

The Acacia:

Reprinted from the August 1998 issue of The Short Talk Bulletin" published by the Masonic Service Association of North America.

There is a good deal of confusion over the shrub associated with the discovery of Hiram's grave but it is most probable that it would have been cassia and not acacia. The cassia plant (one species is *Cassia. actor/â/0*) was introduced into Europe in the early eighteenth century at the time when the ritual was developing. Samuel Prichard's *Afasonty Dissected* (1730) and Anderson's 1738 Constitutions both mention cassia rather than acacia in relation to the gave. On the other hand the available French sources indicate that they had already settled for 'a thorny branch called acacia'. We cannot be precise as to when the change began but at the Union of 1813 it was settled that acacia should be the word for ritual use and, eventually, cassia was seen no more.

It is worth mentioning that *Acacia seyai* is the *Shiiiah* (plural *Shittim*) of Exodus 25:10, the wood from which the Ark of the Covenant and the Tabernacle were constructed.

To some the Cassia is the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil' and 'the Tree of the Serpent'. The Egyptians revered the acacia and used it to make funeral wreaths. Legend connects it, with other plants, to the wood of the cross of Christ, his crown of thorns and the burning bush. There are many aspects to the symbolism of acacia and with other plants, e.g., rosemary, box, myrtle and willow, it reflects a belief in resurrection. Phoenix Lodge of Honour and Prudence, in its unique ritual, refers to acacia as signifying innocence or freedom from sin. It appears to bloom and flourish in its place as if to sav: 'O, Death, where is thy sting? O, Grave, where is thy victory?' and it thereby symbolizes immortality.