



CREMATION

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FLORENCE G. FIDLER

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. THE ANCIENT HISTORY OF CREMATION	7
II. THE MODERN HISTORY OF CREMATION	18
III. THE PROCESS OF CREMATION	27
IV. THE LAW AND ECONOMICS OF CREMATION	34
V. THE OBJECTIONS TO CREMATION	43
VI. THE ETHICS OF CREMATION	57
BOOKS CONSULTED	71
APPENDIX : QUOTATIONS FROM VARIOUS WRITERS, ETC.	73
INDEX	78

TO MY FRIEND

GERTRUDE SWITHINBANK

CREMATION

CHAPTER I

THE ANCIENT HISTORY OF CREMATION

AMONG the manuscripts in the British Museum is a rare copy of *Legends* from the Old Testament, written about the year 1500 by a Greek, named Georgios Chumnos. One of these legends tells the story of Cain and Abel, and relates how Adam and Eve, never having hitherto seen Death, were completely puzzled as to what had actually happened to Abel. In the translation of Mr. F. H. Marshall, "they smote their breasts and lamentation made," but did nothing practical. At last "God in pity did send down an angel to the place" to instruct them in the matter. "This is that Death whereof God spoke," he told them, and gave directions that their son's body should be carried into a "riven cave."

Thus, according to this old legend, Man became aware of the great fact that *something must be done with a dead body*. In the very earliest ages, Paleolithic man doubtless did as the animals did—merely left the dead to lie where they fell. Then gradually came the idea conveyed by the angel of the legend, that *something must be done*. That "something" would at first be the easiest thing: if deep water were at

hand, then the dead would be consigned to river, lake or sea; in the absence of water, the body would be carried outside the camp, or thrown into the forest. As the race evolved mankind acquired the instinct of protecting their dead, and put up a cairn of stones or a cover of branches as a guard against wild beasts. Then, for still greater security, they dug a hole in the ground and hid the body away from sight. Thus gradually several methods of Disposal of the Dead came into force, and seem to have existed concurrently. Dr. Sydney Hartland groups these methods under seven headings—Cannibalism, Sub-aerial deposit, Cave deposit, Water burial, Earth burial, Preservation and Cremation. It is impossible to know when cremation began and for what reasons. Some authorities think that it was the result of Ancestor-worship, the idea being to safeguard the remains from desecration by enemies, or in the case of nomads to provide a convenient means for carrying them from place to place.

Man has always been an adaptive rather than an inventive creature, changing his customs, to meet new conditions as they arose; and there is evidence everywhere that the various methods of Disposal practised were regulated in most cases by local conditions of the moment—quality of soil, weather, temperature, etc. In the frozen north, where earth-burial is even now impracticable for the greater part of the year, cremation or sub-aerial deposit would of necessity be the method adopted. In

places where caves abound, as in certain South Sea islands, cave-burial would be the obvious course, and was indeed general during the Neolithic period, especially down the west coast of America. In some parts of the world the custom has always existed of exposing the dead body to the air, either in the branches of a tree or on a roughly made platform. This was the habit of some tribes of American Indians in the Mississippi basin, while other tribes, at the same time and not far away, burned their dead; the Cocopas, for instance, living in the lower Colorado valley, were forced to adopt cremation because the river floods periodically. Some native races combine burial and burning, but the latter part of the ceremony is almost invariably reserved for their chiefs, the common men and all women and children being denied the honour; in a treeless country the funeral pyre would inevitably be reserved for the great, as so large a quantity of wood would be too valuable to be spent on less important people. The Japanese, Burmese and Hindus seem always to have burned their dead; but the Chinese never, for interment in the actual soil of their country is so involved with their religious opinions that it is, and always has been, essential to send the body of every dead Chinaman back to China for burial, wherever death may have occurred.

When primordial man first recognized the difference between body and spirit, the problem of the spirit's future well-being in the abode of the gods

would present itself as a dominating factor in the method chosen for the disposal of the body: those peoples who believed that the gods live in the earth would put the dead under the ground in order to place them in immediate communication with the gods; those who believed that the gods live in the sky would burn them for the same reason. But because there was a universal horror of pollution from contact with a corpse, "certain tribes," writes Dr. Hartland, "refuse to bury their dead because the bodies would poison the soil and thus pollute the crops and convey harm to the living." Sir Thomas Browne wrote that "the Chaldeans, the great idolaters of fire, abhorred the burning of their carcasses as a pollution of that deity," and the Parsees have always, for the same reason, exposed their dead in specially constructed towers where the flesh is devoured by vultures, and the bones are washed down into a central pit by the rains.

There are many legends which show the close connection in the mind of early man between Fire and Death, some including the idea of sacrifice, as in the Bible story of Abraham and Isaac. Dido, queen and founder of Carthage, and Semiramis, the legendary queen of Assyria, both threw themselves on burning pyres; and Hercules is said to have done the same. The heroes of Homer were burned, and the long account in the *Iliad* of the funeral ceremony of Patroclus is familiar to all. Familiar also are the words, "All the valiant men

arose, and went all night, and took the bodies of Saul and of his sons from the wall of Beth-shan; and they came to Jabesh and burnt them there."

Every Wagnerian knows all about the pyre of Siegfried, which is a version of the Balder myth of the North. According to the early Norse legend, the Fire-burial Age, which had been preceded by a Mound Age, was introduced by the god Odin: and the *Eddas*, the *Heimskringla*, and other epics of the North are permeated with the idea of glory and purification by Fire. In Matthew Arnold's poem, *Balder Dead*, the spirit of Balder returns to his wife, speaking thus:—

Alive I kept not far from thee, dear soul,
Neither do I neglect thee now, though dead.
For with to-morrow's dawn the Gods prepare
To gather wood and build a funeral pile
Upon my ship, and burn my corpse with fire,
That sad, sole honour of the dead.

Then the poem goes on to describe how Odin and the gods watched the launch of the burning vessel bearing the dead body of Balder, and watched it sail away; and, as the sun went down and night came on, the burning ship "still carried o'er the distant waters on, farther and farther, like an eye of fire," until it was consumed, and "all was dark."

It is evident that over a long period burning was looked upon as the greatest honour that could be paid to the dead, and Sir James Frazer in *The Golden Bough* says, "Fire was regarded by the ancients

as a purgative so powerful that properly applied it could burn away all that was mortal of a man, leaving only the divine and immortal behind," and goes on to explain how it was believed that Fire was the *only* force strong enough to purify the spirit and make it fit for communion with the gods. Volcanoes for this reason were regarded as sacred, and had their temples with resident priests in active service, whose constant business it was to mitigate the displeasure of the divinities within by continual prayer and sacrifice. Thus Fire, and Purification, and Honour, and Divinity, have from the earliest times been closely associated in the human mind, and this survives in the speech of to-day, when we speak of "the ashes of the great" and of "the bones of the poor." A ceremonial burning of the Dead would follow as a natural course: but, obviously, until the use of urns came in with knowledge of the art of pottery, the remains of burned bodies were generally buried or lost; so it follows logically that in the aggregate more complete skeletons have been discovered than collections of burnt remains. When the great lapse of time is considered, and the ever-changing conditions of the earth's surface, the wonder is that any proof of early cremation exists at all.

Professor Scott Elliot says that a horde of barbarians from the Far East swept over the early civilizations in Crete, Egypt, Mesopotamia, etc., about 2500 to 2000 B.C., bringing with them the custom of cremation, which hitherto had been

unknown in Europe; and the custom seems to have continued, concurrently with earth burial, until the Christian era. In this country, cremation was the usual mode of disposal in the Stone and Bronze Ages, and was of course general during the Roman occupation. Cinerary urns have been found in great numbers all over the country, particularly in East Anglia, many of which can be seen in the British Museum and in various local museums; and there have been similar discoveries all over Europe.

Herodotus says that the Babylonians embalmed their dead, but the fact that they also carried on cremation scientifically and on a large scale has been proved by the discovery of two large crematoria near Lagash. Mr. S. Langdon, describing these, says: "The bodies were placed in narrow clay casings upon a brick platform, wrapped with inflammable material and covered with soft clay. The body was reduced to ashes by burning wood over the clay casing." Many of these casings have been found, some still containing the ashes, while others have had them removed by means of a hole bored in the side; in the latter case the remains had been transferred to an urn and placed in the family vault. But cremation had evidently cost much money in ancient Babylon, for side by side are the ashes of the rich man in a costly urn, and the body of the poor man, merely wrapped in a reed mat and covered with clay. The Egyptians were of course always peculiar in the matter of Disposal, the elaborate system of embalming being

the result of their concern to preserve the body, so that the spirit could pass in and out of it at will, between its visits to the kingdom of Osiris. The point of interest lies in the fact that mummification was continued among the Coptic Christians until the fifth century.

The assertion invariably made by enemies of cremation, that the early Christians always buried their dead, is not entirely correct. It would seem as if in the primitive days of the Christian Church the matter of Disposal was not regarded from a religious point of view at all, but was regulated by fashion, custom and convenience. The Copts continued to mummify because they had always done so; the Jewish Christians continued their traditional method of burying in hill-side tombs or in sepulchres outside the city or village; and when the Church spread to the Gentiles the custom of the country was in most cases adopted. The Romans had copied the system of cremation from the Etruscans and the Greeks, and throughout the Roman Empire it was the fashionable mode of Disposal among the official and wealthier classes. The earliest Christians, however, were poor; and, in any case, would have found it unsafe to risk the publicity entailed in consigning their dead to a public crematorium, where probably, too, they would not have been allowed to perform their own funeral rites. That they managed to do so sometimes, however, is proved by the ashes that have been discovered in some of the niches of the

catacombs, many of which, as every visitor can see, are far too small to have contained a human body. That the evidence should be small seems inevitable, having regard to the fragility of ashes, to the poverty of the people concerned, and to the constant necessity for secrecy in the actions of any persecuted sect. For about three centuries the Christian dead of Rome were placed—in some form or another—in the Catacombs; and here they rested until recent times, since when the Catacombs themselves have been under the guardianship of people who for the most part are persuaded that incineration is fundamentally anti-Christian: ashes therefore would not be searched for, and might easily be destroyed in the course of excavation.

A breach arose at a very early date between the Jewish Christians and the Gentile members of the Church, and this widened until each party endeavoured to prove its entire disconnection with the other by the adoption of different modes of action. This inevitably would have shown itself in the matter of funeral arrangements; and the alienation, indeed, reached a climax when the Jewish cemeteries were closed to the Christian dead. Later the Christians had their own cemeteries, but the immediate result would logically be that, partly as a necessity and partly to prove their complete independence of Jewish custom, these Gentile Christians should follow the fashion prevalent in the Empire. In the third century the Christian writer, Minucius Felix, stated clearly that the

Church did not *fear* the fire, but *preferred* to bury their dead—for the obvious reason that their Founder, being a Jew, had been laid in a garden-tomb, in accordance with Jewish custom. But the strongest proof that the early Church burned as well as buried their members lies in the beautiful words of our Burial Service. This *Order* was compiled by the religious leaders of the sixteenth century, with much simplification, from two Services in the *Manual*, one of the original Latin Service Books of the Church. Thus the Words of Committal, “earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust,” have come down to us from the earliest times. Why were the words “ashes to ashes” included at all, if there had never been any ashes to dispose of?

The Romans constructed elaborate systems of heating wherever they went, and doubtless carried out their human incinerations in a highly scientific and sanitary manner. The Emperor Severus was cremated at York, the Roman capital of England, in A.D. 211, his ashes being taken to Rome; and the last Emperor to be cremated seems to have been Maximinus. It would seem that the decline of the system synchronized with the decline of the Roman Empire; for, simultaneously with the falling out of use and repair of the Roman crematoria was growing the influence of the Christian Church, which by the end of the fourth century was powerful enough to impose its will on the people and to impress its followers—deliberately or otherwise—with that material conception of Immortality which has

only died out in recent times. So it follows that, as this teaching was affecting thought at the time when cremation could no longer be carried out reverently through sheer lack of means, earth burial remained as the only possible method of Disposal open to Christians. It became so general that in course of time a definite reaction set in; and Fire, far from being looked upon as the perfect means of spiritual and bodily purification, was used as a symbol of disgrace. Thus, in 1428, by order of the Council of Constance, the body of John Wycliffe was taken out of its grave at Lutterworth, forty-four years after his death, and burnt, the ashes being thrown into the river Swift, whence they were carried by way of Avon and Severn to the sea.

CHAPTER II

THE MODERN HISTORY OF CREMATION

FOR many centuries cremation ceased to exist in Europe. Then, in the course of time, those agents of progress—Imagination, the Social Conscience and the Scientific Spirit—began to move. In England the first note was sounded by Sir Thomas Browne, who in 1658 was so much interested in the discovery near his home in Norwich of some Roman cinerary urns that he studied the whole question of the Disposal of the Dead by fire, and arrived at the vigorous conclusions expressed in his tract, *Hydriotaphia, or Urn Burial*. In this he says boldly that these Romans had “declined a visible degeneration into worms,” that “Christians have handsomely glossed the deformity of death, by careful consideration of the body, and civil rites, which take off brutal terminations,” and “to be gnawed out of our graves . . . are tragical abominations escaped in burning burials. Urnal interments and burnt relics lie not in fear of worms, or to be an heritage for serpents.”

The pioneer of cremation in the British Isles was a woman, the wife of the Hon. John Pratt, Treasurer of Ireland, who died in 1710, leaving specific directions that her body should be burned, and not buried. Many of the Pratt family were buried in the cemetery in the Bayswater Road, and when

it was cleared in recent years a stone was found which records Mrs. Pratt's unusual courage. This stone is now to be seen in the Chapel of the Ascension, near Marble Arch; it bears this inscription:—

This worthy woman, believing that the vapours arising from the graves of the churchyards of populous city's may prove harmful to the inhabitants, and resolving to extend to future times, as far as she was able, that charity and benevolence which distinguished her through life, ordered that her body should be burnt, in the hopes that others would follow her example; a thing too hastily censured by those who did not enquire into her motives.

But cremation, as we to-day understand the term, had its origin in Italy, and it was while he was in that country in 1873 that Sir Henry Thompson, the distinguished English surgeon, became practically acquainted with it. Realizing its value as a sanitary reform at once pressing and important, he returned to England full of enthusiasm, and commenced his campaign by publishing an article in *The Contemporary Review* of January 1874, and by making preliminary experiments with the bodies of animals. Public opinion was aroused at once, and for the most part was clamorously antagonistic. But, as is always the case when any new truth is propounded, though there were many who scorned there were a few who listened and understood; and these few constituted themselves into a society for the purpose of advocating cremation. In this way sixteen pioneers, including John Everett Millais,

John Tenniel, Anthony Trollope, R. C. Lehmann, and several clergymen, formed the nucleus of the Cremation Society, which since then has had more than two thousand members' names on its books.

As the Burial Laws in force related to earth-burial only, the Society commenced operations by obtaining expert legal advice, and were assured by two eminent lawyers that cremation was in no way illegal. Their next intention was to build a crematorium in one of the great London cemeteries, but this plan was foiled by the Bishop of the diocese, who not only refused consecration, but opposed the scheme in every way. It became necessary, therefore, to acquire an independent site; so an acre of freehold land was bought at Woking in 1878, and the buildings and apparatus provided. Successful experiments were carried out with the dead bodies of animals, but the following year the movement received a severe check in the form of strong interference by the Home Office. The Home Secretary of that time, who was personally opposed to cremation, used his authority to forbid any incineration of human remains at Woking, with the result that for five years the Society's work was confined to quiet propaganda and to the collection of funds.

Meanwhile several English people had been cremated abroad; and in 1882 the Society was requested by the late Captain Hanham of Blandford, Dorset, to cremate his wife and his mother, both having died leaving express directions for this course of action. The Home Secretary refused his

permission, and so the request had to be declined; whereupon Captain Hanham at once built a small crematorium on his own estate and thus effected his object successfully. He himself died the following year and was cremated in the same place—both events taking place without any interference from the Government.

But a year later Dr. William Price of Llantrisant in Wales aroused a storm of controversy by burning the body of his son on his own land. His method was very crude, consisting merely of carrying the body to the top of a hill, and placing it on a blazing cask of paraffin-oil. An enraged crowd assembled and the doctor was only saved from its clutches by the timely intervention of the police. He was, however, made to stand his trial at the Cardiff Assizes and was there acquitted, Mr. Justice Stephen, who heard the case, delivering the well-known judgment that cremation was legal provided it was carried out without nuisance to others. That judgment was the turning-point of the movement. The Society at once declared themselves absolved from the veto of the Home Office, and offered the use of their crematorium at Woking to the public. The first cremation took place there on March 26, 1885, and there were two others the same year. This first cremation was of an old lady of seventy-one, who had been a member of the Society; and it may be noted in passing that a very great proportion of the pioneer work connected with cremation in all countries has been done by women. It

was thought advisable to strengthen the position by obtaining positive legal authority, in the place of relying on the absence of negative law; so a Bill was brought into Parliament "to provide for the regulation of cremation" in 1884, which, after being thrown out several times, became law in 1902.

From then until now cremation has grown in popularity with the English people—before the War very slowly, since the War very rapidly. Crematoria had already been opened at Manchester in 1892, at Glasgow in 1895 and at Liverpool in 1896; and since the passing of the Act seventeen others have been opened in England, Scotland, Wales and the Channel Islands, the total number of cremations since 1885 being, at the end of 1929, 48,436.

In other countries also the movement has been growing—quickly or slowly according to the varying conditions, for there is a close relationship at all times between progress and the national temperament. In America the authorities for a long time refused permission for the erection of a crematorium in any public cemetery; and the pioneer work was done by Dr. F. Julius le Moyné of Washington, who in 1876 built one for public use in his own grounds; but during the past half-century one hundred and nine crematoria have been opened in U.S.A. In South America, however, there is at present only one—at Buenos Aires. Within the British Empire there are crematoria at Sydney (where advance has been particularly rapid and a second is now being erected), at Melbourne and

Adelaide in Australia, at Wellington and Otago in New Zealand, at Durban and Johannesburg in South Africa, and at Montreal in Canada. India has one at Calcutta, and China one at Shanghai, for the use of Europeans.

Among the European countries, Germany, as might be expected, is far ahead. *Feuerbestattung* was advocated as early as 1855, and the veteran Karl Blind, in discussing the avidity with which the idea took hold of modern Germany, made the interesting suggestion that it was perhaps

“a return to early notions and cherished customs, which centuries of a contrary practice have not been able to root out from the nation’s mind. It is as if a spark of that spirit were again stirring, which urged our light and fire worshipping ancestors to consign their dead to the purifying flame.”

The first crematorium was opened at Gotha in 1879, and there are now ninety in the country. Since the War the movement has advanced rapidly, being fostered by three monthly magazines, by the very fine buildings which have been erected for the purpose, by a special system of insurance providing for cremation at death, and—having regard to the fact that nothing helps on a movement better than organized opposition—by the enthusiastic activities of the only Anti-cremation Society in the world.

In France cremation has always been unfortunate. It had an unlucky beginning, as the permissive

sanction formed part of the famous decree of the French Republic of the 25 Brumaire—a general revolt against Christian usage—which has identified the system for all time in the mind of the French orthodox Catholic as definitely un-Christian. There seems to have been no immediate response to the sanction, but when the idea was revived in the middle of the nineteenth century it gave rise to endless legal quibbles, because it was found that, though still in force, it had not the effect of law. A society was formed, but came to grief as the result of an injudicious introduction of a political element. It was, however, reconstituted in 1880, receiving its *décret* in 1897, and it still functions with increasing usefulness. Cremation was in time legalized, and a crematorium opened in 1889 in the cemetery of Père Lachaise for the compulsory cremation of the very poor. Thus again the movement was handicapped—this time by a connection in the popular mind with pauperism. There are now other crematoria at Lyons, Marseilles, Rouen and Strasbourg; but it is only in recent years that cremation among the educated classes in France has begun to make its way.

Having regard to the opposition of the Roman Catholic Church, more is being done in Catholic countries than might be expected. In Belgium, cremation has not yet obtained parliamentary sanction, but energetic propaganda is carried on by a flourishing society which publishes a quarterly magazine. In Spain and in Ireland no move has

as yet been made; but in Portugal one of the first acts of the Republic was to authorize cremation, which the Braganzas had declined to permit. In Italy, the pioneer country, the development of the practice coincided with the movement for national independence led by Garibaldi and Mazzini. The burial-grounds, being for the most part under the control of the religious orders, were denied to the national party, who were thus forced by the Church itself to take advantage of the new method of disposing of their dead. The movement was stimulated in this way, but its accidental connection with the political and anti-clerical feeling of the time was not altogether fortunate. There are now thirty-six crematoria functioning in Italy; while Austria has two, Russia and Poland one each, and Switzerland nineteen. The city of Zürich may be looked upon as the Municipal Leader of Cremation. In 1874 it had its Society with a membership of over four hundred, and now it is distinguished by being entirely without burial-grounds. The authorities do not forbid burial, but merely refuse to provide facilities for it, insisting that it shall take place outside the confines of the city.

In Czecho-Slovakia, cremation, which had been forbidden under the Austrian monarchy, received attention immediately when national independence came in 1918. One of the first acts of the new Government was to build a crematorium at Praha, and then a second at Liberec. By the end of 1924 four others had been erected through municipal

enterprise; and it is an interesting point to notice in the statistics provided that by the end of 1923 (when there were only three crematoria), 1,236 Roman Catholics and 56 Jews had been already cremated in the country.

In northern Europe Sweden was the leader, opening its first crematorium at Stockholm in 1887: at the present time Sweden, Norway and Denmark have each four, and Finland has one. In Latvia, as in Czecho-Slovakia, one of the first acts of the new nation was to draw up a form of regulations designed to authorize and encourage cremation in the state. In Holland the position is rather curious, as public opinion is far ahead of authority in regard to this matter. There is a Union of Dutch Societies comprising thirty-two branches with a very large membership; and there is also an industrial society with a membership of several thousands. At many large towns the local organizations actually hold the funds for the necessary buildings, but are not allowed to put them up. There is, however, one privately-owned crematorium in Holland—at Westerveld (Velsen), near Haarlem—which carries out hundreds of cremations each year.

In nearly every country there is some sort of society which exists to advocate cremation; and it is clear that the movement is passing rapidly through its difficult initial stages, to be accepted definitely—by its opponents as well as by its adherents—as an acknowledged and established factor of modern life.

CHAPTER III

THE PROCESS OF CREMATION

THE ceremony which ends in cremation can be exactly the same as one which ends in burial up to the solemn moment of committal either to the furnace or the grave: the funeral arrangements, therefore, are in both cases a matter of choice: the one point of difference being that in the case of cremation the whole of the religious service can take place under cover, instead of wholly or partly in the open air. The details of such a ceremony of necessity vary in different countries, with different races, different creeds, and different points of view. The details of the actual process also vary slightly at different crematoria, with different makes of incinerator and different kinds of fuel. But the principle is the same everywhere, and a description of what takes place at the Golders Green Crematorium may be regarded as a fair example of what, at the present time, takes place in most cases.

The funeral procession enters the chapel and the coffin is laid on the catafalque. This is an altar-like table with one end directly in front of the doors which cover an aperture in the wall communicating with the crematorium proper. The top of the catafalque is fitted with sunk rollers, upon which the coffin is placed. The burial-service proceeds, and at the Words of Committal, "Ashes to ashes; dust to

dust," the rollers are set in motion, the doors in the wall open silently, and the coffin, untouched by any hand, glides slowly and noiselessly through them, pushing in front of it a heavy curtain, which at last falls back into its place. Then the doors close, as silently as they had opened. That is all which the mourners in the chapel can *see*; and at no time, from the beginning until the end of the rite, can they hear any sound whatever: Mr. Wells' account of what Bobby heard at the cremation of Christina Alberta's father is, by his own confession, nothing more than the exercise of a poet's licence.

Beyond the doors and the heavy curtain is an ante-room, and here the coffin has glided on to a movable platform, the same size, height and shape as the catafalque. In most cases this platform can be wheeled at once to the door of the incinerating chamber; but if the friends of the deceased have been so unwise as to enclose the shell-coffin in an elaborate outside casket, the latter has to be removed by the special machinery arranged for the purpose. The movable platform with its burden is then run on its rollers to the door of one of the four incinerating chambers, which is already in a state of white heat. The heavy iron door is raised by pulleys, the coffin mechanically propelled within, and the door dropped again silently to its place. This consignment of the coffin to the heated chamber can be witnessed by one or two of the friends of the Dead, if they so desire.

The incinerating chamber, or "retort," is high,

narrow, and long; and is lined with fire-bricks, those on its floor being spaced, so as to form a grid. The small furnace is at the side, divided from the chamber by a high wall, or "bridge," over the top of which the heat passes. This furnace is in two parts, water below and coke above; and it is the carbon-oxide gas produced by mixing steam and burning coke in this manner which provides the high temperature necessary. For one hour the retort is kept at 2,000 degrees Fahrenheit by stokers working under conditions similar to those on an ocean liner. The thin wood of the coffin flares up in one flash and is gone, the light wood-ash being drawn away by the enormous draught made by the long flues and the high chimney. Then gradually the flesh of the body becomes transmuted by means of the great heat into the form of carbonic acid gas, which, in its turn, is drawn up by the draught and mingles with the atmosphere in a purified and innocuous form, to be absorbed by the plant and vegetable life around, in accordance with that Law of Nature, which allows no waste in the life of the earth.

Only the bones remain, and these, freed from the bonds of the flesh, fall in fragments through the brick grid into a lower chamber called "the Second Retort" or "Calcination Chamber," where the process of purification is continued. Here the particles are gathered together by means of an asbestos brush, and swept into a cauldron-like receptacle beneath, which is immediately carried to a cooler

part of the building and its contents spread out on a stone slab for careful examination. Every scrap of ulterior matter is removed, this consisting mainly of the nails and screws from the coffin, which are drawn away by a magnet, and an occasional knot of wood, fallen before it had had time to burn, which is picked out with iron pincers. One thing sometimes still remains to be done: the harder kinds of bone do not turn to dust readily, though they have become brittle and white as branch-coral with the intense heat: so, if necessary, they are passed through a special machine, called a "pulverizer," coming out as a pure fine dust, ready for the urn.

It may be pointed out here that many of the popular ideas regarding cremation are merely fallacies. There are no flames to be seen and there is no sound to be heard; the body is not "put on the fire"; it is never handled, but undergoes its purification alone, as it does in the grave; and, as the heat is generated in a separate furnace, there is no contact with the actual fuel, and consequently no possibility of any foreign matter becoming mixed with the human ashes. Everything that goes into the heated chamber comes out of it, the flesh as gas drawn upward to the air, and the bones as dust and ashes cleansed of all pollution.

What becomes of the ashes after cremation is a matter of choice. The practice of scattering them in the Garden of Rest provided for the purpose at every English crematorium is growing steadily in

popular favour; and now, after two of every five cremations, the ashes are distributed in this manner, the action being that of a sower sowing seed over the grass, where the first shower of rain removes all trace of them. Sometimes the deceased has left special directions that his ashes shall be scattered elsewhere—over the sea, on a hill-side, in his own garden or in some romantic spot that has been dear to him. If they are to be kept, they are put in an urn, which is sealed with leaden seals bearing the name of the crematorium, and labelled with its own registration number, in order to provide exact identification at any future time. The destination of the urn is again a matter of choice, for, being a small thing and its contents harmless, it is of no consequence what becomes of it, apart from the question of respect to the Dead, and the wishes of his friends. Every crematorium has its columbarium where a niche may be purchased for the disposal of an urn in perpetuity. Sometimes, however, it is retained in the personal possession of the relations; or it is deposited in a family vault, or in a church—for cremation has brought back the beautiful old custom of leaving the Dead in the place where he used to worship—or the urn may be buried in some cemetery or churchyard, for interment of urns is allowed in graveyards, even when they have been closed for burials.

The form of memorial presents the greatest range in the matter of choice. In every columbarium are to be seen urns of every conceivable shape, size and

beauty. Many are copied from fine antique specimens in the British Museum; others are simple and plain; some have been specially designed by famous artists; sometimes the dead man has been a collector of beautiful things, and his ashes rest in some choice specimen from his own collection. The sentiment which hallows the place of the dead and leads to the periodical pilgrimage to honour the memories of the departed has grown up through the centuries; and it is fortunate that this sentiment is in no way interfered with after cremation, where the niche in the columbarium takes the place of the grave in the cemetery, and can be kept bright with flowers, or adorned with a soldier's medals, or a great man's "decorations." Apart from the urns, memorials range from a costly stained-glass window or fine mosaic in the Chapel to a rose-tree or a clump of bulbs in the Garden of Rest. On certain walls tablets are attached, these again presenting a large variety of style and size; and garden accessories, such as bird-baths, seats and sundials, suitably engraved, are frequently presented as memorials to those whose ashes have been scattered near by.

A method often followed is to cremate the remains privately, and to return the ashes for the religious ceremony elsewhere—often in the dead person's own church. This is done in the case of a funeral in Westminster Abbey, where, for many years, no burial has been allowed without previous cremation. It is a wise regulation, and it is to be hoped

that the Dean and Chapter will soon have the courage of their convictions and not continue to make themselves ridiculous by retaining a *coffin* as the central feature of the funeral procession. The coffin may be empty, or it may hold the urn of ashes; but everyone present knows perfectly well that it does *not* contain that which it pretends to contain—the body of the distinguished person whom they have assembled to honour. The situation is absurd. The obsequies of our Great in our national Valhalla provide neither place nor opportunity for burlesque, but should be carried out with the dignity suitable to the occasion. It is time that this farcical procedure should cease.

CHAPTER IV

THE LAW AND ECONOMICS OF CREMATION

CREMATIONISTS have never ignored the one great argument against cremation—the removal of evidence in the case of murder—but, on the contrary, have always advocated—indeed, more strongly than anyone else—the amendment of the Burial Laws, which at one time seemed to offer every facility for the concealment of crime, and even now are open to considerable criticism. They began this part of their work by sending a deputation to the Home Secretary in 1893, in order to call his attention to the matter, with the result that a Select Committee of the House of Commons was appointed “to inquire into the sufficiency of the existing law as to the disposal of the dead”; and the Report of this Committee was a complete endorsement of the opinions of the Cremation Society. Since then there have been slight changes for the better, but the law is still far too easy to be entirely safe from abuse—as is evident from the frequent Orders for Exhumation issued by the Home Office. The proper time for the detection of crime is before, not after, the disposal of the victim; and the necessity for any exhumation is in itself a confession of weakness, both on the part of the law and of the police. Moreover, exhumation is generally futile after a certain time, and in any case is useless when the

body has been buried in a communal grave, because identification is then impossible.

The regulations governing cremation, at first voluntarily self-imposed and afterwards legalized, are as follows. The first requirement is that an application for cremation must be made by the executor or nearest relative, who has to make a statutory declaration concerning the details of death, and to answer the question, "Do you know, or have you any reason to suspect, that the death of the deceased was due, directly or indirectly, to (a) violence, (b) poison, (c) privation or neglect?" The second requirement is a certificate, both of the cause and of the fact of death, to be given in a prescribed form of eighteen answers to specific questions, by the doctor who attended the deceased during his last illness, and who must have seen the body since death. The third requirement is that another fully qualified doctor shall give a confirmatory certificate, after a personal examination of the body, and with the right to question both the regular doctor and the nurses and friends who have been in attendance. The business of these two doctors is to certify and explain the cause of death, not to take the responsibility of sanctioning cremation. *That* is done by the Medical Referee appointed by the Cremation Authority and approved by the Home Secretary, who not only can (and frequently does) refuse to allow cremation to proceed unless completely satisfied that the application and certificates are in order,

but who has the power to demand a post-mortem examination.

These stringent regulations should exclude every possibility of a body being cremated which has been the victim of foul play, as no murderer would run the risk of discovery by three separate medical men when he is free to bury the body without these hazardous conditions. Sir Edward Troup of the Home Office, writing in 1925, said that "the effect of the rules will probably be that any attempt to cremate the remains of a person who has been poisoned will lead to detection. There are now fifteen crematoria in England and Wales, and more than 26,000 cremations have taken place, yet in no case has any question subsequently arisen as to the cause of death."

In the case of burial, only one medical certificate need be handed to the Registrar of Deaths for him to issue the order for interment. This one certificate is signed by the doctor who has recently attended the deceased. He is not obliged to examine the body after death, but may base his statement on that given by any person present at the time of death, without verification of its truth; and even this doubtful guarantee can be avoided. Lord Salvesen, the former Solicitor-General for Scotland, has said: "In some cases, and in the past these have run into thousands, an application by a relative or other person without any medical certificate may be sufficient to obtain the necessary order for burial. A person who wished to conceal that the deceased

person had perished from foul play would have no difficulty in many cases in obtaining a burial certificate"; and he goes on to point out that during the forty years in which cremation has been carried on in this country, either under the voluntary regulations of the Cremation Society or under the statutory regulations, a not inconsiderable number of persons have been murdered, and in no single case was there any attempt made by the murderer to have the body cremated.

Thus it is generally considered that the time has come when the conditions regulating earth-burial should be brought into line with those regulating cremation. No precaution can absolutely prevent the possibility of a crime remaining undetected; but it may confidently be asserted that, by the provisions of the Act of 1902 and the Regulations of 1903, the risk has been reduced to a minimum, so far as cremation is concerned.

There is a popular fallacy that cremation is much more expensive than burial, as well as being more troublesome. Needless to say, it can never compete with the very cheapest form of burial, when the body is merely placed with many others in the communal grave of a cemetery, especially when the interment is subsidized from the rates. But in the case of those classes who would pay for a separate grave, and remembering that the undertaker's fees and the funeral expenses are about the same in either case (and of course any amount *can* be spent on a funeral), then it may be definitely said that a

cremation, including the medical certificates, is certainly less expensive than a single interment in a cemetery. The cost of the burial of an urn in a cemetery is a very inexpensive matter—for example, at Hull a few years ago the charge was five shillings. It is obvious that the more general cremation becomes in the country the cheaper it will be. Sir William Horder has said recently that if it followed only 10 per cent. of the deaths in Great Britain the cost would be reduced to a sum very much below that of the commonest form of burial.

The fee of the Medical Referee is borne by the Cremation Authority, and a person's regular doctor often signs the death certificate without extra charge—as he is obliged to do in the case of burial. Thus frequently the only medical charge is the fee for the confirmatory certificate, which averages about two guineas. Apart from this, the chief obstacle to economy may be geographical, for obviously if a person dies next door to a cemetery and a hundred miles from the nearest crematorium, the cost of transport in the latter case renders cremation by far the more expensive process. The relative costs of the actual disposal of the coffin, after its arrival at cemetery or crematorium, vary so much that it is difficult to give figures that are representative. Some cemeteries and some crematoria are owned by private companies, while others are municipalized; in the latter case, the further question arises as to what proportion is borne by the rates. Figures quoted by one cemetery in North-

West London range from £9 to £15 for a private grave with the "privilege" of erecting a monument afterwards; this fee applies to parishioners only, to others it is nearly double; and to it must be added Interment Fees, the cost of the memorial, and the continual charges for upkeep. At the Golders Green Crematorium the inclusive fee for cremation, use of chapel and waiting-rooms, and all attendance is six guineas, members of the Cremation Society being cremated free of charge, and a certain reduction being sometimes made in the case of those people who have been insured under the National Health Insurance Act, and their dependents. In addition to this inclusive charge there is merely the Chaplain's fee (in some cases) and the cost of the urn. A plain urn costs one pound, and the same amount is charged for scattering the ashes in the Garden of Rest. The niches in the columbarium that may be purchased in perpetuity vary in price according to size and position from about eight guineas upwards, including all charges for future upkeep. It will be seen, therefore, that for a person of limited means the total cost of a simple cremation need not exceed ten pounds, provided death takes place near a crematorium; and in the case of a member of the Cremation Society it might work out at much less.

The foregoing facts relate only to the individuals concerned. In considering the cost to the community the difference between the two methods of Disposal is much more marked. Statistics have

recently been collected relating to 166 municipally owned cemeteries in English boroughs, drawn on an average of the three financial years ending March 31, 1926, and covering a population of seventeen and a half millions. These 166 municipalities control 305 cemeteries, occupying in all an area of over 8,000 acres of land, and they registered about ten and a half million interments during the three years. The average expenditure per annum was £800,000, the average income £638,000, the balance being paid by the rates. Thus the average cost per interment works out at £4 12s. 6d., and the average loss per interment at 18s. 9d. Twenty-eight of the 166 authorities made an average profit of 11s. 5d. per interment; the remaining 138 register a loss per interment which ranges in amount from £9 17s. 4 $\frac{3}{4}$ d. borne by the ratepayers of Cambridge to 1s. 1d. borne by those of West Ham.

There is also the negative side of the financial aspect to be considered, for, if all this valuable land near large towns were used for building purposes, for which it is so badly needed, there would be a consequent increase in its rateable value, which in turn would bring a reduction in the rates. The purchase of further land becomes an increasingly expensive charge to the community, and local authorities all over the country are incurring heavy debts in this way. On April 27, 1926, Sir Kingsley Wood, replying to a question in the House of Commons, stated that "the total sum which local authorities were authorized to borrow for the pro-

vision of burying-grounds since November 11, 1918, was £1,249,905"; and on page 104 of the Tenth Annual Report of the Ministry of Health, 1928-9, it is shown that loans were sanctioned to Local Authorities for Burial-grounds and Cemeteries, amounting to £164,304 for 1927-8, and for £208,184 for 1928-9. It is reckoned that altogether about five million pounds has been spent in this way; and that the area of land either already occupied or reserved for cemeteries in England and Wales totals about twenty-five square miles.

In turning to compare these facts with those applying to cremation, one is faced with the difficulty that the latter form of Disposal has not yet been in operation long enough, nor on a large enough scale, for statistics to be fairly compared. Many of the more recently built crematoria have not yet paid for themselves; also, while some are municipalized, others are owned by private companies. The pioneer establishment at Woking and the crematorium at Golders Green are selected as examples of the economic side of the question. The Woking establishment, started by the enterprise of a few individuals, is owned by the Cremation Society, and now has a value which exceeds 100 per cent. of the initial outlay. Golders Green Crematorium was inaugurated thirty years ago with a share capital of £15,000, raised among themselves by a few wealthy enthusiasts, who wished to promote cremation and who could afford to wait for financial return on their outlay. The land cost £6,000 and

the buildings £19,000, the balance being met by a mortgage on the property of £10,000. For some time the expenses far exceeded the income, but for many years now there has been an annual profit, a portion of which, after paying off the mortgage, has been spent in development, the balance providing an adequate return in dividends to the shareholders. The value of the buildings now is about £80,000, and there are ample cash reserves to meet all emergencies. A second Chapel, a second columbarium, and two extra furnaces have been added in recent years; and extensions in the courtyards and cloister, and improvements in the Garden of Rest are always going on.

The financial statement of the proprietary crematorium undertakings at Manchester, Birmingham, and elsewhere also reveal increases of property value without increase of capital liability, although not in such a marked degree as is the case at Golders Green, which was planned on a much larger scale.

It is an indubitable economic fact that every crematorium must, in course of time, be self-supporting, as the whole system is one of accretion, each year bringing an increase in returns and in values. The burial system, on the contrary, is a system of attrition, for every cemetery is but a transient and impermanent thing, offering nothing but a temporary resting-place to those laid in it; and, moreover, a wasteful thing, which engulfs large tracts of land and enormous public funds, giving next to nothing in return.

CHAPTER V

THE OBJECTIONS TO CREMATION

SINCE the first storm of antagonism raised at the beginning of the movement has died down the chief enemies of cremation have been convention, apathy, lack of imagination, and that general attitude of indifference which, of all things, is most inimical to progress. It is still quite a common thing to find a person who, while declaring himself strongly in favour of cremation, is too lazy while alive and well to take the necessary steps to ensure that it will be carried out at his death; and too unwilling, in the case of others, to undertake the responsibility of defying tradition and custom. It is felt—quite properly—that Death does not provide a suitable opportunity for making experiments; but the experimental period of cremation is now past; and if those people who definitely prefer this method of Disposal would take the trouble to put the fact in writing, it would straighten the way for their executors and relatives afterwards.

In France a person may state in his Will that he desires to be cremated, and this statement is legally binding on his executors. In England, unfortunately, this is not the case, as English Law does not recognize property in a corpse. So testamentary instructions, though useful in so far that they make clear the testator's wishes in the matter, are legally

useless. There is, too, always the risk that the Will may not be read until after the funeral arrangements are made: thus it is wise for every cremationist to take what other means he can to ensure that his wish in this matter shall be carried out. There is one case on record when this was done by a trick. The testator, well knowing the bitter opposition of his family to his opinions, had bequeathed the whole of a large fortune to his daughter if he were cremated, and to the Cremation Society if he were buried; when, needless to say, the family's antagonism died out very quickly, and he was cremated as he had wished. They said they thought it would have been a sin to allow so much money to be used for so evil a purpose.

The one substantial argument against incineration—the destruction of evidence of crime—has already been dealt with; but it may be pointed out here that the strict regulations which govern cremation reduce to a minimum the risk of being buried alive—a danger which (though probably largely imaginary) still darkens many a life with the shadow of a great fear. And even in the almost impossible event of a condition of coma escaping the notice of two doctors making a personal examination, it should be remembered that death would be instantaneous at the moment of entering the heated incineration chamber, for no animal life can exist at a temperature of 2,000 degrees Fahrenheit.

As some people still find difficulties in the acceptance of the system, it is proposed to deal individually

with the objections that have been brought forward. First comes the objection that cremation is "pagan." This is of course undeniable, if by "pagan" is meant pre-Christian; but burial and other forms of Disposal are also pagan, and the only way to overcome this difficulty would be to invent some new method never before known on the earth.

Next comes the objection that cremation "interferes with Nature." It does not *contradict* Nature, but merely does quickly that which Nature herself does slowly. And of what does the history of our much vaunted civilization consist but of one long story of Man's interference with Nature? Man has always been the great interferer, and the lesson he has learnt meanwhile is that the way to do good work of every kind is to follow Nature's indication, and to do the work she does, but to do it better and more rapidly.

Then there is the wail of the archæologists. "What," they implore, "what will the discoverers of the future have to guide them in knowledge of the Past if they can find no graves, and no skeletons?" Even Sir Thomas Browne, thinking of his Roman urns, dealt with this point. "Urnal fragments," he wrote, "have this disadvantage of grave interments, that they leave us ignorant of most personal discoveries." The case is one that depends for its solution on a sense of balance, and of relative values in life, and cannot be discussed here and now.

Those people who have in India seen the burning

ghats on the Ganges often oppose cremation because they have not enough knowledge of modern incineration to be able to distinguish it from the crude open-air methods of the Hindus, who continue to build their pyres of wooden logs on the river bank in the same way they have done for hundreds of years. The two methods cannot well be compared.

Vague assertions have sometimes been made that cremation is mainly advocated (for their own evil purposes—whatever they may be) by “unbelievers and Freemasons.” It can only be stated once for all that cremation is nothing more than a reverent and sanitary method of disposing of dead human bodies, and that it has no connection whatever with anything else—neither with “belief,” nor “unbelief,” nor with any religious sect, nor political association, nor secret society. With regard to Freemasonry, although many Masons have been cremated as private individuals, there seems to be no record of a Masonic funeral having taken place at any English crematorium; and the veteran English Mason, Mr. A. E. Waite, has authoritatively stated: “I have never met with any expression of opinion on the subject of cremation, for or against, in any work which can be called official . . . there is no feeling either way on the subject from the standpoint of any Grand Obedience.”

The opposition of the Press is a thing of the past; but for many years nearly all the first-class papers, as the *British Medical Journal* (April 27, 1912)

remarked, seemed "to be afraid that their pages will be defiled if they touched the subject." Meanwhile the comic papers indulged in unseemly jokes, and in the cheap popular Press many an over-coloured report was provided by some enthusiastic journalist, who, scenting good copy, had found it impossible to submit merely a simple and accurate account of what he had witnessed. A notable exception in the journalistic world was the late G. R. Sims ("Dagonet" of *The Referee*), who was one of the earliest supporters of cremation.

The opposition of various vested interests is also wearing down. For some time cemetery companies, undertakers and others were antagonistic from purely commercial reasons; but they are now coming to recognize the fact that nothing more is needed than a certain readjustment of methods, to bring the newer system into line with the older. Some antagonists have complained that "money is to be made out of cremation." That undoubtedly will be the case in the future; but if, when the system becomes more general, municipal authorities are able to find a profit in this way which would pay for the upkeep of the town, instead, as under the present system, of incurring vast debts and as a consequence imposing heavy rates, what harm lies in the fact?

It must be admitted that a certain amount of opposition was the result of blunders made by the cremationists themselves. For instance, in New Zealand, the authorities recognized early that it

might be necessary to insist on cremation in the case of the outbreak of any severe epidemic infectious disease, and that therefore it was wise to provide a crematorium ready to meet any such emergency. Then, having in this way established in the popular mind a connection between the idea of disease and the idea of incineration, they wondered why the new system failed to attract the general public.

In considering the opposition based on specific religious opinion, pride of place must be given to the Parsees, whose creed forbids the pollution of Earth, Air, Fire and Water by the consignment of the Dead to either of these elements; thus, apparently, providing the only case where cremation is opposed on the ground of dogma. In the western world the system has never been condemned because it is contrary to the dogma of any Church, all antagonism having its root in tradition and custom. As a result of this, while religious opposition was at first united, it has in the course of time broken up into sections, each section being influenced by the exact proportion in which spirituality and materialism figure in the teaching of each particular sect.

Religious materialism, in its crudest form, opposes cremation either as the result of some imagined connection with Hell-fire—which would seem to imply some confusion of thought, for surely it is the Soul which is to be tormented in Hell?—or as the result of a belief in the physical resurrection of

the body. As stated in *The Acts of the Apostles*, the basic authority of the Christian Church was established on the fact of the Resurrection of its Founder; and the fathers of the early Church had—somehow or other—to make their followers grasp the idea of the Immortality of the Soul, and of its life as a spirit after death has taken the body which held it. It can be readily understood how very difficult this non-material idea was of acceptance by the simple and the ignorant. Jesus had said, "It is the spirit that lives," but this profound truth was beyond their comprehension; they demanded some visible proof of the fact. Thus, at a very early date, the Church had recourse to pictorial and dramatic forms of description; and, as it is always impossible for the childish mind to distinguish between symbol and reality, it was probably in this way that the belief in a bodily resurrection became implanted in the popular understanding.

But, however that may be, believers in this strange doctrine hold that, at the Day of Judgment, God will miraculously collect the scattered remains of every human being who has ever lived on the earth, in order that each may appear as he appeared when alive—the Judge apparently being unable to recognize a spirit without this material aid; and they oppose cremation on this ground, making it clear thereby that they set a definite limitation to the miracle-working power of God, Who can, it seems, collect the scattered remains of men who died thousands of years ago, of those drowned at

sea, of those burned at the stake or devoured by wild beasts in the Arena, but Who is helpless in the case of persons whose bodies have been cremated at the present time. It would seem as if this materialistic conception were to-day an anachronism, but undoubtedly it is still accepted by certain simple-minded people, who, like children, are unable to imagine a condition of invisible spirituality. A few years ago, Dr. Gore, the distinguished theologian, realizing this fact, made a public statement on the point, saying :

Although in the age of early Christianity . . . the idea of the reassemblage of material particles . . . did prevail . . . yet it received no kind of religious sanction. St. Paul, Origen, and Gregory of Nyassa stoutly maintained that it was an impossible and unintelligent conception and in no way to be identified with Christianity. So strong was the feeling that, when the Church formulated its great authoritative expression of belief, which we call the Nicene Creed, instead of saying, "I believe in the resurrection of the flesh" or "the resurrection of the body," it said, "I accept the resurrection of the dead." . . . It is impossible to read St. Paul's non-scientific but imaginative consideration of the idea of resurrection without seeing that it in no kind of way suggests the reassemblage of material particles; on the contrary, that the Apostle starts by stoutly affirming that flesh and blood—that is to say, the present constituents of our bodies—cannot inherit the Kingdom of God.

On matters of faith it is futile to dogmatize as between one and another; but either on these

grounds, or on others, cremation is definitely opposed by the Fundamentalists and other of the most evangelical branches of Protestantism, by the Roman Catholic Church, and by the Mohammedans.

The attitude of the Church of Rome is doubtless originally due to the manner in which cremation was in the first place accidentally connected with the political movements of the moment in France and in Italy. No edict against burning the dead was issued by the early great councils of the Church; and it was not until 1884 that the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda issued a tentative opinion on the subject, *Cremationem approbare non debes, sed passive te habeas* (You must not approve of cremation, but remain passive in the matter). Two years later a decree was issued which forbade membership in Cremation Societies and declared the unlawfulness of demanding cremation. A third decree followed in the same year, and a fourth in 1892. Nevertheless the movement grew in all countries, and in 1926 the Congregation of the Holy Office, thoroughly alarmed, issued a new decree, which accentuated the conditions and imposed penalties for disobedience. *The Catholic Encyclopedia* states the case thus:

The practice of cremation is reprobated by the Church and no attention must be paid to any request for it. If a person has asked to be cremated, he may not receive Christian burial, unless he repented before dying; unreserved excommunication is incurred *ipso facto* by those who order or compel the Christian burial

of such persons, while those who give it voluntarily are interdicted from entering church, the censure being reserved to the ordinary.

It has been stated repeatedly and on the highest authority that cremation contradicts no dogma of the Catholic Church, but is a "disciplinary" measure; and an English Catholic, asked to explain the position, has replied :

There is nothing actually wrong in burning the bodies of the dead. It is merely that in ordinary times cremation disturbs the pious sentiments of the faithful. It is not in keeping with the beautiful rites of Christian burial; and it has been introduced by enemies of the Church for the purpose of shutting her out from one of her most touching functions. The freethinker burns the body to show, according to him, that that is the end of things, and that there is no hereafter.

There seems to be no explanation of the general Mohammedan opposition to cremation. In neither the *Qur'an* nor in the *Traditions* is there any express injunction regarding the burning of dead bodies, and no confirmation anywhere of the general belief prevalent among Mohammedans that the burning of the body prevents its soul from entering Paradise. Thus it would appear, in this case also, that the objection is not based on dogma, but arises solely from reasons of sentiment and custom.

The Greek Orthodox Church leaves its members entirely free in the matter. The Head of the Greek Church in London has kindly written in answer to

a direct question, "Cremation does not contradict any dogmatical or canonical truth of the Orthodox teaching," and goes on to explain that it has never been "a subject of consideration, and consequently has not received any decision, affirmative or negative."

Among modern Jews the question whether or not cremation may be allowed from the point of view of Rabbinical Law has been extensively discussed, and endless citations from the traditional writings of Judaism brought forward in support of both sides of the argument. It is generally agreed that there is no express law to be found in the *Old Testament* demanding the burial of the human body; and Dr. Schlössinger says that there is no mention of it in Talmudical literature. Modern Chief Rabbis in the various countries unite in opposing cremation in a general way "on the ground that it is not in consonance with the spirit and tradition of Judaism," but there have been individual exceptions to this. For instance, the Rabbi of Trieste in 1890 not only advocated the system during his life, but asked that at death his own body should be cremated; another of the foremost advocates was the Rabbi of Oppeln; and in 1892 the American Rabbis in conference decided that if they were invited to officiate at the cremation of a co-religionist they "ought not to refuse on the plea that cremation is anti-Jewish or irreligious." At the present time some Chief Rabbis oppose it entirely, while others make allowances or arrange-

ments to meet certain cases. The Chief Rabbi of France has decided that the religious ceremony should precede incineration; that the *Hashkabah* should be recited at the home, and that the Rabbi should then retire and not be present during the act of cremation. In recent years several English orthodox Jews have been cremated and the Church has not interfered in any way, but has remained "officially" ignorant of the fact; while the Liberal Jews of London have built a Columbarium in their own cemetery—a very practical way of showing sympathy.

The Church of England has kept an open mind on the subject and has not attempted to influence either its priests or its members for or against cremation. As long ago as 1874 the Bishop of Manchester made a public pronouncement in its favour, and when preaching urged his hearers "to disassociate the resurrection from physical conditions." Since then many bishops and other highly placed ecclesiastics have not only spoken in favour of cremation, but have been cremated; and in 1922 the ashes of the Archdeacon of Durham, Canon Watkins, were placed to rest in the Chapel of the Nine Altars in Durham Cathedral.

The Free Churches of England follow the good example of the Established Church, as their "freedom" consists of leaving each member at liberty to fulfil his aspirations in accordance with his own conscience, making him directly responsible for his actions to God, and not to a priesthood. Conse-

quently, many cremationists are to be found in the ranks of the Society of Friends and other kindred bodies.

In considering lastly the various so-called "modern cults" (Theosophy, Esoteric Philosophy, Christian Science and others), with their entirely spiritual doctrines, it is to find that each is dominated by the belief that the Soul is the real person, and that the Body is merely a temporary envelope provided to carry the Soul through its life on the earth. The usefulness of the envelope ceases at death, as does the paper envelope which has carried an important letter through the post; but—just as we do not allow used paper envelopes to litter our houses, but destroy each one carefully when its purpose is fulfilled—so the human envelope should be decently and reverently destroyed in some way that cannot injure those others which are still—to continue the simile—in the post.

The Theosophists, who consider that the physical body is encased in an etheric body, advocate cremation, because (as C. W. Leadbeater says) "it entirely prevents any attempt at partial or unnatural temporary reunion of the principle, or any endeavour to make use of the corpse for the purposes of lower magic." Dr. Annie Besant explains further that, in the case of earth-burial, this etheric double "floats over the grave, slowly disintegrating; and the unpleasant feelings many experience in a church-yard are largely due to the presence of these decaying etheric corpses." And this, she adds, is

“one among many reasons why cremation is preferable, as if the body be burnt the etheric double breaks up very quickly, having lost its . . . physical centre of attraction.”

It is indeed logical that all classes of non-materialistic “freethinkers,” because their doctrines are based entirely on spiritual grounds, should recognize that the final dissipation of the greater part of the body into the atmosphere in the form of gaseous matter is far more suggestive as a type of the new and brighter life to which the Soul has already passed, than the consignment of the human “envelope” to the abhorred and disgusting conditions of an earthly grave.

CHAPTER VI

THE ETHICS OF CREMATION

THE case for cremation in the first place took the somewhat negative form of a case against burial. In the last century the people of England were shocked by a succession of "burial-scandals"—graveyard sacrilege, persons buried alive, dreadful happenings to dead bodies, and still more dreadful happenings to the living connected with them. Dickens in his novels drew attention to many of the evils current in his day; and the medical profession ceased to specialize in healing the sick, and began to talk about public health and to point out the connection between disease and the condition of burying-grounds. Big cities had arisen, threatening to become bigger, and it was at last generally recognized that something had to be done to safeguard the living from the damage attending graveyard pollution of air and of water.

Public opinion was at length aroused, but when Sir Henry Thompson and his friends came forward with their remedy, the reaction was too sudden and too violent, and the novelty of this new method of Disposal too overwhelming for the people as a whole to accept it. Besides, was it not advocated by scientists; and were not scientists those dreadful people who wanted to destroy religion?

Indeed the very fact that cremation was in the

first place promoted by scientists, for scientific reasons, and from a scientific point of view, explains much of the popular antagonism which for many years obstructed the movement in this country. Its inception coincided with the first exposition of the Law of Evolution and of the theories of Darwin—at a time, that is to say, when it was commonly believed that Science and Religion were mutually antagonistic and irreconcilable. History shows that ever since religion has been formulated at all, each Church as it came into power maintained that power over Man by dominating his *thought*: thus the greatest sin has ever been to think for oneself. In modern days the result of this tendency is, that each time Science, with its ever-increasing knowledge of Nature, has been able to interpret some beautiful Law of God, and to demonstrate His Wisdom, the Christian Church, jealous at not having been able to bring forward the explanation itself, has refused to accept it. Thus, as Mr. Miles Malleson has recently said, “When one looks back over history, one realizes that there is scarcely any case in which Science has made some discovery for human advancement and happiness in which theologians have not been, for a considerable period, heavily on the wrong side.” The period may be “considerable,” but invariably a time comes when the Church finds its position altogether untenable, if not ridiculous; and then is obliged to “climb down” with as much dignity as it can muster. For instance, in the seventeenth century, the Church,

acting upon that "divine guarantee of inerrancy," which Dr. Arendzen has lately told the daily Press governs all its actions and teaching, tortured Galileo because he stated that the earth revolves round the sun and that the Milky Way is formed of stars; but now anybody can make the same statement about the same earth and the same sun and the same stars without danger. Thus, as practically every step made by Science has at first been denounced as "an offence to God" and ultimately accepted quietly, so, in its turn, cremation was "an offence to God" merely because it was a new thing proposed by scientific men.

But, as Sir Oliver Lodge has recently pointed out, this imaginary barrier between Science and Religion is rapidly breaking down under the growing realization of how little either can ever know of God's wonderful purpose and design. On all sides we can see on the part of scientific men a gradual but accelerating movement away from materialism and towards the study of a universe that is far more mysterious than it formerly seemed to be; while, on the other hand, the religionist is much more free than he was to formulate his ideas on scientific lines, and to find beauty and truth in that which was of old forbidden. But half a century ago there was none of this feeling of unity, and the antagonism of the Churches to any new thought coming from outside was a very definite thing. It was logical, therefore, that this new idea regarding the Disposal of the Dead should share in the general religious antagonism.

But one immediate result of the early cremation movement was to make the advocates of burial put their own house in order. The first step had been to prohibit intra-mural burial and to establish cemeteries; and then a general scavenging took place in the churches and in the graveyards. Leaking vaults were hermetically sealed, the poisonous abomination caused by thousands of dead bodies in every state of horrible putrefaction was removed, those coffins which still held together were carried many miles away for reburial, and every local authority armed itself with rules and regulations to prevent any recurrence of the loathsome conditions of the past. The danger once recognized, the first object was to place the dead as far away as was possible, with due regard to accessibility and questions of transport. But what invariably happened in the past, and continues to happen in the present, is that every cemetery placed at first on the outskirts of a town away from habitation, in course of time is absorbed by the town and thus becomes a centre of habitation. Then, after the mass of putrefying animal flesh has done its worst, the ground is "cleared" and used for some other purpose. It is not the present intention to discuss how the "clearing" is carried out, nor to inquire what ultimately becomes of the remains of the "hallowed dead," but only to emphasize the fact that, under this system, the Dead can never find any permanent place of rest.

In reality all that has been done is merely to

arrange that the process of decomposition shall take place out of sight and in a way less harmful than formerly to the living. At the present time advocates of burial declare that, under modern conditions, *no* harm is done; while advocates of cremation contend that water is, and always may be, polluted in the deep network of underground channels running in all directions below the surface of the soil; and that the air may also be affected, partly by means of worms, which (as proved by Darwin's experiments) can bring soil up from a depth of eight feet, and partly through cracks caused by dry weather. When doctors disagree 'tis folly to be wise, but it is obvious that if there were no danger at all in burying dead animal matter many of the regulations in force would not exist; for instance, the carcasses of animals dying from certain infectious diseases must be burned and not buried; such an order would not be required if pollution of air and water were impossible in the latter case.

But all these discussions and all these regulations relate to one side of the question only—the Rights of the Living. This is of course a very important side. If earth-burial is continued indefinitely in any thickly peopled country, the dead—already representing the great majority—will inevitably in course of time displace the living in every large area of population, unless steps are taken to reduce the amount of land used for their disposal—land which is urgently needed for building, for growing food, for allotments, for playing-fields, for open spaces.

The Living have the right to claim adequate sanitation, pure water, and all the other conditions which provide the opportunity to live a healthy life; they have also the right to demand that public money shall be used constructively to these ends, and not wasted on the maintenance of great spaces of sequestered land.

But these Rights of the Living are now so generally admitted by all right-thinking people that there is no need to dwell on this side of the question. There is another side to be considered—the Rights of the Dead. Mr. Galsworthy, in his play, *The Roof*, has poked gentle fun at the “sweet unreasonableness” of the English, who “look on the body as the devil . . . until it’s dead—then . . . the body becomes sacred at once.” But this deeply rooted desire to pay respect to the Dead is not confined to England: it has been universal among all nations from the beginning of history—and possibly before. That instinct which makes the Englishman lift his hat when a funeral passes, and the Mussulman press forward in order to take his turn in shouldering the coffin of some stranger on its way to the grave is no new thing: it is part of a deep sentiment in the human race which desires, in however insignificant a manner, to pay homage to those who have passed over the Great Barrier. Sentiment, even if it be sweetly unreasonable, can never be ignored; on the contrary, it is one of the greatest agents in human existence and holds an important part in the life of every man.

The question, however, which arises is this—how much sincerity and how much hypocrisy lies beneath this universal instinct which causes us to desire Honour for the Dead? The “burial-scandal” of the last century is happily, so far as England is concerned, a thing of the past; but may it not be that Burial itself is a scandal?

It would seem as if the continuance of this horrible and disgusting process of slow decomposition and putrefaction in the earth is due to a complete lack of imagination; for who, realizing these conditions, could deliberately lay the body of some dearly loved being in a place which is so repellent to our feelings that one can hardly venture to describe it? The contents of every grave during the intermediate stages of disintegration are a filthy mass of corruption, composed of blackened, decayed, evil-smelling, rotting flesh, and of the creatures that are devouring it gradually; and this lasts for months or years according to local conditions. The final result cannot be prevented, and when a desperate effort has been made to delay corruption by means of sepulchres, lead coffins, brick graves, etc., the end must invariably be the same. Even when a tomb is outwardly intact we know the contents to be a hideous and disgusting thing: the process going on out of our sight is merely slower in action, and for that reason still more harmful and still more horrible.

A most peculiar psychological situation thus presents itself. On the one hand we find this

universal and perfectly sincere desire to pay honour to the Dead, while on the other we find that the expression of this desire consists in submitting the Dead to the most loathsome conditions that can be pictured in thought.

Now one cannot have Honour and Horror simultaneously and in combination. A choice must be made between them. It is time that this word "honour" should carry with it honourable conditions. Either we must give up this age-long sentiment entirely, or we must express it with real sincerity of heart and mind.

We know that once death has ensued, the person we loved has vanished altogether, and that what is left is merely an empty shell. But since that empty shell is all that is left, surely we ought to treat it with the tenderest care and consideration? Its preservation *as we knew it in life* is impossible—even the Egyptians failed there—and, that being the hard case, surely the heaviest debt we owe our love lies in ensuring its safety from those conditions which are so revolting that it is only by dulling thought that the recollection of a dearly loved body being subjected to them is bearable. Yet while people know that the long, unseen process of decay in the grave is too revolting to describe, and while they shudder at the thought of it, they continue, not only to allow again and again that the bodies of those most dearly loved shall be subject to this process, but also their own.

Respect for the body is in these days a law of life.

Society expects each person to behave so that he at no time offers any physical offence to others; and, if he be powerless to care for himself, by reason of infancy, old age or sickness, then the State provides others to do it for him. Surely that self-respect which most of us maintain when alive and well should continue to exist after death; and, for the reason that we wish to do no harm during our life, it follows that it is the duty of others to act in accordance with that wish after we are unable to act upon it for ourselves.

This is one of the Rights of the Dead. Another Right is that of permanent and undisturbed rest. The word "cemetery" comes from the Greek *koimao*, which means "to lull to sleep"; and it is sad to think how far from its original meaning the word has travelled. The Dead have also the right to safety. The Romans and Greeks held very severe views on the subject of sacrilege done by the disturbance of graves; and modern public opinion shares these views in times of peace. But there is no such immunity in time of war, as has been proved in recent years.

And beyond these Rights of the loved and the unloved Dead there is, in many cases, a higher reason still for honour. During its life on earth this human frame may have been the vehicle of the sacraments of the Church—the water of Holy Baptism, the Anointing Oil of Confirmation, the Blessed Bread and Wine, and at the end the last solemn Rites which the Church has to offer. A body

hallowed by this divine nourishment is a temple of the soul in very truth, and should not, for that reason alone, become the food of worms.

In recent years the æsthetic side of cremation has become more evident than formerly. It was Mr. William Robinson who in 1880 first drew attention to the inherent beauty of the system. When he published his *God's Acre Beautiful* the present method of scattering ashes had not come into vogue, and his argument was that by burying ashes instead of bodies, the resting-place of the Dead may be made the most beautiful spot in every community. "The cemetery of the future," he wrote, "must not only be a garden in the best sense of the word, but the most beautiful and the best-cared-for of all gardens"; and then he pointed out that this can only be brought about by securing the condition of *permanence*: "It is to be a national garden in the best sense: safe from violation as the *via sacra* and having the added charms of pure air, trees, grass and flowers." Urns are at all times more beautiful things than coffins, and the adoption of cremation does not necessarily do away with tombs. In old Roman cemeteries and at Pompeii beautiful tombs may yet be seen with the urns inside them in as good order as when placed there two thousand years ago.

So, with these high ideals before them, the makers of a modern crematorium aim at three principal conditions: reverence, beauty and permanence. The Columbaria are built in such a manner and with

such materials that they will last for centuries as a permanent and fitting memorial to the Dead whose ashes they protect. Thus those who deposit an urn in one of the niches can rest assured that long after they themselves have passed over it will still be there, in perfect safety and under constant care. No ugliness is allowed admittance to the buildings, and skilful attention is paid to the upkeep of the grounds which surround them, for the keynote of a garden should be Life, not Death. As every gardener knows, a beautiful garden cannot be made all at once; but with the maturity brought by time these grounds round our crematoria should become indeed "the most beautiful and best-cared-for of all gardens." Those at Woking have had the longest time to mature, and possess also the natural advantages of water, fine trees, and undulating ground; and in this quiet Garden of Rest many a sad heart has found peace and comfort in its sorrow. For the mourner who has no grave to mislead him is better able to turn his mind to the spiritual aspect of things, and to think of life and death in a truer relationship.

There is, indeed, a very subtle inter-relationship between our attitude of mind towards Death itself and our ideas upon this question of Disposal: the two aspects of thought are closely interwoven, albeit unconsciously. It used to be the habit to fear death, to try to forget its inevitability, to push away the thought of it, to pretend it did not exist. To those people who are still unfortunate enough to fear Death, the horrors of its contemplation are made

infinitely worse to the imagination by thoughts of the horrors of the grave. Maeterlinck has said that Death "has two terrors looming behind it," one of which we have ourselves made. Christianity does not teach that the soul moulders in the grave with the body; but many a mind finds it difficult to disassociate all at once the physical from the spiritual, and requires time to assimilate the idea of the separation brought by death; to these the knowledge of the beauty of cremation comes like a great deliverance. Great sympathy must be felt for the many devout and high-minded members of the Roman Church, who, realizing to the full the reverence and the spiritual beauty of this system of incineration, labour under the disability imposed on them by their creed, and are thus compelled in obedience to act in a way which they know to be unworthy of their now high standard of right and of the highest aspirations of their Faith.

For now a new spirit is awake in the world, one that has no relation to any creed or doctrine. It has no fear of Death, knowing it to be but the gateway to a higher and better life. In *Our Eternity* Maeterlinck regards Death as the wonderful and beautiful climax of life, which opens the door to immortality beyond: "Here begins the open sea. Here begins the glorious adventure, the only one abreast with human curiosity, the only one that soars as high as its highest longing."

The Greeks regarded the Butterfly as a symbol of the Soul, and over the door of the Crematorium

at Velsen in Holland a butterfly hovers in stone as the symbol of our modern idea of Death. It is indeed time that the gruesome skull and cross-bones of the past should be for ever put aside; and a butterfly—one of the most beautiful things in God's beautiful world—might well take its place. For a butterfly is one of the few living things that shows no fear; and above everything there should be no fear. In the Cloister at Golders Green there is a tablet to the memory of that very great Englishman, Charles Montague Doughty, and it bears these words from his own poem, *Mansoul*:

I feared, till on a lintel which those passed,
I read, large-writ, in Everlasting Light,
"Fear ye not, Little Flock:" and underneath,
"Hath not Jeshua said that God is Love."
Words which abide a perfume in our hearts.

Cremation may not be the perfect method of disposing of the Dead with the reverence which is their due, but it is the best method known at present. Fire is Nature's great purifier, the Element provided by the Creator of the World to destroy in order to perpetuate, to deal with all that matter which has finished its work, so that other matter may come into being and, in its turn, carry on the life of the world. In some way or another all dead animal substance has to pass through the process of disintegration until it is reduced again to its component elements and is absorbed into the natural life of the world, where nothing is wasted. Sir Henry

Thompson, in his article of 1874, stated the fact as well as it can be stated when he wrote:

The problem which Nature sets herself . . . is always the same. The order of the universe requires its performance; no other end is possible. The problem may be slowly worked, or quickly worked; the end is always one. . . . In her wonderful economy Nature must form and bountifully nourish her vegetable progeny; twin-brother life with that of animals. The perfect balance between plant existence and animal existence must always be maintained while matter courses through the eternal circle, becoming each in turn. . . . By a thousand pores in every leaf the carbonic acid which renders the atmosphere unfit for animal life is absorbed . . . being every instant purified by plants, which, taking out the deadly carbonic acid . . . restore to the air its oxygen, first necessary of animal existence.

Such, then, is Nature's law, unvarying and inflexible. Our bodies must sooner or later become completely dispersed in the atmosphere and in the earth—the gases to one and the solid portion to the other. When the spirit which animates the form leaves it, then the form itself is needed by other forms of life. This is part of the debt of God's Nature. This is our sure and ultimate destiny, and no human effort can prevent it.

The question we have to decide is merely one of Time. If the payment of Nature's debt to Nature is carried out by means of bacterial germs or micro-organisms, the products are the intermediate products of decomposition; and the essential difference

between cremation and burial is that at a temperature of 2,000 degrees Fahrenheit these noxious intermediate products have no time to form. Shall we, then, harness Nature in this way, as Man has been harnessing Nature since civilization began? Or shall we, in this one case only, leave Nature to do her work in her own slow way?

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APPENDIX

QUOTATIONS FROM VARIOUS WRITERS, ETC.

H. G. WELLS.

(The following quotation is taken from the Introduction to *The Book of Catherine Wells*, and describes the Cremation of Mrs. Wells at Golders Green Crematorium.)

I should have made no attempt to follow the coffin had not Bernard Shaw, who was standing next to me, said: "Take the boys and go behind. It's beautiful."

When I seemed to hesitate, he whispered: "I saw my mother burnt there. You'll be glad if you go."

That was a wise counsel and I am very grateful for it. I beckoned to my two sons, and we went together to the furnace room. The little coffin lay on a carriage outside the furnace doors. These opened. Inside one saw an oblong chamber whose firebrick walls glowed with a dull-red heat. The coffin was pushed slowly into the chamber, and then in a moment or so a fringe of tongues of flame began to dance along its further edges and spread very rapidly. Then in another second the whole coffin was pouring out white fire. The doors of the furnace closed slowly upon that incandescence.

It was indeed very beautiful. I wished she could have known of those quivering, bright first flames, so clear they were and so like eager yet kindly living things.

I have always found the return from a burial a disagreeable experience, because of the pursuing thought

of that poor body left behind boxed up in the cold, wet ground and waiting the coming of the twilight. But Jane, I felt, had gone clean out of life and left nothing to moulder and defile the world. So she would have had it. It was good to think she had gone as a spirit should go.

GUY DE MAUPASSANT.

(From a sketch called "Le Bucher," which appeared in the *Figaro*, Paris, 1884. It gives an account of the cremation of an Indian prince on the beach at Étretat.)

I have therefore seen a man burnt on a funeral pyre, and that has given me the desire to disappear in the same manner. In this way everything is finished at once. Man hastens the slow work of Nature, instead of retarding it by the hideous coffin in which he rots for months. The flesh is dead; the spirit has fled. The fire which purifies disperses in a few hours that which was a human being and throws it to the wind. It makes of it air and ash instead of human corruption. This box wherein a body changes into a black and stinking pulp is repulsive and abominable. The coffin which descends into that muddy hole grips the heart with anguish, but the pyre which flames under the open sky has about it something great, beautiful and solemn.

MAETERLINCK.

(From *Our Eternity*.)

Death, as we usually picture it, has two terrors looming behind it. The first has neither face nor form . . . the other is more definite. . . . Is it Death that digs our graves and orders us to keep there that which is made to disappear? If we cannot think without

horror of what befalls the beloved in the grave, is it Death or we that placed him there? . . . Death descends into our midst to change the place of a life or change its form . . . It is already far away when we begin the frightful work which we try hard to prolong to the very utmost, as though we were persuaded that it is our only security against forgetfulness. . . . Decomposing flesh . . . offends our senses, shocks our memory, daunts our courage, whereas it would be so easy for us to avoid the foul ordeal. Purified by fire, the remembrance lives enthroned as a beautiful idea; and Death is nought but an immortal birth cradled in flames. . . . What happens in our graves poisons our thoughts together with our bodies. The figure of Death, in the imagination of men, depends before all upon the form of burial: and the funeral rites govern not only the fate of those who depart, but also the happiness of those who stay, for they raise in the ultimate background of life the great image upon which men's eyes linger in consolation or despair.

THE RIGHT REV. THE LORD BISHOP OF MANCHESTER.

(Social Science Congress, Manchester, October 1, 1879.)

No intelligent faith can suppose that any Christian doctrine is affected by the manner in which, or the time in which, this mortal body of ours crumbles into dust and sees corruption.

DR. POTTER (Bishop of New York).

I heartily agree with the Bishop of Manchester in his view of the utter irrelevancy of any so-called Christian objections to cremation, which are usually witnesses to great ignorance or great stupidity.

From the Will of W. P. FRITH, R.A.

Believing that the duty of the individual to his kind includes providing for such final disposal of his body as shall be least detrimental to those who survive him and believing that the modern process of incineration provides the quickest and safest mode of such disposal I hereby solemnly express to my survivors and executor my earnest desire and request that on my decease my body shall be cremated at such convenient place as shall furnish the proper facilities.

ELLA WHEELER WILCOX.

I heartily approve of cremation. In the first place it is cleanly; in the second it is economical. It helps along Nature. The body must eventually turn to dust, and why not turn it to dust by cremation rather than have it decomposed in the ground?

THE REV. H. R. HAWEIS.

How pure! How beautiful! All that is mere earthly about us to be taken and purified by fire, instead of being left to the mouldering corruption of the grave. . . . No more long, terrible months with wind and snow and rain above, and the lonely, dark prison-house of decay beneath; nothing but fair golden fire for half-an-hour, and a delicate white ash, at once a symbol of earthly life and heavenly beauty.

THE REV. PAGE HOPPS.

Burial is defilement; cremation is purification. Burial is the degradation of the body; the other is its sublimation. Burial cannot be followed out in the imagination; it is too dreadful. Cremation is lovelier the farther we

follow it, and the longer we think of it. A few moments of pure and blessed searching; and then all is beautiful. For what is more beautiful than that the pure dead body, purified, should be dismissed into the sunshine? . . . At present people cling to the visible grave. . . . We say the dead ones are sweetly sleeping and peacefully resting beneath, and we cover the dreadful reality with our little veil of turf and flowers, and never really face the truth; for all the while that is happening beneath which, if seen in all its horror, would drive us mad.

E. F. BENSON.

(From *A Reaping*, 1909.)

A churchyard stood there on the very edge of the sandy cliff, and one night, with noise of huge, murmurous thunder, an acre of it slid down into the sea. Next morning I visited the place, and there, sticking out of the cliff, were the bones of the dead that had been buried there. . . . I wondered how the trees had not slipped with the rest of the landslide, until I saw . . . one was wrapped round a thigh-bone, another had made a network among ribs (with its roots) . . . it was all horrible and revolting. . . . We have decided definitely against cremation, because it seems such a waste of tissue, and we are both of us going to be properly buried, the one close to the other, so that the same rose may bloom for us both.

SIR MALCOLM MORRIS (1922).

This method of disposal of the dead is going to do more to save the living than any modern movement.

INDEX

Act of Parliament, 22, 37
 America, 9, 22, 53
 Antagonism to cremation, 24,
 43, 45-52, 58, 59
 Archæology, 11-14, 45, 71
 Arendzen (Dr.), 59
 Arnold (Matthew), 11
 Australia, 22, 23
 Austria, 25

 Babylonians, 13
 Beauty, 66-69
 Belgium, 24
 Benson (E. F.), 77
 Besant (Dr. Annie), 55
 Bible, 7, 10, 49, 53
 Bishops, 20, 54, 75
 Blandford, Dorset, 20
 Blind (Karl), 23, 71
 Bones, 12, 29, 30, 77
British Medical Journal, 46
 British Museum, 7, 13, 32
 Browne (Sir T.), 10, 18, 45, 71
 Burial, 16, 36, 37, 42, 45, 55,
 57, 60, 61
 Burial Laws, 20, 34, 37
 Burial Service, 16, 27
 Burmese, 9

 Cambridge, 40
 Canada, 23
 Cardiff, 21
 Catafalque, 27, 28
 Cave-burial, 8, 9
 Cemeteries, 15, 20, 37, 38, 40,
 41, 47, 60, 65
 Certificates, 35-38
 Channel Islands, 22
 Chapel, 27, 32, 42

Chaplain, 39
 China and Chinese, 9, 23
 Christian Church, 14-16, 49,
 58, 65
 Christian Science, 55
 Chumnos (Georgios), 7, 71
 Church of England, 54
 Churchyards, 31, 55, 77
 Coffin, 27-30, 33, 60, 62, 63,
 66, 73, 74
 Columbarium, 31, 32, 39, 42,
 54, 66
 Communal graves, 35, 37
Contemporary Review, 19, 70
 Copts, 14
 Cost of cremation, 37-42
 Cremation Society, 19-21, 34,
 37, 39, 41, 44
 Crime (evidence of), 34-37, 44
 Czecho-Slovakia, 25, 26

 Darwin, 58, 61
 Death, 7, 10, 35, 36, 43, 67,
 68, 74
 De Maupassant, 74
 Denmark, 26
 Dickens, 57
 Doctors, 35, 36, 38, 44, 57, 61
 Dogma, 48-52
 Doughty (Charles Montague),
 69
 Durham, 54

 Early Christians, 14-16, 49, 50
 East Anglia, 13
 Egypt and Egyptians, 12, 13, 64
 Emperors of Rome, 16
 England, 13, 18, 22, 36, 41,
 43, 62

- Esoteric Philosophy, 55
 Etheric double, 55
 Europe, 13, 18, 23
 Exhumation, 34
- Finland, 26
 Fire, 10-12, 16-18, 69
 Flowers, 32, 66, 77
 France, 23, 24, 43, 51, 54
 Frazer (Sir James), 11, 71
 Free Churches, 54
 Freemasons, 46
 Frith (the late W. P.), 76
 Fundamentalists, 51
 Funerals, 15, 27, 32, 37, 72, 75
 Furnace, 29, 30, 42, 73
- Galileo, 59
 Galsworthy (John), 62
 Ganges, 46
 Gardens, 30, 32, 39, 42, 66, 67
 Gases, 29, 30, 56, 70
 Germany, 23
 Glasgow, 22
 Golders Green Crematorium, 27-30, 39, 41, 42, 69, 73
 Gore (Dr. Charles), 50
 Graves, 37, 39, 56, 63, 76
 Graveyard pollution, 57-61
 Greek Orthodox Church, 52, 53
 Greeks, 14, 65, 68
- Hanham (Capt.), 20, 21
 Hartland (Dr. S.), 8, 10
 Haweis (the Rev. H. R.), 76
 Hell-fire, 48
 Hindus, 9, 46
 Holland, 26, 69
 Home Office, 20, 21, 34, 36, 72
 Honour to the Dead, 62, 63, 64
 Hopps (the Rev. Page), 76
- Horder (Sir William), 38
 Hull, 38
- Immortality, 16, 49
 Incineration chamber, 28-30, 44, 73
 India, 23, 45
 Intra-mural burial, 60
 Ireland, 18, 24
 Italy, 19, 25, 51
- Japanese, 9
 Jews, 14-16, 26, 53, 54
- Land used for cemeteries, 40-42, 61, 62
 Latvia, 26
 Leadbeater (C. W.), 55
 Legends, 7-11
 Lehmann (R. C.), 20
 Le Moyne (Dr. J.), 22
 Liverpool, 22
 Living (the Rights of the), 61, 62
 Loans to Municipal Authorities, 41
 Lodge (Sir Oliver), 59
 Lutterworth, 17
- Maeterlinck, 68, 74, 75
 Malleson (Miles), 58
 Manchester, 22, 42
 Memorials, 31, 32, 39
 Millais (John Everett), 19
 Ministry of Health, 41
 Mohammedanism, 51, 52
 Municipal authorities, 25, 40-42, 47
- National Health Insurance, 39
 Nature's Laws, 45, 58, 69, 70, 76
 New Zealand, 23, 47
 Niches for urns, 14, 39, 67
 Norway, 11, 26

