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## INHUMATION OF THE DEAD IN CITIES.

From time immemorial medical men have strongly pointed out to municipal authorities the dangers that arise from burying the dead within the precincts of cities or populous towns. Impressed with the same conviction, ancient legislators only allowed to the most illustrious citizens a sepulchre in the temples of the gods. Euclides was interred in the temple of Diana Euselis, as a reward for his pious journey to Delphi in search of the sacred fire; the Magnesians erected a monument to Themistocles in their forum; Euphron received the same honor in Corinth; and Medea buried her two sons, Mermerus and Pheres, under the protection of Juno Acræ's altars, to guard their ashes from their persecutors. Lycurgus was perhaps the only Grecian legislator who recommended inhumation in temples and in cities, to accustom youth to the daily spectacle of death.

The primitive Grecians, it appears, buried their dead in or about their dwellings; and we find a law amongst the Thebans ordaining that every person who built a house should provide a repository for the dead upon his premises. In latter days both Grecians and Romans erected their tombs outside of their cities, and chiefly by the road-side.

Both religious and civil motives might have dictated the propriety of this regulation. The traveller, setting out upon a journey, and passing by the sepulchres of his sires, could in the presence of their manes invoke their protection; and on his return to his penates, safe from danger, he could put up thanks to the gods for his preservation. As a prudential measure, the interment of the dead beyond the walls of their towns, prevented the fatal consequences that might have arisen from extensive putrefaction and infection, and moreover the burning of bodies would have exposed the adjoining buildings to the danger of frequent fires. It is also possible that policy dictated these sanatory enactments. The ancients held the remains of the departed as a sacred trust, in the defence of which they were ever prepared to fall; and it is not improbable that their warriors would have rushed forth to meet the invader, before he would have defiled, by his approach to their cities the ashes of their ancestors. So scrupulously religious were the Athenians in performing the funeral rites of the dead, that they put to death ten of their commanders, after the battle of Arginuse, for not having committed to the earth the dead bodies that floated on the waters.

There is no doubt but their dead was buried in such a manner as not to prove injurious to the survivors; and Seneca plainly says, 'Non defunctorum causa, sed vivorum, inventa est sepultura.' The ancients both burned and buried their dead, but inhumation appears to have been the most early and the most approved rite. 'Let the dead be buried,' says a law of Cæcrops. Solon justifies the claims of the Athenians to the island of Salamis, from the circumstance of the dead bodies interrupted on its shores having been inhumed according to the Athenian custom, with their feet turned towards the west, whereas the Megarensians turned theirs to the east.

In various instances the burial or the burning appear to have been adopted upon philosophical doctrines. Democritus, with a view to facilitate resurrection, recommended interment, and Pliny thus ridicules the intention: 'Similis et de asservandis corporibus hominum, et reviviscendis promissa a Democrito vanitas, qui non revivixit ipse.' Heraclitus, who considered fire as the first principle, advocated the funeral pile; while Thales, who deemed water the chief element, urged the propriety of committing the departed to the damp bosom of the earth.

The early Christians inhumed the bodies of their martyrs in their temples. This honor was afterwards conferred on the remains of distinguished citizens, illustrious prelates, and princes. The infectious diseases which at various periods arose from this custom, induced Theodosius, in his celebrated code, strictly to prohibit it; and he even ordered that the remains of the dead thus inhumed should be removed out of Rome. The vanity of man, and the cupidity of the priesthood, soon overruled these wise regulations. Every family possessing sufficient means, claimed a vault within the churches, and thereby the revenues of the clergy were materially increased. At all times, even the dead appeared to have shared with the living the obligation of supporting the ministers of the altar. By a law of Hippia, the priestesses of Minerva received a chænix\* of wheat, and one of barley, with an obolus, for every individual who departed this life. The *libitina* of the Romans fulfilled the duties of our undertakers, or rather of the directors of funeral pomp of the French;

\* The chænix contained a pint.

yet they were attached to the temple of the goddess Libitina, whose priests received a fee in simple for every one who died, under the name of *Libitinae ratio*. Suetonius informs us, that in Nero's time the mortality was so great during one autumn, that thirty thousand of these silver pieces were deposited in the fatal treasury. To increase the emoluments of this sacerdotal body, these *libitinarii* sold at high prices every thing that was requisite for the funeral ceremonies, received a toll at the city gate through which the bodies were carried out, as well as at the entrance of the amphitheatre through which the dead gladiators were borne away. Phædrus alludes to this speculation in one of his tables, when speaking of a miser,

'Qui circumcidis omnem impensam funeris,  
Libitina se quid de tuo faciat lucrum.'

It is supposed that this avaricious divinity owed her name to the displeasure it must have occasioned to all who heard it,—*quod nemini libeat*; but it is also possible that it was derived from her bearing poor mortals away, whenever she fancied it, and *ad libitum*.

In more modern times, Theodolphus, Bishop of Orleans, complained to Charlemagne that lucre and vanity had converted churches into charnel-houses, disgraceful to the clergy, and perilous to the community. It was upon this representation that this prince, in his capitularies, prohibited burials in the churches under heavy penalties. But the laws of the wisest could not prevent priesthood from considering this source of emolument, although endangering public salubrity, an indispensable property that could not be meddled with without endangering the church.

In France, Maret in 1773, and Vicq d'Azyr in 1778, pointed out the danger of this practice in such glaring colours, that government by an edict only allowed church interment to certain dignitaries; but in 1804, by a wise law that should be enforced in every civilized community, inhumation in cities was entirely abolished.—amongst the numerous well-authenticated evil results of burying in churches that led to this wise prohibition, the following were the most striking and circumstantial.

In 1773, in Saulieu, Burgundy, an epidemic disease arising from the inhumation of a corpse in the church of St. Saturnin, created considerable alarm. The body of a corpulent person had been interred on the 3d of March, and a woman was buried near it on the 20th of April following: both had died of a reigning fever. During the last burial a fetid effluvia arose from the vault, which pervaded the whole church; and, out of one hundred and seventy persons who were present, one hundred and forty-nine were attacked with the prevailing malady, although its progress had been arrested amongst the other inhabitants of the town.

In 1774, a similar accident occurred in a village near Nantes, where several coffins were removed in a vault to make room for the lord of the manor: fifteen of the by-standers died from the emanation.

In 1774, one-third of the inhabitants of Lectouse perished from a fever of a malignant character that manifested itself after some works that required the removal of a burial ground. Two destructive epidemics swept away large proportions of the population of Riom and Ambert, two towns in Auvergne.

Taking this matter under consideration in a moral, or even a religious light, it may be questioned whether any advantage can accrue from the continuance of the pernicious custom, which during the prevalence of epidemic diseases endangers the life of every person who resides near a church. Does it add to the respect which the remains of the dead are entitled to? Certainly not: the constant tolling of 'the silent bell'—the daily cortege of death that passes before us—the graves that we hourly contemplate, perusing monumental records which more frequently excite unseasonable laughter than serious reflection—every thing, in short, tends to make death of little or no moment, except to those who have heard the mutes gossiping at their door. So accustomed, indeed, are we from our childhood to sepulchral scenes, that, were it not for the parish officers, our church yards would become the play-ground of every truant urchin; and how often do we behold human bones become sportive baubles in the wanton pranks of the idlers, who group around the grave digger's preparations! So callous are we to all feelings of religious awe when surrounded with the dead, that our cemeteries are not unfrequently made the rendezvous of licentiousness and the assembly-ground of crime, where thieves cast lots upon a tomb for the division of their spoil.

With what different feelings does the traveller wander over the

cemetery of *Pere la Chaise*. I am well aware that many of the gewgaw attributes that there decorate the grave, has been called the '*frippery*,' '*the foppery*' of grief; but does there exist a generous, a noble sentiment, that may not be perverted by interested motives and hypocrisy into contemptible professions? how often is the sublime rendered ridiculous by bad taste and hyperbolic affectation! When we behold the fond lover pressing to his lips a lock of hair, or the portrait of all that he holds dear, the cold, calculating egotist may call this the '*frippery of love*'; but the stoic who thinks thus, has never known the 'sweet pangs' of unrequited affection, when, in bitter absence, these collections of bliss gone by embodies, in our imagination, the form we once pressed to our respondent heart. The creation of our busy fancy stands before us, gazing on us with that tender look that in happier days greeted the hour of meeting: or trembles in our tears as when we last parted—to meet perhaps, no more! With what fervour of religious love do we behold the simple girl kneeling with uplifted eye, one hand on the green sod that covers all that endeared her to existence, till, overwhelmed with burning, choking regrets—as idle as they are uncontrollable—she sinks prostrate on the cold earth that now shrouds that bosom which once nestled her young hopes and fears! There have I seen the pale, the haggard youth—to all appearances a student, seated mournfully by the side of a tomb, absorbed in deep thought, heedless of the idlers who passed by him, looking at him perhaps with contempt!—heedless of the swift flight of time, which shrouded him imperceptibly in darkness, until he was warned by the guardian of the dead that 'it was time to depart—and to depart *alone!*' No inscription recorded the 'one loved name': he would not expose it to the unfeeling gaze of the heartless tourist: all he would willingly have traced upon her tomb, would have been '*Here lies my own!*'

The mouldering earth, the fleshless skeleton over which he mourns, cannot obliterate the remembrance of what she was; though her eyes perhaps no longer exist, still their former languid liquid look of bliss, beams freshly in his recollection. The lips which once pronounced the long-wished for avowal of mutual love are still moist and open to memory's embrace—still seem to lip the delicious *tu*! Our language is rich, without comparison richer far than the French; but we have nothing so endearing, so bewitching, as their *tu-toiement*: our *thee's* and *thou's* are frigid, chilly, when compared to the *first toi* that escapes inadvertently from beloved lips! A French writer has beautifully expressed this exquisite moment '*Le premier tu est tout-puissant; c'est le fiat lux de l'ame; il est sublime, il debrouille le chaos!*'

Sublime are the words, 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord!' Would it be irreligious to say, 'Happy are the dead who die beloved?' Their fond and ardent hearts had never been chilled by the withering hand of infidelity and ingratitude. They died in an ecstatic dream of perfect bliss on earth, and never were awakened to the world's mocking realities!—they died when they felt and believed in their heart of hearts that they were dearly beloved—could not be loved more dearly; with that conviction, death, in a worldly acceptation, can never be untimely. Probably they died still sufficiently animated by a latent, lingering spark of life, to press the hand that was so often linked in mutual pleasure in happy days—to feel the burning tear of anguish drop on the pale cheek—to hear the sad, the awful last word, a *Dieu!*—an expression that habit has rendered trivial, but which bears with it, in the tenderest solicitude, the most hallowed meaning, since in pronouncing it, we leave all that we cherish under the protection and the safeguard of our GOD.

Affection deprives death of all horrors. We shrink not from the remains of what we cherished. Despite its impiety, there was something refined in that conviction of the ancients, who imagined that in bestowing their farewell kiss they inhaled the souls of those they loved. How sweet are those lines of Macrobius, originally attributed to Plato!

'Dum semibulco suavio  
Meum pullum suavior,  
Dulceinque florem spiritus  
Duco ex aperto tramite,  
Animo tunc egro et sancla  
Cucurrit ad labia mihi!

Our Shakspeare has quaintly, yet beautifully, described this parting embrace:

'And lips O you  
The doors of breath, seal with a righteous kiss  
A dateless bargain to engrossing death.'