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FIRE-BURIAL

AMONG OUR GERMANIC FOREFATHERS:

A RECORD OF THE

POETRY AND HISTORY OF TEUTONIC CREMATION.

BY

KARL BLIND.

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1871

FIRE-BURIAL AMONG OUR GERMANIC FOREFATHERS.

I

WHEN the question of Cremation is illustrated by historical references, we always hear much of the Indians of old, of the Phœnikians, of the Greeks, the Romans; but scarcely ever—at least in this country—do we see any mention made of our own Germanic forefathers. Yet those who combine an ardent zeal for progress with a faculty of musing over the ways of the past, might not be sorry to find from the records of history, as well as from poetical traditions, that with the Teutonic race also cremation was once the ruling custom.

In England, some astonishment has been expressed that the Germans—both those who dwell in their native home, and those who have settled beyond the Atlantic—should have so eagerly taken up the proposal of Sir Henry Thompson. At Vienna and Berlin, at Leipzig, Dresden, Breslau, Stuttgart, and in several other German towns, agitations in favour of fire-burial (*Feuerbestattung*), as the new term is, are in full course. In some cases, the communal councils are firmly heading the movement. At New York, it is stated, the Germans have erected a great Fire-Hall, with an altar in its centre, at which such ceremonies may be performed as

survivors may deem requisite for the repose of the departed ones, or for the softening of their own feeling of grief.

This idea of reverting to cremation as to a practice urgently required on grounds of public health, as well as commendable from various other reasons, is, however, not of such recent date in Germany as many seem to suppose. It has been put forth and advocated there for upwards of a quarter of a century; not least ably by Dr. Trusen in 1855, and again in 1860, with the motto: '*Salus publica suprema lex.*' But the eagerness with which the proposal of Dr. Trusen and Sir Henry Thompson is at present being worked out on German soil, is certainly such as to have almost the appearance of a return to early notions and cherished customs, which centuries of a contrary practice have not been able to root out from the nation's mind. It is as if a spark of that spirit were again stirring which urged our light and fire worshipping ancestors to consign their dead to the purifying flame.

By not a few, the idea of reverting to cremation is saluted like the deliverance from a depressing thought. 'No people, to my knowledge'—says Jakob Grimm in his masterly special treatise²—'was seized more deeply by the terrors

¹ *Die Leichenverbrennung.*

² *Ueber die Verbrennung der Leichen.* 1849.

of the dank and narrow grave than the Saxons and Frisians of old, after they had made the change from burning to burying.' These were bold warrior-races, quite fearless of death. Yet, with the re-introduction, among them, of the Christian—or rather Jewish—habit of burying the corpse beneath the clammy soil, the terrors of the grave, which a long practice of dissolution by fire had obliterated in the people's mind, were gradually fed into the most oppressive superstitions. There is a ghastly mediæval literature full of those midnight dreams of an over-wrought fancy. The Ossianic wail about the 'narrow, dark house without a ray' is in the *Völsunglied* often intensified by mystic horrors that make the blood curdle.

It had not been so among our Teutonic forefathers. With them, fire-burial even in the dark of night was no doubt a frequent occurrence. Lingering traces of such a custom are to be found even now in the funeral processions at night, with the accompaniment of torches, in honour of departed princes and noblemen, or of students, which still take place here and there in Germany, but are generally considered to have something weird and ghastly about them. Among the ancient Germanic races, these nocturnal obsequies must have been quite an unobjectionable ceremony. The blazing pyre, on which the corpse was resolved into ashes, drove away with its bright flames the host of hobgoblins and vampires which haunted the later Christian tomb.

With cremation, no danger could arise of living flesh being entombed and subjected to unspeakable torments. Hence the imagination of the surviving was not tortured into fears which Biblical cases of apparent death were only calculated to enhance. Who can say whether the change from burying to burning, which we can trace among so many nations of antiquity, had not as

much to do with this consideration as with sanitary reasons, or with the growth of peculiar religious doctrines?

II

At one time, simple interment seems to have been the rule. The Greeks, under Kekrops, still buried their dead. It is said that the myth of Herakles, who mounted the pyre after having been poisoned by the shirt of Nessos, first gave rise to cremation among the Hellenic tribes. This tale, it will presently be seen, fits in, to a certain extent, with what was said among the Scandinavians, about the introduction of fire-burial by Odin. The Lakedæmonians—in many things unlike the remainder of the Greeks—preserved the practice of inhumation. Sokrates speaks of the two modes of sepulture. At the time of Platon there was still interment, as well as cremation. Pythagoras was an enemy of cremation; a fact which may go to strengthen the view of those who regard him as the Buddhagoras, or propagator of Buddhistic doctrines. Buddhism, indeed, showed less favour to cremation than the Vedic religion did, which made it a general precept. The Romans also at first buried; but, if tradition can be trusted, the pyre had become an accepted institution already before Numa. A law of his is mentioned which forbids the pyre to be sprinkled with wine. (*Vino rogi ne aspergit!*) Interment was preserved among the Romans only for infants and for those who had been killed by lightning, and consequently been touched by the fire of Heaven itself.

Tacitus mentions that inhumation was the custom of the Jews without any exception: and this may be said to be proved by numerous passages in the Books of Moses; in the Judges; in Samuel; in St. John; St. Matthew; and so forth. Cremation evidently was regarded by the Hebrews as an unwelcome

prospect and an evil. (Jeremiah xxxiv. 5.)³ Yet there were occasions when even they employed fire-burial unhesitatingly—either to prevent further insult being offered to a corpse by the enemy (1 Samuel xxi. 12)⁴ or to avoid the spreading of infectious diseases (2 Chronicles xxi. 18-19)⁵. This latter fact shows that the Jews, too, were well aware of the sanitary importance of incineration.

III

It is impossible, at so long a distance of time, and with the scanty historical materials before us, to find out whether a sanitary consideration was involved in the change of the burial-form which undoubtedly took place, in a pre-historic epoch, among the Teutonic nations. Early political law-giving generally clothes itself in a religious garb. Nevertheless, in the ordinances it issues on the everyday mode of life, on the festive and funeral ceremonies of a people, considerations of public health are frequently embedded, and still clearly traceable. The Mosaic legislation furnishes well-known instances. We are entitled to a similar surmise in the case at issue. At any rate, there can be no doubt that among the Northmen also, the Fire Age was preceded by a Mound Age. In other words, their Cremation Period followed upon an era during

which they, too, had placed the entire corpses in a hillock, a tumulus, or mound.

With the dawn of history, in the countries north of the Alps, we find fire-burial, even as among the Hindoo, the Greeks, and the Romans, also among the other branches of the Aryan race in Europe—among the Kelts, the Germans, and the Slavonians. When Cæsar warred in Gaul, he observed that the natives practised cremation to the fullest extent.⁶ From his report we see that it was done pretty much in the same way as in India, whither a branch of the Aryan race, originally roaming over what at present is Turkestan, must have brought the custom.

The funeral ceremonies of the Gauls are described by Cæsar as 'magnificent and costly.' Those of the Germans, on the contrary, were of a simpler kind, according to the testimony of Tacitus. In his *Germania* he says:—'There is no ambitious show in their funerals. The only distinction to be observed is, that the bodies of their leading men are burnt with a certain kind of wood. They cover the pile neither with garments nor with incense; only the weapons, sometimes the horse, are added to the structure. The funeral place is marked by a knoll of turf: they reject the honour of laboriously constructed, heavy monuments, as

³ Jeremiah utters a threatening prophecy against Zedekiah, the King of Juda, that he shall be given into the hands of his Babylonian enemies. 'But thou shalt die in peace; and with the burnings of thy fathers, the former kings which were before thee; and they will lament thee, saying, Ah, lord! for I have pronounced the word, saith the Lord.'

⁴ The Philistines had cut off the head of Saul, stripped off his armour and put it in the house of Ashtaroth, and fastened his body to the wall of Beth-shan. 'And when the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead heard of that which the Philistines had done to Saul; all the valiant men arose, and went all night, and took the body of Saul and the bodies of his sons from the wall of Beth-shan, and came to Jabesh, and burnt them there. And they took their bones, and buried them under a tree at Jabesh, and fasted seven days.'

⁵ Jehoram had been defeated by the Philistines and the Arabians. 'And after all this the Lord smote him in his bowels with an incurable disease. And it came to pass, sick in process of time, after the end of two years, his bowels fell out by reason of his sickness: so he died of sore diseases. And his people made no burning for him, like the burning of his fathers.'

⁶ De Bell. Gall. vi. 18.

if it were a burden upon the dead. Laments and tears they soon give up; but grief and sorrow last with them. For women it is meet to utter wails; for men, to keep up remembrance.'

There can be no doubt, in my opinion, that the words '*Funerum nulla ambitio; id solum observatur, ut corpora clarorum virorum certis lignis cremantur,*' imply a universal practice of cremation among the Germans of old. The emphasis is to be laid on the words '*clarorum*' and '*certis.*' In his concise phraseology, which so often verges upon the seemingly incomplete, Tacitus takes fire-burial as a self-understood Germanic custom. He consequently only lays stress on the fact of the simplicity of a German funeral being but slightly deviated from in the case of their chieftains, for whose incineration 'special kinds of wood' were set apart.

There is ample historical proof that some of the Thracians,⁷ who, according to Herodotus himself, must be regarded as a Getic or Gothic people; that the Getes⁸ more specially, as well as the Gothic Herulians,⁹ that the Thuringians,¹⁰ the Trevirians,¹¹ the Frisians,¹² the Saxons,¹³ and the Northmen, all practised fire-burial. Where, as in the case of the Goths of Ulfilas, of the Franks, the Suabians, the Alamans, and a few other German tribes, a direct historical record is wanting, the gap can be filled up by the science of language. By means of it, it is proved, or at all events rendered probable in the extreme, that the same custom prevailed also among this section of the Germanic world. Among the Scandinavians, cremation was said to have arisen from a law given

by Odin, who, on falling sick, ordered a pyre to be raised for himself. So it is stated in the Heimskringla, or World-Circle, of Snorri Sturlason, the Icelandic historian and statesman, who wrote in the thirteenth century, and who has done so much for the preservation of the Norse hero-sagas.

IV

THIS statement about the Law of Odin, who appears in the quality of a Manu, Moses, Lykurgos, or Mohamed, may seem to merit little attention to those who only think of Odin the mythic All-father, the Ruler of the Heavens. The Odin of the Heimskringla, is, however, not the Odin of mythology. He is—at any rate in the sense of the ancient record itself—a historical or semi-historical Odin, the governor of a people originally settled near the Don, who later migrated as conquering warriors towards the North, driven forward as they were by the progress of Roman rule. As this is a subject not very generally known, and as it bears upon the question of cremation, I may be permitted to make a short, and after all but apparent, digression.

Odin's realm—the Heimskringla says—lay east of the river Tanais, or Tanaquisl, which formerly was called Wanaquisl, and flows into the Black Sea. That realm was in Asia, and bore the name of Asa-land, or Asa-heim. Its capital was Asgard. Between the arms of the Tanais lay Wana-land, or Wana-heim, the kingdom of a race with which Odin's people were frequently warring. Odin had possessions also in Tyrk-land. In Asgard he ruled in company with twelve temple priests, of whom he was the first-

⁷ Herodotus, v. 8.

⁸ Pomponius Mela, ii. cap. 2.

⁹ Procopius, *Bell. Goth.* ii. 14.

¹⁰ *Vita Arnulfi Metensis.*

¹¹ *Gesta Trevirorum*; Pertz, *Mon. Germ.* x. 31. 6.

¹² Ciliacus, *Bell. Dithm.* i. c. 19. Walther, *1 Chron. Fres.* c. 8.

¹³ *Epist.* 72 Bonifacii.

These priests were called *diar* (that is Gods, or Divines); or *drottnar*, meaning Masters. A powerful captain in war this Odin was. His sword proved almost invariably victorious, except in the struggle with the Wana race, when the issues of battle were of a checkered kind, and the contest had to be made up by the exchange of hostages. Thus, Niord; his son Freyr; and his daughter Freyja—who were 'not of Asian origin'—came as hostages to Asa-land.

At that time—the Norse saga goes on—the Roman leaders made expeditions all over the world, subjecting nations to their rule. Odin, scanning the future, set his brothers over Asgard. He himself, with his trusty men, first went out in a western direction towards Gardariki;¹⁴ then southwards into Saxon-land;¹⁵ from thence by sea to Fünen, where Odin's-Oe (Odense) still bears his name. Then he sent Gefion northwards over the Sound, to seek after new lands. After his conquests in the North, he gave homesteads to Niord, Freyr, Heimdall, Thor, and Baldur. These were leading men around him. The names of the homesteads so conferred upon his staff, or chief warriors, tally in the *Heimskringla* with the names of the seats, or halls, occupied by the corresponding Gods in the Edda.

Of Odin it is further reported that he was often away for years, wandering through many lands. The laws of the Northmen were fixed by him:—

He gave his country those laws which formerly had been valid among the Asa race. Thus he ordained that THE DEAD SHOULD BE BURNT, and that everything that had been their own should be carried to the pyre. He said everyone should go up to Walhalla with as many riches as would be heaped upon his pyre, and that

he should enjoy in Walhalla also those things which he had hidden away in the earth. The ashes should be thrown into the sea, or be buried deep in the soil; but for illustrious men a mound should be raised as a token of remembrance. For all those who had shown great courage,¹⁶ *bauta*-stones should be raised; and thus it has been kept for a long time afterwards.

Such was the legislation of the great Chieftain. When he came near his death through illness—the *Heimskringla* says—he had himself marked with a spear, as he wished to go up to Godsheim, the dwelling of the deities. He was burnt on the pyre, and his funeral was a most splendid one. His successor in the kingdom was Niord; he, too, was burnt at his death. The same was the case with the *Diar*, or Priests, that died during Niord's days.

Then Freyr followed as a ruler. 'When he fell sick, his men built a hill, into which they put him; they let in a door and three windows. When Freyr was dead, they carried him secretly into the hill, saying to the Swedes that he was still living.' Thus in the case of Freyr, who was buried at Upsala, the legislation of Odin was broken through. The *Heimskringla* then adds that, after the death of the *Diar*, Freyja alone still lived as a priestess, but married to Oddr. This latter name, I will observe in passing, is in Germanic mythology but another form of the name Odin, or Wodan. Odin himself—that is to say, the Odin of historical tradition, of whom the before-mentioned deeds are recorded—died, according to the *Heimskringla*, and went up to the Home of the Gods, before Freyja married Oddr.

The Swedes, it is further mentioned, would not burn Freyr. They called him 'World-God' and honoured him by sacrifices. After Freyr, Fiölnir ruled over the

¹⁴ Probably what is now Russia.

¹⁵ Evidently Germany.

¹⁶ This passage is somewhat obscure in the text. Some interpret it as meaning that a stone-fence should be erected wherever there was danger of the grave being trodden down by the frequent passing to and fro of men.

Swedes; and then the practice of fire-burial begins again among the Asa race.

V

I HAVE given this extraordinary semi-mythic narrative, which yet has some historical interest, because it bears upon Fire-burial in the sense of a state law as well as of a religious ordinance; the Odin who came from the Tanais to Sweden being represented as the warrior head of a theocratic Order—similar, if I may venture upon a comparison, to the later Teutonic knights of the Middle Ages. The tradition which seems to be preserved in the Heims-kringla under a fabulous form has, of course, not the value of an authenticated fact. The whole record is a medley of national hero traditions, of priestly inventions, and of chronological incongruities. But there may, after all, be a kernel of truth in it. Hence it is invested with a strange interest, and gives rise to much speculation.

The very names of the river Tana-quisl, or Wana-quisl, may set us thinking as to a possible lodgment, on the banks of the Don, first of Kelts, then of Wends, which latter may in their turn have been attacked by a Germanic tribe. For the Asgard of the Odin who ruled near the Black Sea, a confirmation might be found in Strabon's 'Aspurgum.' Asgard and Aspurg are, at all events, only two different forms of Germanic speech, signifying the town or the castle of the Æsir. The settlement of Germanic races on the shores of the Black Sea is a historical fact. Nor can we regard it as unlikely that among some Teutonic tribe, in grey antiquity, rulers should have arisen who thought it convenient to assume for themselves the names of deities or of deified heroes.

Under other religious systems also, the names of apostles, of saints, of a Son of God, of a Madonna, or Mother of God, are borne by believers. In Spain and in the Catholic countries of South America, the name of the Christian Saviour is often given to boys at baptism. Among the Spaniards, the Italians, and the French it is a frequent custom to add even the name of the Virgin Mary to a boy's name. So also are there a number of names in Germany, most of them having their synonyms in the languages of other Christian nations, into the composition of which the word 'God' enters—such as Gottfried, Gotthelf, Gotthold, Gottlieb, Gottwalt, Gottschalk. The name of Odin as a human designation is, therefore, by no means startling.

Moreover, in the Norse Langfeðgatal, or Royal Genealogy, which is of a half-mythical, half-historically traditional character, a 'Voden, whom we call Oden,' is mentioned, who is the common ancestor of Anglo-Saxon, Norwegian, Danish, and German kingly families. The Langfeðgatal fabulously begins with Japhet, the son of Noah; then goes through a confused list of names from the Greek, Persian, and Trojan legendary cycle; but finally gives a list of Germanic names from Thor to Finn, Frealaf, and 'Voden, whom we call Oden.' Here, a Thor precedes an Oden; whereas, in mythology, Thor is Odin's son. The Langfeðgatal styles this heroic Oden a King of Tyrk-land, which would make him a ruler also over Turanic races near the Caspian Sea. Even as in the Heimskringla, it is fabulously said of him that he fled before the Romans towards the North.¹⁷ (*Han var Tyrkia Konungr. Han flyði firir Romveriom norðr hegat.*) After a number of his successors, another Oden, or Odin, is

¹⁷ Anglo-Saxon and other German dynasties trace their descent from Voden, or Odin. Properly understood, no divine descent was thereby incontestably meant, though the magic qualities attributed to the chieftain of that name easily led to a confusion. It may not

mentioned in the genealogical table. Odin, at one time, was consequently a frequent name of kings; and that name in itself ought not to be taken as a proof that no such ruler could ever have promulgated a Cremation Law in the North.

If it is objected that among the early Teutonic tribes a priestly caste was not so fully formed as the Heimskringla asserts, I think this objection, too, is not an insuperable one. In Germany proper, according to the reports of Roman historians, the people were certainly far from being priest-ridden. They worshipped in groves and forests, not in temples.¹⁸ The priest, as he does everywhere, considered himself the link between man and Heaven. His was also the right and the duty of calling for and maintaining order during a public meeting. On the field of battle he had, so to say, the function of a provost.¹⁹ Otherwise he seems to have exercised little actual power beyond his magic tricks. The love of freedom, which is mentioned as so strong a characteristic of the Germans, rendered them not less disinclined to theocratic than to an oppressive aristocratic or monarchical rule. Things were otherwise, according to Cæsar, in priest-ridden Gaul. There, the mass of the people occupied the position almost of serfs; and the Druids, well-nigh equal in power to the nobility, had it all their own way both in religious matters and in civil law.²⁰

But in different ages, and among different tribes of the Teutonic stock which once was spread over

so vast an area, institutions naturally differed. Hence, whilst there is, beyond the Heimskringla tradition, no collateral historical evidence of an order of Warrior Priests having, in Indian caste-fashion, once held sway east of the Don, and thence, under Odin, introduced a Cremation Law in the North, it would yet, perhaps, be an error to look upon the whole account as a fable. Its chronology is certainly at fault; and apparent historical elements are so mixed up in it with myth that an inextricable confusion is produced. If the Wana race, however, were to be regarded in a historical light, the position of Niord, Freyr, and Freyja might be compared, in some manner, to that of the rulers of Etruscan race in Rome.

In full keeping with the nature of such semi-historical traditions, the Odin of the Heimskringla, half-soldier, half-priest, appears in the character of a great sorcerer, who was even able to throw himself into various incarnations—exactly like the Odin of mythology. Still, he is a military leader; towards the end of his days he, like a common mortal, falls sick; and as he wishes to obtain eternal blessing, he orders himself, before expiring, to be marked with the point of a spear. For thus only, according to the rules of the great God whose name he bore, he was enabled to go up to Walhalla. In many religious systems, it is true, we meet with a mixture of deities that are enthroned in the welkin, and of incarnations which represent or embody them on earth. Nevertheless, in the case before us, we

be amiss here to mention that those err who believe that in Germanic mythology the rulers of men are designated as a special creation of the All-father: In the *Rígsmaal* of the Edda, the three social orders—the Thralls, the Karls, and the Jarls (the serfs, the freemen, and the nobles)—are all alike the progeny, not of the All-father himself, but of his son Heimdall. Only, in the case of the Jarls, certain qualities of that order are mentioned which approximate them to some extent to the divine possessors of witchcraft. The Jarls, it ought to be remembered, combined the position of warrior chieftains with the functions of high-priests, or magic mediators, between the Gods and man.

¹⁸ Tacitus, *Germ.* c. 9.

¹⁹ *Germ.* c. 8.

²⁰ *De Bell. Gall.* vi. 12.

rather seem to see a real human person, who, for the sake of better swaying men, and making his title of a ruler 'by the grace of God' more valid, assumes the name of the Supreme Being, and surrounds himself with a mystical halo, as kings were wont to do down to rather modern times. I need only refer to the old French and English superstitions about the cure of some maladies by the King's miraculous touch.

I have entered into these details in order to show that the Scandinavian tradition which speaks of a 'Mound Age' being followed by a 'Burning Age,' or Cremation Period, in accordance with a decree of the leader of the invading Asa race, may after all repose on a substratum of historical fact. The breach made in the law in the case of the ruler who assumed the name of Freyr, could be understood on the hypothesis of some aristocratic conspiracy having found it convenient to 'spirit away' the king, or to keep him as a prisoner in a hill ('with a door and three windows!'), whilst the people were told that he was alive, yet had attained to a divine condition. Ancient Roman tradition furnishes an obvious parallel for such secret making-away with a ruler. When a special necessity of this kind for refraining from a public cremation ceremony had ceased, Fire-Burial, we can easily understand, would once more be reverted to at the demise of a Norse King.

VI

LET us now turn, from the *Heimskringla* and the *Langfedgatal*, to the *Edda*, the great Germanic Scripture. There also we meet with numerous instances of cremation. I will premise here that what the *Edda* says of the Gods and Heroes of the Northmen

may, in its essential parts, be regarded also as the substance of the views of the Germans proper. This holds good most especially of the *Hero-Saga*, as well as of the *Younger or Prose Edda*.

Icelanders, like Sæmund himself, travelling in Germany, clearly gathered there some of the chief contents of those epic ballads which we have lost, but which afterwards were, like the Homeric poems, put into a connected form, glossed over, and wrought into a whole, hight the *Nibelungen-Lied*. Sigurd himself, the German Siegfried, is in the *Edda* a Southern prince—that is, a German. The scene of his death is laid near the Rhine. (*Sollinn varð Sigurðr sunnan Rinar*).²¹ We see the Black Forest under the name of the Dark Wood; the Sieben-Gebirge under the name of the Holy Mountains. The familiar names of the Saxons, the Franks, the Burgundians, the Goths, even of Swawa-land, or Suabian-land—which, besides its mythic meaning, may here have a tribal signification—meet us in the Norse record, together with the name of the Huns. 'German men' (*Þýðverskir menn*) are referred to, in the *Edda*, as sources of the Siegfried tale. The *Wilkinsa-Saga* specially mentions, as sources, German men from Soest, Bremen, and Münster. When, therefore, the great Teutonic Scripture speaks of fire-burial among the Æsir and the heroic chieftains, we are warranted in concluding that, in a general way, a Scandinavian as well as a German institution is meant.

The universality of the practice of incineration appears at once from the *Eddic Lay of the High One*, a didactic poem similar to the *Proverbs of Solomon*, where it is said:—'Better to be blind than to be burnt';²² and again: 'At eve, the day may be praised; a woman,

²¹ Fragment of a *Brynhild Lay*, 5.

²² *Hávamál*, 70.

after she is burnt.' ²³ An instance of fire-burial is related from the divine circle of the Æsir themselves. It concerns Baldur, the sweet God of Light, whose very name, in its first syllable, indicates the Sun or the Fire. At the instigation of the evil-doing god Loki, Baldur was shot with a mistletoe twig by the sightless god Hödur, the representative of Night, or of wintry darkness. The myth originally typifies the change of seasons. The ultimate fate of the whole Germanic Olympus was, however, afterwards brought into connection with the death of the White God.

A full description is given, in the Younger Edda, of the funeral ceremonies over Baldur's corpse. The Æsir took it and carried it to the sea. There they put it on Baldur's ship *Hringhorn*, the greatest of all vessels. There was some difficulty in moving the ship; the Gods had to invoke the aid of a Titaness from Iötunheim, the abode of the Giants. Hyrroekinn was her name: which is explained as the one who is surrounded by fire and smoke. On seeing Baldur's corpse placed on board ship, his loving wife, Nanna, the daughter of Neps, burst with grief and died. She also was then carried to the ship, when the pyre was lit; the God of Thunder consecrating it with his hammer. A dwarf, called Lit, ran before the feet of Thor, who thrust him, with his foot, into the fire, so that this pigmy creature also was burnt. Many guests were present at the funeral: first Odin; with him, Frigg and the Walkyres; and Odin's ravens; and Freyr in his car, drawn by the boar Gullinbursti, or Golden-bristles. Heimdall came, riding on his stallion Gulltopp, or Golden-plaits. Freyja appeared in her cat-drawn chariot. A great many Mountain-Giants also were

present. Odin laid the ring Draupnir on the pyre; wherefrom it obtained the quality that, every ninth night, eight equally beautiful golden rings dropped from it. Together with Baldur, his steed, with all its trappings, was burnt.²⁴

I have alluded to the particulars of this tale, because it has its practical significance, as well as its mythic beauty. It was a custom of the sea-faring northern race to light a pyre for a viking on his boat, and then to let the boat drift out to sea. In the Baldur myth quoted, this custom is transferred to the divine circle in Asgard. The ship *Hringhorn*, which the Æsir have a difficulty in moving after the death of the sunny God of Light, is interpreted as signifying the Sun itself. The Titaness who helps in moving it, and whose name is identical with the fiery element, represents, as the whole Giant race in Germanic and other mythologies does, the elementary powers of Nature, which were in a great measure held to be superior to the later-fashioned deities, who rather typify the finished forms of life. Baldur's wife, Nanna, the daughter of Neps, is, from the Norse word '*neppr*,' explained as the bud of flowers: a fit companion of the representative of sunny summertime. The death of the God of Light naturally entails the death of the flowery bud. The same pyre consumes them both.

Lit, the dwarf, is interpreted by Uhland, who has exerted himself so powerfully to find out the key of myths, as the rich tint of summer; from the word '*lit*'—that is, colour. Colour dies when the God of Summer dies. The consecration of the pyre by the hammer of Thor symbolises the sacredness of the flame in which the corpse was to be consumed. In Germanic mythology, the souls were supposed to

²³ *Hávamál*, 80. (*At qvældi skal dag leyfa, kono er brendur.*)

²⁴ *Gylfaginning*; or, *the Infatuation of Gylfi*, 49.

have come earthwards on a ray of lightning—like a flame. On the wings of the flame, which rises heavenwards from the pyre, they therefore return to their original home. Odin and Frigg are present at Baldur's funeral as his progenitors. Freyr, a sun-god himself, whose golden-bristled boar signifies the rays of the fiery orb, makes a good show at a ceremony of fire-burial. So does Heimdall, the guardian of the bridge Bifröst, over which the Æsir daily ride—in other words, of the heaven and earth-spanning rainbow, the red colour in which was assumed to be a flame. The idea of Light is connected even with Freyja, the goddess of love—another mourner at Baldur's obsequies. At night, when gliding over the earth, Freyja was said to leave after her a streak of rosy shimmer, so bright that the wayfarer who had mistaken his path could right himself during the sudden refulgence.

But what is the significance of Draupnir? Whilst the God of Light lived, there was a golden era, so to say, in which Time flowed on with scarcely a perceptible break. With his death, a change comes. The ring which Odin places on the pyre, now produces, every ninth night, eight golden rings—probably a symbol of the nine days which it is supposed made up a week among the ancient Germanic races, as among the early Romans. Lastly, the burning of Baldur's stallion is in accordance with the similar custom at Scandinavian and German cremation rites. Thus Baldur's obsequies are typical in their mythic and their practical meaning.

VII

LIKE the God of Light, so also the heroic figures of the Edda are, after death, placed on the pyre. In that grand tragic lay, the *Third*

Song of Sigurd the Dragon-killer, Brynhild strikes herself with the poniard from grief at Sigurd's murder, which yet she herself has occasioned. In her dying moments she gives orders for the erection of the pyre²⁵:—

One prayer yet I have to pray thee;
'Twill be the last in this my life:
A spacious pile build up in the plain,
That room there be for all of those
Who came to die together with Sigurd!

Surround the pile with shields and garments,
With funeral cloth and chosen suite!
And the Hunic King burn at my own side!

Near the Hunic King my slaves burn,
Adorned each with costly chains:—
Two at our heads, two at our feet;
Two hounds thereto, two hawks as well:
Thus all things are allotted alike.

Let also lie between us both
The ring-set sword, the keen-edged steel,
Again so placed, as when the couch we
ascended,
And were then called by the name of
consorts. . . .

For him will follow five female thralls;
Retainers eight, of gentle race,
Fostered with me, brought up with me,
Whom to his daughter Budli gave.

Much have I said; more would I say
If the God would grant me yet time for
speech.
My voice now falters; my wounds are
swelling.
The truth I spoke. So will I die.

From this description—unless we make great allowance for poetical licence and for the exaggeration which is to be expected in heroic myth—we might conclude that princely funerals, among the ancient Scandinavians, were somewhat similar, in terrible pomp, to those of Eastern races. In Brynhild's *Ride to the Nether World* it is said:—'After Brynhild's death two pyres were made: one for Sigurd, which burnt first; then Brynhild was burnt; and she lay on a chariot which was hung with gorgeous tapestry.'²⁶

²⁵ *Sigurdharkvida Fafnisbana Thridja*, 62–68.

²⁶ *Helreið Brynhildar*.

There is another song referring to Brynhild—the *Lay of Sigurdriða*,²⁷ from which the tale of the Sleeping Beauty is derived, and which also bears poetically upon fire-burial. In it we see Sigurdriða—that is, Brynhild—sleeping on a mountain, in full armour. She is surrounded by flames that rise heavenwards. She had been a Walkyre once, a Virgin of Battle; but Odin, to punish her for having killed a Gothic king to whom he had promised victory, stung her in the veil with a 'sleeping-thorn.' In the *Song of Fáfnir*²⁸ it is said that her sleep was not to be broken by a Prince's son before the Nornes, the Sisters of Fate, had willed it. Now, the *Song of Sigurdriða* relates how Sigurd rides towards Franconian-land, where on a mountain he sees a great fire. On coming nearer, he perceives a structure of shields on which a banner is planted. Sigurd enters, and apparently finds a warrior sleeping with full armour on. Drawing the helmet away, he discovers a woman's features; she is so firmly clad in the harness as if it were grown into her flesh. With his good sword Gram he rips up the armour, first near the head, and then along her arms. She awakes, rises up; whereupon follows a lay, containing words of strange wisdom which the Walkyrian demi-goddess addresses to Sigurd for his future guidance.

I will not deal here specially with the symbolical meaning of Sigurdriða's sleep. It may be enough to say that it evidently refers, like the Baldur myth, to the change between Light and Darkness, between Winter and Summer; the original type of Sigurd being interpreted as a God of Spring, whose touch reawakens dormant Nature. I mention this without wishing to deny the large infusion of historical elements into these heroic myths.

The structure of shields by which Sigurdriða is surrounded, undoubtedly represents a pyre. The tight armour is the thorn-hurdle within which a corpse was placed at a fire-burial. The flames which shoot up to Heaven are those of a lighted pile. The mountain on which the scene is laid, is the hillock, or mound, raised after the funeral ceremony. It is characteristic of all myths that they have their meaning within a meaning; that their imagery lends itself to double or threefold interpretations—not contradictory to, but fitting in with, each other: and so it is also with this *Lay of Sigurdriða*, which contains the germs of the *Dorn-röschen* tale.

Sigurd and Sigurdriða are, in one sense, only heroic transmutations of Odin and Frigg, the deified active and receptive powers of Nature. This process of changing gods into heroes is as frequent as that of changing heroes into gods. In a later stage of mythic decay, Sigurdriða, or Brynhild, becomes the Sleeping Beauty, or *Dorn-röschen*. *La Belle au Bois Dormant* is an Old Frankish tradition of Brunihild. *Dorn-röschen* she is called because she sleeps enchanted within a thickly grown hedge of thorns—which is but a transfiguration of the thorn-hurdle or thorn-hall (*thornechale*, in Old Frankish) that encircled the dead body which was destined to cremation. The horses, the dogs, all things that are with *Dorn-röschen*, also fall entranced asleep. They are the horses, the dogs, and so forth, which were placed on the pyre. The thorn with which Brynhild had been stung by Odin is converted in the fairy-tale into the spindle of a hag. *Dorn-röschen*, like Sigurdriða, is re-awakened by a Prince. She celebrates marriage with him—and so also are vows of eternal union exchanged between

²⁷ *Sigrdrífumál*.

²⁸ *Fáfnismál*, 44.

Sigurd and Sigurdriða in the Eddic song.

VIII

FIRE-BURIAL is again mentioned in the *First Lay of Gudrun*.²⁹ Herborg, the Hunic queen, has lost her seven sons, her father and mother, and brothers four. So she herself has to raise the pyre and to prepare the ride to Hel for them.

As the name of Herborg indicates, she, though called a 'Hunic' queen, must not be supposed to be of Hunnic, but of Germanic origin. Sigurd also is called a 'Hunic' king (*hunskr konungr*) which is but another term for 'German'—like the word 'Southron' (*Sigurðr inn suðrœni*) before mentioned, by which the Scandinavians distinguished the Germans from the Teutonic race in the high North. In other Eddic lays, however, the word 'Hun' and 'Hunic' has the meaning usually attributed to it; Atli, the father of Erp and Eitil, being to all appearance mythically mixed up with the historical Attila, the Scourge of God.

In the *Song of Atli*,³⁰ which strongly foreshadows the subject treated in the *Nibelungen-Lied*, Gudrun—who here stands for the later Kriemhild—takes revenge for the murder of Sigurd. In answer to the appeal of her second husband, Atli, whom she is about to kill, and who implores her for an honourable burial, she says:—

A keel I will buy and a painted cist;
The sheet I will wax to enwrap thy corpse.
All that shall be done, as though we had
loved each other.

The 'keel' seems to refer to cremation on a vessel, or on a pyre shaped in boat-form. The 'painted cist,' on the other hand, and the 'waxed sheet of linen' indicate earth-burial. In the same way, in

the *Lay of Sigurdriða*,³¹ the redeemed Walkyrian maid says:—

For the ninth I tell thee: 'Take care of
the dead,
Wherever thou findest them in the field—
Whether sickness felled them, or the
foundering ship,
Or whether a sword had smitten them.

Let a mound be raised to their memory:
Their heads and hands be washed first!
Combed and dried they shall come to the
coffin.

Then do thou pray for their happy sleep!

Here we see a mixture of funeral rites; perhaps to be accounted for from the occasional interpolation of later Christian ideas into these heathen lays. It may be noted on this occasion that when interment was introduced in the Christian era, some of the previous fire-burial customs were retained among the Germanic nations. Thus, on sepulchral monuments, a cairn, in the shape of a boat, was frequently superposed; the entire corpse being buried beneath this symbol of the Odinic cremation law. At Alamannic and Suabian funerals, the corpse was often placed in the trunk of a tree, hollowed out in the shape of a boat.

It is not to be wondered at that later Christian ideas should occasionally be mixed up with Eddic contents, seeing that this Norse Book was collected, after the introduction of the new faith in Iceland, by Christian converts. They generally preserved the pagan tone with wonderful fidelity. Here and there, however, some different substance and colouring has crept in. In the Younger Edda, in the *Infatuation of Gylfi*, All-father is described in a way utterly contrary to the usual conception of Odin. It is there said of him:—

He lives through all ages, and rules his
whole kingdom, and ordains all things,
great and small. He created Heaven and

²⁹ *Gudhránarkhvida Fyrsta*, 6-8.

³⁰ *Knörr mun ek kaupast ok kistu steinda*. (*Atlamál in Groenlenzku*, 101.)

³¹ *Sigrðrífumál*, 33, 34.

Earth, and the Air, and everything that is in it. . . . This is the chief thing, that he created man, and gave him a spirit which shall live and never die, although the body rots in the earth or is burnt to ashes. Furthermore, all men shall live that are of good behaviour, and be with him at the place which is called Gimil (Heaven), or Wingolf. But bad men shall go down to Hel, and then to Niflhel; that is, below the ninth world.³²

One has only to cast a glance at the subsequent passages of the very same tale to see that the above is a Christian interpolation, superadded on the principle which the Fathers of the Church, especially Origen and Chrysostom, systematically employed and recommended for pious purposes. In sections 4-9, and 51, of this same *Infatuation of Gylfi*, the world is *not* created by Odin alone, but by the three sons of Bór—Odin, Wili, and We; and they create it out of the limbs of the previous giant-form, Ymir. So also, man is *not* created by Odin alone, but by the three gods; and they fashion man and woman out of two trees. Bad men, again, are *not* sent exclusively to Hel; heroes also go there. Lastly, Odin does *not* live through all ages, but dies, like Thor, at the great fiery catastrophe which occurs at the end of times. In such contradictory statements, in one and the same poem, the Norse Scripture does not stand alone. We have to distinguish, therefore, between the old text and a later interpolation, the object of which, perhaps, was to render the transition from heathenism to Christianity more easy.

Though, in the *Song of Atli*, Gudrun speaks of a 'keel' as well as of a 'painted cist,' or coffin, for her husband Atli, in a subsequent

song, named *Gudrun's Incitement*,³³ in which reference is made to the former lay, she calls for the erection of a pyre when she herself is about to die. Musing, before death, on the love borne to her by her first consort, who had been treacherously slain, she exclaims in mingled words of woe and of hopeful reunion:—

Remember, Sigurd, what we together said,
When on our bed we both were sitting:
That thou, O brave one, wouldst come
to me

From the hall of Hel to fetch me back!

Now build, ye Jarls! the oaken pile,
That high it may rise under Heaven's
vault.

May the fire burn a breast full of woes,
The flames round my heart its sorrows
melt!

May more peace be given to all men's
minds,

All women's sorrows be lessened,
If they hear to the end this song of grief.

IX

WHEN we turn over, from the poetical records of the Northern race, to those in which the mythic element somewhat recedes before a more distinct historical tradition, we find it stated, in Saxo's *Danish History*, that when the Saxon king, Gelder, had been slain in war by King Hother of Denmark, his body was cremated. The obsequies were conducted according to the most beautiful rite. The pile was raised by making use of the boats of the vanquished. No sign of respect for the dead was wanting, and a prominent mound was erected over the ashes.³⁴

In the same way, Saxo describes the fire-burial of Harald Hyldetand, when King Ring ordered a similar construction of a pyre.³⁵ All the

³² *Gylfaginning*, 3.

³³ *Gudhrúnarkvæði*, 19-21.

³⁴ Gelderum quoque, Saxonie regem, eodem consumptum bello, remigum suorum cadaveribus superjectum, ac rogo navigiis extracto impositum, pulcherrimo funeris obsequio extulit. Cineres ejus perinde ac regii corporis reliquias, non solum insigni tumulo tradidit, verum etiam plenis venerationis exequiis decoravit. (Saxo Grammaticus, *Hist. Dan.* iii. 41, ed. Steph. J. Stephanus.)

³⁵ Saxo, viii.

weapons, golden trinkets, and other movable property belonging to Harald, were thrown into the fire. The ashes were collected and buried, with the remnants of his weapons and his horse, on Seeland. Ships, it may be as well to remark here, were at that time rather small craft, so that we need be less astonished at their frequent destruction for the purpose of obsequies. In later times the dead kings were not seldom placed in their boats and buried with them in the earth.

The dog of the Norse warrior was burnt with him. It is much forgotten now what important part a ferocious kind of dogs once played in the more barbarous warfare of our ancestors, down to a comparatively recent time. The Kimbrians, at the time of Marius, brought such dogs with them across the Alps. In Arnkiel's curious work³⁶ it is stated that Henry VIII. of England sent to the Emperor Karl V., together with four hundred soldiers, four hundred dogs, with iron collars. So far as it can be made out from historical sources, the custom of burning horses and dogs, at the funeral of chieftains, was more regularly observed in Scandinavia than in Germany. To this day, a custom prevails in many countries of placing the arms of an officer of high rank on his coffin, and of leading his horse after the hearse. This custom has come down from early times through the Middle Ages. It is a symbolical remnant of an ancient sacrificial performance; its meaning being no longer understood by the many.

Among the Northmen abroad, fire-burial was continued down to

the tenth century. Regino, referring to the year 879, says:—'The Normans, having burnt the corpses of their men, fled during the night, and turned their steps towards their fleet.'³⁷

In Orkney and Shetland, the heathen Northmen practised, for at least a century and a half, the fire-burial customs which they had brought with them from Norway.³⁸ The same was done in the tenth century, by the Warangian rulers of Russia, who had given the country a Norse dynasty and aristocracy, and probably even its name. A striking picture of those Germanic cremation rites in Russia has been handed down to us by Ahmed Ibn Fozlan, an Arab ambassador from the Khalife Al Moktador, who, in 921, wrote a report of his journey.³⁹ His description is one of the most graphic; the minutest details being given. 'You Arabs'—said one of the Northmen in Russia to Ahmed Ibn Fozlan—'are fools! You take the man whom you must have loved and honoured, and put him down in the earth, where vermin and worms devour him. We, on the contrary, burn him up in a twinkling; and he goes straight to Paradise.'

So also Sidonius speaks of fire-burial among the Goths. An idea of Anglo-Saxon cremation may be gathered from *Beowulf*. I may, however, first mention that when the hoary-headed Skild, Beo-Wulf's father, dies, he is brought, according to his wish, to the sea-shore, and placed in the hold of a vessel⁴⁰ with all his treasures, his weapons, and armour. It is not said that either he or his things were burnt. The ship was simply allowed to drift out

³⁶ *Die Cimbrische Heyden-Religion* (1703).

³⁷ Pertz, *Monum. Germ.* i. 591.

³⁸ Introduction, by Mr. Joseph Anderson, to the *Orkneyinga Saga*. (Translated by Ión Andrússon Hjaltalin and Goudie.) 1873.

³⁹ See *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquarians of Scotland*. Vol. ix.

⁴⁰ *álædon þá leófne þeóden,
beága bryttan, on bearm scipes
maerne be máste.*

to sea; and the epic almost ironically adds that 'men do not know who got the gifts.'

At Hnäf's funeral, on the other hand, the pyre is distinctly alluded to in *Beowulf*. A very full description is given of the fire-burial of Beo-Wulf himself. Before dying, he asks his warriors to raise for him, after the funereal fire, a mound upon the cliffy height at Hronesnaess, so that it may stand as a lasting memorial, ever before the eyes of his people; and sailors, tossed on Ocean's dark waves, may point to it and say: 'This is Beo-Wulf's Mound!' The epic goes on:

Him þa gegiredon Geata leóðe
 Ad on eorðan unvæclene,
 helmum behongen, hildebordum,
 beorhtum byrnum, svá he bēna vās;
 Alegeðon þá tō-middes mærne peóðen
 hláed hiofende, hláford leófne.
 Geatland's men for him then made
 A pyre broad, most firmly built,
 With helms bedeck'd, with war-shields
 hung,
 And armour bright, as he them bade.
 In the midst they laid, the sorrowing
 heroes,
 Their mighty ruler, their beloved lord.

Ten days were spent in raising over the burnt corpse a tumulus and a monument. Precious stones and ornaments were buried with it. Twelve noble warriors rode round the hillock, with words of grief and songs of praise, lauding Beo-Wulf's bravery and his glorious deeds.

X

The Thuringians of Germany burnt their dead⁴¹ down to the seventh century. In an epistle of Winfrid, or Boniface, the so-called Apostle of the Germans, the custom of incineration among the Saxons is referred to. Karl the Great, who displayed such zeal in fighting against the pagan and freedom-

loving hosts of Witukind, that on a single day he had nearly six thousand prisoners of war decapitated, whilst at other times he drove the vanquished rebels by shoals into the rivers, there to be baptised—Karl the Great made a special enactment against cremation:—'If anyone lets the body of a dead person be consumed by fire, and the bones be reduced to ashes, according to the rites of the heathens, he shall suffer capital punishment.'⁴²

Albeit there is no direct testimony for cremation among the Goths of Ulfilas, yet, as Grimm has shown, we are fully warranted in concluding that they, too, had practised fire-burial. A few words in the Gothic bishop's translation of the Bible are sufficient proof. When he has to translate the word 'grave,' he uses the expression *aurahi*, or *aurahjó*, which is equal to *ráφος*, in which a burnt corpse, among the Greeks, was deposited. For 'thorns,' or thorn-bush—in a passage in St. Luke, vi. 44—he uses the Gothic *aihratundi*. The literal meaning is 'horse-burner.' The hawthorn was, no doubt, so called because it was used for the sacrifice of horses among the pagan Goths.

Again, though there is no written testimony for cremation among the tribes of Upper Germany, which at an early time were converted to Christianity, and therefore had to give up their ancient burial custom, still a great many tumuli on Bavarian, Alamannic, and Burgundian soil, which have been laid open, and which are evidently neither of Celtic nor of Roman origin, show by their cinerary urns, the remnants of a cremation performance. Some of these graves, from the coins found in them, are held to be as late as the sixth century. There are also various Old High German and Middle

⁴¹ Capite amputato, cadaver more gentiliū ignibus traderetur. (*Vita Arnulfi Melensis*.)

⁴² Cap. vii. (Pertz, 3, 49.)

High German locutions referring to the pile (*pigo*, or *pîga*), the pyre (*eit*), the thorn-cover (*thornechale*), and the hurdle (*hurt*, or *hort*)—all pointing to the burning of bodies. In many of these latter cases, it is, however, not cremation that is meant, but penal execution upon the body of real or supposed criminals.

The fact is, when fire-burial as a sanitary practice, founded on a religious ordinance, was abolished by the introduction of a new creed, the pyre and the hurdle were retained as modes of criminal punishment, or for the purpose of laying ghosts and wraiths to rest! According to early Swedish laws, witches were burnt. The same was done—and this is a noteworthy point—with the corpses of persons whose troubled spirits were said to haunt and do harm to living men. Thus cremation was considered a cure against the horrors of nightly apparition. One superstition was fought by means of another.

In German criminal law, in the Middle Ages, the expression frequently occurs: '*mit der hürde richten*'—to judge with the hurdle. In the *Sachsenspiegel*, the law code of Lower Germany, of the thirteenth century, the expression 'to burn upon the hurdle' (that is, at the stake) is employed in an enactment directed against heretics, sorcerers, and criminals.⁴³ Whilst not tolerating cremation of the dead, though public health benefited by it, the Roman priesthood made cremation of the living flesh of heretics and professors of witchcraft (meaning, in many cases, the adherents of the old Germanic belief) a cruel State institution.

XI

THE remembrance of fire-burial lingered in the mind of the German

people for a long time after the introduction of Christianity, in spite of the Roman Catholic clergy having degraded the destruction of bodies by the agency of fire to a mark of infamy upon those that came under its operation. Such popular remembrance of a Burning Age was kept up in the very names attaching to certain localities as burning, i.e. burial-places. But, gradually, the meaning contained in these names became obscured and lost to the general understanding.

In German fairy-tales which are current to this day, the pyre is repeatedly mentioned, but only as a means of punishment—for instance, in *The Twelve Brothers*; or in *Marien-Kind*,⁴⁴ where also the thorn-bush occurs, which a princely deliverer cuts through. In the tenth and eleventh centuries, the tradition of fire-burial was still strong among the people of Lower Germany, who had last been converted to the new religion. In the fifteenth century (1475), a burial-place in Southern Germany is mentioned, called '*im brand zen haidengrebern*,' which explains itself as 'The Burning-Place near the Heathen Graves.' Mediæval poetry also dimly preserved a recollection of the old custom. In a poem by Stricker, on Karl the Great, it is said that after the battle of Runzêvâl, or Roncesvalles, a great miracle was wrought. At day-break it was found that a hawthorn twig had grown through every dead heathen. Near each Christian's head, a beautiful white flower had sprouted up.

Zwei ungeliche wunder
sach man an in beiden.
durch ieslichen heiden,
der dâ ze tôde lac erslagen,
was gewachsen ein hagen. . . .
die kristen lügen hin dan.
dâ sach man ieslichem man

⁴³ Swilch cristen man ungeloubic ist, oder mit zeoubere umme get, oder mit vergifnisse, unde des verwunden wirt, den sal man uf der hurt burnen. (*Sachsenspiegel*, Art. 13. § 17.)

⁴⁴ *Grimm's Tales*, 3. 9.

bi sinem houppe stân
 eine wize bluomen wolgetân.
 do die gotes pilgerine
 von des lichten tages schîne
 die hagedorne sâhen,
 si begunden dar gâhen,
 und sâhen die heiden sô geschant,
 daz bi den schanden wart erkant,
 daz die sêle verloren wâren
 unde aller gnâden erbâren.⁴⁵

The hawthorn twig is here the symbol of fire-burial, though perhaps poetically misapplied to a people who did not use cremation. The beautiful white flower signifies the martyrdom of the Christian warriors in their struggle against unbelievers. 'God's pilgrims,' in Stricker's poem, thus had no difficulty in finding out whose soul was saved, and whose destined to eternal damnation. The hawthorn near them was the visible mark of disgrace. It is curious to learn that *Hagedorn* (Hawthorn), in the Middle Ages, actually became a nickname in Germany. Probably it meant then an infidel. It would be interesting to know whether that name was so handed down from olden times to the excellent German poet whose songs have something of a pagan, Anakreontic tinge.

The 'peculiar kinds of wood' with which, according to Tacitus, German chieftains were cremated, may partly refer to the hawthorn, partly to the juniper tree and other bushes that emit a fragrant smell. Olaus Magnus⁴⁶ records that the juniper tree was used for the fire-burial of princely persons. For others, oak and beech wood was used. The rose-gall (*Sentis canina*) is even now called in German either *Dornrose* or *Schlafrose* (sleeping-rose), and a mossy excrescence on it *Schlafapfel* (sleeping-apple). German plant-names having much reference to mythological ideas, it seems obvious to connect the name of this plant with the sleep-thorn used by Odin for entrancing Brynhild, the later Dorn-röschen. In

other words, we would come here upon the plainer fact of the thorn-rose, or rose-gall, having been used in cremation-rites at the burial of more distinguished persons.

Jakob Grimm, who has carefully collected the facts bearing upon this subject, points out that the tumuli themselves, which were raised after cremation, had frequently a hawthorn plantation upon them. Such plantations were considered sacred. The axe was not to touch them. Ancient grave-mounds in Schonen are called either *bålhögen* (burning-hills), or *tornhögen* (thorn-hills). The tradition of the sacredness of such hawthorn has been kept up in this country also down to a recent time. According to a note in the Statistical Account of Scotland, 'there is a quick-thorn of a very antique appearance, for which the people have a superstitious veneration. They have a mortal dread to lop off or cut any part of it, and affirm, with a religious horror, that some persons who had the temerity to hurt it, were afterwards punished for their sacrilege.'

XII

WHEN we remember the views of many nations of antiquity, as well as the former Hindoo practice of *suttee*, it will scarcely be wondered at that among the Norsemen, and among some of the ruder Getic tribes of old, there should have been the custom of the voluntary sacrifice of bereaved widows. Among the German people, no trace of this, to our feelings so utterly repulsive, practice can be made out. Tacitus does not mention it. The passage on cremation in his *Germania*, which I have before mentioned, would be differently worded had widow-sacrifice been in existence among the race which was located between the Maas, the Danube, and the Baltic. The very expression: 'For women it is meet to utter wails; for men,

⁴⁵ Stricker, 10854.

⁴⁶ *Historia de Gentibus Goth. &c.* iii. cap. 11.

to keep up remembrance,' is a proof that *suttee*, even in the fullest voluntary form, was not an institution among the Germans of old.

Their Gallic neighbours had, though not the practice of widow-burning, still that of burning serfs and retainers on the pyre of a prominent man. From Cæsar we must, moreover, conclude that there was, among that Keltic race, not the least respect for the personal rights of women, or of menials and dependants.⁴⁷ It was not so among the Germans whom Cæsar and Tacitus describe. The ideas of personal right were far more developed among them. Over the very serfs the master had no right of life and death. If slaves were slain, it was rather from a sudden impulse of anger than because the law permitted it. The children of freemen and serfs grew up together indiscriminately; no specially tender care being taken of the former. Only with riper age, and with the display of manly virtue, the distinction between the freeman and the serf became visible. Among those German tribes where kingly government was established, the liberated serf could attain even to high administrative position.⁴⁸

Women, among the Germans of old, were held in the highest estimation. Their position was far higher than that of the female sex among the Semites, the Hellenes, the Romans, or the Kelts. Though not equals of men in duty, and therefore not loaded with the responsibilities of men, something sacred and prophetic attached to them. Their counsels did not remain disregarded, nor their opinion ne-

glected.⁴⁹ The names of Veleda, of Aurinia, and many others, are cited as typical of the remarkable influence exercised by German women. Captivity, whilst being loathed more than death itself by German warriors, yet had less terror for them than the idea of seeing women of their own race fall into the hands of the foe. The Romans, therefore, with the cold calculation of statecraft, frequently exacted, from a temporarily vanquished German tribe, some female hostages as a pledge of peace. Mainly monogamous, the Germans possessed marriage laws which excited the wondering admiration of the Roman historian. Not the bride presented a morning gift to the bridegroom, but he to her: namely, cattle; a bridled horse; and a shield, with a sword and spear. The wife was not to consider herself outside the pale of man's thoughts and perils. During a battle, German women, together with the very children, remained near their husbands and relations. The presence of women was regarded as a most sacred testimony for the bravery of men; their applause as the highest that could be earned. Mothers and wives kept close to the battleground to tend wounds, to bring food, and to exhort men.⁵⁰ The bearing of a Thusnelda in captivity elicited words of surprise and admiring awe from the Roman victors themselves.

Under such laws and customs, and with the prevalence of such views concerning the relation between the two sexes, is it possible to believe that widow-sacrifice in any form should have been practised among the pagan Germans?

⁴⁷ Viri in uxores, sicuti in liberos, vitæ necisque habent potestatem. Et quum patrum familias illustriore loco natus decessit, ejus propinqui conveniunt: et de morte si res in suspicionem venit, de uxoris in servilem modum quaestionem habent: et si compertum est, igni atque omnibus tormentis ex cruciatas interficiunt. (Cæsar, *De Bell. Gall.* vi. 18.)

⁴⁸ Tacitus, *Germ.* c. xx. and xxv.

⁴⁹ Inesse quin etiam sanctum aliquid et providum putant, nec aut consilia earum aspernantur aut responsa negligunt. (Tacitus, *Germ.* viii.)

⁵⁰ Tacitus, *Germ.* vii. viii. xviii.

XIII

OF the Thracians in Eastern Europe, who were probably of Germanic origin, Herodotus relates that the women frequently disputed between themselves as to which of them should be allowed to ascend the pyre together with the departed husband.⁵¹ The same is related of the Getae—undoubtedly a people of Germanic origin. It is stated that the Getic women left behind wept at their dereliction, envying her who was allowed to sacrifice herself.⁵² The same was stated by Latin authors about Indian women.

Among the Scandinavians, the custom of voluntary widow-sacrifice was once deeply rooted. There was no enforced law; but women themselves—and a tolerably strong-willed race they were—assented to the practice, probably from a religious notion; often from highly-wrought feelings of union for life and death. The voluntary character of widow-sacrifice appears from an Eddic Lay,⁵³ where Brynhild says, after the death of Sigurd:—

More seemly 'twould be if our sister
Gudrun
Were to mount the pyre with her consort
and lord—
Had good spirits to her but given the
counsel,
Or had she a soul resembling mine!

Gudrun, however, does not mount the pyre. She remains alive for the purpose of revenge, whilst Brynhild, inflamed with love for Sigurd, stabs herself with the poniard, and asks to be burnt at his side (*brenni mér inn húnka á líði aðra.*)

The monk Oddo relates how a

Swedish queen would not remain with her husband because the latter had vowed he would not live ten years after the death of his foe Styrbiorn. This shows that, in the popular view, conjugal fidelity was measured by the standard of conjoint death. The queen in question, therefore, thought it prudent to withdraw at once from the fatal bond. On the other hand, there is a passage in Saxo⁵⁴ where Hermutrud says to her husband, King Amleth:—‘That is a detestable wife who would scruple to die with her consort’ (*detestabilem inquam feminam, quæ marito morte conferri formidaret*).

Saxo also tells the touching story of Sygne, which has been so frequently treated in mediæval poems. Sygne, the King of Denmark’s daughter, was married, against her father’s will, to Hagbarth, duke in Sweden. Captured by the Danish King, Hagbarth asks his wife whether, if her father were to inflict death upon him, she would enter upon another marital vow. Sygne replies:—

Believe me, dearest! I shall die with thee,
If changeful Fate shall have such mischief wrought.

Life’s span I shall not care more to prolong,
When to the mound thou’rt driven by dark death.⁵⁴

Thereupon Sygne prevails upon her maids to die with her. They all twist ropes from their veils, and hang themselves, after having set fire to the hall. Hagbarth, led to the place of execution, sees from afar the well-known chamber in fiery glow, and the figure of Sygne within it. Death has no longer any terror for him: Sygne’s love,

⁵¹ Herodotus v. 5. ἔχει γυναῖκας ἕκαστος πολλάς· ἐπεὶ δὲ τις αὐτῶν ἀποθάνῃ, κρίσις γίνεται μεγάλη τῶν γυναικῶν, καὶ φίλων σπουδαὶ ἰσχυραὶ περὶ τοῦδε, ἥτις αὐτῶν ἐφιλέτο μάλιστα ὑπὸ τοῦ ἀνδρός.

⁵² Pomponius Mela, ii. c. 2:—‘No feminis quidem segnis est animus. Super mortuorum virorum corpora interfici simulque sepeliri, votum eximium habent: et quia plures simul singulis nuptæ sunt, cuius id sit decus, apud iudicatos magno certamine affectant. Moribus datur, estque maximum laetum, cum in hoc contenditur, vincere. Moerent aliae vocibus, et cum acerbissimis planetibus efferrunt.’

⁵³ Sigurdharkvidha, iii. 59.

⁵⁴ Saxo, iv.

proved to the end, is his consolation; and he dies cheerfully.⁵⁵

Not to women, however, was the custom of self-sacrifice confined. Friends, among the ancient Norsemen, frequently did the same. Twelve men of a warlike retinue sometimes 'went with the chieftain into the grave-hill,' in order to prove their devotion unto death. In some cases it would seem that the 'hill' was only a hiding-place, where the chieftain himself, with some of his trustiest men, kept concealed before a victorious enemy. From this practice it can be more easily understood that so many stories should have arisen about enmountained heroes and great warriors, albeit for not a few of those tales a strictly mythological explanation can be given, as I have shown elsewhere in an essay on *The Barbarossa Legend*.

For us it is difficult to imagine a state of society in which the bonds of marriage, or of companionship-in-arms, were considered so strong as to entail death all round when the main link was broken. To those who accuse antique nations of cruelty on that account, Grimm replies that such self-sacrifice cannot justly be stigmatised as cruel, whilst 'there was real cruelty when, among Christian nations, heretics and wretches were in masses delivered over to the flames in the most inhuman manner by the infatuated zeal of priests'—who burnt men and women alive!

XIV

AFTER cremation, the Scandinavians buried the ashes of the dead in the open field, or in groves, when flowers and herbs were planted on the tomb. Probably the burial in groves and woods was the more general custom. Hence, in *The Song of Harbard*, graves are metaphorically called 'the wood-dwell-

ings of the old.'⁵⁶ The tumulus of those who had been more distinguished in life was encircled with *bauta*-stones—a word variously interpreted as meaning either fence-stones, or sacrificial stones. At any rate, they were also memorial stones; various signs being engraven on them—such as serpents, hammers, or crosses. The hammer of Thor was one of the numerous forms of the pre-Christian cross. Among the most different races all over the world, the Cross has been found; and those who have given any attention to the subject know well that in numerous religions this symbol is by no means connected with the idea of martyrdom.

Graves were held in high veneration among the pagan Scandinavians. It was assumed that protecting deities dwelt near them. Fire-burial had certainly not the effect of blunting or destroying the feelings of respect for the memory of the departed. The runic inscriptions on gravestones were invariably of the simplest kind; no highly-flown words of praise, but a plain, unadorned sign of remembrance. Yet, such was the reverence paid to the last dwelling-place of man, that no desecrating hand could be laid on those heathen monuments even some time after the change of faith had been operated. Only when two or three generations of converts had died away, such devastation became a system.

Then, these runic stones were built into Christian churches, or used for common edifices; for bridges, fences, even for seats before house-doors! Arnkiel, who wrote after Sir Thomas Browne,⁵⁷ and who occupied the position of a Protestant pastor in Schleswig-Holstein, gives a number of instances from Denmark and Schleswig. Thus, he says, the splendid runic stone of King Gorm,

⁵⁵ Saxo, 7, 130.

⁵⁶ *Hydriotaphia*; or Urn Burial. 1658.

⁵⁷ *Harbardslíodh*, 45.

of Denmark, was, at his time, embodied in a stone fence in a parish of Schonen. The runic gravestone of Tufe was to be seen in the wall of a church at Sandby, in Seeland. Near Apenrade, a church was partly built of such rune-inscribed stones. Not to speak of the want of respect for the relics of generations gone by, a great many valuable monuments of historical and literary import were in this way recklessly maltreated, and often disfigured or destroyed.

XV

THOSE who object to fire-burial, as if it were a desecration of the human body, will see from the above that our Germanic forefathers, even when little advanced yet in civilisation, were by no means forgetful of raising a record over the ashes of their dead. There are some who oppose cremation from the point of view of orthodox theology. Now, the Germanic tribes not only believed as strongly as any Christian could in the immortality of the soul, but also in a resurrection of the flesh. Yet this did not prevent them from changing their earlier custom of interment into that of fire-burial.

In their view, the soul—when leaving its heavenly home in the flowery realm of the Goddess of Love—was first carried earthwards, as a divine spark, in the shape of a flash of lightning, to be embodied here in the form of a child. To carry the soul back towards the Abode of Blessedness on the wings of a flame, seemed to them no greater miracle than its wonderful descent to, and incarnation on, earth. Who can say whether the introduction of fire-burial did not eventually turn out even a means of fortifying, among

our ancestors, the belief in the immortality of the soul? They were Fire and Sun worshippers since the days when they had dwelt as rude hunters and herdsmen on the plains of Central Asia. At Ariovist's time, according to Cæsar, they adored the Sun, a God of Fire, and the Moon. The Sun and the flickering flame represented to them—as to the Indians,⁵⁸ the Persians, the Greeks, and the Neo-Platonics—pre-eminently the vivifying powers, the spark of life, the essence of the soul. There have been, and there are, races to whom Fire is so sacred that on that very account they refrain from cremation. The Germanic nations, too, believed in the sacredness of the flame. For that very reason they made it the hallowed conveyance of the dead. The twirling fiery tongues which rose from the pyre towards Heaven did not fill them with the idea of final destruction, but rather with that of ennobling purification. They were easily brought to see in it a cleansing of what they conceived to be man's eternal being from mere earthly dross. They looked upon the flame as the true conductor of the dead, as the emancipator of the soul. The application of fire to the corpse appeared to them to be a means even of appeasing and purifying the soul: a view we also find among the Greeks⁵⁹ and Romans.⁶⁰ The very idea of Purgatory in the Roman Catholic Church has been a graft on this early pagan view.

The strength of the Germanic belief in the resurrection of the flesh may be seen from the elaborateness with which this idea was worked out and upheld among a race so systematically given to fire-burial. The departed leaders of men, who had fallen in battle, were supposed

⁵⁸ 'I am the fire that dwells in the bodies of all things which have life,' says Krishna in the *Bhagavad-Gîtâ*; or, 'I am the brightness in the flame, the vitality in all beings,' according to the translation used in Mr. Hurrychund Chintamon's recently published *Commentary on the Text of the Bhagavad-Gîtâ*.

⁵⁹ See *Iliad*, vii. 410.

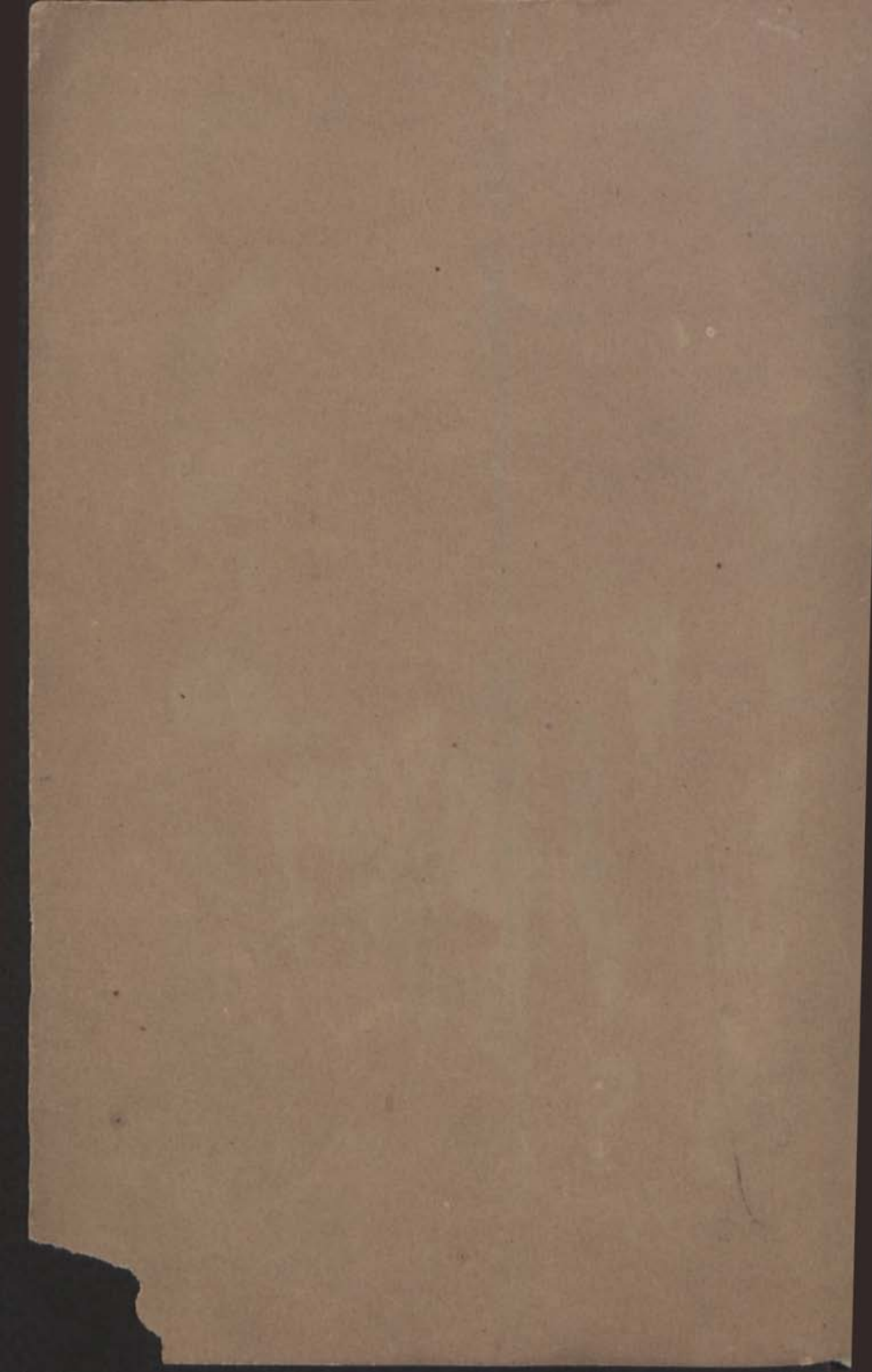
⁶⁰ Lucanus, *Pharsalia*, ix. 9.

to dwell bodily in Walhalla with Odin, in the golden, shield-adorned hall called Gladsheim, the roof of which is built of shafts. There the heroes fight and feast, in full physical vigour. With Thor, in Thrudheim, the common folk were assumed to lodge. Other hosts of the dead dwelt with Freyr, in Alfheim. Others with his sister Freyja—for of her it was said that, like Odin, she could choose daily one-half of those who had fallen in battle, to receive them as her companions in Folkwang. Again, with Hel, in Niflheim, dwelt those who died, not in battle, but from old age or from illness. According to a passage in the Younger Edda, which I have before quoted, 'bad men travel Hel-wards;' but the whole text of this passage shows it to be a later addition. In the older, poetic Edda, there are references even to the dwelling of heroes with Hel, who, like Demeter, was regarded as a Mother of Life as well as of Death, ruling over the nine nether worlds.

The assertion of an English bishop that cremation must injure the belief in bodily resurrection—a view ridiculed already by pagan Latin controversialists—is certainly not tenable, when looked at from a historical point of view. Those who incline towards the miraculous are never stopped by minor considerations. The belief in the Supernatural is not affected by this burial question; or how could the strictly orthodox reconcile their theory with the fact of many

people losing their lives accidentally by fire? Are those who have the misfortune of being so burnt also excluded from continued existence in another world? Will either Catholic or Protestant assent to this logical consequence? And if not, can the premiss be upheld by them?

Again: are the Christian martyrs whom Nero is said to have burnt for a night's sport, doomed, in the opinion of orthodox Christians, to eternal destruction? Or will the adherents of the Reformed faith acknowledge that the early martyrs of their own creed, who perished, like Huss and Hieronymus, at the stake, were, by this process of cruel cremation of the living flesh, effectually disposed of for all eternity? These and similar questions, which suggest themselves too obviously to require amplification, need only to be put, in order to show at once to the most thoughtless that objections to fire-burial cannot be maintained even from the point of view of strict orthodox theology. As to men of a scientific way of thinking, their opinion has been made up long since. For them, the question of Cremation resolves itself into one of public health,—to be settled in the public interest, though with every due regard for the memory of the dead. And if, in doing so, we have to revert to a custom which was surrounded, among our forefathers, with a poetical halo, that very fact is apt to recommend a practice most urgently required for the welfare of the living.



Jan. 1870

Almost Wrecked.

33 225

"I shall resign with courage as I shall have the pleasure of a monopoly all the evening."

"Unless Mr. Ravenswood accompanies us," suggested the feline M Folcade, with that indefinite something about him which could compare to nothing so well as purring.

"He has an engagement at half-past eight," answered Westcliffe, smoothly, "so the monopoly holds good."

"Eh bien, comme vous voulez."

(To be continued.)

Cochran, William

What are we to do with our Dead?

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The common rites of sepulture bestow,
To soothe a father's and a mother's woe;
Let their large gifts procure an urn at least,
And Hector's ashes in his country rest."

—Pope. *Homer. Iliad, Book xxii.*

How to dispose of our dead is a problem which is daily increasing in pressure upon the inhabitants of all our large cities and towns, and which, in proportion to the difficulty experienced in its solution, demands immediate and careful consideration. The day has gone past when we could honestly agree with Sir William Dethick, Garter King at Arms, who conducted the funeral of Mary, Queen of Scots, when he says (1599) "The best kind and manner of sepulture for all men, after theyre estates and degrees considered, is to be honourably and decently put into graves and covered with earth." At the same time we are scarcely disposed to follow the example of the persons whom the gallant old knight mentions in the latter part of the paragraph:—"I find that antiently most people have consumed their dead bodies in fire; though some did *eat them*, esteeming theyre bellies to be the most precious place for the burial of their parents, and so opinioned were they, that they would not be diswaded from it, no less than others could be perswaded thereunto."

Nor need we produce statistics to show the injury inflicted on otherwise thriving communities by the results of our ordinary method of interment (comparatively few being able to afford intermural burial), as the evils of crowded graveyards are perfectly well-known; never-

theless, in opposition to recognised facts and laws, but in deference to time-honoured prejudices, we continue to lay our dead in the satiated earth around us, merely because such was the custom of our forefathers. Granted that interment and its accessories may be the most ancient and imposing manner of burial, and that the language of Milton, in his Epitaph on Shakspeare, is not much exaggerated when he sings—

“Then thou our fancy of itself bereaving,
Dost make us marble with too much conceiving;
And so sepulcher'd in such pomp doth lie,
That kings for such a tomb would wish to die.”

it does not follow that it is the best ; on the contrary, it must be apparent to every candid mind, thoroughly conversant with the subject, that inhumation, to those inhabiting large centres of civilization, is at once the worst and most dangerous, therefore altogether antagonistic to modern ideas of social economy and refinement, as the bursting graves, “where human harvests grow,” and the sickening odour of corruption after rain, observed in every metropolitan cemetery, abundantly testify.

It may be said that interment was the only method of sepulture recognised by the ancient Jews ; that Christianity having emanated from that nation, proselytes to its faith naturally followed the Hebrew burial customs ; and that the practice of burning the dead, followed by the Greeks during the Trojan war (apparent from Homer's description of the funeral pile of Patroclus) expired with the overthrow of Paganism ; yet, after a careful examination into the merits of other plans for the disposal of the dead, it will be strange, indeed, should any one persist in clinging to our present gloomy, tawdry, expensive, and pernicious custom.

Two leading principles seem to have actuated the ancient Pagans and others in the practice of cremation in preference to interment, i.e., in order to save the bodies of their dead from mutilation by wild animals or enemies ; and to emancipate the living from a fear of in-

fection during the mortality of a plague. The present Hindoo custom, and the cremation of the bodies of King Saul and his sons by the men of Jabesh-Gilead, (1 Samuel xxxi. 12) are illustrations of the first, whilst the prophet Amos (vi. 9, 10) appears to indicate a period of tribulation in consequence of an epidemic, which illustrates the second. Fortunately in modern times, in Europe at least, less apprehension for the integrity of the dead, even on the battlefield, exists; but the baleful influences of the charnel-house and the grave in cities and towns, on the health of the living, are yearly becoming too apparent to be longer ignored; too conspicuous now to be even temporarily shrouded or palliated by any flimsy veil of mere social sentiment.

It may not be flattering to our national vanity to be told that centuries ago the same baleful influences were recognized and provided against by several eastern nations. Magellans, a Jesuit missionary, who wrote in the middle of the seventeenth century, says that "in China all persons are prohibited under great penalties to bury their dead within the walls of their cities. It is also lawful when a person dies at a distance from his own house to transport his body from one city or province to another, provided, nevertheless, that they do not bring their dead through the cities, but round about by the walls." It is the fact, too, that in Burmah the dead from the various towns and villages are invariably taken through a special gate or opening on the western side, called "The gate of sorrow," to the public cemeteries, which are always situated in that direction, and at a distance from the haunts of the living. Here, also, it is provided that anyone dying in the suburbs must be taken outside the circuit of the walls to the spot arranged for interment or cremation.

The enemies of cremation fancy they possess several bulwarks surrounding the practice of interment, which they believe to be impregnable, such as—that burning the dead would occasionally defeat the ends of justice in cases of poisoning or mechanically induced death; the nuisance consuming dead bodies in the open air would create; and on account of the blow cremation would inflict on our sable and melan-

choly friends, the undertakers. Although it appears scarcely necessary to notice such trivial objections, yet, in the interest of the public, it may be judicious to refute them. It is well known that only a portion of the viscera is usually examined in cases of suspicious death: such portion might still be retained by the authorities as heretofore, although the cremation of the corpse proceeded, and any suspicion of a violent death might be dissipated or confirmed by official examination previous to the holocaust.

The nuisance which frequent funeral pyres would undoubtedly occasion is probably the strongest argument against cremation which has yet been adduced. As an instance of this it is but fair towards those in favour of interment, to allude to a judicial trial which occurred in India on the 26th June, 1838, reported in the Asiatic Journal, Vol. 25th new series, page 7. A Mr. Grey applied to the resident magistrate for relief, against the nuisance occasioned by the continual burning of dead coolies and other natives in the neighbourhood of his estate near Balanaghur. It appeared that every effort of this gentleman's cook, aided by the most savoury and appetising sauces for which that country is renowned, had failed to impart a relish for dinner, whilst cremation was proceeding in an adjoining ghat, and the wind blew in the complainant's direction. Unfortunately for Mr. Grey it came out in evidence, that burning the dead had been practised at the same spot for some seventy or eighty years, and as this gentleman was but a recent arrival in that part of the country, he could receive no legal redress, so the decision was given against him.

But the advocates for conducting cremation in closed iron vessels, or properly adapted furnaces—such as those constructed for the purpose by Professor Siemens of Dresden—so far from seeking to abolish one crying evil by the creation of a greater, are actuated by the philanthropic hope of eradicating one of the fertile sources of secret water and air pollution, by the application of a scientific remedy at once cheap and effectual, neither ghastly to the eye nor revolting to the other organs of sense, and devoid of ostentation. Even without

any special appliances the retorts of our gasworks might be utilized for the purposes of cheap cremation by friends of the deceased, whose purses were meagerly supplied, yet whose minds had been emancipated from the thralldom of mere sentiment; and in this manner many a dull and useless mortal, who, during life had been at best but a guttering taper, would in his "iron shroud" prove a "burning and a shining light."

Cremation, like every other comparative novelty in this practical age, is more likely to appeal successfully to individual minds when its merits are supported by actual experiment, than when advocated merely as a theory. Accordingly, the paragraph contributed by the Prussian correspondent of the *Times* to that paper of the 27th Sept. on this subject will, no doubt, have been read with interest. It appeared that a congress of physicians and naturalists at the town of Breslau on the 22nd September witnessed a trial of cremation, in which ignited gas was the agent of destruction. A corpse subjected to the incinerating power of this medium parted with nearly all its softer parts during the short space of half-an-hour. After the lapse of a similar period, the bones had almost entirely been consumed; and in the course of another hour scarcely anything remained to indicate that a human form had been operated on.

From the daily papers, we learn that the body of an Englishwoman (Lady Dilke), was burnt at Dresden, on Friday, 9th October, in compliance with her dying injunction, and that the result of the cremation was comprised in a little heap of white ashes, weighing about six pounds.

Still later, we read in the *Daily Telegraph* of another example which occurred in the same city, at the factory of the Messrs. Siemens. On the 7th November, a coffin containing the remains of a German doctor's wife, was introduced into one of the furnaces, and a jet of superheated air directed upon it. Under the influence of the intense glow, the body became rapidly desiccated, was gradually deprived of its solidity and bulk, assumed first a red, then a white heat, and finally

subsided into fine ashes, which were solemnly collected, and deposited in an urn the following day. The process lasted one hour and eighteen minutes, and, assured as we are that nothing occurred during the cremation in the least offensive to the senses, we can readily believe that had the clergy, invited to be present, been sufficiently alive to their own future interests, and true to the national proclivities, they might have consented to officiate on this occasion, using, probably, a modified version of the burial service, so that anything, even sentimentally distressing, could scarcely have happened to mar the impressiveness of the event.

It may, indeed, not be inappropriate at this point to remark, parenthetically, for the information of those recalcitrant Teuton parsons, that burning the dead in China was originally introduced there by the clergy of the beautiful silk-producing province of Kiangnaw, and practised by them at first on the dead of their own order. But with the acute eye for the main chance, which was a distinguishing feature in the cloth in early times, the Buddhist priests soon contrived to extend the benefits of cremation to the laity, and to secure whatever profits it might yield. Observing the difficulty experienced in disposing of their dead by the poor around, on account of the high price of land, the priests built additional furnaces in connexion with their monasteries and called them "Body burning Towers," the use of which was let out for hire. As a philanthropic idea this was highly commendable, but unfortunately the practice degenerated into one of extortion, which continued a public scandal until about the end of the eleventh century, when Imperial lands were granted, and others purchased throughout the province, to be used as cemeteries for the indigent.

Once the shock to public sentiment has been somewhat mitigated by the effacing finger of time, and some well-meaning, but didactic and mistaken Journalists, have ceased to brand cremation as "a desecration of those bodies which Christ died to redeem, suggesting the final doom of the unbelieving and impenitent," the successful experiments just alluded to, and others which are certain, presently, to

follow, on being known to the masses, will have probably more effect in popularising this method of disposing of our dead, than many volumes of learned disquisition could accomplish.

If our undertakers became sufferers in consequence of the hoped-for universal substitution of cremation for interment, we must bear in mind that the change would utilize the talents of a much more elevated and gifted class. Who that has visited and studied the superb collection of antiquities in the British Museum can have failed to note the exquisite proportions and unrivalled beauty of the cinerary urn known as the Barbarini, or Portland vase?

This noble specimen of Greek art was discovered at Monte del Grano, near Rome, about the middle of the sixteenth century, in a tomb supposed to have been the last resting-place of the Emperor Alexander Severus. Into similar receptacles—reverently placed in a niched public columbarium, instead of being thrust into the present orthodox but inartistic and melancholy box—might the precious ashes of our beloved dead be finally deposited, and any risk of contamination to the remains, from the adjuncts of combustion, averted by previously wrapping the body in a shroud of asbestos cloth, after the manner observed in Greek and Roman times, and at present adopted at the funeral obsequies of Tartar princes.

Thus we should effectually revolutionise the prevailing system of meretricious yet expensive funerals; we should be rid of their tawdry trappings and subsidised minions of woe; we should disappoint the worm of his inheritance, and we should be enabled to rejoice that when the bloom of life had left the cheeks of our dearest and best, it would no longer be succeeded by the corruption of the grave. Notwithstanding the evident merits of cremation, whether viewed from an economical, humane, sentimental, artistic, or sanitary stand point, its introduction and practice in this country is meeting with the most lively and energetic opposition, some of which, strange to say, may be traced to the fair sex. At Hartlepool, on the 8th September last, a bold innovator, who attempted to bring before the Town Commissioners a motion in

favour of the adoption of this method of disposing of the dead, was received with a torrent of abuse mingled with the picturesque, although scarcely charitable suggestion, "Put him in a tar-barrel ; roast him alive !" When the excitement subsided, a petition from the mothers of Hartlepool was presented against burning the dead, and in favour of the continuance of interment. "Cremation," one of the ladies remarked, 'might be entertained thirty years hence, but at present Christian burial was the paramount desire of all.' It would be interesting to ascertain the other points of resemblance, which no doubt exist, between some of the inhabitants of this town and the enlightened persons who claim Darwin as a residence ; but about this there need be but little dubiety, that an unfortunate spirit of blind prejudice against sanitary improvement is evidently common to both.

Embalming the dead, as practised by the ancient Egyptians, appears to be a lost art, but even did we possess the secret, its expense (varying between £258 6s. 8d. according to Sextus Empiricus, and £41 according to Dr. Eadie), and the humid nature of our climate would interpose insurmountable barriers against its universal adoption. Even in countries where a kind of preservative process is in vogue, as among the Arcanese, Burmans, and Peguese, it is not much relied on, as the body, if that of a high priest, is only permitted to remain surrounded and filled with antiseptics for three years, when it is blown to atoms with gunpowder. Probably, after all, the loss of the ancient art of embalming need not be much regretted if old Nehemiah Grew's ideas on the subject, published in his "*Musaeum Regalis Societatis*" in 1694, are to be accepted. In describing a mummy presented to Gresham College by Prince Henry, Duke of Norfolk, he says :—"It is very probable that the way of embalming amongst the *Ægyptians* was by boiling the body (in a long cauldron like a fish-kettle), in some kind of liquid balsome ; so long, till the aqueous parts of the flesh being evaporated, the oily and gummous parts of the balsome did by degrees soak into it, and intimately incorporate therewith. Much after the

same manner, as sugar doth, in the condition of pears, quinces, and the like."

Among other methods in use for the disposal of the dead the three curious Tibetan customs may not be generally known. The "Terrestrial burial" consists in the cutting up of the body into small pieces by certain authorised persons acting under a chief, when the fragments are eaten by dogs; the "Celestial," in mixing the pounded bones with roasted meal and throwing balls made of the compound to the vultures; whilst the bodies of those whose effects prove inadequate to the expense of disintegration, are cast into the water and thus "Aquatic" burial is regarded as a great misfortune if not disgrace. Revolting as those customs may be, they seem comparatively civilised beside that of the Calmics, whose dogs, travellers tell us, may frequently be seen on the steppes, rending dead bodies in pieces, and dragging the limbs all over the desert. This, again, is exceeded in horror, even, by the practice of the ancient Scythians, who kept a special breed of dogs to devour all those who became enfeebled by age or disease.

Although such atrocious desecration of the dead, and infamous massacre of the dying, could never be possible in any civilised country now, there are those at home to whom the disposal of the dead by cremation would be regarded with scarcely less horror, and whose aversion to interment is also extreme. To such persons a third course seems open.

It sometimes happens that our youngest and fairest, snatched away by death, in infancy or early childhood, maintain the same perfection of feature and beauty of expression which characterised them whilst in life. What wish could be more natural, therefore, than that the parents or relatives should long to arrest and fix that last fond look and lingering smile on a countenance from which the fell destroyer had been unable to rifle a single charm? That such a seeming impossibility is easy of accomplishment, we were long ago assured by Dr. Abbate, a Neapolitan savant of considerable celebrity. About the year 1869 he preserved the body of a youth of seventeen who

had fallen a victim to phthisis, and so complete was the process of petrefaction employed that the integrity of the form, the sharpness of the features, and even the roseate hue of the nails were entirely preserved; besides, the subject was without odour of any description, and had acquired nearly the hardness of marble. In this condition the petrified corpse was exhibited in the ex-convent of Santa Maria della Nuova, and such was the interest created, and the favourable impression produced on the spot by the process and its result, that several gentlemen in Naples added codicils to their wills, requiring their heirs to have Dr. Abbate's discovery applied to their own bodies, in the event of their predeceasing the learned physician.

It is somewhat disappointing that beyond the above facts we are as yet ignorant of the process in question, Dr. Abbate having steadily declined to divulge his secret. But he intimated that he was prepared to show its extraordinary results in any part of the world to which he might be invited. It is possible he may have already done so privately in this country, and that some of our medical men are now in possession of the process. Should this supposition prove true, the enemies of interment and cremation may yet hope to see their cherished dead collected around them as in a sculpture gallery; at all events, they will have the satisfaction of knowing that the remains have been rescued equally from the worm and the flames.

WILLIAM COCHRAN.

False Economy.

The word economy has of late been reiterated more than any other current amongst us. What with the high price of coal rendering fuel a luxury to many, the dearness of provisions, and the greater financial liabilities in various ways characteristic of an age by no means remarkable for simplicity of tastes and modes, the necessity for ingenious domestic management has been felt, and hence the merits of economy, so-called, have been more persistently preached than of old. Imposing epithets have great weight, even though their real meaning be Greek to us. The village dame who declared that she always felt spiritually strengthened after hearing the word Mesopotamia in the Sunday sermon, afforded only an exaggerated illustration of what is common to a numerous class. Those who would "assume the virtue if they have it not" of thriftiness, satisfy their conscience by expatiating on "economy." It is desirable, however, that we should understand the real meaning of a word before taking it into familiar use, yet in nine cases out of ten, the term economy is uttered without regard to its relevancy or derivation, which signifies distribution or administration, and not merely curtailed expenditure as is generally supposed. It is of far more comprehensive import than is implied by simply withholding the hand from outlay; and this narrow view of an important subject leads to the most unsatisfactory results. To recognise the comparative value of objects, to select and abide by those of chief importance, is as necessary in the rule of our households as in the conduct of our lives, and for this, order, method, taste, judgment, are essential. Those who would follow out the true principle of economy would often find them-

614.62 *Principally an Argument for*
Cremation

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ON

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DEATH

AND HOW TO DIVEST IT OF ITS TERRORS

WITH SOME REMARKS ON THE FINAL DISPOSAL OF
THE ANIMAL ORGANISM

BY

KEITH NORMAN MACDONALD, M.D. ERLANG.,

M.R.C.P. AND L.R.C.S. EDINR., AND L.R.C.P. LOND.

EDINBURGH:
MACLACHLAN AND STEWART, 64 SOUTH BRIDGE.

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ON DEATH.

THOUGH the mission of the physician is to "obviate the tendency to death," for which object an intimate acquaintance with the several phenomena resulting from those chemico-vital forces which constitute life is essential, yet it does not make him the less thoughtful and painstaking to spend some time in meditating upon the changes which the human organism undergoes, when the balance between these forces has been disturbed, and ultimately becomes destroyed. On the contrary, the profound lessons to be learned from the final struggles of suffering humanity are fraught with intense interest to those who earnestly study the natural phenomena of life and death.

I have chosen the above subject for the present Essay for two reasons—1st, Because it is one which few men care to grapple with, owing, I suppose, to its unattractive gloominess; and 2d, Because, according to my judgment, I considered that a monograph upon a topic of such vital importance to all men, might be acceptable alike to lay, as well as professional readers, especially since, apart from my own particular views, I have compared notes with some of the standard works of the day in reference to the present state of our knowledge on the subject.

Before, however, proceeding to describe the anatomico-

physiological changes which take place towards the close of life, I purpose making a few observations of a general nature, in order to exhibit my theme in a more favourable light than it has hitherto been regarded, and of demonstrating the reasonableness of the proposition with which I started, viz., that the subject of death, properly treated, is actually capable of being divested of most of its sadness.

To begin with, there is a common notion prevalent, in which many essayists and some naturalists concur, that all animated beings have an instinctive dread of death implanted in them from the beginning, and that all their impressions of fear may be attributed to this instinct of self-preservation. This I am very much inclined to doubt, as applied in the ordinary acceptation of the term; for if it were so, it would be equally distributed amongst all animals in proportion to their means of progression, and capabilities of effecting their escape on the approach of an enemy.

The instinct alluded to is fear of injury, altogether irrespective of the ultimate consequences which might accrue therefrom, and not of destruction. And this is in a great measure due to an educated experience, acquired through coming in contact with predatory neighbours, which, for the sake of illustration, can be shown to be hereditary only in the case of those animals that are frequently molested by man and his coadjutors, independent of any instinct implanted by design.

It is well known to those who are capable of making use of their eyes and understanding that some animals are wilder than others in certain localities, almost in proportion to the price placed upon their heads, while the same animals in other countries, where they are not so much harassed, do not exhibit any unusual symptoms of fear on the approach of man. As familiar examples, I may mention the fox and the crow, two of the greatest enemies of the gamekeeper in

this country. Now, in India, I have observed that the former does not exhibit half the cunning the same animal does in this country, while the latter is so tame that it frequently enters houses almost as ordinary poultry do, and pilfers from the breakfast table with the greatest coolness. Geographical position alone, and slight variations from a naturalist's point of view, could not account for this. Moreover, if we ask any one who is in the habit of watching the habits of wild animals which are the most wary, he will probably immediately reply with the fox and the crow pretty high upon his list.

The Duke of Argyle, in a very able paper "On Animal Instinct," which he contributed to the *Contemporary Review* for July 1875, records several instances of the apparently marvellous instinct displayed by some animals. His Grace is evidently a very acute observer, but I must take exception to some of his methods of generalisation. He observes, page 361, that "the youngest chick knows a hawk, and the dreadful form fills it with instant terror." No doubt it may, but chicks as a rule exhibit exactly the same symptoms of consternation in the form of a subdued cackle when a pigeon or other bird, even one of their own species, approaches them on the wing. The same objection may be taken to the case of the dog, "not being itself a flying animal, has sense enough not to attempt the pursuit of prey which can avail itself of this sure and easy method of escape." If his Grace had ever come across badly-trained and young dogs, he would soon find that the very opposite is the case. Young dogs especially frequently *do* chase birds on the wing for considerable distances, until they rise to such a height that they are scarcely perceptible, and that the interest in continuing the chase has been drawn out to a mere thread; and the same holds good when they are chasing their favourite prey, hares and rabbits, the interest

lessens as the distance between the pursuing and the pursued increases, and *vice versa*.

There is no use in our exclaiming, "*non nobis, Domine,*" simply because we can't understand the as yet hidden secrets of nature. If we jumped at conclusions from observation alone, we would soon find ourselves upon the horns of a dilemma. In early infancy we observe that a child grows in proportion to the quantity and quality of the nourishment it receives, that, in fact, milk forms brains, and not only brains, but bone and muscle also. We know that without brains there can be no intellect, ergo, without milk we can have neither brains nor intellect. Both are the products of matter, but it would be reasoning from the wrong side of the question to hold that intellect must have been in the milk prior to its elaboration, and vital process of absorption, into the system, simply because we observed the results. It is only by taking a comprehensive view of animated life that we can at all hope to arrive at anything like sound conclusions on a matter of this nature. We must neither give vent to our preconceived notions on the subject, nor be influenced by solitary instances of supposed observed facts, however accurate and trustworthy the observers thereof should happen to be.

For these reasons, therefore, it appears to me that an incompatibility exists between this so-called instinct, implanted by design in all animals, and the actual order of things; for, while some animals are scarcely able to move, others are provided with terrible weapons of offence, to prey upon those very animals that are least able to take care of themselves.

Without, however, entering into the vexed question of the theory of evolution, which is at present exciting general interest, I may dismiss it for the present, by remarking that in my own opinion it is the most rational which has as yet

appeared, and my firm conviction is, that if it is not exactly an explanation of some of the wonderful phenomena which we see taking place around us, the truth will eventually be found to lie at least in that direction.

But to return to man. He has greater reason to fear death, because he knows by common observation that it will probably overtake him some day; yet there is no instinctive fear of death even in man. A child has no conception of death, or indeed of injury, until it gains by considerable experience how to discriminate between those causes which produce pain and those which do not. A vigorous youth laughs you to scorn when you talk of death to him, and a man in the prime of life, conscious of his physical strength, cannot for a moment entertain the thought of it as being at all a serious one. The same may even be said of men advanced in years, while in the full enjoyment of robust health. Indeed, we may go a step further; though the dim and hazy eye, the tremulous hands, the stiffened spine, and impaired motion clearly indicate that the man is not what he was, it scarcely dawns upon him, unless reminded of it, that the hour of dissolution is nigh, until at last little is left beyond a sort of vegetative existence, which gradually crumbles away, almost uninfluenced by the past or solicitous for the welfare of the future. This is not an imaginary picture. No man knows when he is about to die, and it is fortunate that, notwithstanding the warnings of the theologians, the actual fear of death does not enter the heart, unless under extraordinary circumstances. It is different, however, when the body is hopelessly diseased; then, as the physical powers show symptoms of decay, so do the mental: the one being dependent upon the other, nothing but morbid ideas can result therefrom. But even under such circumstances, weak as the mind may be, it clings most tenaciously to the last ray of hope. At the

same time, as all our ideas of life can only partake of the animal existence, there is manifested in disease very little concern for the things of this world, which very materially mitigates the transition from the material to the indefinite.

It is the living who suffer most. A certain amount of sorrow at the loss of friends and relatives prevails amongst all races, owing to social companionship, originally accomplished for purposes of offence and defence, and for sexual reasons; but this is little in comparison with the amount of distress that can be produced by appealing to the imagination. In Christian countries we are worse off in this respect than our Pagan neighbours.

The monstrous absurdity of a future eternal punishment, and the threats of the "wrath to come," which are perpetually being dinned into our ears, produce a most distressing effect upon the minds of people who are incapable of abstract reasoning, while, at the same time, they render a most degrading picture of what man's conception ought to be of an exalted Deity.

The misery created by the dissemination of such dogmas is incalculable, and adds terribly to the bewilderment of those left to lament the dead. The poor Buddhist, who hopes for nothing beyond complete annihilation, is indeed happy in comparison with us, and the strains of music which are supposed to accompany the transported soul of the departed is, to say the least, cheering, when contrasted with the melancholy black gloom which pervades the last rites of Christianised communities. The meek Hindoo, also, who knows that his body will be submitted either to a process of cremation, or deposited in the sacred waters of the Ganges, fears nothing, for he feels confident in the future; and the Ashantee *Caboceer*, who knows that a slave will be sacrificed to accompany him in his restless peregrinations in the next

world, does not for a moment doubt but that he is in the right direction.

This leads me, further, to consider the powerful effects of climate in influencing man's sentiments. In those high latitudes where storms and tempests frequently abound, with long and dreary wintry nights, which, in their awful grandeur, render the face of the earth terror-stricken and desolate, the inhabitants are said to be of a more melancholy temperament than those who reside under a semitropical sun, enjoying a beautiful transparent and exhilarating atmosphere over head, where, for months together, they can behold a magnificent sky, undisturbed by the elements. The former are morose, because they distrust nature. Experience has taught them not to place the slightest confidence in the elements; and, as Mill well observed, they find nothing in nature to admire. On the contrary, they find her, in their estimation, cruel and unjust in the extreme, hence they become distrustful and superstitious; while the latter, however much degraded by indolence and ignorance, retain, through the bountifulness of nature, an outward cheerfulness and remarkable equanimity of disposition; and though this is often tinged with treacherousness and other gross qualities, it must be admitted that the "struggle for existence" has had a large share in their production.

If we could imagine a state of existence from which the phenomenon of night were altogether abstracted, and that we lived in perpetual day, in a beautiful climate, with nothing to awe us from above, there could not possibly be such a thing as superstition or fear, and even religion could gain no hold upon the minds of men. It was on beholding phenomena which he could not understand that induced preadamite man to conceive the existence of something supernatural, and the first form of worship, we may reasonably

infer, was undertaken with a view either to appease the elements, or to thank the sun for having once more quelled the wrath of deities.

Since these days the conception of a God, or gods, has been gradually improving from the tyrannical and terrible to the magnanimous and exalted. In the more civilised countries the force of certain customs and habits in our social relations tends greatly to discompose our mental tranquillity when the hand of death falls heavy upon us, which can be shown to be capable of considerable mitigation by the exercise of a little common sense. The wearing of mourning—in itself a silly custom—too often adds to the embarrassments of those who lose their chief support, and ought to be done away with, as well as all other outward signs of bereavement. It matters little to the departed what may be done for the sake of appearances, consequently, as no possible good can be effected by pulling long faces, erecting monuments, &c., it is unreasonable on the part of an enlightened society to countenance them. Everything calculated to cheer the sorrowful should be encouraged, and though it is a hard saying, and one which touches the inner educated feelings, I have no doubt but that, in our most perfect state, we shall not mourn for the dead. It is as natural for a man to die as for a blade of grass to grow. Both are minute atoms in the universe, and, for aught we know, the one may be of as much importance as the other, serving certain phases of existence, and obeying the same laws. Seeing, therefore, that as all must die, why should we not be reconciled to our fate? If we don't hasten our own destruction, we certainly cannot avoid it much beyond the meagre span of threescore and ten which has been allotted to us. Why we should feel so acutely the loss of our own offspring is a problem that can't at present be solved. It is equally inexplicable why we should concern ourselves so

little about the loss of others. We are not particularly affected on meeting a funeral in the street, but when the inevitable plumed hearse drives up to our own doors, then we wring our hands in the agony of despair. The fond mother who has been deprived of her beloved cherub finds no solace even in the comforts of her religion. However pious and resigned she may appear to be, she can't help thinking that she has been hardly dealt with; and, certainly, if we are allowed to make any use at all of our intellects, we are bound to conclude that the Deity never resorts to such a clumsy and human method of chastisement. There must be some other reasons, therefore, and these we shall find to rest entirely with ourselves. Vice, ignorance, carelessness, and want of forethought, then, are the great factors of all our misery and excessive mortality. A tree planted in a suitable soil grows to maturity and gradually decays, unless influenced by external agencies; so likewise would man, if there were not numerous preventible causes at work, of an artificial nature, to arrest his progress.

The thriftless rascal who begets a larger family than he can well support, or who squanders his means in riotous living, not only produces a terrible amount of wretchedness during his lifetime, but also transmits the same to a luckless, and too often unhealthy, offspring. If such an one were treated as a lunatic, and cared for as such, who can say how much unhappiness, and vice, and crime might be prevented, and how much better would it be both for himself and his unfortunate posterity?

I have listened to many a sad tale, and in all of them the most superficial examination could trace manifest symptoms of mismanagement of this kind. Drunkenness alone, I believe, creates as many sad hearts, both directly and indirectly, and as many premature deaths, as all other causes put together. Indeed, I have often wondered why

an enlightened legislature should permit or uphold such causes of vice. With us our laws relating to drunkenness and assault are a mere sham. If these were punished with prolonged terms of imprisonment, without the option of a fine, an incalculable amount of suffering would be prevented, and an equal benefit conferred upon especially the lower orders of society, and if that did not suffice, a proper restriction upon the sale of intoxicating liquors, which would certainly be supported by the intelligence of the nation, ought to be enforced. I have no sympathy whatever with those miserable statesmen, who, for party reasons, permit bad and unjust laws to exist without attempting to remedy them, nor for those who cannot see beyond their own immediate sphere, who believe that man is only capable of a certain amount of improvement, and that he will always continue to be pretty much like what he has been in the past, and what he is at the present day. In his primitive state, the strongest and the most intelligent plundered and robbed the weakest and most ignorant. A good deal of this takes place among us even still; but we are very much improved, and, if this be admitted, I do not see why we should not arrive at a state in which there will be no more "blundering and plundering."

The paramount duty of all civilised statesmen at the present day is, first of all, to endeavour to put a stop to all wars, especially European wars, and then to turn their attention to domestic affairs. I am aware that some cynics may observe, "*cui bono*," since attempts have already been made in that direction and have failed. To whom I reply, These attempts have been of the most meagre description, backed by very hollow influence, and altogether apparent to the most superficial observer to be utterly worthless. We must not, therefore, despair on account of these small failures, we must just "try again." If any first class nation

were to take the initiative in this great question, by reducing its armaments, and exhibiting a real desire for this millennium of peace, others would soon follow its example, despite the ravings of the short-sighted, and the results would be very different, and far more ennobling than the petty squabbles of our representative Sciolists, who are averse to progress.

The next great question which I consider most conducive to human happiness would be a comprehensive scheme of sanitation. We know, without entering into details, that proper sanitary precautions prevent the spread of contagious diseases, and diminish the mortality over certain given areas; hence, we naturally infer that the adoption of sanitary laws prevents disease and death. This is surely a great boon, and one well worthy of greater attention than it has hitherto received. Take, for instance, scarlet fever. Experience has taught us that this is one of the most fatal diseases of childhood, and that it also occurs epidemically. Now, by taking proper sanitary precautions, we can not only render the disease less fatal than otherwise it would be, but we can actually stamp it completely out, provided always that the knowledge we possess has been properly applied; and so of all other epidemics and pestilences. Against this it may be said that those epidemic diseases which are peculiar to childhood, and which, as a rule, are inoperative after a single attack, often make their appearance spontaneously, and appear to follow man wherever he goes. No doubt there are certain inexplicable features about them which cannot at present be accounted for, but it is not the less strange that scarlet fever, so far as I am aware, has never been witnessed in India, nor cholera in Australia. If these diseases were natural visitors of the human race, how is it that upwards of two hundred millions of people should be exempt from the one, and very prone to incursions of the

other? There can be no doubt, therefore, that with properly organised sanitary laws, thousands of lives could be saved annually that now perish helplessly, not only during childhood, but in all stages of existence.

This brings us face to face with another most interesting and speculative question, viz., supposing that all the measures above recommended were adopted, and that all human efforts were strung to the very utmost, to prolong life and to lessen the mortality, and seeing that these means would tend greatly to an increase of population, what would be the ultimate result? This can be viewed in different lights. Those who hold that the world was made for man, or that man was made to complete the world, and constituted the final act of creation, can have no difficulty whatever in settling the matter to their own satisfaction. As, however, I do not happen to share either opinion, I can afford to assure philosophers of this stamp that they know nothing at all about it. The advent of animated beings upon this earth, in the present state of our knowledge, is altogether beyond our comprehension. I cannot, therefore, admit that man was a special creation apart from all other living organisms. That the one should live an eternal life, and that the other should only serve a temporary purpose, is to me an unreasonable and unwarrantable conclusion, which cannot be accepted by any one who does not go out of his way to degrade his intellect. Great as the gap between man and the higher vertebrata may appear to be, there is a uniformity of structure and physical conformation, as a whole, which compels the man of thought and the earnest searcher after truth to conclude that the difference is only in degree, not in kind. One thing is pretty clear, that if the population of the world goes on increasing as it has hitherto done, it is merely a question of time how long it will take to fill this limited sphere of ours until there is scarcely standing room left. And here we are

left upon the verge of a whirlpool of confusion. I do not pretend to be able to clear the difficulty satisfactorily and conclusively, but I may be pardoned for saying that I do not believe in a sudden catastrophe which is to define the limit between time and eternity. As we have no direct proof of the past history of the universe, we have no right either to predicate or to dogmatise as regards the future further than what is reasonable, or probable, or likely to happen. There does not appear, therefore, to me a more reasonable solution of the question than that, as animated nature has been gradually developed from a less perfect to a more perfect state, the time will come when man is bound to become extinct, either from a natural wearing out and decay, or a gradual change in the physical condition of the globe rendering it unfitted for his existence.

In support of this view I may observe, that as we approach a higher state of civilisation, the causes which originally led to a natural and sexual selection in the propagation of the species will become more and more weakened in proportion as the intellectual development increases at the expense of the animal propensities, until at last the desire for increasing the offspring becomes completely obliterated. Further, we know that certain inexplicable changes have taken place in the physical condition of the atmosphere without our cognisance, a notable instance of which I may mention—the potato blight of 1843. Here was evidently a peculiar change brought about in the condition of the atmosphere which spread over both hemispheres almost simultaneously, and brought famine and death to limited localities in its train. No one had the remotest idea that any change was going on, yet we must have been breathing the very essence of that wonderful murrain. Other phenomena of a similar nature may arise in the future, and prove equally destructive to the continuance of animal life.

When we look upon life, its objects and enjoyments, there does not appear to be anything much worth living for beyond the shadowy adulations of our fellow-men. There is no permanent happiness in it. We find in fact that it consists merely of a series of animal pleasures, certain particles of matter influencing other particles of matter, and all dependent more or less upon the sun's rays for existence. Without heat and light we can have little or no life, and all our pleasures, past, present, and to come, are entirely dependent upon these two forces. He who views life in this light can have no fear of personal death. He feels confident that no amount of logic, and especially of clerical logic, can dislocate his stand-point. He is, in fact, unassailable, and whether there is something mysterious in another sphere or not, he has no hesitation in affirming that "beyond these voices there is peace."

Having so far disposed of the several causes which render death so terrible to the living, I now proceed to consider the different modes by which death may occur, and the final changes which the animal organism undergoes after the vital spark has fled.

Beginning at the seat of intelligence, the brain, we find that the functions of life may be arrested—1st, By *coma* (κῶμα, sound sleep). This condition is caused by obstruction to the circulation of the blood through the brain, by pressure from effusion of blood, serum, lymph, or pus into the brain; from distension of the blood-vessels, as in apoplexy, and from coagula formed within their walls; by depressed fractures of the skull, and the influence of narcotic poisons, such as alcohol, carbonic acid, opium, and many others of a similar nature; as well as by the retention of the excrementitious matter of the urine and bile in the blood. 2d, By *paralysis* (παράλυσις, to relax), from injured function of the medulla oblongata and spinalis, on which the act of

respiration depends, either through suspended function of the nervous centre itself, the result of injury, or the action of certain poisons, such as woorara, conia, belladonna, &c.; or of the afferent nerves which convey impressions towards that nervous centre, viz., the pneumogastric and sympathetic; or of the efferent nerves, the phrenic, spinal accessory, and intercostals, which reflect those impressions to the breathing apparatus. 3d, By *cardiac syncope* (*καρδια*, the heart, and *συνκοπτω*, sudden prostration). The heart's action may suddenly cease either through a loss of irritability (paralysis) of its muscular walls, or by tonic spasm, which maintains it in a state of rigid contraction. In both cases death is instantaneous. In the former state both sides of the heart are found distended with blood after death; in the latter the organ is found to be so firmly contracted that no blood is contained in its ventricles. 4th, By *asthenia* (a priv., and *σθενος*, strength), or gradual cessation of the heart's action, induced by diseases which destroy life by gradually exhausting the strength, such as long-continued fevers and inflammations of various organs, hemorrhages, excessive discharges of animal fluids, and deficient nourishment, causing inanition, which reduce the vigour of the vital functions of the whole body to such a low ebb that the heart ceases to beat. 5th, By *asphyxia* (a priv., and *σφύξις*, the pulse) or *apnœa* (a priv., and *πνέω*, to breathe), literally want of breath. This mode of death has its seat in the breathing apparatus, and terminates life by suspending the functions of respiration, and is distinguished from apnœa produced as a secondary result of serious mischief in the medulla oblongata, induced by paralysis, or division of the 8th pair of nerves in the neck, in being dependent upon the lesions which produce death directly through the respiratory organs. The principal disorders which produce death in this manner are diseases of the lungs and air passages, croup, laryngitis, pneumonia,

bronchitis, pleurisy, &c., causing effusion into those organs, the pressure of tumours or any other mechanical means, such as smothering, strangulation, and drowning, which prevent the entrance of air by the mouth and nostrils. 6th, By *necræmia* (*νεκρος*, dead, and *αἷμα*, blood). Dr C. J. B. Williams defines this as another mode by which death may occur, having observed that in typhoid fevers, and many pestilential disorders, none of the solids of the body exhibited changes sufficient to warrant the conclusion that death could be attributed to them. "The appearance of petechiæ and vibices on the external surface, the occurrence of more extensive hemorrhages in internal parts, the general fluidity of the blood, and frequently its unusually dark or otherwise altered aspect, its poisonous properties as exhibited in its deleterious operation on other animals, and its proneness to pass into decomposition, point out that the circulating fluid is the essential seat of disorder, and the failure of its natural properties as the vivifier of all organs and functions is plainly the mode by which death begins in the body." How far this is true cannot at present be determined; but there can be no reasonable doubt that in pestilential diseases a powerful poison does circulate in the blood, which destroys life, either directly, by arresting the vitality of the blood, or indirectly, by producing a poisonous influence upon the nervous system.

Dr Carpenter adds another mode of death, viz., by *cold*, which "stagnates all the vital operations of the system." When the external temperature is exceedingly low, congestion of the internal vessels is induced through the blood being thrown internally, occasioning a torpid condition of the nervous centres, and cessation of the circulation due to asphyxia. When the cooling is gradual, the stagnation is universal, and it is in this manner that death from starvation occurs; for then the combustible matter supplied by the

food being withheld, inanition, with loss of the calorifying power, is the inevitable result. This can be proved by experiment. It has been found that when animals were totally deprived of food, they suffered a progressive daily diminution of temperature, gradually increasing as the animals became weaker, until at last no heat at all could be generated, and death supervened.

Death of the body as a whole has been termed *Somatic death*, and of certain portions of it, *Molecular death*. Somatic death is often consequent on Molecular death, when the latter interferes with the circulation, elaboration, and purification of the blood, by cutting off the supply of nutritive materials and oxygenation of that fluid upon which the vital organism depends. Molecular death does not, however, necessarily produce Somatic death. Limbs can be amputated, and other important portions of the body may be removed without proving fatal, when they do not interfere with the nutritive functions of the viscera and sensorial functions of the brain. But when destruction of certain portions of the nervous centres, as, for instance, injury to the origin of some of the principal nerves of respiration in the floor of the 4th ventricle of the brain, or some slight structural disease of the heart occurs, death may be instantaneous, because these lesions arrest either the respiratory movements, or suspend the action of the heart.

The vital activity of the whole body is dependent upon a due supply of the circulating fluid, and when this does not take place, the heart must cease to beat. Numerous instances have been recorded where Molecular death in every part has not followed immediately upon suspension of the heart's action. Ciliary and muscular movements have been observed after Somatic death, as well as several acts of secretion, and *even* of nutrition, as, for instance, a continuation of the secretion from the poison glands of certain

reptiles, and the growth of hair after death: also instanced in the maintenance of local nutrition, and the generation of animal heat; in the reunion, after a lapse of some hours, of parts that have been completely severed from the body, such as fingers and toes, portions of noses and ears, which could not have happened if these parts were already dead.*

In cold-blooded animals, such as reptiles and fishes, Molecular death follows Somatic death much less rapidly than it does in the warm-blooded, birds and mammals, &c. This is due to the tissues of the former being possessed of a lower degree of vitality. They retain their vital activity for a longer period than the latter, which require the maintenance of a higher temperature; hence, the rapid cooling of the body after Somatic death in warm-blooded animals causes its vitality to be extinguished more speedily. This is further evinced by the influence of artificial warmth in sustaining the vitality of parts separated from the body. It is supposed, moreover, that the rapidity with which Molecular death follows Somatic death is influenced by the mode of death, and the condition of the fluids and solids of the body at the time. Thus, in death from *necræmia asthenia*, gradual cooling of the whole body and sudden violent impressions upon the nervous system, Molecular death immediately supervenes upon Somatic death; while, in death from causes which produce a gradual syncope or asphyxia, Molecular death may be postponed for a considerable period.

We know from common observation that decomposition is very much influenced by temperature and surrounding circumstances; being hastened by heat, and retarded by cold. Indeed, the latter appears to be capable of retarding it for an indefinite period, as instanced in the remarkable

* See Carpenter's "Human Physiology," 7th edition, page 981.

case of Prince Menschikof, related by Adolph Erman in his "Travels in Siberia," vol. i. page 462, where the body of that prince had been exhumed at Berezov in 1821, after a burial of ninety-two years in the frozen soil of Siberia. During that long period his body had undergone but little change, and his heart and other parts were removed and sent to his descendants.

A still more remarkable instance of the antiseptic power of cold is exhibited in the discovery of the body of an ancient elephant (*Elephas primigenius*), in a mass of ice at the mouth of the River Lena in Siberia, in 1805 (*Quart. Journal of Science*, vol. viii. p. 95), the race of which must have been extinct long anterior to the Historic period. Though putrefaction is assisted by a low temperature, it is also retarded by a very high one, ranging from 100° – 212° , the explanation of which appears to be that in the former state a certain amount of heat is necessary to the combination of the gaseous elements of the body during decomposition, as well as to the existence of the gaseous products resulting from their union; while, in the latter, a high temperature causes a rapid evaporation of the water in the tissues of the body, by which they become dried and coagulated, and thus it happens that bodies buried in the hot and arid sands of Egypt have been dug up after a long period of interment in the state of desiccated mummies.*

With reference to the effects of cold in arresting putrefaction, my own opinion is, that when all the moisture within the body becomes congealed, the chemical forces necessary for setting Molecular death in motion, by causing a new change, which binds these subtle particles together, renders them inert. Within both extremes, however, a summer temperature of between 60° and 70° produces greater putre-

* See Taylor's "Principles and Practice of Medical Jurisprudence," vol. i. 2d edition, page 99.

factive changes in twenty-four hours than a week's exposure in the winter. Though we cannot be positively certain when Somatic death occurs and Molecular death in every part of the body begins, it is not difficult, as a rule, to distinguish between real and apparent death.

After cessation of respiration and of the heart's action in actual death, the features—except in certain cases of violent death, as, for instance, from stabs on the battlefield, where they exhibit manifestations of the emotions at the moment of death—assume a pinched and placid appearance of terrible solemnity. The eyes become glassy and wrinkled, and insensible to the action of stimuli, and the lids remain half open, through retraction of the lower, and drooping of the upper, lid. The lower jaw sinks, and there is a ghastly pallor, which soon assumes a leaden hue. The muscles lose their irritability (the capability of contraction on the application of a stimulus, such as electricity), the skin becomes pallid and waxy looking, owing to the absence of circulation, and the body becomes gradually colder, until at last, like any inert substance, it comes down to the temperature of the surrounding medium, which, under ordinary circumstances, when exposed to the air, occupies from the moment of death to between fifteen and twenty hours. The temperature of the interior of the body during life ranges between 98° and 100° , but from the moment of death that heat passes off by radiation, conduction, and convection, as it does from inert matter, until it is reduced to the temperature of the medium, air or water, &c., in which it may be placed.

The cooling of the body after death is also influenced by its condition at the time of death, the mode of death, and the circumstances under which it may be placed. When death takes place suddenly, as by accident, or by violence, the body as a rule takes a longer time to cool, subject, of course, to the condition already mentioned, viz., the medium

of exposure. A body immersed in water of course cools much more rapidly than one exposed to a moderate temperature of the air. In cases of death from certain diseases, such as malignant cholera, phthisis, and some other chronic disorders, and during the stage of collapse from poisoning, bodies have been found quite cold on the surface soon after death, and in such cases coldness has been found in the extremities, and other parts exposed, some time before death. These are very important facts, in a medico-legal point of view, in determining the probable lapse of time since the occurrence of death; but cases now and again arise which sorely test the skill of the medical jurist. As these, however, are of an exceptional nature, and beyond the scope of this Essay, I must refer to works on medical jurisprudence for further details.

Another very important sign of *actual death* is the occurrence of *post-mortem rigidity*. This condition usually sets in about five or six hours after death, and lasts for sixteen or twenty-four hours. The muscles of the limbs become hard and contracted, the joints rigid and stiff, and the body generally firm and unyielding. It begins in the neck, lower jaw, and face, and extends downwards to the muscles of the upper extremities, and trunk, and then extends to the lower extremities, and passes off in the same order. It appears to be slow in manifesting itself in cases of death from hemorrhage, irritant poisoning, apoplexy, &c., and in all cases of asphyxia, while in cases of death from cholera, and various diseases, such as phthisis, typhoid fever, &c., attended with prolonged exhaustion, it has been found to occur not only shortly after death, but while the body was still warm. Atmospheric changes also appear to modify the duration of cadaveric rigidity. In dry and cold air it will persist a much longer time than in a warm atmosphere saturated with moisture. Formerly it was supposed that rigidity never

occurred after death by lightning, but now we are in possession of abundant evidence to prove that this opinion was unfounded. It may appear and run through its course rapidly, and, no doubt, in some instances where this has happened, the conclusion was at once arrived at that it did not occur. And as rigidity has been observed to take place simultaneously with the coagulation of the blood throughout the body, and the fact of the blood being found in a fluid state after death by lightning, and under some other conditions, must have still further led to this erroneous conclusion.

The only infallible test by which *actual death* can be determined is when decomposition has fairly set in. This first manifests itself by a bluish green discoloration of the skin covering the abdomen, which rapidly extends to the chest, between the ribs, neck, face, legs, and lastly in the arms. The discoloration appears to depend upon an infiltration of the animal fluids, especially of the blood, into the skin. The blood also assumes a darker hue, owing probably to the action of ammonia upon its red colouring matter. At the same time, we find that various gases are produced not only in the hollow organs of the body, but under the skin generally. These gases being sulphuretted hydrogen and ammonia in the early stages, and carbonic acid, carbonate of ammonia, nitrogen, carburetted and phosphuretted hydrogen in the later stages. The time after death at which these changes occur vary considerably, from a few hours after to many days or even weeks; but decomposition is seldom apparent until rigidity has ceased, or, in other words, until the muscles of the body have entirely lost their irritability. And the ultimate result of these changes is, that after a longer or shorter period the organic matter of which the animal body is composed returns to the inorganic condition from which it sprang, and the material body

as an individual disappears. The fleshy parts are resolved into carbonic acid, water, and ammonia (which pass off into the atmosphere to replenish the vegetable world), nitrous and nitric acid, and various other noxious compounds already mentioned, while the bony skeleton, consisting of some of the mineral constituents of the earth's structure, viz., lime, phosphorus, iron, sulphur, magnesia, sodium, potassium, &c., are finally washed into the soil in solution, to supply organic life again in some other form. Hence an explanation of that wonderful cycle of changes by which the vegetable supplies the animal, and the animal the vegetable world, and thus the balance between the two is being constantly maintained.

Now, concerning *apparent death* and *premature interments* a certain amount of alarm, especially in Continental states, has existed, owing to the writings of excitable individuals who have devoted their attention to this subject.

The idea of apparent death being mistaken at the present day for real death is simply preposterous, at any rate in civilised countries. Indeed, the cases that have been recorded by different authors, both ancient and modern, must be received with a great amount of caution, as the facts in connection with most of them appear explicable on ordinary physiological principles.

In the writings of the ancients there are frequent allusions to premature interments. Pliny has a chapter "*De his qui elati revixerunt*," and mentions, among others, the case of a young man of rank who was revived by the heat of his funeral pyre, but who perished before he could be rescued. In the writings of Winslow, Bruhier, and many others, may also be found an ample collection of melancholy instances of premature interment, if they could be relied on.

M. Fontanelle and M. Carre, two French writers, have of late years each collected forty-six cases of premature inter-

ments of the living, or of apparent being mistaken for real death. M. Fontanelle's cases were collected from all sources, whether scientific or not, from the time of Plutarch downwards, which of itself is quite enough to render them more or less untrustworthy.

M. Carre, on the other hand, asserts that since 1833 there have been forty-six cases of premature burial in France alone. "Twenty-one of these returned to life at the time they were about to be deposited in the earth; nine recovered owing to the affectionate attentions of their relatives; four from the accidental falling of their coffins; three from the punctures of pins in fastening their shrouds; and seven from unusual delay in the funerals!" Statements of this kind are too absurd to be entertained for a moment, they display such an amount of gross carelessness and incapacity on the part of officials and "affectionate" relatives, which we cannot believe in reality to exist. The establishment of mortuary houses, such as exists in various cities of Germany and Switzerland, where bodies are rarely buried until after a lapse of three days, is a good regulation and safeguard against accidents, though, perhaps, erring on the side of extra caution. A better plan would be a medical certificate twenty-four hours after death by officials specially appointed for that purpose, after which the burial should immediately follow. An arrangement such as this would prevent unnecessary delay, and the possibility of premature interments.

Numerous well-authenticated instances have, however, been recorded, where persons labouring under catalepsy (vulgarly termed trance), hysteria, concussion, syncope, and various other maladies, have been pronounced dead by ignorant bystanders, because there happened to be coldness of the surface of the body, and no outward signs of respiration and circulation, where, no doubt, if interments were to

have followed upon their dictation, living persons might have been consigned to a premature tomb; but such a thing, as already stated, could not possibly happen now-a-days in any civilised country.

It is not a little remarkable that some individuals have possessed the power of voluntarily inducing a state of apparent death, the most wonderful instance on record being that of Colonel Townsend, reported by Dr George Cheyne, who was himself a witness of the fact. In this case the action of the heart could be suspended to such an extent that no pulsation could be detected, though he remained in this condition for half an hour. He did actually die, however, nine hours after the performance of one of those experiments.

Mr Braid, in his "Observations on Trance, or Human Hybernation, 1850," mentions several instances of the wonderful performances of certain Indian fakirs, who voluntarily submitted to burial in underground cells for periods varying from some days to six weeks, in whom there appeared to be a complete suspension of all vital operations, resembling complete collapse, and which continued until means were taken to produce resuscitation. If these stories are to be credited, we can only account for such phenomena by assuming that the individuals concerned must have been able to produce at will a state of artificial somnambulism, or a "hypnotic" or "mesmeric" condition.*

In considering the proper disposal of the animal body after death, it must be admitted that, like all other great questions of public utility, it is difficult for agitators to approach it with impartial and unbiassed minds, because every one who has thought at all upon the subject must have arrived at some

* For further information on this subject, besides the works already quoted, I may refer to Dr Symond's article "Death" in Todd's *Cyclopædia of Anatomy*, vol. i., and article "Premature Interments" in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*.

conclusion, either favourable or unfavourable, to the present mode of disposing of our dead. And, at the outset, I must frankly admit that if I were hastily required to put down my name either for being cremated or boxed up ten feet below the surface of the earth, I should probably say, I'll write you on the subject ; but when, on mature reflection, I look calmly at what the anatomist, the chemist, and the sanitarian have got to say on the subject, I can only arrive at one conclusion, viz., that whatever process guarantees the greatest safety to the living, is the most proper and efficient that can be adopted. That cremation, then, is a safer method of disposing of the dead than the one in common use, no intelligent man who has looked into the subject can deny. Indeed, our common sense suggests to us that whatever dangers may arise to the living by the present mode of burial, especially in the vicinity of large cities, none whatever can accrue from cremation, so long as the noxious vapours which are given off during that process are capable of being consumed.

This I shall endeavour to show, with the assistance of the labours of those scientific men who have already instituted experiments into the comparative merits of underground burial, &c., and cremation. Violent partisanship is not likely to assist us much in this inquiry. We must rather be guided by the light of science and reason ; for if these do not carry conviction along with them, individual opinions, however eminent, can never gain any hold upon the public mind.

It strikes me, therefore, that while having due regard to public sentiment on the one hand, it is the duty of every intelligent man to bring his influence to bear fairly, yet firmly, upon every one within his own immediate circle on this important question on the other ; and thus, by keeping the subject constantly before the public, we shall be the

better enabled to pave the way for legislative improvements, without offending particular sections of the community.

Let us for a moment look at the matter from a common sense point of view, and here it may be as well to dispose of the question of sentiment, once for all, by exhibiting its absurdity. We all know that when death has actually happened, no action on the part of the living can be of the slightest avail in preserving the body in its integrity. We know, further, that according to the present mode of burial our individual bodies must pass through a prolonged and horrible process of decomposition, and it is not very consoling to be cognisant of the fact, that this destructive process occupies a great many years before our final extinction can be accomplished. Now, though we do not actually see this, there can be no gainsaying as to the manner in which it is accomplished, and we are not unfrequently influenced both directly and indirectly by it. Men have been struck down dead, as if by lightning, on coming in contact with the terrible effluvia emanating from decomposing human remains, and thousands have perished, and are still perishing annually, through consuming the products of dead animal matter. Not only that, but it has been pretty clearly demonstrated of late, that besides being liable to be poisoned by the water which has filtered through graveyards, and other sources of dead animal matter, we can in a similar manner be affected by the milk of cattle that have grazed in their vicinity, and there can be no saying to what extent we are affected by effluvia from the same sources floating about in the atmosphere which we breathe.

If we now examine the other side of the question, we shall find that by the simple act of cremation all this can be prevented. In the space of one single hour the process of cremation, properly conducted, does more than a burial of twenty years could possibly do, by consuming the whole

body, and leaving nothing but about 3-5 lbs. weight of delicate white ashes, which are perfectly harmless; while, at the same time, all the noxious gases resulting from the combustion are consumed, consequently, nothing deleterious to animal life can pass off into the atmosphere.

Compare this with what is actually going on in our cemeteries, within a few yards of our doors, and one moment's reflection must convince every one capable of thinking that cremation is the safest, best, and most salutary means by which we can possibly dispose of those who are nearest and dearest to us, and there are no other means by which we could cherish their beloved memories better than by preserving their ashes.

For the benefit of the uninitiated, I may observe that Sir Henry Thompson (to whom is due the merit of having first brought this subject prominently before the public of this country, in an able and masterly essay on cremation, originally contributed to the *Contemporary Review*) has described the process in detail, which can be verified by intelligent chemists and engineers, as being capable of being worked upon a large scale to meet the requirements of the age.

The process is briefly as follows:—"A powerful reverberating furnace will reduce a body of more than average size and weight, leaving only a few white and fragile portions of earthy material, in less than an hour. I have myself personally superintended the burning of two entire bodies, one small and emaciated, of 47 lbs. weight, and one of 140 lbs. weight, not emaciated, and possess the products,—in the former case weighing $1\frac{3}{4}$ lbs., in the latter weighing about 4 lbs. The former was completed in twenty-five minutes, the latter in fifty. No trace of odour was perceived; indeed, such a thing is impossible. . . . The remains already described were not withdrawn till the process was complete, and nothing can be more pure, tested by sight

and smell, than they are, and nothing less suggestive of decay or decomposition. The experiments took place in the presence of several persons. . . . In the proceedings above described, the gases which leave the furnace chimney during the first three or four minutes of combustion are noxious, after that time they cease to be so, and no smoke would be seen. But those noxious gases are not to be permitted to escape by any chimney, and will pass through a flue into a second furnace, where they are entirely consumed; and the chimney of the latter is smokeless—no organic products whatever can issue by it. A complete combustion is thus attained.”*

Dr William Siemens† has invented a furnace by which even a more rapid and complete combustion can be attained. “The body employed was a severe test of its powers, for it weighed no less than 227 lbs., and was not emaciated. It was placed in a cylindrical vessel, about seven feet long by five or six in diameter, the interior of which was already heated to about 2000° Fahr. The inner surface of the cylinder is smooth, almost polished, and no solid matter but that of the body is introduced into it. The product, therefore, can be nothing more than the ashes of the body. No foreign dust can be introduced, no coal or other solid combustible being near it; nothing but heated hydrocarbon in a gaseous form and heated air. Nothing is visible in the cylinder before using it, but a pure, almost white, interior, the lining having acquired a temperature of white heat. In this case, the gases given off from the body so abundantly at first pass through a highly-heated chamber among thousands of interstices made by intersecting fire bricks, laid throughout the entire chamber, lattice fashion, in order to

* “Cremation, the Treatment of the Body after Death,” by Sir Henry Thompson, pages 38, 39, &c. Henry S. King and Co., 1874.

† *Idem*, page 41.

minutely divide and delay the current, and expose it to an immense area of heated surface. By this means they were rapidly oxidised, and not a particle of smoke issued by the chimney ; no second furnace, therefore, is necessary by this method to consume any noxious matters, since none escape."

Nothing could be more simple or more effectual than the above processes, and nothing offensive to the senses, or feelings, or religious sentiments of friends and relatives need be experienced. On the contrary, every facility can be rendered for permitting attendants to pay their last tribute of respect, and what is more, they can have the ashes of those whom they loved handed back to them, which they could not procure by any other mode of burial.

To my mind there is something consoling in knowing that since we cannot arrest the inevitable, and that our connection with this life must cease sooner or later, our feelings can be spared, by the simple process of cremation, the horrible idea of our bodies undergoing a most repulsive and gradual process of decomposition and decay.

Sir Henry Thompson has, moreover, discussed the subject from an economic point of view, and, judging from the figures which he has adduced,* it is impossible to deny but that by substituting cremation for the present mode of burial, the value of ashes and bone earth which would be saved the country would considerably exceed half a million pounds sterling annually.

I doubt, however, if statistics of this nature can carry sufficient weight along with them to influence public opinion in favour of cremation, but it is only fair that we should appeal to the feelings and common sense, as well as to the pockets, of the nation, and in this case we can do so with confidence, as we feel sure that our ground is firm, and our arguments unassailable. A great majority of the scientific

* *Op. cit.*, page 10.

men of the day can scarcely fail to be on our side, as the question is not one of individual caprice or eccentricity, but one of great public and national utility.

True, the question is yet in its infancy, but it is one not likely to be lost sight of. As it becomes more developed, it will not be looked upon as such a terrible innovation on ancient customs, and men's minds will be better prepared to view the subject in a calmer light.

For the present we must patiently await the verdict of time, and a more mature deliberation of the subject, before we can expect it to be universally adopted. Meantime, it would be well if the supporters of cremation were to secure legislative sanction for the erection of suitable structures in or near our large cities for trial; and let it be optional to individuals and relatives to choose whichever mode of burial they may think fit, and thus, without producing any sweeping changes, opponents and supporters would have ample opportunities for testing the merits or demerits of the process.

Numerous objections can, of course, be raised against the general adoption of cremation in preference to underground burial, but the only one which appears to me to present any difficulties is, that if cremation were to supersede ordinary interments, the ends of justice might run the risk of being defeated in some cases of poisoning. A little closer examination, however, will show that even this is not an insuperable objection. The appointment of state medical officers and experts, whose duties it would be to investigate all causes of sudden and mysterious death—capable of analysing anything placed before them—would not only completely annihilate this objection, but would probably also act as a deterrent of crimes of this nature.

Here we might copy with advantage the system, or a modification of it, which exists in the large cities of France

and Germany, &c., where officers (*Médecins Vérificateurs*) are specially appointed for verifying the cause of death in every instance, who are bound to state or report in writing full particulars of each case, somewhat in the following manner:—1st, the Christian name and surname of the deceased; 2d, the age; 3d, the sex; 4th, the profession; 5th, if married or not; 6th, the exact date and hour of the decease; 7th, the street, the number and story of the house in which it occurred; 8th, the nature of the illness, and if there be any reason for making a *post-mortem* examination; 9th, the duration of the illness; 10th, the names of the persons who supplied the medicines; 11th, the names of the doctors and others who attended the case. “Besides this verification made by the doctors belonging to each ‘quartier,’ of Paris, by an order of the Prefect of the Seine, April 1839, a committee was formed to watch over the service.” If we had an arrangement something similar to the above, such a thing as apparent, being mistaken for real, death, would be impossible, which is another objection to cremation.

In private life, and amongst intelligent men, I find about one-half either in favour of cremation, or at any rate not against it. Some think it a “sensible method,” others “the best thing that could be adopted,” while even those who are opposed to it can only say that it would hurt the feelings of mourning relatives—that there is something in “earth to earth.” Of course there is. There is also something in “ashes to ashes,” and something still more significant in “dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.” I have mentioned these objections as being some of the principal ones, and even these are only noticed to show how easily they can be refuted.

It is very natural to expect that many men who might be willing to support a Cremation Act should ask, How is it possible to carry out such a scheme upon a large scale with-

out wounding public feeling, and putting the country to a tremendous amount of unnecessary expense? Nothing can be easier of explanation. A glance at the subject will suffice.

We know that the cost of laying out and maintaining our present cemeteries is very considerable, and that, in consequence of their being situated in the immediate vicinity of our large towns, it is merely a question of time, and that at no very distant date, when those repositories of decaying animal matter shall have to be abandoned owing to building encroachments, so that what is at present extramural will then be intramural, full of danger, and fertile sources of contamination to the living. With cremation, on the other hand, the whole aspect of the question would be completely altered. Neither now, nor at any future period, would there be the slightest danger to the living, and the cost of erecting and maintaining suitable mortuary houses for the purpose would not be so great as under the present system of interment, and altogether we should be benefited individually and collectively by it.

Ornamental structures upon a magnificent scale, which might be surrounded by numerous objects of interest, and rendered attractive in various ways which need not be detailed here, not the least of which would be an abandonment of all outward semblance of mourning and funereal equipages, would complete a change that all enlightened people should indorse. No sensible man expects, or would even wish, that in this generation or the next the erection of tablets and monuments to the memories of the departed should be discontinued; nevertheless, it will be admitted that as time wears on they must ultimately become effaced and obliterated. We of the present day do not know where to seek for the ashes of our forefathers, and it will be the same with us in our turn, when no traces of our human existence can be found!

In the capacity of thinking men we are bound to consider this, and when we do so we find that "all is vanity." The feelings which we cherish for the dead are only those that could be shared by the living: there is a great gulf between. Nothing that we can do in the way of remembrance can be of the slightest use to them; even the longing ambition after fame is but a worldly idea, in fact, a form of mental weakness, for the moment the last breath has been drawn our severance has been completed for ever.

To some the thought of death is terrible; to many it is a source of great relief from the cares and sorrows of this world; whilst to all it will prove a beautiful, tranquil, and undisturbed rest, in which there need be no concern for the future.

K. N. MACDONALD.

EDINBURGH, *October 1875.*

ADDENDUM.

U. B.

SINCE the above was written I see that Dr Richardson, speaking before the Social Science Congress at Brighton, on the 11th Oct. 1875, made allusion to cremation in the following terms:—"For various reasons the process of burial is still retained—firstly, because the cremation process is open to serious medico-legal objections; secondly, because by the complete resolution of the body into its elementary and inodorous gases in the cremation furnace, that intervening chemical link between the organic and inorganic worlds, the ammonia, is destroyed, and the economy of nature is thereby dangerously disturbed; thirdly, because the natural tendencies of the people lead them still to the earth as the most fitting resting-place into which, when lifeless, they should be drawn."

It will be observed that I have anticipated Dr Richardson's objections. The medico-legal difficulties I have completely disposed of, and if anything further were wanted, it would be quite easy to preserve the contents of the stomach for a period of years *in doubtful cases*, or, what would be better still, to analyse them at once and be done with it. His second objection is altogether a matter of presumption. It is not denied that plants give out oxygen and absorb carbonic acid and ammonia, and thus assist in maintaining the balance between the animal and vegetable worlds; but it is a different matter altogether to decide whether the world would come to a standstill or not if *our* bodies were not

restored to mother earth. We are in possession of sufficient evidence to show that there must have been a most luxuriant vegetation thousands of ages before man appeared on the earth. Does Dr Richardson think that the Saurians of those days supplied all the requisite ammonia, or that the carboniferous epoch could have done without either? I have got great faith in chemistry and physics, but it would take a good deal to make me swallow Dr Richardson's bolus. We can have no idea whatever of what would happen in the event of cremation being adopted, further than that the living would benefit by it, and vegetation could get on without the ammonia of *our* bodies. There are many other sources of ammonia besides human bodies, and if we found the world were *really* going to the dogs, we might supply the requisite ammonia artificially! His third objection being entirely a sentimental one, which has already been disposed of, it need not be noticed further in this place.

LA CREMAZIONE

PER

RAFFAELE DE MARTINIS

P. d. M.

Veterem et meliorem consuetudinem
humandi frequentamus.

MINUC: FEL: cap: XXXIV.



NAPOLI

TIPOGRAFIA EDITR. DEGLI ACCATTONGELLI

1875

THE HISTORY OF

THE

REIGN OF

CHARLES THE FIRST

BY

JOHN BURNET

OF

THE

UNIVERSITY OF

OXFORD

IN TWO VOLUMES

LONDON

LA CREMAZIONE

INTRODUZIONE

*Veterem et meliorem consuetudinem
humandi frequentamus.*

MINUC. FEL. cap. XXXIV.

Da poi diciannove secoli l'umanità incivilita cristianamente consegna alla terra il corpo morto del suo simile, affinchè vi subisca la pena del primitivo fallo in esecuzione della divina sentenza: Sei polvere, e polvere diventerai. Ma il genio persecutore di tutto ciò ch'è cristiano, non contento della guerra spiegata contro i ciimiteri e gli accompagnamenti religiosi al sepolcro, che vuole rimutati in civili, pretende ridurre non più in polvere le umane spoglie per opera di natura, ma in cenere per quella del fuoco. Laonde fra le forsennate grida demoralizzatrici del nostro secolo v'ha pure quello che pretende intimarci la cremazione dei nostri

cadaveri. Questo grido dice: Bruciamo i nostri morti! (1)

Di questo grido fa mestieri conoscere;

I.° Lo scopo, cioè quello che dimanda:

II.° Da chi sia emesso:

III.° Ragioni vere di tal dimanda.

Delle quali cose ad avere completa conoscenza, fa d'uopo sapere:

I.° Degli usi dei diversi popoli antichi seguiti nella sepoltura dei loro morti:

II.° Quale sia il costume cristiano:

III.° Se il costume cristiano sia tale da preferire al pagano.

Queste cose brevemente esporremo, e dall'esposizione di esse potrà il lettore conoscere lo vero stato della quistione che si agita, per penetrare nell'animo dei popoli l'indifferenza ed il disprezzo per la tomba cristiana.

(1) È questo il titolo di un opuscolo sparso in Francia per corrompere la coscienza sociale pure su questo argomento della sepoltura.

CAPO I.^o

Del modo di seppellire i cadaveri usato dagli antichi popoli.

Uso dei barbari antichi — Dei popoli inciviliti dell'oriente — Di quelli dell'occidente.

La ricerca del modo di seppellire i cadaveri in uso presso i diversi popoli dell' antichità è una di quelle parti dell' archeologia che ha dato ragione da scrivere molti dotti volumi. Noi, che non scriviamo per i dotti, ma pel popolo, ci limitiamo a dire soltanto quello che la sua ignoranza è necessario che sappia, per intendere la questione che ora si porta al suo giudizio. L' erudizione potrà essere dagli amatori gustata ai fonti che non tralascieremo di citare.

Per la stessa ragione, e per l'onore della umana famiglia, trasandiamo di ricordare la sepoltura data dagli antichi barbari. Questi antropofagi facevano del proprio stomaco una tomba agli uccisi, deplorando di non poter fare altrettanto con i morti d' infermità; se non antropofagi, crescevano dei cani a compiere l'opera della morte sul corpo umano, come altri abbandonavano il cadavere alla voracità degli avvoltoj nel fondo dei burroni.

I popoli inciviliti dell' antichità nei funerali uffizii furono conformi alle dottrine filosofiche e religiose ricevute e seguite nella vita domestica e civile. Eraclito pensava che il mondo avesse origine dal fuoco, e che nel fuoco tutto dovesse andar risoluto: Talete opinava l' avesse dall' acqua, e che tutto terminasse con lo sciogliersi in vapore. (1) Da queste opinioni sulla origine e fine del mondo risultarono due maniere di sepoltura: l' inumazione e la cremazione. Questa era eseguita bruciando i cadaveri ravvolti, come alcuni vogliono, nell' amianto, che al fuoco non distruggesi. La quale arsione era o delle sole carni o delle ossa stesse, onde le ceneri, che ne risultavano, erano riposte entro urne, che si custodivano nelle case od altrove. Di queste urne cenerarie moltissime ancora esistono nei musei di Europa.

La prima, l' inumazione, era eseguita sotterrando i cadaveri nelle case, entro e fuori le città, lungo le vie che alle città stesse menavano. L' inumazione non era eseguita al modo istesso presso tutti i popoli che l' avevano in uso; perchè alcuni, avvolto il cadavere in un lenzuolo, senz' altro lo riponevano nella terra, mentre altri in pietre cavate e ricoperte, il che produceva la tumulazione che riesce allo stesso della inumazione.

(1) Servio lib: II. Aneid.

Molti dei popoli antichi usavano imbalsamare i cadaveri prima di tumolarli o seppellirli, ma diversi modi d'imbalsamazione erano usati a ritardare la corruzione o ad evitarla completamente.—La completa imbalsamazione produceva la mummificazione, onde le mummie delle quali i nostri musei conservano alcune.

La tumulazione e l'umazione dei cadaveri imbalsamati era in uso presso gli Egiziani, i popoli della Scizia e gli Etiopi, come si ha da Diodoro e da altri. Parimente usavano i Persiani, i quali ungevano di cera i cadaveri, per testimonianza di Plinio. L'umazione presso questi popoli era eseguita o immediatamente dopo aver imbalsamati i cadaveri, riponendoli in casse di legno o di vetro; o, dopo scorso un anno dall'averli ritenuti nelle case, li trasportavano nei templi o fuori le città (1).

Presso i Greci era in uso l'inumazione e la cremazione. Della prima ci assicura Cicerone, affermando averla avuta da Cecrope (2). Della seconda fanno testimonianza Luciano, Omero e gli altri storici greci; e v'ha chi creda che cominciasse dalla guerra di Troia, ed altri da Ercole. Però sembra che la cremazione fosse in uso per i grandi seppellimenti operati dallo

(1) GIRAYDI. De vario sepeliendi etc: cap: XVII, XX.

(2) De leg. lib: II. Nam et Athenis jam illo more a Cecrope, ut ajunt, permansit hoc jus terra humani.

Stato, e l'umazione di uso privato e comune. In questo privato modo di seppellimento salirono a tanto lusso i Greci, che Demetrio Faleereo dovè emettere leggi sulla dimensione delle tombe, e Licurgo ordinava che queste fossero poste in città e presso i templi degli dei, come abbiamo da Erodoto.

Sul conto degli Ebrei v'ha chi creda, che usassero della cremazione e della umazione imbalsamando pure i cadaveri; ma della prima straordinariamente (1), e della seconda universalmente, primitivamente e comunemente. Gravissimi autori affermano che la cremazione si usasse per i soli cadaveri dei re per aver tempo da preparare le solenni esequie; altri, questi casi speciali interpretano per una affumigazione del cadavere causata dall'abbruciare molti aromi intorno ad esso (2); o, per una tal combustione aromatica prodotta dalla imbalsamazione, che gli Ebrei aveano presa dagli Egiziani, benchè diversamente la eseguissero (3). Ma potè essere vera cremazione non ordinata dalla legge, sebbene introdotta

(1) I casi speciali di cremazione si trovano: I Reg. XXXI, 12, 13—II Reg. II, 5 — II Paralip: XVI, 1, XXI, 19 — Ierem; XXXIV, 5 — Amos, VI, 9, 10.

(2) QUENSTED. *De antiquis ritibus sepulchralibus*. Cap. VII. *De ipsa funeratione*.

(3) NICOLAI. *De sepulchris Hebraeorum. lib. I. cap. II*.

ta dal popolo come tanti altri usi presi dai popoli gentili con i quali trattavano (1).

I Romani bruciavano ed inumavano i loro morti, come appare dalle leggi delle XII Tavole, che inibivano in città sì l'inumazione che la cremazione:

Hominem mortuum in urbe ne sepelito neve urito (2).

(1) SPENCER. *De legibus Hebraeorum ritualibus. De ritibus gentium ad Hebraeos derivatis.* cap: XI. CLAIRE. *Archeologia* cap: XV. art: VI.

(2). Il Sig. Giov. Battista Ayr su di questo frammento delle XII Tavole così scrive al Polli negli *Annali di Chimica fasc. di dicem. 1872*:

“Gli antichi popoli d’Italia cremavano i cadaveri. I Romani facevano il somigliante. Indi, forse mossi da amor dei parenti, misero in non cale i riti dei progenitori, ed incominciarono non solo a seppellire i cadaveri nella città, ma anche a conservarli nelle proprie abitazioni alla foggia egiziana”.

“Le leggi delle XII Tavole sancirono non solo che i cadaveri non fossero seppelliti od usti nella città, ma che tutti fossero cremati fuori di essa. Il cemento e sviluppo legale delle sanzioni seguenti lo assodano: *Rogum, Custumve novum proprius sexaginta pedes ne adijceto aedes alienas, invito domino. Hoc plus ne facito, rogam ascia ne polito.* Le leggi delle XII Tavole non fanno affatto menzione della tumulazione ed inumazione, ma sì vero del rogo.

“Presso i Romani nessuno poteva non essere cremato; ciò era riserbato solo all’arbitrio di qualche despota, come fu di Mario.”

Dobbiamo fare osservare al Signor Ayr che s’inganna

L'umazione era per essi l'antico ed universale modo di seppellire come attesta Plinio (1)

sul conto degli antichi popoli d'Italia. Di questi dice Plinio lib. VII: *Vetus certe institutum sepulture*. Commette poi un anacronismo dicendo l'umazione posteriore alla cremazione. Gli Italiani molto tardi istituirono la cremazione: Plinio dice: *At postquam longisque bellis obrutos erui cognoverunt, tunc institutum*. S'inganna affermando che il frammento imponga la cremazione e non l'umazione, l'una o l'altra era facoltativa, come ora vorrebbero i zelanti sacerdoti d'Igea, ma fuori la città: l'umazione per evitare infezioni, e la cremazione, *propter ignis periculum hoc adjectum est*, dice Cicerone. Il ch. professore vorrebbe confermata la sua interpretazione con i frammenti che nel testo seguono il primo frammento con la parola. Ma questi sono antecedenti. Il Gotfredo scrive: "*Ec quod illud? Superius non dixit. Placuisse nonnullis decurtatam hanc esse sententiam, aut superioris alicujus appendicem. Possis tamen dicere initium legis fuisse ac si scriptum esset: Hoc plus ne faciatis. Plus, inquam, quam sequenti lege continebitur*"; cioè: *Umerete e cremerete i vostri morti, ma fuori la città*. Per confermare di quanto affermiamo, cioè che nel *ne sepeliri* s'intende della umazione, riportiamo le parole di Cicerone: *Non qui uratur sepeliri, sed qui humetur obscuras cum sit, sic interpretor. Finem sepulture ustionem non fuisse, sed humationem. Improprie sepeliri, qui uritur: proprie, qui terra conditur*.

(1) *Hist. lib. VII, c. LIV*. *Ipsam cremare apud Romanos non fuit veteris instituti; terra condebantur. Nemo ante Sillam dictatorem traditur crematus, idque eum voluisse, veritum talionem erat* to scilicet C. Marii cadavere.

benchè la cremazione fosse in tempi posteriori generalmente adottata e poi resa una forma di pena di morte. Benchè l'uno e l'altro modo fosse in uso, pure Cicerone chiaramente afferma che solo alle ceneri sepolte si appartenevano l'onore ed i sacri diritti del sepolcro, perchè l'umazione era ritenuta per la sepoltura propriamente detta (1).

Dei Germani (2), dei Galli (3) e degli altri popoli non parliamo, perchè le loro costumanze da una delle surriferite non si differivano. (4)

Dalle quali cose chiaro appare come il primitivo modo di seppellire di tutti i popoli sia stato la umazione eseguita con tumoli ed imbalsamazione o senza; che la cremazione sia stata introdotta posteriormente, più largamente in uso presso i popoli pagani, e che presso gli Ebrei presenta pochi casi e dubbii.

(1) Priusquam in eos (mortuos) iniecta gleba est, et ille, ubi crematum est corpus, nihil habet religionis. Iniecta gleba tumulus et humatus est et gleba vocatur, ac tum denique multa religiosa completur. *De Leg.* lib. II.

(2) TACIT. *De Moribus Germanorum*, cap: XXVII.

(3) IUL: CAESAR. *De bello gal:* lib. VI.

(4) GIRALDI Op: cit: cap: XXVII. XXVI.

CAPO II.

Del costume cristiano

L'inumazione e la tumulazione fu sempre la maniera di seppellire seguita dai cristiani. — Testimonianze dei padri. — Del dritto romano. — Del dritto canonico.

Il costume cristiano nel seppellire fu l'umazione e la tumulazione dei cadaveri alcune volte imbalsamati. Dagli *Atti degli Apostoli* sino alle ultime elucubrazioni di archeologia cristiana, i fautori della cremazione non potranno ritrovare altro uso diverso da questo.

(1) Cap: V. vers. 6. 10. Surgentes autem juvenes amoverunt eum, et afferentes sepelierunt.... et sepelierunt ad virum suum.

(2) L'umazione fu sempre presso i cristiani accompagnata da cerimonie religiose occulte o pubbliche secondo che il cristianesimo era libero o perseguito dai tiranni, onde l'*accompagnamento civile* è un trovato dell'anticristianesimo moderno, copia di quello Giuliano apostata che inibiva tali accompagnamenti di giorno, per non ingombrare le vie, e funere i cittadini. Le cerimonie che precedevano e seguivano l'umazione si trovavano descritte da Dionigi Areopagita, nella *Ecclesiastica Ierarchia* ed ivi venet: 1755 pag: 276. Presso il Casalio, De *teribus sacris christianorum ritibus. Part: III. c. LXVI. De funeribus priscorum christianorum.*

Il Martene così riassume il costume cristiano: «Depositi in tumulo et operculo contecti terra obruebantur. Is erat communis Christianorum sepeliendorum usus». (1) Il Giraldis si estende più ancora nel riferirci gli usi cristiani. « I corpi dei nostri defunti noi laviamo, come anticamente i Romani ; e, a seconda della condizione del morto, lo vestiamo sì che il pontefice con ponteficale ed il re con regio ornato, o come avrà disposto per testamento. Preceduto dal segno della umana redenzione, e dai sacerdoti di ogni ordine, seguito dagli amici e parenti messi a tutto, lo trasportiamo al tempio ed al cimitero. Quivi secondo il costume è deposto nella terra, che è da vulgare e plebeio, o in marmorei sepolcri ad uso de'grandi, o in quelli di porfido e di bronzo, ch' è proprio da re e da potenti ; poichè grandemente interessa ai nostri restituire la terra alla terra, che, come canta Lucrezio, è la madre universale ed il comune sepolcro :

Uniparens eadem est commune sepulcrum. (2) »

ella M. Gaume , *Le Cimetière au dix-neuvième siècle. Quelques lettres* ; e più copiosamente e con maggiore edizione presso l' illustre Monsignor Coppola nell'opuscolo: *Sui Sepolcri pagani, ebrei e cristiani.*

(1) De antiquis ecclesiae ritibus. Lib. III, cap: XIV
(2) Cap : XXIX. De christianorum sepeliendorum ritibus.

Noi potremmo mostrare, con l'autorità degli storici e con la dottrina dei Padri, come il cimitero sia nato col cristianesimo; ma sarebbe un moltiplicare citazioni per dimostrare che la Chiesa da tenerissima madre ha cura non delle sole anime, ma dei corpi dei suoi figli, che reputa cosa santa, e che ha sempre santificata la terra dove li deposita ad attendere la futura risurrezione. Inoltre esistendo un'opera analoga, (1) tralasciamo di farlo, limitandoci a ricordare il riscontro di Tertulliano per la cremazione usata dai gentili, i quali usavano dello stesso fuoco a bruciare i cadaveri ed a cuocere le vivande per i defunti. (2) Ricordiamo che l'accusa che ci è fatta di avversare la cremazione è antica, perchè, fra le empietà attribuite dai gentili ai cristiani, era quella di promettere la eternità ad essi che supponevano venire dalla terra, e che nella terra volevano disfatti. Minuzio Felice rispose a questa accusa (3), come santo Agostino.

(1) MG. GAUME: *Le cimetière au dix-neuvième siècle*.

(2) TERTUL: *De resurrectione carnis*, cap: I. Defunctis parentant; et quidem impensissimum officium... quos negant sentire quidquam, escam desiderare praeferunt. At magis ridebit vulgus, tunc ego quod cum ipsos defunctos atrocissime exurit, quos postmodum gulosissime nutrit: iisdem ignibus et promerenda offendens. O pietatem de crudelitate ludentem! satisfiat, an insultat, cum crematis cremat.

(3) MINUT. FEL: *In Octav: cap. XI, e XXXIV.*

rispondeva all' altra degli stessi gentili, che attribuivano a divina vendetta il non essere stati molti cristiani sepolti nell'eccidio di Roma, mentre si diffondeva in lacrime per la sepoltura di Monica (1). Ricordiamo parimente che l'umazione dei cadaveri pel cristianesimo non solo è stata sempre il mezzo di seppellire i suoi morti; ma l' ha annoverata fra le opere di misericordia che stabiliva nel mezzo del mondo pagano. Lattanzio (2), contro i filosofi suoi compagni di studio e non di convinzioni, mostrando quale fosse il vero culto, affermava: « *Ultimum illud et maximum pietatis officium, peregrinorum et pauperum sepulturam: quod illi (i filosofi) virtutis justitiaeque doctores prorsus non attigerunt. Nec poterant id videre, qui utilitate omnia officia metiebantur.* ». Di questa pia opera apporta ragione da disgradare solo i transformisti contemporanei, ma tale che Lattanzio credeva valevole contro gli stoici e gli gnostici del suo tempo. « *Non patiemur figuram et figmentum Dei feris ac volueribus in*

*mortuis extinctis, aeternitatem promittere. Inde vide-
et et execrantur rogos, et damnant ignium sepul-
cras.*

(1) Vedi il libro delle sue Confessioni, e De Civit.
dei lib: I. cap: XII. XIII; nonchè il libro De Cura
sacerenda pro mortuis cap: IV. V.

(2) Divinarum Institutionum lib: VI. De vero cultu
cap. XII.

praedam jacere, sed reddimus id terrae, unde ortum est. »

Siffatte cose ricordate basterebbero a chiarire come l'umazione sia l'uso cristiano di seppellire. Ma siccome la cremazione è ancora invocata in nome della civiltà dell'antica Roma (1); così non sarà senza utilità dire che la cremazione fu proibita da Antonino per testimonianza del Besaldo (2), e che rimase negli ultimi tempi di Roma come una forma di pena di morte onde i corpi dei condannati alla morte del rogo, perchè fossero seppelliti, era d'uopo di permesso. « Corpora eorum qui capite damnantur cognatis ipsorum neganda non sunt. Hodie eorum, in quos animadvertitur, corpora non aliter *sepeliuntur*, quam si fuerit petitus et permissum... eorum quoque corpora qui *exsecrandi damnantur* peti possunt, scilicet ut ossa et cineres collecta sepulturae tradi possint. Digest: lib. XLVIII. Tit. XXIV. *De cadaveribus punitorum*. Da questa proibizione Finckeltan deduce il silenzio del dritto romano sulla cremazione. (3) « Nusquam cremandorum cadaverum jure nostro mentio fit. Siquidem Ulpianus

(1) Annali di Chimica applicati alla med: fasc. 1872-73.

(2) Consid: politic: vitae et mortis, cap: I. presso il Casalio.

(3) Disput: de jure sepult: Thes. XXVII.

et aliorum I. C. ejus aetatis saeculo jam usus urandi corpora desiit, et praesertim Justiniani et compilatorum juris, qui jam receperant fidem catholicam».

Ma lo stesso dritto riconosce l'umazione, ne regola il modo, dichiara i diritti che da essa come da cosa sacra fluiscono, come è facile vedere da tutto il titolo settimo del libro undecimo del Digesto: *De religiosis et sumptibus funerum*. Noi citeremo di questo titolo solo le parole di Marciano: Divi fratres admonuerunt ne justae sepulturae traditum, idest *terra conditum*, corpus inquietetur; e quelle del titolo seguente che riferiscono, secondo il Gotfredo, la legge di Numa che proibiva seppellire la donna morta incinta prima della estrazione del feto: *Negat lex regia, mulierem, quae praegnans mortua sit, humari, antequam partus excidatur*. Dopo siffatte parole è inutile ricordare le Novelle che tramandano alla memoria dei posteri i soccorsi e le corporazioni stabilite da Costantino e confermate da Anastasio per l'accompagnamento e la sepoltura dei poveri. (1)

S'invoca la civiltà di Roma, ma dei tempi corrottissimo paganesimo, ma non quella che diceva dire agl' imperatori: *Potentiae nostrae*

(1) Novella. XLIII. di Leone XII. e LIX. *De debita pensia in exequiis defunctorum*.

subditi nostri, sive vivant sive moriantur, curae sunt!

Non ci fermiamo a raccogliere testi e citazioni del Dritto canonico, perchè è a tutti noto che questo assume l'inumazione come un fatto giuridico cristiano, del quale vede solo le conseguenze spirituali per quelli che ad essa partecipano, o che di essa doveano essere privati; ed i dritti di quelli che prestano l'opera loro per l'interro. Della cremazione non fa parola come di cosa non cristiana, e col suo silenzio ribadisce che l'inumazione sia il solo uso dei cristiani di seppellire i morti.

CAPO III.

Il costume cristiano è da preferire al pagano

L'umazione è conforme alla dignità umana ed all'ordine cosmico. — Non è per se antigiênica. — La cremazione e gl'interessi religiosi — La cremazione e la medicina legale ed il processo criminale — La cremazione e la legislazione italiana.

§. I.

Che l'umazione, o il costume cristiano, sia da preferire alla cremazione, recente e non primitivo costume pagano, sarà facile rendere evidente, se si consideri il cadavere nel complesso delle sue relazioni. Queste possono raccogliersi in quelle che il corpo morto ha con l'individuo umano del quale è stato gran parte; con la società umana che abbandona; con l'universo alle leggi del quale deve ancora sottostare, ed in fine, è da considerarlo in relazione della religione professata dall'individuo umano a cui appartenne, e di quelli che gli sono superstiti. Di queste relazioni potranno rigettare i materialisti quelle sole di ordine morale, reputando il corpo morto dell'uomo una cagna qualunque, ma non sarà ad essi possibile conoscere quelle di ordine fisico senza negare realtà del morto umano corpo. Le relazioni

di ordine morale ci serviranno a mezzo di dimostrazione per quelli che ancora si reputano uomini, e le altre impiegheremo ad insegnamento di quelli che amano discendere dal gran papà *scimione*, se per essi vi sia alcuna parola al mondo che valga a persuadere.

La prima relazione del cadavere è quella che per tutta la sua vita è corsa con lo spirito da quale era informato, e col quale componeva l'uomo.

Per questa relazione il cadavere è da più una carogna, perchè partecipa alla dignità umana, partecipando ogni parte componente a quella di tutto il composto; e perchè la coscienza umana di tutti i popoli e di tutti i tempi, tranne i materialisti contemporanei, ha reputato il cadavere degno di umani onori.

Per questa relazione è da trattare il cadavere secondo la dignità del composto umano ed i desiderii giusti ed onesti dello spirito che lo informava, cioè secondo la dignità umana. Questa richiede che la dissoluzione del corpo sia fatta secondo il processo delle leggi cosmiche naturali e non artificiali; perchè l'uomo facendo parte dell'universo non può sottrarsi alle leggi che lo regolano, e ad esse gli vuole sottostare.

Le leggi cosmiche della dissoluzione del corpo animale sono quel complesso di trasfe

mazioni che diciamo putrefazione. Questa è la dissoluzione naturale al corpo umano, avvenne che il corrompimento delle cose è naturale quando avviene secondo la esigenza degli elementi costitutivi del corruttibile; (1) e la esigenza delle parti del corpo umano è quella di ritornare alle primitive forme, sotto le quali attua la gran legge cosmica di servire alla conservazione e produzione degli altri esseri che compongono l'universo. « Le sostanze, scrive Liebig (2), che compongono i vegetabili e gli animali sono nate sotto il dominio della forza vitale. Essa è quella che determina la direzione in cui attiransi gli elementi, essa è una forza di movimento capace di comunicare questo agli atomi in riposo, e di opporre una resistenza ad altre forze di movimento, alla forza chimica, al calore ed alla forza elettrica... Allorchè dopo la morte la forza vitale opponesi all'influenza di esse, subentrano i fenomeni meravigliosi che noi dinotiamo col nome di fermentazione, di putrefazione, di eremacausia. Essi sono dei processi di scomposizione mercè i quali gli elementi, negli ultimi ri-

(1) *Corruptiones rerum naturalium, simpliciter naturales dicuntur, quando fiunt secundum exigentiam principiorum materialium. S. Thom: In 2. sent: Dist: XIX.*

(2) Lettere chimiche *Let. XII. XXVII.*

sultamenti loro, vengono ridotti allo stato che possedevano prima che avessero preso parte al processo vitale. Gli atomi organici degli ordini più elevati vengono per siffatti processi ricondotti a quelle combinazioni dell' infimo ordine da cui nacquero».

« Si conosce da tutti che gli esseri organizzati provano, dopo la morte, una trasformazione, che ha per effetto di fare sparire a poco a poco dal suolo la materia di cui essi si compongono. Ma sono le parti animali che soprattutto provano questa metamorfosi in un tempo più breve: esse si diffondono nell' aria allo stato di gas, e finiscono per non lasciare che le parti minerali venute dalla terra».

Questo gran fenomeno di dissoluzione si compie negli esseri organizzati, subito che la morte arresta l'azione delle cause variabili sotto la cui influenza le combinazioni che li compongono si erano formate. I prodotti della economia vegetale ed animale provano, mercè l'azione dell'aria e dell'acqua, una serie di metamorfosi, di cui l'ultima ha per risultato la trasformazione del loro carbonio in acido carbonico, del loro idrogeno in acqua, del loro azoto in ammoniaca e del loro solfo in acido solforico».

« Per lo effetto di queste azioni chimiche che sono le conseguenze della morte, gli ele-

menti dei corpi organici riprendono dunque le forme primitive sotto le quali possono servire di alimento ad una novella generazione. Gli elementi venuti dall' aria ritornano all' atmosfera; gli elementi forniti dalla terra rientrano nel suolo. La morte, la dissoluzione di una generazione intera, diviene così la sorgente della vita di una novella generazione (1). »

Dopo il peccato originale, il corpo umano è condannato alla dissoluzione per mezzo della putrefazione !

Inoltre, la relazione corsa fra il cadavere e lo spirito che lo informava, porta che sia rispettato l' istinto della forma verso la materia, come reputasi sacro il volere umano nella disposizione delle sue cose. L' istinto di conservazione del proprio corpo fa reclamare che la indispensabile distruzione di esso sia fatta col maggior ritardo consentito dalle leggi cosmiche.

Ora chi non vede che la sola inumazione, non potendo imbalsamare tutti i cadaveri, corrisponde alle naturali esigenze del corpo umano, e soddisfa parimente all' istinto dello spirito ? Per essa la dissoluzione del corpo è operata dagli agenti naturali col ritardo naturale alle cause dissolventi, mentre la cremazione non ritarda la dissoluzione, ma la produce preco-

(1) Liebig Lettere Ch imiche *Let: VII, e seg.*

cemente con la celerità efficace del fuoco avvivato dai bruciatori di uomini, e non coll'azione diretta degli agenti naturali della putrefazione dei corpi animali. Distrugge, ma non lascia putrefare: ci rende cenere, ma non polvere!

L'umazione adunque, come quella che risponde più all'istinto umano della conservazione del corpo ed alle leggi di cosmico ordine volute osservare dallo spirito umano che informava il cadavere, è la più conforme alla dignità umana. Per tale la ritenne Cicerone, e però da preferirla: *Mihi quidem antiquissimum sepulturae genus fuisse videtur, quo apud Xenophontem Cyrus utitur, redditur enim terrae corpus et ita locatum ac situm quasi operimentum matris obducitur.* (2)

§ II.

Le cremazione è reclamata da alcuni in nome della scienza moderna come un mezzo igienico a evitare le infezioni, che dai cimiteri suppone si spargano fra i viventi, sia per le evaporazioni dei corpi putrefatti, sia per l'assorbimento che ne possono fare le sorgenti di acqua potabile. Le prime sono tenute dal Polli, dal Gorini, dal Sig. Wegmann Ercolani, nel suo opuscolo Zurigo: *La Cremations des corps envisagée con*

(2) De leg; lib: II.

me le procédé le plus rationnel d'inhumation. Il secondo impensierisce con altri il Signor L. Pappenheim, citato dall' autore dell' opuscolo edito a Parigi, che ha per titolo: *Brulons nos morts*, che scrive: « Se la chimica organica avesse più progredito, se si conoscessero le materie organiche contenute dall' acqua potabile, si troverebbero delle sorgenti di acqua contenenti delle sostanze putrefatte di proteina o di altri detriti analoghi, con gran danno di quelli che usano di tale acqua, e si scoprirebbe che il male proviene da qualche lontano cimitero ».

Sul conto di questo secondo mezzo delaterio d' infezione noi osserviamo innanzi tutto essere un semplice sospetto, una ipotesi, non della scienza, sì del Sig. Pappenheim; perchè egli stesso afferma che la chimica organica ignora le *materie organiche contenute nell' acqua potabile*, nel quale stato d' ignoranza come potrà affermare, che le sostanze organiche, che possono essere contenute dalle acque siano velenose. Nella verità dell'ipotesi non vediamo perchè la infezione delle acque debba attribuirsi ad un *lontano cimitero* anzichè ad una vicina carogna, o ad un cadavere putrefatto nelle acque lungo il loro corso.

Il rispetto che dobbiamo alla chimica ed ai cultori di una scienza che con i suoi progressi ha fatto tanto avanzare le scienze affini, ci

obbliga a dimandare se il Signor Pappenheim sia un cultore almeno di questa scienza. Imperocchè egli accusa la chimica organica di aver poco progredito, mentre egli ignora non solo i progressi, ma i principii della scienza (1).

(1) Il Sig. Pappenheim ignora che l'analisi immediata dei principii organici è giunta a tal grado di perfezione che non è possibile che sfuggano ad ogni diligenza chimica i principii organici ed organizzati che possono accidentalmente trovarsi in un'acqua potabile. Diremo di più che le acque potabili se sono tali non debbono contenere che tracce tutt'al più di sostanze organiche accidentali. È noto infatti che mille grammi di acqua potabile non contengono in media più di $0,00003$ di sostanze organiche: ed è vero altresì che il chimico può in un'acqua qualunque determinare fin la milionesima parte e meno ancora di sostanza. Sarà soltanto questione che invece di prendere ad analizzare un litro di una data acqua ne prenderà dieci, cento, mille, appunto come fecero i famosi chimici Kirkoff e Bunsen quando giunsero alla scoperta del rubidio e del cesio.

Circa alle sostanze organizzate come infusorii e altro, è noto che la microscopia discopre gli esseri meno percettibili.

Ma ciò che maggiormente sorprende nelle parole del Pappenheim è ch'egli parla di sostanze putrefatte di proteina. Ma sa egli che la proteina è un tipo delle sostanze albuminoidi che non esiste in natura ma che fu preparata dal Mulder. Come dunque nelle acque potabili (e non potabili) si può trovare tanto facilmente un prodotto chimico artificiale?

Noi però vogliamo essere più concessionisti, vogliamo ammettere che egli intenda accennare ai detti

Ma non possiamo astenerci dal riprovare l' autore dell' opuscolo *brulons nos morts*, che in un libro di propaganda dia del *competentissimo in fatto di quistioni d' igiene* ad un tal uomo. Lo autore ad ammettere l' odio contro i cimiteri nella coscienza popolare, gitta nelle menti l' autorità di un uomo incompetente, che a raggiungere il proprio scopo dichiara *competentissimo*. Solita arte ad uccellare i semplici !

Ma sondiamo le acque, analizziamole, per vedere quanto vi sia di positivo nell'assorbimento temuto dai cremazionisti. Ma innanzi tutto è da osservare come questo assorbimento, questa infezione sia ancora una ipotesi, un problema per gli stessi cremazionisti, come si rivela dalla lettera del professore Amati al Signor Polli (1). Il ch. autore così scrive : « Io credo pertanto che prima di tutto sia necessario dimostrare con

vati proteici, cioè ai principii albuminoidi. In tal caso noi gli diremo che questi sono poco solubili in acqua e che i loro prodotti di trasformazione (di putrefazione) sono per la più parte gassosi, quindi non è probabile che si trovino nelle acque potabili, ed infatti non si conosce analisi di acqua potabile che accenni alla esistenza di principii proteici. Questi principii si possono trovare nelle acque delle fontane, nelle acque stagnanti, nelle acque in seno di cui sono avvenute, accidentali putrefazioni; ma in tal caso non sono più acque potabili, e che siano impotabili distinguera ogni ultimo idiota.

(1) Annali di chimica, Fascie : Ottobre 1873.

fatti positivi, se e fino a qual punto il sistema della inumazione sia contrario alla salute pubblica. L'analisi delle acque potabili che servono all'uso delle popolazioni più vicine ai cimiteri; le osservazioni sullo stato sanitario di quegli abitanti ed altre vie di procedimento, che sta a Lei non a me di suggerire, potranno determinare la opinione pubblica a promuovere un giudizio definitivo su questo argomento che deve interessare tutti i municipii.»

Inoltre le sorgenti di acque possono venire da strati profondissimi, e possono essere superficiali. Nel primo caso le materie organiche cadaveriche non possono pervenire a tanta profondità, e se vi pervenissero, le sarebbero ridotte a sostanze primitive ed in forma e quantità innocua, perchè è scientificamente vero che le sorgenti molto profonde sono purissime, come le reiterate analisi di sommi chimici moderni hanno constatato.

Che se le sorgenti non sono così profonde ma superficiali, questa tanto problematica e temuta infezione delle acque, quando sarà accuratamente studiata, si vedrà che non avviene, affermando il Signor G. Battista Ayr che gli elementi cadaverici per inumazione o tumulazione rimangono inerti e confinati in un tumulo od in una fossa. (1) Ma, se non si voglia aggiustare

(1) Annali di chimica etc. vol. IV, fasc: dicem: 1857

fede a siffatta opinione del Signor Ayr, la quale rende inesplicabile come egli, professando tale principio, possa dimandare la cremazione come unico mezzo ad evitare le infezioni cadaveriche dei cimiteri; pure il temuto assorbimento non è così irreparabile da dover bruciare i morti per lasciar vivere i viventi. Infatti le scaturigini superficiali per lo più non sono potabili, ed in tale ipotesi poco a noi importa il loro assorbimento; se sono potabili ed infette, resta a dimostrare che sia infezione cadaverica proveniente da cimitero; il che se vero, è colpa di chi abbia posto il cimitero sopra o vicino il corso delle acque, che debbono dissetare gli abitanti di un paese. Ed in questo caso istesso, ch'è effetto non della natura ma della imperizia umana, debbono ancora convincerci i cremazionisti della necessità di abolire tutti i cimiteri, dal perchè uno di qualche borgata è mal costruito; e dimostrarci la necessità di abolire i cimiteri anzicchè usare degli altri mezzi che la scienza suggerisce a purificare le acque ed a renderle innocue.

Il voclo dei cremazionisti per farci barattare i cimiteri, è una pretensione, che la scienza ed il buon senso non possono ammettere. Meglio sarebbe emesso a persuadere il popolo a far uso, al bisogno, dei filtri e di un poco di carbone a purificare le acque, che più dei miasmi palu-

stri sono causa di morbi; con maggiore utilità dell'igiene e più temperanza e ragionevolezza scientifica tanto dire sarebbe fatto per dimandare le modifiche del Signor Lefort, per i pozzi e cisterne in prossimità dei cimiteri, accettate dall'accademia medica di Francia. Creiamo riportarle, benchè la prima già faccia parte delle nostre leggi sanitarie. (1).

(1) 1. Domandare la revisione del decreto 17 marzo 1808, la distanza di 100 metri parendomi insufficiente a impedire una comunicazione fra le acque dei luoghi di sepoltura e i pozzi in prossimità.

2. Qualunque possa essere la distanza delle abitazioni, che si stabiliscano nuovi cimiteri solamente dove sia provato che le acque d'infiltrazione del suolo non possano comunicare coi pozzi in prossimità, anche di abitazioni lontane.

3. Di praticare attorno ai presenti cimiteri, le cui fosse siano spesso accessibili alle acque, e specialmente attorno ai luoghi principali di sepoltura e dove sono sepolti animali, come risultano dall'ultima guerra, di praticare, dico, profonde trincee dreni in maniera di allontanare dai pozzi e dai luoghi di abitazione le acque derivanti dai centri di putrida fermentazione.

L'accademia ha approvato l'impiego di questi mezzi, ma, aderendo al parere del Relatore, credo necessario di consigliare anche e prescrivere, sotto la sopralutendenza di un Consiglio d'igiene, una perpetua e abituale analisi delle acque di pozzi adoperati per uso alimentare e capaci di venire contaminati e ciò specialmente nei distretti privi di sorgenti e di acque correnti. (*Moniteur scientifique*, juin 1872).

Parimente la scienza ed il buon senso sono di accordo nel vedere che del primo mezzo d'infezione non è da accusare il cimitero, ma chi lo costruisce e quelli che di esso hanno cura. Perchè queste infezioni dipendono dalla posizione del cimitero, dalla natura del terreno scelto all'uopo, e più ancora dalla esecuzione dei regolamenti sanitari. Quando questi sono buoni e meglio osservati; quando persone intelligenti hanno scelto il luogo pel cimitero a giusta distanza dall'abitato e dalle sorgenti potabili del luogo; quando non abbia una ventilazione periodica o troppo forte in direzione delle popolazioni vicine, (1); quando tali condizioni, con la opportuna qualità del terreno, si avverano nella costruzione di un cimitero, solo il fanatismo, solo una idea preconcepita potrà far declamare contro le infezioni dei cimiteri, ma la scienza, la vera scienza nulla vi troverà da temere.

Sopra tale argomento amiamo avvalerci dell'autorità competentissima del ch. professore Zimmo, che all'eminenza della scienza chimica aggiunge l'esperienza per le delicate commissioni a lui affidate per tutelare l'igiene pubblica contro le infezioni, che potrebbero essere causate dai cimiteri tanto venuti in odio. Egli così

(1) MAGISTRETTI. Architettura Civile lib. II. cap. II. art. II.

scrive: « Nei cimiteri, non condizionati a norma dei regolamenti in vigore, basterebbe coprire i cadaveri di calce e polvere di carbone per impedire ogni qualsivoglia esalazione. Ma vediamo qual sia la natura chimica di queste esalazioni e giudichiamo dalle medesime quali inconvenienti ne possano derivare.

Abbandonato un cadavere liberamente all'azione degli agenti cosmici, essendo favorevole l'aria, la temperatura, è indubitato che soggiaccia ad uno avvicinarsi di trasformazioni che distinguonsi col nome tecnico di *putrefazione*. Da queste trasformazioni nascono senza dubbio degli effluvi nocivi, e dirò pure tossici pei viventi: idrogeno solforato, fosfuro d'idrogeno, solfidrato ammoniaco, acido carbonico ed altri prodotti accidentali più o meno abbondanti deleterii, oltre ad una miriade d'insetti e di microzoi, che di per sè stessi costituiscono un fomite gravissimo d'insalubrità, di epidemie e di peggio.

L'eremacusia del Liebig, cioè la lenta ossidazione che si verifica nei corpi animali, cessata che sia l'ordine e l'armonia delle funzioni della vita, determina un complesso di composizioni che in gran parte sono subordinate allo stato del cadavere ed alle cause morbose della morte, essendo già noto che alcuni cadaveri, messi in identiche condizioni d'aria, umidità e tempo,

ratura, sioggiacono a diversa intensità di corruzione, e danno alcuni prodotti di trasformazioni diverse, e perciò più o meno nocivi o micidiali, e capaci di diffondersi e moltiplicarsi nell'aria stessa a spese di tanti esseri inorganici, organici ed organizzati che incontrano nell'oceano aereo, dove la luce, l'elettricità soprattutto influiscono non poco a determinare altr'ordine di trasformazioni, che possono essere dei germi morbiferi, e che sono sempre indubitabilmente molesti.

Ma quando il cadavere è ben custodito, e non dirò in modo assoluto, ma relativo al modo come si pratica nei cimiteri, la sua corruzione non solo è molto più lenta; non solo è diversa per alcuni prodotti di trasformazione, ma le sue esalazioni, cioè gli aeriformi che svolge, restano quasi del tutto compressi e lentamente assorbiti dagli strati di terra e calce che lo ricuopre, o sia la sola terra siliceo-argillosa-calcareo. La compressione anzi di per se sola impedisce e cangia alcune azioni chimiche *infra* ed *extra* cadaveriche, onde si hanno in maggior dose dei prodotti liquidi, che vengono assorbiti dal terreno sottostante della fossa, col quale terreno determina delle combinazioni chimiche inorganiche e semiorganiche, le quali essendo fisse, o, per lo meno, non potendo volatilizzarsi, non possono trasfondersi nell'ambiente, e

per conseguenza non possono in verun modo nuocere, nè offendere, sia pure l'olfatto, degli astanti alla fossa colmata e ben condizionata.

Se così non fosse bisognerebbe verificarsi senza dubbio grave danno non soltanto ai custodi ed inservienti dei cimiteri, dove essi vivono e dormono a permanenza, ma tutti gli individui delle abitazioni vicine, siano anche al di là di 100 metri, come per legge.

Io dunque non so vedere gl'inconvenienti, danni, i pericoli della pubblica e privata salute provenienti dalla inumazione dei cadaveri fatta secondo il prescritto dai Regolamenti sanitari oggi in vigore.» (1)

(1) Chi infatti potrebbe dichiarare antighienici i cimiteri italiani costruiti secondo il nuovo regolamento sanitario, per l'esecuzione della legge del 20 marzo 1875 del quale amiamo trascrivere gli articoli seguenti dal capo quarto.

Art. 57. La polizia dei cimiteri è di esclusiva competenza delle autorità municipali.

Art. 60. I cimiteri debbono di regola essere collocati alla distanza almeno di metri duecento da ogni aggregato di abitazioni, contenente un numero maggiore di duecento persone, ed in modo da evitare che il vento dominante porti i miasmi sull'abitato.

Art. 62. Nel caso di costruzione di nuovi cimiteri o dell'ampliamento di quelli già esistenti, il sindaco trasmetterà il piano topografico, corredato degli opportuni schiarimenti, al prefetto della provincia il quale nominerà una Commissione composta di

L'umazione adunque ed il cimitero non sono per se cosa antigienica, ma le infezioni procedono dall'abbandono e dalla negligenza di quelli, che reggono la cosa pubblica.

Ma la cremazione poi è veramente igienica, come dai cremazionisti è dichiarata? rende impossibili gli effluvi nocivi, o ne produce peggiori? I sostenitori istessi della cremazione affermano, ciò dipendere dalla perfezione degli apparati, ed alacramente studiano la soluzione del problema. Ma vi perverranno? Un uomo competente lo nega.

« Sia qualunque il metodo di cremazione che dovrebbe adottarsi, bisognerebbe sempre sottoporre i cadaveri ad elevata temperatura, e perchè se ne abbiano più facilmente le ossa o le ceneri, bisognerebbe esporli in vasi aperti — siano crogiuoli, recipienti di ghisa, o altro; — ovvero, volendo operare in vasi chiusi, bisognerebbe calcinarli con corpi ossidanti, altrimenti si avrebbe carbone animale e non cenere animale».

« Or bene operando in vasi aperti, la tempera-

membro del Consiglio provinciale di sanità, di un ingegnere civile e del sindaco del comune dove il cimitero dovrà essere stabilito, allo scopo di riconoscere se, tanto sotto il rapporto del sito, che sotto quello dell'estensione del terreno, e dei suoi caratteri geologici, la località designata presenti le condizioni igieniche necessarie.

tura elevata necessaria non trasformerà certamente le materie animali del cadavere in idrogeni carbonati, in solfuro d' idrogeno, in fosforici ecc. poichè questi all'aria libera bruciando a loro volta si trasformerebbero all'istante in acido carbonico, acido solforoso, fosforico ecc. e quelli che sfuggirebbero alla combustione sarebbero dei prodotti pirogenati, massime quelli che si svolgeranno nel primo periodo di riscaldamento, e questi sarebbero abbondanti riuscirebbero molesti, deleteri e diffusibili surtamente ed incomparabilmente assai più delle lente e piccole esalazioni, che potrebbero sfuggire da un cadavere sotterrato anche nei cimiteri peggio condizionati. Dippiù siffatti prodotti di esalazione del cadavere cremato non avrebbero neppure il vantaggio di essere utili all'agricoltura. Si noti pure che per avere le ceneri o le ossa con tal mezzo si richiederebbero dei grandi vasi aperti e riscaldati al rosso bianco, e quindi si richiederebbe un ampio locale per i forni occorrenti ed una forte spesa di combustibile».

«Se poi la cremazione si facesse in vasi chiusi come in crogiuoli coperti, in istorte e simili, si avrebbe un immenso effluvio di prodotti pirogenati fetidissimi ed oltremodo dannosi, e i cadaveri resterebbero carbonizzati e non più calcinati, e si richiederebbe anche molto local tempo e combustibile, oltre la mano d'opera

Noi non vogliamo ritenere quanto dice il ch. prof. Zinno, ed amiamo supporre che la chimica, la fisica e la meccanica riunendo le loro forze pervenghino a produrre tali apparati. Ma in tale ipotesi la scienza avrà fatto uno sforzo che contraddice all'ordine cosmico, che altererà la economia di esso, della quale alterazione il chiarissimo professore Ayr annunziò alcune gravi e perniciose conseguenze, che crediamo riportare. In natura, egli scrive, tutto è metamorfosi: la materia è sempre l'istessa: essa subisce solo forme diverse. Se gli animali e vegetali, dopo la loro morte, non ridonassero alla natura gli elementi che li hanno prodotti, è certo che verrebbe a scomparire dalla superficie terrestre ogni pianta ed ogni animale, perchè mancherebbero alla natura gli elementi per plasmarli.

L'uomo deve morire e scomporsi necessariamente per dar logo agli altri viventi. In questa trasformazione degli esseri viventi consiste l'ordine di natura. » (1)

Sono queste le sole conseguenze della invocata cremazione? Noi non ci crediamo competenti a dire delle altre: ci limitiamo a ripetere che tale soluzione sarebbe colpevole di lesa dignità umana senza provvedere realmente all'igiene dell'uomo, per testimonianza della scienza e del buon senso.

(1) Annali di chimica etc: fascio. di dicembre 1872.

Ed alla scienza ed al buon senso si unisce pure la logica, la quale è urtata dal silenzio dei cremazionisti, e dal loro argomentare a favore della cremazione. Infatti, i cremazionisti a dimostrare il cimitero essere origine d'infezioni si asserrano fra le opinioni di pochi scienziati da altri contraddetti, e non dicono di una sola moria certa, ricordata dalla storia che fosse prodotta dalle infezioni cadaveriche neppure di quei tempi nei quali i vivi ed i morti dimoravano insieme nei tempj e nelle città, nella quale comune dimora, per non pochi secoli s'intrattenero. Questo silenzio ci apprende che i timori dei cremazionisti sono immaginari, perchè i padri nostri vivendo fra i morti, nè con quella circospezione della quale noi facciamo uso, vissero più di noi e meglio di noi. Il che se non ci renderà degli Orfili sprezzatori delle infezioni cadaveriche, rassicherà l'animo con i mezzi comuni di preservazione. Il quale sentimento dell'animo sarà rafforzato dall'argomentare molto difettoso dei cremazionisti per persuaderci ad accettare la cremazione, perchè passa dal possibile al reale dal particolare al generale. Dai cimiteri così argomentano, si possono spargere delle infezioni; dunque le popolazioni sono infettate dalle esalazioni di essi: si distruggano i cimiteri. — I Borghi di Rotondella e Bollita, come a

tra volta ho scritto, hanno i camposanti vicino all' abitato, e questi son posti sur un piano alquanto elevato. Al di sotto vi sono delle sorgenti di acqua, ed i rispettivi abitanti ne fanno un uso quotidiano. Certo quei fonti sono il prodotto delle aque che scendono dal cielo sulla superficie dei due camposanti, e contegono in soluzione i principii cadaverici ». Da queste promesse così particolari, si deduce la condanna contro tutti i cimiteri, con una motivazione da processo di borgo : ecco la condanna.

« In questo secolo di progresso converrebbe rimuovere l' insalubrità dell' aria da infezione cadaverica ». (1) Bruciamo i nostri morti !

§. III.

« La cremazione non si oppone alla religione. Se vogliansi negare i miracoli, non è uopo che si dica che quella si oppone. Se poi si ammettano, questo funebre rito non si opporrà.

L' estinto cremato, potrà meglio conservarsi in un' urna e, se sarà in idea di santo, potrà meglio essere adorato, e propagansi le sue reliquie in lontane regioni. Le ossa potranno essere invase dallo spirito di Dio, e fare miracoli : Ossa ejus prophetabant.

(1) Lettera del Sig. Ayr al professore Polli. Anna-
li di chimica fasc: dicem: 1872.

Quel Dio che farà risuscitare i morti nel giorno finale, potrà infondere nelle fredde ceneri e nella ossa calcinate lo spirito mirabile. Ecce ego introducam in vos spiritum et vivetis ».

Così il ch. Signor Giovanni Battista Ayron nella sua seconda lettera al commendatore Giovanni Polli, (1) che sembra canti con Lucano *in VII de occisis*.

Coelo tegitur, qui non habet urnam.

Il ch. autore crede che la cremazione non urti la possibilità di tutti i miracoli ammessi dal cattolicismo, nè i dogmi dello stesso. Ma noi gli facciamo osservare che fra i miracoli ve ne ha uno, che la cremazione rende impossibile. Il ch. autore deve sapere dalla storia della medicina legale, come questa scienza sia chiamata alcune volte a pronunziarsi sulla incorruttibilità di alcuni cadaveri, per sapere da essi se sia un fatto scientificamente naturale o pu- no; perchè la chiesa cattolica annovera la incorruttibilità soprannaturale fra i miracoli;

(1) Annali di chimica applicati alla medicina fasc. di Gen. 1873. Vedi nel fascicolo di aprile la lettera del Dot. Francesco Anelli al Dot. Rota nella quale dice: L'incenerimento toglie nulla al lato sacro delle funzioni che si prodigano agli esseri defunti ».

non si determina nel suo giudizio senza sentire innanzi la scienza (1).

La cremazione intanto sottrae alla divina provvidenza la materia sulla quale dovrebbe operare il miracolo, il corpo dell' uomo *in idea di santo*, e toglie alla scienza il fatto sulla causa del quale dovrebbe giudicare, privandola ancora del bel fenomeno della mummificazione naturale (2). Non è dunque indifferente per i miracoli nè per la scienza: lede questa e si oppone ai divini attributi.

Il ch. scrittore pare accenni ai due dogmi del culto dovuto alle reliquie, ed all' altro della risurrezione dei corpi. Per quanto riguarda il primo se la cremazione non lo nega, diminuisce per fermo l' oggetto del culto, che potrebbe essere l' intiero corpo, ed alcune volte incorrotto, e la cremazione lo riduce ad un pugno di cenere della quale saranno poche le ragioni, che potranno averne dei granelli, e non vi saranno più ossa sulla terra da poter essere *invase dallo spirito di Dio*.

Sul conto del domma della risurrezione, *fiducia* dei crisitani, nulla vediamo nella cremazione che lo contraddica, perchè alla di-

(1) BEN. XIV. De Servor: Dei etc.; *lib.* IV, P. 1. *cap.* XXX, XXXI. De cadaverum incorruptione.

(2) GASPER. *Medicine Legale*, *chap.* II.

vina onnipotenza non è ostacolo che regga, la cenere per essa non è più della polvere e delle ossa: chi le ha fatte da nessuna esistente materia, avrà potenza ed è idoneo a rifarle dalla preesistente materia di ciascuno conservata nell' universo sotto altra forma. Così argomentava Tertulliano contro i filosofi del suo tempo, che negavano la possibilità della risurrezione. (1) Quindi noi ripetiamo a quelli che ne dubitassero le parole, che il filosofo Taziano indirizzava ai Greci e che contengono la credenza di tutti i secoli cristiani. «Nato mortale, dopo la morte novellamente esisterò. Tuttavolta la mia carne sia distrutta dal fuoco, la evaporata materia è raccolta dall' universo; benchè sia dalle acque del mare e dei fiumi distrutto non per tanto sono pure annoverato fra i figli del ricchissimo Dio. Il che quantunque s' ignori dall' empio e dall' animo gretto, pure Iddio che domina la sostanza a sè nota, a suo piacimento, la ritornerà alla primitiva forma ». Ma riportiamo pure un' altra fedele traduzione delle sue parole.

(1) TERTUL: De resurrectione carnis cap. XII. Si enim ex nihilo Deus molitus est cuncta, poterit et carnem in nihilum perductam exprimere de nihilo. Sive de materia modulatus est alia, poterit et carnem quocumque dehaustam evocare de alio. Et utique idoneus est reficere, qui fecit; quanto plus est fecisse, et carnem refecisse, initium dedisse, quam reddidisse.

« Ita natus et per mortem ad non esse redactus, atque iterum inconspicuus oculis denuo existam. Quamvis enim caro tota incendio consumatur, materiam tamen evaporatam mundus excipiet: quam quam aut in fluviis aut in mari contabescam, aut a feris dilanier, condor tamen in penu praedivitis Domini: quod licet pauperes et impii nesciant, Deus tamen qui regnat substantiam sibi conspicuam, quando voluerit ad pristinam integritatem reducet ».

Ma benchè non contraddica al domma della risurrezione, pure la religione non può accettare la cremazione. Perchè la religione non è solo dogma rinchiuso nello assentimento dello spirito, ma è sentimento, ma è pratica, è costume, ed il sentimento cristiano dell'anima rifugge dal pensiero che il suo compagno del merito, l'inunto dei carismi della grazia, sia distrutto dal fuoco e non dagli agenti naturali con naturale processo. Il cristianesimo non ha avuto in uso la cremazione, dessa è un costume pagano; (1) il cristianesimo fin dalla sua origine ha usato della inumazione, come quella, che risponde meglio all'antico e miglior mo-

(1) Non è da obiettare che in alcune guerre sono stati bruciati i morti. In tale circostanze è stato scelto il minor male fra quello di una moria negli eserciti e la cremazione dei morti, perchè impossibile seppellirli regolarmente.

do di seppellimento, ed alla umana dignità della quale tutela i dritti.

Il cattolicismo, completo cristianesimo, abborre e rigetta la cremazione, perchè non è uso cristiano, perchè è un' altro sforzo del paganesimo risorgente, che come tutti gli altri torna nocevolissimo alla società!

§ IV.

Il filo del ragionamento sulla cremazione conduce a vederla nelle sue attinenze con gl'interessi sociali, poichè il mortale lascia dopo di sè dei suoi simili, dei quali sono da considerare gl'interessi.

A sentire i cremazionisti, dall'abolizione della umazione gl'interessi materiali della società sarebbero grandemente migliorati. Alcuni di loro ti dicono che le spese d'interro sarebbero ridotte ad un nulla. Ciò, rispondiamo, dipenderà dall'apparato col quale sarà fatta la cremazione, e faremo tali conti quando sarà risoluto il problema degli apparati economici. Altri dicono che spacciati i cimiteri si guadagnerebbero molti ettari di terra per l'agricoltura. Mettere in campo tale argomento mentre la migrazione lascia molte terre incolte sul suolo italiano, e si manca di braccia per renderle feconde, non è logica che possa interessare.—No

manca chi proponga letamare le terre con l'ottimo stabbio, ch'è il cadavere umano; v'ha chi suggerisca utilizzare il carbone animale che darebbero gli umani corpi bruciati, e chi delle ossa umane propone fare bicchieri da vino, e chi, illuminare le città col gas da estrarre dai corpi battezzati! Nerone illuminava Roma colle fiaccole cristiane, cioè con i corpi dei martiri unti di resina! Confutare siffatte cose sarebbe compartire alle fiere ed ai pazzi l'immeritato onore di risponder loro con umano ragionamento (1). E ciò basti.

(1) FRANCK. La Presse médicale Belge, août 1872 pag. 295.

L'inconveniente dell'inumazione è l'esalazione di miasmi deleteri: perciò si è preconizzata la cremazione, ossia l'arte di abbruciare i morti. Ecco ciò che noi proponiamo ed abbiamo in nostro favore eccellenti ingegneri inglesi, che approveranno certamente l'idea eminentemente pratica d'*un' officina a gaz funebre*.

Dopo un' ora il cadavere passa allo stato di gaz, e le poche ossa carbonizzate, miste ad un pò di silice, formeranno magnifici oggetti di vetro o di cristallo, che verranno messi a disposizione dei parenti del defunto.

Si potrà così avere un bellissimo servizio da tavola formato coi resti dei membri della propria famiglia.

Da un buon zio si formerà una tazza per Champagne rischiarendosi nel medesimo tempo col gaz che ha prodotto.

Una bella cugina, morta sul fior dell'età, verrà trasformata in vaso di fiori, e così di seguito.

Ma la cremazione non fa prosperare gl' interessi materiali, e lede grandemente gl' interessi morali della società. Questi che sono lesi, per non dilungarci troppo, noi raccogliamo in quello della distruzione di una scienza che per cremazione diventerebbe in gran parte inutile, mentre è l' effetto di grandi elucubrazioni del genio umano: e, nell' altro della impunità di molti delitti, che andrebbero impuniti, e della morte apparente di alcuni che per la cremazione diverrebbe reale, rinnovellandosi pel fanatismo di pochi, che si dichiarano scienziati, le barbarie dei bruciati vivi. Nuova specie di universale Inquisizione, che si vorrebbe stabilire in nome della scienza!

La scienza che vediamo minacciata è quella che risulta dalla legge e dalla medicina, che alcuni dicono antropologia forense, ed altra medicina legale. Questa tuttavolta sia di antica origine, pure dopo l' introduzione della filosofia del dritto nello studio della legislazione, ha tanto progredito a profitto della umanità, quanto la sua sorella, la medicina clinica per lo svolgimento delle scienze affini. Per tal progresso si è resa la benemerita della società umana per i grandi benefizii, che da essa quest' ha ricevuto. Non è nostro pensiero enumerare tutti quei vantaggi, che dalle diverse sue parti alla società provengono per la luce che spande

nel Foro civile, perchè sarebbe un elogio, benchè meritato, fuori luogo ; ma non possiamo tenerci dall' accennare qualcuno di quelli che produce col venire con le sue trattazioni specialissime in soccorso della legge e giurisprudenza criminale per tutelare la conservazione della specie umana e produrre la sicurezza individuale.

« La medicina legale determina l' età della vita fetale ed extrauterina, e con ciò porge lumi al giudice per riconoscere se un dato feto appartenga ad una piuttosto che ad altra madre.

« Mostra i caratteri distintivi e proprii delle echimosi cadaveriche, e insegna a non confonderle con quelle che vengono prodotte da percosse, o ingenerate maliziosamente.

« Investiga le cause dell' aborto naturale e procurato.

« Somministra le prove di attentato venefizio, e anche dopo non breve tempo, da che l' uomo avvelenato è reso putrido e informe carcase, scorge nel cuore di que' miseri avanzi il tossico che lo trasse di vita.

« Essa si occupa altresì profondamente dei vari permutamenti del corpo sottoposto alla putrefazione ; e, dall' osservare questi ed altri simili fenomeni, costanti, immancabili della natura, in rapporto alle leggi e alle forze con cui solitamente si producono, perviene per tal modo a condurre il giudice a cognizioni, che

tutta mostrano la possanza della scienza e del genio nello svelare le più importanti e recondite verità.

«Insomma la medicina legale e nel palazzo del ricco, e nella casa del povero, e nelle solitudini delle campagne, e nelle tenebre delle foreste, e negli orrori del sepolcro, perseguita il delitto e lo scopre. Essa può dunque riguardarsi una potente e casta benefattrice dell'umana famiglia, che giace signora in seno della giustizia e della pace, ad estirpare come pestilenza sociale que' malfattori che in mille occulte guise attentano alla vita, alle sostanze e all'onore: mentre dall'altro canto a figli esuli, o a figli poveri, a spose orbate del marito a padri acerbamente dilaniati dagli effetti di false accuse riporta la libertà, i beni, l'esistenza, l'onore, che ognuno credeva vituperosamente perduto (1)».

In questi grandi aiuti che appresta alla umanità la medicina legale è confortata dalla chimica e dalle altre scienze affini; ma queste inutilmente presterebbero il loro concorso, se la medicina legale non potesse avere sotto gli occhi il cadavere, benchè in perfetta putrefazione.

Perchè tutta volta l'ispezione cadaverica

(1) GANDOLFI Fondamenti di medicina forense. *Par.*
I. cap. II.

esterna e l'autopsia non possano sempre avere un risultato completamente decisivo senza l'analisi chimica; pure perchè l'autopsia serve a prestare alla chimica i materiali da analizzare, e perchè molte volte da per sè sola può constatare il modo della morte, *ha un grandissimo valore, e non merita il discredito del quale si vuol circondarla.* (1); e perchè lo stato della putrefazione fa emettere giudizi alla scienza, che illuminano il magistrato nella scoperta della colpa e del colpevole.

«Lo studio intorno la putrefazione addiviene importantissimo al medico legale per molti e considerevoli motivi; è necessario questo studio per conoscere distintamente con prove di evidenti fatti gli effetti cadaverici, affine di non confonderli cogli effetti patologici, come sarebbero certe macchie che simulano le contusioni; i turgori flogistici che simulano i coloramenti sanguigni prodotti da iperemie che succedono nei corpi morti; e addiviene essenziale altresì tanto per rivelare i segni di alcune commozioni, i quali non sono reperibili tosto dopo la morte, e le sottilissime feriture penetranti restate al cuore o ad altri visceri, quanto per fissare approssimativamente, e fin dove è possibile il tempo da che un individuo mancò alla vita.

(1) GASPER. *Medicine Legale. Partie Thenatologique.*
de l'autopsie.

«Le esumazioni sono adunque di un grande interesse alla giustizia, e l'utilità loro è manifesta e comprovata. E in vero, quante volte purtroppo l'aprimiento di una tomba, e le accidentali esumazioni dei cimiteri non diedero a vedere con fatti irrefragabili l'orribile spettacolo di persone le quali, dopo deposte nel sepolcro, riacquistarono le forze vitali per essere ben presto consumate dalla più feroce agonia?

«Quante volte le ossa d'un cadavere, svincolate dai suoi legamenti e scoperte per la dissoluzione dei muscoli, non mostrarono fino all'evidenza riportate fratture in tempo di vita?

«Se un tempo la dissoluzione cadaverica, considerata a certo grado, fu ritenuta cagione capace a rendere infruttuose le ricerche del medico-legale, e costitui, per così dire, un mezzo di difesa per que' timidi che sentivano ribrezzo ad imbrattarsi le mani colle materie dei nostri corpi disciolte dal processo della putrefazione, oggi questa è invocata alla ricognizione della causa di occulte morti (1)».

Ora supposto che la medicina legale non possa più avere la ispezione esteriore ed interiore del cadavere; che non possa esercitare l'autopsia, nè studiare la putrefazione nelle sue diverse epoche, ne seguirebbe, che questa scienza, fruttuosa

(1) GANDOLFI. Fondamenti etc: *Part: II. cap: XLIX.*

di tante sollecitudini e di tanto tempo, verrebbe nella sua parte speciale a mancare di scopo ed mezzo. E questo detrimento non si restringe alla sola scienza, che verrebbe meno nel suo progresso; ma si estenderebbe a tutta la società, alla quale non potrebbe più far sperimentare i suoi benefici effetti. Il processo criminale, di fatti, diverrebbe in molti casi impossibile, ed in quelli proprio che attaccano la sicurezza della vita individuale, e che possono facilmente sfuggire alla ocularità del Foro criminale, perchè delitti occulti, che la sola scienza rivela con la testimonianza dei naturali elementi. Tal' è la condizione nella quale è posta dalla cremazione la società. La medicina legale non avrà che un pugno di cenere d' innanzi a se, al quale non potrà dimandare nè il tempo nè il modo della morte dell' ucciso e dell' avvelenato. Questa cenere non può, come la ispezione del cadavere e la putrefazione, mostrare alla scienza nè il tempo nè la causa della morte, e la chimica istessa, con tutto il progresso contemporaneo, nei casi di avvelenamento non potrà scoprirne la esistenza, perchè tutti i veleni organici di qualunque natura, come alcoloidi, glucosidi, acidi ec. sono distrutti più o meno rapidamente e completamente alla temperatura da 100.° a 350.° Tutti i principali composti antimoniali (cloruri di antimonio, tartaro stibiato ec); tutti

i preparati arsenicali, mercuriali, il fosforo, il bromo e moltissime altre sostanze velenose si trasformano, si volatilizzano e si disperdono a temperatura inferiore a 450.^o

E certamente per cremare un cadavere, qualunque sia il metodo, occorre una temperatura maggiore di 450.^o

Nulla è a dire delle trasformazioni che moltissimi o quasi tutti i veleni subiscono all'azione del fuoco, quando trovansi insieme a sostanze animali, e, nel caso di cui trattasi, a sostanze cadaveriche.

Che cosa diverrà il processo criminale? Un impossibile per molti delitti occulti, che pure sono dopo anni rivelati dalla umazione che, rende possibile l'analisi chimica dei resti sfuggiti alla ferocia del delinquente. La storia non potrà più annoverare condanne e ritorni alla libertà, all'onore come quelli che raccoglie per testimoniare alla medicina legale la riconoscenza ad essa dovuta dalla società. (1)

Che cosa farà il magistrato? Nella impotenza di scoprire il modo ed il tempo della morte, rimanderà libero l'omicida che seppe con benedite arti preparare ed eseguire la uccisione del suo simile, di modo che la umana giustizia non possa fargli colpa della morte altrui, e colpirlo della sociale vendetta.

(1) GANDOLFI P. I. *cap* II. §. II.

E la scienza? Maledirà a quei pochi che ad essa sbarrano il cammino del progresso, ed impediscono di essere umanitaria. Dirà che la presente quistione è da trattare non da quelli che compongono e scompongono nei laboratorii, ma sì da chi sa elevarsi alla contemplazione degl'interessi morali della umanità, a cui si deve più che una immaginaria igiene. I cremazionisti vedono queste difficoltà, ma le saltano a piè pari, e sì da indignare chiunque non abbia smesso ogni sentimento di pudore e di umanità. « Voi dite, scrive il dottore Francesco Anelli, (1) la giustizia punitiva avrà mutilate le braccia per colpire il reo; come si potrà procedere ad una 2.^a ad una 3.^a esumazione dal momento che il cadavere è ridotto cenere? — Io non mi sottoscrivo a quel periodo di transizione, da qualcuno dei fautori della cremazione accampato, cioè che *si chiuda un occhio se un delinquente sfugge al meritato castigo*, in vista dell'immenso bene, che ridonda alla società dalla contrastata incinerazione.... Ma che? le classi dei medici e dei legisti non varranno a trovar una via di mezzo per questi casi peculiari? Tu sai come sia infimo e poco decoroso il nostro emolumento per visite giudiziarie ca-

(1) Lettera al Dott: Antonio Rota. Annali di chimica fasc: aprile 1872.

daveriche ; ebbene, se queste visite, invece d'esser una sola, fatta con un sol medico, fossero più e praticate da diversi medici non è egli vero che nulla sfuggirebbe di quello che preme e desidera riscontrare? E all' Erario risulterebbe un danno incalcolabile. »

Qual via di mezzo troveranno i medici e legisti ? Non varrà per fermo quella di rendere massimo l' infimo emolumento, perchè per anni di tal tempra sarà sempre insufficiente. Se s' imponesse l' autopsia generale per tutti i morti prima di essere cremati, non vi sarebbe il tempo necessario specialmente nelle popolose città, e si avrebbe la putrefazione ad aria libera peggiore di quella che tanto temesi. E qual falange di pubblici funzionari non bisognerebbe nei crematorii per constatare la identità delle persone e delle cose nella ipotesi dell'autopsia generale ? Se non rendesi obbligatoria l' autopsia, i casi *peculiari* sarebbero ben più numerosi di quelli che registra la storia della medicina legale, ed i tanti luttuosi casi di morti redivivi si rimuterebbero in casi di vivi bruciati. E tutto ciò avverrebbe per la natura istessa della cremazione senza supporre corruzione alcuna negli esecutori delle visite giudiziarie daveriche. Ma questa può facilmente accadere supposta la cremazione, perchè con essa cessa ogni responsabilità del medico, che potrà chiuder

dere un occhio se un delinquente sfugga al meritato gastigo al luccichio di qualche moneta che venga a confortarlo nell' amarezza dell' animo che sente per l' infimo e poco decoroso emolumento, nella certezza che il fuoco estinguerà le tracce di ogni delitto, e lo renda irresponsabile innanzi alla giustizia umana, del delitto ad essa occultato. Ciò diciamo perchè la legge e chi regge i destini della società deve prevedere quanto è possibile, che il corrotto umano cuore possa operare, non perchè supponessimo tanta corruzione nei discepoli di Esculapio.

Ecco a quali pericoli è esposta la società dalle innovazioni contro l' umazione. I secoli che furono, se non toccavano il materiale nostro progresso, erano uomini come noi, e più di noi tutelavano i veri interessi sociali armonizzando i materiali veri con i morali, e noi sotto-poniamo i morali ai materiali fattizii ed immaginari!

Aspettiamo intanto che siano tutelati i dritti della umanità dai medici e dai legisti, e poi ci risolveremo sull' adottare o no la cremazione!

§. V.

Ma come i medici non possono trovare questa via, così i legisti non vogliono. Alcuni di questi fanno voti per la cremazione, forse senza alcu-

na coscienza che tale operare di essi si oppone ai primi ed essenziali diritti della società che eglino dovrebbero tutelare, e che è contrario alla legge della nazione.

Per fortuna della umanità è da distinguere la legge dai legisti. Noi li distinguiamo; e diciamo prima alcuna cosa brevemente della legge, e poi dei legisti, non potendo qui dire quanto vorremmo, e quanto sarebbe d'uopo per la importanza della materia.

La legislazione italiana, benchè in molte sue parti urti il principio cattolico, pure, per quanto riguarda la presente quistione, non è avversa al cattolicesimo. Noi rimontiamo allo Statuto: questo ha dichiarato: *La religione cattolica, apostolica romana è la sola religione dello Stato. Gli altri culti ora esistenti sono tollerati conformemente alla legge.*

Con siffatta professione politica di religione è riprovato dalla nazione quanto alla religione dello Stato si oppone o non è consentaneo. La cremazione è un uso nè cattolico, nè valdese, nè ebreo, ma opposto all'uso cristiano della umazione seguita sempre dalla religione dello Stato e dai culti tollerati. La nazione non contenta di avere siffattamente mostrata la sua volontà a favore della inumazione, l'ha in modo esplicito dichiarata nel suo codice generale, e nello speciale che regola la materia.— Nel primo scrive: art: 385:

cod. civ. *Non si darà sepoltura se non precede l'autorizzazione dell'uffiziale dello stato civile.* La sepoltura è l'inumazione. Non vi è chi possa dedurre la possibilità della cremazione da questo testo di legge, non potendosi attribuire alla legge altro significato da quello delle parole nel proprio significato, secondo la connessione di esse e l'intenzione del legislatore, come lo stesso codice avverte, *art. 3. cod. civ.* e secondo l'aforismo della sapienza romana. *Cum in verbis nulla ambiguitas est, non debet admitti voluntatis quaestio* (1)?

Nella legge speciale che regola la sanità pubblica si conferma la legge generale che riconosce l'inumazione come la maniera da seppellire i morti, stabilendo che i consigli sanitari debbano dare il loro parere sulla costruzione dei cimiteri, ed il cimitero è il luogo della inumazione e non della cremazione. Questa legge nel suo articolo 20.º così dichiara: I Consigli danno parere in ordine alla costruzione e trasporto dei cimiteri etc: Che la umazione sia legge dello Stato, e che escluda la cremazione messo ancora in evidenza dagli art: 66, e 74 del regolamento pubblicato col decreto dell'otto giugno 1865, che affermano: « Per regola generale, ogni cadavere dovrà esser *sepolto* nel cimitero ».

(1) Leg; 25, § I. *Dig: de legat: 3.*

tero del Comune dove seguiti il decesso. Le inumazioni avranno luogo in fosse separate disposte in linea parallela. » Non altrimenti è disposto dal capo V dell' ultimo regolamento per l' esecuzione della legge del 20 marzo 1865 sulla sanità pubblica, e della legge 22 giugno 1874. In esso è detto sempre dei cimiteri, e si dispone sulla inumazione ed esumazione, sul trasporto di un cadavere operato da un comune in un altro. Le quali cose mostrano che la sola inumazione è il modo di seppellimento secondo la legge.

L' inumazione essendo una legge dello Stato ed al tempo stesso della religione e dei culti tollerati da esso, noi possiamo invocare contro la cremazione, fino a che una legge della nazione non l' avrà ammessa, gli articoli del codice penale, coi quali la nazione sancisce le sue leggi e punisce i reati contro la religione ed i culti tollerati. Quindi invochiamo l' articolo 184 del codice penale italiano, che nel secondo alinea dice: « Incorrerà nella stessa pena (una multa estensibile a lire cinquecento e gli arresti) chiunque pubblicamente commette atti fatti, che siano di natura da offendere la religione, ed eccitare il disprezzo, e produrre scandalo ». Invochiamo l' art: 188. Invochiamo l' articolo 517 sulla violazione delle leggi sulla inumazione: « Coloro che avranno contravvenuto in altro modo alle leggi od ai regolamenti »

lativi alle inumazioni, saranno puniti col carcere estensibile a due mesi o con multa estensibile a lire duecentocinquanta. E perchè per un cadavere cristiano è un insulto l'essere bruciato, noi invochiamo l'art: 519, che punisce chiunque si sarà reso colpevole *d'insulti ai cadaveri*.

E ciò in quanto alla legge—È da dire delle mene e delle opere dei legisti.

Questi promotori della cremazione non vedono altra via di mezzo da quella d'introdurre la cremazione nella legge a dispetto della nazione che non la vuole. Tentarono nel Senato d'intromettere la cremazione nelle nostre leggi, ma i loro intenti fallirono per opera del senatore Bucci, che la dichiarò inopportuna al punto di vista giuridico, *giacchè non sempre si può sapere, appena uno muore, se il suo cadavere sia utile alla giustizia*. I legisti non si tennero per vinti, ed a vincere usarono quest'arte. Non potendo introdurre la cremazione nella legge, la introdussero nel regolamento. Ed eccoti che nel regolamento per la esecuzione della legge 20 marzo 1865 sulla sanità pubblica e della legge del 22 giugno 1871, n. 1964 si legge: « Il ministro dell'Interno, inteso il consiglio superiore di sanità, potrà permettere altre maniere di inumazione, conservazione o distruzione dei cadaveri,

compresa la *cremazione* in casi e per motivi eccezionali » !

Un regolamento di legge che distrugge la legge ! Ecco l'opera costituzionale dei legisti !

Della natura e del valore giuridico di questo articolo del regolamento ci riserbiamo di parlare altrove: per ora ci contentiamo osservare che, da oggi innanzi, il ministro per l'Interno ci potrà distruggere morti sia lasciandoci maciullare, macinare, incenerire; o, ci potrà conservare col farci petrificare, marmorizzare, mumificare, salare secondo i casi ed i motivi eccezionali, che i legisti troveranno sempre modo da dichiarare ragionevoli e giusti, avendoli il regolamento lasciati indeterminati (1).

La inumazione adunque è da preferire alla cremazione, ed il cimitero al crematorio !

Così fra sè e sè, crediamo dica il lettore, che ci ha seguito nella lettura di queste poche pa-

(1) Tale articolo del regolamento fu inserito per dimanda del R. Istituto Lombardo. Il Sig. Polli, che ne dava la nuova fin dal Gennaio 1873. nei suoi articoli di chimica. „ Frattanto che la questione si agitava ne' suoi elementi fisiologici, civile e religiosi, giova sapere che nella seduta del 5 dicembre del R. Istituto Lombardo si è deciso di domandare al Ministero dell'Interno che nel nuovo Codice sanitario del Regno, fra i diversi modi di seppellimento oltre all'inumazione e all'imbalsamazione dei cadaveri fosse ammessa anche la *incinerazione*.

gine. A siffatta verità deve piegarsi la ragione, dopo le cose dette, se ancora ha coscienza della umana dignità, che trovasi compromessa col gittare il corpo umano al fuoco in un fornello qualunque. La coscienza sociale dovrà a tale preferenza fare omaggio, se ama reggersi al lume della verità, anzichè farsi menare dal fanatismo di alcuni o dall' odio di altri contro le cose cristiane, dai quali sentimenti ispirati, mostrano il cimitero origine d' infezioni e di morte. La società, se ancora sente gratitudine verso il suo benefattore, il cristianesimo, deve zelare che il costume cristiano non vada smesso; se la società vuole che il capo lavoro del genio umano, la medicina legale non maledica alla frenesia di un giorno, dalla quale è minacciata nella sua esistenza; se vuole cessare da se l' accusa dei suoi figli dei quali lascia invendicata la morte, perchè il fuoco nasconde il colpevole; se la società è ancora una riunione di uomini e non di scimmie, deve contrapporre alle strida nefaste dei bruciatori di uomini il grido umano e cristiano emesso dai padri nostri, del quale l' eco sarà ripetuto con benedizione dai secoli avvenire:

UMIAMO I NOSTRI MORTI!

Noi possediamo il più antico ed il miglior modo di seppellire i nostri simili!

Questo grido per noi Italiani è un dovere politico, perchè dobbiamo difendere le leggi che ci rendono un popolo costituzionale; ed al tempo istesso un diritto, perchè possiamo vogliamo usufruire della legge che ci rende un popolo libero!

Questo grido emesso dalla umanità e dagli Italiani offesi nei loro sentimenti e nei loro diritti, si rimuta nell' altro ch' è titolo di questo capitolo: Il costume cristiano è da preferir al pagano!

Nell' animo di alcuni liberi pensatori la questione della cremazione, era un colpo contro il cristianesimo. Ma ogni attacco contro la chiesa cattolica si muta in sua apologia. La inumazione seguita dalla chiesa mostra come quest' ultima abbracci tutti gl' interessi umani dell'individuo che di tutta la società, li considera nella loro importanza, e secondo questo provvede alla tutela di tutti, zelando i morali mentre non trascura i materiali interessi; conformemente alla ragione, gitti le basi delle sue istituzioni tutelatrici degl' interessi dei suoi figli!

CONCLUSIONE

Queste poche pagine, che il lettore ha già scorse sulla supoltura di tutti i popoli antichi e moderni, ed intorno al costume cristiano, e sul perchè questo era da preferire al pagano, erano dirette a scoprire che cosa dimandasse il grido che invoca la cremazione, gli autori di esso, e le ragioni che possono muovere gli animi a siffatta dimanda.

Crediamo che dalle cose dette il lettore possa di per sè senza alcun nostro aiuto scoprire il primitivo oggetto delle nostre ricerche, non dovendo egli altro operare che dalle verità intese dedurre conseguenze che sono ovvie e comuni, per lo mezzo delle quali sono messe in piena luce le cose e gli amatori di esse. Ma non pertanto aggiungiamo qualche altra parola per prestargli aiuto in siffatta deduzione, affinchè i meno veggenti istessi possano tutto vedere. Ed a farci più brevi diremo solo dello scopo vero della cremazione, che oggi tanto calorosamente si dimanda e degli autori che la sollecitano, dalle quali risulteranno le ragioni per le quali è invocata, già da noi innanzi accennate.

La cremazione, se si presta ascolto ai cremazionisti è dimandata per diverse ragioni di utilità pubblica, le quali da essi sono tenute

per nulla al confronto della gravissima, dell'igiene. La cremazione è dimandata solo perchè per essa, salva la religione alla quale non si oppone, è indispensabile rimedio a conservare la pubblica igiene. Ecco lo scopo ch'è messo in mostra. Ma un tale scopo non esiste, perchè vedemmo che il cimitero non è per se anti igienico, ma che può divenirlo solo per colpa dell'uomo; e che la religione non può essere indifferente per esso. L'igiene è uno scopo adunque immaginario, che se pur vero fosse con altri semplicissimi mezzi si potrebbe ottenere. L'igiene è la ragione palese, che altre ne cela: queste bisogna scoprire. I cremazionisti gridano a piena gola, che la religione è pienamente salva, che le ceneri possono riscuotere l'onore che la chiesa cattolica conferisce ai suoi eroi, che anzi in tale pietoso uffizio viene coadiuvata dalla cremazione, che non abbandona il corpo umano agli orrori ed alle sezzure della putrefazione. Tale delicatezza verso la religione c'insospettisce: questa che si vuole dimostrare inattaccata, è il vero punto verso del quale è diretto l'attacco. (1)

A scoprire la vera ragione bisogna volgere

(1) Il cadavere purificato da vergine favilla sarà più caro agli uomini a Dio ed alla Religione. *Annali di Chi. fasc. dic. 1872.*

re lo sguardo a quanto lo spirito contemporaneo dimanda sul conto della sepoltura cattolica. Tutti conoscono che l'accompagnamento religioso si vuole ridurre civile, e si che nè la croce nè il prete debba accompagnare il defunto, ma i soli fratelli stretti a lui nei vincoli della solidarietà sotto l'emblema massonico. Fino ad oggi le persone morte separate dalla chiesa aveano ricetto nella parte non benedetta del cimitero cattolico. Il che, benchè ragionevole, perchè, chi non ha voluto in vita la credenza, che dà dritto al ricetto in terra benedetta dal cattolicismo non può morto essere in essa raccolto; pure tal costume cattolico dispiace, come infamante, e si dimanda che il cimitero non sia più terra benedetta, ma senza benedizione uguale per tutti. La legge che governa i vivi è uguale per tutti, e questa è atea, perchè non lo dovrà essere la terra che li raccoglie morti? (1) Il cimitero si vuol trasportato molti chilometri lontano dalle grandi città, ad evitare le infezioni, quasi le piccole non avessero lo stesso diritto alle preservazioni contro le infezioni ca-

(1) Sulle quistioni del cimitero che hanno tanto agitato il parlamento nel Belgio è da vedere la *Revue catholique* di Lovanio. 15 Feb: 1874. *La question des cimetières en Belgique et le projet de conciliation de M. baron d'Anethan.* per F. I. Moulart.

daveriehe (1). Si dimanda la promiscuità delle tombe, perchè questa conduce a quella dei templi, e questa all'abolizione di ogni religione positiva. A conseguire la vittoria contro i cattolici nelle diverse parti di questa strana pretensione dei liberi pensatori, è da premettere la vittoria contro la legge del potere civile che ha confermato i costumi cattolici. Il che porterebbe lunghe discussioni nei parlamenti da produrre il scoprimento completo delle intenzioni, senza calcolare la resistenza delle parti avverse, cattolici, protestanti, ebrei, da persuadere a smettere gli usi che si ebbero dal cristianesimo, e da tutta l'antichità, che arriva ad Adamo, che non tutti nè da per tutto sono disposti a smettere.

A tutte queste guerre di dettaglio mette fine il crematorio. Abolita la inumazione « ridotto l'uomo in un pugno di cenere e nulla più » le quistioni di cimitero non avrebbero più luogo, perchè la cremazione restituirà chi le dimanda le ceneri del morto, delle quali potrà disporre come vorrà. Ecco lo scopo del grido, che all'orecchio umano e cristiano risuona a ragione feroce: Bruciamo i nostri morti.

(1) Sono ben note le pretenzioni del Municipio di Parigi nel voler trasportare i cimiteri a molta distanza da quella città, e le protestazioni di tutti in contrario.

Ma non creda il lettore che da sì pessime intenzioni siano animati tutti quelli che invocano le novità della cremazione. Fra essi vi sono professori di gran merito ed accademie mediche, (1) alle quali non possiamo fare il torto di supporre che siano animati da tali principii, benché non possano essere scusati di fanatismo per una innovazione, che non è di quella importanza sociale, che si vuol mostrare. E ci duole vederli, senza che eglino ne abbiano coscienza, servire col loro genio alle basse, interessate e forse settarie intenzioni di altri, che mettono a proprio profitto le ricerche degli animi cultori delle scienze e stranieri alle mense delle sette, che credono lavorare nell'interesse della sola scienza. Ma più ci duole vedere al-

(1) Nella sua solenne adunanza del 7 Agosto 1872, il R. Istituto Lombardo di Scienze e Lettere proclamò, per il concorso al premio quinquennale di fondazione Secco - Comneo, il seguente programma:

Tema per l'anno 1877.

“Indicare un metodo di cremazione dei cadaveri da sostituirsi all'attuale inumazione, a fine di spianare la via a quest'igienica riforma, già proposta e accolta nel Congresso medico internazionale del 1871.—Si dimostrerà con buone ragioni, avvalorate da sperimenti sugli animali, che il metodo indicato è innocuo, spedito, economico, e tale da soddisfare ai riguardi civili.”

cuni di questi nomi onorevoli frammisti a quelli di congiuratori contro del cristianesimo e della società. Vediamo la cremazione caldeggiata della società del libero pensiero, (1) e dalla frammassoneria. Quest'ultima nella *Rivista della Massoneria*, giornale che si stampa in Roma, così diceva: «La chiave di volta di tutto il sistema contrario alla massoneria fa ed è quel sentimento ascetico e transcendente che trasporta gli uomini al di là del mondo esistente: che li fa considerare come passeggeri a brevissima permanenza sulla terra: che li induce a far sacrificio di tutto per acquistarsi felicità in una vita che comincerebbe nei cimiteri: questo ha da essere distrutto dal martello della massoneria (2) ».

Ecco quelli che dimandano l'abolizione dell'inumazione, e che vorrebbero persuaderci ad accettare la cremazione.

Se si volessero classare i cremazionisti, sarebbe facile cosa vedere come alcuni invocano la cremazione perchè in essa vedono un progredire della chimica e scienze affini; altri p

(1) La società del libero pensiero di Firenze plaudiva nel 1871 ad un discorso del Professore Casarelli, che dimandava l'abolizione della inumazione e lo stabilimento della cremazione— *L'Imparziale* maggio 1871

(2) 13 Febbrajo 1874.

chè si disfarrebbero del cimitero, che li anno-
ia con i suoi ricordi di oltre la tomba; dei terzi
la caldeggiano perchè credono con essa dare un
calcio al cattolicismo: tutti ce la presentano
come l'unico mezzo da salvare l'igiene.

I primi sono degli onesti uomini di scienza,
che vivono assorti nelle loro elucubrazioni
scientifiche, delle quali vorrebbero che l'attua-
zione fosse generalmente ricevuta, perchè la ra-
gione ama il figlio del suo pensiero e facilmente
cade nel fanatismo per esso. Gli uomini scienti-
fici non distinguono il loro gabinetto, la loro sa-
la da esperienze dal mondo che li circonda, e
credono che quello ch'è buono pel primo lo sia
pel secondo. Il filosofo nell'interesse del suo si-
mile impone alla materia i calcoli e le formole
della scienza, ma il prevaricatore cuore umano
ne profitta a danno della umanità. La scienza
non deve farsi strumento della umana nequizia!

Noi però applaudiamo al progresso delle na-
turali scienze alle quali tanto dobbiamo, e ren-
diamo le dovute grazie ai cultori di esse, che,
con i loro studii, rendono a noi profittevoli le
leggi, che reggono l'universo. Ma in questo tro-
vato, ancor dubbio, a vedere altre scienze più
importanti per la umanità in pericolo; a vedere
per esso gl'interessi morali della società esposti
alla malignità del cuore umano, preghiamo
i fatti scienziati, di ritenere le loro scoperte

nel campo delle tesi scientifiche a gloria della scienza progrediente, come tante altre, che per lo meglio della umanità si lasciano nello stesso campo, senza farle discendere in quello della pratica, dove diverrebbero perniciose e non proficue.

Quelli che vorrebbero disfarsi del cimitero come di una cosa cristiana che ad essi riesce noiosa, sono liberi pensatori gente che rigetta la fede e la tradizione dei padri, intollerante dell'altrui libertà, che si oppone al loro libertinaggio.

A questi noi diciamo, che lascino libera questa noia a noi, ai cattolici, ai protestanti, agli ebrei, alla umanità tutta quanta, nell'interesse degli stessi liberi pensatori. Il cimitero è l'origine della pazienza cristiana e della longanimità umana. Il cimitero ci parla della labilità delle umane cose e lascia intravedere la stabilità delle eterne: raccoglie il pensiero fra il tempo e l'eternità e ci fa eleggere questa e concepire disprezzo verso di quello.

Il cimitero apre il cuore alla speranza di una risurrezione seguita dalla giustizia divina punitrice dell'umanità peccatrice. Il cimitero consola il giusto perseguitato; e gli dà forza a tollerare la tirannide. Senza del cimitero la pazienza umana si stanca! Nel vostro interesse, liberi pensatori, lasciateci la libertà della tomba!

A quelli che nella cremazione credono trovar mezzo da insultare alla Chiesa, diciamo: Questa, ben altre volte ha riso del rogo: sulla polvere dei figli scrive il nome degli autori della novella onta, ed assisa sulle ceneri dei nemici ricorderà i trionfi sopra di loro riportati!

A tutti, che per la igiene propongono la cremazione, rispondiamo che la igiene è da difendere contro le infezioni degl'imputriditi viventi, che minacciano la vita fisica e morale della società, ma non così stranamente è da tutelarla contra del cimitero; perchè l'inumazione eseguita secondo le leggi, basta a difenderci contro le infezioni della putrefazione dei nostri morti, avendo noi il migliore e più antico modo di seppellire i nostri fratelli, onde a ragione gridiamo:

UMIAMO I NOSTRI MORTI !

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VALEDICTORY ADDRESS

TO THE

MEDICAL GRADUATES

OF THE

UNIVERSITY OF LOUISVILLE:

MARCH 1, 1875.

By DAVID W. YANDELL, M. D.

PROFESSOR OF THE SCIENCE AND ART OF SURGERY AND CLINICAL SURGERY.

LOUISVILLE:
PRINTED BY JOHN P. MORTON & CO.

1875

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CREMATION.

GENTLEMEN,—“To preserve the living and make the dead to live, to keep men out of their urns and discourse of human fragments in them, is not impertinent unto our profession, whose study is life and death, who daily behold examples of mortality, and of all men least need artificial mementos or coffins by our bedside to remind us of our graves.” These are the words of Sir Thomas Browne, who was one of the luminaries of our profession two hundred years ago. Your studies heretofore have related to the living, and your business hereafter will be chiefly with them. We hope it will be a long time before you are troubled much with questions relating to the dead. In one sense, however, and that a very important one, the question as to the proper disposition of the dead concerns especially medical men. The subject of sepulture has become in some parts of the world one of deep concern as bearing upon the health of communities; and as men crowd more and more into cities, it must in time claim the anxious consideration of a much larger number. As guardians

of the public health, physicians must indicate and enforce the hygienic bearing of the subject. To us, it is true, the question has no present interest, and for ages to come it is not likely to press upon our people. And yet even here in Louisville it has assumed a practical shape; for since the town was laid out two public cemeteries have been filled and closed, and the city is fast stretching around and beyond our beautiful Cave Hill. But in countries where the population is dense it is already a question of most serious magnitude how they shall dispose of the dead in such a way as not to affect injuriously the health of the living.

Rest is the thought suggested by death. The body after "life's fitful fever" seems to be at rest. The luster of the eyes has fled; the muscles are rigid; the countenance has lost its animation. All appears to be in a state of repose. But it is not rest. Every moment of life was one of ceaseless activity and change. At no period from birth to the closing hour was it for a moment the same body. The living particles that composed it in infancy had been exchanged for other particles in youth, and those that formed the buoyant body of the young man had given place to others in the frame bent by age. Rest in all its pilgrimage there was none; and after death, when at last all seems to be still, a new arrangement of the elements which constituted the frame is begun. The hydro-carbons that

entered into its composition are resolved into the more simple forms of carbonic acid and water; the nitrogen compounds are converted into ammonia; the sulphur and phosphorus enter into new combinations, and the more perishable parts soon disappear. The bones, slower to yield to the disintegrating forces, crumble at last under the action of water and the atmosphere, and return to dust. Nothing in the end remains of the wonderful organism to distinguish it from the inorganic bodies among which it was entombed. The body seems to have perished. Not only has life become extinct, but all the blocks that framed the glorious temple have been removed and scattered to the winds or mingled with the elements from which they were derived. It seems as if destroyed. To the eye the work would appear to be one of annihilation; and so the ancients thought when they gave the bodies of their friends to the funeral-pile. They fancied that they were destroying them, and that no base or common use could ever afterward be made of what had once been a noble and revered frame. But the fire was only resolving more rapidly the cherished remains into their original constituents, effecting in an hour or two what the slow chemical processes would have required years or centuries to accomplish in the grave. In either case the elements composing the body are only changing their relations; they are scattered, not annihilated. As in

life the waste particles had escaped only to enter upon new offices, feeding vegetables, which were to become in turn the food of animals, so these products of decay are diffused abroad on the air or mix with the soil to form the nutriment of plants.

No power short of the Omnipotence which created matter can ever destroy a particle of it; and by the power which called living matter into existence it has been ordered that it shall be perpetually useful as well as active. Every liberated atom that leaves the bodies of animals, and of god-like man with the rest, by a fiat of the Creator goes unerringly to minister to the wants of other organisms. Dying vegetables sustain the life of animals, and animals returning to dust vegetate again in succeeding generations of plants. One kingdom supports the other, as generations of plants minister to the growth of those that follow.

“Lo! all grow old and die—but see again
How on the faltering footsteps of decay
Youth presses—ever gay and beautiful youth,
In all its beautiful forms. These lofty trees
Wave not less proudly that their ancestors
Molder beneath them.”

Whether we will or not, as the effete matters of our bodies go in life to nourish vegetation, after death the bodies themselves must return to the state in which they become subservient to the vegetable world. “Na-

ture," as Sir Henry Thompson puts it, "will have it so, whether we like it or not. She destines the material elements of my body to enter the vegetable world on purpose to supply another animal organism which takes my place. She wants me, and I *must* go. There is no help for it. Nature hides no talent in a napkin." Whether the body wastes away in the grave or is consumed speedily by fire, the final result is the same.

The question of a change in the present mode of disposing of the dead having been recently much discussed on the other side of the Atlantic, and cremation having been very seriously urged by the writer just quoted, as well as by others, as a substitute for interment of the body, it may not be uninteresting to give some thought to the subject at this time.

Burying, burning, embalming; these are the three modes adopted by humanity for the disposal of its dead. I might stop, if time permitted, to describe what has been called the more "phantastical" modes of disposing of the body after life has left it, as that of the Indian Brahmins, who burnt themselves alive, one of which strange people amazed the Athenians by throwing himself upon his funeral-pile and exclaiming, "Thus I make myself immortal;" or that of the Egyptians, who, afraid of fire, endeavored to preserve the bodies of their dead by precious embalmments and inclosures in glass; or that of the Chaldeans, who, though idola-

ters of fire, abhorred, it is said, the burning of their corpses as a pollution of that deity; or that of the Scythians, who, rejecting all interment, made their graves in the air; or that of the Persians, who, caring only for their bones, gave their flesh as food to dogs and wild beasts; or that of the Musselman, who affects the grave, and requires it to be of such size that he may rise in it to his knees, and there fight the final battle between the white and black angels. But I shall confine myself to the two methods of simple inhumation and cremation, and especially to the latter.

There can be no doubt that the earliest mode was interment. The example of Abraham and of the patriarchs proves it, if we reject the tradition according to which Adam was buried near Damascus, in Mount Calvary. It is in this way that the remains of the great Israelitish leader and law-giver, Moses, were disposed of, as we learn by the hot contest between Satan and the archangel about his body. The practice was to bury their dead out of their sight. But cremation also prevailed at an early age, and to no inconsiderable extent. Homer gives noble descriptions of funerals at which the bodies of his heroes were consumed by fire. That of Patroclus, the friend of Achilles, is one of the most imposing.

The scene is a military camp. The troops, weary after a day of hard fighting, are gathered in silent

squads around their bivouac-fires or lie sorrowful in their tents, for Patroclus, the flower of warriors, has fallen by the hand of the crested Hector. His bleeding corpse lies in the tent of his foster-brother Achilles. On the glowing hearth a huge tripod is quickly placed, in which water is heated to wash the bloody stains from the manly form of the hero. When this has been done the body is anointed with rich oil, and the gaping wounds closed with an old and costly ointment. The body, wrapped in fine linen, is then transferred to a couch, and over all is spread a white mantle. Achilles, unable to restrain his grief, seeks the beach, throws himself down among his Myrmidons, and prays that the voice of the murmuring sea may drown the fierce tumult raging in his breast. Slumber at last enfolds him. The soul of Patroclus comes to his side, and in sorrowful tones entreats that their bones shall not finally lie apart, but be gathered in one receptacle, the golden urn given to Achilles by his mother.

With the morning comes an order from Agamemnon, king of men, that a corps of the army proceed to the forest and gather wood for the mighty pyre that Achilles has designed for his friend. The wood is brought and heaped in a vast pile, a hundred feet in length and of equal width. Slowly and sorrowfully the body of Patroclus is borne from the tent and laid upon the pyre. There it is covered with the locks

of the Myrmidons and the amber hair of the disconsolate Achilles. With it are deposited the heads of two favorite hounds, the fat of a score of oxen, twelve fiery steeds, and the bodies of twelve noble Trojan youths captured in battle and now slain in honor of the occasion. The torch is applied. All night long the flames leap to their devouring task, and the coming day reveals that their work is done. Dark-red wine is poured upon the still glowing embers. The somber ashes of the wood are lifted from the whiter ashes of the bones, and those lying in the center of the pyre are carefully separated from the others and gathered into a golden vase. This is wrapped in a double fold of caul and placed in a fitting tomb, there to rest till others of equal rank with Menaetides shall become shadows; and these last sad rites concluded, the army gives itself up to races and to games.

I might, if time allowed, give you from Homer the description of another funeral which quickly followed this—that of the noble Hector, celebrated within the walls of Troy—but I must pass on to describe a similar scene among another people.

On the 18th of March, in the year 44 B.C., there was seen in the Roman Forum a gorgeously-gilded chapel, toward which a mournful procession was advancing. At the head of the procession, as chief mourner, was an ex-consul. Behind him, on a couch inlaid with

ivory and strewn with vestments of gold and purple, a body was borne by some of the most illustrious men of Rome. It was the body of one who had been the "foremost man of all this world." He had led armies in Europe, Asia, and Africa, and wherever he marched victory marched by his side. For one of his campaigns he had received the honor of a triumph of fifteen days, an honor which had been accorded to no general before. Two years after this he had been honored with a triumph of twenty days. In a few years more a triumph of forty days had been decreed. The senate had saluted him with the title of father of his country, and had decreed that his triumphal car should be borne by horses of the sacred color—white—and that his figure in ivory should be borne in procession among the images of the gods. As great in peace as in war, he had after subduing his enemies turned his mind to great plans for the good of his country. He had proposed to make a digest of the Roman laws, to establish libraries, to drain marshes, to dig canals. But his career had been cut short by a band of assassins, who had plunged twenty-three daggers into his body. The assassins had proposed to throw the body into the Tiber, but had been prevented by fear. For several hours the mangled body had lain neglected where it had fallen, for the attendants of the great emperor had fled with the rest. At length three of the attend-

ants had ventured to take up the corpse and convey it to the pontifical mansion in the Forum; for the murdered man at the time of his death was *pontifex maximus*. Here his agonized wife threw herself on the still bleeding body, and by a tearless grief bore mute testimony to the extent of her loss. His cold form was laid in the great hall, from all sides of which his long line of illustrious ancestors looked down upon it. Messengers were dispatched for Antistius, the surgeon, who came and made careful examination of the wounds. He pronounced but one of the twenty-three stabs fatal; that had penetrated a vital organ, and Cæsar had died of hemorrhage.

The senate had felt itself compelled to decree a public funeral. A pyre had been constructed in the Field of Mars, outside of the walls of the city; for the laws forbade cremation within the walls. But the funeral-oration was to be pronounced in the Forum, and the chapel had been erected toward which the sad procession was moving.

At the head of the couch on which the body was placed lay the toga pierced by the daggers of the assassins. The people had been invited to offer for the pyre garments, jewels, spices, and the order in which they were to come had been prescribed; but so great was the rush to make offerings that the police had been unable to maintain order, and the offerers came

by any route they chose. When the couch was set down the body could not be seen, but an image of wax was turned round by machinery, so that all could see the three-and-twenty wounds. And now the chief-magistrate of Rome ascends the rostra to deliver the funeral-oration. He recites the decrees of the senate, which declare sacred and inviolable the person of the murdered man, and he points to the mangled body before them. After a burst of feeling he girds his robes closely around him, advances to the bier, and chants a hymn to the body as the image of a god. "Thou alone, Cæsar, wast never worsted in battle. Thou alone hast avenged our defeats and wiped away our disgraces. By thee the insults of three hundred years have been avenged. Before thee has fallen the hereditary foe who burnt the city of our fathers." All now turn their eyes to the bloody image, and the groans of men and the shrieks of women drown the voice of the orator. Suddenly seizing the toga which hung over the body, he opens it and shows the rents made by the murderers' daggers. And now the excitement of the people becomes uncontrollable. They cry out that the body shall not be taken to the Field of Mars, but that it shall be burned within the city. Some point to the shrine of Jupiter Capitolanus, others to the palace from which the hero's spirit ascended to the gods. But now men come rushing forward bearing

tables, beams, benches, whatever could be found in the adjoining buildings. Suddenly two young men, with swords by their sides and javelins in their hands, apply the torch. The excited multitude think that in the young men they have seen Castor and Pollux doing honor to their hero. Upon the blazing pile the musicians throw their brazen instruments and splendid dresses, the soldiers their armor, the matrons their ornaments and even the golden bullæ which hung from the necks of their children, while the multitude feed the flames with oils and scented woods. A cry arises, "Let us seize the brands and fire the traitors' houses!" and crowds of infuriated men, with blazing brands rush forth toward the dwellings of the chief-conspirators. When the pyre has been consumed the remaining embers are quenched by wines, the ashes of the bones are separated from the ashes of the wood, reverently washed, wrapped in linen, deposited in a vase of a material befitting the rank of him whom the Romans placed among their gods.

Examples of cremation among the Hebrews are related in the Scriptures of the Old Testament. Thus we read in Amos that Moab burned the bones of the king of Edom into lime; and in the first book of Samuel it is related that "when the inhabitants of Jabesh-Gilead heard of that which the Philistines had done to Saul, all the valiant men arose and went all

night, and took the body of Saul and the bodies of his sons from the wall of Bethsham, and came to Jabesh, and burnt them there. And they took their bones and buried them under a tree at Jabesh, and fasted seven days."

From what has been said you will see that cremation, as practiced in ancient times, was effected at a considerable cost of fuel at least; and on this account it has been objected to by a Frenchman, who declares that if all the ancients had been burned the moderns would have frozen to death for want of wood to make their fires. Recent ingenuity, however, has obviated this objection, and made it possible not only to reduce the body to ashes quickly, but with the consumption of an exceedingly small amount of fuel. Yet, with all that the most improved reverberatory furnace can do in that way, I question whether any real saving has been effected over the plan adopted in the case of Isaac, who, as we read in sacred history, carried his pyre on his shoulders.

Among other objections to inurning the remains of the dead, some one has declared that if the previous dwellers in the world had all been preserved in vases, there would not now be left standing-room for those now alive. Sir Henry Thompson has answered this objection by proposing to scatter the ashes at once upon the fields, that they may immediately pass to

their destined uses. All bodies do not, it appears, burn equally well. The poisoned soldier mentioned by Plutarch "put out two pyres when his belly broke." To avoid such accidents it has been suggested to add the body of one woman to the bodies of eight or ten men, as being more inflammable, and therefore likely to make things warmer.

The only instance of cremation in this country of which I have any knowledge occurred many years ago, and in the person of a noted citizen. I am indebted for an account of it to my learned colleague, Dr. Bell.

Henry Laurens was one of the wealthiest merchants of Charleston. When the revolutionary struggle commenced he was in Europe superintending the education of one of his sons. He immediately returned home, threw himself with great vigor into the contest, was one of the foremost patriots of South Carolina, and enjoyed the unbounded confidence of Washington. He was elected a delegate to the Congress of 1776, and was elected president of that body. In 1779 he was sent as minister plenipotentiary to Holland; but, having been captured by a British vessel, was confined to the Tower of London for fourteen months. The British authorities made him many offers to abandon the cause of his country, but they were all spurned. Soon after his release Congress appointed him one

of the commissioners to make a treaty of peace with Great Britain, and in 1782, in conjunction with Franklin and Jay, he signed the preliminaries of the treaty.

It is known that the distinguished South Carolinian made a will which contained the most positive commands for the burning of his body. The reason for this strange order is not generally understood. Laurens had a daughter, one of the loveliest of the girls of South Carolina. When about fifteen years of age she apparently died, and was shrouded and placed in a coffin for burial. The coffin was open, and lay in a room fronting the bay. A number of her friends, young ladies and gentlemen, were sitting as watchers of the corpse. As one of the ladies walked near the coffin she was startled by a slight movement of the body, and her actions drew the other watchers to the coffin. They were soon convinced that Miss Laurens was alive. The family were summoned and prompt measures taken for her resuscitation, which were successful. She afterward married Dr. David Ramsey, the patriot and historian, and an eminent physician of Charleston. Laurens never forgot the scene in his house connected with the narrow escape of his daughter from being buried alive. In prescribing cremation for his body, and in directing disinheritance for disobedience of this order, he declared that he could conceive of nothing more terrible than resuscitation

in a closed grave. His body was burned in accordance with the injunctions of his will.

The Christian religion brought to light a truth which finally rendered cremation odious. As it has been expressed, it "glossed the deformity of death by careful consideration of the body." Recognizing the body as the lodging of Christ and the temple of the Holy Ghost, Christians were considerate of it, as well as of the immortal soul, and attended its burial with long services and full solemnities; and so Christianity "gave final extinction to the sepulchral bonfires," and the practice of cremation died out by the beginning of the fourth century.

One of the arguments which have been presented in favor of cremation is that what remains of the body after the analysis of fire is unchangeable. As Sir Thomas Browne expresses it, "He that hath the ashes of his friend hath an everlasting treasure. Where fire taketh leave corruption slowly enters. In bones well burnt fire makes a wall against itself." But cremation is urged upon much more practical grounds. It is urged as a measure necessary to the health of the living in communities where great numbers of bodies are undergoing decomposition, preventing, as it does, the process of putrefaction and all its attendant evils. It is less expensive than burial as now conducted, and renders costly cemeteries unnecessary.

Sir Henry Thompson, one of the most brilliant surgeons of modern times, and withal a conspicuously liberal and enlightened philanthropist, thus sums up the advantages of cremation: "For the purposes of cremation nothing is required but an apparatus of a suitable kind, the construction of which is well understood and easy to accomplish. With such apparatus the process is rapid and inoffensive, and the result is perfect. The space necessary for the purpose is small, and but little skilled labor is wanted. Not only is its employment compatible with religious rites, but it enables them to be conducted with greater ease and with far greater safety to the attendants than at a cemetery. For example, burial takes place in the open air, and necessitates exposure to all weathers; while cremation is necessarily conducted within a building, which may be constructed to meet the requirements of mourners and attendants in relation to comfort and taste. Cremation destroys instantly all infectious quality in the body submitted to the process, and effectually prevents the possibility of other injury to the living from the remains at any future time."

In reading the history of cremation as practiced in various nations, one can not fail to be struck with the tenderness exhibited by the survivors to the relics of the departed. The bones were carefully washed with wine and milk, "and mothers wrapped them in linen

and dried them in their bosoms, where they had been first fostered and nourished." Artemisia, the wife of Mausolus, even went so far as to drink of the ashes of her husband, erecting over the remainder a tomb of such magnificence that it ranked long as the seventh wonder of the world.

But there is another fact with which we are impressed as we read this history, and that is the proof afforded every where of the early and universal respect to another life and a future state of existence. "Before Plato could speak," it has been beautifully said, "the soul had wings in Homer." All men craved immortality, and believed that their friends were alive in another world. Ulysses, that "unconquerable man," was unconcerned as to how he should live here, provided he could have a noble tomb after death. Socrates said to his friends, "You may bury my body if in that you think not you are burying Socrates." The philosopher, regarding only his better part, was indifferent whether his body should be burnt or buried. When proceeding to the last sad office they that kindled the funeral-pile turned their faces away, as expressing an unwilling ministration; and before applying the torch they raised their eyes toward heaven as the place of their hopes. Lucian, though in a jesting way, expressed the prevailing belief of his times when he said of Hercules, "That part which proceeded from Alcmena perished, while

that from Jupiter remained immortal." Such was the belief of these ancient pagans; and, though they saw the body perishing in the flames, they were assured that the soul endured forever.

But I must hasten to a close. Only a few words remain to be spoken. The bond which has so pleasantly united us as officers and students of the University of Louisville is now severed, and we take you, pupils no longer, by the hand as professional brothers. Be assured that you will bear away with you our best wishes. Go forth into the world and triumph; such is the prayer of your teachers. We hope the day is far distant when the obsequies of which I have been speaking to-night will be solemnized in the case of any of you. We expect you to prove worthy of the profession in which your new title declares you to be both skilled and learned, discharging faithfully its gentle and tender offices, and fulfilling unselfishly all its lofty obligations; and then it will indeed be but a small matter with you whether your ashes shall be gathered in costly urns, or your bodies lie beneath the rock-ribbed hills or are hidden in the caverns of the sea. Doing well your duty, you need give no thought to the rest. Gentlemen, farewell!

CREMATION OR BURIAL

A Paper read at the Meeting of the British Medical Association in
Cambridge, August, 1880

BY T. SPENCER WELLS

*Vice-President of the Royal College of Surgeons
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THERE are, no doubt, many members of the British Medical Association who have not thought very much about the evils of the present mode of burying the dead in this and many other parts of the world. There are many more who have not heard at all, or have thought very little, of recent proposals to reform the present system, or to substitute for it one which can be proved to be far better. It is scarcely forty years since the causes of the high rate of mortality, and the means of preventing disease, attracted much attention in our profession; and the necessity for sanitary regulations was impressed upon public opinion. The influence of light and air, of a supply of pure water, of good drainage, ventilation, and cleanliness, as means of preventing disease and prolonging life in large towns, populous districts, and the country generally; the influence of employments upon health; the habits of different classes of the people; the condition of their dwellings; the injurious effects of many nuisances, and the inadequacy of power for preventing them, are all subjects of recent study, and do not yet form a sufficiently defined part of medical education.

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It is quite unnecessary here to remind you of the beneficial influence upon the public health and the longevity of the nation exercised by our profession during the last forty years ; but it does appear to me to be necessary to call for the earnest attention of the Association to one source of danger which is increasing every year—the burial of the dead. It is about forty years since a member of our body, Mr. Walker, wrote the remarkable work on graveyards which led to the special inquiry into the practice of interment in towns, and the admirable report of Mr. Edwin Chadwick, which was presented to Parliament in 1843. The evidence he adduced as to the propagation of disease from decaying or putrefying human bodies was amply sufficient to prove the dangerous tendency of all interments in churches or in towns, and led to the removal of many burial-places from towns or crowded districts into suburban cemeteries. The effects have been salutary. But, with a rapid increase of population, we are now beginning to suffer from the evils which Mr. Chadwick foretold, namely, “shifting the evil from the centre of the populous districts to the suburbs, and deteriorating them” * * * “increasing the duration and sum of the existing evils.” Many of our suburban cemeteries are now very much in the condition of town graveyards forty years ago ; and the attention of thoughtful men outside the bounds of our profession has already been directed to a growing evil. Only last year, at the opening of the Social Science Congress at Manchester, the respected and beloved bishop of the diocese, in opening the congress, thus referred to the recent consecration of a new cemetery. “Here,” he said, “is another hundred acres of land withdrawn from the food-producing area of the country for ever.” And he added, “I feel convinced that, before long, we shall have to face this problem, How to bury our dead out of our sight, more practically and more seriously than we have hitherto done. In the same sense in which the ‘Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath,’ I hold that the earth was made, not for the dead, but for the living. No intelligent faith can suppose that any Christian doctrine is affected by the manner in which, or the time in

which, this mortal body of ours crumbles into dust and sees corruption." And he concludes: "This is a subject that will have to be seriously considered before long. Cemeteries are becoming not only a difficulty, an expense, and an inconvenience, but an actual danger."

In the debate on the Burials Bill in the House of Lords on June 24th, the Earl of Beaconsfield said that what is called "God's acre" is "really not adapted to the country which we inhabit, the times in which we live, and the spirit of the age. What I should like to see would be a settlement of this question by the shutting up of all God's acres throughout the country. I think the churchyard of the ordained minister, and the graveyard of the dissenting minister, alike, are institutions which are very prejudicial to the health of the people of this country; and their health ought to be, if not the first, at any rate, one of the first considerations of a statesman. Now we have been moving gradually in the direction of these views, and there has been for some years a notion, soon about to amount, I believe, to a conviction, that the institution of churchyards is one which is highly prejudicial to the public health. I think it would be a much wiser step if we were to say that the time has arrived, seeing the vast increase of population in this country and the increase which we may contemplate, when we should close all these churchyards, and when we should take steps for furnishing every community with a capacious and ample cemetery, placed in a situation in which, while it would meet all the requirements of the society for which it was intended, would exercise no prejudicial influence on the public health." And he concluded his speech in these terms:—"I think the direction in which we ought to have moved would have been to shut all these churchyards and graveyards, and to have assisted the Government in some adequate proposal which would have furnished the country with cemeteries in which none of these painful controversies could have occurred, and which would have conduced to the preservation of the health and welfare of the country."

The impressive exhortation of the Bishop of Manchester, from which I have just quoted, was the result, as he tells us,

of the perusal of two very able papers written by one of the most distinguished members of our own body, Sir H. Thompson, and published in the *Contemporary Review* in 1874. The first paper, on the "Treatment of the Body after Death," led to a reply from Mr. Holland, then Medical Inspector of Burials in England, which contains a summary of all that can be said in defence of cemeteries. But the rejoinder of Sir H. Thompson is a masterly exposition of the evils of our present mode of interment, with an answer to many of the objections to cremation as a substitute for burial, and some account of modern improved apparatus for burning dead bodies at a moderate expense, without any nuisance, and with due regard to the sentiments of surviving relatives. I trust that Sir Henry may be induced to reprint his papers in a form easily accessible to the people. One of the first effects of the perusal of Sir H. Thompson's papers was the association together of a small number of men, and the formation of the Cremation Society of England, numbering, among members of this Association, notably Mr. Ernest Hart and Mr. Lord. I have here the first part of the *Transactions* of this Society. It forms a pamphlet of only sixty-six pages, but it contains a great deal of information as to cremation at home and abroad, up to the date of the sixth anniversary of the Society last January. It may surprise many to learn that cremation is already legalised in parts of Germany and in Italy; that crematoria have been erected and used in Gotha and in Milan and Lodi, and a society established in Rome. A phase in the sanitary laws of Switserland which forbade cremation has been removed, and a piece of ground in the new cemetery at Zurich has been set apart for the erection of a crematorium.

On June 16th last, Professor Polli (whose researches on the antiseptic action of the sulphites and hyposulphites I brought before the Association in this town sixteen years ago, in an address on the causes of excessive mortality after surgical operations) who, in late years, had been one of the most ardent supporters of cremation, who had himself proposed a method which was the first tried in Italy, had his body, by his own express desire, cremated, and his ashes were consigned

to their resting-place with all due solemnity, in the presence of mourning relatives. This cremation was the sixty-eighth which has taken place in Milan since January 1876.

Several large cremation societies have been formed in Switzerland. One large society in Holland has several branches. In France, the Paris Municipality has called for designs for the best form of furnace. In Belgium, one society in Brussels has more than four hundred members, and M. Creteur has been thanked by the Government for the successful cremation of the bodies of soldiers killed near Sedan. In America, cremation has already been practised at Washington, and several societies have been formed; and the Brazilian Government is about to erect a crematorium at Rio de Janeiro.

While all this has been going on in the European continent and in America, the Cremation Society of England has been working on quietly but earnestly, has purchased an acre of freehold land near Woking, has erected a Crematorium on the model of the *Gorini* furnace, which is the most approved in Italy, and has experimentally proved that the body of an animal may be reduced to a clean innocuous ash, weighing about a twentieth of the unburnt body, at a very small cost, and without any appreciable odour or visible smoke.

The Society has obtained the very highest legal authority, and the admission of the late Home Secretary, that cremation is not illegal, provided it be practised without nuisance, or leading to a breach of the peace. But Sir R. Cross obtained from the Council a promise that, before burning a human body, they would endeavour to carry a short Bill through Parliament, or to obtain the insertion of a clause in some Burial Bill, affirming that cremation might be legally practised, and under proper regulations. Hitherto, the Council have been unable to obtain this parliamentary sanction, and it remains to be seen how far Sir William Harcourt will consider the Council bound to the present Government by their promise to his predecessor in the Home Office. After any discussion which may follow this paper, I trust many of you will sign an address to him, which I will read after I have asked you whether the time has not arrived when cremation

should be supported by the British Medical Association, collectively, and by each of its branches. The sanitary advantages over burial in coffins, or in wicker baskets, are undeniable and very great. Most of them are so well known to you all, that I may pass them by without further mention; but I must allude to one most remarkable argument in favour of cremation which has just been advanced by Pasteur, after his examination of the soil of fields where cattle had been buried, whose death had been caused by that fatal disease known as "charbon," or splenic fever. The observations of our own Darwin "on the formation of mould," made more than forty years ago, when he was a young man, are curiously confirmatory of the recent conclusions of Pasteur. In Darwin's paper, read at the Geological Society of London, in 1837, he proved that, in old pasture-land, every particle of the superficial layer of earth, overlying different kinds of subsoil, has passed through the intestines of earth-worms. The worms swallow earthy matter, and, after separating the digestible or serviceable portion, they eject the remainder in little coils or heaps at the mouth of their burrows. In dry weather the worm descends to a considerable depth, and brings up to the surface the particles which it ejects. This agency of earth-worms is not so trivial as it might appear. By observation in different fields, Mr. Darwin proved, in one case, that a depth of more than three inches of this worm-mould had been accumulated in fifteen years; and, in another, that the earth-worms had covered a bed of marl with their mould in eighty years to an average depth of thirteen inches.

Pasteur's recent researches on the etiology of "charbon" show that this earth-mould positively contains the specific germs which propagate the disease; and that the same specific germs are found within the intestines of the worms. The parasitic organism, or *bacteridium*, which, inoculated from a diseased to a healthy animal, propagates the specific disease, may be destroyed by putrefaction after burial. But, before this process has been completed, germs or spores may have been formed which will resist the putrefactive process for many years, and lie in a condition of latent life, like

a grain of corn, or any flower-seed, ready to germinate, and communicate the specific disease. In a field in the Jura, where a diseased cow had been buried two years before, at a depth of nearly seven feet, the surface-earth not having been disturbed in the interval, Pasteur found that the mould contained germs which, introduced by inoculation into a guinea-pig, produced charbon and death. And, further, if a worm be taken from an infected spot, the earth in the alimentary canal of the worm contains these spores or germs of charbon, which, inoculated, propagate the disease. And the mould deposited on the surface by the worms, when dried into dust, is blown over the grass and plants on which the cattle feed, and may thus spread the disease. After various farming operations of tilling and harvest, Pasteur has found the germs just over the graves of the diseased cattle, but not to any great distance. After rains, or morning dews, the germs of charbon, with a quantity of other germs, were found about the neighbouring plants; and Pasteur suggests that, in cemeteries, it is very possible that germs capable of propagating specific diseases of different kinds, quite harmless to the earth-worm, may be carried to the surface of the soil ready to cause disease in the proper animals. The practical inferences in favour of cremation are so strong that, in Pasteur's words, they "need not be enforced."

And now a word as to the sentimental objections to cremation. The Bishop of Manchester, in the address to which I before alluded, admits that his sentiments are "somewhat revolted by the idea of cremation;" but he adds, "they are, perhaps, illogical and unreasonable sentiments." We all know how difficult it is to convince illogical and unreasonable people; they must be left to the influence of time and example. But it is of importance to show to all that reason, and true sentiment, and good feeling of reverence for the dead, of affectionate regard for their memory, are more logically and reasonably associated with a purifying fire than with decay, putrefaction, and danger to the living; and on this important part of the subject I am glad to bring before you the book of my

friend Mr. Robinson, who has done so much of late years to improve our gardens, parks, and open spaces, and who is one of the Council of the Cremation Society. He calls this book *God's Acre Beautiful, or the Cemeteries of the Future*. He argues that the resting-places of the dead should be "permanent, unpolluted, inviolate;" that permanent beautiful cemeteries could be easily maintained if urn-burial were practised; that existing graveyards and cemeteries can only be of temporary use; that their monuments and memorial stones soon decay or crumble away; and that urn-burial might lead in the future, as it has done in the past, to more noble and enduring monuments. Let me read to you a page from Mr. Robinson's book.

"By the adoption of urn-burial, all that relates to the artistic embellishment of a cemetery would be at once placed on a very different footing. One of the larger burial-grounds now closed, perforce, in a less time than that of an ordinary life, would accommodate a like number of burials on an improved system for many ages. The neglect and desecration of the resting-places of the dead, inherent to the present system, would give place to unremitting and loving care, for the simple reason that each living generation would be as much interested in the preservation of the cemetery as those that had gone before were at any previous time in its history. We should at once have what is so much to be desired from artistic and other points of view—a permanent resting-place for our dead. With this would come the certainty that any memorials erected to their memory would be carefully preserved in the coming years, and free from the sacrilege and neglect so often seen. Hence an incentive to art which might be not unworthy of such places. The knowledge that our cemeteries would be sacred—would be sacred to all, and jealously preserved by all, through the coming generations—would effect much in this new field for artistic effort. In days when careful attention is bestowed upon the designs of trifling details of our houses, it is to be hoped that we shall soon be ashamed of the present state of what should be the beautiful and unpolluted rest-garden of all that remains of those whom we have known, or loved, or honoured in life, or heard of in death as having lived

not unworthy of their kind. Such a revolution in our burial arrangements will not come suddenly; but perhaps a little reflection may serve to convince those who have feelings of repulsion to urn-burial that, as a matter of fact, less dishonour is done to the remains of those whom one loves in subjecting them to a fire which reduces them to ashes which can be carefully preserved, than in allowing them to become the subjects of the loathsome process of corruption first, and then subjecting them to the chance of being ultimately carted away to make room for some metropolitan or local improvement." The preservation of inscriptions and memorials, whether in or around churches and public buildings, the erection of beautiful tombs with urns as family burying-places, would be worthy objects for the best efforts of artistic design.

As to the ceremony of burial and performance of any religious service, distinguished members of the clergy of the Church of England have shown that scarcely any alteration would be called for in our burial-service; and it is felt that, as urn-burial might be practised to any extent and for any length of time in or around churches and public buildings, in towns as well as in distant cemeteries, and without the expensive transport and ugly expensive forms of our present system of burial, men might again, as of old, rest in death near the scene of their work in life; and the restoration of the family tomb to the chapel or crypt would renew and add to the tie between the family and the church. Our places of worship and the spaces which surround them, if urn-burial became general, would be amply sufficient for the preservation of the remains of our dead for generations to come, and would enable us to convert existing cemeteries, which are rapidly becoming sources of danger to the public health, into permanently beautiful gardens. Instead of filling up large spaces with decaying dead bodies, we should have natural gardens, open lawns, pure air, fine trees, lovely flowers, and receptacles for vases, which, as well as the cinerary urns and chests themselves, might be made important helps in the culture of art. In country houses, urn-burial would lead to family burial-places within the grounds, and encourage monumental work of



high artistic merit; and, in the country church, the ashes of the people might repose in the place where they worshipped, instead of polluting the earth of the surrounding churchyard and the water drunk by the surviving population, or being carried to a distant cemetery, which overcrowding must in time make only a very temporary resting-place.

The "earth to earth" system, as it is called, so ably advocated by my friend Mr. Haden—the burial in porous wicker baskets, instead of wooden or leaden coffins—has some advantages. It is somewhat cheaper, and decay is more rapid; but the ground is for a long time occupied by what pollutes earth, air, and water. Mr. Haden's argument that, as a body, after coffinless burial, decays away in about six years, we may "bury again in the same ground with no other effect than to increase its substance and to raise its surface," surely strikes at the root of all sentiment of reverence or affection for the dead—and, with what hazard to the living, the recent researches of Pasteur are amply sufficient to prove. In addition to the dangers from simple putrefaction polluting earth, air, and water, we have to consider the dissemination of the germs of specific contagious diseases. Liquid animal matter oozing from putrefying corpses in a churchyard may possibly be so purified by the oxidising power of a few feet of earth as to be bright, clear, and inoffensive to any of our senses; but water which is neither cloudy nor stinking, but rather enticing and popular, like the water of the Broad-street pump in 1874, has carried cholera to those who drank it. How often typhoid fever has been caused in the same manner, who can tell?

But I must not detain you longer. Here is the Address to the Home Secretary, and I hope it may be signed by many who are convinced that the present custom of burying the dead is associated with evils which ought to be remedied.

"We, the undersigned members of the British Medical Association assembled at Cambridge, disapprove the present custom of burying the dead, and desire to substitute some mode which shall rapidly resolve the body into its component elements by a process which cannot offend the living, and may render the remains absolutely innocuous. Until some better

mode is devised, we desire to promote that usually known as cremation. As this process can now be carried out without anything approaching to nuisance, and as it is not illegal, we trust the Government will not oppose the practice when convinced that proper regulations are observed, and that ampler guarantees of death having occurred from natural causes are obtained than are now required for burial."

In conclusion, let me ask you to think on the following propositions.

Decomposing human remains so pollute earth, air, and water, as to diminish the general health and average duration of the life of our people.

Existing churchyards and cemeteries are not well fitted as safe, secure, permanent, innocuous places of repose for the remains of our dead.

The expense of funerals and interment in graves presses unduly upon the means of the middle and labouring classes.

The present system of registration of death is so imperfect, that common causes of preventable disease are not detected; and life is also rendered insecure by the omission of efficient arrangements for the due verification of the fact and causes of death.

These evils might be mitigated or prevented—(1) if national cemeteries were provided and maintained, under the direction of duly qualified officers of public health, and not left, as now, to be sources of private gain to commercial companies; (2) if no interment were allowed without a certificate of the fact and the cause of death by an officer of public health.

All this should be urged by those who are content to improve on our present mode of burial. Those who will go further, who will assist in the attempt to arrest the evils inseparable from even the very best mode of burial, who would add to our reverence for the remains of the dead, ensure an impressive religious service, and at a reduced expenditure provide for permanent monuments in beautiful open public spaces, may at the same time prove the influence which our Association can exert, and ought to exert, upon the health and morals of the Nation.

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THE
JOHN CREAR
LIBRARY
THE

CHARTER, BY-LAWS &c.

OF THE

NEW YORK

CREMATION SOCIETY.

ORGANIZED IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK,
March 8th., 1881.

Incorporated March 26th, 1881.

ENT
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Incorporated March 26th, 1881.

ENT
NATIONAL MUSEUM
YASSEL

All letters of enquiry, relating to the society, should be addressed to the corresponding-secretary, and all business communications to the recording-secretary, P. O. Box 1999 New York City.

OFFICERS — 1881.

REV. J. D. BEUGLESS, D.D., - - *President.*

DELAVAN BLOODGOOD, M.D., }
E. C. TOWNSEND, } - *Vice-presidents.*

JOHN STORER COBB, - - *Corresponding-secretary.*

D. W. CRAIG, - - - - *Recording-secretary.*

E. A. CASWELL, - - - - *Financial-secretary.*

EDWARD C. COCKEY, - - - - *Treasurer.*

J. E. P. DOYLE, }
CHARLES PUTZEL, }
C. W. C. DREHER, } - - - *Executive-committee.*
W. P. KREMER, }
A. C. C. TAMSEN, }

The above officers constitute the council of the
society.

BOARD OF AUDIT.

AUGUSTUS G. COBB, A. H. EDINGER,
HENRY F. LUCAA.

MEMBERS,

LIFE.

Caswell, E. A.

Cobb, J. Storer.

Remington, Cyrus, K.

ANNUAL.

Adler, Isaac.

Cobb, Augustus G.

Bache, Albert D.

Cobb, J. Saxelby.

Bell, Charlotte J.

Cockey, Edward C.

Bennett, Wm. C.

Colyer, C. Washington.

Berendsohn, Julie.

Craig, D. W.

Berendsohn, S.

Daulte, Frank.

Berghaus, Alexander.

Davis, G. D.

Birmingham, Edw. J.

Doyle, J. E. P.

Beugless, Rev. J. D.

Dreher, C. W. C.

Bloodgood, Delavan.

Edinger, A. H.

Brown, Hugh B.

Falck, Gotthelf.

Brush, Geo. R.

Fiske, Bradley A.

Burnz, Channing.

Goldman, Bertha.

Burnz, Mrs. E. B.

Goldman, Julius.

Califf, J. M.

Guiterman, Maurice.

Calman, David.

Gwynn, Stuart.

Hammond, Wm. F.	Meredith, Gen. J. H.
Hanway, P. J.	Miller, Lieut. F. A.
Herrman, Daniel W.	Noyes, Chas. B.
Herrman, Mrs. H.	Pratt, Edwin A.
Jones, William H.	Prentiss, Amos.
Kremer, W. P.	Putzel, Charles.
Kremer, Mrs. W. P.	Ross, J. W.
Küttler, Richard.	Tamsen, A. C. C.
Lambert, T. S.	Townsend, E. C.
Lucaa, Henry F.	Wells, Henry M.
Lyons, Fredk. A.	Wintraecken, A.
Meredith, Mrs. I. G.	Woolson, Geo. C.

ASSOCIATE.

Boardman, S. G.	Hoffman, Prof. F.
Carpenter, John B.	Hoffman, Mrs. C.
Cockey, Chas. H.	Waggener, Jos. R.

CORRESPONDING.

Thompson, Sir Hy.	Wells, T. Spencer.
Eassie, William.	

PRIMARY COMPACT.



NEW YORK, March 8th, 1881.

We, the undersigned, regarding burial as an objectionable mode of disposing of the dead, and considering cremation to be, in every way, preferable, do hereby unite ourselves into an association for the purpose of providing facilities for carrying cremation into operation:

(Signed)

J. Storer Cobb,
J. D. Beugless,,
Chas. Putzel,
Edward C. Cockey,
E. C. Townsend,
D. W. Craig,
C. W. C. Dreher,
Delavan Bloodgood,
Eliza B. Burnz,
S. G. Boardman,
Augustus G. Cobb,
Edwin A. Pratt,
Chas. B. Noyes,
Amos Prentiss,
Henry J. Lucaa,

J. E. P. Doyle,
J. W. Ross,
Channing Burnz,
T. S. Lambert,
W. P. Kremer,
Geo. R. Brush,
Albert, A. Wood,
Mrs. H. Herrman,
Daniel W. Herrman,
P. J. Hanway,
Edward J. Birmingham,
J. Saxelby Cobb,
A. C. C. Tamsen,
Fredk. A. Lyons,
Mrs. W. P. Kremer.

CERTIFICATE OF INCORPORATION.

I.

This instrument certifies that we, the undersigned, all of full age, citizens of the United States, and citizens of the State of New York, under and pursuant to, and in conformity with the act of the legislature of the State of New York, passed on the 12th day of May, 1875, entitled, "An Act for the incorporation of societies or clubs, for certain lawful purposes," and the several acts amendatory thereof, do associate ourselves together to form a society for the purposes hereinafter set forth.

II.

The corporate name of the said society is hereby declared to be "The New York Cremation Society."

III.

The objects and purposes of said society will be to disseminate sound and enlightened views respecting the incineration of the dead; to advocate and promote, in every proper and legitimate way, the substitution of this method for burial, and to advance the public good by affording facilities for carrying cremation into operation.

IV.

The number of the council of the said society shall be eleven.

V.

The names of the council who are to manage the affairs of the said society for the first year of its existence are as follows:

J. D. Bengless,	Delavan Bloodgood,
E. C. Townsend,	J. S. Cobb,
D. W. Craig,	E. C. Cockey,
J. E. P. Doyle,	C. W. C. Dreher,
W. P. Kremer,	A. C. C. Tamsen,
Charles Putzel.	

[The certificate is subscribed and acknowledged by the members of the council, and a consent to its filing is endorsed by Abm. R. Lawrence, Justice of the Supreme Court; and the foregoing copy is certified as correct by the clerk of the said court.]

The number of the council has since been increased to twelve, and an amended certificate, subscribed and acknowledged as required by law, filed with the Secretary of State, and a duplicate of the same with the county clerk.

VI.

BY - L A W S.

NAME.

1. This organization shall be incorporated under the name of "THE NEW YORK CREMATION SOCIETY."

OBJECTS.

2. The objects of the society are to disseminate sound and enlightened views respecting the incineration of the dead; to advocate and promote, in every proper and legitimate way, the substitution of this method for burial; and to advance the public good by affording facilities for carrying cremation into operation.

MEMBERS.

3. The members of the society shall consist of three classes: active, associate, and corresponding members.

4. Active members shall be subdivided into annual and life members, of whom the annual members shall be those who are paying the regular dues, and the life

members those who have paid such dues for twelve successive years, or have paid the sum of thirty dollars in one sum.

5. Active members only, who are not in arrears for dues, shall be qualified for election or appointment to any official position in the society; to vote at any election; and to debate and vote at any meeting, except as to matters relating to the incineration fund, to which associate members, when in the city of New York, will have the same right.

6. Corresponding members must be chosen from among those who have distinguished themselves, by rendering service in the promotion of cremation; and they may reside in any part of the world, except as limited by the next following paragraph.

7. Active members may reside in any part of the United States, but associate and corresponding members shall not reside within a radius of five miles around the city of New York.

8. Corresponding members, when in the city of New York, will be entitled to attend the meetings of the society, by sending their names to the corresponding-secretary. They will not, however, have the privilege of voting, nor will they be entitled to the benefit of cremation, after death, by the society.

9. All members must be in sympathy with the objects of the society.

PROPOSAL AND ELECTION OF MEMBERS.

10. Every application for membership must be made upon a form of the society, and no more than one application shall be made upon one form.

11. Every application must be signed by the applicant, and endorsed by two members of the society; it must also state that the applicant is in sympathy with the objects of the society, and be accompanied with the initiation-fee.

12. At the meeting at which any application is presented, it shall be referred without debate to the council; and not later than at the meeting following next but one it shall, with recommendations from the council, be returned to the society for its action.

13. Every applicant for membership shall be voted for separately, and a four-fifths majority of the votes cast shall be necessary for election.

FEES AND DUES.

14. The initiation-fee for an active member (annual or life) shall be three dollars, and for an associate member one and one-half dollars, which shall be returned if the applicant be not elected.

15. Active annual members shall further pay regular dues of three dollars per year, half-yearly in advance, and life members the sum of thirty dollars in one payment. The dues of associate members shall be one and one-half dollars per year, payable semi-annually in advance.

16. All the fees and dues received from associate members shall be paid into the incineration-fund; and of all fees and dues received from active members one-half shall be paid into the same fund.

17. No member shall, while in arrears for dues, be entitled to any of the privileges of the society.

18. After the receipt from any member of the annual dues for twelve successive years, no further payment will be required from such member. These payments for twelve successive years shall entitle an active member to all the privileges of the society for the remainder of his life; and an associate member to the benefit of the incineration fund without further charge.

19. Any member who has neglected to pay his dues for three months after the same were payable, shall be considered in arrears, and shall be notified by mail to that effect by the financial-secretary. Should he disregard such notice for thirty days after its being mailed, his name shall be struck from the roll of members.

20. The dues of life members are payable at the time of the meeting next following their election.

21. Whenever any of the dues of an active annual member have been remitted by the council, such period of remission shall not be reckoned as a portion of the time necessary to entitle such member to a life-membership; but the years before and after such remission shall, for such purpose, be considered as successive years.

22. Corresponding members will not be required to pay any fees or dues.

OFFICERS.

23. The officers of the society shall be a president, two vice-presidents, a corresponding-secretary,

a recording-secretary, a financial-secretary, a treasurer, and an executive committee of five members.

24. These officers shall together form the council of the society.

25. There shall also be a board of audit, consisting of three members of the society, no one of whom shall at the same time be a member of the council.

26. No member shall hold, at the same time, more than one office in the society.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS.

27. All elections of officers shall be by ballot, and a majority of the votes cast shall be necessary for a choice.

28. The officers of the society and the members of the board of audit shall be elected annually on the day following that upon which the annual meeting is held in each year.

29. At the same time there shall be elected three inspectors of election.

30. All these officers shall hold their offices for one year, or until others have been elected to their places.

31. The polls shall be opened at 8 P. M. and closed at 10 P. M., immediately after which the inspectors of election then in office shall canvass the votes cast, and, through their chairman, announce the result of the election.

32. The first election may be held immediately after the adoption of these by-laws, and in such manner as shall be decided upon by a majority of the members

present. The officers so chosen shall hold their offices until the day following the first annual meeting, or until others have been elected to their places.

DUTIES OF OFFICERS.

The President.

The duties of the president shall be :

33. To preside at the meetings of the society and the council, and decide all questions of order.

34. To appoint all committees, unless such appointment be otherwise specially ordered.

35. To countersign, with the financial-secretary, all checks for the withdrawal of moneys from their place or places of deposit.

Vice-presidents.

The duties of the vice presidents shall be :

36. To preside, in their order, according to the number of votes received by each at their election, over the meetings of the society or council, in the absence of the president or when so required by him; and to countersign checks for the president, in case of his inability to do so himself.

The Corresponding-secretary.

It shall be the duty of the corresponding-secretary :

37. To officially conduct the general correspondence of the society.

38. To notify new members, officers, and members of committees of their election or appointment; and

to notify members of committees of the time and place of the first meeting of such committees.

39. To keep, in suitable books provided for the purpose, true copies of all communications written by him on behalf of the society; to preserve, on proper files, all communications received by him on the same behalf; to report such correspondence at the next meeting of the council, as well as the whole or part of the same, as may be ordered by the council, to the society.

40. To take charge of the rooms, the corporate seal, the by-laws, records, and general archives of the society, except in so far as they may be expressly placed under the charge of others.

41. To certify all acts and proceedings of the society, and notify the council of the death, resignation, suspension, or removal, of any member or officer of the society.

42. To communicate all resolutions of the council or society to such person or persons as they may affect.

43. To obtain by purchase or otherwise, under the direction of the council, books, pamphlets, papers, and other literature, relating to the disposal of the human dead.

44. To perform the duties of the recording-secretary in case of his inability to perform them himself.

45. To preside at all meetings of the society and council, in the absence of the president and the vice-presidents.

46. To superintend the printing and publication of

all such matter as the council or society shall order to be printed.

The Recording-secretary.

The duties of the recording-secretary shall be :

47. To keep accurate minutes of the proceedings of the society, and to report the same at the regular meetings, unless otherwise ordered by the society ; and to record them, after approval, in the society's minute book.

48. To permit the inspection of the minutes by any active member of the society, who may so desire.

49. To notify members of all special meetings and of the annual meetings.

50. To report, without delay, to the corresponding-secretary, such resolutions and other proceedings, as require action to be taken thereon.

51. To act as secretary of the council, and present its reports at the regular meetings of the society.

52. To perform the duties of the corresponding-secretary in case of his inability to perform them himself.

The Financial-secretary.

The duties of the financial-secretary shall be :

53. To receive all fees, dues and other moneys paid to the society, to give receipts for the same, and immediately pay them over to the treasurer and take his receipt.

54. To keep a detailed account of all moneys received by him, and report the amounts at the regular meetings of the society.

55. To countersign, with the president, all checks for the payment of moneys by the society.

56. To send notice to all members in arrears, and to report the same at the regular meetings of the council.

57. To furnish the inspectors of election, prior to every annual meeting, with a list of members of the society not in arrears for dues.

58. To report any or all matters relating to his office to the council, whenever so required by that body.

The Treasurer.

It shall be the duty of the treasurer:

59. To receive, and give receipts, for all moneys paid to him by the financial-secretary on account of the society.

60. To keep a detailed account of all moneys received and disbursed by him on account of the society; report the amounts at every regular meeting of the society; render a detailed report at the annual meeting; and report to the council, whenever so required by that body.

61. To deposit the funds of the society, in the name of the society, in the depository or depositories designated by the council, whenever such funds in his hands shall amount to one hundred dollars; and to sign checks for the withdrawal of such moneys, whenever such withdrawal is ordered by the council.

62. To execute, in conjunction with at least two good and sufficient sureties, approved by the council, a bond in such sum as shall be determined upon by

the council, for the faithful discharge of his duties, and for the proper care of, accounting for, and return of, all moneys or other property of the society which may come into his possession.

63. A neglect or failure to furnish such bond within a reasonable time after his election, shall be regarded as a refusal to serve, and the office shall be declared vacant, and filled by the council, as hereafter provided.

The Council.

64. The council shall have the general direction and control of the affairs, property, and funds of the society.

65. It shall designate such incorporated places of deposit, in the city of New York, for the moneys of the society, as in its discretion it shall see fit.

66. It shall hold regular meetings for the transaction of business upon such days as it may from time to time appoint, but not less frequently than once in each month.

67. It shall have power to fill, for the unexpired term, any vacancy that may occur in any of the offices of the society, except vacancies in its own body, created by removal for cause.

68. It shall have power to declare vacant, by a vote of the majority of the whole council, the seat of any member of its own body who shall refuse to serve, or who shall have been absent from its meetings for three successive months; and also to remove from its own body, in the same way, any member thereof, for any cause whatsoever. In the latter case, however, it shall be the duty of the council to report every such vacancy

to the society at its next regular meeting thereafter, when it shall be subject to review by the society. Should such action of the council be sustained by the society, the members present shall at once proceed to fill the vacancy thus created.

69. It may appoint the necessary agents, clerks, and servants of the society, with such powers, duties, and compensation, as it may from time to time determine; and it may, at pleasure, revoke such appointments and make others in their stead.

70. It shall not, without an approving vote of the society at a regular or special meeting, make any contract whereby a liability of more than two hundred dollars in amount may be incurred by the society; nor, without such vote, make any sale or disposition of the property of the society exceeding that sum in value.

71. It may, in its discretion, remit the annual or half-yearly dues of any member of the society, except that portion which is to be paid into the incineration-fund.

72. It shall provide, at the expense of the society, for the secretaries, treasurer, and other officers, the necessary books, stationery, &c., for conducting the duties of their several offices; also the literary exercises to be held in conjunction with the regular meetings.

73. At all meetings of the council a majority of its members shall constitute a quorum for the transaction of business.

Inspectors of Election.

74. It shall be the duty of the inspectors of election to be present, and in charge of the ballot boxes, from the

opening to the close of the polls at the annual election which shall be first held after the commencement of their respective terms of office; to check off the list furnished by the financial-secretary the name of each member, as soon as he has deposited his vote; to canvass the votes at the close of the polls; and to announce the result of the election.

Board of Audit.

75. The board of audit shall thoroughly examine the books of the financial-secretary and the treasurer, whenever, in its judgment, it shall seem necessary; see that they are properly kept, and that all moneys received and paid are properly accounted for; and perform generally such duties as pertain to the office of a board of audit. A majority of its members shall affix their certificate of examination to every report presented by the above officers.

MEETINGS.

76. Regular meetings of the society shall be held at 8 P. M., at such place as shall be determined upon by the council, on the second and fourth Tuesdays of each month of the year, except during July, August, and September.

77. The council may call a special meeting of the society whenever it shall deem it advisable to do so; also, upon a written request signed by twelve members, the recording-secretary *shall* call such meeting.

78. Every request for a special meeting, and every notice thereof, shall state the object for which such meeting is to be called.

79. The annual meeting of the society shall be held on the first Tuesday after the first day of January, in each year. At such meeting no business shall be transacted but the receiving and adoption of the the annual message of the president and the yearly reports of the council and the officers of the society.

80. At any meeting of the society twenty active members shall constitute a quorum for the transaction of business.

81. To the literary exercises held in conjunction with the regular business meetings of the society, the public may be admitted, with or without charge, at the discretion of the council.

82. Every member of the society may be required to show his card of membership to an officer appointed by the council, before he is admitted to any regular or special business meeting of the society.

CONDUCT OF MEETINGS.

83. At all regular meetings of the society, the business shall be conducted in the following order:

- I. Reading of minutes.
- II. Reports of officers.
- III. Reports of committees.
- IV. Communications from the council.
- V. Proposals for membership.
- VI. Election of members.
- VII. Unfinished business.
- VIII. New business.
- IX. Adjournment.

84. At any special meeting of the society no business shall be transacted but that for which the meeting was called.

85. Every proposition presented for the action of any meeting, may be required by the presiding officer to be in writing and signed by the member presenting it.

86. In conjunction with the regular business meetings papers may be read, or lectures and addresses delivered, in furtherance of the objects of the society.

87. At all meetings the proceedings shall, except as otherwise provided for, be governed by Cushing's Manual.

THE INCINERATION-FUND.

88. The purpose of the incineration-fund is to provide facilities for carrying into operation the cremation of deceased members of the society.

89. All moneys belonging to, or contributed, donated, or bequeathed to, this fund, shall, immediately upon their receipt by the treasurer, be placed in the designated depositories, and not withdrawn on any other account than the carrying out of the purpose of the fund.

90. The manner in which its purpose shall be carried into execution shall be determined by the council; it being understood that every active or associate member shall be entitled, at his death, to cremation at the expense of the fund.

91. Such expense of cremation, paid out of the fund, shall not include the conveyance of the body to the

place of incineration, nor any expense other than that of cremating the body, and returning to the party or parties authorized to receive them, the ashes of the deceased in a receptacle provided for that purpose.

GENERAL PROVISIONS AS TO DEBT.

92. The moneys of the society, with the exception of those directed to be paid into the incineration fund, shall be applied to the necessary current expenses of the society, in accordance with the discretion of the council; and no debt on account of the society, beyond the amount of funds in the treasury for its payment, shall, at any time, be incurred.

AMENDMENT OF BY-LAWS.

93. These by-laws may be altered or amended at any regular meeting of the society, except the annual, by a two-thirds vote of the members present, provided notice of such alteration or amendment had been given at the previous meeting, and two copies of the same handed to the recording-secretary.

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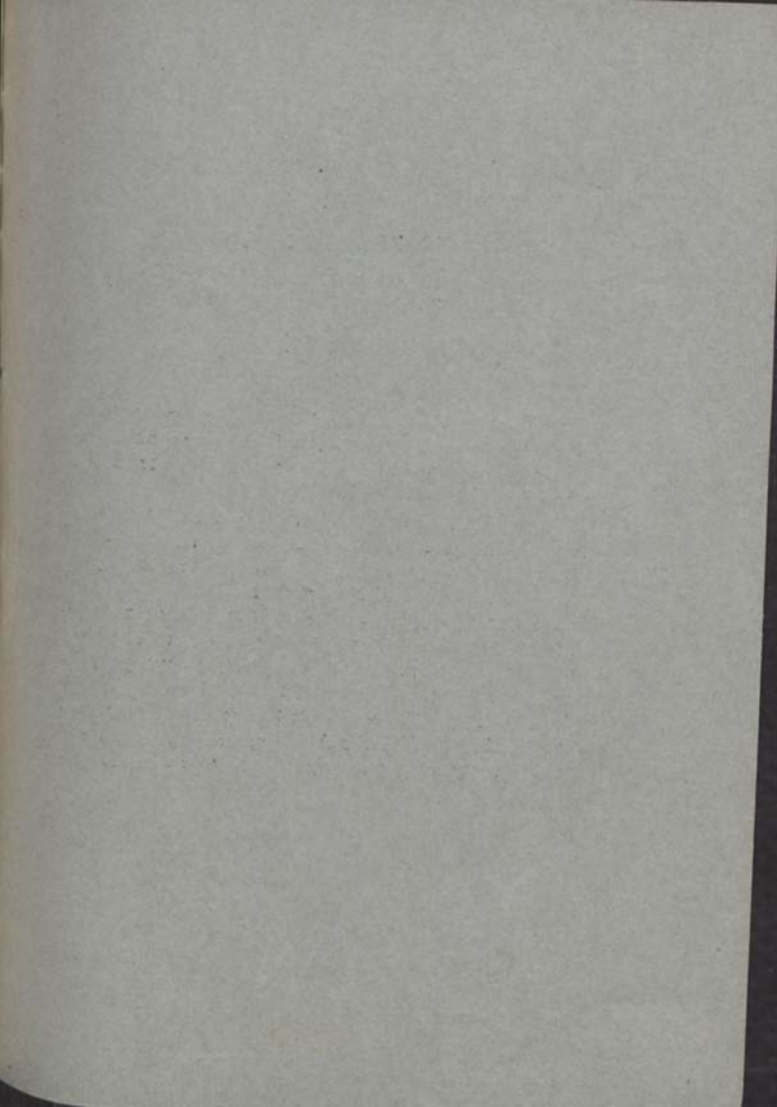
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Copies of these by-laws &c. have been printed in Ger-
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 secretary, P. O. Box 1999, New York.

ARTICLE IV. OF THE BY-LAWS.

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THE
UNITED STATES
CREMATION COMPANY
Limited.

This company is formed for the purpose of acquiring land and erecting thereon the necessary buildings, works, and other appliances, for carrying cremation into operation.

Its capital stock is \$50,000, divided into two-thousand shares of twenty-five Dollars each; and of every share taken ten per cent. is required by law to be paid in cash at the time of subscribing.

As soon as one-half of the capital stock is subscribed, the stockholders will be called together to complete the organization, and decide upon the company's plan of active work.

The secretary to the commissioners may be addressed at P. O. Box 1999 New York City, and will be pleased to afford any further information that may be desired.

DISPOSAL OF THE DEAD.

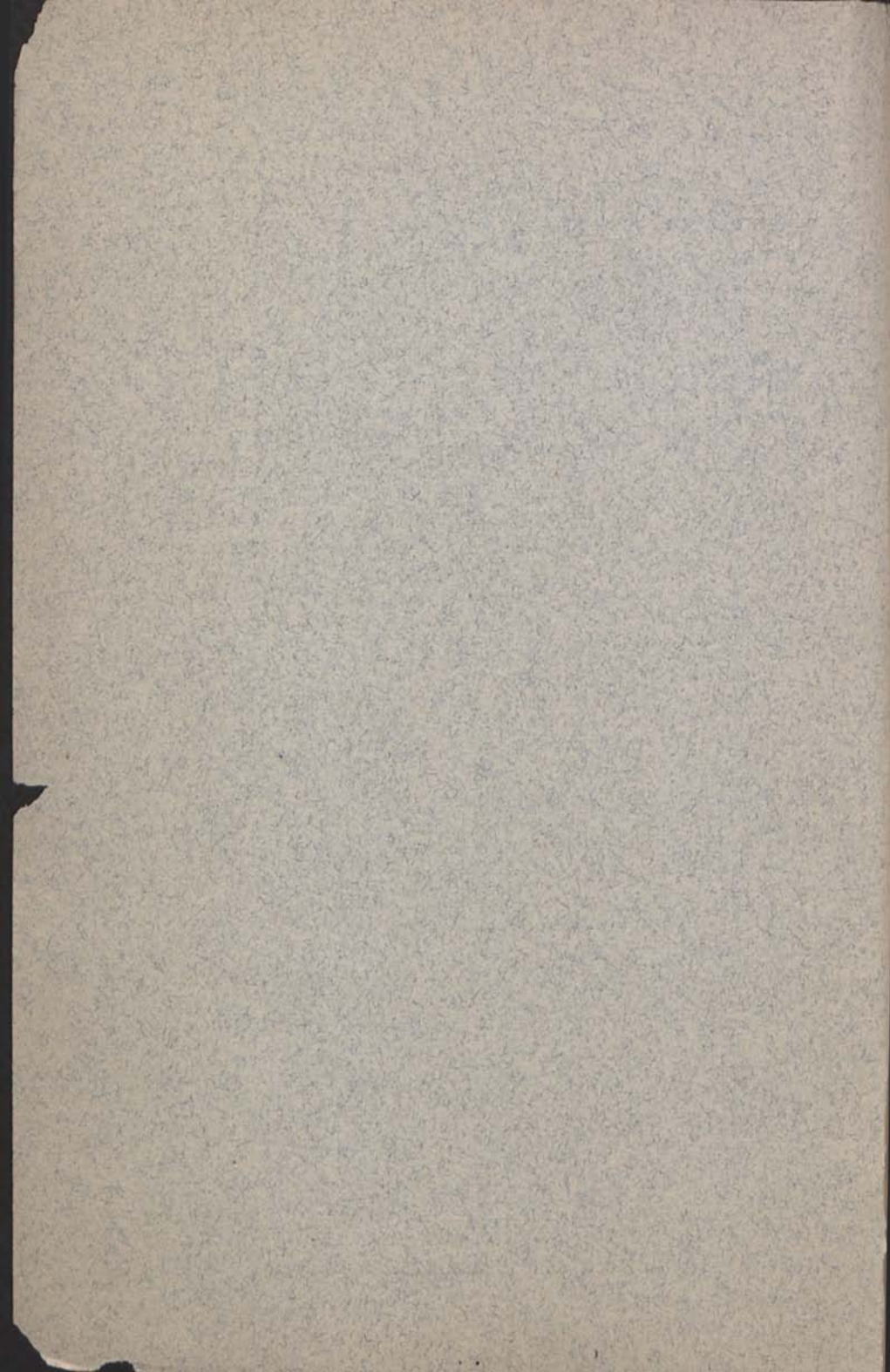
BY

W. H. CURTIS, M. D.,
CHICAGO, ILL.

READ BEFORE THE AMERICAN PUBLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION, AT SAVANNAH, GA.,
NOVEMBER 30, 1881.

*[Reprinted from Vol. VII. Public Health Papers of the American
Public Health Association.]*

CAMBRIDGE :
Printed at the Riverside Press.
1882.



THE DISPOSAL OF THE DEAD.

By W. H. CURTIS, M. D.,

Chicago, Ill.

In the disposal of the dead three principal methods have been employed by all nations and tribes, viz., *Exposure*, *Inhumation*, and *Embalming*.

Each of these prime methods are capable of numerous subdivisions, dependent upon the social and intellectual status of the nation or tribe.

Whatever the method employed, it has usually been one intended to express toward the dead some sentiment, as fear, revenge, solicitude, affection, etc., etc., inherent in all individuals, whether civilized or not. The method, together with the obsequies attending the final disposal of the body, have also usually been intended to express certain of the religious sentiments of the survivors.

With hardly an exception, the belief in the existence of an immortal soul, and oftentimes of the immortality of the body as well, have been fundamental doctrines with all tribes and classes of men whether civilized or not, and the disposal of the body has often been made with direct reference to the supposed welfare of the soul. This is illustrated in the customs of the Turks, who hasten to bury the body, believing the soul to be in torment until the body is thus disposed of.

Of the three prime methods mentioned I am disposed to give preference, in point of antiquity, to *exposure*. This being, I think, the most logical conclusion, when we take into consideration the barbarous nature of primitive man, and the low grade of intelligence and morality of which he was possessed.

Most authorities give precedence to burial, and probably, so far as we have any historical or other positive evidence, this is correct; certain it is, however, that the method employed is not distinctive of intelligence and culture, as we find all three of the primitive methods, with their various local modifications, in use at the present day by tribes and nations differing widely in social and intellectual development.

As an illustration of the different methods now in vogue, we may mention the customs of certain tribes in Africa, who drag their dead into the forests and leave them to be destroyed by wild animals. The Osage Indians, having a fear and horror of death, will no more occupy a hut in which a death has occurred, but leave the body a prey to carrion birds. Some of the tribes of Brazil cast the dead body into some pool or ditch; other tribes of South America tie a weight to the body and sink it in some lake or river, which is but another method of exposure.

A similar practice is in vogue among the nations of Guienne, who, like the ancient Ichthyophagi, throw their dead into the sea.

The Kamchatkan, looking to the happiness and welfare of the soul, keeps certain dogs for the express purpose of devouring the dead, believing that those who after death become food for dogs will be furnished with fine dogs in the world to come.

Probably the most enlightened sect that practice exposure at the present day is the *Parsees*, who erect high towers, properly called "towers of silence," on which the dead are exposed to the ravages of the vultures that haunt their vicinity. A single remove from the practice of exposure, pure and simple, is the custom of the Moors, who cover the body with stones and thorny shrubs to protect it from beasts and birds of prey. The Colchians anciently suspended the bodies of men to the branches of trees, but buried the women. The Todas burn all except children who are victims of infanticide, these are buried. The Ghondo and Bils of Africa, burn the men and bury the women. The Muddikers bury, but burn lepers, probably for sanitary reasons. The Kalmucks follow all modes.

Among nations who bury their dead, the same diversity of customs exist as among those who practice exposure: some burying in expensive coffins or sarcophagi, often within or near their dwellings, others carrying the body to almost inaccessible caves or clefts in the rocks or mountains, or depositing them in hollow trees.

Neither does the use of a coffin seem to be a distinctive test of culture, as the Mohammedans use no coffin, while some of the lowest tribes, in point of intelligence, use coffins hollowed from trees, or make use of boats for this purpose.

Herodotus, Cicero, Lucan, Spondatus, and others, give accounts of Asiatic nations who devoured those slain in battle, and killed and feasted upon the sick and aged.

Embalming the dead, while of great antiquity, and though practiced to some extent at the present day, does not seem to have ever been a favorite method, and has practically become a lost art; in fact it never seems to have been employed until the human race was quite highly developed, and never seems to have prevailed as a universal custom to the exclusion of other modes, but rather to have been confined to the rich and noble of the nations employing this method.

The ancient Egyptians attached great importance to the preservation of the body, believing that so long as it retained its form, the spirit hovered near, and was capable of ministering to its friends. Their ingenuity was therefore aroused, and by means of drying the body, salting, smearing with wax and honey, stuffing it with cedar dust and aromatics, coupled with the peculiarly dry climate, they succeeded in producing a mummy capable of enduring, practically, forever.

At first these bodies were placed in vessels of glass, clay, or wood, and preserved at a distance from any dwelling, in some isolated cave, or covered with dry sand. These customs did not long continue, however, and the bodies came to be kept in the dwellings of sorrowing relatives, until large

numbers became congregated in each house ; as a consequence epidemic diseases became prevalent, and baffled all skill, until attention was directed to these collections of dead bodies as the cause, and their removal to a distance was followed by a cessation of the plague.

Our present funereal customs are probably largely derived from those of the ancient Greeks and Romans. Among the Greeks, the most ancient method of disposal of the dead was by *inhumation*. Their custom was to bury in the open fields, upon the sea-shore, at the foot or top of high mountains. Pausanias has left a remarkable list of the celebrated graves of his day. In the end, the Greeks seem to have adopted the custom of burning their dead, probably in imitation of the Phrygians. At first this rite was esteemed a high honor, and was only allowed to those chieftains who had distinguished themselves in battle, or had rendered valuable services to their country. The custom finally came into general use, and was practiced to a greater extent than in any other country. The ashes were preserved in urns, and kept within private houses, and sometimes within the temples.

The customs of the Greeks and Romans in relation to the disposal of the dead seem to have been nearly identical ; they also seem to have recognized earlier than any other nation the baleful effects of intramural interment, and to have passed stringent laws prohibiting the practice.

Most of the celebrated Grecian legislators made these laws an important part of their codes. Plato even went so far as to prohibit burial in fields fit for cultivation.

The ancient Romans held the dead in great veneration, and believed that the souls of the unburied must wander for a hundred years along the Styx. Hence the custom of strewing with earth the corpse accidentally met.

It was a great crime in ancient Rome to disturb the contents of a grave, or to deny an enemy decent sepulture. Historians tell us that the Greek and Roman soldier would run any risk to himself, and endure any hardship to secure the corpse of a friend slain in battle, that it might not be denied the privilege of the funeral pyre.

There is no doubt but what burial preceded the burning of the dead among both the Greeks and the Romans ; none were, however, permitted burial within the city walls of Rome except the vestal virgins, who seem to have been allowed privileges denied to sovereigns. In the course of time the privilege was extended to the most illustrious, and finally the honor was abused to such an extent, and the evils consequent upon the practice were so glaring, that at the commencement of the fourth century it became necessary to enact the famous Twelve Tables, part of which we give, as showing the evil effects of burial customs similar to our own, which were recognized by enlightened nations sixteen hundred years ago.

First law. — Let no dead body be buried or interred within the city.

Second law. — Let all costliness and excessive wailings be banished from funerals.

Fifth law. — Let not the women tear their faces or disfigure themselves or make hideous outcries.

Sixth law. — Let not any part of a dead body be carried away in order to perform other obsequies, unless he died in war or out of his own country.

Seventh law.— Let no slave be embalmed ; let there be no drinking around a dead body, nor any perfumed liquors be poured upon it.

Eighth law.— Let no crowns, festoons, perfumed pots or any kind of perfumes, be carried to funerals.

Eleventh law.— Let no gold be used in the obsequies, unless the jaws of the deceased have been tied up with a gold thread. In that case the corpse may be interred or burned with the gold thread.

Twelfth law.— Let no sepulture be built, or funeral pile be raised, within sixty feet of any house, without consent of its owner.

In the early days of Rome and Greece, before the introduction of cremation and other sanitary laws relating to the disposal of the dead, it was the common practice to bury, not only within the city walls, but within the family dwellings ; there was even a law in Thebes forbidding any person to construct a dwelling without providing a suitable repository for the dead ; as a natural consequence, these congregations of the dead soon rendered the city very unhealthy, and led to a removal of the dead to without the city walls. We read of a certain part of the city of Rome that became so unhealthy that the Emperor Augustus gave a large part of one of the cemeteries to Mæcenas, who so completely purified it and changed its character, that it became one of the most beautiful parts of the city. He then built thereon a beautiful villa, to which the Emperor frequently repaired for fresh air and repose.

During the numerous and bloody wars of the republic, and the incursions of the barbarians, it became a pressing sanitary problem with the Romans, how to dispose of the dead. Embalming was not practical. Burial was too slow and every way unsatisfactory ; while the great veneration in which the dead were held would not permit exposure, even if for other reasons it had been desirable. Cremation solved the problem, offering as it did the most complete protection from infection, was perfectly respectful to the dead, and at the same time afforded a splendid opportunity for the performance of those religious rites so dear to those children of superstition. Cremation then became common, the ceremonies accompanying it, however, varying with the wealth and importance of the deceased.

During the early days of the empire cremation was sanctioned by universal custom, although it was never obligatory, and was always objected to by some, whether for sentimental reasons, or because of the costly nature of the rite, we are not informed ; the practice was finally discontinued in Rome during the reign of the Emperor Gratianus, for the reason, we are told, that it caused numerous fires. It hardly seems probable that this could have been the true reason for its discontinuance. It was probably the result of numerous causes, among which we may reckon the restrictions imposed upon the extravagant customs employed in performing the rite, which the legislators were forced to enact, and also the fact that the quarries near the city, afforded an opportunity for the disposal of the dead in a way at once simple, cheap, and healthful, while it conformed to the wishes of a class.

The early Christians of Rome adopted the mode of burial in preference to cremation, from the fact that a principal tenet of their belief was the literal resurrection of the dead at the final coming of Christ.

Their first interments were made in the catacombs, to which they resorted for the performance of their rites and ceremonies. Persecution was rife and the number of martyrs legion, and particular galleries were set apart for the reception of their remains.

As the sect increased in numbers and power, they abandoned the dark and gloomy catacombs for the performance of their ceremonies, and sought the light of day. Some wealthy citizens having become identified with the sect, donated portions of their estates for the use of the church, and in these concessions the bodies of the faithful were buried, and so originated the first Christian cemeteries.

In these cemeteries altars were erected and chapels built to serve as protection from the elements during the performance of the obsequies and other ceremonies. To these chapels were conveyed the bones of the martyrs, and the belief in the vicarious efficacy of these relics served as a strong incentive to the donors of the land, and the high officials of the church, to seek sepulture for their bones near those of the blessed martyrs, and beneath the chapel walls and roof. The pressure of these claims soon led to so great a violation of the laws relating to burial, that Hadrian was compelled to restore them to their full vigor, and Antoninus Pius extended their sway to the whole empire.

The law for a time was strictly enforced ; but at the end of a century and a half we find that the Emperor Diocletian was obliged to issue new decrees. At length the opposition the Christian Church had met with during its early years was overcome by the conversion of the Emperor Constantine.

The temples within the city walls, that until now had known only the worship of heathen gods, were practically deserted, and were finally purified, and to them conveyed the altars and relics from the catacombs and chapels without the city walls.

The inordinate faith in the efficacy of relics, with its resulting violations of the burial laws, was for a time held in check, but obtained the mastery on the death of Constantine. This strong pillar of the church seemed to demand some recognition greater than had been accorded his predecessors, and he was therefore buried beneath the porch of the Church of the Holy Apostles. This paved the way for several of his successors, who had been great benefactors of the church, and in time the privilege was extended to others who had founded chapels or contributed liberally to the decoration of the altars, etc., until in time the indulgence was sold to the highest bidder. The practice was well illustrated in the epitaph of the man who, having too little wealth to secure a tomb near the altar, did the best he could for his bones, and inscribed this comfortable sentiment upon his tombstone : —

“ Here I lie, beside the door,
Here I lie, because I'm poor ;
The farther in, the more you pay,
Here I lie as well as they.”

In Constantinople and other cities of the empire the abuse of the burial laws became so general that Theodosius the Great, with the Emperors Gra-

tian and Valentinian II., were obliged to reissue edicts against the practice. They not only prohibited interments in towns, but ordered all bodies, urns, and memorials removed from within the walls to a distance. During the sixth and seventh centuries, the violations of the laws against intramural interment again became general and flagrant, and we find Gregory the Great complaining of the system of "voluntary gifts," that procured for the rich and venile privileges denied their superiors during the earlier years of the church.

The centuries following the pontificate of Gregory, down to the Council of Trent, were but a repetition of those preceding them, so far as this question is concerned; on one side we find the various popes, bishops, and ministers, with hardly an exception, ostensibly proscribing the practice of intramural interment, and no doubt many of them were sincere in their desire to uphold the laws and preserve the health of their subjects, but the fact remains that the "voluntary gifts" were made and accepted, and the inordinate self-love of the individual was constantly displayed in the struggle to procure for his poor carcase privileges denied his superiors, at no matter what cost to the public welfare. After all, it is a pretty hard matter to convince people that "death levels all," and laws have ever proved inadequate to the task.

May we not conclude from this hasty sketch of the origin of burial as now practiced, — the so-called "*Christian burial*," — and the continued warfare that has been waged against it by sanitarians, and even by the potentates of the church itself, that it is against the spirit of true religion and sound policy to continue it? The student of history and of ceremonial institutions cannot fail to see the immense power exerted by those rankest of superstitions, the vicarious efficacy of relics, and the literal resurrection of the body, in the formation of our present system of burial.

The hygienic dangers from burial *per se* were, as I have stated, recognized by the ancients; although they did not have the aids of modern chemistry, they seem to have discovered the fact that decomposing animal remains are not devoid of danger, but were capable of and did produce disease and death in the living.

That burial, as frequently performed at the present time, does not render the dead body innocuous, has been demonstrated time and again, and under almost every variety of circumstances, and yet we, in this year of grace 1881, are frequently informed that decomposing animal remains are not dangerous to health, and that the dead body once laid in the grave, there can be absolutely no danger to the living from it. The dangers to be apprehended from earth burial are usually classified as follows:—

- 1st. Contamination of water supply.
- 2d. Contamination of air supply.
- 3d. Direct infection, should it become necessary to reopen graves.

That these are not imaginary or fictitious dangers I firmly believe, and that they have been directly recognized in numerous well authenticated instances is simply a matter of history. I should not deem this part of the subject worthy of any words, but should treat it as a well established fact,

were it not for the publicity given to such articles as the one upon cemeteries, in the ninth edition of the "Encyclopedia Britannica," wherein the writer says, after enumerating the apprehended dangers from earth burial in a similar manner to what I have already given: "There is really no evidence in support of these serious allegations; on the contrary, there is much concurrent testimony which tends to completely discredit them." He then, after admitting that cemeteries may be mismanaged so as to become a source of danger, but treating this as a possibility very unlikely to occur, and saying that "only very ordinary precautions are required to render a cemetery perfectly safe," quotes from Mr. Holland, medical inspector for England and Wales, as follows: "*If* no more dead be buried in the soil than the free oxygen contained in rain and dew carried through it will decompose, and *if* such soil be left undisturbed until the processes of decay are complete, and *if*, as is almost certain to be the case, the use of such grounds for burial be discontinued at the latest when it becomes full of remains that do not decay, and probably long before, such places will be neither harmful while they are used for burial, nor anything but beneficial when such use of them is discontinued, as they will become large decorative gardens, or small parks, reservoirs of fresh air."

Thus, Mr. Holland. As will be observed, the word *if* is used like the mantle of charity, to cover a multitude of sins, and it hardly seems necessary to say that *very* few such cemeteries exist, and I do not know of one.

To resume our author of the "Encyclopedia": "With regard to the alleged peril from air pollution, it may be replied that there can be no danger, so long as the dead are laid in a sufficient space of properly planted ground, and at a moderate distance from any considerable number of houses, and for this purpose a mile is quite sufficient. . . . Whoever perceives any odor from a well kept cemetery? Yet if danger were present, the sense of smell would give unmistakable evidence of it.

"As to the question of water pollution, especial care is always taken to study the drainage of our cemeteries with reference to the neighboring sources of water supply; shallow surface wells, near a cemetery, are open to suspicion, as the water may be tainted by organic matter filtered through the soil, but suspected wells can be closed by the authorities, and it must be remembered that shallow wells are nearly always dangerous, whether they are near cemeteries or not. Deep wells are almost invariably safe, even near a cemetery, and in most places water is brought in mains from a distance, in such a way that pollution from cemeteries is impossible. As to the danger of infection, if it existed anywhere, assuredly we should have some evidence of it from the great cemeteries of the metropolis, yet there is not a particle of such evidence forthcoming; on the contrary, it is now very generally conceded that there need be little if any fear of infection from a dead body," etc., etc.

Undoubtedly, such a cemetery as is indicated by our author, would be highly desirable, and a great improvement upon any now in existence, if we except, perhaps, some of those in use by the Turks, which scientifically are far better adapted to the rapid decay of the body, and its undisturbed re-

pose, in that they use no coffin and bury but one body in a grave. The consequence is, however, that the cemeteries near their large cities, like Constantinople, occupy a much larger space than is required by the living population.

Undoubtedly earth burial can be performed in such a manner as to be practically harmless to the living, and the recommendations of our author are all good and valid ; but that they are always followed I deny, and I am inclined to think it very exceptional that any attention is paid either to the drainage, the number of bodies placed in a given space, or to any of the requirements admitted to be necessary to a healthy and well-ordered cemetery.

That the danger of infection of the water supply in cities which derive their supply from a distance, and distribute it in mains, is quite small, I am prepared to admit, but that this applies to the thousands of cities and towns throughout the country, whose dependence for water supply is wholly or in part upon wells, I deny. Neither are country cemeteries, so far as my knowledge goes, ever laid out with any reference or thought as to their sanitary requirements, convenience alone being consulted, consequently they are usually near the church, often in the heart of the town, or upon some knoll whose drainage is oftentimes directly into the wells in the valley below. Many others than he of the "Encyclopedia" have written lengthy articles, intended to prove the total innocuousness of earth burial, and quote high-sounding names (mostly French) in support of their theories. Without exception, they claim the total and absolute harmlessness of the products of decomposition, but usually, and unfortunately for the good of their argument, wind up with directions how to make a cemetery perfectly harmless, and unfortunately again, they do not agree as to what is necessary to achieve this result ; for instance, one advocates the thick planting of trees and shrubs to absorb the gases evolved ; another wants nothing planted, that the winds may have free access and dilute these harmless (?) gases. One advocates a light porous soil, through which the water can freely percolate, another thinks a heavy clay soil, with suitable drainage, better.

It is but charitable to believe the gentlemen mistaken who are so positive in their assertions that there is no evidence in support of the unhealthfulness of cemeteries, and the infectious qualities of the dead. Such mistakes are hardly excusable, however, when we consider the many authentic records with which the literature of the subject abounds. As for the so-called investigations they quote in favor of their arguments, all that need be said is that nearly all were made at the instigation of, and were paid for by cemetery associations, who had every interest in the result.

Much of this clamor comes from the city of Paris, whose citizens have long been trying to secure the removal of certain cemeteries to without the city limits ; indeed, laws were long ago passed ordering their removal, but have never been carried into effect, why, can easily be imagined.

Paris boasts to-day of the most "beautiful cemeteries in the world," and, leaving the sanitary question entirely out, the beauties (?) of earth burial are fully exemplified in this great metropolis. With cemeteries full to repletion a century ago, they are still made to do duty, and serve to enrich the mem-

bers of the cemetery association. The dead are buried in a common grave, holding fifty or more bodies; the poor are buried gratuitously, those who are able are charged a fee, usually twenty francs, which is said to insure your grave from intrusion for five whole years. At the end of this time another tenant is put in. If you are very particular, and happen to have some antiquated notions respecting the sanctity of the tomb, for a double fee you may be permitted to rest undisturbed for ten years. At the expiration of this time you, and any tombstone you may have erected, must come up and make room for your successor. People go to Paris for their fashions, how soon will the natural increase of population compel us to adopt this one?

In Naples they have a custom similar to that of the Parisians. The Italians are quite a practical people, and look upon a dead body as only fit for soap grease, so they have a series of three hundred and sixty-five pits, one for every day of the year. Into one of these pits all who die within the twenty-four hours are put, there to rest until the trump of the archangel shall bid the dead arise. After enjoying the "sweet rest of the grave," that poets sing of, for three hundred and sixty-four and a fraction days, the trump (and in this case spades are trumps), indeed, bids you rise. Verily a man must indeed be a heathen to wish any other disposal of his body than this.

As we have seen, the dangers to public health from intramural interment were recognized by the ancient Greeks, Romans, and Egyptians, and the practice was prohibited among them for this, and no other reason. We have also seen that nearly every pope, bishop, and council of the Christian Church, have been forced to recognize the evil and prohibit it, notwithstanding the church had the strongest of pecuniary and other reasons for continuing the custom.

That proper precautions are not observed, and that carelessness or ignorance on the part of officials exist, is no doubt true, but it is no answer to the argument, but is rather a confession that such dangers do exist.

History teems with accounts of epidemics caused by animal decomposition. St. Augustine, Lucan, Marcellinus, and other historians, relate numerous instances of plagues arising from this cause. More recently, Piattoli in 1774, Navier in 1775, and Vicq d. Azyr in 1778, made exhaustive studies of the subject, and published voluminous works, containing arguments that modern chemistry has confirmed and not refuted. Later still, Ambrose Paré published numerous instances of pestilences caused by emanations from pits filled with dead bodies. But, as it has been charged that the advocates of the abolition of earth burial have no evidence not dug up from past centuries, I will not quote further from the history of the forgotten past, but pass on to more recent dates, and see if we can find any evidences of the noxious properties of earth burial.

In 1849 the city government of London had the question of the healthfulness of the city cemeteries investigated, and for this purpose a commission of gentlemen, selected for their high medical and scientific skill, were appointed, and their unanimous opinion, after a thorough examination into

all the facts pro and con, was that the cemeteries were dangerous to public health, and had been the cause of numerous and severe epidemics. In their report they say: "We may safely rest the sanitary part of the case on the single fact, that the placing of the dead body in a grave, and covering it with a few feet of earth, does not prevent the gases generated by decomposition, together with putrescent matter which they hold in suspension, from permeating the surrounding soil and escaping into the water beneath and the air above."

That the authorities having charge of cemeteries are not always the proper ones, or to be trusted as to the proper number of bodies to be placed in a given space of ground, witness this extract from their report: "In London, in some of the poorer districts, the soil of the churchyards was raised two, three, and even four feet, within a few years, and in the immediate neighborhood of such cemeteries epidemic diseases were both more common and more fatal. Within thirty years there had been interred more than 1,500,000 bodies in a space not exceeding three hundred and eighteen acres." This overcrowding is not an isolated instance, but is common in as bad or worse degree in nearly every large city in Europe, England, France, and we may almost add America.

The Board further states, in speaking of certain churchyards, "Their condition is abominable, and the smell revolting, and distinctly to be perceived in all the adjoining houses, in every one of which cholera or diarrhoeic diseases had occurred." Again the report states, that "cholera was unusually prevalent in the immediate neighborhood of London churchyards."

Dr. Lyon Playfair, of London, an authority whom few will care to question, says: "I have examined various churchyards and burial grounds for the purpose of ascertaining whether the layer of earth above the bodies is sufficient to absorb the putrid gases evolved. The slightest inspection shows that they are not thoroughly absorbed by the soil lying over the bodies. I know several churchyards from which the most fetid smells are evolved, and gases with similar odors are emitted from the sides of sewers passing in the vicinity of churchyards, although they may be more than thirty feet from them."

Sir Henry Thompson, who has written exhaustively upon the subject of earth burial, and who quotes nearly one thousand authorities as to its dangers, says: "Thousands of human lives have been cut short by the poison of slowly decaying and oftentimes diseased animal matter. The graveyard pollution has probably found a victim in some social circle, known to more than one who may chance to read this, and I need hardly add that in times of pestilence, its continuance has been often due mainly to the poisonous influence of the buried dead."

As to the exact manner in which cemeteries are detrimental to health, as yet comparatively little is really known. That the decaying human body, *per se*, is capable of producing any specific disease, I think no one will claim; neither is it evident that sewer gas, decomposing animal or vegetable matter, or the thousand and one influences confessedly injurious to health, are capable of producing any one particular malady.

The gases from the decomposing human body, together with the water that may have percolated through the remains, probably act in a similar manner to that of sewer gas and sewage water, that is as a bearer of contagious and infectious germs. In and of themselves they possess no property of producing disease, except in the same way impure air or water from any cause tend to cause disease, that is, by lowering the grade of vital energy of the individual, and rendering him more susceptible to the action of the particular disease germ, virus, or entity, whatever it may be.

Recent investigations tend strongly to prove the theory, that each particular infectious disease is caused by the direct reception into the body of a particular and specific disease germ, capable of producing in a suitable soil a particular specific disease, and no other.

Among the diseases supposed to be produced in this manner, may be mentioned typhoid and typhus fevers, cholera, yellow fever, perhaps diphtheria, and numerous other diseases, distinguished by the property of being conveyed to the human body from the soil, hence designated as filth diseases. When infection plays so important a part as it does in these diseases, it seems to be a necessity to admit the presence of a germ, be it animal or vegetable, or belonging to some unknown kingdom intermediate between the animal and vegetable. "A poison may kill, but cannot infect, still less multiply to an enormous degree."¹

The investigations of Pasteur and others into the etiology of disease, have been productive of astonishing and oftentimes unlooked-for results, none more so, perhaps, than those concerning the disease anthrax, or splenic fever, an infectious disease peculiar to animals, but having a striking analogy to some of the infectious diseases of man, and bearing a close resemblance to pyæmia and septicæmia, and to some extent to cholera and typhoid fever.

This is one of the oldest known infectious diseases of animals, yet it is but recently that anything definite was known as to its origin or nature.

Professor Pasteur has succeeded in isolating in the blood of animals afflicted with this disease a peculiar bacteria of rod-like form, which, upon infection into the circulation of healthy animals, produces anthrax, and no other disease. A proof almost incontestable that the disease was caused by this bacteria, an organism so minute that no filter can be devised, that will separate it from the blood, but which seems to be unable to pass through the placenta, is this: "Inoculation with fœtal blood that does not contain bacteria, does not produce anthrax, while inoculation of the blood of the mother, that does contain bacteria, gives positive results." Now, if we accept this as final, we may claim that there is at least one infectious disease of which we have some definite knowledge.

Now how is this disease propagated? It is a well attested fact that animals free from the disease and not brought into contact with animals afflicted with it, may be preserved free from the disease indefinitely, but if turned into pastures in which animals dead from the disease are buried, and that too, it may be, at some time far anterior to the turning in of the well flock, the well animals are almost certain to contract the disease.

It is also a well attested fact that the mortality from anthrax in flocks occupying pastures and yards in which those dead from the disease are buried is much greater than in those flocks where the dead are disposed of in some other manner. In one case the mortality decreased from twenty-one to two per cent. in one year on discontinuing burial.

These are significant facts, and one's first impression is that the disease germs are conveyed to the well animals through the grass; but this does not seem to be the case, as solutions made from the well-cleansed grass, and injected into the blood of healthy animals, do not produce the disease. Bollinger is strongly of the opinion that the soil occupies the role of an intermediate bearer of the anthrax germ, and is capable of retaining and preserving the germ in a condition capable of being revived for an indefinite period. He further considers the disease as highly contagious, and liable to be transmitted through mediate agents, as the soil, water, air, flies, etc.

Professor Pasteur has recently made known his investigations relating to earth-worms as a factor in the promotion of disease, and the dangers to be apprehended from them in the soil of church-yards. As to the disease in point, viz., anthrax, his investigations seem to be conclusive, he having cultivated the germ and produced the disease, by inoculation with the contents of the worm deposited in the form of "castings," brought up from the bodies of animals dead from the disease, and buried deep below the surface.

These facts accepted, we can readily see the risks we run from these humble denizens of the earth, when we consider their remarkable activity. Professor Darwin, in his recent work, gives some astonishing statistics of these ceaseless labors. In one instance mentioned by him twelve ounces of these "castings" were thrown up upon a single square foot of ground in one year, or at the rate of fourteen and one half tons per acre.

There is no reason to think anthrax an exception to the other diseases I have mentioned, and probably many more, in its nature and manner of propagation, and it only requires patient investigation to prove the truth or falsity of this theory of disease.

If disease is caused by specific germs, as now seems highly probable, we have still to learn the peculiar nature of each particular germ. The probability is that all are not alike infectious, and some may be destroyed by the processes of decay in the dead body, while others may find in this process the means of augmented life and activity.

It is quite in accordance with the germ theory of disease that fever germs find an excellent opportunity for multiplying in the moist and humid soils of some cemeteries, and but wait the action of water percolated through the soil, the evolution of gases from the decomposing body, the silent but energetic work of the earth-worm, or other equally effective agencies, to bring them in contact with the outer world, when they may speed upon their mission of pestilence and death. It is much easier to see, and more in accordance with science to believe, in the ability of disease germs to lie dormant for a time, lacking the necessary conditions for their propagation, and finally reappearing when these conditions do obtain, than it is to believe in any other of the numerous theories of disease, the exploded spontaneous generation and dispensation of Providence theories not excepted.

It is a well established clinical fact, I think, that only the most minute quantity of the "*materies morbi*" of disease, be it a virus, a miasm, a germ, or what not, is sufficient to reproduce the disease in its most virulent form, whenever it shall be deposited in a suitable soil, and under favorable conditions. This being the case, the initiation of an epidemic depends not upon the *quantity* of infectious material, nor upon the medium by which it is conveyed, but upon the quality of the soil upon which it finds lodgment, and there can be no absolute safety from infectious and contagious diseases, aside from the rapid and entire destruction of the *fons et origo* of the disease. That the dead do kill the living is only too true, and that cholera, yellow fever, and the whole list of zymotic and infectious diseases, are capable of being, and are, transmitted through the contamination of water and air supplies, is no more difficult of demonstration, than it is to prove the ability of sewer gas or sewage water to propagate disease. True, we are as yet unable to demonstrate the exact appearance of the particular germ of these diseases; but that such a germ does exist is, we may say, almost proven, and coupled with the known conditions of the air and water supply in certain epidemics, it rises almost to the plane of a demonstration, that these are the media through which the disease is propagated. The proximity of burial grounds to disease-infected localities is not to be explained on the theory of coincidence.

That the infectious germs of these diseases have never been seen, handled, or smelt, is but small proof that they do not exist, and such writers as he of the "Encyclopedia," who insist upon these conditions, as essential to danger from them, are best answered by the anecdote of old Dr. Lloyd, who, in 1795, made the remark that yellow fever was in the air. A bystander, whose faith in the literal accuracy of everything the good old doctor might say was beautiful and touching to behold, was greatly alarmed, and next morning bright and early went up on his housetop to look for it, but saw it not, and ever after said he did n't think much of Dr. Lloyd.

If more proof of the disgusting and hurtful qualities of earth burial is wanted, the evidences can be obtained in nearly every hamlet and city in the civilized world, and I would only weary you did I consume more of your time in quoting from the numerous authentic sources at command. There always has been, and I suppose always will be, those who esteem it a privilege or a duty to "snuff up corruption and call it a rose." And how can I better close this part of the subject than by quoting the words of the old sexton, in Sargent's "Dealings with the Dead":—

"How long, O Lord, how long, will thy peculiar people disregard the simple and unmistakable teachings of common sense, and the admonitions of their own proper noses, and bury the dead in the midst of the living? Above all, how long will they continue to perpetrate that hideous folly of burying in tombs? What a childish effort to keep the worm at bay, to stave off corruption yet a little while, to procrastinate the payment of nature's debt at maturity, — 'dust thou art and unto dust shalt thou return,' — for what? That the poor senseless tabernacle may have a few more months or years to rot in; that friends and relatives may, from time to time, upon

every reopening of the tomb, be able to gratify their morbid curiosity, and see how the worms are getting on ; that whenever the tomb is unbarred for another tenant, as it may be at a time when corruption is doing its utmost, its rankest work, the foul quintessence, the reeking deleterious gases, may rush back upon the living world, and, blending with a thousand kindred stenches, in a densely populated city, promote the mighty work of pestilence and death."

These are homely words, but unfortunately too true.

How, then, shall we dispose of the dead? In answering this there are other questions beside those of a sanitary nature to be considered. Two of these, viz., sentiment and practicability, are likely to be important features in the final solution of the problem.

The emotions which prompt us to a loving and tender regard for the dead bodies of our friends, even though we are fully convinced that they are only clay, only effete matter passing from a higher to a lower form, are among the characteristics of civilization, and only among the lowest and most degraded of savages do we find an utter contempt for the dead manifested. All who have studied the subject are agreed, that among nations who acknowledge that the dead have some rights, the rights of the living and the amenities of society are more highly respected.

Says the venerable bishop of Toulouse : "This respect is a natural sentiment in every stage of society ; and depraved indeed must those be who do not feel it. No social ties could unite us if death were able instantly to extinguish affection in the hearts of the survivors. He who feels no emotions of grief or pity beside the grave of a fellow-being, could have borne no love to that being during life."

I am disposed to allow great weight to what is called sentiment, in the solution of this as well as every other social problem, provided the sentiment be of a healthful and decent nature ; but for the mawkish sentimentality of some of the advocates of inhumation, I have nothing but contempt. It is a false sentiment they display, because it has no foundation in fact, and is not productive of a single benefit, to any person or community.

Practical sentiment is always better than impractical.

There are exceptional persons who look upon the dead body as something loathsome, and to be got out of sight as quickly as possible ; and any disposition that accomplishes this, no matter how, is all that is necessary. But among the large majority of persons there is, however, a strong desire that when they come to die their body may be protected from all violence, and be permitted quietly to return to dust, unobserved by mortal eye. With our present system of burial, this is a physical impossibility ; there is no security from impertinent meddling with our bones. Of this the ancients were aware, and the history of every land confirms it. Says good old Sir Thomas Browne : "Who knows the fate of his bones, or how often he is to be buried? who hath the oracle of his ashes, or whither they are to be scattered?"

Much of the disturbance of burial grounds, it is true, has been the result of necessity. The dead must make room for the living, and no matter the amount of foresight used, the plats of ground devoted to burial purposes

have necessarily had to give up their dead. Unfortunately the indignities offered the "uncomplaining dead" fill many a dark page in the history of the world. The love of gold and the demand for room, have been more potent than any sentiment of affection, respect, or common decency. Burial grounds intended for hamlets have been made to do duty for large and prosperous cities, and into space intended for hundreds, thousands and even millions have been crowded. To do this they had to be "managed" in a way so disgusting and shameful, I will not pain you with its recital. The sentiment of "rest in the grave" is beautiful in the abstract, but its utter falsity in fact, is evident to any one who has thought much upon the subject, and is perhaps nowhere more forcibly illustrated than in the disposal of the defunct Capucins. In one of their monasteries near Palermo, the bodies of over 2,000 are preserved in the cellar. Their plan is this: the body of a dead monk is buried in a subterranean gallery, in a grave, from which its former tenant has been removed, to make room for the new-comer. Perhaps the body has been permitted to enjoy the sweet rest of the grave for four years, rarely more than seven; as a consequence, the processes of decay are still rife; to obviate this, the body is placed in an oven and baked for a time, then dressed as during life, and hung up upon the wall, to serve as an object of peaceful and sentimental reflection to all comers. To complete the travesty, and render the argument for this mode of burial still more clinching, I would suggest the adoption of the American custom of hanging mottoes bearing, not the legend "God Bless our Home," that would be asking too much; but the still more impressive and cheerful one so often seen in church-yard literature: "Stranger, as you are now so once was I; as I am now so you must be; prepare for death and follow me."

But not yet is the poor body permitted to rest. Each in his turn is taken down, his bones scraped and cleaned, the long bones arranged in columns and festoons to decorate this gehenna, and the skulls used to build altars to the Most High God, over which prayers are offered, asking Him to aid his children in mortifying and lightly esteeming the mightiest of his handiworks, — the human body.

There may be a sentiment connected with this I cannot appreciate; but better far, and more intelligible to me, is the sentiment of the Hindu, who sees in the smoke of the ascending funeral pyre the soul of the departed wending its way to realms of bliss, and in the handful of ashes cast upon the waters of the Ganges, the reunion of the body with the universe.

Another objection to earth burial, aside from the legal and necessary interference with the remains, may be mentioned the criminal interference, or "body snatching." This evil has reached a magnitude in this country, greater, perhaps, than in any other, and is so great that no body is secure from the unholy rapacity of the ghoul. Rank and social position are no securities; law does not prevent it. The crime is increasing, and neither the corpse of the pauper, committed to the earth with the tears of a single friend, or the body of a martyred president deposited in a vault, provided with all the mechanical securities human ingenuity can suggest, is safe from the ravages of this fiend of all uncleanness.

The prevalence of this crime has led to the adoption of many elaborate and costly devices for the protection of the body, which are wholly beyond the means of the poor to secure. No matter how dear to him the body of his dead, the sanctity of the grave which common decency and the laws should secure to him are not for such as he, but only for those whose wealth will enable them to make use of these additional means of displaying their affectionate regard and tender sentiment for the dead. The growth of this evil has tended largely to revive the pernicious and disgusting practice of tomb and vault burial.

As a sanitary evil, the placing of dead bodies in tombs and vaults, is far greater than burial in the ground itself. The earth, doubtless, does absorb and decompose into harmless products a portion of the deleterious products of decomposition; in tomb and vault burial these products are confined, and allowed to escape, *en masse*, on every opening of the vault, or in the more improved (?) vaults, are allowed constant egress through so-called ventilators.

One more reason against burial there is, and one not connected with the sanitary or economic part of the question. No doubt there exists in nearly every one, at some time, a vague, it may be, and undefinable, but no less horrible, fear of being buried while yet alive. By most people, perhaps, and especially by that class who are able, from their peculiar organization, to take a philosophical view of this as of all other questions, the subject is at once dismissed as something very unlikely to occur; and if by any possibility it should, their sophistry convinces them it could scarcely be attended with any pain, and would probably not be realized. With others, and every physician has met with many such, the subject is one causing intense mental anxiety. Often have I been asked the possibility or probabilities of such an occurrence, and if there was no certain means by which to distinguish the fact of death. With some, call them monomaniacs if you will, the subject is one of paramount importance, and is a shadow that constantly attends them by day and haunts their pillow by night. Some certain and infallible sign, by which we might determine the fact of death, has been the dream of many pathologists. Large rewards have been offered for its discovery; but as yet the one certain sign, apart from the evidences of incipient putrefaction, is but a dream. Many evidences taken together, with the circumstances of the particular case, such as auscultation of the heart and lungs, the condition of the eye, the application of fire to the skin, the accession followed by the loss of rigidity of the muscles, etc., offer strong presumptive evidences of death. Yet it is but honest to confess, that the border land between death and seeming death is so narrow that the possibility exists of committing to the grave, and all that this implies, the still living body. No doubt most, if not all the sensational stories with which the public press abound, of bodies that have turned in the grave, are dependent, not upon the fact that the body was buried alive, but upon careless handling of the coffin, or upon the operation of the gases of decomposition. I am convinced, however, that there is not and in the case of epidemics cannot well be, the proper verification of death that the importance of the subject demands. Is not,

then, some method of disposing of the body, that offers complete euthanasia, better than our present mode? That our present system of burial does not meet the demands of a just and true sentiment, of love and respect for the dead, while at the same time offering a practical solution of the question, What is the proper sanitary disposal of the dead? I claim, and in support of this claim would again quote from the eminent London sanitarian, Mr. T. Spencer Wells, who says:—

“Decomposing human remains so pollute earth, air, and water as to diminish the general health and average duration of life of our people.

“Existing cemeteries are not well fitted as safe, secure, permanent, innocuous places of repose for the remains of the dead.

“The expenses of funerals and interment of the dead in graves presses unduly upon the means of the middle and lower classes.

“The present system of registration of death is so imperfect that common causes of preventable disease are not detected; and life is also rendered insecure by the omission of efficient arrangements for the due verification of the fact and cause of death.”

Have we, then, any means of disposal of the dead that is safe, secure, permanent, innocuous, and at the same time practical, reverential to the dead, and that offers no violence to the feelings or rights of the living?

In my opinion *cremation* fulfills these conditions better than any method yet devised.

The problem to be solved is thus tersely put by Sir Henry Thompson:—

“Given a dead body, to resolve it into carbonic acid, water, and ammonia, rapidly, safely, and not unpleasantly.”

The question—how to dispose of the dead—has been looked upon for many years as one to be decided by the peculiar sentiment and taste of the individual, and undoubtedly these elements must fill an important place in the solution of the question. It is, however, or will soon become a question of pressing sanitary importance, and as such must stand or fall upon its sanitary merits. If people's sentiments can be made to conform to the sanitary solution of the question, so much the better, and I for one do not see why they cannot. There are people who, when stripped of every other argument in favor of burial, claim that it is the most natural method. A poor argument, were it true. Nature is oftentimes a bungler, and performs her work by the slowest and most unsatisfactory methods. A limb is attacked by gangrene; nature might effect an amputation in time and spare the patient's life; the chances are she would not; any way, we do not wait to see, but call upon art to perform in minutes what nature, unaided, would require months to do. The case is similar with the dead body. If left to nature it would be resolved into its elements in time, and might spare the health and life of the survivor; the chances are it would not. Are then the processes of nature so holy that we may not in this case seek to regulate them to our profit?

Change is the one inflexible law stamped upon all created things, and we do not contravene nature's teachings when we help her to perform quickly the processes of her alchemy.

Another objection to cremation advanced by the sentimentally religious opponents to the rite is that it is a revival of an ancient pagan rite. Granted, but in this case we must admit that the heathen were wiser than we. Undoubtedly cremation originated among so-called heathens; what particular nation or race, we are unable to ascertain. It is quite rational to believe its origin to have been with some people who worshiped the sun-god *Ra*, and looked upon fire as the earthly representative of that god, and there seems to me nothing impious or unnatural in their seeing in the destruction of the body by fire, a reunion of that body with the to them divine element from which it sprang. I imagine that could those heathen be translated into this nineteenth century, and see how faithfully some self-styled Christians worship earthly gods, they would see in their vaunted affection for earth burial quite as heathenish a desire to be eternally united with their *mud god*.

Supposing cremation was originally a heathen rite, the same may be said of nearly every one of the rites of the Christian church of to-day, and more than this, the human child has grown too old to longer be frightened with the threatened ghost of a heathen.

No doubt Christianity, with its doctrine of the literal resurrection of the body, was largely the cause of the abolition of the custom of burning the dead, so long and universally practiced before the origin of the Christian church; but happily the doctrine of a literal resurrection has so completely died out, that any remaining straggler who may have the temerity to advance that as an argument against the readoption of the rite, may be effectually silenced by the question of Lord Shaftesbury, "What has become of the blessed martyrs?"

It is but a waste of time to enumerate or attempt to refute many of the arguments advanced by the captious opponents of cremation. There are but two worthy an answer, viz.:—

1st. Will not the ends of justice be defeated in the destruction of the means of detection of crime?

2d. Is not cremation too costly to be practical?

As to the first of these objections, in view of the great benefits plainly to be derived from the adoption of the custom, the disadvantages from this cause seem very insignificant. The resources of toxicology are so great at the present day that precautions highly necessary in the time of Lucretia Borgia are not required. Criminal poisoning is not a common crime now, and the vegetable poisons are seldom to be detected after death, certainly not if the body has laid long in the grave. Of the mineral poisons, very rarely are more than two or three used with criminal intent, and these, particularly arsenic and strychnine, present such plain and unmistakable ante-mortem phenomena as to render the necessity for the disinterment of the body an act of gross carelessness.

Dr. Bonfanti, of Milan, for twenty-six years official medico-legal expert of Italy, in a paper showing the fallacy of this objection to cremation, says that in all the cases of which he has had charge, many thousands in number, only ten have involved the exhumation of the body, and four of these

were where the murderer himself had buried the body to conceal his crime.

Sir Henry Thompson shows that not one in a million are ever exhumed for this purpose, and with an improved method of inspection, which seems to be demanded in any event, the dangers to be apprehended are absolutely infinitesimal. On the other hand, were cremation universally adopted, the crime of "body snatching," which in the eyes of the law is held barely second to that of murder, would necessarily be done away with. Of course the detection of all crime is highly desirable, and that of criminal poisoning particularly so; but it seems to me the custom or law that effects the greatest good for the greatest number coincides most nearly with our democratic principles. If there are, as is stated by eminent statisticians, more persons who die annually from causes directly attributable to our present system of burial than fall victims to the assassin's knife, a change in this system would seem to be desirable. Even if an occasional Brown does get more arsenic in his tea than is good for him, the whole Smith family may be saved from death by typhus.

Now as to the costliness of cremation. So far it cannot be denied that the incinerations that have been performed in this country have been attended with expenses that place the privilege beyond the reach of the poorer classes. That this is necessarily the case does not follow. As practiced by the ancients the rite was both costly and imperfectly done, the cost mainly depending upon the expensive wines and oils used in the performance of the religious ceremonies, and not upon the amount of fuel actually required; indeed, the process seems to have been conducted upon a very economical basis, in the case of some of the martyrs. Good old John Strype has told us to a farthing what it cost to cremate Cranmer, Latimer, and Ridley, viz.: £1 16s. 6d. for the three; this included fuel, carting, and even the chains and staples used to hold the pyre in position. They did n't waste any more sentiment or oil over martyrs in those days than we do over paupers in this. That incineration by means of pyres erected in the open air is costly, imperfect, and offensive to common decency, I am prepared to admit, and I do not wonder that those who may have read the accounts of such cremations as those of the poet Shelley, for instance, and little or nothing of the improved methods of to-day, should be disgusted with the very mention of the subject. The popular notion seems to be, that the body is to be submitted to a sort of roasting, frying process, attended by dense smoke, disgusting odors of burning flesh, and a whole nightmare of kindred horrors. Nothing of the kind, however, occurs. In the improved furnaces of to-day the body does not come in contact with the fire at all, only with an intense heat of 2,000° or more. At this temperature the body simply withers away into a pure white ash. The gases generated are burned in a separated chamber adapted to the purpose, and no smoke, odor, or other unpleasant phenomena occur to offend the sensibilities of any, be they ever so acute. To attain these nearly perfect results, of course costs money. The furnace cannot be erected in this country for less than three to five thousand dollars, — a mere bagatelle compared with the cost of some of our cemeteries,

The fuel necessary to attain this high temperature, with the necessary attendance, makes the expenses of the incineration of a single body about fifteen dollars. The actual cost of fuel when the furnace is once heated is only seventy-five cents to one dollar. The apparatus used by the Danish society at Copenhagen effects the cremation in about an hour, and costs only from five to seven shillings. After all, the costliness of cremation does not seem to be such a very great objection. Of course, if we are forced to send the body to Washington, Pa., to Milan, to Padua, or any other of the existing crematories, the privilege is placed beyond the means of any but the rich. But when the crematories are more numerous and accessible, as they no doubt soon will be, the necessity for an expensive lot in an expensive cemetery, an expensive casket, and all the pride, pomp, and circumstance of a funeral *a la mode*, may be dispensed with by those who, from necessity or choice, are able to see that death does level all.

I do not expect, however, that the cheapness or costliness of cremation will ever play any important part in the question of its final adoption. People always have had, and probably always will have, their individual notions as to how much money they will expend upon the funeral of their friends, and whether the money is expended upon a costly casket or a costly urn, the baker and the milkman will be obliged to see their just dues vanish in the funeral display, in the future as in the past; and as prodigious lies will sully the face of the silver or gold cinerary urn as ever disfigured the marble shaft.

In cremation we have, then, a method of disposing of the dead at once safe, secure, innocuous, practical, reverential to the dead, and that cannot interfere with the rights of the living.

Will it become popular, is the question; and the answer depends not upon its merits, which are evident, but upon people's prejudices, born of the long observation of the burial custom; to overcome these prejudices is the work, gentlemen, of such as you, acquainted as many of you are with the horrible and disgusting features of death, as none others can be; to you particularly belongs the moulding of public sentiment, that death may indeed come to be looked upon as a dreamless sleep and an eternal rest. It is useless to attempt to effect any great social reformation by means of any law. Cremation is no exception, and can never become popular through any law; there must first be the demand for it, and this demand must come from the educated and refined, for it certainly is an advance in the social scale, and a refinement upon our present dangerous and barbarous mode.

One of the most beautiful attributes of true refinement is displayed in the love for the home and family. The sentiment of affection for the dead, as well as the living members of the family, has ever been one of the tenderest and most available spots, against which tyranny and superstition could launch their arrows. Not infrequently have the dead been denied the right of sepulture and peaceful rest by the vindictiveness of kings and priests, and used as a fulcrum by which to raise *their* statue into the niche of their ambition. In no country have the buried dead been safe from unhallowed intrusion, and in no land has burial offered even common respect to the

dead; and yet if the sentiment of "rest in the grave" is worth entertaining at all, the grave should be sacred forever. It has been urged that cremation was not a necessity in this country, where there is plenty of room for burial. It is not so; there is no room, and should not be, for such plague spots of corruption as now exist. Man is a gregarious animal, and it is not right to compel him to remove his dead to a distance compatible with safety to his neighbor, at great expense, when we have the means, cheap, safe, and effectual, for the accomplishment of the object nearer home.

Certainly the means should be provided for those who may wish to make use of this method of disposing of their dead. "Man should disappear and not rot; he should no more be transformed into a mass of corruption, the source of filthy and injurious exhalations, than into a grotesque mummy, a shapeless mixture of resin and perfumes. Man should become a handful of ashes, and nothing more."

That cremation is already popular among a large and rapidly increasing class, is very evident; the public is beginning to see that it is, after all, a very rational and desirable method of disposing of the dead. Italy probably outranks any other country in the popularity of this rite and the actual number of incinerations performed. Milan and Gotha already possess the most complete facilities for the performance of the rite.

In Switzerland two or more societies already exist, and crematories are soon to be erected in Zurich and other cities. In Germany the movement is becoming very popular, and societies have been formed in Dresden, Leipzig, Vienna, and Berlin.

In Denmark, Copenhagen has a society numbering fifteen hundred members, including eighty-three distinguished physicians, and many Protestant ministers of high standing.

In London and Paris large societies have already been formed, and new crematories have recently been erected in Rome, Vavese, Pavia, Cremona, Udine, and Leghorn.

The British Medical Society, at a recent session, highly commended cremation, and recommended its general adoption. In most of the countries mentioned laws prohibiting the practice had to be repealed. In this country every one has the legal right to dispose of his body as he may see fit, so long as the ordinary proprieties of society are observed. All the opposition cremation has to encounter in this country, then, is that of individual sentiment and prejudice, and, strange as it may seem, there is not as much of this as one would naturally suppose, when we consider the deep root the custom of burial has taken from the fact of its long observation.

The American people are to a large extent practical, and when once convinced that cremation is really reverential to the dead, and removes a constantly increasing menace to the health of their families and themselves, they will not be slow to adopt it. Indeed, societies have already been formed in several of our large cities, and several crematories are soon to be erected. Even admitting that the subject is entirely one of taste, it must be a depraved taste, indeed, that would prefer to consign his body to that "narrow house that holds its tenant so long," there to moulder and decay.

and if we think of them at all, it must be in that repulsive and disgusting condition, that is only tolerated by custom. How much better to commit the body to the cleanly and beautiful flame, and have them returned to us in a short hour in the form of scentless and beautiful dust, to dispose of according to our taste and wishes. "He who hath the ashes of his friend, hath an everlasting treasure," said old Sir Thomas Brown two hundred years ago.

What a strange and holy thing death is. "We follow our friends to the dim threshold of that silent land, we feel their soft clasping hands relax, and that is all. No sound proclaims the parting of the soul, and yet in that thin moment's flash a veil has dropped between them and us." We may not lift it; but if, as some suppose, the spirits of the departed still linger near the scenes once dear to them, and have cognizance, not only of their friends, but of the bodies once made glorious by their inhabitants, which think you they would contemplate with greatest satisfaction, that loathsome mass for which, as Bossuet says, "there is no name in the human language," or the scentless ashes?

There is no such thing as rest in the grave. The moment the breath leaves the body the disgusting processes of decay begin. Who cares to lift the coffin-lid a few short hours after it is closed upon what was but yesterday the most beautiful of earth's creatures? Who does not prefer to think of the departed as they were in life? We know "the soul, the life, the all, has fled;" yet we love that cold clay, and in after days we try to remember their every word and look and gesture, and we sometimes visit that mound in the church-yard, and, struggle as we may, we cannot keep the imagination from picturing to us the dark and loathsome scene we know is going on below; and we wonder if the grave were to open now if we could recognize our dead, or if the work of decay has already destroyed all semblance, and we speculate upon the number of years that must elapse before the work of destruction is complete, and we go away with the mind full of the horrors of death, and with material for many an hour of horrible thoughts and troubled dreams. If there be one who has experienced none of this, for such an one the beautiful, cleanly fire burial offers no inducements of a sentimental nature.

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OM

LIKBRÄNNING

HÅLLET PÅ VETENSKAPSAKADEMIENS HÖRSAL 28 APRIL 1882

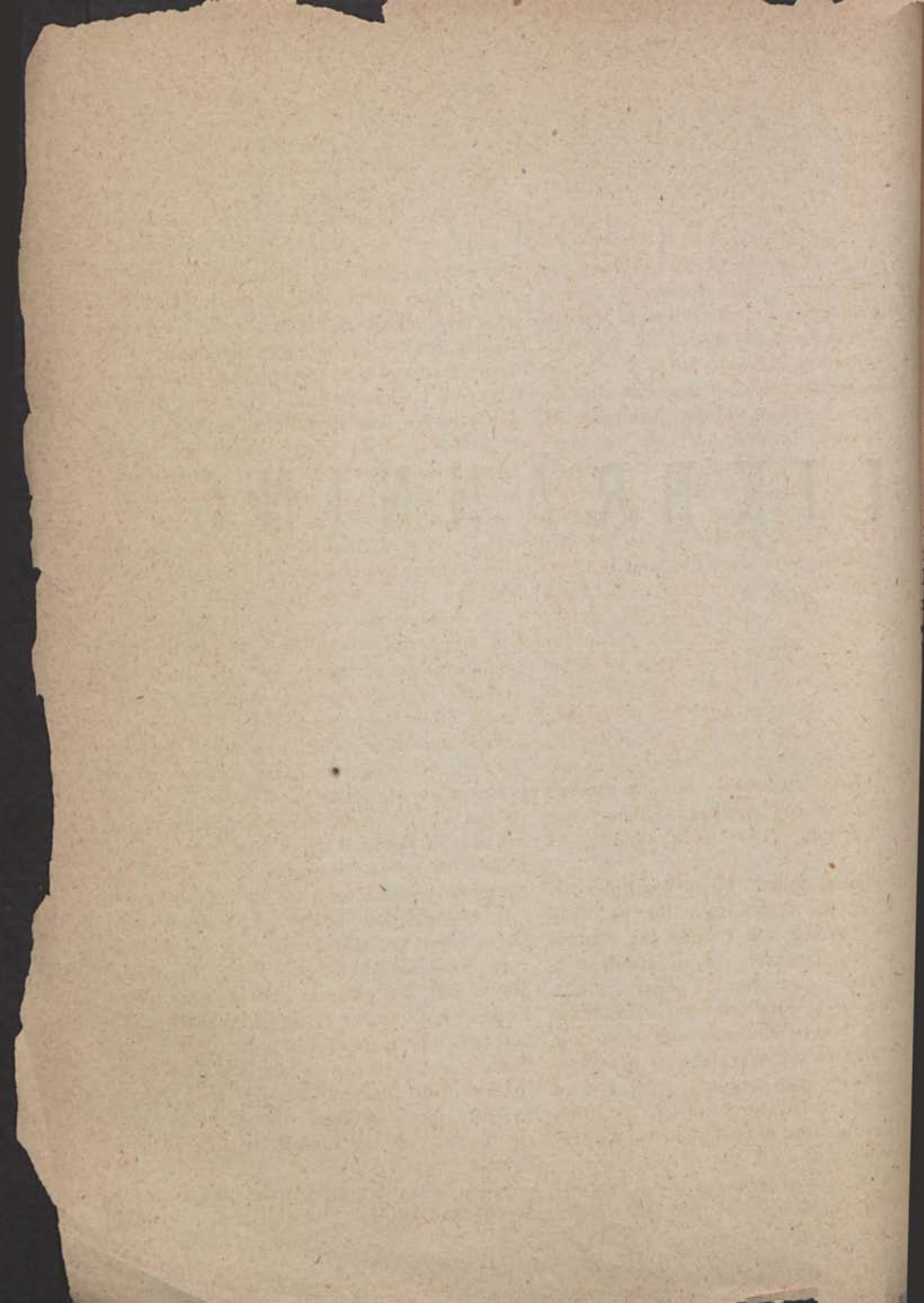
AF

PER LINDELL

(AFTRYCK UR INDUSTRIIDNINGEN NORDEN)

STOCKHOLM

ISAAC MARCUS' BOKTR.-AKTIEBOLAG
1882



Det finnes knappast något tänkbart sätt för liks förstöring eller förvaring, som ej varit allmän plägsed i någon vrå af världen. Söker man efter de motiv, de särskilda folken möjligtvis haft vid valet af det ena eller andra sättet, så torde man i de allra flesta fall kunn astanna vid den förmodan att, oafsedt sådana abnormiteter som att några vilda folkstammar pläga uppäta sina döda, de haft afsky för förruttnelseprocessens ohygglighet och velat på bekvämaste vis göra sig liken qvitt, och att således lokala och klimatiska förhållanden dervid spelat hufvudrollen. Sålunda gräfvor man i de flesta länder liken ned i jorden, i några bränner man upp dem, eller kastar dem i floderna eller hafvet, hvilket sistnämnda sätt såsom bekant begagnas äfven af civiliserade nationer på längre sjöresor, eller i några länder, der stark köld eller ett tort och hett lufttreck motverkar förruttnelseprocessen, lägga man liken helt enkelt ned på marken eller upp i träden. Slutligen finnas äfven seder, der man låter liken förtäras af löda djur.

Det judiska folket hyste jemförelsevis större afsky än andra folk för de döda kropparna, hvadan ock i Mose lag stadgas att »den, som kommer vid en död menniska, han skall vara oren i 7 dagar». Ännu mera synes detta emellertid varit förhållande med de gamle Mederna och Perserna, som de ansågo att världens 4 grundelement skulle orenas genom beröring med en döda, så att denne hvarken fick brännas eller jordas utan oskadliggjordes den genom att omgifvas med vax. Sedan det ena eller andra sättet sålunda blivit häfd, knöt sig lätt dervid religiösa

föreställningssätt och föreställningarna om lifvet efter detta, och detta intensivare i den mån bildningsgraden var låg. Sålunda ställdes bruket af likens nedsänkande i jorden i samband med föreställningarna om ett dödsrike i underjorden. Kroppen förvarades särdeles omsorgsfullt af de folk, hvilka i likhet med de gamle Egypterna trodde på själavandringen, med äfven af de första kristne, emedan de väntade Kristi snara återkomst för att upprätta det tusenåriga riket. Med likbrännandet enade sig lätt idén om en symbolisk reningsprocess, hvilken den döde skulle undergå före inträdet i ett kommande lif. Så var förhållandet hos fenicierna och andra folk, som dyrkade himlakropparna; men icke hos dem, som dyrkade elden, emedan de skulle ansett denna sin gudomlighet derigenom förorenad. Bland underliga vanor, som stå i samband härmed, vill jag ytterligare nämna bruket i Bengalen att kasta de döende i Ganges, på det att de skola dö i den heliga floden och denna upptaga deras anda; bruket på Fidschiöarne att begravva äldre personer lefvande, emedan man trodde att tillståndet i dödsögonblicket skulle oförändradt fortsättas i ett kommande lif, och det därför vore fördelaktigt att ej dröja, tills man blefve allt för gammal och skröplig, samt bruket hos många sydamerikanska stammar att, om man så får säga, dricka sina döda. Detta tillgår så att den i en gryta halfförkolade massan utröres med någon vätska, som förtäres, dervid man tror sig kunna på sig öfverflytta den aflidnes dygder.

Huru olika hvarandra de många sätten för behandlingen än äro, låta de sig dock

alla sammanfattas i tre hufvudklasser. Vid den *första* söker man bibehålla kroppens form; dit hör balsamering och mumifiering. Vid begrafningssätten, tillhörande den *andra* klassen, låter man denna form långsamt förstöras genom likens utsättande för naturens påverkande krafter. Den förnämsta representanten härvid är vår vanliga begrafning. Vid den *tredje* klassen slutligen påskyndar man denna förstörelse medelst kemiska agentier eller vanligast medelst användande af förbränning.

Det är endast med begrafning och likbränning, som vi här skola sysselsätta oss.

Den allmännast förekommande seden att nedsänka liken i jordens sköte går tillbaka till den gråaste forntid och har sedan begagnats genom alla historiens skeden hos de flesta kulturfolk och har kunnat bibehålla sig äfven i länder, der likbränning blifvit införd, så att äfven der nästan alltid de båda olika sätten bestått jemte hvarandra. Likets nedläggande i jorden är också ett bekvämt sätt att blifva detsamma qvitt, *men endast under vissa villkor* oskadligt. Der dessa villkor ej uppfyllts, der hafva systemets många olägenheter framträd, och detta stundom så tydligt, att man sett sig tvungen bryta med mångtusenårig sed.

Bland dessa olägenheter nämner jag här först, (emedan det är en praktisk tid vi lefva i), dem som stå i samband med frågans sanitära och ekonomiska sidor.

De organiska väsendena, växter och djur, bestå af visserligen endast några få elementarbeståndsdelar, nemligen syre, väte, kol och kväfve, hvartill kan läggas svafvel och de oorganiska beståndsdelar, som efter förbränningen bilda askan; men dessa beståndsdelar hafva i följd af lifskraftens inverkan ingått i synnerligt sammansatta föreningar, hvilka genast börja sönderfalla i enklare beståndsdelar, så snart detta okända något, hvilket vi kalla lifvet, flytt. De genomgå dervid, synnerligast om de härleda sig från en kväfvehaltig djurkropp, en mängd mellan-

former utaf allt enklare och enklare sammansättning, till dess sent omsider endast mycket enkla föreningar återstå. Dessa mellanformer äro af den mest helsofiendtliga art, hvarom också deras ohyggliga lukt bär vittne. I synnerhet är detta förhållandet, om under förruttelseprocessens gång bris på syre råder.

Till begrafningsplatser utses derföre gerne sandjord, som erbjuder luften stora mellanrum att tränga ned och påskynda förruttelseprocessen. Under sådana gynsamma förhållanden kan denna vara afslutad inom några få år, men *äfven då* bortgå genom jordlagret ohelsosamma gaser och bortsköljes till grundvattnet eller andra närliggande vattensamlingar flytande förruttelseprodukter, för hvilka människor och djur må taga sig till vara, och *äfven då* sprida flugor och maskar smittan från liken på oberäkneliga vägar..

Uti lerhaltig och vattensjuk mark fortskrider förstörelseverket mycket långsammare och bildas äfven vida ohyggligare förruttelseprodukter. Ännu efter årtiondens förlopp påträffa också dödgärfvarne i en sådan mark rester af så väl lik som kistor. Ja, det kan t. o. m. inträffa, att liken undergå ett slags förfettningsprocess, adipocering, hvarigenom de förunderligt väl bibehålla sitt ursprungliga utseende. Det mest beryktade af sådana fall är från vårt eget land. Historien om Fet Mats från Falun är bekant i vida kretsar, sedan en tysk poet derom diktat ett litet poem. Han var en ung grufarbetare, som nedföll i grufvan och råkade blifva liggande i ett sådant vattensjukt jordlager, ända tills han efter 50 års förlopp upptogs. Ingen kände igen liket af den blomstrande ynglingen mer än en gammal skräplig gumma, som i honom återsåg sin ungdoms älskade.

Det väckte stort uppseende, när man å 1849 på en kyrkogård i Zürich fann att samtliga liken öfvergått i sådant likfett. Sådant har skett äfven på många andra

kyrkogårdar, och ett och annat fall har kunnat konstateras i följd deraf att dödgräfvare begagnat likfett till bränsle och skosmörja, ja t. o. m. utbudit sådant till salu. Här föreligger således en ny förvärfskälla för vår industriösa tid, hvilken måhända skall komma äfven någon företagssam landsman till godo, enär på många begravningsplatser, exempelvis en del af den nya begravningsplatsen i Stockholm, liken ligga i mycket vattensjuk jord.

Under gångna, fromma tider sökte man få sin sista hvilostad så nära som möjligt intill kyrkorna, hvilka ofta voro resta öfver helgonens och martyrernas gravar. Mot frikostig betalning kunde man t. o. m. blifva jordad inuti kyrkan, och åträn efter en förnämlig bänkplats täflade med fäfangan att efter döden få någon mera bemärkt hedersplats uti templet. De författare, som skrivit öfver detta ämne, anföra talrika fall, då de härigenom i kyrkorna alstrade likgaser spridde död och förderf. Förgäfvess uttalade sig flera kyrkomöten mot denna osed. Den bibehöll sig länge envist under skydd af påfvarne, hvilka gäfvos sin tillåtelse i de fall, då den döde rikligt begäfvat kyrkor och kloster.

Längre dröjde det, innan man allmännare började inse faran af att vistas i närheten af begravningsplatserna under bar himmel och började yrka på dessa giftårdars förflyttande utom städernas områden; ohyggligheterna måste hopa sig i massor, innan det ondas tillvaro blef fullt erkänt. Den allmänna helsovårdsläran vinner endast långsamt sina segrar och hvad serskildt vårt land beträffar har man ej ens i denna stund fullständigt lyckats få begravingarne inom städerna afskaffade. Utlandets stora hufvudstäder erbjuda i detta hänseende beaktansvärda exempel. De stora, nya begravningsplatserna, som man der uppfört utom städernas ramar, de äro inom kort omkringbyggda af den växande jettestaden och en ny-utflyttning nödvändig. Man har derför

varit betänkt på att förlägga begravningsplatserna på milsvida afstånd och låta bantåg dit afgå flera gånger om dagen. Det kan dock bli fråga om huruvida ens denna utväg skall blifva i längden möjlig, sedan äfven landsorternas befolkning fått ögonen öppnade för begravningsvåder och det farliga grannskap, man vill förskaffa den. Såsom ett betecknande exempel på huru förtviflade man här och der anser förhållandena vara må anföras ett förslag, som väckts af en herr Wilson, att för att kunna göra sig af med de 100,000 lik, som London årligen lemna, införa dem i en ihållig pyramid på ett utrymme af ungefär 17 tunland och med en höjd af 900 fot. Det skulle således blifva ett nytt Babels torn, hvilket helt visst skulle bereda den stora metropolen Babylons öde. Om det ohyggliga begravningsättet i Palermo, Neapel och andra syditalienska städer vill jag här endast erinra.

Men ej endast de stora städerna lida utaf kyrkogårdarnas gifter, utan också smärre samhällen lida. Huru många af våra byar t. ex. äro ej bygda efter samma plan som Kungsholmen här i Stockholm — kyrkan på öfversta höjden, kyrkogården deromkring och nedtill prestgården och andra boningshus med sina brunnar! Låtom oss ihågkomma, att hvart enda lik är under årtalen en farlig sjukdomshärd, isynnerhet om dödsorsaken varit en smittosam sjukdom, och att öfver hvarje begravningsplats framströmma gaser, hvilka äro att betrakta såsom motsatsen till hvad man benämmer frisk luft, hvarom också de flesta dödgräfvares sjukliga utseende bär vittne.

På det ingen må tro, att jag söker öfverdrifva faran, vill jag nämna att en i koporna afliden person gifvit upphof till utbrottet af en koppepidemi ännu 30 år efter sin död och att den berömda *Pasteur* nyligen meddelat att får, hvilka under några timmar betat på ett ställe, der 12 år förut i mjältbrand aflidne djur hade blifvit nedgräfvda,

sjelfva i sin ordning blefvo angripna utaf samma sjukdom.

En ords befolkning har emellertid att lida icke blott utaf det felaktiga begrafningsättet uti den egna eller den närliggande kommunen utan stundom äfven af dem, som råda i långt bort belägna länder. Sålunda har Europa esomoftast hemsökt utaf smittosamma farsoter ifrån Egypten och asiatiska länder, der ogynnsamma omständigheter göra likjordandet ännu mera förderfbringande än hos oss. Hvad nu särskildt angår Egypten, bibehöll man seden att mumifiera liken intill det 5:te århundradet, då landet blef kristet och derefter muhamedanskt, hvarvid den gamla seden af mumifiering utbyttes mot begrafning i jord. Hundrade år senare (år 542) spred sig derifrån den första verkliga orientaliska pesten, hvilken decimerade Europas folkmängd och minskade det fruktbara landets egen befolkning ifrån 7 till 2 millioner menniskor. En annan pesthärd ligger i Persien i närheten af Babylon, hvarest Muhamedanerna uti Kerbela och Mesjed Ali hafva heliga begrafningsställen, hvilka sedan tusen år fyllds af lik och förruttnelseprodukter. Den ojemförligt största pesthärd är dock det brittiska Indien; der är det emellertid ej egentligen begrafda lik, utan sådana, som blifvit ofullständigt förbrända, hvilka gifva upphof till den så fruktade asiatiska koleran.

Här föreligger således ett nytt bevis på hvilken solidaritet i intressen, som råder mellan jordens skilda folk, och att det ej är nog att sopa rent utanför egen dörr utan att man äfven måste bidraga till att det samma blir gjort utanför andras. Den sträfvan, som nu råder hos alla mera bildade folk, att reformera begrafningsättet, behöfver derföre ej vara framtvingadt af några skriande missförhållanden i det egna landet, utan äro stundom yttringar af den pliktänsla, som borde bjuda en hvar att i mån af sin förmåga bidraga till bortskaffandet af dessa mensklighetens plågo-

ris — farsoter, hvilka skörda flera offer än krigen.

Svärigheter, som allt mera hopa sig för anskaffandet af lämpliga begrafningsplatser, i förening med vår fåfanga, att ej vilja vara sämre än andra, hafva uppgjagat omkostnaderna för äfven en ganska anspråklös begrafning till högst betydliga belopp. Man klagat öfver att det är dyrt att leva, men det är ännu dyrare att dö. Äfven af ekonomiska skäl är således en, ju grundligare ju bättre, omskapning af det rådande begrafningsättet synnerligen önskvärd.

Men vida mera än af dessa skäl inverkas ett känsligt sinne utaf de gräsligheter, som likens jordande medföra. Den skall förstå mig, som setat på en kär graf och tänkt på huru det gräsliga förstörelseverket dernere långsamt men oemotståndligt fortgår, huru de förr så kära dragen antaga de ohylligaste uttryck och huru alltsammans förvandlas till en stinkande massa, vämjeligare än den sjukligaste fantasi kan måla den. Det är en reel verklighet, som ligger bakom menniskonaturens omedvetna fasa för den långsamma förruttnelsen. Det är denna aning om det förskräckliga, som försiggår dernere, som gör kyrkogården så hemsk och fyller barnens fantasi med en plågsam ångest att de döda skola gå igen. Ja! de komma igen, men ej såsom spöken i hvita svepningar, ej såsom benrangel, utan osynligt smygande sig på oss i luften, som vi andas, och vattnet, som vi dricka. Den österländska sagan om vampyren innehåller en fruktansvärd kärna, ty i en mening är det sant, att de döda suga bort blodet från de levande. De finnas, som påverkas af dessa gräsligheter djupare än hvad jag här anser tillständigt skildra; och det är på deras vägnar man allt ifrigare yrkar på att desse ej af en barbarisk, hänsynslös lagstiftning, en qvarleva från råare tider, måtte mot deras vilja tvingas ned i den stinkande grafven att blifva maskarnes föda och sjelfva

bidraga till att deras efterlevande kära förpestras.

Det låter bra, när man talar om den fridfulla grafven och den eviga hvilan, men talet är en *lög*n, ty oafsedt den långt ifrån fridfulla förruttnelseprocessen, störes grafvens frid inom några år eller årtionden af dödgäfvaren, som kastar omkring våra lemningar, för att lägga dit ett nytt lik, om hvilket samma bedrägliga lögnar sägas. Man är ej heller säker för att naturrevolutioner, såsom öfversvämningar, skola kringsprida våra halfförruttnade ben, och äfven om vi lika med Egyptens Pharaoner skulle kunna resa väldiga pyramider öfver våra grafvar, så skulle dock en kommande tid utaf nyfikenhet eller af andra skäl vanhelga hvilorummet. Men äfven genom politiska tilldragelser plåga grafvarnas frid kränkas; sålunda skändades under den första franska revolutionen konungagrafvarne i St Denis.

Då jag vet att mången här ej ens skulle tåla vid att tänka på det ohyggliga öde, som väntar dem, hvilka blifva begrafna, innan lifvet flytt, vill jag endast i förbigående nämna, att vårt nuvarande begrafningssätt ej lemnar tillräckliga garantier för att ej hvem som helst af oss skulle kunna blifva lefvande begrafven. Det har t. o. m. varit exempel på att en person, som af läkaren fått en åder afskuren, vaknat upp i sin kista. Ett sådant fall är anfördt af doktor J. P. Trusen i hans stora arbete »Die Leichenverbrennung» sid. 159, tryckt i Breslau 1855. Endast ett enda fall vill jag ytterligare anföras. Här i Stockholm afled för ung. ett år sedan en äldre dam, som icke mindre än två särskilda gånger och med ett tidsmellanrum af 30 år varit skendöd, och i båda fallen först mycket sent räddades från att bli lefvande begrafven.

En författare, Unzer, uppgifver att öfverhufvud taget flera menniskor blifva lefvande begrafna än de, som sjelfva förkorta sitt lif, och dock är dessa senares antal i Eu-

ropa årligen mer än 25,000. En fransysk läkare har uppgifvit att af 650 personer är en skendöd; i Amerika har man uppgifvit samma siffra till icke mer än 100, så att 1% af alla lik der skulle vara skendöda(?).

Genom särskildt gjord efterforskning har man konstaterat 107 fall af skendöda i Hamburg under 25 år och i Amsterdam under samma tid ej färre än 990. Men jag vill ej uppskrämma fantasien, jag vill endast fästa uppmärksamheten vid att faran är vida större än hvad man i allmänhet antalar. Isynnerhet är den hotande för nyfödda barn och qvinnor af alla åldrar, hvilka äro utsatta för en mängd nervsjukdomar, hvilka utan att alltid vara dödliga gifva utseendet af verklig död.

Dessa och andra olägenheter, för att ej säga gräsligheter, som äro förbundna med likens jordande, hafva upprepade gånger gifvit anledning till införande af förbättringar, hvilka emellertid visat sig vara föga annat än palliativer. Man har derigenom så småningom kommit till den öfvertygelsen, att här endast ett radikalt botemedel kan hjälpa — en fullständig systemförändring, och då vändt sina blickar mot den 3:dje af mig nyss omnämnda klassen utaf likbehandlingsmetoder, den som inbegrep sätten att påskynda kroppens förstörelse medelst kemiska agentier eller förbränning. Metoderna med kemiska agentier ligga ännu i sin linda och föga torde äfven vara att af dem i en framtid hoppas. Vi skola därför vända oss till likförbränningen för att utröna hvad man af den skulle kunna vänta, — förutskickande en flyktig och mycket sammanträngd historik öfver densamma.

Likbränningen sträcker, äfven den, sina rötter in i den uralsta forntid. Sålunda har man i närheten af staden Alba i Italien påträffat ett stort antal askurnor, hvilka befunno sig under ett djupt och mycket fast lager af lava, hvars spår kunde

följas ända till berget Albanus. Men då ej ens den äldsta historia lemnar någon antydning om att detta berg haft någon eruption, måste man antaga att likbränning användts uti det gamla Latium långt före Romarnes tider. Den har sedan i jernbredd med jordbegravnin varit allmän sed hos forntidens mest bildade folk, såsom hos Indiern, Feniciern, Judarn före den Babyloniska fångenskapen, Grekerna och Romarne samt begagnades äfven af våra förfäder under den s. k. bronsåldern. Den syntes de gamla allra minst lika så ärevärdig som det kristna dopet förefaller oss, ty likasom exorcismen, eller djefvulens besvärjande, är förbunden med dopet af den lefvande, så betraktades likbränningen såsom ett elddop för de döde och synes såsom det renaste utflödet af den hedniska gudaläran, som till sin guddomlighet tog det praktfullaste sinneverlden visar, den allt lifgivande solen.

Denna forntidens förbränningsmetod, hvilken ännu begagnas i flera utomeuropeiska länder, var emellertid mycket rå, och skulle ej vinna nutidens bifall. Den stora vedåtgången gjorde att de fattigare klassernaingo nöja sig med en ofullständig förbränning eller rostning, den der fyllde granskäpet med afskyvärd stank. Så var t. ex. förhållandet i det gamla Rom, hvarest folkhumorn benämnde dessa förbränningsanstalter *culinæ* eller kök, och voro de förlagda till en särskild trakt utaf staden, der gudinnan Mephitis fick sitt tempel och der den stora världstadsen drägg af båda könen hade sitt tillhåll. Men likafullt stod likbränningen hos dessa folk i långt högre anseende än likjordandet och påbjöds stundom af lagstiftarne utaf sanitära skäl. Så fortgick det ända till början af 4:de seklet utaf vår tidräkning, då kristendomen blef statsreligion i det romerska riket, och från denna tid påtvingades jordbegravnin de underkufvade folken såsom en nödvändig beståndsdel af den nya läran. För-

bränningen bibehölls emellertid ännu, men såsom ett skymfligt straff för kättare.

I senare tid känner man endast några få likbränningar uti civiliserade länder efter denna ursprungliga metod. Första presidenten i Amerikanska kongressen i Filadelfia 1774, Henry Laurens, blef bränd i slutet af förra århundradet, emedan han så uttryckligt förordnat, dertill förmädd af att en hans dotter hade befunnits vara skendöd. År 1822 blef den engelske skalden Shelley, som drunknat i Medelhavets bränd i Livorno; ceromonien dervid leddes af hans vän Lord Byron. Slutligen brändes 28 jan. 1855 vid Rivas (Nicaragua) 12 officerare och 100 man af de amerikanska regeringstrupper, hvilka stupat i en slagtnin. Jag skulle ännu kunna lägga till det misslyckade försök, som Créteur gjorde att efter slaget vid Sedan 1871 desofficiera de belgiska slagfälten.

Äfven om ett fall, dervid kemikalier begagnats, kunde jag här berätta.

Furst Pückler-Muskau, som dog i Tyskland 1871, hade i sitt testamente förordnat att hans kropp skulle förbrännas eller förstöras på kemisk väg, men då någon tillfredställande likförbränningsmetod på den tiden ej var känd, blef liket förstördt medelst inverkan af kaustika alkalier, hvilket tillvägagående föll sig oerhördt dyrt.

Det var, som sagdt, en rå och föga tilltalande metod för likens tillintetgörelse som vid samtliga dessa tillfällen begagnades, och dock höjde sig den ena stämman efter den andra, som yrkade på likbränningens återinförande. I Sverige skedde detta, såsom mången torde minnas, af doktor Soldin för 25 år sedan. Talrika arbeten, hufvudsakligast utaf läkare, blefvo i tryck synliga, hvilka påvisade nödvändigheten af att i grund reformera det brukliga begravningssättet, och bland andra förklarade den internationella läkarekongressen i Florens 1869 att införandet af likbränning vore i civilisationens och den

offentliga helsovårdens namn oundgängligen nödvändigt.

Så hade frågan mognat och trängde sig från studerkamrarne ut i allt vidare kretsar. Det visade sig dock att ifrån ord till handling var här ett ovanligt svårt steg, i hvars tagande många misslyckades. Man likasom väntade att något oförmodadt skulle inträffa, hvilket kunde besegra den första släpfriktionen.

Just i samma stad, der den nämnda kongressen hållits och året efter den, afled en förnäm indisk furste, Radjahh af Kelapore, hvilken med talrik svit befann sig på resa i Europa. Han blef efter indiskt rituel bränd på bål 1 dec 1870. Öräkeliga millioner gånger hade sådant förut skett, men näppeligen någon gång väckt så stort uppseende och haft viktigare följder. Beskrifningar om de praktfulla ceremonierna cirkulerade genom hela Europas tidningspress och vid sjelfva bålet stodo tänkande män, hvilka viste att draga nytta utaf hvad de sågo.

Det är ur detta bål, kan man säga, som den moderna likbränningen utgått såsom en ny fogel Fenix.

Med förnyad iver började man nu åter att diskutera frågan om likbränning. Hvarföre dröjde man? Läkarna hade gjort sitt — det var på ingenjörerna, pyroteknici, man väntade.

Men denna gång behöfde man ej vänta länge. Flera förbränningsugnar blefvo under de närmaste åren konstruerade isynnerhet af italienare och särskildt väckte en af dem, professor Brunetti i Padua, med sin bränningsmetod stort uppseende vid verdensutställningen i Wien år 1873. Om också utaf dessa och andra skäl Italien är att anse såsom den moderna likbränningens egentliga hemland, så är det dock i Tyskland, som den hittills bästa likbränningsugnen blifvit konstruerad, och äfven i Tyskland (Dresden), som den första likbränningen med anlitande af den nutida tekniska vetenskapen blifvit utförd.

Till en början kunde man ej frigöra sig

från den tanken, att man borde till ett eller annat industriellt ändamål uppsamla och tillgodogöra sig de produkter, som bildade sig vid likens torrdestillation eller ofullständiga förbränning. Sådant var t. e. den apparat, som af doktor Richter föreslogs redan år 1856. All tanke på ett sådant industriellt biändamål måste dock hållas fjerran från likbränningsfrågan, emedan den är stötande för känslan och dessutom torrdestillationsprodukter af qväfvehaltiga organiska ämnen hafva en den vedervärdigaste lukt, hvilken helt visst skulle göra en på så vis utförd likförstöring allt annat än populär.

De fordringar, man måste ställa på en likbränningsugn, äro att med dess verkningsätt ej följer något för känslan stötande, att förbränningen sker raskt och fullständigt, så att endast ren och hvit aska återstår, hvilken lätt kan tillvaratagas, att inga illaluktande gaser få utkomma i atmosfären, utan dessa fullständigt förbrännas, så att inga andra gaser ur skorstenen bortgå än de, som förefinnas i vanlig ren luft, eller syre, qväfve, kolsyra och vattenånga, hvartill kan läggas såsom en mindre viktig fordran den, att omkostnaderna böra vara relativt låga.

Det är således intet lätt problem, pyroteknici här haft att lösa, allrahelst om man besinnar, att människokroppen innehåller ungefär 60% vatten och dessutom en betydlig mängd qväfve och oorganiska ämnen, hvilka hindra förbränningen. Ett sålunda sammansatt ämne brinner alls icke, då det antändes, såsom förhållandet t. ex. är med ett stycke trä, och det låter sig endast med svårighet förbrännas, t. o. m. om det omgifves med brinnande lågor. Det första villkoret för att förbränningen skall kunna försiggå raskt och fullständigt är att upphettad syrgas i riklig mängd tillföres liket, och derföre lemna alla de förbränningsugnar, de må nu eldas med ved, stenkol eller gas, som låta en syrefattig, om

också aldrig så het låga stryka fram omkring liket, otillfredsställande resultat. Bättre blir detta, om i lågan införes en större mängd luft, men allra bäst, om alls ingen låga användes, utan liket omspolas med upphettad luft eller syrgas. Så är också förhållandet vid den tyska förbränningsugnen, den s. k. Siemenska.

Professor Reclam vid universitetet i Leipzig upptog med anledning af nyssnämnda verdensutställning i Wien frågan om likförbränning med energi och lycka. För att erhålla en god ugnskonstruktion vände han sig till ingenjör Friedrich Siemens, egare af en glasfabrik i Dresden, hvilken redan förvärfvat sig ett namn såsom utmärkt pyrotekniker. Med användande af samma princip, som i den bekanta Siemenska generatoren, hade denna också snart löst sin uppgift, så att han redan den 9 okt. 1874 kunde utföra en likförbränning. Rättigheten af detta system erkändes så allmänt att t. o. m. den berömda engelske kirurgen Sir Henry Thompson, hvilken såsom ifrig likbrännare själf konstruerat en ugn, öfvergaf sitt system för det bättre Siemenska.

Ett äkta par D. i England hade i ett dem emellan uppgjortt testamente tillförsäkrat hvarandra att den efterlevande skulle föranstalta om, att de jordiska kvarlevorna af den först aflidne skulle förbrännas. När derföre Lady D. år 1874 aflidit, blef hennes lik efter balsamering sändt till Köln, samt, emedan likbränningsfrågan längre framskridit i Sachsen, vidare till Dresden, der det, såsom nyss nämndes, blef förbrändt 9 okt. 1874 uti Siemens fabrik. Man sökte göra denna första förbränning så högtidlig som möjligt och, då svårigheter mötte att få någon prest att bevista densamma, blottade hvar och en af de närvarande sina hufvuden och höll i tysthet en kort bön, innan likkistan med liket infördes i ugnen.

Den andra förbränningen i samma ugn skedde redan en månad derefter eller 6 nov. 1874. Det var äfven denna gång en

qvinna, som heldre ville öfverlemnas sitt lik till lågorna än till den hemska grafven. Hon hade afidit i en ålder af 23 år och hennes make, en sydtysk läkare, bevistade förbränningsakten.

Uti Italien, hvarest dock många de mest framstående män arbetade för likbrännings införande, hade man svårare att bringa saken i verkställighet. Redan flera månader före de nu nämnda förbränningsarna hade i Milano Baron Alberto Keller afidit samt förordnat att hans lik skulle förbrännas, för hvilket ändamål han donerat 10,000 francs, af hvilka öfverskottet skulle användas till uppförandet af ett krematorium på Milanos kyrkogård. De nödiga förberedelserna härtill togo en tid af 2 år, så att donators vilja kunde gå i fullbordan först den 22 jan. 1876; men dermed var också isen bruten och dermed stälde sig ännu en gång Italien främst bland de länder, som arbetade för reformens genomförande.

Vid denna första moderna likförbränning i Italien utfördes de kyrkliga ceremonierna af den protestantiska presten Paira, som dervid bland annat yttrade: »Oss åligger det att bevitna, att religionen icke är bunden vid de vexlande begrafningsbruket; hennes lärosatser äro eviga och höjda öfver förgängliga sedvanor. Hon bjuder sina tjänare att akta den döendes fria vilja, så länge denna icke står i strid med moralens och statens lagar, och hon kan gifva åt de efterlevande samma tröst och samma lärdomar vid askurnan som vid den öppna grafven.»

Med anledning af denna förbränning slöto sig 200 likbränningsens vänner i Italien samman till en förening, hvilken under namn af »Società per la cremazione dei cadaveri» antog stadgar redan 8 febr. 1876 och allt sedan framgångsrikt verkat för likbränningsidéns utbredande ej blott i Italien utan äfven i andra länder. Bland andra resultat af denna förenings verksam-

het vill jag nämna, att den utverkat det tillägg uti den italienska helsovårdslagen att uti hela riket sedan år 1878 den s. k. fakultativa* likbränningen blifvit införd och att likbränningsanstalter utom den i Milano, som intill 5 sistlidne mars förbränt 177 lik, numera finnas i Lodi och Rom, hvarjemte man är betänkt på att uppföra sådana i flera andra italienska städer.

I Tyskland finnes f. n. endast en likbränningsanstalt, den i Gotha, hvarmed sedan år 1878 utförts 68 likbränningar. Såsom belägen midt ibland ett med oss närbefryndadt folk, äro derifrån hemtade erfarenhetsrön för oss af särskildt intresse.

Dervarande nya begravningsplats jemte derpå befintliga likbränningsanstalt invigdes högtidligen 17 nov. 1878 af pastor Dreyer, som dervid bl. a. yttrade: »Vi inviga detta ställe icke blott såsom det, hvilket skall omsluta våra gravvar. Det skall äfven bevara askan af dem, hvilkas jordiska hölje är förvandladt genom eld, och heliga skola urnorna vara för oss, heliga såsom gravvarna. — Skulle likbränning vara något ogudligt eller okristligt, så kunde vi ej inviga detta ställe dertill. Men det är icke så. Den stöter väl mot kristlig sedvänja, men icke mot kristlig tro och lära. — Vår Herre och Frälsare säger: »Det är anden, som gör lefvande, köttet är till intet nyttigt» och aposteln Paulus: »Hvad som är synligt det är af tiden, men hvad som är osynligt det är af evigheten». — När vi skiljas från det jordiska höljet, då tillhörer detta oss icke mera, ske dermed huru som helst, vår tillvaro i evigheten beröres icke det minsta deraf. Och har icke den äldrige Polykarpus och den hjeltemodige Johan Huss och många andra trosvittnen, hafva icke de dött i lågorna, och har väl någon någonsin ment att de derföre icke skulle

* Med fakultativ likbränning menar man af lagstiftningen gifven rättighet att under vissa vilkor använda likbränning i stället för begravning.

vara med i paradiset?» I Gotha står hela det protestantiska presterskapet på likbränningsens sida, hvilket äfven offentligentillkännagafs af Superintendenten Seydel vid den första der verkställda förbränningen 10 dec. 1878, dervid han förklarade att »vår stads evangeliska presterskap vill hafva offentliggjort, att den anser förbränning af de dödas jordiska kvarlefvor i stället för deras upplösning i jorden såsom icke stridande emot religionen eller den heliga skrift, och den är derföre redo till att utföra sin embetspligt vid detta så väl som vid det andra begravningssättet.» Det katolska presterskapet i orten bekämpar emellertid likbränningen, så att det lutherska presterskapet måste tjenstgöra äfven vid katolikernas likbränning. I samband härmed torde böra nämnas, att det katolska presterskapet i Italien icke, så vidt jag vet, lagt några hinder i vägen för det nya bruket.

Den nyssnämnda begravningsplatsen eger med förbränningsanstalten gemensamt begravningskapell, uti hvilket i hvardera fallet den kyrkliga ceremonien utföres efter samma ritual. Skall liket brännas, sänkes det derefter jemte hela sitt underlag ned genom golfvet och föres utan att någon vidrör kistan in i förbränningsugnen. Skall det åter jordas, utbäres det på begravningsplatsen. Man har gjort den iakttagelsen, att det i början endast var de mera upplysta samhällsklasserna, som begagnade sig af likbränningen, men att sådan numera förekommer äfven inom de lägre samhällslagren, och detta ehuru man satt priset ganska högt för en likbränning, så att densamma utgör ungefär 72 kronor.

På tal om kostnaderna vill jag nämna, att motsvarande omkostnader i Milano endast utgöra 28 kr., hvartill dock kommer betalningen för urna och plats för densamma uppställande, utgörande sammanlagt 5 till 38 kronor. Förbränningen försiggår der på endast 5 kvarts timme.

I Nordamerika skedde den första lik-

bränningen 6 dec. 1879 uti en liten stad Washington, i Pennsylvanien. Sedan dess äro i detta land utförda ungefär 20 likbränningar och ett lifligt intresse råder der för frågan, i synnerhet ibland de invandrade tyskarne.

Uti nästan alla kulturländer, med undantag af Sverige och Norge, har man bildat föreningar för att arbeta på besegradet af det aktiva samt det ännu vida svårare passiva motståndet mot den nya reformen. I England t. ex. bildades en förening redan år 1874, hvilken insamlat mycket penningar och redan för 3 år sedan kunde bygga en utmärkt förbränningsugn, men ännu har i detta konservatismens hemland myndigheternas tillstånd ej kunnat erhållas, ehuru presterskapets sympatier äro att påräkna. Såsom betecknande för frågans ståndpunkt i England vill jag anföra följande utdrag ur ett tal, som i okt. 1879 hölls af Lordbiskopen i Manchester uti en vetenskaplig förening:

»Sistlidne fredag invigde jag ett stycke af en ny kyrkogård, som ligger söder om Manchester, fullt 5 engelska mil från stadens centrum. Denna kyrkogård, som är 97 aere stor (nära 80 sv. tunland), har inalles kostat 1,800,000 kronor. Den är mycket vacker, man dock kunde jag ej dervid underlåta att göra två reflektioner. Den ena var den, att det var en mycket lång väg för de fattiga för bortskaffandet af deras döda, och den andra att nu åter ett stort stycke jord var borttaget från den del af landet, som frambringar föda åt befolkningen. — — — Jag är öfvertygad om att vi inom kort blifva tvingade till att taga spörsmålet, huruledes vi skola skaffa de döda bort från våra ögon, mera praktiskt och mera allvarligt, än vi hittills gjort. I samma bemärkelse som det heter att »sabbaten är till för människans skull, men icke människan för sabbatens», tror jag att jorden är skapt för de lefvande, men icke för de döda. Ingen förnuftig tro kan gå

ut på att det sätt, på hvilket vår dödlige lekamen faller till stoft och går upplösningsen till mötes, eller den tid, som dertill åtgår, kan stå i strid med någon af kristendomens lärdomar. Jag erkänner att mina instinkter och känslor, närmast väl på grund af vanor och idéassociationer blifvit något upprörda vid tanken på likbränning; men dessa känslor äro kända hända ologiska och oförnuftiga. Sir Henry Thompson har i en afhandling gifvit en djupsinnig och allvarlig utveckling af saken och han visar huru liten anledning det egentligen finnes för de något sjukliga känslor, som i allmänhet göra sig gällande när talet är om begrafningar. Jag vill blott fästa uppmärksamheten på att detta spörsmål inom kort måste tagas i allvarligt öfvervägande. Våra kyrkogårdar välla oss icke blott besvär, utgifter och obehag, utan utgöra rent ut en fara.»

I Zürich är det presterskapet, som ställt sig i spetsen för agitationens införande, i det att pastor primarius Lange upplät Peterskyrkan derstädes åt sin kanzler för anställandet af en offentlig debatt öfver frågan. Uti denna diskussion deltog så väl han sjelf som stadens förnämsta vetenskapliga auktoriteter, af hvilka ett par, doktor Vegmann-Ercolani och professor Kinkel, genom utgifna skrifter förberedt reformen. Numera finnas i Schweiz flera föreningar, som verka för likbrännings införande och är, enligt hvad jag förmodar, frågan nu der i det närmaste afgjord. Under nästkommande september skall i Genève en hygienisk kongress hållas, till hvilken representanter för likbränningsidén i flera länder kallats.

I vårt grannland Danmark bildades 24 mars förlidet år »Förening för Ligbrænding», hvilken i denna stund räknar närmare 2000 medlemmar. Ordföranden är jur. professor C. Goos i Köpenhamn. En af föreningens verksamaste ledamöter och stiftare, doktor F. Levinsson, har med särdeles intresse

bidragit till spridandet af likbränningsiden inom de öfriga skandinaviska länderna och har beredvilligt tillmötesgått dem med upplysningar, hvilka härutinnan vändt sig till honom.

var, »som innantill äro fulla af de dödas ben och all orenlighet».

Det fins ett ställe i Jobs bok, som är värdt en särskild uppmärksamhet.

Uti det 19 kapitlets 25 och 26:te vers står nämligen enligt Luthers öfversättning: »Jag vet att min förlossare lever och han skall på sistone uppväcka mig af jorden; och jag skall sedan med desso mine hud omklädd varda, och skall i mitt kött få se Gud». Genom likets uppbrännande skulle man således komma att gå miste om den eviga saligheten. Härmed förhåller det sig dock så, att öfversättningen är origtig, i det att den hebreiska urtexten säger just raka motsatsen, eller »——— ja, om min hud icke finnes mer, om detta kött blir förstördt och t. o. m. utan kött, skall jag se Gud».

Från Bibeln är det sålunda icke som man hemtat påståendet, att förbränningen skulle vara hednisk. Låtom oss då se hvad historien säger!

Under kristendomens första tider och sedan förut nämnda dröm om Kristi snara återkomst skingrats, egde den nya lärans bekännare inga andra fördomar för eller emot förbränningen än dem, som rädde hos de folkslag de sjelfva tillhörde, och om man också uppsökte ensliga begravningsplatser, såsom i Roms katakomber, så var detta uteslutande framtvingadt utaf fruktan för förföljelserna. Hos Arianerna fortfor seden att bränna ända in i det 15 århundradet, då de med vapenmakt undertrycktes af de ortodoxa frankerna. Förföljelsen mot likbränningen är att spåra först ifrån den tid, då kristendomen blef den segrande och kyrkan en magt, som sträfvade att allt mera befästa sitt valde. Det var en ny tid, som bröt in, och den gick hårdhänt till väga, ty den nöjde sig ej med att undanskaffa hvad orätt var, utan för att göra rent hus vände den sig, likasom radikalismen i alla tider, i första rummet emot hvad som varit heligt och kärt — emot religion, vetenskap

Man har emot införandet af likbränning anført hvarjehanda betänkligheter. Sålunda har man af religiös hänsyn anført, att den ej anstår ett kristligt samhälle, emedan den är en hednisk sedvänja, mot hvilken framstående kyrkofäder och synodalbeslut bestämdt uttalat sig. Utaf de många uttalanden af nutidens framstående kyrkans män, som jag redan anført, bör emellertid framgå, att äfven den frommaste kristen ej af religiösa skäl borde hafva något att mot likbränningen invända, men vi skola gå frågan närmare på lifvet.

Uti hvarken Gamla eller Nya testamentet finnes en enda rad, som med framgång kan anföras såsom skäl emot likbränning, utan tvärtom skulle man af de få bibelställen, der frågan i förbigående vidröres, snarare kunna göra en motsatt slutledning. Sålunda erfar man, att före den Babyloniska fångenskapen likbränningen användes bland »Guds egendomsfolk», judarne, såsom en hedersbetygelse åt konungar och härförare, men äfven af sanitära skäl. Af sistnämnda skäl har den t. o. m. blifvit anbefald af profeten Amos, enligt den troiligen tillförlitligaste tolkningen af 6:te kapitlets 10:de vers i Amos' bok.

Af särskildt intresse bör emellertid vara hvad vår religionsstiftare sjelf yttrat i frågan. Detta tyckes visa en så ringa aktning för grafven och grafläggningen, att han helt visst aldrig tänkt, att likjordandet skulle komma att få någon religiös betydelse. Till en lärjunge, som vill gå bort för att begrafva sin fader, säger han: »Låt du de döda begrafva sina döda», och till de skriftlärde och fariseer, att de liknade de graf-

och konst, och då måste naturligtvis likbränningen såsom det anseddaste begrafningssättet inbegripas uti den allmänna fördömsen. Under sådana förhållanden är det en heder att blifva bannlyst, isynnerhet när man får så godt sällskap som hela antikens skönhetsverld.

Hvad kyrkans påbud i frågor af denna art beträffar, vill jag citera ett yttrande af Napoleon den Store: »man måste noga skilja emellan det af verkligt religiös art, som presterna föreskrifva, och det som endast är afsedt att öka anseendet hos kulturens tjänare»; och ett annat af teologen och statsmannen, biskop Monrad, hvilken såsom bekant i en ödesdiger tid stått vid Danmarks riksröder: »Om det är en öfvertygelse hos helsevårdens målsmän, att det nuvarande begrafningssättet är förderligt för folkens helsa, och om staten skulle stifta en lag, som påbjöd likbränning, så anser jag icke att kyrkan är berättigad att motsätta sig en sådan lag, och, om den också ville det, huru den skulle kunna det? Hyvartill gagnar det att sätta sig på sina höga hästar och bruka stora ord, när de stora orden dock äro magtlösa? Vid alla sådana tillfällen måste kyrkan underordna sig statens bestämmelser».

Man har äfven emot likbränningen anført, att den skulle bidraga till ökande af brott, i det att den borttager den sista möjligheten till upptäckt af ett begånget mord. Det förekommer nämligen stundom (i vårt land i medeltal ung. 1 gång om året) att misstanke uppstår, det en redan begravnen person ej dött en naturlig död, i följd hvaraf myndigheterna förordna att grafven skall öppnas och liket undersökas af rättskemist. I och för sig är ett sådant tillvägagående vedervärdigt och äfven farligt, men det medför derjemte sällan något egentligt resultat, enär det endast är ett begränsadt antal gifter, som någon tid efter begravningen kunna af kemist upptäckas, i det att andra, särskildt de organiska gifterna, snart nog sönderdelas och andra,

såsom t. ex. fosfor, fördunstar. Dessutom har erfarenheten visat, att uti de fall, då giftmord sålunda konstaterats, ytterst sällan en af läkare utfärdad dödsattest förekommit vid begrafningstillfället, åtminstone har detta ej inträffat med något af de lik, som i Danmark uppgräfts under en tidsperiod af 39 år, och i Milano hafva af 10 likundersökningar, gjorda under loppet af 20 år, endast 4 lemnat positiva resultat, men i alla dessa 4 fall voro liken påträffade i en källare, dit de af mördarne blifvit undan-gömda. Noggrant iakttagna förordningar om läkareattest vid dödstillfället synas således vara tillräckligt betryggande, och den kriminella likuppgrävningen ej vara att betrakta annorlunda än såsom ett farligt, vidrigt och oftast för sent kommande försök att godtgöra en samhällets underlåtenhetssynd. Skulle likbränning blifva införd, är det naturligt att sådana anordningar vidtagas, som lemna garanti för att den döda ej varit offer för ett mord. Härigenom skulle den komma att göra den medicinska vetenskapen en stor tjänst, i det att den skulle underlätta införandet af en ordentlig liksyn och derigenom lemna materiel till en noggrannare statistik öfver dödsorsakerna, än den något land ännu eger.

En sådan likbesigtning skulle äfven verka nyttigt i andra hänseenden, i det att den skulle borttaga faran för att komma lefvande i likkistan, uppdaga de misstag, som af läkaren tilläfventyrs blifvit begångna vid behandlandet af den afidne, samt mycket underlätta upptäckten af i hemlighet begångna mord. Långt ifrån således att likbränningen ur rättsmedicinsk synpunkt eger någon enda olägenhet, är dess införande tvärtom önskvärd ur så väl denna som den rent medicinska. Också har — andra auktoriteters uttalanden att förtiga — sundhetskollegiet i Danmark i infordradt utlåtande till justitieministeriet yttrat, att anmärkningen om svårigheterna att uppdaga förbrytelser, sedan liken blifvit brända, har

efter kollegiets åsigt ingen vigt, så länge det endast är fråga om fakultativ förbränning.

Man har äfven anmärkt, att brännningen vore ett bevis på bristande pietet mot den döde och att den ej lemnade något föremål för de efterlevandes kärleksfulla omvårdnad sådant som grafkullen. Den bristande pieteten är emellertid endast ett hjernspöke hos den som så dömer, ty, om den döde af fasa för grafvens mysterier uttalat en bestämd önskan att blifva efter döden bränd, så vittnar det icke blott om kärlekslöshet utan, rent ut sagt, om råhet att motsätta sig denna önskan. De, som föredraga det nu varande begrafningssättet, lemnas naturligtvis i oqvald besittning af rättigheten att följa sin smak, och detta äfven, när i en framtid likbränningen blir det vanligaste förintelsesättet. Man kan nämligen antaga, att endast ett fåtal skall begagna sig af rättigheten att i jorden begravas, hvarigenom de nu öfverklagade olägenheterna skola mycket förminskas, och äfven att man den tiden skall hafva hunnit så långt i humanitet, att man skall tillmötesgå en så besynnerlig nyck som den att vilja nedstoppas i jorden för att der föruttna. För öfrigt borde inses, att askurnan är ett lämpligare och värdigare objekt för de efterlevandes hyllning än hvad grafkullen är, i synnerhet som eganderätten till denna senare i de flesta fall endast varar ett eller annat årtionde.

Det är således ett rent humanistiskt sträfande detta att söka få likbränningen införd. Men äfven ur sedlig synpunkt kunde man rika den och hänvisa på följderna af begravningsplatsernas förläggande på stora afstand från städerna, hvarigenom mängden hindras ifrån att besöka de bortgångnas hvilon, och banden emellan de levande och de döda slitas. Denna tanke är bland annat framhållen af erkebiskopen i Paris, kardinal Guibert, hvilken inlagt en skarp protest emot begravningsplatsernas långväga flyttning.

Det finnes många, hvilka visserligen säga sig vara öfvertygade om likbränningens företräden och om att den förr eller senare skall blifva införd äfven i vårt land, men dock förmena, att denna reform ännu länge kan uppskjutas, emedan ännu icke det gamla begrafningssättets olägenheter äro hos oss särdeles i ögonen fallande och emedan ännu icke den allmänna opinionen uttalat sig för reformen. Jag frågar då: huru stora skola dessa olägenheter vara för att anses tillräckliga? Är det ej nog att ett, låt vara oräknadt, men dock helt visst stort antal af begravningsplatsernas grannar föra en tynande och sjuklig tillvaro? Är det ej nog att årligen hundradetals af våra medmenniskor lefvande begravas och utsättas för ett qvalfullare dödssätt än det, hvar till samhället dömer sina värsta brottslingar, eller att för ett mångdubbelt större antal lifvet förbittras vid tanken på grafvens fasor? Jag kunde vidare hänvisa på de höga och allt mera stigande omkostnaderna för begrafningarna, de förkylningar, för hvilka de vid jordfastningarne närvarande utsätta sig m. m., men vill såsom ett sista skäl för reformens påskyndande betona den solidaritet folken emellan, om hvilken jag förut talat. Det anstår ej ett folk sådant som det svenska att endast liknöjdt se på huru andra kulturfolk arbeta för lösningen af denna humanitetsfråga, för att sedan i all beqvämlighet njuta frukterna af andras arbete. Vår plats är i första eller andra ledet, men icke i det sista; och för det arbete i mensklighetens tjänst, vi sålunda utöfva, för det exempel vi gifva, derför skola världens mäktige en gång hålla oss räkning, när det på allvar blir fråga om huruvida vår tillvaro såsom nation är berättigad eller icke.

Hvad den allmänna opinionen beträffar, så är det väl sant, att den ännu icke uttalat sig, men den har ju hittills icke varit i tillfälle att döma — och är det endast dess dom man väntar på, så är det min

tro och mitt hopp, att man ej skall behöfva vänta länge.

Ytterligare skäl emot likbränningen stöda sig på att densamma skulle borttaga undervisningsmateriel från anatomisalarna och verka hinderligt vid det framtida studiet af den komparativa antropologien; men så länge som brott och elände finnas, torde detta undervisningsmateriel lika väl som nu komma att finnas, och den sistnämnda vetenskapsgrenen skall helt visst i allt ökadtt mått finna materialier uti skulpturarbeten, fotografier m. m. För öfrigt bör vid så väl denna som andra anmärkningar erinras om, att det är endast fakultativ likbränning som afses.

Ett till utseendet obetydligt hinder är det dock, som tynger mera i vågskålen än alla dessa och andra skäl tillsammans, och det är den omständigheten, att enhvar af oss så förknippat begreppen död och begrafning med hvarandra, att en annan begreppssammanställning endast med svårighet låter sig verkställa. Man är med ett ord sagdt ej van vid likbränningen. Hindret skall naturligtvis med tiden allt mera bortfalla och en begreppssammanställning af död och likbränning blifva så naturlig, att man knappast skall förstå huru det någonsin kunnat vara annorlunda och att några hinder af detta slag kunnat finnas emot likbrännin- gens införande.

Det skall komma en tid med friskare och lyckligare menniskor än denna, då ej fasan för gravens ohyggligheter skall försvåra de döendes sista stunder, då större tillmötesgående mot andras känslor skall råda och då ej vår kropp skall såsom ett vederstyggligt afskräde fraktas undan. Då skola

våra stora städer prydas af praktfulla kolumbarier, uti hvilka våra kroppar hastigt och lätt förvandlas i hvit aska och uti hvilkas ljusa salar äfven arbetets slaf skall få tid att knäfalla vid de urnor, som gömma askan af hans bortgångna kära. Då skall äfven i de aflägsna bygderna här och der ett litet tempel höja sig, hvilket likasom en katolsk kyrka äfven under veckans lopp inbjuder till besök och allvarliga betraktelser, och hvarst den uppvexande ungdomen skall lära sig vörda minnet af dem, som varit bygdens heder, och således stärka det allt mera slaknande bandet emellan den och fosterjorden.

Då nu intet i Sveriges lag direkt förbjuder likbränning, skulle man möjligen här likasom i Tyskland för 8 år sedan kunna få reformen genomförd genom myndigheternas öfverrumpling. Men lojala medborgare anstår det att gå de lagliga vägarne och först söka utverka myndigheternas tillstånd, om också den vägen endast långsamt för till målet.

Det arbete, som här föreligger, är så betydande, att det vida öfverstiger en endas krafter, hvadan många måste samverka för att ett resultat skall blifva möjligt. Den allmänna opinionen måste vinnas genom föredrag, broschyrer och tidningsartiklar, samt derefter myndigheternas bifall utverkas. Det är derföre nödvändigt, att en stor förening bildas, som ömsluter medlemmar ur samhällets alla klasser och som med sin moraliska påtryckning och med den makt ett samfäldt, väl planlagt arbete skänker ar betar på den nödvändiga reformens genomförande.

