the chiefs,
Or Hector flying from Achilles' spear.

The world thou didst discover is thine own:
No footprints didst thou find except thine own,
And theirs, whose stealthy feet and dusky forms
Move in thy epic story, like that throng,
Impassionate, wrought on the Grecian urn,
Of which the poet caught the immortal rhythm.

What chance, or trick of brain, or subtle law
That links things by their contrast, brings the grave
Of him with dreanful eyes, whose name is writ
In the warm marble of his chiseled verse,
And not in water, as he dying, moaned,
Beside the grave of him, who put his own
Unquenched fire in virile shapes of life,
Peopling the wilderness, and who now lies
In the sun's laughter rippling o'er the lake?

The old world and the new! The same old play
Of manhood, greed and stress of circumstance,
Whate'er the setting and the pageantry!
He gave new accents to the ancient tale,
And deftly wrought the assemblage and the march,
And staged the drama, of creative days,
In which the Empire of the West had birth,
And men, shaped in the clash of wild frontiers,
Whose moulds are broken, fought for a continent.

Fair Glimmerglass! he hath enchanted thee,
And filled with dreams thy sleep amid the hills.
The footprints of that fateful fight are on
Thy marge and, in the moonlight silvering
Thy face, glide spectral shapes. The Muskrat's ark
Creeps in the faint breath of the silent night.
Big Serpent, son of Uncas, holds his tryst
Sharp at the appointed sunset on the rock
Hard by the serpent river's leafy source.
And Hist, the Honeysuckle of the Hills,
Hears in the Huron camp his squirrel-note.
Still, in the twilight of soft summer eves,
Sweet hymns and orisons float on the air
From the canoe of Hetty, as she prays
Over her mother's grave beneath the lake.
And now, as in those storied days, Judith,
The Splendid, queens it in her tragedy,
With warm, brave eyes, facing the Nemesis
Of her inheritance and fatal dower.
As the night deepens and the stars burn clear

Like beacon-fires, we catch the quiet voice
Of Deerslayer, him of the straight tongue, white
In thought and deed, the moccasined Parsifal,
Making his argument for tortured death
To keep the word he pledged the torturers.

Here, in the mystic beauty of the lake,
To which he gave life's pathos and its might,
Which crept into his youth and haunted him
Across the seas, nor played him false, but breathed,
When he brought back to it his crownéd life,
Its gracious balm on his unbroken force,
He sleeps, in shadow of the shrine, in which
He read the riddle of that mystic sleep.

The Founder of Cooperstown

COOPERSTOWN received its name not, as the casual visitor might suppose, in honor of the novelist, but from his father, Judge William Cooper, who was the founder of the village. The close of the Revolutionary War opened the western frontier of New York to peaceful settlement, and offered an inviting field of enterprise to such a man as William Cooper, whose life in the quiet town of Burlington, New Jersey, was fraught with dreams of adventure and speculation in the conquest of the wilderness.

In 1785, through conveyance from the sheriff of Montgomery county, Cooper acquired, in the region of Otsego lake, at a cost of about fifty cents an acre, some 30,000 acres of land, originally part of a patent issued by the colonial government. On horseback, and alone, he rode through dense forests to the source of the Susquehanna, and carefully explored the region of his purchase. "I visited the rough and hilly country of Otsego," he afterward wrote to a friend, "where there existed not an inhabitant, nor any trace of a road;

I was alone, three hundred miles from home, without bread, meat, or food of any kind; fire and fishing tackle were my only means of subsistence. I caught trout in the brook and roasted them on the ashes. My horse fed on the grass that grew on the edge of the waters. I laid me down to sleep in my watch coat, nothing but the melancholy wilderness around me. In this way I explored the country, formed my plans for future settlement, and meditated upon the spot where a place of trade or a village should afterwards be established."

Cooper was so impressed with the possibilities of the Otsego district that he extended his possessions in the adjacent patents, and began to set forward his plans for colonization. He induced settlers to follow him, and in 1786 forty thousand acres of land which he offered for sale were taken up within sixteen days. No other settlement undertaken after the Revolution met with such immediate success. Cooper had a genius for this sort of enterprise, and a capacity for leadership that made him all but king of his new world. He knew how to satisfy the needs of poor settlers. He found means to protect them in days of famine, and contributed from his private purse to the common welfare. He opened a store of supplies, and gave credit to the settlers. He

marketed for them their first commercial products. He knew the crops that were best adapted to the soil and climate. He led and instructed the settlers in the art of building roads and bridges. He laid out a plan of the future village, and the streets of the present village follow lines which he then set down.

Superior to the colonists in intelligence and education, Cooper yet possessed qualities of what might be called sportmanship that won both the loyalty and affection of the sturdy pioneers. This trait is illustrated by a characteristic story that Cooper once offered one hundred and fifty acres of land to any man on the patent who could throw him in a wrestling match. Tradition says that one contestant was finally successful, and the land was duly conveyed to the victor.

Some idea of the commanding position which Judge Cooper occupied in the village which he founded may be gained from Fenimore Cooper's novel, *The Pioneers*, in which, while historical accuracy of incident or character is disclaimed, *Judge Temple* is easily identified as a kind of idealized Judge Cooper.

Encouraged by his success in Otsego, Cooper became a speculator in land, on a large scale, throughout Western New York. He established permanent settlements where others had failed,

and, in the process, built up a fortune. In his later years he wrote: "I have settled more acres than any man in America. There are forty thousand souls now holding, directly or indirectly under me, and I trust that no one amongst so many can justly impute to me any act resembling oppression. I am now descending into the vale of life, and I must acknowledge that I look back with self-complacency upon what I have done, and am proud of having been an instrument in reclaiming such large and fruitful tracts from the waste of the creation."

Cooper possessed remarkable insight concerning the potential energies of newly settled regions, and with a large vision of the future foresaw and advocated the construction of the Erie Canal. His ability and versatility attracted men of parts to visit him, and his home in Cooperstown became a famous center of hospitality. Well known men of the times were frequently his guests. Exiled foreigners sipped Madeira at his table. Talleyrand once was entertained by him and indited verses to his eldest daughter.

Cooper had the accomplishments of the English country gentleman and himself composed verses in the conventional manner of the times. A specimen of these appears on the tomb of the daughter celebrated by Talleyrand. Her grave

lies between the tomb of her father and the stone that commemorates Colonel Richard Cary, one of Washington's aides. She was killed by a fall from a horse, in 1800, in the twenty-third year of her age. Her brother, Fenimore Cooper, afterward wrote of her that she was "perhaps as extensively and favorably known in the middle states as any female of her years." The wooded eminence which rises at the west of the village is named in her honor, "Hannah's Hill." These are the verses which her father composed and caused to be carved upon her tomb, without inscribing, singularly enough, her name, which was not added until many years afterward:

Adieu! thou Gentle, *Pious*, Spotless Fair,
Thou *more* than Daughter of my fondest care;
Farewell! farewell!! till *happier ages* roll,
And waft me *Purer*, to thy kindred Soul.
Oft shall the Orphan, and the Widow'd poor
Thy *bounty* fed, this *lonely* spot explore;
Here to relate, thy *seeming hapless* doom,
(More than the *Solemn Record* of the tomb,
By tender love inspired, can e'er portray,
(Nor *sculptur'd Marble*, nor the *Plaintive* lay,
Proclaim thy Virtues thro' the vale of time)
And bathe with grateful tears, thy hallow'd Shrine.

In the political life of the times William Cooper's capacity for leadership naturally gave him an

important place. He became the first judge of Otsego county, and served two terms in Congress. Politics, amid the unsettled conditions of the frontier, offered a field of effort as adventurous as the work of taming the wilderness.



Photo by Telfer

“Here lies the foremost pioneer”

In December, 1809, while leaving a political meeting in Albany, after a session abounding in stormy debate, Judge Cooper was struck on the head with a walking stick by a political opponent and died as a result of the blow.

Recalling the story of his career, one is disposed to claim for Judge Cooper's dignified sarcophagus

in Christ churchyard a share of the attention bestowed upon the tomb of his more illustrious son. For here lies the foremost pioneer of Cooperstown, notable among the frontiersmen of America.



Photo by Telfer

“Inscribed to the memory of Father Nash, first rector
of Christ Church”

The Tomb of Father Nash

SHADED by venerable pines and noble elms, there stands in Christ churchyard a marble shaft inscribed to the memory of "Father Nash, first rector of Christ's church" and "Mrs. Olive, wife of Father Nash," whose bodies lie beneath the sod awaiting the day of resurrection. Among some three hundred tombstones arrayed upon the greensward, vainly struggling, with the decrepitude of age, to hold themselves erect and to keep alignment in their ranks, the monument of Father Nash, as one enters the driveway gate, most commandingly appears, and reveals him to the fancy as captain of the army of the dead. From the church nearby, of which the dead form the silent guard, the congregation strolling homeward passes by this tomb, and the visitor who pauses to read its inscription may look back through the open door-way into the sanctuary where Father Nash in lifetime led in prayer and praise, and preached the Word, and broke the Bread of Life. It is this relationship of his to supernal truths that compels assent to

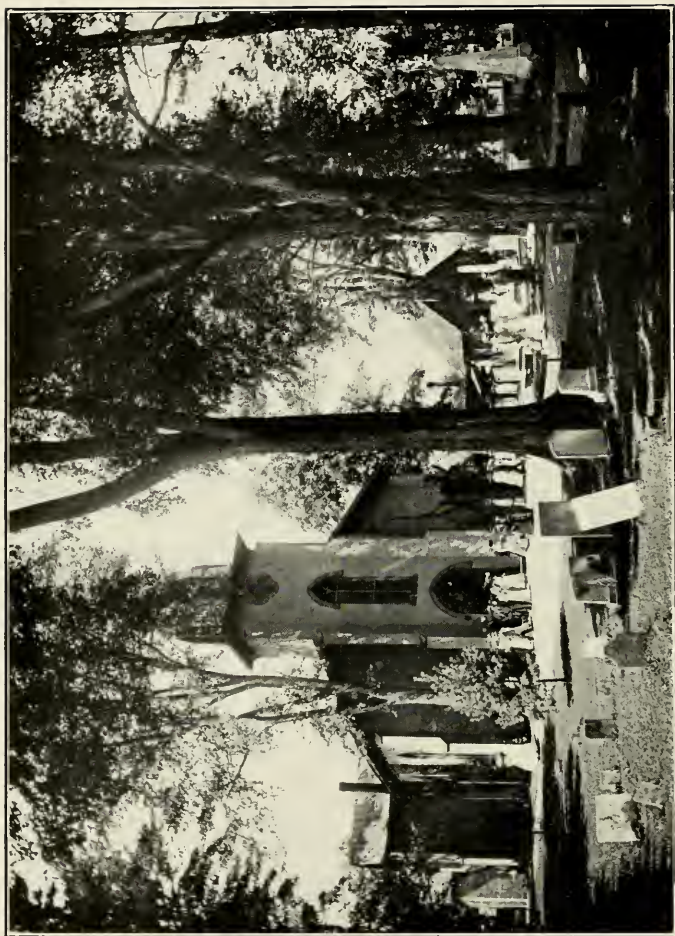


Photo by Telfer

“The congregation strolling homeward passes by this tomb.”

what the monument seems to assert in according to Father Nash, within this consecrated ground, a certain supremacy which the standards of the world would perhaps deny. In this view, a striking contribution to the harmonies is found in the admirable restraint expressed in the simplicity of the world-famous tomb within the same enclosure. While Fenimore Cooper's grave is sought each summer by a thousand pilgrims who never heard of Daniel Nash, yet the novelist is here commemorated only as a humble Christian and parishioner of the church near which his body lies, and the monument of the founder of American romance is thus distinctly subordinate to that of the lowly priest of Otsego forests.

This grave of Father Nash reveals a vein of poetry in a nature otherwise absorbed in the drudgery of frontier life. For it is by his own choice that the missionary pioneer is buried here. The very spot beneath the pines was of his choosing. That he should care whether after death his cold limbs be laid at rest here or yonder marks him for a man of sentiment. In him was no pride of common sense demanding what it matters to a corpse whether burial be here or there. He was a man not ashamed to profess a sentiment quite barren of utility. Merely it stirred his imagination to reflect that, as he lay in his narrow

bed beneath the sod, the pines above would whisper orisons to sunny skies, and with tossing plumes beat time to dirges through the wintry night; the church bell now and again would make the earth vibrant with solemn sound, and footsteps overhead of worshippers old and young would pass, going to and fro; while through the ages, in the church nearby, Christ's Eucharist would be ever offered, uniting in mystic fellowship the quick and dead.

In the history of Western New York the Rev. Daniel Nash deserves a place among the foremost pioneers. Wherever the most adventurous men were found pushing westward the frontier of civilization, there was Father Nash, uplifting the standard of the Church. Not only had he courage and indomitable energy; he displayed remarkable foresight in his manner of laying foundations. Nearly all of the parishes in the Otsego region were established by him, and most of them flourish at the present time. Outside of his work in Otsego, Father Nash made frequent missionary journeys westward through Madison and Chenango counties, southward through the Broome and Delaware regions, eastward to Montgomery, and north through Oneida and Jefferson, to Ogdensburg in St. Lawrence county, one hundred and fifty miles to the north of his Otsego home.

Bishop Philander Chase visited Otsego county in 1799 and gives a vivid impression of the more than apostolic simplicity of Father Nash's surroundings. The Bishop found the missionary living in a cabin of unhewn logs, into which he had recently moved and from which he was about to remove to another equally poor, inhabiting with his family a single room, which contained all his worldly goods, and driving nails into the walls to make his wardrobe. The Bishop assisted the missionary in his moving, and describes how they walked the road together, carrying a basket of crockery between them, and "talked of the things pertaining to the Kingdom of God." In his missionary journeys, Father Nash rode on horseback from place to place, often carrying one of his children, and Mrs. Nash with another in her arms behind him on the horse's back, for she was greatly useful in the music and responses of the services. Mrs. Nash is described by a contemporary as "an amiable lady of benignant mind and placid manners."

Father Nash is the original of the Rev. Mr. Grant in Fenimore Cooper's novel, *The Pioneers*, but while the author of the Leatherstocking tales has well represented the genuine piety of his model, he has, perhaps purposely, disguised him as a rather anemic and depressing person. Father

Nash was a man of rugged health, six feet in height, full in figure, over two hundred pounds in weight, of fresh and fair complexion, wearing a wig of longish hair parted in the middle, and dressed always, as circumstances permitted, with a strict regard for neatness.

The slightest sketch of Father Nash would lack symmetry without some reference to the well-known story of his answer to a farmer who asked him what he fed his lambs. "Catechism," replied Father Nash, "catechism!" And behind the smile that followed this homely sally the analyst of character would have seen the earnest purpose of his mission to the children of Otsego that was one of the sublime secrets of his ministry.

"No Otsego pioneer deserves honor more," says Mr. Halsey, in *The Old New York Frontier*, "not the road builder or leveller of forests, not the men who fought against Brant and the Tories. To none of these, in so large a degree, can we apply with such full measure of truth the sayings that no man liveth unto himself, and that his works do follow him."

The Story of the Churchyard

I never can see a churchyard old,
With its mossy stones and mounds,
And green-trees weeping the unforgot
That rest in its hallow'd bounds;
I never can see the old churchyard,
But I breathe to God a prayer,
That, sleep as I may in this fevered life,
I may rest when I slumber there.

Our Mother the Church hath never a child
To honor before the rest,
But she singeth the same for mighty Kings,
And the veriest babe on her breast;
And the Bishop goes down to his narrow bed
As the ploughman's child is laid,
And alike she blesseth the dark brow'd serf,
And the chief in his robe arrayed.

And ever the bells in the green churchyard
Are tolling to tell you this:—

“Go pray in the church, while pray ye can,
That so ye may sleep in bliss.”

—*From Christian Ballads, by Bishop Cox.*

CHRIST CHURCH, in Cooperstown, is surrounded by one of the most picturesque country church-



Photo by Telfer

“The vista through the cloister is reminiscent of the Old World”

yards in America. Not comparable in antiquity to the churchyards of Europe, it has yet a quaint and venerable aspect, and there are certain views of it, like the vista through the cloister, that are reminiscent of the Old World.

Burial grounds in connection with churches are not so common in the country districts of America as one might suppose. They are found only about the churches of the oldest parishes. In early days, when the population was thinly scattered over a wide area, and settlers were separated by distance and bad roads from any place of public worship, small family burying grounds in the fields began to be customary, and cemeteries at convenient points along the highway were sometimes used in common. This tendency, together with a growing regard for sanitary precaution, hindered the multiplication of churchyard burial grounds, and brought about the establishment of public cemeteries. The religious sentiment, which prompted the burial of the dead as near as might be to a sanctuary, gave way to practical considerations, and churchyard burials became infrequent.

Susan Fenimore Cooper, daughter of the novelist, in her *Rural Hours*, published in 1851, has this to say of Christ churchyard:

“The oldest tomb belonging to the good people

of this little town lies within the bounds of Christ churchyard, and bears the date of 1792. It was a child who died of the small-pox. Close at hand is another stone bearing a date two years later, and marking the grave of the first adult who fell among the little band of colonists, a young man drowned while bathing in the lake—infancy and youth were buried before old age. At the time these graves were dug, the spot was in a wild condition, upon the border of the forest, the wood having been only partially cut away. In a few years other members of the little community died, one after another, at intervals, and they were also buried here, until the spot had gradually taken its present character of a burying ground. The rubbish was cleared away, place was made for those who must follow, and ere many years had passed the brick walls of a little church rose within the enclosure, and were consecrated to the worship of the Almighty. And thus this piece of ground was set apart for its solemn purposes, while shaded by the woods, and ere it had been appropriated to common uses: the soil was first broken by the spade of the grave-digger, and Death is the only reaper who has gathered his harvest here. The spot soon lost its forest character, however, for the older trees were all felled; possibly some among them may have been used as timber in building the little church. Happily, at the time of clearing the ground, a few young bushes were spared from the axe, and these, having been left to grow at will, have become fine flourishing trees. The

greater number are pines, and a more fitting tree for a Christian churchyard than the white pine of America could scarcely be named. With all the gravity and unchanging character of an evergreen, they have not the dull gloom of the cypress or the yew; their growth is noble, and more than any variety of their tribe, they hold murmuring communion with the mysterious winds, waving in tones of subdued melancholy over the humble graves at their feet. A few maples and elms appear among them, relieving their monotonous character. Some of these have been planted for that purpose, but the pines themselves are all the spontaneous growth of the soil. Judging from their size, and what we know of their history, they must have sprung up from the seed about the time when the first colonists arrived—contemporaries of the little town whose graves they overshadow."

The oldest tomb in the churchyard, to which Miss Cooper refers, stands rather inconspicuously among others near the centre of the enclosure. It bears this inscription:

Here lies
SAM^L GRIFFIN,
Son of JOSEPH GRIFFIN;
Who Died Oct^r, 11th A.D. 1792
Aged 4 years and 6 months.
Happy Infant early bleft!
Here in peaceful slumber, reft;
Early refeu'd from the Cares
Which increafe with growing years

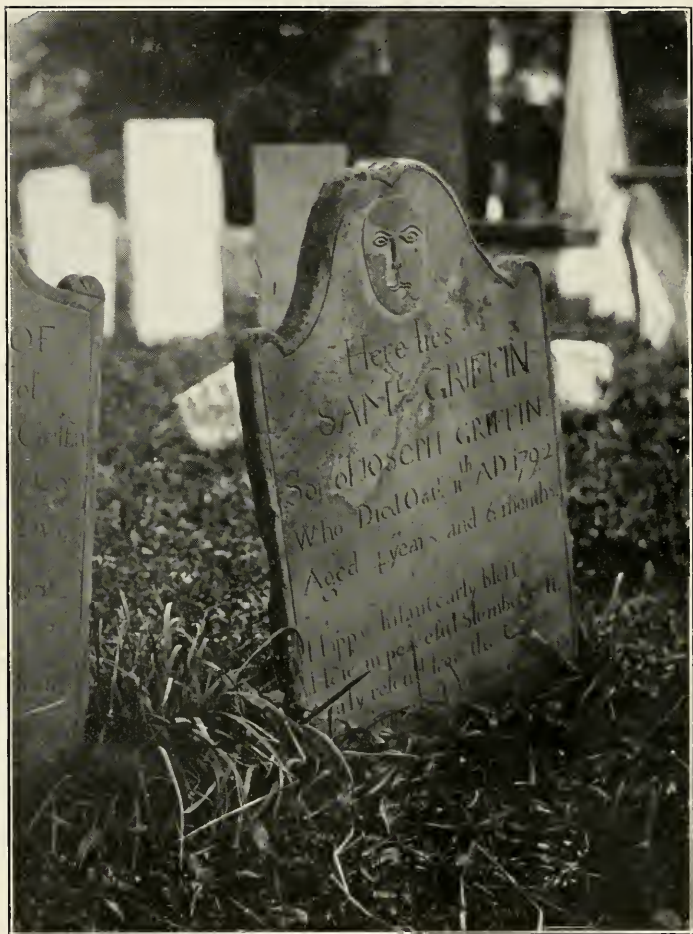


Photo by Telfer

“The burial of this child fixed the site of Christ Church”

It is of curious interest to reflect that the burial of this little child, too feeble in years to make an impress upon the community, determined, in the process of time, the location of the first burial ground, with all the graves, notable and nameless, which it contains, fixed the site of Christ church, and set the axis of future parochial activity.

Christ churchyard is singularly fortunate in the subdued harmony of the memorials which it contains. The most obnoxious crimes against art are usually found in public cemeteries. In no other field is such unbridled license given to the permanent expression of bad taste. Criticism stands dumb before grotesque and mawkish monuments to the dead, since they are efforts to give outward form to genuine grief and love. Without any artistic qualification except sincerity, the mourner too often causes to be imaged in everlasting marble some crude hallucination of his sorrow.

In Christ churchyard, while there are some monuments that one might wish otherwise, the general charm of effect is not disturbed by any individual atrocity of design. Almost the only varieties of form that depart from the usual headstone are found in the recumbent slab, and the sarcophagus, or chest-like tomb, both of which

have repose and dignity. The earlier headstones suggest forcibly that the common field-stone of which they were made is much better material for the purpose than the more ambitious marble of a later day. It mellows into lovely tones with the passing years, while the marble only soils and grows dirty with age. Its surface is softer to the eye than marble. It yields itself more gracefully to inscription, and the lettering is more legible and permanent.

A good example of this old fashioned sort of tombstone is that of the first adult in the village who died a natural death. It is inscribed as follows:

MR. JAMES N. BARBER

Died of Small-Pox, January 27th, 1795.

Aged 46 years;

To whose Memory this Stone is erected

By his Son David Barber.

The Soul, from Life's superfluous cares enlarg'd
 Its Debt of human Toil and Pain discharged,
 Resigns the Body to its Native Clay,
 And to an unknown fomewhere wings its way.

Orientated Graves

THE practice of burying in churches or churchyards is said to be connected with the custom of praying for the dead; certainly it is almost as ancient. In England, it was as early as the year 750, according to Lord Stowell, that "spaces of ground adjoining the churches were carefully enclosed and solemnly consecrated to the burial of those who had been entitled to attend divine service in those churches, and who now became entitled to render back into those places their remnants to earth, the common mother of mankind, without payment for the ground which they were to occupy, or for the pious offices which solemnized the act of interment."

Equally ancient must be reckoned the custom of burying the dead with the feet to the East. Aside from the Christian tradition, there has been, among many races and tribes throughout the world, a remarkable consensus of custom for the practice of laying the body east and west, sometimes with the head to the east and sometimes to the west. This custom

is said to be due originally to solar symbolism, and the head is turned to the east or to the west, according as the dead are thought of in connection with the sunrise, the reputed home of deity, or with the sunset, the reputed region of the dead.

The Christian faith, however, gave a new significance to this matter. The Christian dead were laid in the grave with face upward and feet to the east, in token of the Resurrection at the coming again of the Sun of Righteousness. The custom arose from the thought that at the Second Coming of Christ, in the East, the dead, as a mighty army all facing one way, shall rise to greet him. In Wales the east wind is still called "The wind of the dead men's feet."

Christ churchyard has had regard to this tradition in the disposal of its graves. The dead lie with their feet eastward. Yet, since the graves naturally follow the parallel of the enclosure, which is not exactly east and west, but conforms to the general bent of the village, they fall short, by a few points of the compass, of facing due east.

Among the early settlers of Cooperstown there was one family not to be put off with any vagueness of orientation. It was that of Joshua Starr, a potter, whom Fenimore Cooper describes as "a respectable inhabitant of the village." To his mind it was plain that if a proper grave should

face east, it should face the east, and not east by south. In him was the courage of conviction, and no slavish deference to majorities. Accordingly, the graves of the Starr family are notable among the tombs of Christ churchyard in being



Photo by Telfer

“Not to be put off with any vagueness of orientation”

set with the foot due east, as by a mariner's compass. The wide headstones split the plane of the meridian; their edges cleave the noon-day sun and the Polar star. To the casual observer these three tombs, as compared with all others in the churchyard, seem quite awry. In reality they alone are correct; all the rest are wrong.

A Frolicsome Epitaph

OBJECTS of mirth are not sought in graveyards. Yet there is one tomb in Christ churchyard over which there has been laughter more than tears. It is the grave of Jenny York, a negro slave, whose tombstone appears at the east end of the churchyard, in the part reserved for the burial of members of her race, of whom there were a number in Cooperstown in early days. Among the more prosperous colonists some were slaveholders, and the institution was not yet regarded with general disapproval. On the day before the consecration of Christ church, in 1810, the following advertisement appeared in the *Otsego Herald*, one of the Cooperstown newspapers:

FOR SALE.

(For want of employment)

A stout healthy *negro*, 18 years of age. He has been used to farming business. For terms inquire of this office.

The same newspaper stated, under the date of October 13, 1810, that there were then twenty-

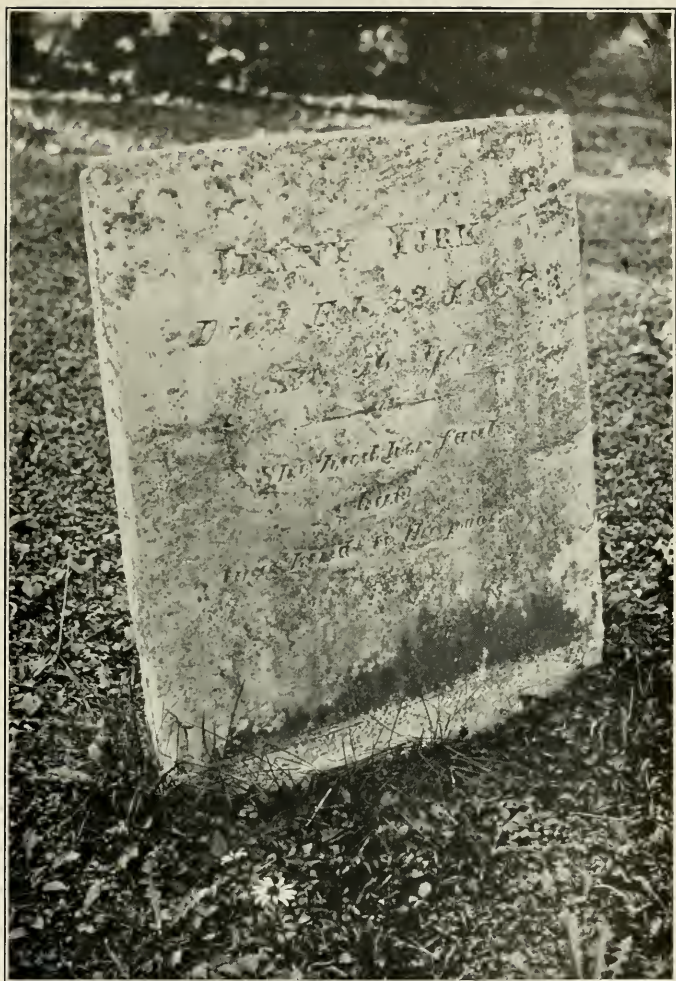


Photo by Telfer

“One tomb over which there has been more laughter
than tears”

four negroes in the village, of whom twelve were slaves.

Jenny York was a cook in the family of the Hon. Samuel Nelson, for many years a justice of the United States Supreme Court and a resident of Cooperstown. Like many of her kind, Jenny combined great culinary skill with a keen sense of property-right in whatever passed through her hands. Choice provisions and delicacies disappeared through systematic dole at the kitchen door, or sometimes being reserved against a holiday, re-appeared to furnish forth a banquet in the servants' hall, to which Jenny's dusky friends were bidden, and made the welkin ring with wassail and good cheer.

The current story is that, when Jenny died, the negroes of the village chose for her grave an epitaph to extol, without altogether approving, her left-handed generosity. The stone is inscribed as follows:

JENNY YORK

Died Feb. 22, 1837.

Æt. 50 yea.

She had her faults
but
was kind to the poor.

Churchyard Miscellanea

THERE are two kinds of men; those who love churchyards, and those who care for them not at all. Both kinds visit Christ churchyard, and the classification is automatic. Some glance at Cooper's grave and haste away with an air of duty done. The lovers of churchyards linger, and stroll thoughtfully among the tombs. They find a charm in the most obscure memorials of the dead. They read aloud to each other the quaint inscriptions. Now and again they pause to copy some chiseled epitaph that strikes the fancy. They kneel or lie prone upon the turf before a crumbling tomb to decipher its doleful couplets, thrusting aside the concealing grasses, lest a word be missed. They wander at will beneath the trees, and, before departing, enter the old church, to rest and pray within the stillness of its fane. For such there are delights in Christ churchyard that lean not at all upon famous names or the pomps and vanities of history.

The tombs are rich in verse. Few of us, in modern times, would dare to submit stanzas of



Photo by Telfer

“There are delights in Christ churchyard that lean not upon famous names.”

our own composition to be inscribed in cold stone everlastingly. We should be thankful that our forefathers, in this matter as in much else, were more courageous. We could ill spare the poetry of old churchyards.

A marble that fronts the walk between the church and chapel is inscribed with a verse that touches upon the motive of all churchyard poetry. It is dedicated by his parents to Joseph Temple, an only son, who died in 1807, in the twenty-first year of his age.

Go then blest shade where bliss
 sincere is known
Go where to love and to enjoy are one
Yet take these tears mortalities relief
And till I share your joys forgive my
 grief
Of love sincere oh this last pledge
 receive
A stone a verse is all I have to give.

In this view, it is not the quality of the verse, but its necessity as a proper tribute to the dead that justifies its existence. Poetry and stone are forms of homage.

The churchyard contains, of course, a variant of the couplet that is seen everywhere and always in cemeteries. It appears upon a stone a few feet

to the east of the Cooper enclosure, commemorating an infant who died in 1799.

From Death's areft no age is free;
Prepare to *die* and follow me.

This is not so lugubrious as its more usual form:

As I am now, so you shall be;
Prepare to die and follow me.

The oldest epitaph but one in Christ churchyard is that of Jabez Wight, a cabinet-maker, who was drowned while bathing in the lake, July 14, 1794. Of the original settlers he was the first adult to meet death. The stone stands near the one last mentioned, and bears these lines:

Death, like an overflowing stream,
Sweeps us away; our life's a dream:
An emty tale, a morning flower,
Cut down and wither'd in an hour.

Evidently this effusion was much admired, for it reappears upon the tombstone of Jeremy Summers, a child who died in 1828, and whose grave lies at the corner of the Tiffany plot, which is surrounded by a small square of iron fence just south of the Cooper enclosure.

The Rev. Frederick T. Tiffany, second rector of Christ church, and sometime chaplain of the House of Representatives, may probably be regarded as the author of the lines which appear upon the tomb of his daughter, Mary, who died at the age of seventeen years. The verses deal with one of the special problems of faith, touching the recognition of loved ones in a future life.

And shall we e'er again thy features trace,
Beloved child! thy lineaments review?
Yes, though the sunken eyes and livid hue,
And lips comprest, have quenched each lively grace,—
Death's triumph—Still we recognize the face
Which thine for many a year affection knew.
And what forbids that, clothed with life anew,
It still on memory's tablet holds its place?
Tho' then thy cheek with deathless bloom be sheen,
And rays of splendor wreathe thy saintlike brow,
That change, we deem, shall sever not between
Thee and thy former self; nor disallow
That love's tried eyes discern thee through the skreen
Of glory then, as of corruption now.

In the third tier east of the Tiffany enclosure a curious use of verse appears upon two stones, whereby Captain Joseph Jones and his wife Keziah, both dying in 1799, seem to converse in

responsive couplets. Mrs. Jones avers majestically,

Within this Silent grave I ly.

to which the hero of battles quite meekly replies,

This fpace is all I occupy.

An epitaph that wavers uncertainly between verse and prose fronts the walk between the church and chapel:

Albert O how lonely
 We are here without our son
 And we hope again to meet thee
 Around our heavenly father's
 Home.

The very crudeness of some epitaphs seems to emphasize their terrible sincerity. Here is one just south of the Tiffany plot,

Mourn not since freed from
 human ills,
 My dearest friends & two
 Infants still,
 My consumptive pains God
 semed well,
 My soul to prepair with
 him to dwell

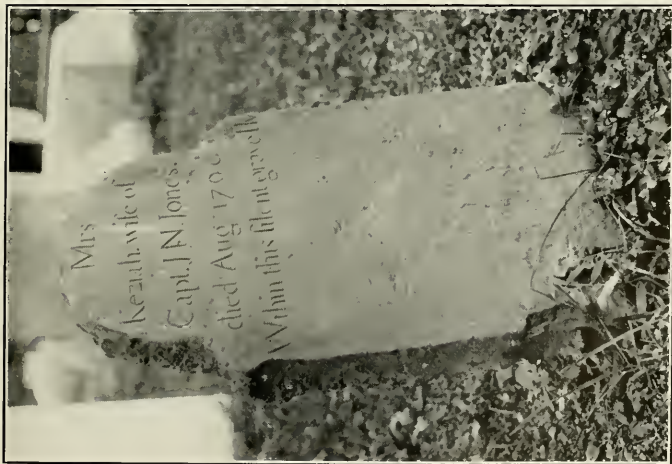


Photo by Telfer

“Within this silent grave I lie.”

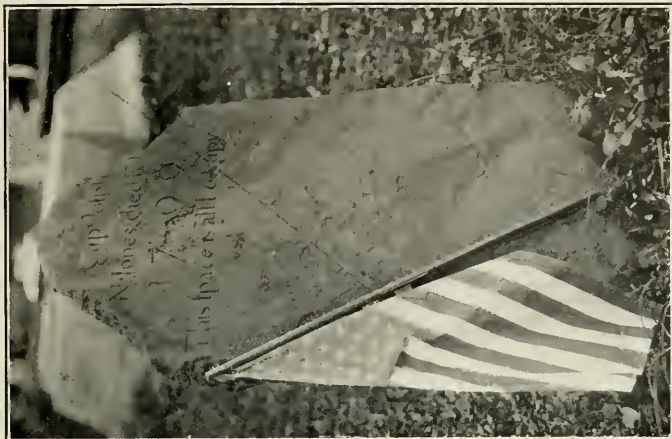


Photo by Telfer

“This space is all I occupy.”

Northward of this tomb is a sarcophagus that shows a well-laid plan in a state of imperishable incompleteness. Besides a memorial of the dead, the tomb was intended to be a kind of family record. The names of children and grandchildren were inscribed, and as they departed this life their names were marked with a chiseled asterisk referring to a footnote which pronounced them "dead." Four deaths were so recorded; then the sculptured enrollment was discontinued. Written still among the living there remain four names, of those who have been long dead, while the name of one born since the monument was erected, survivor of all the rest, was never included in the memorial.

One of the five flat stones near the driveway, not far from the church door, bears an epitaph which, while eulogizing a wife, gives an unpremeditated characterization of its composer:

She passed through life and from life to death, without the reproach of the world or her own conscience, and the remembrance of her virtues is fondly cherished by him to whose happiness in the endearing scenes of wedlock, they essentially contributed.

On the next tomb but one is engraved a fervent appeal to the sympathy of the passer-by:

Stranger hadst thou ever a wife,
Snatched from thee by death,
In the bloom of youth beauty and virtue
 If thou never hadst
 Thou mightest imagine
 But cannot feel
The anguish of a disconsolate husband
 Who has placed over her remains
This tablet as the last but too feeble testimony
 of his tenderest affections
And to mark the spot where lies the best of wives
The most affectionate of mothers
And the sincerest of friends.

Northeast of this group, the tomb of Mrs. Sarah Munn, standing somewhat alone, relates with a certain archaic gracefulness, that

She lean'd her head on Jesus' breast,
And breath'd her life out sweetly.

Near the orientated tombs of the Starrs is the grave of an infant who died in 1794, and whose epitaph breathes both love and trustful resignation:

Sleep on fweet babe; injoy thy reft:
God call'd the foon, he faw it beft.

A more severe view of the Deity appears upon a gravestone six rows east of this, commemorating James and Tamson Eaton, who died in 1846.

Tamson was fifteen years of age, and despite the name, was a girl, as the verse reveals:

This youth cut down in all her bloom,
Sent by her God to an early doom.

James, aged twenty-one years, was evidently killed by lightning, and the event is thus poetized:

What voice is that? 'Tis God,
He speaketh from the clouds;
In thunder is concealed the rod
That smites him to the ground.

Next to this is a tomb which reflects a cheerful stoicism:

Adieu my friends dry up your tears
Here I must lye till Christ appears.

In the second tier east is a stone bearing this sentiment:

Friends nor physicians
could not save,
This mortal body from
the grave,
Nor can the grave con-
fine it here,
When Christ commands
it to appear.

The next tomb but one to the striking Carter memorial cross, recumbent near the border of the

driveway, is that of Mary Olendorf, and bears these feeling lines:

Tread softly o'er this sacred mound
For Mary lies beneath this ground
May garlands deck and myrtles rise
To guard the Tomb where Mary lies.

In the midst of the second row to the east a brownstone of singularly beautiful hue marks the grave of Sally Huntington and is inscribed with an epitaph that has the ring of sincerity:

This woman was full of
Good works and Alms deeds

She slept in Christ and with her dying breath
Exulting triumphed o'er the sting of death
Distinct th'o feebly with her faulting tongue
The praises of Almighty God she sung
Thus lived the best of women to the end
The village favorite and the village friend.

South of this is a fine specimen of the older sort of tombstones, dedicated to the memory of Captain John Howard, a tanner, and the first militia captain of the village, who, in the summer of 1799, was drowned in an heroic effort to save a man who had fallen beneath some floodwood in the Susquehanna. Says the epitaph:

Striving another's life to save,
 He sunk beneath the swelling
 wave.

No grave in the churchyard except Cooper's receives more attention from strangers than that of Scipio, an old slave, whose beautifully lettered tombstone is near that of Captain Howard. It is inscribed as follows:

In memory of SCIPIO, an aged slave, a native of Africa who died March 27th, 1799.

Oft did he, Shivering, Call, to bless the hand
 That would bestow a Cordial to his wants;
 Oft have I drop'd a tear to see his sorrow'd face
 Cast smiles around,
 On those whose feeling hearts
 Had, for a Minute
 Made him forget
 The Hardness of his fate.

His venerable Beard was thin and white;
 His hoary Head bespoke his length of Days:
 His Piteous tales of Woe,
 While bending o'er his Staff,
 He did Relate
 Were heard in penfive Mood,
 By Those
 Who look'd beyond his tatter'd garb,
 And saw his Many Sorrows.

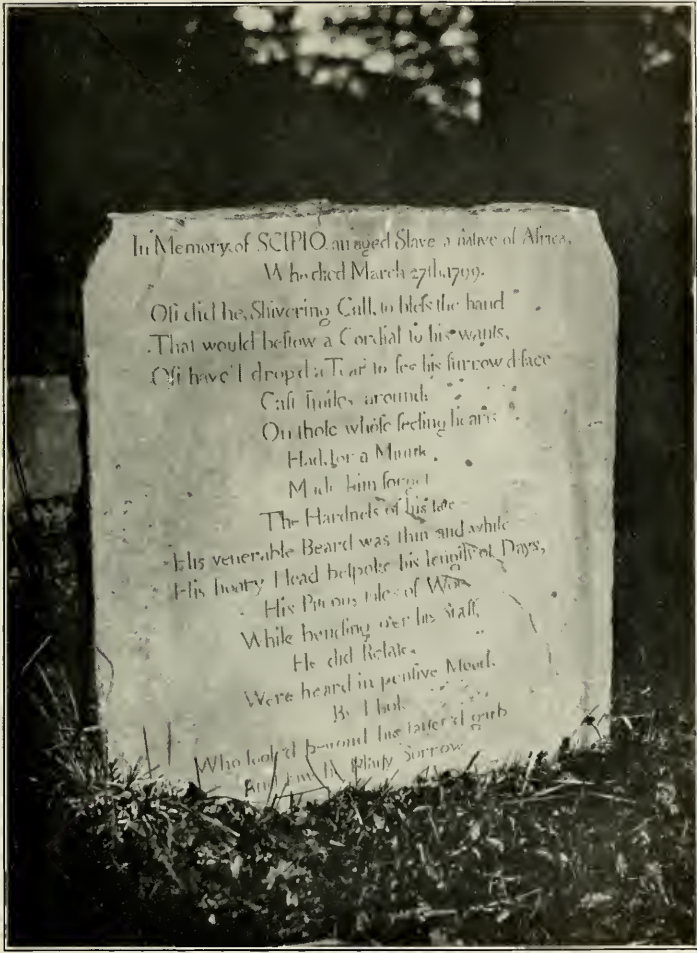


Photo by Telfer

“ No grave, except Cooper’s, receives more attention ”

North of this stone, after passing three intervening tombs, one comes upon an odd inscription that marks the grave of a fourteen-year-old boy who was drowned December 3, 1810.

Thus were Parents bereav'd
of a dutiful son and community
of a promising youth, while
pursuing with assiduity the
act of industry.

One might be curious to know what this act of industry was that cost the life of young Garrett Bissell, but history is silent.

“Joe Tom,” a negro whose tomb fronts the east end of the churchyard, was for more than a score of years sexton of Christ church, and when he died, in 1881, had been for half a century a unique figure in the life of the village. “Joe Tom” was always the general factotum at public entertainments and had won a title as “the politest negro in the world.” Music of a lively sort he scraped from the fiddle or beat upon the triangle. He was chief usher at meetings, chief cook at picnics, a stentorian prompter at dances, and chief oar at lake excursions. On occasions of this latter kind

it was "Joe Tom's" peculiar duty, assigned to him by nature in the gift of wondrous lungs, to awaken the famous Echo of the Glimmerglass. Stationing his scow at a point on the lake opposite to Natty Bumppo's cave, the negro would shout across the water, "Natty Bumppo! Natty Bumppo! Who's there?" and after a moment the cry would be flung back, as by the spirit of Leatherstocking, from the heights of the steep and rocky shore. On a still summer evening "Joe Tom" was sometimes able, by a single shout, to call forth three distinct echoes which were heard in regular succession, the first from the cave, the second from Mount Vision, and the third from Hannah's hill on the opposite side of the lake, until the margin of the Glimmerglass seemed to resound with cries of "Natty Bumppo!" uttered by eerie voices.

On the extreme southern border of the churchyard, about fifty feet from the street, there is a tombstone that seems to shudder away from human sight, shrinking behind the shelter of a tree, and clinging to the ragged skirts of the hedge. Whoever searches out this tomb cannot fail to be obsessed with the feeling that it is connected with some mystery, to which the inscription darkly alludes:

In memory of
Abraham Spafard.
Who died at 8 o,
clock P. M. 3d. Sep^t 1827.
in the 49th year of
his age

The trump shall sound,
and the dead shall
be raised.

Why eight o'clock? What is the significance of this concern to perpetuate the memory of the exact hour of death? The truth is that at just eight o'clock on the evening of September the third, in the year of Our Lord 1827, Abraham Spafard was brutally murdered. He was killed by Levi Kelly, a farmer of the town of Otsego, a man noted for his violent temper, from the effects of which Spafard was attempting to shield a boy when Kelly shot him dead. Kelly was executed at a public hanging on a lot not far from the site of the present High School, December 28, 1827. Throngs of people gathered from the whole countryside to witness the hanging, some bringing their children to profit by the dreadful object-lesson. So much was the hanging regarded as an interesting and legitimate public spectacle that a large temporary staging, designed to afford space

for six hundred people, was erected for the accommodation of spectators. Just before the execution this staging became so overweighted that it collapsed, killing two men, and injuring upwards of a score.

Kelly's body was buried in that part of the churchyard which belongs to the Cooper family. No stone was ever raised to mark the place of Levi Kelly's burial, and time has obliterated all traces of his grave. Yet that his bones are here interred is not less certain than that the body of his victim lies in another quarter of the churchyard, beneath the stone that names the hour of crime. The murderer and the murdered sleep beneath the shadow of the same sanctuary, awaiting the Day of Judgment. To that Great Assize the tomb of Abraham Spafard makes appeal for both, in the words of a Faith that promises not justice, but mercy, to us all:

The trump shall sound,
and the dead shall
be raised.

A Churchyard Funeral

It is seldom, in modern life, that the full beauty of the Order for the Burial of the Dead is realized. In the customary usage of the day the Burial Office of the Book of Common Prayer must be rudely disjointed by necessary adjournment, for the latter part of the ritual, to some distant cemetery. The service is interrupted in the midst by an incongruous clatter of coaches and a tedious loading up of carriages at the church door.

The Burial Office was composed at a time when interments of the dead were commonly made in churchyards. Throughout the ritual the circumstance of the churchyard is assumed. The rubrical direction at the beginning of the Office says, "The Minister, meeting the Corpse at the entrance of the Churchyard, and going before it, either into the Church or towards the Grave, shall say or sing, *I am the resurrection and the life, saith the Lord: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me, shall never die.* The order is then given for that portion of the service intended to

be rendered in the church, which would include, according to the more ancient custom, the Requiem Mass; then is set forth the ritual to be used at the grave.

In this Order for Burial there is a unity of design that becomes manifest only when, as in olden times, interment is made in the yard adjoining the church, where the outdoor function appears as a natural sequence to the service of the sanctuary, and is connected with it by an orderly processional from the church to the churchyard.

Christ churchyard, in the full glory of its Summer foliage, offers a superb setting for such a service, and the now rare occasions of interments within this quaint God's acre are long remembered by those who witness them. After the service in the church the procession of choir and clergy, headed by the crucifer, issues from the main door, followed by the bearers carrying the bier upon their shoulders. The mourners and the remainder of the congregation come reverently after, and with the thrilling chorus of some triumphant resurrection-hymn the procession moves slowly to the grave. The sunshine sifts through the foliage of the over-arching trees, glitters upon the processional cross, gleams upon the white robes of choristers, and transforms into a mantle of glory the pall that drapes the body of the dead. At the grave, the

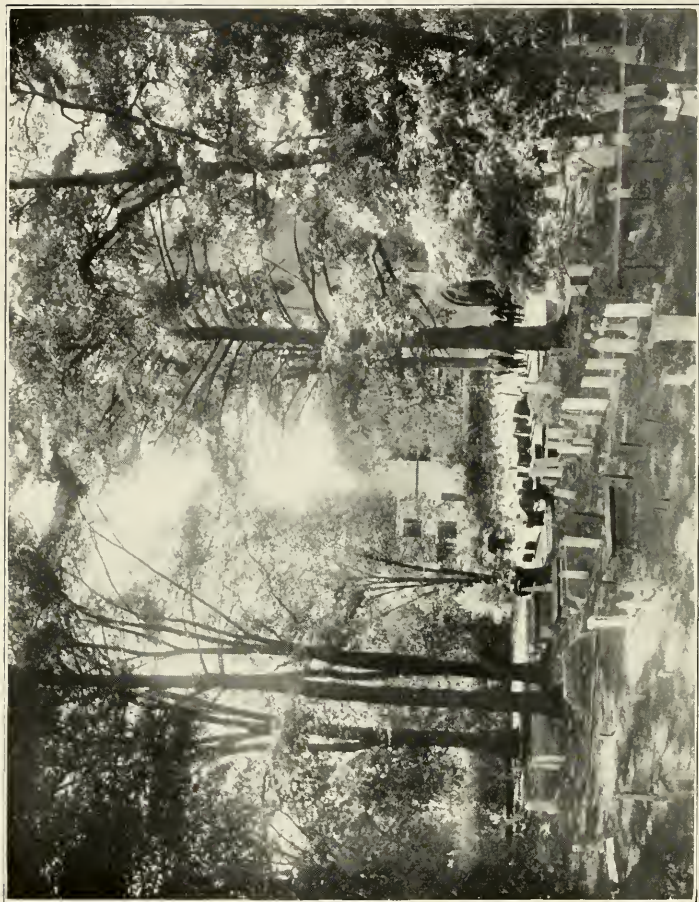


Photo by Slotc

“With the thrilling chorus of some resurrection-hymn, the procession moves slowly to the grave”

dirge-like anthem beginning "Man that is born of a woman" is less lugubrious when well sung than as commonly read, and adds a more uplifting quality to this portion of the service. A solemn hush falls upon the company as the priest steps forward for the formal act of burial. The dust flashes momentarily in the sunbeams as it falls from his hand into the open grave, while the rhythmic cadences of the committal float once again over the consecrated ground. No words in the English tongue have vibrated more deeply in human hearts than the majestic and exultant avowal of faith with which the Church consigns to the grave the bodies of her dead:

"Forasmuch as it hath pleased Almighty God, in His wise providence, to take out of this world the soul of our deceased brother, we therefore commit his body to the ground; earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust; looking for the general Resurrection in the last day, and the life of the world to come, through our Lord Jesus Christ; at whose second coming in glorious majesty to judge the world, the earth and the sea shall give up their dead; and the corruptible bodies of those who sleep in Him shall be changed, and made like unto His own glorious body; according to the mighty working whereby He is able to subdue all things unto Himself."

The Church

“ON a Saturday afternoon in midsummer I found myself by chance on the Southern shores of Otsego Lake, looking northward on a scene which for quiet and soothing beauty can hardly be surpassed. Before me lay the mirror of the Glimmerglass; warm lights threw a flush upon the skies; the day was going away; the omens of the evening were already in the clouds; a breeze, scarcely strong enough to ruffle the water, came from the western hills; the woods were reflected in their native colors along the silent shore. But below was more than what met the eye. Through and under this exterior beauty voices could be heard, speaking of the mystery of the natural world. * * * At such times and in such places men become aware of some unspeakable strangeness in their life, and, keeping silence before mysterious and dimly indicated presences, they know that it must be possible to draw its hidden meaning from God’s world, from hill and plain, from deep, still waters and shadowy woods, from the currents of the evening

breeze and the outstretched shadows of ebbing day.

“Hard by that lake stands an old church, shaded by tall pines and other trees, and keeping watch and ward over the surrounding resting-



Photo by Telfer

“The omens of the evening were already in the clouds”

places of the dead in Christ. On the following morning I found myself at the early celebration in that venerable fane. Here another mystery confronted us, like the other, too deep to search out; the mystery of the Coming of our Lord in Holy Communion. The church also, like the

lake, was held in the stillness of a holy peace. The voice of the priest, as he recited the office, was the only sound that broke upon the ear; the words of Christ were repeated; and then, to the eye of faith, 'came Jesus and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you.' "

These words referring to Otsego Lake and Christ church form the introductory paragraphs of "The Sacramental System," by the Rev. Morgan Dix, D. D., sometime rector of Trinity church, New York, who passed his boyhood in Cooperstown. The musings to which he gives utterance express, with poetic insight, the deeper feelings awakened in many a soul by this village church and the charm of its natural surroundings. What the lover of nature feels stirring within him as he penetrates the heart of the mysterious forest, this and more the lover of the Church is aware of when he enters a Christian sanctuary and kneels before an altar that mystically unites the history of Man and God. He who loves both Nature and the Church finds ever new delights on either hand, for each imparts continually fresh significance to the other, as being revelations, in different spheres, of the same Eternal Energy.

Christ church was consecrated on July 8, 1810, by Bishop Benjamin Moore. The identical building is still standing, most of the changes having

taken the form of additions to the original structure. While the spire is of later date, the tower that it surmounts has remained unchanged from the first, with the exception of the buttresses, which both here and elsewhere on the exterior of the church were of more recent construction. The nave, exclusive of the present transept and chancel, constituted the original church. Tall white columns within the nave supported the roof until 1840, when the heavy brackets of native oak were constructed to sustain it, and a Gothic style began to be affected in the renewal of interior woodwork and a reshaping of the windows. The changes may be best understood by reference to the model of the original church which stands in the vestry room. This model was constructed by Mr. G. Pomeroy Keese, who died in the centennial year of the parish, and having been warden for some years and vestryman for more than half a century was better informed than anyone else concerning the first one hundred years of the church's life; nor had the church and churchyard ever a more devoted lover.

The transept was constructed in 1864, and the present chancel was added in 1891 as a memorial of Mrs. Jane R. A. Carter. The interior of the church is rich in memorials of those who have worshipped within its walls. The Altar, with



Photo by Telfer

“ Rich in memorials of those who have worshipped within its walls ”

reredos, of Caen stone, was erected in 1910 in memory of the Rev. Philip A. H. Brown, late vicar of S. John's chapel, Varick Street, New York, and formerly rector in Cooperstown, where he was greatly beloved.

The font, the earliest memorial placed in the church, commemorates Mr. Theodore Keese, warden of the parish, who died in 1858. Superimposed upon the font and embedded in such wise that it holds the water used in Holy Baptism, is the original baptismal bowl that was used in the church by the first rector. The bowl was given to the church by the Hon. Elijah H. Metcalf, a member of the original vestry, and after being discarded for half a century, during which it was put to various uses, the relic was restored to the church by Mrs. Sophia E. Blodgett, granddaughter of the donor.

The organ, erected in 1909, is a memorial of the Rt. Rev. Henry C. Potter, D. D., seventh bishop of New York, who, during the summers of his latter years, regularly attended the services of Christ church. His last public appearance was in Christ church, when, not five weeks before his death, he read the prayers at the funeral of a youth. The personal dignity of the Bishop, his commanding presence, a certain picturesque magnificence, the strength of his countenance, the

incisiveness in his manner of speech, were characteristics that marked him as a leader of men, and dominated the many public assemblies of which he was remembered as the central figure. Cooperstown associates such a memory of him with a scene rich in kaleidoscopic color and historic significance, when, on a Sunday afternoon during the village centennial celebration, multitudes listened beneath the sunlit trees upon the green, while the Bishop, mantled in an academic gown of crimson, described his vision of the future of religion in America. The Bishop did not live to see the fulfilment of his prophecies, but died, within a year, in this peaceful village, which always touched him with its charm, and where, after all that the wider world accorded him, he was most intimately known and sincerely loved.

The Litany desk of carved oak commemorates Francis Upton Johnstone, M. D., who became a vestryman in 1871.

On the right-hand side of the nave, as one enters the church, the middle window is a memorial of Miss Susan Fenimore Cooper, who died in 1894. A daughter of the novelist, Miss Cooper's memory is revered in Cooperstown for qualities all her own. She gained rather more than local fame, in her time, as a graceful writer, and was distinguished for her knowledge of the birds and flowers of

Otsego hills. The memorial window, with its figure of Charity distributing alms to children, sets forth the aspect of her character which won for Miss Cooper the grateful regard of posterity. Her life-work was the establishment in Cooperstown of the Orphan House of the Holy Saviour, where, since 1870, homeless and destitute children from far and near, many of them rescued from unspeakably evil influences, have received Christian care and nurture. Nor shall it be forgotten that, while others gave more largely of funds, the Thanksgiving Hospital, one of the most useful village institutions, founded in gratitude for the close of the Civil War, originated in Miss Cooper's heart and mind. The memorial window idealizes in form and color the spirit of this noble woman, without attempting portraiture. A real likeness of Miss Cooper, as she appeared in her ripest years, would recall a sweet face framed in dangling curls, a manner somewhat prim but always gentle and placid, a figure slight and spare, with a bonnet and Paisley shawl that are all but essential to the resemblance. She would be best represented in the midst of orphan children whom she catechises for the benefit of some visiting dignitary, while the little rascals, taking advantage of her growing deafness, titter forth the most palpable absurdities in reply, sure of her benignant

smile and commendatory "Very good; very good, indeed!"

The screens of native oak in the two archways that open into the church on either side of the chancel have an interesting history. They were reconstructed in 1910 from a screen erected in 1840, in what was then the chancel, by Mr. James Fenimore Cooper, the novelist. This screen, and the changes in the interior of the church already mentioned as belonging to the period, are referred to in a letter dated "Hall, Cooperstown, April 22nd, 1840" and addressed by Mr Cooper to Harmanus Bleecker, Esq.:

I have just been revolutionizing Christ church, Cooperstown, * * * converting its pine interior into oak—*bona fide* oak, and erecting a screen that I trust, though it may have no influence on my soul, will carry my name down to posterity. It is really a pretty thing—pure Gothic, and is the wonder of the country round.

This screen remained in the church, with some alterations, until 1891.

For the present purpose the screen was divided, the panels were cut out, allowing a vista through the tracery, and the design was skillfully adjusted to the necessities. Of the two screens thus resulting from reconstruction the one on the

organ side is the least altered in design and material from the original, and is a memorial of Judge William Cooper, the founder of Cooperstown. The other was erected in memory of Mr. Paul Fenimore Cooper.

Passing through the gates of this screen one finds in the Vestry room some historic memorials of the church. Besides the model of the original edifice, there are portraits of the Bishops of Albany, and of all the Bishops of New York who had jurisdiction in the parish before the erection of this Diocese, together with portraits of all rectors of Christ church, up to the present time. The most valuable portrait is an old oil painting of Father Nash, first rector of the parish.

Many inquiries are made by visitors concerning the location of Fenimore Cooper's pew. The identical pew is no longer in existence, but, in the transept, the side pew which is now nearest to the pulpit occupies practically the same position. In Cooper's day the present chancel, it must be remembered, did not exist. The space which now lies between the chancel steps and the front pews was occupied by a platform at the rear of which, in the midst, backed by the oaken screen, stood the altar and pulpit. This platform did not extend entirely across the end of the church, but was flanked on either side by two pews placed

sidewise. On the left, as one faced the platform, the two pews were occupied by the families, respectively, of Richard Cooper and Judge Nelson, associate justice of the United States Supreme Court, whose memorial tablet now adorns the adjacent wall. Of the two pews on the right of the platform the first was assigned to the Pomeroy family, and the second was that of James Fenimore Cooper.

There is one aspect of Christ church and churchyard that lies quite beyond the imagination of those who journey thither only in Summertime. Winter reserves a splendor of its own for Christ churchyard. The immaculate veil which nature draws by stealth across the view adds a sense of mystery in concealment. Of a winter's night, when the moon rides the heavens, her beams transfigure the homely old church, which seems to look down upon the mantled graves in an attitude of majestic benediction.



Photo by W. H. Yates (Taken at midnight by moonlight)

“The moonbeams transfigure the old church”

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