

## THE DISPOSAL OF OUR DEAD.

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The theme I have chosen for this discourse is one that has already taken a strong hold on the public mind, and is destined to be fully discussed in its various aspects: I mean the substitution of burning for burial; the adoption of fire, in the place of earth, as the power that shall decompose our bodies—reducing ashes to ashes, instead of dust to dust. The practice, though it has fallen into disuse and become unpopular, is as old as any, and as honorable. The discussion of it in modern times is not new; in Europe, at least, the idea has become familiar. It is favorably entertained by people of opposite cast of mind; by men of science, and men of religion; means have been perfected for making the idea an institution; and the ancient custom has been actually, in some countries, in essence, though not in form, revived. The sudden interest excited abroad and at home in the question, is due not to any love of novelty or desire for change; it comes from the side, neither of an excessive spiritualism nor of an excessive materialism; but is rather another phase of the interest in the

whole welfare of the living that is now engaging so much earnest thought. The care of men and women is characteristic of our time; it addresses itself to every department of life. It appears in better provisions for physical health; in thoughtfulness for the rearing and nurture of children; in the study of sanitary science, in improved methods of regulating cities; in solicitude for the housing and distribution of families; in short, in every kind of concern for temporal comfort. The subject of cremation falls immediately in the line of these discussions. It is a subject that is felt to be of vital moment to the living; and, by those who have the well-being of the living at heart, is to be approached in an earnest and serious spirit, for it is a subject that concerns us as human beings—not as adherents of a peculiar faith, or members of a particular church, or believers in a special creed. The movement in favor of cremation is not an infidel or pagan movement, but one in which a bishop may feel as deep an interest as a rationalist; a devotee as a doctor; a minister as a materialist; the most delicate and poetic, as the coarsest and most prosaic mind. Its significance is in its simple humanity.

Christendom borrowed, or rather inherited its custom of interring the dead, from the Hebrews, with whom it was universal. The burning of the dead is

scarcely mentioned in the Old Testament. But one case is spoken of in which bodies were actually burned—the case of Saul and his sons; but the narrative is not clear, and the instance was clearly an exception to a general rule. The burning there, moreover, was but partial, for the rites of sepulture were afterwards performed on the bones. Jacob and Joseph were embalmed, after the Egyptian fashion, for their more complete preservation. The care which Abraham took to purchase a plot of ground in Macpelah, as a family burial-place, was continued by his descendants. The tenderest feelings gathered around the family tomb. To be gathered to one's fathers was the familiar phrase applied to death. To remain unburied was revolting to the Jewish mind. It was the last misfortune. Even executed criminals were not allowed to remain unburied after sunset of the day of their execution. No doubt the dread of infection had its share in suggesting such an enactment—a danger at times so great, that, at least on one occasion, relatives were bidden to burn their dead to escape from it. The Hebrew burial-places were sacred. They were usually outside of the cities—only kings and prophets being honored with interment within the walls. The graves were commonly caves or grottoes, situated in shady, cool retreats, surrounded by trees. The suggestion for our

ornamental cemeteries may well have been derived from the usage of the ancient Hebrews, whose burial-places were often gardens. The graves were either dug, as ours are, in the earth, or hewn out in the side of a rock; in either case carefully guarded against spoliation. The tombs were often costly and magnificent—splendid mausoleums not unfrequently—with many chambers, where each person might lie, in his own separate niche, and so preserve individuality in death. Reverence for the dead body was profound.

The custom of interment did not rest solely in private or social feeling. There was an idea in it: the idea that the body contained, in some sense, the soul; and that its burial was somehow a guarantee of the soul's peace. This idea was spread widely through the ancient world. Primitive rites of interment indicated plainly that, when a body was buried, something living was supposed to be buried with it. The expression: "We enclose the soul in the grave;" the custom of calling thrice on the soul of the deceased person; the wish that he might live happy in his abode under the ground; the three farewells; the writing of the name on the tomb; the habit of burying with the body vestments, utensils, arms; of bringing food and wine to the sepulchre at stated seasons—all suggest that the soul was believed to remain with the body in the subterranean abode.

The body being unburied, the soul was not at rest, but hovered sadly about the lifeless form, or wandered, an unhappy spirit, or a malignant demon, tormenting the living with diseases, bringing misfortune on them, terrifying them as spectres—now pleading, now threatening, if by any means it might obtain sepulture. Hence the universal anxiety respecting burial; the directions given concerning it; the care that it should be done properly; the solemnity of the duty that was devolved on relatives and friends in regard to the last funeral rites. Hence the desperate efforts to rescue the bodies of chiefs slain in battle, that their souls might have rest in the sacred earth, instead of roving in sadness, as they must, if the bodies fell into the enemy's hands, and were left a prey to vultures and jackals. It seems to have been the earliest opinion that men lived in the tomb; that souls did not leave bodies, but stayed fixed to that piece of ground where the bones were interred.

This belief prevailed, and may be distinctly found, with certain tribes of North America. The evidence of such a belief cannot be detailed here, and need not be, if it could; for the bare indication of it is enough for my purpose. But evidence there is to show that the aborigines of this continent did, here and there, hold the doctrine, in a clear and emphatic form, that the soul would return to the bones; that the bones

would once more take on the covering of flesh ; and that thus the man would rejoin his tribe. Language was employed very similar to that used by Paul, in the famous chapter of I. Corinthians. The bodies of the dead were spoken of as seeds, which, planted in the earth, or preserved safely in sheltered places, would in time germinate into living beings. In some dialects, the word for bone and the word for soul are essentially the same ; the word for soul literally denoted "that which is within the bone." The same doctrine was applied to the bones of animals. (Brinton's "Myths of the New World," p. 254, &c.)

A belief not remotely akin to this may be found in the Old Testament. From the beginning, the Hebrews closely associated the soul with the body ; and even when the notion of an under world for departed spirits, as distinct from the grave, had become well developed, the body was not left out of the account in the anticipation of a future state. The prophet Isaiah, speaking of the dead bodies of Israel's enemies, cries exultingly : "They are bodies that shall not rise again ; shadows that shall not reappear ; but *thy* bodies (oh, Israel !) shall revive : the corpses of my own people shall be restored." The vision of the valley of dry bones, in Ezekiel, implies the same faith. Daniel, in plain words, announces a time at hand when "many of those that sleep in the dust of

the earth shall awake—some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.” Such representations prove sufficiently that belief in a resurrection of the dead, and a reunion of souls with their former bodies, and a continuance of the old human life on a new earth, was widely spread among the people. In the story of the Maccabees, the faith comes out with startling prominence. The heroes, mutilated and dying, console themselves and cheer one another by the thought that the members the tormenters had wrenched off would be restored to them at the last day; and the writer of the book solemnly ratifies the expression of such a hope. The Pharisaic belief in a resurrection involved, as one of its chief features, the revival, in some shape, of the form. The later rabbins refined on the idea; some of them surmising that, in a particular bone, the “ossiculum luz,” lay the germ of the future body, which, at the proper time, would appear in health and beauty, like the plant from its seed. Through Paul—who was a Pharisee, and who taught the resurrection of a spiritual form from the carnal body, which could not, itself, enter the kingdom of heaven—the doctrine passed over to the Christian Church, where it became domesticated, and has found an abiding-place ever since.

On such a basis as this that I have described rests

the practice of burying the dead. Thus deeply is the custom rooted in natural feeling, reverence, and faith. Thus dear is it through long experience and pious hope; thus closely wrought into the texture of the human mind. Lovely sentiments were associated with it. The buried dead seemed to preserve their identity after their decease; to the survivors they were still real as persons—palpable forms yet, although temporarily removed from sight. The dead had abodes; they were a company, a commonwealth; the cemetery was an underground city. The living lingered lovingly about the place where the departed lay; they fixed themselves in the neighborhood, made permanent homes, formed strong attachments to the soil, cultivated the spirit of permanence, and knit their communities together by steadfast clamps of association. To the practice of interment may be due, in a considerable degree, the solidity and persistency of the people, who would endure anything rather than leave or be driven away from their dead, whom they could not carry with them to other lands.

How sweet, too, the sentiment of rest that was associated with the grave where the beloved one lay! It is wonderfully expressed in Job. "Why died I not on issuing from the womb? For now should I have lain still and been quiet; I should have slept; I should have been at rest with kings and

counsellors of the earth; with princes that had gold and filled their houses with silver. There the wicked cease from troubling, there the weary are at rest. There the prisoners repose together; they hear not the voice of the oppressor. The small and the great are there; the servant is free from his master." These pathetic words come to us now whenever we think of the still forms that lie so peacefully beneath the monument or the sod, sleeping their unbroken sleep "after life's fitful fever." We know, on reflection, that this is illusion. We know that there is no stillness in the grave; that Nature, which never rests, and allows no rest to organized or unorganized thing—Nature, which abhors rest, respecting not even the dread repose of death, seizes at once the cast-off body, and with occult chemistry and slow burning decomposes and consumes it. But the ancients did not know this as we do. That the body, left above ground, decayed, they perceived; and, to prevent the effect of it, would even resort to burning on occasion; but of all that went on beneath the ground they were not aware. They could not, therefore, be sensible, as we are, of the serious perils that were involved in their practice. That it endangered the health of the living they never conjectured. They did not care so much for the living—that is, for the masses of the living, as we do; they were not

such nice observers of cause and effect either ; if the calamity fell, they did not trace it to that quarter ; if the ravage came, that practice was not held responsible. The land was nowhere so thickly populated that room for interment could not be obtained in the vicinity of human dwellings ; or, if it was, intramural sepulture was not regarded as dangerous. It was not suspected that the pestilence that walked abroad at noon-day, and the arrow that flew by night, proceeded from those sacred receptacles where they had so carefully, and with such tender ceremony, deposited the remains of their friends.

But all this we see, and cannot be blind to. The eager science of our century, exploring the secret places of the earth and air, analyzing all substances, and resolving the elements into finer elements, detecting the trail of the imponderable gases, and following the windings of invisible currents of movement, has brought to noon-day light the astounding fact that the dead are persecutors of the living, not as haunting spectres, but as mouldering forms. Yes, there is no room to doubt that men and women who have been healers and comforters during life, may be destroyers and saddeners after death ; that they who were living benedictions may be dead curses ; that they whose presence sweetened the air, whose breath was an aroma, became poisoners on leaving the earth ;

the grave, which their friends think of so tenderly, visit so piously, mourn over so sincerely, ponder upon so tranquilly, being, in fact, a laboratory where are manufactured the poisons that waste the fair places of existence, and very likely smite to the heart their own lovers. It is now demonstrated, the fact is attested by scientific observers and corroborated by medical testimony of unquestionable value, that the common practice of interring the dead is positively pernicious to the living. Were this the place to detail the evidence or give the testimonies at length, it would be easy to quote authorities from works within reach of all who can read. But now there is time only to say, in general terms, that the revelations made on this subject are of a nature to awaken serious reflection on the practice which, from old association, has become so dear to us, and to suggest a duty, on the part of true religion, to desist from a custom which the old religions sanctioned. There are many who feel that it is a case of religion against religion; religion enlightened by knowledge and sweetened by humanity, against a religion clothed in an ignorance that could not be put off, and associated with rites that could not be dispensed with.

Thirty years ago a systematic examination of the graveyards of London, made by well-known and trustworthy persons, disclosed a state of things that smote

the public with horror. People learned to shudder at the pretty green spots they had thought so pleasant to the eye. There was a strong feeling of objection to intramural interments, which found its way to America. Acts of Parliament were passed prohibiting it. What could be done was done to stay an evil, by putting the worst of the abominations away. Vaults were sealed ; in some instances the dead were removed and carried off to a considerable distance. But such removal, while it relieved a locality, did not abolish a process. The same thing went on outside of the city that went on within it. An evil was removed, but was not exterminated. Air was still poisoned, though it was not the air which thousands of human creatures breathed ; water was still tainted, though not the water which thousands of human creatures drank ; soil was filled with noxious vapors, though not the soil on which thousands of people built their habitations. Those mural cemeteries were once in the fields till the houses crowded upon them ; these cemeteries in the fields will one day be in cities, when the exigencies of the growing population shall have filled up the intervening space between them and the village border. If intramural interment is dangerous, all interments are dangerous ; for that which makes them palpably unsafe in the one case, and apparently innocent in the other, is merely the circumstance of being in their

neighborhood or not ; a variable circumstance that has no solid or permanent weight, and never could have unless a safety line could be clearly drawn, and a complete seclusion effected from the approach of all deleterious influence..

But to effect such complete seclusion as would answer the purpose is practically impossible. The air is never still above the city of the dead, but like other air is set in motion by natural causes, and spreads its health-giving or disease-breeding elements abroad over wide reaches of territory. The springs of water, and currents from distant hills and rivulets formed by the falling of the summer's rain or the melting of the winter's snow, obey the law that governs all fluid bodies, trickle in directions that nobody knows of, and mingle with the streams that quench the thirst of villages and supply the need of cities. The water we drink and the air we breathe have histories that none can recite, and are employed in offices that none can question ; and this being so, there is wisdom in doing what we can to make the history a pleasant one and the function blameless.

The earth is a powerful disinfectant, but it may be overworked. The London Report, before alluded to, contains this remarkable sentence : " 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 from permeating the surrounding soil and escaping into the air above and the water beneath." Trustworthy authority is quoted to show that the absorbent qualities of the soil are, at present, not always sufficient to discharge deleterious gases of their noxious effect.

Researches into the composition of soil and water in different localities make it abundantly evident that emanations from the ground, striking upward and downward, are vigorous causes of disease and death; low, malignant fevers, dysentery, cholera, have here their source. In places and periods of more than usual mortality these causes are found to be active. We hear of this continually from boards of health and medical inspectors, whose business it is to watch over the sanitary conditions of our cities, to warn people against the perils of insufficient drainage, neglected garbage, and impure atmosphere. It is only another cry from the same voice that would put us on our guard against another unsuspected source of mischief.

This is the strong point against interment, and it is a point strong enough to overbalance many lesser arguments on the other side. There are other points that deserve consideration. The English economist, for example, objects to the ceaseless waste of an important natural fertilizer, which, under the existing cus-

tom, is sequestered from use, thus entailing a direct expense by its loss, and imposing another expense by the necessity of importing a substitute, in the very same form as that which was squandered ("Popular Science Monthly," March, 1874, p. 597); a consideration that looks light enough when mentioned in general terms, but which, when fairly taken in pieces and weighed, has great force—in an old country like England, immense force. The economist objects against the cost of interment to the poor in all cities and large towns. They must purchase land, keep it in order, employ men to prepare the receptacle for their dead, transport them no small distance thither, and, if they wish to mark the place with a suitable memorial, take from their scanty income the means necessary to do it. This objection has little weight now in country villages and small towns, where the land is cheap and the open fields are within easy reach; but in great cities like New York the tax, as I have reason to know, presses heavily already on people of moderate means who wish to preserve their self-respect and perform what the customs of society require. Every clergyman knows that the tax on such as these is serious, and cannot be paid without encroaching on the provisions for comfortable subsistence.

But this is not the point I would urge here. The prime consideration is that of the public health, and they must

be very momentous arguments that can countervail this. No sentimental or religious considerations can be fairly urged, for the healthy sentiment is ever the noblest sentiment, and every form of religion must give way to the religion that consults human weal. The religion that is satisfied to make or keep the earth a graveyard in face of all consequences, is not for these times.

There is but one method of disposing of the dead that is not open to similar objections, or to others almost equally weighty, peculiar to itself: that is the removal of them by fire. The practice of burning the dead does not, as I have said, yield in antiquity or in honorableness to the one we adopt. It is found among people in all respects as intelligent, refined, and worshipful as any. It is associated with feelings of the noblest kind, with veneration and tenderness, and regard to moral obligations. This practice, too, has an idea at the centre of it; a religious idea, and, curiously, an idea intimately connected with that of immortality. It is the fashion to call cremation a pagan custom; and so it is; but it must be remembered that the whole ancient world was pagan, in the usual sense of the word; and that, in their day, the pagans were the greatest people on earth. If pagans burned, pagans buried too: the worst of pagans buried; so that if there is any reproach in the paganism it must be shared by the custom of interment.

The practice of burning the dead was sacred with people who, in the sun, the central fire, the glowing source of life, the visible lord of creation, saw the emblem of the Supreme Being. Fire was the holy element, spiritual, pure at once and purifying. These people kept the sacred fire always burning in their temples and their houses. It was divine; they worshipped it; they ascribed power to it—power to bestow health and happiness. They prayed to it, the eternal, the ever young, the ever beautiful, the universal nourisher and bestower of good. We find this worship throughout the East—in India, Greece, Italy. It dates back to the time when there were no Italians, Greeks, or Indians; before the tribes that came from Central Asia separated into groups of nations. How it came to the Continent of America will never, probably, be known. But on the Continent of America it has been found, and wherever found it has been in connection with the custom of burning the dead. (Brinton, p. 144.) This was a privilege commonly reserved for the few, the priests and the nobles, who were destined not to rot in the ground like the vulgar herd, but to mount aloft to immortality on the wings of flame. Not to be burned was the sign of humiliation; not to be burned was to be condemned to transformation into some bestial form. Fire meant life, and to be taken up by

fire was to be lifted to the higher regions of life. The fire consumed only what must die; it sublimated and purified everything that could not. The soul being formless, the destruction of the body did not compromise its identity. Rather the consumption of the body by the immortal flame rendered the spirit wholly free to assume a new environment, and fashion its own form from the elements furnished by its new conditions of existence.

Christians object to cremation that it destroys the soul's tabernacle, and thwarts the hope of personal resurrection. How can the form revive after such a process? A moment's reflection suggests that, as nothing less than a miracle of Almighty power will avail to restore the form that has been dissipated into vapors by the chemistry of the soil, the same exertion of power will avail to restore it when it has been dissipated by the action of flame. To recover a shape from a heap of ashes can be no more difficult than to recover it from a mound of dust. The slow burning in the earth is as fatal to identity as the swift burning in the fire. The final result is as imponderable. If there be somewhere within the frame a spiritual form which disengages itself at death, or if, in some deep recess of it, there be an infinitesimal germ of life from which the spiritual man shall spring, fire could no more injure it than earth. It must, from its

nature, be imperishable. Religiously viewed, the idea that animates the believer in cremation is nobler than the idea that animates the believer in interment; for, taking literally the statement that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, it makes haste to put them away, that the incorruptible portion may ascend by its proper motion to its celestial abode. They to whom the practice of cremation is native regard with compassion such as practise interment.

But to us the practice of cremation is recommended on the same ground that the other practice is condemned: namely, the ground of human welfare, the comfort and safety of the living. It is recommended on other grounds also. On the score of economy it has the advantage. It dispenses with several conditions of expense, and with the conditions that bear hardest on poor people—the necessity of buying land, of constructing sepulchres, of transporting the dead long distances to their final home. The process of reducing the body to ashes is inexpensive; it requires little time, it involves no costly preliminaries, no toilsome and fatiguing journey. Such considerations are not mercenary; far from it. If one is ever mercenary, it should not be at the hour of death. Avarice never looks so vile as when it would save a few miserable dollars by scrimping the decent arrangements of a funeral. It is only natural that we should

lavish generously our tributes on the silent forms of those we have loved; that we should enclose them in precious wood, and cover them in seemly raiment, and make them fragrant with flowers. I would rather encourage this than rebuke it; and that it may be encouraged, I would reduce the unavoidable expense to the lowest practicable sum, thus allowing a margin for the pure gratification of feeling. The available means should not be quite exhausted in the bare task of putting the now useless form away from sight. Let the saddest and most indispensable part of the last rites tax no more, than cannot be avoided, the light purses of the artisan and mechanic; and let the most of what can be spared be put at the disposition of pure affection; for this is consolation, while the other is agony. It is claimed already for cremation, and it will be claimed more and more, that it allows this margin, and thus plays into the hands of love.

On the æsthetic side, the side of beauty and grace, the practice of burning has clearly the advantage. It presents a sweeter field of contemplation to those who look beyond the moment of disappearance, into the day after death, and follow even a little way the destiny of the vanished form. The substitution of a swift and silent process of transmutation for the slow and distressing one of decay is, when fairly considered, a relief to the mind. The substitution of a

pile of white ashes which the eye may look at without offence, for the mass of corruption which the eye cannot look at, or the mind contemplate at all; the substitution of a skilfully-contrived and well-arranged receptacle for the unsightly grave; of the graceful urn for the shapeless mound is, of itself, a recommendation. The funeral ceremony may preserve all its solemnity and beauty. Everything may be done that is now done, everything that can be done, before the body is dismissed forever from view: prayers may be said, hymns sung, words of memory, hope, and benediction spoken, tender greetings of the living and farewells to the dead expressed; the whole interval between the moment of death and the moment of disappearance may be filled with the bloom of feeling; and then the thoughts, instead of going downward into the damp, cold ground, go upwards towards the clear blue of the skies, where the last trace has disappeared.

Shall it be counted a small thing either that now, after the new process of transmutation has been gone through, the remains of our dead are, if we choose, still with us in our homes? We may leave them in gardens, as now, if we prefer, preserving our cemeteries as they are, with the exception of the long mounds, and thus give permanence to the homes of the dead; but we may also carry them with us when we

go away to live in other States, and so keep up the tradition of the ancestral line wherever our lot may be cast. To leave our dead behind us is often painful. To return alone from foreign lands where they have died among strangers, resigning them to a strange soil, causes in most persons a sharp pang. That which gives a sense of permanency to the home, is the association of ancestral memories with it. The home is where the household gods are: the pictures, images, emblems, relics, urns, which bring tender recollections close, and are the best substitute for the visible persons themselves. We are more ready to go where fortune leads when all we have loved goes with us; and the new abode is relieved of much of its crudeness by the presence in it of all the past there is. In a New World like ours, where change of residence must be the rule, and examples of fixed homes for generations are rare, this consideration is not wanting in weight. We need to keep with us all our sanctities in order that our minds may not be dissipated and our hearts frittered away by the variety of local associations. One may be indifferent as to the spot where his own remains are laid, but few are indifferent in regard to the spot where repose the remains of their friends. It may be very unreasonable to care what becomes of these; but it is very usual, and will be for generations to come; and, taking things as they are, it should be a ground

of congratulation that a source of pain can be so easily removed.

But in the discussion of a subject like this such considerations, however interesting, are of secondary moment. The burden of the argument rests on the ground of sanitary science. Which usage best consults the well-being of living men; is most favorable to health, usefulness and happiness; is most consonant with a civilization that makes the satisfaction of humanity on the globe its care? These are the questions, and these questions, it would seem, can be answered only in one way. All the danger attends the custom of interment; all the danger is avoided by the custom of cremation. This cardinal point made, incidental points will arrange themselves. A practice essentially beneficial will prove to be at last in all respects beneficial. Objections will be removed one by one; means will be discovered of evading the most formidable difficulties; changes for the better in many adjacent departments will accompany the one radical change.

The strongest argument against burning the dead is that the process will immediately destroy all trace of guilt in cases where death has been caused by poison. If it be true, as is asserted, that, as a rule, but one body in 27,800 is exhumed for the purpose of detecting crime, and that the evidence in every such case has been doubtful and conflicting, or, from some other cir-

cumstance untrustworthy, this objection loses much of its force. It is suggested that cases of poisoning would quickly multiply as the chances of detection diminished. But is it likely that criminals of that kind are ever deterred from crime by the risk of disinterment and consequent discovery? If they are, here is, indeed, a point to be guarded; and how it may be guarded does not appear. But that it can be, who doubts, that is acquainted with the resources of modern vigilance? Additional security before the disposal of the body must prevent the need of after examination. For the rest, we can believe that in time, and in a comparatively short time, the current of feeling will flow into the new channel, so that men will wonder they could ever have flowed in any other; sentimental repugnances will be overcome; the novelty will be instituted, and will collect reverences upon it as all institutions do, and the practice that is based on utility will be sanctioned by poetry and adorned by art.

Nobody expects that such a change will be effected in a day. It must come gradually, and by slow degrees. The proposition will be met by every species of objection; it will be laughed at, and it will be scoffed at. Some will argue, some will complain, some will denounce. Some will cry "nonsense," and some will cry "danger," and some will cry

“blasphemy.” The ignorant and superstitious will lift up their hands in horror; pious people will exclaim; sentimental people will grieve. To attempt an alteration in the language of a religious creed, or in the shape of a religious ceremony, is arduous and audacious. But such difficulties, if they occur, should operate as stimulants—not as discouragements. This is precisely the task that rationalists contemplate. This is our task. It may be long and hard and seemingly hopeless; but it is what we have undertaken. Week by week, day by day, in public speech and private conversation we assail the ancient creed, pushing our mining operations close up to its foundation-walls, and directing against its towers the full force of trained and furnished minds. So far as any practice is founded on prejudice, and perpetuated as an outgrowth of theological belief, loyalty to our own rational conviction prompts us to suspect it, and, when in any way noxious, to assail and remove it. Each time this is done, ancient foundations are shaken. If it is done in a wise temper, friendly to truth and sympathetic with good, the old foundations will give place to new ones capable of sustaining a nobler structure. The practice of interment has been intimately associated with beliefs that we repudiate as superstitions. We need not, however, assume that it is identified with them. The practice of burning

the dead can be reconciled with any creed ; no faith need be shocked by it. If Jews can favor it—as it appears they are doing in Berlin—if a bishop of the Church of England detects no mischief in it, we need be in no haste to assume that Christian sects will offer serious opposition. The reform concerns us as men—not as believers in any particular dogma.

Still, as far as may be, prejudices must be humored. Tasks like this should be undertaken reverently. Let no natural feeling be lacerated ; let violence be done to no decent sanctity. The change proposed touches men in their most sensitive part ; it is wise to preserve as much as truth and goodness justify, for it will all be needed to give to the new usage dignity and grace.