

PULVIS ET UMBRA.

We shrewdly suspect that the ordinary sane individual forms his or her opinion upon the relative propriety of various modes of disposal of the dead by the exercise of the imagination, rather than by calm reasoning or an attempt to apply the dictates of religion; otherwise we cannot explain to ourselves why we, with the majority of mortals, continue to have a preference for ordinary burial. Viewed philosophically—aye, viewed with the truest reverence—it is a small matter what becomes of the encasing shell when the *imago* bursts therefrom and wings its flight away. That shell must inevitably vanish. Sooner or later, be it in the space of a few brief minutes or be it only after an odd thousand or two years, the lifeless body must become thin air and a mere handful of dust, and dust and air be blown to the four quarters of the heavens. Do what we will, hold we however firmly to whatever creed, however strong our conviction that once again this corruptible shall become the framework of the incorruptible, we must admit that by no human device can we overcome its corruptibility.

Fundamentally the views of the majority concerning the proper disposal of the dead resolve themselves into a matter of æsthetics, a matter not of what is best for the community, but of what is most seemly to themselves; and what is most seemly is, as we say, essentially determined by the imagination. With most of us the final determination of the matter—if with most it be not the first and final—is based upon an attempt, as grimly humorous as it is pathetic, to strive to appreciate the comfort of confined dissolution *à la mode*, as compared with the swifter dissolution within the furnace. We cannot divest ourselves of the idea that this familiar body of ours is our very self, cannot help picturing it as still sentient after death, cannot contrast the relative advantages—or rather, disadvantages—of the furnace and the grave without in the one case a painfully keen anticipation of the agony to be endured in the process of being burnt, while, regarding the other, we are the slaves of custom and view with relative indifference the inevitable happenings underground, the uncleanly horrors of putrefaction (to use the mildest of language). Let the earth be shovelled in, and the tombstone cover everything. That is enough for us.

Like unto healthy people in general, we, of the editorial staff, are not given to contemplate this matter of the *omne quod superest*. As individual members of the community, we do not by any means represent ourselves as active advocates of cremation. What we here take to be the general view of the subject may—so little have we