

Earth to earth : an answer to a pamphlet on "cremation" / by Francis Seymour Haden.

Contributors

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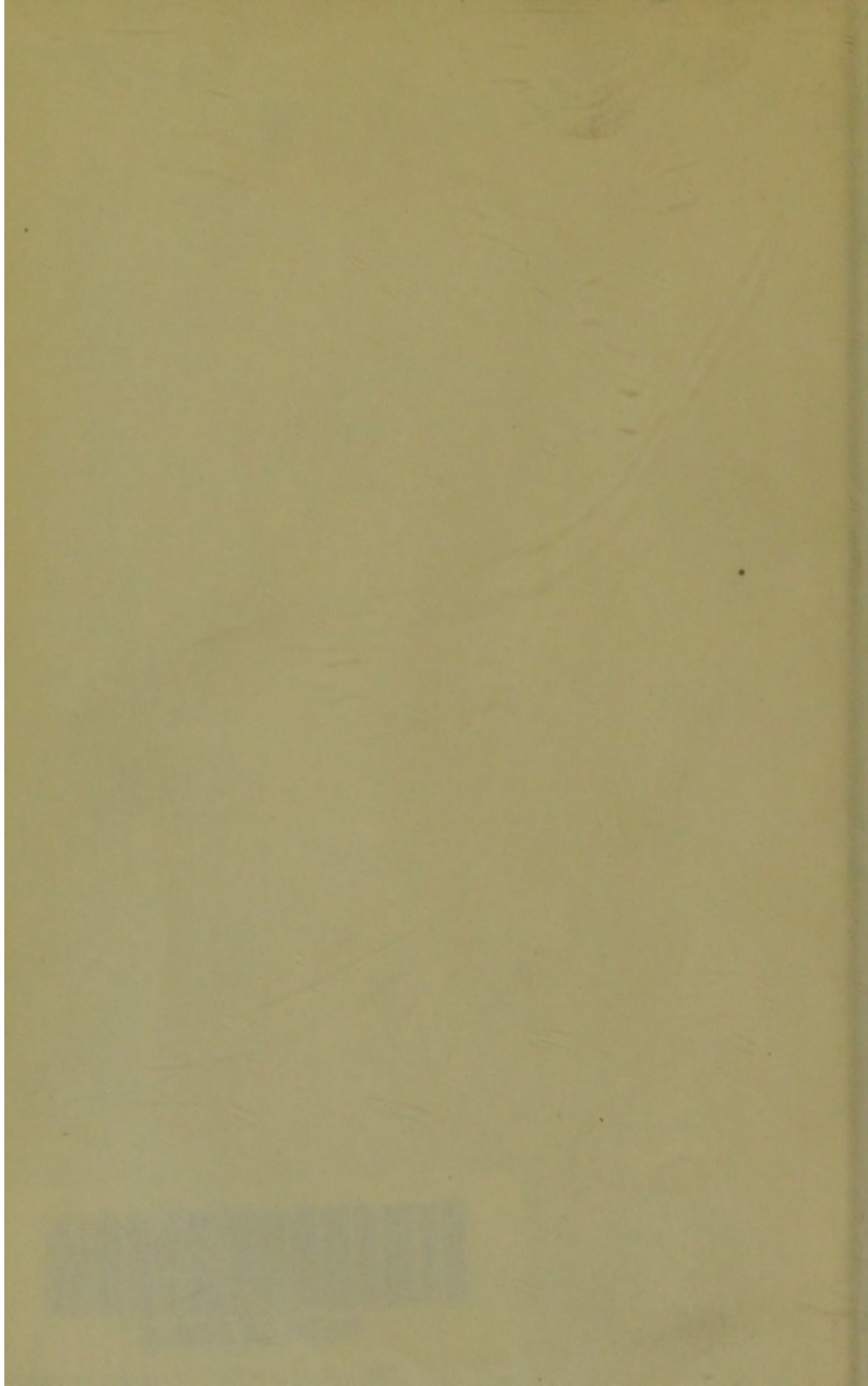
CREMATION

BY WILLIAM W. BAKER, D.D.

*Let us not be afraid of the fire,
For from the fire and the furnace
The Lord will bring forth
The righteous thing.*

WILLIAM AND CO.

NEW YORK



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EARTH TO EARTH.

AN ANSWER TO A PAMPHLET ON

“CREMATION,”

BY

FRANCIS SEYMOUR HADEN, F.R.C.S.

*“Lay her i' the earth:
And from her fair and unpolluted flesh
May violets spring!”*

London:

MACMILLAN AND CO.

1875.

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FROM "THE TIMES,"

January 12, 1875.

THE interesting letter which we print this morning from Mr. Seymour Haden draws a terrible picture of the extent of an annoyance innocently inflicted. It is bad enough, he says, that a dead body should be kept for several days above ground, but, even when it is at length got rid of, the mischief it is capable of occasioning is by no means yet at an end. The fault, however, is entirely with ourselves. We are not content to lay the corpse simply in the ground until, by a process of transmutation rather than of decay, its constituent elements have assigned themselves to fresh purposes. We perversely inclose it in a strong coffin, and in other ways protect it from the wholesome influences of the soil in which it is laid, thus needlessly prolonging the inevitable course of dissolution, while we render it in every way more injurious and more horrible. Our burial-places are thus sources of

infection to the air and water in their neighbourhood, and the living are poisoned with no benefit to the dead, but rather to insure results which we should all wish to avoid both for ourselves and for our departed friends. The remedy is obvious, and there is nothing either in reason or sentiment that need prevent us from applying it. Not only should bodies be buried speedily,—six-and-thirty hours is the utmost interval which Mr. Seymour Haden would permit,—but we should be careful so to bury them as not to keep them from wholesome contact with the earth. A light wicker basket, without a lid, and filled in decently above and below with fragrant herbs and flowers, should take the place of our unwieldy and senseless coffins, and earth should be restored to earth. If this were done, we should avoid the many pernicious consequences of our present unnatural and unscientific system.

There are, in truth, so many objections to the chief alternative which has been proposed in the place of Mr. Seymour Haden's plan that we are heartily glad to learn on such excellent authority that the offending process¹ is not really necessary. Sentiment is so strong already that most of us

¹ Cremation.

will be delighted to find that reason is on the same side, and that the position which they thus unite to defend is safe from the attacks of Italian and German *savants*. Mr. Seymour Haden objects to Cremation as a troublesome and wasteful way of doing what could be much better and more simply effected by a proper sort of burial. When all is done, too, Cremation is only another form of burial in the end. The solids which would remain when the lighter portions of the body had been dissipated would have to be got rid of in some way or other. If they are preserved, they will accumulate inconveniently on our hands, and will come, in the course of a generation or two, to be looked upon with no great reverence. They will thus scarcely be insured a resting-place above ground, and when they are buried, as, after all, they must be, the work will probably be done with even too little ceremony. How much better, he exclaims, to do at once what must be done sooner or later, and to spare ourselves the troublesome and expensive means by which the necessity will have been postponed! We have, in fact, been fighting hitherto against Nature, and with very imperfect weapons. The "Cremationists" would improve upon our present species of warfare; but

they, too, would be no less certainly beaten in the long run by the power against which they are matching themselves. We have only to yield wisely to the dictates of natural laws, and we shall find our account in a cheaper, a less troublesome, a less pernicious, and a more efficacious way of proceeding than we have been able to invent for ourselves.

Mr. Seymour Haden's proposals may be summed up in a few words. They amount simply to this—that by some decent contrivance or other we should allow the earth to come into actual contact with, and to exert its known chymical effects upon, the bodies which are still to be placed within it. The manner in which he advises us to effect this is as little liable to objection as possible. There is nothing needlessly revolting in the process of interment which he suggests. Custom is a great influence, and "earth to earth" are words with which we have been so long familiar that we do not shrink from what they describe as we do from the application of other agencies which science—and, as it would appear, mistaken science—has been vainly pressing upon us to adopt.

EARTH TO EARTH.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "TIMES."

SIR,—An agitation, attributable possibly to an imperfect appreciation of the merits of the case, has been caused by the proposal of certain German and Italian writers in their own country, and of an eminent surgeon in this, to substitute the burning of the dead for their interment.

Interment, the apostles of Cremation tell us, in substance if not in terms, and speaking of it in its most comprehensive sense, is repulsive in idea, costly and ineffectual in fact, horrible in practice, a vilification of the dead, and a danger to the living. In a variety of publications which have excited much attention, they denounce not any particular mode of interment, or any palpable abuses which they recognise as having crept into the practice to discredit it, but the practice itself. They take no notice of the fact that the dead are little more than nominally buried, and that, by the

interposition between them and the earth that should resolve them, of such media as wood, lead, brick, and the like, interment as a principle is rendered all but nugatory, and as a practice deprived of its *raison d'être*. Finally they leave it to be inferred, since they give us no hint to the contrary, that the evils thus created are inherent in the principle of interment, and upon this inference, and upon no other ground, found their recommendation of Cremation.

It is the object of this letter, Sir, not so much to join issue with the Cremationists, whose position I must venture to think untenable, as to invite attention to the important fact which underlies, and to some extent excuses, their proposals,—viz., the fact that the dead are improperly buried; and, with reference to the serious and pressing evils which have resulted from our present mode of interment, to suggest a consideration of the following propositions:—

1. That the natural destination of all organized bodies that have lived, and that die on the earth's surface, is the earth.

2. That the evils which they (the Cremationists) would have us believe to be inseparable

from the principle of interment are independent of that principle, and wholly of our own creation.

3. That the source of these evils is to be found, not in the burial of the dead, but in the unreasoning sentiment which prompts us to keep them unburied as long as possible, and then to bury them in such a way that the earth can have no access to them.

4. That the burial of the body supposes its resolution by the direct agency of the earth to which we commit it, and that the earth is fully competent to effect that resolution.

5. That to seek to prevent the beneficent agency of the earth by inclosing the dead in hermetically sealed coffins, brick graves, and vaults, is in the highest degree unphilosophical, since it engages us in a vain resistance to an inevitable dispensation, and has led us to accumulate in our midst a vast store of human remains in every stage and condition of decay.

6. That the remedy for such evils is not in Cremation but in a sensible recognition of, and a timely submission to, a well-defined law of nature, and, if need be, in legislative action to enforce the provisions of that law.

The claim that the earth has upon its dead, no less than that which the dead have upon the earth, is a proposition, one would have thought, too obvious to merit discussion. To understand it we need only consider the properties with which the soil at our feet and everywhere at our disposal has been endowed ; that it is the most potent disinfectant known and the readiest of application, and that, by a combination of forces inherent in it, which might well appear contradictory but for the wonderful purposes they are destined to effect, it is resolvent and re-formative as well ; that that which under the influence of the air was putrefaction, in the earth is resolution ; that which was offensive becomes inoffensive ; that which was mere decay a process of transmutation. To question the competency of the earth, thus endowed, to effect the resolution and conversion of its dead, or to fail to perceive and profit by that competency, would pass comprehension if habit had not taught us to shut our eyes to it, and if the advocates of Cremation had not stepped in to tell us that we may improve upon it.

The main conditions of effective and of non-effective burial are shortly these. When the body dies, putrefaction sets in at once, and, for as long

as it is allowed to remain exposed to the air, continues. The air excluded, the process is arrested. The air readmitted, the process goes on. If the body have been dead some days, and putrefaction be well advanced before the adoption of measures to protect it from the influence of the air, the process will be arrested at the point it has then attained, and, for as long as the physical conditions are permitted to last, will remain at that point. Two methods of excluding the air from a dead body present themselves in practice, the direct and natural method of placing it in the earth, and what may be called the evasive and unnatural method of inclosing it in an air-tight case or coffin. By adopting the first method, inasmuch as we both exclude the air and invoke the resolvent action of the earth, we fulfil all the conditions of effective burial. By adopting the second method we fulfil only one of these conditions, and, for the sake of keeping the body by us a few days longer than is safe or reasonable, prevent the other. In the first case resolution at once takes the place of putrefaction; in the last the condition of putrefaction is rendered permanent. In the first case if we look for that body at the end of five or six years we shall not find it, or, rather, we

shall be unable to distinguish its tissues from the earth with which by that time it will have become in part assimilated. In the last, if we look for it after fifty years, we shall find it as we left it—*plus* the action upon it of the air and of the fluids of the body which we have included with it in the coffin—that is to say, in a state of advanced but unprogressive putrefaction.

The following illustrations represent aptly enough the two conditions described:—

On Christmas Day, 1870, I buried in a corner of my garden a favourite dog. On the 1st of November, 1874—the other day—I dug down upon the spot, and recovered all that was recoverable of the body of my old companion. The residue lies upon a sheet of white foolscap paper on the table before me. It consists of a few scattered bones, with a little friable matter loosely attached to them which has all the physical characters of common earth, without the slightest odour or anything to indicate that it had once been animal tissue. Resolution, in fact, except as to the bones, which have lost much of their weight, and the cancellous structure of

which is beginning to break down, has been fully effected.

In 1868 I was permitted to visit the burial-ground of St. Andrew's, Holborn, then, with its contents, in course of removal to make way for the new Viaduct. The ground about the church had become raised 15ft. or 18ft. above its original level, and perpendicular sections had been made in it, here and there, from its surface to a depth varying from 10 feet to 30 feet or more. The face of these sections represented the interments of three centuries and a half. All the burials, except those in the Plague-pit and one or two others to be presently mentioned, had been made in wooden or leaden coffins, some of which were still intact, and some broken in. Little difference, as to condition, could be perceived between the coffins of Charles II.'s time and those recently used, or between the coffins which were of lead, and those which were of wood. In the coffins which were intact were their contents, also intact, but putrid, unrecognizable. In those which had been broken in, nothing was to be found but a little ordinary earth, corresponding possibly to the solid constituents of the body which it had replaced, and, occasionally, not always, a few bones. Nothing more. The

EARTH TO EARTH.

body itself had disappeared, and "earth to earth" had been accomplished. Here and there, in other parts of the ground, were graves lined with brick and filled with water, in which the coffins of those who had been buried in peculiar honour still floated, some head, some feet uppermost, as their gaseous contents determined. Here, again, a few fetters indicated the spot where some evil-doer had undergone what was intended, no doubt, to be the last sentence of degradation, but whose poor body, having had the advantage of being buried without a coffin, had disappeared—as had also for the same reason, the tenants of the Plague-pit. The whole tangible remaining mass, consisting of several thousand bodies, was removed, night by night to Ilford, where it now lies in a pleasant garden, and the new Rectory House of St. Andrew's stands upon the restored level. The removal was effected without difficulty, danger, or scandal, and a letter somewhat similar to the present one, which I wrote to you at the time, was not printed for fear of the embarrassment it might occasion while the ghastly work was in progress.

These illustrations will now help us to realise the following facts:—

1. That the condition of these unresolved dead is precisely the condition to which all are condemned who have been kept unburied for a week, and then are buried in closed coffins.

2. That this dead population—these festering tenants-in-perpetuity of the soil—actually outnumber by hundreds of thousands the living population above them, and that unless (as in the case with the Holborn burial ground) an Act of Parliament should interpose to remove them, there they must lie incapable of further change, a reproach to our intelligence and a source of poison to our springs, for any time to come.

3. That, unwarned and undeterred by the magnitude of the evils we have thus created, we are still engaged in extending and perpetuating them in cemeteries so close to town that they must soon become a part of it.

4. That were the dead only properly buried not one of these evils would have any existence—not a single dead body would remain to infect the soil—and a quantity of land of incalculable value, now hopelessly alienated, would be liberated for purposes of hygiene or of utility.

And what, after all, it is now time to ask, is the

nature of the advantage that we are content to purchase at this heavy cost, and to obtain which we do not hesitate to deprive the dead of their sole prerogative? Simply, and solely, the satisfaction of keeping them unburied a few days longer than Nature intended! The body that should have been laid in the ground three days ago still lies up stairs, a sheet drawn over the face to protect it from the flies, and the windows slightly opened to relieve the upper part of the house of the indescribable *aura* that has begun to pervade it. No one who could help it has gone into the room these three days, and they that have had to pass the door have passed it hurriedly and furtively. Then, when from its condition the body can no longer be allowed to remain exposed, and when, in reason, its interment should be effected, comes instead the stereotyped announcement that the "closure of the coffin can be no longer delayed," and then three, or even four more, miserable, fretful, useless days follow. You cannot go out—it would not be decent; you cannot sleep because you cannot go out; your waking hours are passed in a forced and irritating inactivity, your nights in painful endeavours to realize the cherished lineaments which, by an evasion of Nature's plan, you are

still able to keep within a few feet of you—not, indeed, as you saw them when summoned to look upon them for the last time before they were “screwed down,” but as they were a week before—beautiful with the peculiar beauty that distinguishes the recently dead, and the impression of which you would have been only too glad to be able to retain. At length the shuffling of many feet upon the stairs, and the dull shocks sustained by the walls in the descent of the heavy coffin, tell you that the time has come when custom has decreed that you may be released and the dead put to its rest. And what a rest! Surely, Sir, it is time that, by a mere effort of our common sense and moral courage, we put an end to so irrational a practice and opened our eyes to the fact that we cannot thus outrage a Divine ordinance with impunity; that whenever it may please us to bury our dead properly—and nothing is easier—Earth will be found competent to do her own work, and Nature to carry out her own laws: and that a recourse to Cremation, or to any other proceeding involving a departure from those laws, will turn out to be quite unnecessary.

How, then, are we to bury our dead? Clearly

within a reasonable time of their dissolution, and in coffins, if we must have coffins, of such a construction as will not prevent their resolution. No coffin at all would, of course, be best, or a coffin of the thinnest substance which would not long resist the action of the earth, or a coffin the top and sides of which admitted of removal after the body had been lowered into the grave, or a coffin of some light permeable material, such as wicker or lattice-work, open at the top, and filled in with any fragrant herbaceous matters that happened to be most readily obtainable. A layer of ferns or mosses for a bed, a bundle of sweet herbs for a pillow, and as much as it would still contain after the body had been gently laid in it of any aromatic or flowering plant for a coverlet—such a covering, in short, as, while it protected the body from the immediate pressure of the earth as effectually as the stoutest oak, would yet not prevent its resolution. I can conceive no better form of coffin.¹ Let us emulate, too, the healthy sentiment of those older Jews who considered it an indignity and an injury to be refused prompt burial, and so made an offence to the living, and bury it while it is still grateful to every sense, and while,—if we feel

¹ From *κόφινος*, a twig basket—a pannier.

it an effort and a sacrifice to part with it,—we may also feel that we are making that effort and submitting to that sacrifice in the cause of the dead.

Nor would there be the least difficulty in framing an Act which, with a truer consideration for the dead, should provide for such a mode of burying them as our reason and our interest require. The appointment in each district of a proper officer to take cognizance of everything relating to the dead of that district, should be one of the things such an Act provided for. An obligation on the part of every householder to report within a certain time the occurrence of any death or deaths under his roof should be another. The visit of such officer (also within a specified time) to verify the fact of death and to define and prescribe the requirements of the law as to time and mode of interment, another. And,—since it is our unnatural delay in burying the dead which necessitates their hermetic inclosure,—that the interval between death and inhumation should in no case exceed, say, 36 hours. The abolition of the permanent tenure of the ground by the dead and of the use of imperishable coffins, brick graves, vaults,

and every impediment to the resolution of the body should be another. The institution of special Boards, corresponding to the Bureaux des Pompes Funébres in France, for the management of cemeteries (which Boards should not include the local guardians of the poor) another. And, in respect to the economy of the ground, careful provision, of course, that graves once used should not be reopened till ample time had been given for the resolution of their contents.

Nor, since it may be taken as an axiom that Nature will ever be found ready to supply us with the means of doing that which she requires us to do, need we ever be at a loss for ground in which to bury our dead. If it be true that a body, properly buried, is resolved in five, or, at most, six years, it follows that, at that interval or at intervals as much longer as we please, we may bury again and again in the same ground with no other effect than to increase its substance and to raise its surface. Is there, however, no ground in the immediate neighbourhood of our city that would be the better—I put the question parenthetically and only to illustrate the peculiar fitness and reason of

the suggestion—for this increase and for being thus raised? The Cremationists will tell us that there is not, but is there the shadow of a foundation for such a statement? Along the course of our great river from London to the sea, for instance, have we not vast lowland tracts of rich alluvial soil deposited by its current, and capable of being drained, planted, and beautified, in which, with equal benefit to the land and to ourselves we may bury our dead for centuries? If, as we have seen, the surface of the Holborn burial ground was raised 15 or 18 feet by the interments within it of three centuries, why should not the lowlands of Kent and Essex be gradually raised and reclaimed in the same way, and as much as possible of the valuable ground in and about the city now occupied as cemeteries be restored to better uses? What if it take us thousands instead of hundreds of years thus to reclaim and elevate such lands, deprive them of their malarious character, and at the same time practically dispose of our difficulties as to burial for ever? With the broad and silent river for our Appian Way, and the salt breeze from the sea to refresh it and to swell the many-coloured sails which, as long as we remain a nation, will continue to traverse and enliven it, what better, more natural,

or more characteristic burial-place can a maritime people have?¹

And now, Sir, with the soil at our feet asking us to reclaim and replenish her in this simple and obvious way, what are we to think of the wild project to drive into vapour the bodies of the 3,000 people that die weekly in greater London alone, at a needless cost, an infinite waste, and (on such a scale) with an effect on the respirable air of the city that has yet to be estimated? I say advisedly "at an infinite waste," because it is incorrect to say that, in its ultimate reception of the products of Cremation, the earth acquires an augmentation of its concrete substance equal to that which it receives when a body is actually committed to it. If that were so we might as well intercept and burn up all the organic matter which has died, and which in the course of nature would find its way back to the earth. What really happens, however, is this. When the body, consisting as it does of solid and fluid constituents in certain proportions, is placed within the earth, the fluids are withdrawn

¹ This paragraph, as appearing to indicate a utilitarian purpose in which it is proposed to turn the dead to account, has been, as it seems to the writer, unnecessarily taken exception to.

by various attractive forces, evaporation, and the requirements of vegetation, while the solids remain to constitute a portion, however small, of new earth. Exposed to the more rapid desiccation of the furnace something like the same thing, indeed, may be said to result, since the fluids are driven off and the solids remain; but there is this essential difference in the two processes—a difference fatal to cremation—viz., that while, by the earth, the solid residuum is wholly resolved and disposed of, by the furnace, it is left upon our hands; that while one process, in short, is perfect and final, the other is incomplete. What are we to do with this residuum, with this six, eight, or ten pounds of solid matter (about the average weight, by the way, of the Egyptian mummy) that the furnace is incapable of driving off? Are we to scatter it 'broadcast over our fields,' as recommended by a distinguished Cremationist? Apart from the fact that this is only another and a clumsy way of burying it, I doubt a general acquiescence in such a mode of disposing of it, and rather fear that the tendency may be to preserve it, and that room must be found somewhere for the 3,000 urns or other vessels capable of receiving it. What are we to do with these urns?

Are we to reopen our church vaults (happily closed though still uncleansed) for their reception, or take them into our houses and move them with our furniture with every change of abode? How will our sons' sons, who have lost all interest in us, feel disposed to treat them? Will it not come to pass that, perplexed by such embarrassing possessions, they will one day want to get rid of them, and will there not then be some little risk of their desecration? What if, after all, they should listen to the voice of nature and be driven to bury them?

If the positions sought to be established in this letter are true—if burial be the natural and necessary process we have asserted it to be—we may be sure that sooner or later, evade or misinterpret her as we may, Nature (whether in our columbaria or our cemeteries) will make herself heard at last, and—by the penalties she imposes upon us for our abuse of her gifts—compel us not only to bury our dead, but to BURY THEM PROPERLY.

I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

F. SEYMOUR HADEN.

January 12.

FROM "THE TIMES,"

February, 2, 1875.

IT is seldom that a question which concerns everybody, and which is beset with prejudices and interests, is so carefully, sensibly, and reverentially treated as that entitled "Earth to Earth" has been in these columns. Stepping on the tenderest of ground, and with thorns and briars, too, in the path of his argument, Mr. Seymour Haden, nevertheless, said all that was necessary, without laying himself open to one serious objection. Beyond the trifling remark that in order to express the destruction or purification of miasma he had employed a word which properly meant the arrest of decay, we cannot recall a single criticism worth notice on his long and able letter. We wish we could be certain the appeal to our moral sense will be responded to as thoroughly as that to our scientific perceptions. Mr. Seymour Haden proved

his case, and it now remains to be seen whether a world which professes to have attained the very acme of enlightenment on all material questions is wise enough to be governed by the sound logic which itself appeals to. We certainly know a great deal more about this matter than our fathers did ; but thus far, instead of being the wiser, we are tenfold more the victims of sentimental weakness. The letters, however, that reach us, especially the appeal by Lord Essex to women, and the decisive response to it by "Vita," give us some hope that a topic necessarily distressing has not been brought up in vain. It should never be forgotten that everybody has a voice in this matter, and everybody a right to dictate the future disposition of that which is now his only inalienable and most valuable property—his own body. Both custom and law give as much range of choice in this matter as is compatible with public decency. If any one of our readers to-day is buried, we will say a fortnight hence, with a pomp, a cost, and a durability of arrangement contrary to his own wishes, and perhaps beyond his means, it is his own fault. It is positively unfair to leave the business to survivors. In the absence of all instructions to the contrary,

it is a fair presumption that what is actually done, however absurd it may be, has been distinctly and even pleurably contemplated by the person now its unconscious object. We assert that it is in the power of every gentleman and lady in this country to take a sheet of note-paper, to write on it the few words forming the second paragraph in "Vita's" letter, and put it into an envelope superscribed with a direction that it be opened immediately after death.

Of course it will be said that English feeling is all the other way, and that the revolution demanded cannot be effected in a day. We are rather inclined to think that an increasing evil, as our funereal customs certainly are, is likely to entail a violent reaction, which it would be well to anticipate. Every day there occur instances verging upon scandal in their folly and wickedness. A poor man dies after some years of failing health and strength, amid burdens and difficulties ever increasing. His mind has latterly been clouded; the reins of discipline and of judgment have fallen from his hands; his weaknesses have had more sway; his long-standing debts have been accumulating; his household accounts are in arrear; creditors great and small are waiting for

his recovery or his death. By mere force of habit he fosters the old illusions founded on his hopes, or his wishes. He dies. Immediately orders and invitations are sent out, for he must be buried as he lived. In a day or two, with the aid of a lawyer, perhaps at his suggestion, a search is made; desks, drawers, strong boxes, writing cases, are opened, and the contents turned upside down. No will is found, or, if found, an old one, disposing of properties long parted with, or mortgaged to their full value. A call at the banker's elicits a melancholy and long-concealed tale. As for securities, stock, shares, deeds, they are nowhere to be found, or, if found, are worthless. Possibly there is a bill of sale on the furniture of the house. There really is not sixpence to be got at, or coming in—nothing but old debts struck off, or that should be. Of course, there is a long doctor's bill to be paid; rent, rates, and taxes, too, perhaps. Such is the moment when by sheer force of custom a new debt of fifty pounds is incurred for a perfectly useless and, under the circumstances, dishonest expenditure. We seem to have put an extreme case, but we can assure our readers it is not so extreme or so uncommon as they may suppose. In this case the illusion

of a life goes on by a sort of momentum after death. The ruling passions of the life have been ostentation, indulgence, unwillingness to look facts steadily in the face, and to live accordingly; and as the man has lived so he dies, and so he is buried. He is buried as if so important a person must indeed be a loss, not only to his family, but to the whole world; and as if his body, the centre of so much social worship, had a right to be long protected from the laws of decay. It is within the last half-century that prodigious funerals, awful hearses drawn by preternatural quadrupeds, clouds of black plumes, solid and magnificent oak coffins instead of the sepulchral elm, coffin within coffin, lead, brick graves, and capacious catacombs have spread downwards far beyond the select circle once privileged to illustrate the vanity of human greatness. If there must be dynasties living to be forgotten, and therefore pyramids and obelisks, it was something that these necessary mementos should be few and exceptional. But latterly funeral pomp has exceeded itself, and while the world is living faster than ever it did, and fashion indulging in wilder caprices, death, in a kind of rivalry, joins the race of extravagances. Funerals are more oppressive, mourning

more costly, and both really more revolting to the true instincts of real grief. Perhaps the most odious part of the affair is that the pressure is put not merely on poverty, but on poverty at its very weakest. The survivors are often wholly incapable of action—worn out, prostrated, overwhelmed. A neighbour does it all, and goes by the common rule. He can only open the door to the undertaker and his myrmidons.

On Mr. Seymour Haden's main positions there can be no dispute. A correspondent suggested that one kind of soil hastens decay and absorbs the results quicker than another; but every one who has frequently stood by the sexton at his work knows that in all ordinary burial-grounds the marvel is how quickly the stoutest frame yields to the salutary influences of old mother earth, not how long it withstands them. He also knows that while there is a certain pleasure in the reflection that earth has really come to earth in obedience to the Divine command and in faith in the Divine promise, nothing is so shocking as the too successful result of attempts to set that command at naught. When it is necessary, as sometimes it must be, to disturb interments not older than the rest, but of a more ambitious—shall we say rebel-

lions?—character, the spectacles disclosed are such as to make one envy the pauper his quicker return to Dame Nature's all-teeming, all-receiving bosom. The family vaults of old parish churches are, as anybody may know, the scene of more grotesque incidents, more sacrilegious robberies, more horrible profaneness, than any spots above ground, however open to the every-day world. Nuisances as they certainly are, they suffer a Nemesis in the dishonour and contempt they often bring on the poor remains they were designed to protect and honour. We feel, however, that the question is one of a larger character. Our appeal must be to that great, wealthy, and ambitious middle class, which aims to be as good and as generous as the highest, but somewhat wiser and more ready to learn. It has shown itself susceptible of strong impulses and capable of great movements. Can it make up its mind to return in due time, at the appointed hour, to the earth it springs from, with cheerfulness, alacrity, and good-will? Heroes have tried the edge of the fatal axe, and even kissed it; saints have embraced the cross or the stake; monks and hermits have worn their own shrouds, slept in their coffins, or by the side of the open grave; even wise men have had their *memento*

mori over their heads, and potentates have had the warning daily whispered in their ears. The emblems of mortality had a prominent place in the religious devotion of a former age, when even ladies of fashion used to retreat from the world for days or for a season, in order to go through the semblance of death and burial in one quaint form or another. There is no need of all this. It can be done much better, with much more sincerity and much more edification. If we could only make up our minds to quit this world, when the call comes, rather more unrepiningly, putting a better face on the matter, and accepting our fate without the black looks of a rebel or of a slave, we should thereby impart more life and force to all the lessons of mortality preached in our ears. We are invited to hasten to our journey's end, and to see in death the gate of life. We are told a thousand cheerful things of our common goal, and we hold it a sin to doubt or despond as to that distant, further country. Then why are we to add continually new terrors to that Death which we believe not to be terrible at all? Why are we to dress the road to Heaven as if it were indeed, and could only be, the descent into a Pagan Tartarus?

POSTSCRIPT.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "TIMES."

SIR,—If your leading article of this morning had been printed in letters of gold, as, indeed, in a certain sense, it is, it could not more fittingly, more effectively, or, if the expression may be permitted, more gracefully dispose, for the time, of the question I have thought it right to raise.

In anticipation of that leisure which busy people are so apt to promise themselves, but which experience usually reveals to them as a constantly diminishing quantity, I had meant, in a second letter, to reduce to a practical shape that of which little more than the principle had been suggested in the first. I abstain. Enough has been said, at all events for the moment, to awaken public

attention to the existence of a great self-created moral and material evil, and time may now perhaps with advantage be given for those reflections which cannot fail to bring about its remedy.

Meanwhile, as a part of the subject with which I have no pretension to deal, let me submit to the consideration of that great middle class, to whose interests and sense of self-respect you address yourself more particularly to-day, the following extract from a Report on Intramural Interments presented to both Houses of Parliament in 1843.

Mr. Wild, an undertaker, is under examination :—

“ Question.—Are you aware that the array of funerals commonly made by undertakers is strictly the array of a baronial funeral—the two men who stand at the doors being supposed to be the two porters of the castle, with their staves, in black ; the man who heads the procession, wearing a scarf, being a representative of a herald-at-arms ; the man who carries a plume of feathers on his head being an esquire, who bears the shield and casque, with its plume of feathers ; the pall-bearers, with batons, being representatives of knights-companions-at-arms ; the men walking with wands being supposed to represent gentleman-ushers, with their wands ; are you aware that this is said to be the origin and type of the common array usually provided by those who undertake to perform funerals ?

“Answer.—No; I am not aware of it.

“Question.—It may be presumed that those who order funerals are equally unaware of the incongruity for which such expense is incurred?

“Answer.—Undoubtedly they are.”

I am, Sir, your obedient Servant,

F. SEYMOUR HADEN.

February 2.

NOTE.—The second letter alluded to will contain—1. observations on the defective state of the law in respect to the burial of the dead; 2. an enumeration and demonstration of the unmistakable signs of death, and of the practical impossibility, in this age, of premature burial; 3. the proper treatment of the body after death, and its preparation for interment; 4. observations on the site, formation, and management of a burial-place within easy access of London, with special provision that a grave once used should not again be opened till ample time has been given for the complete resolution and disappearance of its contents.

THE END.



