ESSIE WILLIAM

CREMATION OF THE DEAD

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Содержание

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PREFACE

Shortly after having accepted, from the members of the Council of the Cremation Society of London, the office of Secretary, a wish was expressed to me by the President of the Metropolitan Branch of the British Medical Association, that I should prepare a paper upon the Bearings of Cremation upon Public Health. A short paper, with this title, was therefore read, and was afterwards published in the Journal of the Association by the Editor, Mr. Ernest Hart. It was so favourably received by all, that I have been induced to extend my enquiries and so render the work, if possible, more acceptable as an exposition of the subject. I am sensible of its many defects, but I trust that it will be found to furnish some useful information which cannot well be obtained elsewhere, besides proving an assistance to those who are desirous of studying the question more fully.

William Eassie.
Child's Hill, London, N.W.

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Cremation of the dead is neither new in theory nor in practice. In the England of modern times, however, the question has only recently assumed recognised importance. And the more one considers cremation, the more one finds himself wondering how it has come to pass that we practise burial, with its many faults, and do not burn our dead. Thousands amongst us are now beginning to feel thankful that the dead are soon to 'rule our spirits from their urns' in a realistic and not alone in a poetical sense. They think there is something majestic and even pleasurable in the idea that it will ere long be possible, on all civilised shores, to leave their mother earth, not with a partial, but with a fully consummated sacrifice upon her altar, bidding her adieu none the worse, but rather the better, for their sojourn with her. They groan and labour under the burden of enforced burial, and 'hail with satisfaction and joy the prospect that a chariot of fire may receive them instead of the cold and darksome grave.'

The scheme has met with some enemies, and injudicious promoters of the system have not proved the least of them. The idea that it was sought to make it compulsory, was an unfortunate utterance. The notion of producing illuminating gas for general purposes from the combustion of the bodies was another mischievous idea.[1] Equally so was the proposal for the erection of a tall shaft in the cemetery grounds, where the gases could be seen consuming – something after the fashion, I suppose, of the twelfth century's *lanternes des morts*. The publication of crude and undigested fancies does more harm than good to the subject they are meant to benefit.

It has been urged that the practice of burning the dead had its origin in a heathen religion, but it is not wise to accept the imputation. Let us take Greece for an example. All historians inform us that the people of ancient Greece practised inhumation. But when they did practise cremation, they nowhere associated the burning of the dead with the worship of the gods. And we are at liberty to argue from this fact that neither did the aboriginal peoples from whom they derived it, regard it as an act with which religion had aught to do, the story of Odin notwithstanding. And the reason why the Greeks did not practise it earlier, was doubtless simply because the bulk of the colonists came from countries where another system prevailed. Cecrops and Danaus, who were instrumental in colonising Athens and Argos, were Egyptians, and Cadmus, the founder of Thebes in Bœotia, was a Phœnician.[2] Neither of these nations burnt their dead, but practised another system of burial.

There can, I think, be little doubt that the burning of the dead was originally resorted to upon sanitary grounds, and as a means of protecting the living from the effects of corruption. Putridity was observed to be loathsome and dangerous, and it was found that the practice of burning, and that only, at once resolved the body into its first elements. In Scandinavia, the dead were disposed of by fire from the earliest recorded times, and the great antiquity of the custom amongst the Celtæ, Sarmatians, and neighbouring nations, has never been doubted.[3] It was practised in our islands also in pre-historic times.

Cremation was the prevailing custom from remote ages in Scythia, or what is now called Tartary, and we are free to believe that its origin was similarly a hygienic one. The Scythians were the progenitors of the Thracians, and we read that these latter observed incineration from the earliest date.[4] The Thracians in their turn introduced the practice amongst the Greeks, although it is possible

[1] The original proposer of this scheme was M. Rudler, who proposed it to Dr. Caffe, of Paris, in 1857.

[2] Jamieson.

[3] *Ibid.*

[4] Herodotus.

that a portion of the Hellenes learnt it from the Phrygians, who again very probably obtained it from India. The Greeks, too, evidently adopted it from motives of sanitary reform; at all events, there was no religious question involved in it. About 1500 B.C., the Greeks invariably buried their dead;[5] they had not learnt the valuable lesson. They do not seem to have burned them either in the ninth century before Christ, for the Institutes of Lycurgus specify the manner in which burial was to be performed. In the time of Socrates, however, 500 B.C., cremation appears to have become optional, for Plato makes Socrates say that he did not care whether he was burned or buried. It was, however, common enough about 100 B.C.; I myself have dug up on the site of Dardanus relics of this kind of sepulture. Time rolled on, and in their turn the Romans, who also originally inhumed,[6] borrowed the salutary practice, performing it first inside the city, and then extramurally. It did not become general in Rome, however, until towards the close of the Republic. Towards the end of the fourth century it became much neglected, and finally the Christians, inimical to the practice, although it was nowhere forbidden in the New Testament, made haste to abolish it in Europe. Burial and burning appear to have been practised contemporaneously for some little time, on our own Yorkshire wolds for example,[7] but ultimately the former triumphed.

I have said that the process of burning the dead is nowhere specially forbidden in the New Testament, and neither is it in the older Scriptures. Moses nowhere legislates against it, and it is reasonable to suppose that he must have heard of it, having been a considerable traveller. The early Jews are said to have objected to burning because they held the idea that the soul holds more or less intercourse with the body for a year after death. That the ancient race held this notion is corroborated by the 'dwelling among tombs and enquiring of spirits.'[8] The Hebrews were also said to have interred in caves or tombs – from Abraham down to Joseph of Arimathea – from a fear of premature interment, since the sun was not allowed to go down twice upon the unburied dead. It is more reasonable to suppose that the motive of public health was the correct one. Possibly they might have burned their dead also – as in nearly all originally well-wooded countries – if they had been possessed of fuel.[9] This was a drawback, and from what I have seen of Palestine, I doubt whether at any time sufficient fuel could have been found for everyday use in this way. When visited by a pestilence, however, the Rabbis admit that fires were kept burning in the valley of Tophet to consume the dead.[10] This was apparently a universal custom. When Homer hinted that the frequency of the kindling of the funeral pyres was owing to the contagion sent by Apollo, he alluded to the practice.[11] And without doubt cremation was the proper treatment at such times, and would spare the horrid sights witnessed when large common graves are dug. Interments of this class are never free from danger. Instances are known where these communal graves have been opened up and the disease of the dead sufferers once more let loose upon the living.

Fortunately for sanitary science, cases are upon record where a disturbance of the interred victims of infectious epidemics has been followed by a fresh outbreak, and thus we are fairly warned of the danger. In 1828, Professor Bianchi explained how the dire reappearance of the plague at Modena was due to an excavation made in some ground where, 300 years previously, the victims of the plague had been interred. At Eyam, in Derbyshire, remarks Mr. Cooper,[12] the digging up of the plague burial-grounds caused an immediate outbreak of disease. Mr. Cooper also describes how the excavations made for sewers in the site where the victims of the plague of 1665 were buried, enhanced

[5] Cicero.

[6] Pliny.

[7] Canon Greenwell.

[8] Jamieson.

[9] Cremation is not opposed to Jewish doctrines. – 'Jewish Chronicle,' April 10, 1874.

[10] Frazer.

[11] 'Iliad.'

[12] 'On the Causes of some Epidemics.' Glasgow, 1874.

the virulence of the cholera which visited London during the year 1854. Mr. Simon had previously warned the authorities of what would result from any disturbance of the spot.[13] Dr. Playfair also declares that the fever prevalent in Rome is due to the exhalations from the soil, which is saturated with organic matter.

In 1843, when the parish church of Minchinhampton was rebuilding, the soil of the burial-ground, or what was superfluous, was disposed of for manure, and deposited in many of the neighbouring gardens. The result was that the town was nearly decimated. I have lately made personal inquiries upon the spot, and find that the mischief which resulted has been even understated. The outbreak of the plague in Egypt in 1823 has also been traced to the opening of a disused burial-ground at Kelioub, fourteen miles from Cairo. Two thousand perished in the village, and Cairo suffered fearful mortality. The outbreak of plague from this cause is also vouched for by M. Pariset, who was sent to Egypt by the French Government to inquire into the cause of the plague. Even the exhalations of a single corpse buried twelve years have been known to engender a dangerous disease in a whole convent.[14]

I think it may be accepted as proven that the burning of the dead was of purely sanitary origin, and that it is erroneous to consider it a religious one. It became identified with heathen worship, because then everything was heathen. In Italy, the Abbé Bucellati, of Pavia, deprecates the idea that cremation can in any way be considered heretical; at the most, says he, it can only be called a rash project. The Rev. Mr. Long, of Zurich, for his part, insists that religion has no title to mix itself up with the question. The subject is essentially one of health, and will so remain. We may almost say that so prominently did the practice bring forth the idea of purification in the minds of its original observers, that several semi-religious mystifications were born of it. Thus the body was supposed by some to be unclean after the soul had left it, and that fire alone could purify it. Others held that by burning the body the soul was finally loosed from the clay, and cleansed from the contaminations which it contracted in the flesh.

In order to arrive at a correct idea of all the modes of sepulture followed out in this country since the islands were first populated, it would be necessary to consult almost an endless variety of archæological, ethnological, and anthropological works. Professor Rolleston has, however, lately reprinted a paper of his, upon the methods of 'Sepulture observable in late Romano-British and early Anglo-Saxon times, in this country,' and it deals with as much of the question as answers the present purpose. He shows that burning of the dead was not resorted to by the early Christians of England, and he quotes Mr. Kemble to the effect that all Anglo-Saxon burials without cremation in England are Christian. This says nothing for or against the desirability of the reintroduction of cremation amongst us. The question, however, is a curious and interesting one, and all would doubtless wish to know whether or not the examples of cremation already recorded from fifteen counties in England are all heathen. When some of the graves were opened they were found to contain fragments of charcoal, but that again must not be necessarily taken as an evidence of cremation. It was but the other day that a wooden bowl full of charcoal was found in the tomb of Leonardo da Vinci. In the middle ages it was common to place a vessel full of ashes on the pillow of a dying Christian and to bury it with him; and the practices would seem identical. The reason for finding 'shards, flints, and pebbles' in the later and possibly Christian graves has also led to some curious discussion. It is inferred that it was probably allowed in earlier Christian times, and only discarded about the time of Shakespeare.[15] The whole controversy must be left in the hands of those who, like Professor Rolleston, are prosecuting

[13] 'The plague-pit,' says the 'Lancet' of September 16, 1854, 'is situated within the area bounded by Argyll Place, King Street, Tyler Street, Little Marlborough Street being directly over the pit.'

[14] H. W. Hemsworth.

[15] Rolleston.

researches into the early methods of burial, and who have opportunities and attainments for coming to a right and final conclusion.

It would be supremely foolish to object to the burning of the dead on the score of its being completely a heathen practice, and as if burial in the ground was not at one time open to the same objection. Not only so, but the battle between torch and spade was fought out in early times as now.

A writer of the second century admits that many of the Gentiles disapproved of cremation on the score of the cruelty which it did to the body, which did not deserve such penal treatment.[16] This is exactly what some are declaring now. An exclamation is even to be found in an old Greek poet asking Prometheus to take back the fire which he had procured them.[17] Just as now a few Christians are contesting the propriety of burning the dead upon any consideration whatever, so the heathens were disputing the like question before the advent of Christianity. Heraclitus advocated burning – Thales and Hippon burial. Up to this day the Persian fire-worshippers will have naught to do with cremation because they regard it as a profanation of their deity. Nay, peoples are still disputing in countries which are painted in pagan black upon our missionary maps, and where Christians as yet have no footing. In Japan, the Shinto sect practises burial, the Monto sect cremation.[18] In Madras Presidency the votaries of Vishnu are burned, and those of Siva are buried in the common way. Amongst the hill tribes of North Aracan one tribe buries its dead in graves dug in the villages, the adjacent one burns its dead after the fashion of the neighbouring Burmese.[19] And to quote one more example, some tribes of the Miau-Tsi – who are all of them zealous Buddhists – burn their dead, whilst others do not.[20]

People are every now and then solemnly informed that it is unadvisable to practise cremation because it is supposed to militate against a belief in the resurrection.[21]

But the ancient Romans, as has been explained by his Grace the Bishop of Manchester, believed in the immortality of the soul, which is a collateral idea, and *they* practised the burning of the dead. They did not believe in the resurrection of their present bodies, it is true, neither do many now.[22] The truth, on examination, however, appears to be that the early Christians objected to it because it was practised by the pagans, and because it was necessary to draw a strong barrier line between the two faiths. The ostensible objection which they found to burning was that their bodies had been redeemed and renewed in God's image. They taught that it was unlawful to burn the dead, because the penalty of fire had been remitted. The body was to be buried, and was thus held to be in readiness for the last trump. They did not believe that it was impossible to raise up the martyrs which were even then burnt, but they were not to burn. The breach between the two faiths was not at first an utter one, however. The Christians interred in the same places as the heathens, and even painted and engraved upon the catacombs representations of the heathen gods and goddesses.[23] The breach, however, widened, and then came the more Christian emblems of wreaths of flowers, angels, and children. Later on in succession came the Good Shepherd, the cross, the crucifixion scene, and so on,[24] gradually leading up to the skull and cross-bones of the last century. By this time the Christians heard of burning with horror. But a classical reaction set in about the time of Pope and Dryden, and

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[16] Tertullian.

[17] Jamieson.

[18] 'Lancet.'

[19] St. A. St. John.

[20] Rev. J. Edkins.

[21] The Earl of Shaftesbury once remarked to an eminent promoter of the present cremation movement, with regard to this very prevalent and erroneous notion, that it was altogether unreasonable. 'What,' said he, 'would in such a case become of the blessed martyrs?'

[22] 'I presume that it has been shown beyond doubt that the material particles which make up our bodies are in a constant state of flux, the entire physical nature being changed every seven years; so that if all the particles which once entered into the structure of a man of fourscore were reassembled, they would suffice to make seven or eight bodies.' – Rev. A. K. H. B.

[23] Dean Stanley.

[24] *Ibid.*

now again may be seen in every churchyard the broken shaft, the inverted torches, and other emblems. It would also be fairly impossible to count the number of marble urns which 'in pride of place' rest upon the monuments in our cemeteries.

Many other groundless objections have been imported into the cremation question. For instance, some demur to burning because the body of our Saviour was not so treated. Can anything be more puerile than this when once it is examined? Our Saviour's body was not burnt simply because He was a Jew, and the Jews practised burial in sepulchres. He performed several of His greatest miracles owing to this very practice. But if we are to follow the prototype so closely, why do we practise burial in the earth? And why do we not lay our dead in roomy sepulchres? I have perused most, if not all, of the religious objections which have been urged against cremation, and I humbly say that they appear to me to be outside the pale of argument altogether. They rank only as very respectable crotchets, and never rise above mere sentiment. The truth is, that the question of burying the dead or of burning them ought never to have been made, if ever it has seriously been made, a religious question. As professing Christians we should take the advice of a late writer, and take care that the burning of the dead does not fall into altogether infidel hands, and so become at last a symbol of irreligion.[25] It would be wise also to commence adding to the Hymnals[26] compositions which would suit the new and more rational order of things, and so prepare the weaker brethren for what one cannot help calling the inevitable.

Cremation has been objected to[27] on the score of its being an indecent mode of disposal of our dead, but I for one differ from this view entirely. Anyone who resides on a main road leading to a large metropolitan cemetery, will be able to speak with certainty as to the indecency of very much which they witness appertaining to the present mode of sepulture. And how anyone can be found to uphold against all argument the present unfeeling shams of paid mourners with 'wands, batons, feathers, and fooleries,' indulged in simply from custom's sake and a dread of what the world would say if the 'conventional costumes and mock expressions of woe' were omitted, I cannot imagine. The funerals of the rich are always conducted with decorum, but those of the poor are often hideously the reverse of this, and tend, I am sure, more than anything to blunt the finer feelings of our nature.

We shall have occasion to notice in the proper place the proposed procedure in the new order of things, but may here remark that when cremation has once taken place, shorn of no religious rite, the ashes may be placed in urns or interred in ground duly set apart for the purpose, and surrounding the machinery for incineration. Or they may be removed to distant and loved churchyards without fear of evil effects following. I think that the likeliest place for the reception of the relics would be the vaults of our churches, where they could be taken charge of by the ministers of religion. Once in charge of appointed persons, no unseemly litigation could take place as to the possession of them. In Siam the ashes are sometimes buried in the grounds surrounding the temples, and a small pyramidal mound erected over them.[28] There could be no objection to treat them so here, but if urned they could be equally well placed in a columbarium,[29] and proper inscriptions put over the receptacles, as was

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[25] I. O. in 'Church Review.'

[26] Cremation has already been made the subject of verse upon the Continent. Dr. Moretti, of Cannero, in the 'Annali di Chimica,' 1872, has given to the world some excellent verses; and Professor Polizzi, in a poem published at Girgenti, 1873, and dedicated to the memory of Dr. Salsi, has also eloquently apostrophised the subject. Some two-and-twenty stanzas in the Milanese dialect were published in 1874, by Civelli of Milan. I have also seen some German verses, signed 'Dranmor,' and a short but charming poem in the same language by Justinius Kerner. It is a matter of regret that those of our own poets who have been in favour of burning the dead did not enshrine their proclivities in verse. Southey, for instance, wrote that the custom of interment 'makes the idea of a dead friend more unpleasant. We think of the grave, corruption, and worms: burning would be better.' But he left us no poetry on the subject.

[27] It forms no part of my purpose to defend cremation against those who consider that its practice might lead to the commission of crime owing to the entire destruction of the body. This and other objections have been suitably dealt with in the work of Sir Henry Thompson.

[28] Crawfurd.

[29] See Plate VI.

done on the small stone sarcophagi of Italy. An English Catholic writes to the effect that cremation would once more enable us to bury our dead in the churches,[30] and the suggestion would commend itself to many minds. Some such practice is hinted at in the book of Isaiah. On All Saints' day[31] the vaults could be thrown open for public resort.

In both ancient Greece and Rome the dwelling-house was made the repository of the funeral urns; at all events, the practice was carried on for a very long period. The Thebans at one time had a law that no one should build a house without a specific repository for the dead.[32] It is possible that private mausoleums could with due decency be attached to ancestral mansions in our country,[33] but such cases will necessarily be rare. Even then they should be subjected to proper supervision. It would most certainly prove unseemly for the poorer classes to place them, as has been mooted, in their residences, subject to all the inconveniences of removal and other easily imagined drawbacks. Disrespect and irreverence only could follow such a recommendation. The Theban regulation just adverted to proves that the heathens, as they are called, were not to be charged with any lack of respect to their departed dead. On the contrary, the most tender sentiments are wound round the practice of cremation. Hercules is reported to have burnt the body of Argius, because only in this way could he return the son to a sorrowing father.[34] Nay, in some cases the reverence for the dead became transcendental, and the rites of cremation were carried to such an extent that the funeral pile was shapen like an altar, and bedewed with wine and incense. This, however, was in the decadence of the nation. Nor was this all, for sometimes an altar called an *acerra* was afterwards built before the sepulchre.

These few remarks upon the cremation of human bodies have as yet referred only to those which have succumbed to the ordinary evils of life; but I cannot forbear recording my conviction that it would be wise in the stricken field to have recourse to the practice. During the sittings of the recent International Sanitary Congress a paper was read by Professor Reclam of Leipzic, in which he most strongly urged the adoption of cremation after destructive battles. He described a new portable burning apparatus capable of reducing the carcase of a horse to ashes within two hours, and at a cost of four shillings' worth of fuel. He moreover declared that the dead, both men and horses, left on the battlefield of Gravelotte might have been by the aid of such machinery reduced to 'a harmless heap of white ashes in four days.' One thing is certain: science, which invented the mitrailleuse, could easily devise a proper apparatus.[35]

Combatants who have been slain, or who have perished through sickness, are buried as haste dictates, and often imperfectly. I saw, during the war, relics of the dead protrude from the Sebastopol trenches. The bodies at Metz were in many cases exhumed by the Germans and re-interred, because the superficial burial rendered them dangerous to adjoining tenements, and a source of contamination to watercourses. At Sedan the same thing occurred, only in this instance the dead bodies were consumed with pitch and straw.[36] Cremation is the only practice which seems commendable in times of warfare. Numerous dead Saracens were burnt by the King of Castile. During the wars between the English and the Burgundians and the French – the latter led by Joan of Arc – the dead were on one occasion piled up outside the city of Paris, and consumed in one huge pyre. After the late battle of Cuenca, the Carlists threw many of their dead into fires presumably lit for the purpose. Surely it would be well for sanitation's sake, that the slain were burnt, as in the olden times, upon days set apart

[30] 'Building News,' April 18, 1874.

[31] Or All Souls' day. Some most touching scenes are witnessed in continental cemeteries on this occasion, more particularly in France and North Germany.

[32] Potter.

[33] See Plate V.

[34] Jamieson.

[35] Mr. Hemsworth has suggested an apparatus for the purpose.

[36] Dr. Parkes, 'Practical Hygiene,' 4th edit. 1874.

by arrangement of neutrals. The Genevan and other Conventions could scarce find nobler work to inaugurate than this. It would be a wise repetition of history, should another great war unfortunately break out, if the combatants would adopt this salutary practice of 3,000 years ago. With the ancient Athenians, when soldiers fell in battle it was the custom to collect them into tents, where they lay for a few days, in order to ensure recognition. Each tribe then conveyed their dead in cypress shells to the *Ceramicos* or place of public burning; an empty hearse following behind in memory of the missing. It is not necessary, however, that the dead should be burned internationally. During the Trojan war – and since the discoveries of Dr. Schliemann we are almost at liberty to believe in it – men were sent out from each side to collect the dead, and the Trojans and allies burnt on separate pyres. There can be no doubt whatever that the dead were so treated. I have always considered that one or more of the huge earth tumuli on the plains of Troy, which I have frequently visited, would prove to cover ancient funeral pyres, and this point was put beyond all dispute by Mr. Frank Calvert in 1859. He opened up the Hanai-Tepeh tumulus there, and found an immensity of ashes, corresponding to what might have been expected after a great burning of the dead. He came to the conclusion that this was the site of the funeral pyre raised by the Trojans after the first truce.[37]

Were cremation practised now-a-days in times of warfare, and with our improved appliances, there would be no costly monuments to be kept up by the invaders, such as we now jealously maintain on the heights of Sebastopol[38]– nothing be left behind to recall a strife best forgotten. The ashes of our warrior dead could even be brought home to lie in the fatherland. When Nestor recommended the bodies of the slain Achæans to be burnt close to the ships, in order that the survivors might be able to carry home the bones, and raise over them a common tomb,[39] he proved himself much wiser than our generation.

The general adverse feeling to burning even the dead bodies of animals at the present day, has without doubt often brought about serious evils. During the Crimean war the putrefaction of numberless horses in and around the French camps became ultimately a serious matter,[40] and had they been destroyed by fire no evil effects could have followed. Why were they not destroyed by fire? – for fear of offending the prejudices of their allies? For one reads that in the battle of Paris, on March 30, 1814, 4,000 horses which were killed, were burnt twelve days afterwards. It is doubtful, too, whether or not the removal of diseased cattle from our midst by burial only, is sufficient to stamp out a very virulent plague. I find that during the great plague of 1865, in Great Britain alone 132,000 cattle were attacked; 17,368 of which were killed, and 81,368 of which died.[41] Had a few hecatombs been slain and burnt at the commencement of the visitation, or had the initial thousand of sickly ones been slain and consumed by fire in Russia, the steppe murrain would have been speedily stamped out.

In a similar manner should be treated the whole of the meat seized as unfit for food. In Gloucester, some years ago, and when the mayor had no power to fine the vendors of bad butchers' meat, the carcases were, it is said, destroyed by fire outside the city wall. Would that such jurisdiction existed now! In the metropolis alone, thousands of tons of animal food are yearly condemned, to say nothing of fruit and vegetables. The State should burn these up with even more alacrity than contraband of custom. And the purification by fire might be even extended to the humblest things. It has been said that the lower animals which perish in our midst must perforce send thousands of

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[37] 'J. Arch. Soc.' vol. xvi.

[38] The commissioners sent to report upon the state of the English graveyards in the year 1872 found no less than 130 cemeteries occupied by our dead. Forty-five of them contained no monuments, and 65 only headstones of the commonest kind. The French had gathered together some 28,000 of *their* dead, and formed one large *campo santo*. The English commission reported that it would require 5,000*l.* to put the graveyards in seemly order, and an annual expenditure of some 200*l.* more. It appears that the graves have been frequently rifled by the Tartar peasantry in search of rings and other valuables. See 'Daily Telegraph,' Oct. 30, 1874.

[39] 'Iliad.'

[40] Dr. Parkes.

[41] Gamgee on the 'Cattle Plague.'

pounds of mephitic vapour daily into the air, if left unburnt.[42] It is not necessary to enumerate what else it would be desirable to destroy in this way. They can be seen in nearly every river, canal, and pond, in every ditch, gutter, and even street.

Medical men are the chief exponents of the good results which will follow the adoption of cremation, and with one exception the whole of the foreign writers upon the subject are professors of some branch of medical science. It is the same in our own country.[43]

[42] Frazer.

[43] The last public utterance was made by Dr. Wheelhouse, of Leeds, in his address of October in the present year. He says: —'Do we not shun, and that most wisely, the presence of those afflicted with infectious diseases so long as they remain amongst us; and yet, no sooner are they removed by death, than we are content, with tender sympathy indeed, and most loving care it is true (but with how much wisdom?), to lay them in the ground that they may slowly dissipate their terribly infectious gases through the soil, and saturating that, may thereby recharge the rains of heaven, as they filter through it, with all their virulence and terrible power of reproduction in the systems of the living. I am not the thorough and entire believer in the disinfecting and depurating power of the soil that I once was; for terrible examples of its failure have, in my judgment, come under my notice.'Sir Henry Thompson has lately sounded a note of alarm on this subject; and though, for the present, it may fall upon ears unheeding or unsympathetic, I yet venture to think that, in time to come, his warning will be enforced by stern necessity, and that some better method of disposing of our dead will take the place of the burial so honoured and revered by us.'

CHAPTER II
METHODS OF TREATING THE DEAD

It will be necessary for my purpose to give a short description of the chief modes of disposing of the dead, and to quote a very few examples of each practice. In instancing such examples, I will as much as possible confine myself to my note-books of the last four years, and by so doing the matter will not only be more likely to possess novelty, but it will have been based upon the late observations of our distinguished travellers and possess authenticity.

The first method of disposal which I will mention is Exposure, which might be better described as no burial at all. The Colchians and Phrygians at one time hung the dead bodies upon the limbs of trees,[44] and some of the Indians of the Plains of North America to the present day do little else, since they expose their dead, after a rude bandaging, upon platforms erected upon the top of tall poles. Many ancient nations, however, purposely exposed their dead to the predatory instinct of animals. For instance, the Syrcanians abandoned their dead to wild dogs.[45] The ancient Ethiopians threw their dead into the water, to be devoured by aquatic animals.[46] The Parsees, as far back as 400 B.C., and for an untraced time previously, exposed their deceased friends upon high gratings to feed birds of prey, and such 'towers of silence' are in use up to the present day. Dr. Aveling informs me that in India they are accustomed to carry the body to the top of a hill and place it upon a stone slab, returning for it in order to bury it when the bones are picked clean. Disturbances have frequently taken place of late between the Hindoos and Parsees owing to this practice, for the vultures and other birds often let fall portions of the body during their flight into the gardens of the former. And speaking still of our own times, the Hindoos often expose their dead by the banks of their sacred river to the attacks of the river monsters; some of them even, when fuel is scarce, cast the partly burnt body into the Hooghly. Some Kaffir tribes also remove the dead out of sight to spots in the bush, where they are devoured by wild beasts.[47]

Casting the body into the deep is another form of exposure, with the reservation that although it is understood to be in the nature of things that it will be devoured by the lower animals, this is not the primary motive. The practice is common with all maritime nations on the occurrence of deaths out at sea. Burial in the sea generally has, however, of late been recommended as a panacea for the ills seen to be consequent upon inhumation. One writer[48] pictures the 'dead ship' daily departing from the strand with its lifeless burden, and reverently and prayerfully committing the bodies to the bosom of the 'mystic main,' until the time when the sea shall give up its dead. But there is little to recommend the practice, even if the idea were not revolting to a people who exist largely upon fish and crustaceans. When a flight of locusts was some years ago swept by a storm into the Bay of Smyrna, many people there would not feed upon fish for a considerable time afterwards, and what would the feeling be if only the dwellers in our littoral towns and villages followed out burial in the sea? Even the *sinking* of the bodies with heavy weights down to the ocean's depths would be hazardous. The only people who appear to practise sea-burial are the aborigines of the Chatham Islands. When a fisherman there departs this life, they put a baited rod in his hand, and, after lashing him fast in a boat, send him adrift to sea.[49] But I need not further continue the subject,[50] and I think that it may be taken for granted,

[44] Frazer.

[45] Spondanus.

[46] Frazer.

[47] 'Iron.'

[48] Veritz.

[49] Welch and Davis.

[50] Dr. Parkes, in the chapter upon the *Disposal of the Dead*, in 'Practical Hygiene,' evidently leans to the opinion that burial in

that sea-burial, or immarment, or immersion, or aquation, or whatever names the method may be known by, will never become general. The ancient Lacustrine dwellers did not practise water-burial, but disposed of their dead upon *terra firma*, evidently from motives that have already been explained.

A method of petrifaction has lately been broached, and has met with some adherents. Something is to be produced similar to a relic which I once saw for sale in Manchester, taken from a guano-bed about thirty years ago, and which had been interred in the phosphates about a hundred and fifty years previously. In a cave in the Bay of Nipea, a number of bodies were discovered which had been petrified by the waters of some springs. The latest mode of effecting this kind of sanitary preservation was practised upon the body of Mazzini; and the result was, I understand, very disappointing.

A system of inhumation analogous to that practised when stone-coffins were in use is now agitating in Germany.[51] It is proposed to encrust the subject over with a cement, and, after placing it in a sarcophagus of similar artificial material, to pour more of the same matter in a fluid state around it, so that the dead would be entombed in a solid matrix of long-enduring material. But those who are practically acquainted with the nature of cements, or rather with the impossibility of resting assured that proper cements would always be used, will know that it is more than likely that, out of the 32,000 who are said to die annually per million, one-half of the bodies would be enveloped in an impoverished material, which would speedily fall to pieces, with disastrous results. Dr. Sedgwick has expressed himself as certain that even plaster of Paris would prove ineffective in preventing the exhalations from coffins. Supposing, too, that each of the defunct required a space of one cubic yard only, where could cemeteries be obtained which could afford permanently to alienate 32,000 cubic yards of space per million annually? The scheme carries wildness upon its very face. Something analogous to this system of burial was the strange one carried out by the ancient Peruvians. A late traveller[52] has described some of the Huacas, as the places were called, and the well-preserved remains of which are still to be seen. It was a system of piling up coffins of plaster in pyramid fashion, to such an extent that one of these pyramidal mounds measures over 14½ millions of cubic feet. One carefully examined measured over 3½ millions of cubic feet, and was one mass of half-mummified bodies. As fast as a death took place, a chamber of sun-dried material was prepared upon the mound, and the body laid in it; and although the material of which the mound was composed was little else than mud-plaster, these cellular-built Huacas possessed a wonderful power of resistance to decay. One of them, in 1854, had occasion during the war to accommodate a battery of artillery on its summit.

Many of the ancient peoples buried in caves. The primeval races frequently used the caverns once inhabited by the extinct beasts for this purpose.[53] The ancient Persians hewed out holes in the mountains with the same view. The early Arabians also hid their dead in caves, in order to protect them from wild beasts. Burial-caves of some ancient Russian peoples are found along the Borysthenes.[54] To this class of burial might also be said to belong all those tombs which were built up in chambers with rude pieces of stone, and whether afterwards heaped over with earth or not. A tomb of this latter description was the huge barrow of the Emperor Yung-Lo, with its extensive megalithic avenue leading to its centre, by way of which the dead was visited or the tomb cleansed.[55] The stone lines on Dartmoor may have originally belonged to this category. Even at the present day the Inguishes of the Caucasus bury in vaults of masonry built above ground, with an aperture in the west side by which the corpse is introduced, and which is afterwards filled up with stones.[56]

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the sea *might* suit maritime nations.

[51] Dr. von Steinbeis.

[52] Mr. H. J. Hutchinson.

[53] Buckland.

[54] Frazer.

[55] Lieut. Oliver.

[56] Howarth.

We now approach *burial in the earth*, and the common practice of the present day. It is not needful, however, to say much here concerning it, as it will be treated of in a separate chapter, where its shortcomings will also be noted. The most persistent practisers of inhumation[57] are the Chinese. They seem rarely to have followed any other system of burial. Long before the Christian era they used coffins, and previous to committing them to the ground inserted in them gold and silver valuables. But at that time they did not form grave-mounds or fence them round with extensive palisades.[58] The secret of their attachment to burial in the earth lies in the fact that they believe that the body must rest comfortably in the grave, or misfortune will follow the family.[59] The Chinese are therefore particularly anxious about the suitableness of the burial site, and sometimes a priest is consulted and a fresh interment made. This superstition has considerable disadvantages, because the dead not being interred in enclosed spaces, as with us, but at the fancy of the relatives, it is sometimes impossible to make roadways from place to place. They oppose tramways and railways for this reason, and riots with the Franks have already taken place in consequence. The Chinese never desecrate the graves of even foreign sailors, and have been known to inter cast-ashore bodies with the greatest attention. To wherever they themselves wander, and whether they die and are buried in California or in Australia, they are eventually re-interred in the Flowery Land, in the mortuary erections of the villages dear to them. It is therefore not uncommon to see a China-bound vessel from San Francisco well freighted with the bones of disinterred Celestials. On the hills in China the graves are often allowed to remain undisturbed for years, whilst in the low-lying districts the bones are gathered up as soon as possible.[60] There is no such thing there as a burying-ground or cemetery.

The treatment of the dead known as embalming was carried on by the ancient Egyptians from apparently the remotest times. They believed in the transmigration of souls, and their return in three thousand years to the same body; hence the practice. Long before the sumptuous mummy-pits were commenced by the later races, the system was in full observance. There have lately been exhibited[61] a bone necklace and two flint bracelets which were found in a very rude mummy-pit on the edge of the Plain of Thebes, and doubtless these represent the distant antiquity of Egypt. Flint instruments have also been found in mummy-cases.[62] The extent of country over which mummifying must have extended was enormous, if, as is urged,[63] there was any kinship between the red races of Europe and America and the Egyptians – who all practised embalming in some shape or form – and as was supposed to be the case from the existence of pyramid building in all three countries.

Embalming has continued to meet with supporters in most civilised countries, but little practical result follows, for the opportunities of practising it are few and far between. Some literature exists on the subject, and a few treatises have been published upon it in our own country, notably one by Surgeon Greenhill in 1705. Mummifying preparations were, I find, patented by Orioli in 1859, by Morgan in 1863, by Audigier in 1864, and by Larnandes in 1866. Suggestions for a partial embalmment were also published in 1860 by Copping and in 1863 by Spicer. The filling of the arterial and vascular systems with concentrated solutions was also proposed by Spear, Scollay, and by two Parisians, in the year 1867; and yet another patent was issued in 1868. But we may assume that an universal system of embalmment is undesirable in our times. There is no purpose to serve in withholding from nature her very own. Cases may be imagined in which the practice would be advisable; but, as a rule, the earth's surface is required for the living, not for the dead; and we have, at least here, no underground caves. Had the Egyptians lived in a damp climate such as ours, there would have been no embalming.

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[57] This word conveys the meaning of burial in the actual earth better perhaps than any other.

[58] Wylie.

[59] Dr. Eatwell.

[60] Lockhart.

[61] By Mr. McCullum in 1873.

[62] Rossellini.

[63] By Professor Gennarelli.

It is not every country that is suited to the practice. The people of Etruria were, it is now supposed, Egyptian in descent, but they were content with images of mummies only. The failures we ourselves have met with, and which are to be seen in the Royal College of Surgeons Museum[64] and other places, are quite sufficient to disenchant anyone. The Egyptian authorities themselves eventually abolished the practice.[65] What would they have said if they had lived to see their revered dead and their sacred animals carted away and sold as a drug, or worse still, as a manure? Professor Coletti has wisely remarked that when a man passes over to the majority[66] he should speedily become 'a handful of simple earth and nothing more.'

There is a system of burial somewhat analogous to embalming, which consists of drying up the body, and then interring it. The ancient Peruvians used to dry their dead in the sun, and inter them in a sitting posture, bound in cotton cloth, the quantity of saltpetre in the ground completing the desiccation.[67] The Huacas or huge pyramidal burial mounds of these people, which were so constructed that each added body, with its funeral accessories, had its own clay-mortar enclosure, prove also that some rude attempt at embalmment was practised.[68] To the present day races are discovered which possess some knowledge of the art. A tribe in South Australia practise the following system. They place the deceased in a sitting posture near the top of the hut, and keep up fires until the body is dry, when they proceed to bandage it. Eventually they hide it away amongst the branches of trees.[69] In another remote part of the world, Japan, the Aino aboriginals, when a chief dies, lay the body out at the door of the hut, remove the viscera, and wash it daily in the sun for a whole year. When completely dried, the remains are put in a coffin and buried.[70] In India beyond the Ganges, the Looshais also practise a desiccation of the dead.[71] And the manner in which the body of our noble traveller Dr. Livingstone was prepared previous to bringing him home, would seem to point to the prevalence of such a custom, or to the tradition of one, amongst the African races.

There remains now only cremation to notice, the origin of which practice is lost in obscurity. It would serve little purpose to compile a mere list of the countries in which it was practised. Sufficient now to say that nearly all the ancient peoples observed it, the Chinese and the Jews being notable exceptions to this rule. The ancient Germans burnt their dead;[72] so did the ancient Lithuanians – placing the ashes in urns of unburnt clay, and burying them in mounds, as is proved by an exploration of the great barrows near Sapolia in Russia.[73] Over our own islands also, cremation seems to have been common. Urns are still unearthed from time to time in England, and in parts of Ireland – one part of Antrim especially – the ground is almost studded with burial sites of this character. In Scotland, too, many similar remains have been discovered. In Hindoostan the system is all but universal, and in Siam, where the ashes are frequently placed in urns of great value,[74] it doubtless existed from the first peopling of the country. The people of Pegu and Laos also burn their dead;[75] and in Burmah,

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[64] See the body of Mrs. Van Butchell, embalmed by Dr. Hunter and Mr. Carpenter in 1775.

[65] Walker.

[66] What a majority this must be, if the human skeleton from the Florida Reef is rightly estimated by Agassiz at 10,000 years old, the Egyptian relics from the Limant Bay borings by Rosière at 30,000, the remains from the New Orleans forest by Dowler at 50,000 years, and if the human bones found at the Illinois river, at Natchez, at Calaveras, at Anguilla Island, and in the Ashley river, are correctly stated by Schmidt, Dickeson, Whitney, Rijgersma, Holmes, Lubbock, and others, as contemporaneous with the mammoth and mastodon!

[67] Hutchinson.

[68] Bradley.

[69] Hutchinson.

[70] St. John.

[71] Dr. A. Campbell.

[72] Tacitus.

[73] Bogouschefsky.

[74] Crawfurd, &c.

[75] Feudge.

when a Buddhist priest of rank dies, the body is embalmed in honey, laid in state for a time, and then sometimes blown up with gunpowder together with its hearse.

Scarcely a year passes over our heads without adding to our list of cremation-practising peoples. Thus we have lately learnt that amongst the Gāro Hill tribes of Bengal, the dead are kept for four days and burnt at midnight within a few yards of their residences, the ashes being put into a hole in the ground dug upon the exact spot where the burning took place, and a small thatched building erected over the grave, which is afterwards allowed to fall to pieces.[76] The Khāsi Hill tribes also practise cremation of the dead, and the ashes are collected in an urn, and temporarily buried close by, until it is deemed proper to remove them to the family depository of the tribe.[77] Some of the Aracan tribes of Further India also burn their dead, leaving at the place of cremation some packets of rice, a neglect of which custom is a bar to inheritance.[78] And not only from remote Asia do instances of cremation come before us, but from America, where the practice was little suspected. Thus the Cocopa Indians there practise it to the present day, laying the body upon logs of mezquite wood, burning it, with the effects of the deceased, and placing the ashes in urns with peculiar ceremonies.[79] The Digger Indians also burn their dead, the nearest relative collecting the ashes and mixing with them the gum of a tree. This they smear on their heads in evident imitation, one would suppose, of the Israelites when in mourning.[80]

[76] Elliot.

[77] Major Godwin-Austen.

[78] St. A. St. John.

[79] Professor Le Conte.

[80] Chapman.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.