

Funeral Oration

held

at the bier of

Mr. L. J. Jaffe

by

Dr. Solomon Cohn
Chief Rabbi of the Duchy of Mecklenburg

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כי יש לעץ תקוה כי יכרת ועוד יחליף ויונקתו לא תחדל.... וגבר ימות
ויחלש ויגוע אדם ואין.

For there is hope for a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again, and that its tender branch will not cease....But man dies, and where is his strength; yea, man perishes, and what remains of him? (Job, 14, 7)

An earnest, somber word, oh grieving assembly!, at this bier an earnest somber truth, never to be more clearly experienced than at this moment, as we accompany a weary pilgrim to his eternal resting place. Oh look you at Nature! Yon tree has died, blasted by winter's raw winds. All weaving and working strength has fled the earth, an icy breeze having stormed over its face. But spring does return, lighter and milder breezes blow again and from million-fold springs, new life again pours through the frozen arteries of Nature; fresh, exquisite growth is displayed on fields and meadows; fragrant blossoms sprout again from branches and sweet fruits appeal to refresh. But Man - when death lays its ice-cold hand on his warmly beating human heart, when death's dark wings rustle over his head, when a human eye is sealed by the iron sleep of death, when a person dies, what then remains of him? What remains behind for you, oh mourners, from the dear departed, surrounded by your tears? What remains for his spouse, the proud crown of whose life has, with the death of her husband, sunk to the ground. What remains for his spouse, her heart so aching, her spirit so full of sorrow, so joyless, her soul barren and lonely – what retains she from her spouse, whom this cover will enclose for ever? Who will help her bear the weight and burdens of life, now that

her loyal companion has been torn from her in mid--pilgrimage? Who will banish grief from her breast and relieve her heart of cares, now that her life's tender partner has so prematurely found the goal of his wanderings? And ah! who will be by her side to raise her small, dependent children, to help them scale the ladder of life in the light of God and the gracious radiance of the Religion – now that their natural protector, provider and leader descends into the grave? And you, oh sons, what remains for you from your father, whose every heartbeat was devoted to your welfare, whose every thought and striving was directed only to laying a firm, secure foundation for your lives; who pursued only one aim – how to realize for his dearest an honorable place in the world. To whom other than his children was his tireless and dynamic activity devoted? For whom other than his family did he live a life full of honest labor? And now that death has taken him from you, now that he has for ever departed from amongst you, has all of him really gone? - is nothing of him left behind with you? - וגבר ימות ויחלש ויגוע אדם ואין -

Fellow mourners! Man has yet a possession more precious than his body; a treasure exists in him which is indestructible, which cannot be confined in the grave.

Every virtue practiced by a person here on earth is immortal; no good works performed by a man in this world turn to dust. And in truth, the departed was a noble person. Charity was a basic feature of his life. He gave, and gave, and never tired of giving. (נתן נתן תתן אפילו אלף פעמים) 'you shall surely give' – even a thousand times") was true of him in full measure. The needy turned to him from near and far – they knew that they had in him a faithful supporter.

And as he lived doing good deeds so he died doing good deeds. Just a few days before his death he assigned a not inconsiderable sum as a charitable legacy. So noble a spirit does rise above the confines of the grave and lives on in the memory of his pilgrimage's grateful companions. And the departed was a loyal, upright adherent of his Faith, he was a Jew in the fullest sense of the word; for the sake of Judaism no sacrifice was too great or heavy. He sought to foster and maintain in his house the chaste sanctity of Jewish life, of Jewish tradition. And you who remain behind! Could all this ever really vanish from your hearts? Should it not rather live on and work within you as the holiest legacy of your father? His pilgrimage was short indeed, but replete with pious good deeds, and now that he appears before God, he does not appear before Him empty-handed. ולא יראו פני ריקם ("and none shall appear before me empty"); rather his virtue goes before him and the glory of God gathers him up: והלך לפניך צדקך וכבוד ד' יאספך .

Wander on then, blissful spirit, into the halls of eternal life. Should there be among us any who have aggrieved you – then may we find forgiveness, just as we send after you a message of forgiveness from anyone among us whom you may have aggrieved. Travel on into the realm of the immortal spirits: ר' אליעזר אומר: בערב אתה זובה ובבא השמש ר' אליעזר אומר: בערב אתה זובה ובבא השמש (Berachot 9a) ("R. Eliezer says: 'In the evening you slaughter [the paschal lamb] and at sundown you eat'.) That which your namesake R. Eliezer once taught has been fully confirmed in you. Eliezer! In this your pilgrimage you have sacrificed darkness and have acted in the manner of a servant of God. And now, as the sun of your life has

set, you will enjoy the reward bestowed upon the pious and the righteous by God, by Him who gave you and has taken you - may His great and holy Name be blessed from eternity to eternity!

ד. נתן וד' ללקח יהי שם ד' מברך . Amen .

(“The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.”)