

CREMATION; IN ITS BEARING ON PUBLIC HEALTH.

Sanitary science has taught us truths so important as to the deleterious effects of placing the bodies of our dead in almost hermetically sealed coffins and then depositing them in the earth, that, if we were not in daily contact with the blind conservatism of the human race, we should be surprised that this method was not long ago supplanted by some other system which would effect quickly and advantageously that which goes on in the grave slowly and mischievously. As says Sir Henry Thompson: "No dead body is ever buried within the earth without polluting the soil, the water, and the air around and above it;" and to this statement Sir T. Spencer Wells adds his testimony in a paper read before the British Medical Association: "Decomposing human remains so pollute earth, air, and water as to diminish the general health and average duration of life."

Singular as it may appear, this very pollution has the effect of making the contaminated water more attractive as a beverage. The sparkling brilliancy which is found so pleasant and refreshing is chiefly due to the large amount of nitrates contained within the water; and these are the results of decomposition. Upon this question the London Lancet, which is perhaps the highest medical authority that we have, speaks with no uncertain sound when it says: "It is a well ascertained fact that the surest carrier and the most deadly fruitful nidus of zymotic contagion is this very brilliant, enticing water, charged with the nitrates which result from decomposition."

A source of danger which is apt to be overlooked is the possibility of spreading disease through the agency of living organisms. Pasteur suggests that in cemeteries it is very possible that germs propagating specific diseases of different kinds may be carried to the surface of the soil by earth worms; and Prof. Kock, having made observations in the same direction maintains that, almost without regard to the depth at which a body may be interred, the spores may ascend to the surface and infect those who come within the reach of their influence.

In his work "On the Causes of Some Epidemics," Mr. Cooper cites, among other cases, that of Eyam, in Derbyshire, England, where an immediate outbreak of the plague was occasioned by the digging-up of the burial places of former victims; and we are further told by Mr. Eassie that, in 1843, when a parish church in Gloucestershire was rebuilding, some of the superfluous soil of the burial-ground was sold for manure and deposited in many of the neighboring gardens, with the result that the town was nearly decimated.

M. Pariset, a special investigator of the French government, also traces the outbreak of the plague in Egypt, in 1823, to the opening of a disused burial-ground about twelve or fourteen miles from Cairo.

In the discussion of the subject of cremation, a great advance has been made in the last few years. The theory has gained a victory, but there yet remains a widely diffused prejudice against the practice. And yet, in this, man only seeks the best method of doing nature's work in her own way, but more quickly than she can do it unassisted. He only aims at the encompassment of the rapid reduction of the body by means of a heat which purifies every exhalation, and leaves but pure, white, and absolutely harmless ashes. The ceremony which accompanies the incineration of a body need not be shorn of one item of religious rite, and our church-yards may, without fear of any evil effects, be used as the repositories of the ashes.

One who has witnessed this ceremony, and by the sight has been converted from an opponent to an earnest supporter of the system, writes: "As we turned from the incinerator, where we had left the body of our friend, it was pleasant to think of him still resting in its rosy light, surrounded and enveloped by what seemed to us as floods of purity. It was grateful, too, to feel that whatever might remain after would be as he would wish it, clean, and white, and, like his own pure self, without offence to thought or memory. After all that I have seen, I must say that my feelings are completely changed, and that the process of incineration is so much more attractive than anything which I had ever conceived that I would as much rather see my dearest friend cremated than buried as can possibly be imagined."

There have been objections made to cremation on religious grounds. We are told that it is unscriptural and that it militates against a belief in the resurrection. It certainly is not forbidden in either the Old or New Testament, and some commentators of undoubted repute, such as Pusey, Bauer, and others, think that, in certain passages of the sacred writings, they find evidence that, in former times, the Jews practiced incineration as well as burial. The late Bishop of Manchester, at the consecration of a new cemetery, made use of these significant words: "Here is another hundred acres of land withdrawn from the food-producing area of the country. I feel convinced that, before long, we shall have to face the problem, how to bury the dead out of our sight, more practically and more seriously than we have hitherto done. In the same sense in which 'the Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath,' I hold that the earth was made,

not for the dead, but for the living. 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."

After thinking over the subject carefully let us ask ourselves one or two questions.

1. Are we willing that, after death, our bodies shall be so disposed of that, in their decomposition, they shall constitute an element of danger to our survivors?

2. Do we desire that the bodies of those whom we loved and revered on earth, and on whose works for the welfare of others we delight to dwell, shall, so soon as life has departed, become the originators of evil to mankind?

If we can answer "yes" to these questions, then let us continue our present methods of burial. If, however, we do not desire these things, let us unite for the purpose of carrying into operation a better system.

THE "PEERLESS POSER."

In his CONSERVATIVE, the esteemed J. Sterling Morton, takes occasion to differ with the opinion of the Star, that Mr. Bryan cannot again secure the nomination of the democrats for president. "What was possible," says THE CONSERVATIVE, "to a Weaver-supporting populist of 1892, at alleged democratic conventions in 1896 and 1900, is not impossible in 1904 to the same peerless poser for the plain people."

Two times and out would seem to be a proper rule to apply in the case of Mr. Bryan, even though the great national game admits of three strikes. Admitting all of the superlative talent of the democratic party for dense and stupid politics; conceding its propensity to cast aside principle for expediency; acknowledging its tendency to take up with any idea or fallacy which it may believe will aid it in gaining power; even then there is no reason to think that it will risk for a third time its chances for obtaining control of the government on a man who has twice led the party to defeat, and who is confessedly weaker now than he was when he made his first run.

The democratic party is not wise, nor honest, nor true to any policy which might win for it the confidence or respect of the people. But it is hungry and its necessities will force a shrewder method of meeting them than to place at the head of its ticket in 1904 a man who is no longer peerless even as a poser.—Kansas City Star.