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## Epitaphs as Exponents of Literary Flavour

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### Abstract

#### Headstones with the Passage of Time

In olden days, stones were used to mark the graves. Stones were kept as a mark of respect to the dead. People were buried in smaller plots. And those plots were near their homes. Many of them were not buried in Cemeteries meant for the dead. An individual chamber was used to bury all the dead in the family. Time passed and churchyard burials became popular. The dead in the particular Parish were buried in the same churchyard. The place was owned by the church. In course of time, there came, individual or family graves. Stones were kept near the head of the dead as an honour. These Stones contained simple inscriptions such as the name of the dead. As time passed, there came a change in the process of commemoration of the dead. Short Sayings and Drawings adorned the grave stones. Elaborate funeral customs included the art of filling the headstones with literary flavour.

Symbols started appearing on such stones as a religious belief. Images such as a pair of wings were carved depending on the social status of the dead. In addition to the name of the dead, his occupation and his position in the society started appearing on the headstone. And thus, inscriptions on the stone grew with the passage of time. In recent times, these stones are becoming more personal with the help of the increased technology. Some are etching into the stone the portraits of the dead. Some are carving the pictures of the mementoes of the deceased.

## Contents of Headstones

Headstones are also kept at the feet. This is to differentiate the grave from other graves. It is because all graves look mostly similar. The earliest grave markers were monuments. Such tombs were formed using large stones. Letters on the headstones varied from Carver to Carver. As calendars rolled by, monuments were created with marble which suited excellently well for hand-carving. Specialized Letter Carvers were engaged to beautify the headstones. They beautified such stones using different alphabets and lettering styles. The headstone epitaph includes the name of the dead, his date of birth, date on which he died and a Quote from the Bible or from a holy religious book.

The purpose is to speak highly of the virtues of the dead. This, in turn, will strengthen the bond between the living and the dead. It may even be a symbol that reminds the onlooker of his temporary life on earth or mortality. The epitaphs are mostly sentences from popular Poems or Songs. The inscription will stand for hundreds of years or at least as long as the headstone stands at the grave. And therefore, the Saying or the Quotation should not be chosen in a hurry. Care should be taken to write or quote a beautiful Couplet that sounds more meaningful. The simplest Epitaphs are always the most profound. More emphasis should be laid on analyzing what should be engraved on the tombstone. Attention should be focused to choose a better, rather, the best Epithet.

## Nature of Epitaphs

Epitaphs ought to be short and simple. They should be in few lines. They offer an opportunity to sum up a person's life in few words. They are like ventilators for real emotions. They convey real emotions. They convey a strong feeling. The best Epithets are eternal or last long. Once, the Epitaph is engraved, there should not be any secondary feeling to change it. Exaggerated sentimental Epitaphs should be discouraged. The Epitaph should speak directly and it means that the sentences should be clear and in a catchy one. Epitaphs can be drawn from Prose, Poetry, Drama, Fiction, Biography, Autobiography or Essay.

Epitaphs are to be chosen so that they should live long as a fitting memorial to the person who is no more. They should make the readers remember the dead person more clearly and more dearly. The Epitaph should be a free expression or celebration of life.

Only then, it will bring peace to such of those who visit the grave. And therefore, an Epitaph should have life in itself.

- ❖ Some are uplifting Epitaphs.
- ❖ Some are emotional outbursts.
- ❖ Some are mourners in stone.
- ❖ Some are tears in slab.
- ❖ Some are verbal inspirations.
- ❖ Some are deep sentimentalists.
- ❖ Some are pessimistic
- ❖ Some are optimistic.
- ❖ Some are fanciful
- ❖ Some are lighter in vein.
- ❖ Some are heavy doses of tragedy.
- ❖ Some are like burnt-out candles.
- ❖ Some are torches of guidance.
- ❖ Some are like milestones on the highway of life.
- ❖ Some are path-setters.
- ❖ Some are ideals to be adopted.
- ❖ Some are an ennobled track.
- ❖ Some are like beating the bush around.
- ❖ Some are stone angels of goodwill.

#### Examples of Short Epitaphs:

- ❖ Beloved
- ❖ Most beloved
- ❖ Loved One
- ❖ So Loved one
- ❖ Remembered with love

- ❖ Bedded in Gods care
- ❖ Love continues forever
- ❖ Never forgotten
- ❖ Always green in memory
- ❖ Golden are the Memories
- ❖ A life well lived

### Examples of Longer Epitaphs:

- ❖ You are always in my heart and memories
- ❖ Tears water our bond and growth.
- ❖ Let angels sing in chorus to rest you in peace.
- ❖ Blessed sleep be yours and yours alone.
- ❖ What we were are still we are.
- ❖ Our brief partings will bring us together again
- ❖ No one spread more love than you
- ❖ You live in the hearts of those that always love you
- ❖ Your song is ended but the melody lingers on
- ❖ No one thinks of winter when it is still spring.
- ❖ The story of your life has no end at all.

### Familiar Epitaphs on Headstones:

- ❖ A colourful dream lies buried here.
- ❖ I am not today what I was Yesterday.
- ❖ Life is not about waiting for the storm to pass.
- ❖ The leaves of memory fall which are collected and preserved.
- ❖ Unseen but you are always near.
- ❖ So loved, so dearly, so close but so far.
- ❖ Let your soul stand supreme before Million Universes.

- ❖ May you be remembered as you remembered all others.
- ❖ Where there is lighter, deeper are the shadows.
- ❖ Life given to us is short but memory lives longer and longer.
- ❖ Born but died to be born again.

### Quotes by Writers of fame:

- Death is the golden key that opens the palace of Eternity. (Milton).
- Dim funeral candles are heaven's distant lamps. (Longfellow).
- When my heart is sky-bound, the shadow of my body lies here. (Kepler)
- There is no pain as great as the memory of grief. (Aeschylus)
- The best portion of a good man's life lives outside the grave. (Wordsworth)
- Heaven is the treasury of everlasting joy. (Shakespeare)
- When you are sad, search for joy. (Gibran)
- The heart of man is restless until he finds rest in God. (St. Augustin)
- What you seek is seeking you. (Rumi)
- When soft voices of joy die, they vibrate in the memory. (Shelley)
- We die to live in Eternity's sunrise. (William Blake)
- We're like butterflies that see few summer days. (Keats)
- God's garden needs flowers and so you are gone there. (Byron)
- Earth has to borrow that God cannot heel. (Alexander Pope)

### Epitaphs as Literary Ornaments

Epitaphs are ornaments adorning the neck of the Goddess of Literature. They are rich in literary elegance emanating the celestial fragrance of literary flavour. Some Epitaphs are like miracles that keep the eyes open to see only the good, hear the better and do the best.

Epitaphs coined by Giants of Literature are like Classics of Literature. They excel in the art of counseling and in putting the passer by on the path of nobility and reality. Death is certain but some have conquered it by planting the banners of popularity with their good deeds. They were like candles burning bright and filling the world with

the brilliance of kindness, charity and fraternal excellence. They had disproved the doctrine that Death is the end of all. They had redefined Death as the harbinger of new life. They had withstood the test of times by putting up a tryst with destiny to prove that man is superior to all creatures. These stones are not just pieces of rock but are towers proclaiming eternal truths. They are like rocky trumpets voicing out the melody of birth and death. They are certainly the stone-bugles blowing out the realities of existence and the purpose of life. A well-worded Epithet is like a well orchestrated musical extravaganza that thrills the heart and delights the soul.

Headstone Epitaphs not only commemorate the dead but also stand as verbal Testimonials of his ace-qualities, abilities, ambitions, aspirations and achievements.

