

**Practical suggestions for the establishment of national cemeteries / by
George Alfred Walker.**

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PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

6

FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF

NATIONAL CEMETERIES.

BY GEORGE ALFRED WALKER,

Surgeon,

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TOWNS, AND AUTHOR OF "GATHERINGS FROM GRAVE YARDS," "THE
GRAVE YARDS OF LONDON," "INTERMENT AND DISINTERMENT,"
"THE MINUTE ANATOMY OF GRAVE DIGGING," "A
SERIES OF LECTURES ON THE ACTUAL CONDITION
OF THE METROPOLITAN GRAVE YARDS,"
ETC. ETC. ETC.

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BY GEORGE ALFRED WALKER.

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THEORY OF THE NATIONAL SOCIETY FOR THE AMELIORATION OF BURIAL IN
TOWNS AND AUTHOR OF "SUGGESTIONS FOR GRAVE YARDS," "THE
GRAVE YARDS OF LONDON," "THE GRAVE YARDS OF LONDON," "A
"THE NINETEEN YEARS OF GRAVE DUGGING," "A
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ETC. ETC.

Public opinion has at length pronounced itself so decidedly against intramural sepulture that we may regard the abolition of that immoral and injurious practice as being not only inevitable, but imminent. Having contributed, so far as my humble means permitted, to the attainment of this necessary and long-desired reform, I have thought it incumbent on me to offer some brief observations on the manner in which the reform may be carried out, to the benefit and satisfaction of the public. It is not enough to point out the existence of an abuse, we must also indicate the remedy, and its mode of application.

Did space permit, it were easy to demonstrate that the moral and physical evils which more immediately arise from burials in towns, are not the only ones connected with that practice. In all large cities, especially in London, the expenses of intramural sepulture press most heavily on the poorer classes. Hence, the dead are often kept, before burial, for an almost incredible period in the midst of the living. I brought this point prominently before Parlia-

ment in my petition in 1842, and demonstrated before the select committees of 1840 and 1842 two great requirements of the age,* viz., more enlightened, more comprehensive views as to the position and structural arrangements of the dwellings for the living, and more especially as to the mode and expense of transit, and the *selection of localities* for the INTERMENT OF THE DEAD.

Competent and credible witnesses have deposed, that the poorer classes are sometimes compelled to keep their deceased relatives for three weeks, before they can collect the sum necessary for the most humble ceremonial, and during this time the health and moral condition of the survivors are subject to a variety of most injurious influences.

Under the present system, indeed, exorbitant charges for the interment of the dead in cities are inevitable.

In the present brief remarks I cannot enter into details. It must suffice to state, that Parliamentary witnesses have shown that the expense of an ordinary funeral, for a person of the middle class, is from £50 to £70; for an artizan, £5 to £10; for the absolutely poor, 13s., and this does not include ground or burial fees.

The money expended for interments in London during the year does not fall much short of ONE MILLION of pounds sterling. The annual expense for Great Britain has been calculated at FIVE MILLIONS sterling. This sum, nearly equal to the revenue raised under the poor-law, is largely derived from those to whom reduced charges, regulated by a *fixed* tariff, for the burial of their dead,

* See my evidence specially referred to in the Report of the Select Committee, appointed "to inquire into the Circumstances affecting the Health of the Inhabitants of Large Towns and Populous Districts, with a view to Improved Sanitary Regulations for their Benefit." 1840. See also my evidence before the Select Committee appointed to inquire into the "Effects of Interment of Bodies." 1842.

would be a great, and, in more senses than one, an invaluable boon.

There are two classes of persons—the claimant and the non-claimant, destitute—the one receiving parochial relief, the other, whose patient endurance and unsubdued independence have supported, during many years, an unequal struggle against adversity, and its last resource—the work-house.

It is the duty, as I trust it will be the determination, of those in authority, to take especial care that, at the lowest possible cost, an appropriate and solemn transmission, and a “last home,” should be accorded to these, the poorest of our brethren. Nay, more, in the case of meritorious and deserving individuals who have not been claimants of parochial relief, and who may have exhausted, during the exigencies of a long illness, their independent resources, I would suggest that a provision should be made by the Government for affording them, under the certificate of duly authorised persons—medical attendants, or others—the gratuitous means of interment, under class seven.* Such an arrangement would bring comfort and aid to numbers, at a time when, of all others, it would be most seasonable, and most required.

If, however, the Legislature forbid the practice of interment in towns, it is the duty of Government to carry out the law, by providing an efficient system of extramural sepulture, suited to the feelings and requirements of the entire community.

A GENERAL ACT for the establishment of Cemeteries should at once be passed. Every City, Town, and I may add, very many Villages, in the United Kingdom, require Suburban Cemeteries. Any inquiry as to *effects*, viz., deteriorated health, premature death, and the

* Vide p. 13.

poisoning of water from grave-yards, which I have proved follow as a matter of course, is not only unnecessary, but a waste of time and money. All that is required, is, to determine as to the *condition of the soil*, and the *site* of the projected cemetery. Every facility ought to be afforded by the Legislature, and every unnecessary obstruction removed. *Separate* acts of Parliament, more especially when opposition is offered, involve often a great outlay of money, and an expenditure of time, which might be much better employed.

Cemeteries ought *not* to be in the hands of joint-stock companies. They ought to be NATIONAL INSTITUTIONS, or vested in corporate or town authorities, or managed by committees elected by the rate-payers, subject to the supervision of a general authority, free from local feelings and prejudices. Private speculations in burials, or any such ownership, ought never to have been permitted. I am aware that there are persons who approve of joint-stock cemeteries, and who disapprove of a compulsory act for the prevention of intramural burial. Yet, only three acts for the formation of joint-stock cemeteries were obtained in the year 1846 !

It seems to me highly improper to leave a reform like this to *local* efforts, and then to saddle such efforts with immense fees, extracted, it is true, in the first instance from the pockets of public-spirited individuals, who, in one instance, to my knowledge, believed that they had *given* rather than invested. Besides, the money so unnecessarily expended must be repaid (principal and interest) in the shape of increased "fees," by the friends of the deceased who may be buried in such cemeteries.

The different cemeteries in the hands of companies should be purchased from the shareholders, who should be equitably and even liberally treated with, and as they are situated

in localities towards which dwellings have already approached, or may be expected to approach, they should be stringently regulated, with a view to their being closed, before they, in turn, become nuisances.

For the above paramount reasons I am decidedly of opinion that Government, under the change contemplated, should take on itself the charge of organising and administering, or rigidly supervising, a general plan for the interment of the dead throughout Great Britain.

Let us now consider, generally, how this may best be done, confining our remarks, for obvious reasons, to London.

The annual mortality of London is about 56,000, or 154 per day, and as each body should be allowed to remain ten years in the grave for complete decomposition, we have to provide for 560,000 bodies.

I have shown elsewhere* that an acre of ground will give SANITARY burial to 136 adults, annually, and no more. On this calculation, 412 acres of land would be required outside the city, but as this implies the most economical distribution, we may calculate on 500 acres, at least, being necessary; for a certain space will be required for mortuary receptacles, previous to interment — chapels, monuments, tombs, — waiting-rooms for mourners, visitors, and residences for the officers of the establishment, who must reside in the immediate locality of the cemetery.

As I have many years since proved that burial in vaults, in coffins lined with lead, is most injurious in its consequences, the Legislature should prohibit the practice of depositing dead bodies in vaults, or catacombs—more especially under the pavement of the chapels in which the mortuary service is performed; or, if at all permitted, in deference to existing feelings or prejudices, the practice should be discouraged, as

* Lecture iv. p. 5, "On the Actual Condition of the Metropolitan Grave-yards."

much as possible, by the imposition of a heavy pecuniary charge.

The proposition to establish "METROPOLITAN PAROCHIAL BURIAL-GROUNDS" in the vicinity of London, made by a Committee appointed at a meeting of several of the Metropolitan Clergy on the 23rd day of December, 1847, cannot be entertained, because the re-creation of "PAROCHIAL BURIAL-GROUNDS," would neither meet the pressing necessities of the case, nor satisfy the demands of the public.

In this Report it is stated, that "the expense of the purchase, enclosure, and laying out of about 150 acres for burial grounds would, according to the calculations laid before the committee, amount to about £180,000."

"It would require," says the Report, "for the purpose of the *perpetual* interment of the dead of the metropolis, not less than 646 acres of land;" therefore, if, as is proposed, 150 acres of land, buildings, &c., are to cost £180,000, a sum of about £800,000 sterling would be required.

This, I conceive, would be an unnecessary, and therefore an unjustifiable expenditure of public money, as I shall now endeavour to show.

A celebrated heathen philosopher would not permit fields fit for tillage to be employed for the purposes of inhumation; and it would be difficult, I think, to produce a valid objection to the appropriation of comparatively valueless common lands, in the neighbourhood of London, for such a purpose. More especially as there are large available tracts of such land in the immediate vicinity of the railways, admirably adapted, both as to soil and site, and sufficiently capacious to receive the dead of this metropolis for many centuries to come.

The South-Western Railway runs through a vast tract, —Woking Common. There are other localities which will

readily present themselves; for example, on the Eastern Counties line, High-beach and Wanstead-flats. The Surrey side of the river affords peculiar advantages for the erection of MORTUARY stations,—as the Nine-elms,—also approachable by the River Thames, and the now unused (excepting for goods transit) South-Eastern branch line—the Bricklayer's Arms station.

Let those who may object to the apparent boldness of this scheme reflect, that railways offer the readiest, and by far the most economical, mode of conveyance; that the necessity is urgent, nay, imperative; that the change would effect an incalculable sanitary and moral reformation; whilst the appropriation of land, as I have said, comparatively valueless, would be a wise and prudent measure, in anticipation of the prospective requirements of a vastly increasing population. These cemeteries should be open to all, without distinction of class or creed. They should be, in the strictest sense of the term, *general* or NATIONAL CEMETERIES. They might be placed, where practicable, between lines of rail, branch lines, or sidings, conveying the funeral train into the cemetery itself. RECEPTION HOUSES, as I have said, would be required at both extremities of the line. Under certain circumstances it might be necessary to remove bodies to the cemetery some days previous to interment, and accommodation would be required for mourners, robing rooms, and other purposes.

It has been proposed to erect a number of mortuary houses for the temporary reception of the dead previous to burial. The objects of such arrangements are, to avoid the danger of premature interment, and to relieve the poorer classes from the necessity of retaining the corpse in their crowded habitations for a prolonged period before burial.

The latter object is certainly a most desirable one; but

it may be questioned how far the advantages may compensate the increased expense of such buildings.

As to the danger of premature interment, it may be obviated by the appointment of special officers, whose duty it shall be to ascertain and verify the fact of death, and without whose certificate no corpse shall be removed for burial. These officers must be medical men; and modern science enables them to ascertain, without a shadow of doubt, whether or not life has become extinct. The office might be conjoined with that of "registrar of births and deaths," and in this way a staff of competent officers might be obtained at a moderate cost. For many reasons, I do not think that they should interfere with the service of the administration; nor do I think that the dignity of the medical profession admits of its being mixed up with the calling of an undertaker.

It appears to me, that all the expenses of the national system would not only be abundantly covered by the receipts, but that a large and an increasing surplus must accrue. Even with a most liberal expenditure, we shall still have an economy of 50 per cent. on the present system.

Having thus provided resting-places for our dead, and indicated an excellent mode of transit, which would, in my opinion, satisfy in the fullest manner the moral and religious feelings of survivors, let us examine whether these objects can be fulfilled without an extravagant expenditure. Here, as in all other affairs, we must be guided by experience, and as we have no practical experience of our own, we must turn to that of other countries. Paris, for its size, wealth, importance, and population, is the only European capital which can be compared to London; although its population be no more than 1,000,000, and the annual mortality about 29,000.

The number of metropolitan cemeteries is five; and they comprise an extent of 115 acres, but are insufficient. A very

extensive piece of ground has been recently walled in, as a supplement to Montmartre, on the northern side of that cemetery.

Every thing connected with the interment of the dead is performed by a single administration, denominated "service des Pompes Funebres," which acts under a contract with the Government. Persons dying in the hospitals, or in the Hotel des Invalides, and not claimed by their friends, are buried at the expense of these several establishments.

The indigent are buried gratuitously by the administration, on certificate from the mayor of the municipal district of the deceased.

The bodies of persons, one remove from the above class, are interred under what is called the "ordinary service" of the administration. This comprises a hearse, drawn by two black horses; there are also four bearers, a coachman, and a superior attendant, all respectably clothed in black; a coffin likewise, covered by a black pall.

The expense of this funeral is £1. 1s. 8d. to £1. 3s. 6d.; but of this sum the administration receives only 11s. 6d., viz., 5s. 9d. for cost of transport, and 5s. 9d. for coffin. The remainder goes to the corporation of the city. About one-third of the entire burials take place under this head.

The religious ceremony connected with the "ordinary service," is very simple, and performed gratuitously by the clergy.

The "extraordinary service" is divided into nine classes, to each of which is annexed a tariff, or printed scale of charges. The scale of each class is most comprehensive, and a selection may be made from it, according to the requirements or tastes of those who order the funeral. Thus the whole of the service, and articles enumerated under any

given class, may be ordered, or the order may be simply confined to the hearse and coffin; but when a selection of a particular class has been made, parties must confine themselves to the tariff of that class, and not mix the others with it.

The following is the scale of charges under each class, reduced to English money. Each sum total, however, must be increased by 15s. for adults, and 8s. 2d. for children, the tax on burials to defray expenses of transport, and also by the price of the coffins, which vary from £22. to 17s. 6d., according to the materials and lining. On the other hand, it should be remarked, that the sum total for each class is the *maximum* which the law allows to be expended, though orders for this maximum are hardly ever given, and that the "anniversary religious service," which increases the expense about one-fourth, is seldom required, except by the families of the rich.

	1st Class.	2nd Class.	3rd Class.	4th Class.	5th Class.	6th Class.	7th Class.	8th Class.	9th Class.	Ordinary Service.
	£ s.	£ s.	£ s.	£ s.	£ s.	£ s.	£ s.	£ s.	s.	
Religious Service.	24 10	18 5	11 5	8 5	5 10	2 5	1 0	0 15	11	Gratis.
Undertaker's Service.	94 0	83 0	49 5	22 10	14 0	5 3	3 0	2 7	4	11 8
Total . . .	118 10	101 5	60 10	30 15	19 10	7 8	4 0	3 2	15	
Anniversary Religious Services.	26 0	20 15	12 0	8 15	6 5	2 10				
General Total	144 10	121 0	72 10	39 10	25 15	9 18	4 0	3 2	15	11 8

A glance at the above table shows, that the cost of interments varies from £120 to 15s., and from the total of each class about 1-5th may be deducted for services not required in the orders given. The 6th and 7th classes are those under which the greater number of interments take place, and it may be calculated that about £120,000 are annually expended for the interment of 25,000 bodies.

With such moderate charges it might be supposed that

the funerals under each class are conducted in what we would call here a "shabby manner." This is far from being the case. The religious portion of the ceremony is conducted with a degree of pomp and solemnity unknown in Protestant England, and the remaining portion comprises more than enough to satisfy the most fastidious. The first class funeral, for example, includes ornamental mourning of the church and house of the deceased in magnificent style—a hearse with 4 horses, 18 mourning coaches, 2 curates, 4 vicars, 50 priests, 12 professional singers for the grand mass, 22 chorister boys, 4 instrumental performers, and an accessory service of surpassing pomp. In fact, every portion of the service, in all classes, is conducted in a most satisfactory manner; but the mode of interment of paupers and unclaimed bodies would not certainly be suited to the increasing requirements of English feeling.

The arrangements of classes and tariffs will require great consideration.

Now, on the above scale, and making the most ample allowance for difference of prices and transport in the two countries, the following tariff may be deduced for England; it is offered, however, as what may possibly be done, rather than as a definitive arrangement:—

	£	s.	d.
Parish poor, to be paid by the several parishes or unions to administration.	0	12	0
7th class	1	0	0
6th class	2	0	0
5th class	6	0	0
4th class	10	0	0
3rd class	25	0	0
2nd class	45	0	0
1st class £150 to	200	0	0

These charges, much more equitable and reasonable than the present, would give an annual sum of about £300,000, for the interment of the dead of the metropolis.

The present cost of interments is fully £800,000 per annum for the metropolis. Under the reformed system it will not exceed £350,000, being a difference of £450,000

per annum in favour of the latter. This alone is an important consideration. Indeed, when experience shall have given practical knowledge of the best mode of working out the national system, I feel persuaded that it will be possible to diminish the expense of funerals for the working-classes and artizans, without detracting from the proper discharge of the duties connected with the interment of the dead, and the due solemnity of the service. It must be remembered, that the Parisian tariff is not based on the cheaper mode of funeral railway trains, so admirably adapted for London, but necessitates the more costly means of transit by coach and hearse.

To sum up, I would propose:—

1. That a general system of extramural sepulture shall be forthwith organised throughout Great Britain.

2. That medical men be appointed to fill the ancient office of “searcher,” and that no body be removed for interment without a certificate of the cause and fact of death.

3. That interment of the dead during the summer quarters, within a period of days, be compulsory.

4. That for London common (and, if possible, Crown), lands in the neighbourhood of railways should be appropriated for GENERAL CEMETERIAL purposes—sidings or branch lines conveying the funeral trains into the ground itself, as proposed by me to the Select Committee on Interment in Towns in 1842.

5. That the afternoons of Tuesday, Thursday, and Sunday in each week be appropriated for the purpose. That on the alternate days, special trains may, if required, be provided.

6. That a central administration be appointed to undertake every service (except the religious) connected with the burial of the dead *at fixed and specified charges*, which latter, however, shall not exceed certain *maxima* laid down therein.

7. That the duty of providing for the interment of the dead be exclusively confined to the aforementioned administration.

Under the above system the dead might be reverently buried; the physical and moral standard of our people greatly elevated, whilst, the poorest would be assured of a secure "last resting place," which under the existing order of things, has long been impossible.

The advantages arising from a fixed scale will be at once apparent to the least reflective. The cost, of what is termed "a respectable walking or carriage funeral," varies from ten up to hundreds of pounds; and it is unfortunately the case, that an expenditure is too frequently incurred, under the pressure of bereavements, which taxes most severely the means of survivors, or plunges them in difficulties which, to my knowledge, often involves a forced and ruinous sacrifice of their property.

The numerous and valuable class of our population, which a wise paternal government should carefully protect, and which has the greatest claim upon its sympathies and assistance, would be enabled, under a tariff, (fixed as low as possible) to select from the various classes of funerals the one best adapted to their circumstances.

Under a general system, and with a single administration, I feel convinced that interments can be conducted according to the above tariff, in a much more respectable and satisfactory manner than at present; and if the Legislature—completing its work—shall institute a national administration for the interment of the dead, beyond the abodes of man, this great question will be solved, in a manner alike conformable to the dignity and the interests of the nation.

G. A. W.

ST. JAMES'S PLACE, ST. JAMES'S STREET,
December 1, 1849.



