

The City Funeral.

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Publication/Creation

[Place of publication not identified] : [publisher not identified], [1872]

Persistent URL

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THE CITY FUNERAL.

DEDICATED TO GEORGE ALFRED WALKER, ESQ.,
SURGEON.*

" . . . Did these bones cost no more the breeding, but to play at
loggats with them? Mine ache to think on't."—*Hamlet*.

It was a City Funeral
Proceeding on its way,
A some time worthy citizen
In his city grave to lay.
The hearse was black, the steeds were black,
Black feathers grimly shaking :
A black Jehu sat driving too
His ghastly undertaking.
Cloak, scarf, and cape, and gloves and crape
Evinced the tribulation,
The grief, regret, and *profit* yet
Attending inhumation.
The carriages, like tortoises
In black, crawled at no high rate,
But each one bore, behind, before,
The banner of the Pirate.

* Author of "Gatherings from Graveyards," "The Grave Yards of London," "Interment and Disinterment," "Burial Ground Incendiarism," "A Series of Lectures on the Actual Condition of the Metropolitan Grave Yards," "Practical Suggestions for the Establishment of National Extramural Cemeteries," "On the Past and Present State of Intramural Burying Places," "Grave Reminiscences," "Chart of Diseases of the Skin," etc. etc. See Note.

Some in the train might feel or feign,
Perchance, a tone of sadness ;
But oh ! they wore (that Coffin corps)
A look of grisly gladness.

A jovial hue that charnel crew
Maintained in spite of sorrow,—
For why ? they still mused on the “ Bill ”
To be sent in to-morrow.

Through narrow streets, where Toil retreats,
To gender, rot, and die
In fetid cells, whose sights and smells
With Grave scenes almost vie ;

By nooks and chinks, whose filths and stinks,
Comparisons defy,
Save with the pains, and sins, and stains,—
Their bitter progeny ;

Through crowded lanes, whose holes and drains
Some ceaseless Pest supply,—
A Typhus stench, or a Cholera drench,
To stunt the swarming fry ;

Where, day and night, Disease and Blight
Steep body, mind, and soul ;
And Vice, and Dirt, and Death exert
Their triple-leagued control.

Plague-spuming clime ! where Want and Crime,
Despair, blaspheming Mirth,
And Envy dwell, to show how Hell
May be outdone by Earth.

By Temples foul, where like a ghoul,
With gibbering laugh and grin,
And yell and shout, reels in and out
The maniac slave of Gin!

By squalid courts, abhorred resorts
Of every outcast grade,—
Where Felons lurk and Debtors shirk
The day, and night at hopeless work
Still finds the sempstress maid,—
Or plies (with shuddering leer and smirk),
The Lost her hideous trade!

Through scenes like these the obsequies
To grace, the corpsemen wound,
Till reached the train their own domain,—
The *consecrated* ground.

Anon, they bring the lifeless Thing
In solemn order forth,
With gentle care and pious prayer
To lay it in the earth.

O child of clay, where shouldst thou lay,
Save in thy mother's breast?
Beneath the sod the human clod
Shall sweetly sink to rest.

Dear friends shall come to mark thy tomb,
And drop the silent tear;
Field-posies pale shall scent the gale
That fondly lingers near.

And birds shall sing, and violets spring
Above thy grassy mound,
And heavenly dew shall still renew
The turf that wraps thee round.

Good were such rest! But, reverend Priest,
(Most orthodox graveholder),
In *this* rank pit, say is it fit,
A Christian's bones shall moulder?

A human vat, as foul and fat
As rotting flesh can make it,
Turned up anon, that wind and sun,
May sweeten blanch, or bake it!

Flesh, skull, or bone, upwildly thrown
To make room for another
In the "Body-binn,"* where, out and in,
Each fareth like his brother!

O Mother Earth, what horrid dearth
Of aught like thee or thine!
Yet men are told this festering mould
Hath privilege divine,—

Though not a grain doth now remain
Of pure primæval dust,
But a putrid mass, whose poison gas
Reeks through the sweltering crust.

Though year by year (the fact is queer)
Fed with increasing victual,
That churchyard square, save upwards, ne'er
In size extends a tittle!

* "Body-binn,"—gravediggers' slang term for the grave.

Though gorged and crammed and choked and
jammed
With dead to suffocation,
That burial place still finds a space
For fresh accumulation !

Yet dwelleth nigh the Deadman's sty, e,
A *living* population,
Whose looks present a *grave* comment
On Graveyard legislation.

Behold the race ! compare and trace
Each lineament and feature
Of what should be Humanity,—
God's last and noblest creature !

Corrupt in blood, the human bud
Nor strength nor beauty showeth,
Or child or man, a puny, wan,
Degenerate Being groweth.

Can such things be ? How long shall we
(O unwise generation !)
Unto the Living make the Dead
A vile abomination ?

1846.

From "LYRICS OF A LIFE TIME."—Samuel Smith (the late),
The Chestnuts, Woodbury Downs, Stoke Newington.

Note.—'The City Funeral.'—This poem was written in 1846, as a humble attempt to assist the labours of that great sanitary reformer and philanthropist whose name appears on the page.

It was sent, through a friend, to a weekly publication, and returned to the author, with a flattering eulogium by the editor, regretting that

"certain reasons" prevented its appearance in that journal. Whether these "certain reasons" referred to a fear of giving offence to "certain" parties interested in the maintenance of things as they were may be reasonably suspected.

As to the merits or demerits of the poem itself, at all events it is not overcharged with the horrible, or (to use a modern phrase) the "sensational," but strictly true to the revolting facts connected with "The Burial of the Dead in the midst of the Living," as the writer's personal experience can avouch, and a perusal of the works of Mr. G. A. Walker will testify.

These abound in details (bare statements of facts daily enacted in the heart of London, close to our greatest thoroughfare, the Strand) far exceeding in repulsive terribleness any of the imaginary horrors of the 'Tales of Wonder,' 'The Monk,' 'Melmoth,' 'Mysteries of Udolpho,' or such like publications.

The special phase of sanitary reform to which so large a portion of Mr. Walker's life has been devoted, was anything but of an attractive nature. The personal examination of every graveyard in the Metropolis, the risk of infection, the coarse opposition of gravediggers and sextons, the resentment of low undertakers, whose "craft" became imperilled, the wilfully blind opposition or inertness of a higher class of opponents, the clerical vested interests,—all to be encountered and overcome by the sheer force of truth, and the simple laws of health and propriety,—demanded in the man setting himself to such a task, a degree of energy and perseverance rarely to be found. And let it be remembered, to his eternal honour, all this was done at great personal expense, and without any expectation of fee or reward.

Now that the battle has been practically won, the abolition of "Intramural Interment" (with all its moral and physical evils) obtained, and a more rational, healthy, and decent mode of sepulture achieved, it may well be, that a passing tribute of admiration and respect should here be paid to One who has unquestionably conferred a great benefit upon his fellow-creatures, and who, like many another public benefactor in the ranks of peace and science, has as yet been suffered mainly to rest content with the reward of his own conscience, and the contemplation of the valued results of his labour.

S. S.

August, 1872.

WALKER.

A Recognition Owed—To George Alfred (Grave-Yard) Walker.

I.

Who closed the intramural tombs ?

Asks many a writer, many a talker.

"*I* shut them up!" Lord Shaftesbury fumes,

The very Graves replying,—WALKER!

2.

Who gave pure air unto a host ?

Who of plugged chinks was the uncaulker ?

"Why *I*!" shrieks Southwood Smith's pale ghost,

The very Air re-echoing,—WALKER!

3.

But when—"Both good deeds, *I* did,—there!"

Roars Chadwick* like some brazen hawker,

Then—like the Graves and like the Air,—

The very London Boys cry,—WALKER!

C. K.

* "His (Chadwick's) onslaught on INTRA-MURAL, and scheme of EXTRA-MURAL Interment, was borrowed—almost *verbatim*—from the works and labours of the gentleman—so well known to the Medical Profession as GRAVE-YARD Walker.

"This was pretty well; but there are no bounds to the philanthropic despotism of such a radical reformer as Edwin Chadwick, and, in due course, he produced a Report, stolen, without acknowledgement as to its telling facts, from "The Walker on Grave-Yards."—*Engineers and Officials*.—Edward Stanford, 6, Charing Cross. 1856.

The following Works, by Mr. WALKER, contain facts of the most vital importance, on Intramural Burials, and on the Sanitary Question, generally.

Gatherings from Grave Yards:—Particularly those of London; with a Concise History of the Modes of Interment Among Different Nations, from the Earliest Periods—And a detail of Dangerous and Fatal Results produced by the Unwise and Revolting Custom of Inhuming the Dead in the Midst of the Living, 1839.

The Grave Yards of London:—An Exposition of the Physical and Moral Consequences Inseparably Connected with our Unchristian and Pestilential Custom of Depositing the Dead in the Midst of the Living; with the Examinations of the Author, upon this Important Subject, before Select Committees of the House of Commons in 1840, 1842.

Interment and Disinterment:—Or a Further Exposition of the Practices Pursued in the Metropolitan Places of Sepulture, and the Results as Affecting the Health of the Living, 1843.

Burial Ground Incendiarism—the Last Fire in the “Bone House:”—In the Spa Fields Golgotha, or the Minute Anatomy of Grave-Digging in London, 1846.

A Series of Lectures on the Actual Condition of the Metropolitan Grave Yards:—Delivered at the Mechanics Institution, Southampton Buildings, Chancery Lane, London, 1846.

Practical Suggestions for the Establishment of National Extramural Cemeteries, 1849.

On the Past and Present State of Intramural Burying Places:—With Practical Suggestions for the Establishment of National Extramural Cemeteries, &c, &c., 1851.

Grave Reminiscences:—Shortly will be Published,—Some Experiences of a Sanitary Reformer, 1878.