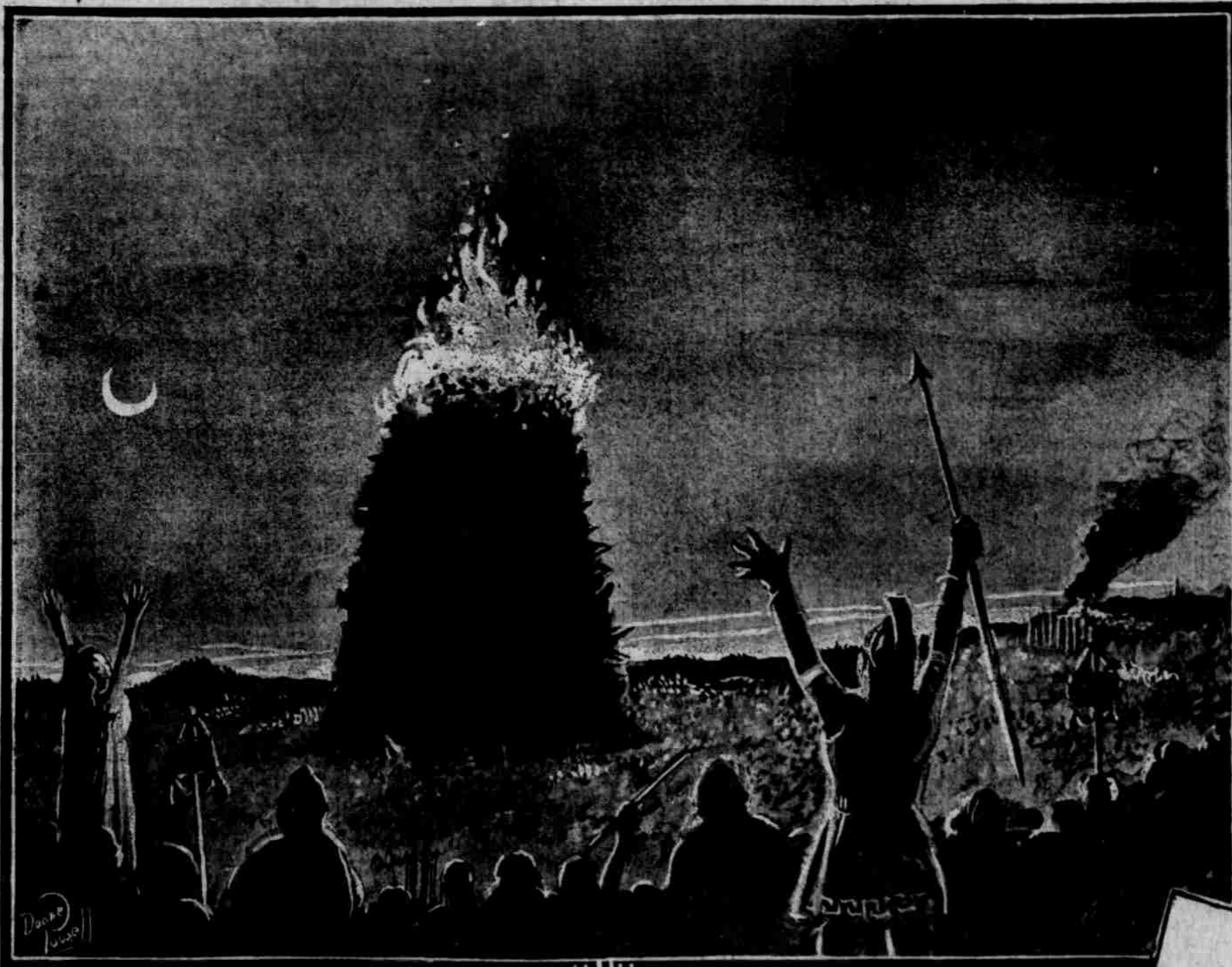


Ashes to Ashes Becomes Literal Fashion with Cremation



CREMATI**O**N of the dead, practiced by the ancients in the anti-Christian era, and employed to reduce again to ashes the body of Omaha's merchant prince, Emil Brandeis, is finding more and more favor with the people as the years pass and encountering less opposition from the church.

Prior to 1869 there were no crematories in either Europe or America, but an agitation for them was beginning, following disclosures of disease and death in the vicinity of cemeteries where thousands had been buried and whose slow decay was an ever-present danger to the living.

Following the crucifixion of Christ the custom of burning the dead on funeral pyres fell gradually into disuse, although the custom had been general and in places and at times imperative. Only Egypt, Judea and China had held to inhumation of the body, burying it in the earth, the tomb or the sepulcher.

"Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither can corruption inherit incorruption," said Paul, and this was an influence that brought about the first incineration in the United States, although men of the medical profession had been denouncing the graveyard as a menace to the living and a mistreatment of the dead. Cremation, however, first arose out of necessity. It was in the Trojan war where Homer describes such a frightful carnage that the funeral pyre was the only method of disinfecting the field of battle and removing the bodies from the blood-soaked field where they were being torn and eaten by the wild beasts and the birds of prey.

Sylla, who had committed a most sacrilegious profanation on the body of Marius, directed that his own body be burned so that he might escape a like posthumous vengeance. It was from this incident that cremation among the patricians of Rome dated.

Frequency of burials alive has also contributed to cremation. In Iowa several years ago a beautiful girl was buried while in a trance. Relatives later desired to remove the body and exhumed it. The girl was found lying on her face, her features distorted almost beyond recognition, her clothes torn and her hands clutched in her hair. She had awakened, realized what had occurred and turning in her coffin frantically endeavored to force the clamped cover from her bier before she suffocated.

Dr. F. Julius Le Moyné and Prof. Samuel D. Gross were among the earliest advocates of cremation in America. In 1874 a crematory society had been organized in England and the process successfully demonstrated. In 1878 Le Moyné built at Washington, Pa., the first crematory in the

United States, and the first man cremated was Baron de Palm. The second one built in this country was also in Pennsylvania, at Lancaster.

Today there are forty crematories in the United States and others are being rapidly completed. In Europe the following countries have built them: England, 5; France, 3; Italy, 27; Switzerland, 5; Germany, 5; Denmark, 1; Sweden, 1. There is one at Montreal, Canada, and a society called "Die Flamme" will build one at Vienna, Austria, having but recently organized.

California has built five and New York has constructed a like number. Nebraska will have one before the year is out, as the Forest Lawn Cemetery association is now erecting a \$90,000 structure. A law was passed through the legislature authorizing cremation here before the cornerstone of the first crematory was laid. Cremation has been approved by many prominent men and women of America. Among those who have spoken or written their approval are: Phillips Brooks, Charles A. Dana, Dr. William A. Hammond, Andrew Carnegie, Edward Everett Hale, Ella Wheeler Wilcox, William Waldorf, Astor, Marshall P. Wilder and Frances E. Willard. Omaha men attempted to form a crematory association here fifteen or twenty years ago, but failed in securing sufficient financial assistance. Many Omaha residents, however, have set the precedent, followed by Emil Brandeis, who had requested his brothers to see that his body was incinerated.

Henry Pundt was one of the first Omahans to be cremated. He was a wealthy resident in the early days and lived in a large brick house where the Brandeis theater building now stands. He went to Europe, sickened and died in Hamburg, where his body was burned, the ashes placed in an expensive stone urn and forwarded to Omaha. The urn was held up for duty by the customs officials of New York and a delay of several days occasioned.

George W. Lininger, who died in 1907, was first buried here and in 1908 exhumed, sent to Davenport, Ia., and cremated. His ashes were given to the Masonic Home at Plattsmouth, Neb., and now rest in an urn in the basement of that institution, to which he had been a generous donor.

Mrs. Samuel Brown, a sister of Herman Kountze, died in April, 1909, and was cremated at Davenport. Other Omahans who have been

cremated there and their ashes brought back, scattered to the winds or buried are: Alice Egbert, George Mittauer, Caleb J. Gregg, Mrs. Maud Fellner, Mary E. Chapman, Edwin F. Jacobi and Mrs. Henrietta Brooks. Several Omahans have been sent to Minneapolis, where they were cremated. Mrs. A. L. Rawitzer was one of these. Her husband, the president of the Omaha Tent and Awning company, had her ashes brought back to this city. Two years ago J. W. Holmes died and his body was reduced to ashes by the quicker methods of the crematory. J. E. Baum's body was shipped to Denver, being one of the few cremations of Omaha people done in that city. Judge Ferguson and William H. Wyman were also cremated.

Fritz Wallburg, a German actor who had spent much time in Omaha and was well known and had many friends here, died in October, 1909. His body was sent to Davenport for cremation. Miss Beatie Hofmeister was a victim of death in 1908 and her relatives sent her remains to Davenport and had the ashes returned. Few undertakers of the city but have been requested to burn and not bury the body of the dead. Many of these undertakers have been converted to the quicker method of disposing of the dead and openly approve it, but others still maintain earth burial is better.

There are those who believe cremation is a violation of the sentiment of the scriptures and look upon the process with horror, but may believe it is the safest and sanest way of disposing of the remains of loved ones, grown doubly dear in death. "Between burial and burning there is no difference in the final result. The difference is in the process. The inevitable change is wrought in the one case quickly, in the other slowly; in the one by the action of clean flame, in the other by the action of the damp earth."

Brought into the chapel of a crematory the body is wheeled noiselessly after the services into the sarcophagus, the retort sealed and the oil jets opened and lighted and incineration secured by burning sprays of atomized petroleum, by which a temperature of 3,000 degrees Fahrenheit can be obtained. There is no smoke, no flame and nothing obnoxious in the process. Within an hour the

cremation is complete. All that remains is from three to five pounds of white ashes. Only ashes of the bone remain, all else, including the structure of the casket, has disappeared in light ash or gaseous product. The spirit has laid off its "overcoat of clay," the body and that ethereal something called the spirit have been "purified as by fire."

Omahans who have witnessed the incineration of the dead say there is an absence of the shock usually accompanying burial in the earth. One has thus described the process:

"I have stood before the threshold of the crematory with a faltering heart. I have trembled at the thought of using fire beside the form of one whom I had loved. But when, in obedience to his own dying request, I saw the door of the incinerator taken down, its rosy light shine forth, and his peaceful form, enrobed in white, laid there at rest amid the loveliness that was simply fascinating to the eye and without a glimpse of flames or fire or coals or smoke, I said, and say so still, this method, beyond all methods I have seen, is the most pleasing to the senses, the most charming to the imagination, and the most grateful to the memory."

Not sentiment but unpleasant facts have led medical men to proclaim against the graveyard and our present manner of conducting funerals as a "tissue of horrors dropped as a curtain at the end of each human life." But, from a sentimental standpoint, they maintain it is much better to dissemble the flesh quickly into its original elements by the clean power of fire, rather than give it to the earth for worms and putrefaction to slowly make of it a thing of ghastliness and danger.

Better by far, they say, reduce the lifeless form, once so full of the essence of life, a bubbling energy, to a pile of odorless ashes than to allow the thing "made in the image of God" to become a noisome exhalation, a grotesque mummy, a shapeless compound of pitch, resin and perfumes.

Few cemeteries exist longer than a century. In England tombstones that have marked the last resting places of the loved, the lover, the stranger and the friend have, in instances, been torn down after several decades and the granite gravestones

converted into material to pave long stretches of roadway. Other cases are on record where cities have been built upon graveyards, less dangerous to the living only than the custom among the aborigines of interring their dead beneath their own homes where they became tutelary deities. Manhattan was once a graveyard. Beautiful parks, the playground of the children of the modern world of progress, have been at remoter times ghostly cities of the dead, where white gravestones stood as sentinels in mute witness to the dissolution that is inevitable.

Even upon an economical basis, it is claimed cremation must eventually displace the ancient custom of burial in the ground. Hundreds of acres, fertile and fair to look upon, have been converted into graveyards.

Ministers of the gospel of all creeds and sects have pronounced cremation sanitary, proper and not in conflict with Biblical precept. Dr. A. Buccellati, a Catholic priest and professor of theology at the university of Pavia, a learned ecclesiastic of Italy, writing to Prof. Polli at Milano, said:

"You enquire of me in what relation cremation stands to religion. As a reasoning Catholic, free from any prejudice, I do not hesitate for a moment to openly declare that cremation, as you and your colleagues understand it, is not inconsistent with the teachings of religion."

Rabbi Abram Simon of the congregation of B'nai Israel of Sacramento, Cal., has said:

"I have no hesitancy in declaring that, to my mind, cremation will be the future method of disposal of the dead. It is the necessary method; it is rational; it is expedient; it is desirable."

Rev. George Hodges, dean of the Episcopal Theological school of Cambridge, believes in the methods of cremation and thinks it would revive an old and cherished custom.

"Cremation will make possible a revival of the old custom of laying the dead away in the church. There would be no more removal of the relics away, out of our sight."