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MS-4787: Abba Hillel Silver Papers, 1902-1989.

Series V: Writings, 1909-1963, undated.

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Funeral of Hiram Rivitz, 1951.

*Funeral of Hiram Rivitz
June 1957*

A disciple once asked his master, "I venture to ask about death." The master replied, "While you do not know life, how can you know about death?"

Life is a mystery and death is an even greater mystery. Who can fathom the impenetrable processes of growth and decay, the enigma of existence?

But death always stirs certain deep and somber thoughts in the minds of thoughtful people. Death reminds us of the fugitive character of our life and of the swift passage of our days. It makes us aware, sharply and dramatically, of the hard ineluctable facts of human destiny, of the things which we cannot bend to our will, nor master, nor circumvent.

Death compels us to confront, however unwillingly, the boundaries of our power, the limitations of our capacities. "All flesh shall perish together, and man shall turn again into dust."

How many dreams remain unrealized and how many hopes unfulfilled when death summons us? Even if we are privileged to reach the traditional span of life of three score years and ten, and if by strength, four score years.

Therefore, the Psalmist prayed, "Teach us, O Lord, to number our days that we may get us a heart of wisdom." The presence of death should not fill our hearts with despair. It should rather teach us wisdom. How to live and how to use our fleeting days to their utmost, how to crowd each passing hour with fullness and meaning and purpose. The ever-present fact of death should help us to clear our perspective on life and on our ambitions, and should give us deeper insight into the true meaning and value of life.

Dear friends, we are gathered here - family, relatives and friends - to pay a last measure of memorial tribute to Hiram Rivitz, whose earthly career is now ended and who has entered upon that pilgrimage everlasting which some day you and I, too, will be called upon to undertake. Mr. Rivitz lived in our community for many years.

He contributed in a most significant manner to its industrial progress and up-building. He revitalized one of the important industries in our country, and assisted in the development of new technical processes which greatly expedited and increased its production, thereby contributing to the material wellbeing of many people.

To his tasks Mr. Rivitz brought ^akeen mind, unusual courage and resoluteness, and a confident outlook. He was always intellectually alert, well informed and eager for knowledge. He had the faith and the initiative of a master builder.

Mr. Rivitz believed in his country, its institutions, its people, and its future. He loved America. His life was part of the exciting saga which is America. Born in humble circumstances, he worked his way steadily upward by dint of unremitting effort, perseverance and native ability, seizing every opportunity for education and advancement until he reached to a position of eminence among the industrial leaders of our nation. Mr. Rivitz often spoke of his early days and his early struggles. He recalled frequently his youth at the National Farm School near Philadelphia where he was an honor pupil, and of the years when he studied law, a profession, however, which he did not practice. He looked upon his early struggles as the logical rungs upon which an American in this gracious land of freedom and opportunity could rise to higher levels of economic competence and influence.

Mr. Rivitz was a man of strong and outspoken convictions, and whether one agreed with them or not, one could never question their sincerity or their patriotic motivation. Mr. Rivitz was for many years very active in the Boy Scouts Movement of America, for he was interested in and greatly believed in the youth of our country. He was also active in the Society for the Blind and in the American Heart Association. For many years he was a member of The Temple. In recent years he evidenced a growing participation in other philanthropic and civic causes.

His friends and relatives will mourn his passing. His beloved daughter and her family will forever cherish the memory of a devoted and affectionate parent and grandparent. This is the tribute which memory always pays to those who pass on, but who cannot be forgotten.

What more should we say? What more can we say when we stand before these dark veils of the mystery of death, veils which some day we, too, shall have to penetrate, but in humble submission to One Who ordains all things, whether we understand them or not, let us repeat in the spirit of our ancient sages, "All that the Lord does is for the best."

