The month of August was an important one in the life of Dr. Rob Morris, the master builder of the Order of the Eastern Star, the Masonic Poet Laureate, the scholar, the teacher, the Christian gentleman, the friend of mankind. He was born in August, married in August, and buried in August.

Rob Morris was born near Boston, Massachusetts, on August 31, 1818. He was the youngest of a family, all of whom had been born in New York City, and shortly after his birth the family returned to New York. His childhood and early manhood was spent in New York where he had the best educational advantages. Following his graduation from college, he went to Mt. Sylvan Academy, near Oxford, Mississippi, where he became principal of the Academy. Here he met Miss Charlotte Mendenhall, a daughter of one of the most prominent families in Mississippi. They were married August 26, 1841.

We are not told very much about Mrs. Morris except that she was a loving, faithful wife, in sympathy with her husband's work, and that during the singing of hymns, at the hour of family worship in their home, the air was led by Mrs. Morris.

She was the mother of seven children, which was considered a rather small family in those days. There were three boys, John, Alfred and Robert, Jr., four girls, Sarah, Charlotte, Ruth and Ella.

After a lingering illness, the youngest daughter, Ella Wilson Morris, passed away on July 29, 1877, at the age of twenty. In June of that year Dr. Morris wrote a poem entitled, "The Father To The Dying Daughter" which portrays a beautiful family life and his faith in a future life.

Dear Ella, as you watch the flowers of June,
    And wear away the summer days in pain,
Do you not often think of seasons gone
    And wish that childhood's days were back again?
I know you do; they were such sunny days;
    Your happy girlhood never knew a care;
Sisters and brothers shared your merry plays,
    Your parents took of all your pains the share.
How sweet the moments fled we use to sing
    Such joyful melodies; when evening fell
To father's knee your little hand would cling,
    And prayers went up to HIM we loved so well.
We sang sweet, "Mary at the Saviour's Tomb";
    We sang "Thus far the Lord hath led us on";
And in dear mother's own domestic room
    We kissed good-night, and then to bed were gone.
Ah, Ella, there is nothing left like this,
In womanhood there dwells such woe and pain;

Had we but known, it was our time of bliss;
Oh that my children were but young again.

Gray-haired and sad, I meditate to-day,
My tears fast dropping through the lonely hours;

Is there not somewhere, somewhere far away
A home where bitter memories come no more?

We do believe there is, we will believe,
You learned such faith, my daughter, at my knee;

The Holy One, who never can deceive,
Assures us of a blest eternity.

Read it again, "All tears are wiped away".
The saints with crowns and harps all radiant stand,

The LAMB sits on the throne, and endless day
And jubilant song pervade the happy Land.

Then bow with patience, Dearest, 'neath your load;
A mighty Saviour waits to be your Guide;

JESUS the painful pilgrimage hath trod,
Eternal life and light with Him that died.

Dr. Morris was named "Robert," but he says: "I adopted the apparently quaint and odd cognomen "of 'Rob' as a prefix. The immediate cause "of this was my determination not any longer to be confounded with Mr. Robert Morris, the author and poet of Philadelphia".

Dr. Rob Morris was a poet, and a writer of note. He was the composer of many Sunday School songs, poems and lectures. He wrote more than three hundred poems in the interest of Masonry, and many for the Order of the Eastern Star.

A lady who was initiated into the new Order of the Eastern Star by Dr. Morris himself gives this vivid description of him: "He was a powerful and magnetic speaker; there was not a movement in the hall while he was speaking for he held his audience spellbound. He was a small man with brown curly hair and a short full beard. He had the merriest blue eyes you ever saw and everyone who heard his voice or had shaken hands with him could never forget that hearty, brotherly handclasp of his".

And a Mason said this of him: "Brother Morris' marked trait was industry. He made little pretension to genius or talent of the high order, but he always made the best use of his time. I never saw him idle for a moment, in the lodge or out of it he was ever seeking or communicating Masonic light. He visited sick brethren, if there were any, at their houses, and imparted comfort. He inquired for destitute brethren and tendered them aid. He looked up the graves of departed Masons and suggested better care of them."
We are also told that he was extremely fond of Nature—a collector of shells, arrow-heads and eccentric stones. The lilies of the field and the wayside flowers were very dear to him.

In February, 1850, he was confined to the house with an attack of rheumatism, and it was at this time he worked out the theme and name of the Order of the Eastern Star.

One sultry afternoon, in August, 1854, Dr. Morris was walking home from a neighbor's house, sat upon a fallen tree, and upon the back of a letter dashed off, under momentary impulse and in stenographic character, the lines of his famous poem, "The Level and the Square". In one sentence of that poem he breathes his belief in the leveling influence of death and the hope of the immortality of the soul:

"There is a world where all are equal,  
We're hurrying to it fast;  
We shall meet upon the level  
When the gates of death are passed."

Many of his poems have a sad and melancholy note, especially those written during the Civil War. Let us remember he was born and reared in the North, and spent the remainder of his life in the South, so his heart must have been very heavy at the bitterness in the land. He was a man of peace and brotherly love, and had kindred and friends on both sides of the Mason and Dixon line.

One song entitled "Never Slight A Hailing Brother" was composed and sung at an assembly of Masons held at Memphis, Tennessee, in the summer of 1863, in which both Federal and Confederate soldiers were present.

Never slight a hailing brother—  
Be it Blue or Gray he wear;  
Never ask his creed or country,  
So he's faithful to the Square;  
Only know he's true and faithful  
To the solemn vow he swore,  
And then a generous hand extend him  
As in peaceful days of yere.

Sad the strife, and fearful, Brother,  
Almost hopeless seems the end;  
Some have felt its utmost horror,  
In the loss of home and friend;  
Yet the fire and shot have left us  
Even stronger than we were—  
And oh, this day Freemasons conquer,  
Faithful, faithful to the Square.

When sweet peace shall bless us, Brother,  
And the fire and shot have ceased,  
Then we'll strive not to remember  
All the cruel things that passed;  
But there's one thing we'll forget not,  
While a memory we bear;  
It is the sacred tie so cherished  
By the Brothers of the Square.
A copy of another poem, "The Wastings of War", was sent to President Lincoln, and a most complimentary letter was received.

In 1868, the Masons of this country raised between nine and ten thousand dollars to enable Dr. Morris to visit the Orient.

He traveled extensively in foreign countries and spent nearly a year in the Holy Land, where he wrote many of his poems. While seated on the shore of the Sea of Galilee he wrote the beautiful song. "Memories of Galilee". The scarlet lily blossoms profusely in Palestine, and on the shores of the Sea of Galilee he also wrote:

CONSIDER THE LILIES

Consider how the lilies grow,
Perfume shedding, widely spreading,
How the scarlet blossoms blow!
Broad in Galilee their fame,
Jesus called them by name.
Consider how the lilies thrive,
    Beauteous ever, toiling never,
Only need to smile and live;
Father has them in His care,
 Makes the scarlet blossoms fair.
Consider what the lilies say:
    "All is given us from, Heaven,
Father keeps us every day.
He who makes the lilies grow,
Will he not provide for you?"
Consider how the lilies die—
    Loved and cherished, lost and perished,
We are for eternity!
He who gives the flowerlet bloom,
He will snatch us from the tomb.

On November 8, 1861, Dr. Morris' home, "The Three Cedars," was destroyed by fire. This fire cost him the loss of many of his Masonic jewels, diplomas and certificates. Numerous books, papers and manuscripts were lost, but his courage was not destroyed. He built another home and continued writing.

Dr. Morris entered life eternal on July 31, 1888, lacking just one month of reaching his three score years and ten. He was buried on August 1st. Mrs. Morris passed away on August 14, 1893, and was buried beside her husband.

A grand-daughter, Miss Ella Morris Mount, is a Past Grand Matron of Kentucky, and has been Grand Secretary of Kentucky for many years.

In 1950, when your first Worthy Matron, Mrs. Fay Lockman, was Grand Marshal of the Grand Chapter of North Carolina, she and I went to Washington, D.C., to attend the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Order of the Eastern Star. Miss Mount unveiled an oil painting of her grandfather, Dr. Rob Morris, at the International Temple. We had the honor of shaking hands with her, so we had "The Stars at our Fingertips".

The Morris home, at LaGrange, Kentucky, is owned by the Grand Chapter of Kentucky, Order of the Eastern Star.
In the autumn of 1947, my husband and I visited the Rob Morris Home. We were graciously received by the caretaker, who conducted us through the eight rooms of the two-story building. Some of the furniture is of that period but we were shown several pieces that belonged to the Morris family. One that was especially interesting was a little old-fashioned organ. Enlarged pictures of Dr. and Mrs. Morris were in the living room. The original desk, used by Dr. Morris, was in his office on the second floor. On this desk was a map of the Holy Land and his Bible. On the fly leaf of the Bible, written in his own hand, was "Rob Morris, LaGrange, Kentucky, U.S.A." In his office were shells and bottles of seeds, and a bookcase contained a number of scrap-books. In a glass case was a letter written to a grandchild. The salutation was: "My dear Namesake" and closed "Your affectionate Grandfather".

We walked to the cemetery, which is just a few hundred yards from the Morris home, to visit the graves of Dr. and Mrs. Morris. A tall marble shaft marks their resting places. On one side is the Square and Compasses, and on the other the Five-Pointed Star. On the iron gate to the cemetery are these words: "Valley of Rest".