

**The second of a series of lectures ... on the actual condition of the metropolitan grave-yards / [George Alfred Walker].**

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The second of  
a series of  
lectures.



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THE

SECOND OF A SERIES

OF

LECTURES

DELIVERED AT THE MECHANICS' INSTITUTION, SOUTHAMPTON  
BUILDINGS, CHANCERY LANE, JAN. 22, 1847,

ON THE ACTUAL CONDITION OF THE

METROPOLITAN GRAVE-YARDS.

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BY GEO. ALFD. WALKER, Esq., SURGEON.

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"No burying-places should be tolerated within cities or towns, much less in or about CHURCHES and CHAPELS. This custom is excessively injurious to the inhabitants, and especially to those who frequent public worship in such CHAPELS and CHURCHES. God, decency, and health forbid this shocking abomination." \* \* \* From long observation I can attest that CHURCHES and CHAPELS situated in grave-yards, and those especially within whose walls the dead are interred, are perfectly unwholesome; and many, by attending such places, are shortening their passage to the house appointed for the living. What increases the iniquity of this abominable and deadly work is, that the burying-grounds attached to many CHURCHES and CHAPELS are made a source of PRIVATE GAIN. The whole of this preposterous conduct is as indecorous and unhealthy as it is profane. Every man should know that the gas which is disengaged from putrid flesh, and particularly from a human body, is not only unfriendly to, but destructive of, animal life. Superstition first introduced a practice which self-interest and covetousness continue to maintain."—DR. ADAM CLARKE'S Commentary on Luke vii, v. 12-15.

LONDON:

LONGMAN, BROWN, GREEN, AND LONGMANS, PATERNOSTER ROW;  
HIGHLEY, 32, FLEET STREET; AND ALL BOOKSELLERS.

1847

METROPOLITAN SOCIETY  
FOR THE  
**ABOLITION OF BURIALS IN TOWNS,**  
17, NEW BRIDGE STREET, BLACKFRIARS, LONDON.

(ESTABLISHED NOVEMBER, 1846).

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(WITH POWER TO ADD TO THEIR NUMBER).



covered by and intermixed with dirt, was next shoveled up—literally tossed up on a shovel, and thrown into the barrow. When the body, thus broken up, had been concealed in the hole, it was barely covered with earth. A body had been buried in this grave five weeks previously, and “I believe it,” says Mrs. Drew, “to have been the same body which was used in this inhuman manner.”

Mr. C. Comyns, who resides next door, had his attention directed to the occurrence by Mrs. Drew. Mr. Comyns went into the church-yard; saw the fresh blood of the recently mangled corpse, covering a surface of a foot square on the wall of the workhouse of St. Pancras, down which it ran. He sought the minister of the place, who is, or was, the sexton; insisted on his accompanying him to the spot; pointed out to him the mid-day evidences of the guilt of his agents, who were then engaged in trampling on and filling in the coffin, from whence they had just previously so brutally ejected the body.

A spirited individual, Mr. William Harrison, at once brought the matter under the notice of the police authorities. His allegations were found, upon inquiry, to be perfectly true, as were those of Mrs. Drew, Mr. Comyns, and Mr. Potter; indeed, they were not denied by the grave-digger, named Smith, who attempted to justify them on the plea of necessity and established custom.

It appears that the land for the Cemetery, as it is called, was purchased of the parish of St. Pancras; its vestrymen are, therefore, jealous of its honour, and they have gone out of their way to testify thereto. Old St. Pancras grave-yard and the the young St. Pancras poorhouse may be likened to mother and daughter, whilst St. Giles's Cemetery, happily placed between parent and child, has, between two stools, fallen to the ground.

So much, then, for the men of St. Pancras in “very full” vestry assembled, and its committee of grave-yard inspectors, who have so complacently constituted themselves into a society of mutual congratulation. So much at present for the grave-yard on the other side of its workhouse wall, and the “management” pursued therein. We have given perhaps too much time to a refutation, that ought not, in decency, to have been required; however, it has been asked for and obtained.

Since last we met, the cause which I advocate has made rapid progress. Yet, much yet remains to be done.

In this country, distinguished above all others for a tenacious adherence to old customs, no matter how absurd, injurious, or reprehensible such customs may be, the progress of reform has always been slow. Yet, if ever there was a subject calculated to excite public attention, to arouse the indignation of the good, and ensure the aid of every philanthropist, it is the cause for the promotion of which we have this night met together.

Let any one look with an unprejudiced eye at the actual state of the Metropolitan burying-places, densely surrounded, as they too generally are, with a swarming living population. Let him examine the vaults crowded with dead,

over which frequently, divided by a thin covering, he must sit during divine service. Let him reflect, that in the body and aisles of many churches and chapels, graves and vaults are employed for the interment of the previous living worshippers, and that the occasional opening of such vaults, charged with deadly products, has produced serious, and even fatal, disease. Let him further reflect, that the entire practice is left to the "management" of the lowest class of the community, whose brutal fool-hardiness is stimulated by drink, and by the consciousness that their lives are worth little to themselves, and less to society. Let him think of these things, and let him ask himself whether alteration of the present system be not imperatively required, and that immediately.

The more one contemplates the serious injury done to the population of our large towns by our present system of internal sepulture, the more is he lost in wonder that the people, generally sufficiently alive to a perception of what they consider prejudicial to their interest, do not rise *en masse*, and demand as an act of justice, and as a matter of right, that many, if not all, these places should cease to be employed. If the necessity of suppressing the nuisance complained of has, years since, been by others tacitly admitted, how much more necessary is it, as time progresses, and population continually increases, whilst the burial-places are comparatively decreasing, that all who are interested in the well-being of the community should be up and doing.\*

Let us now enter upon the examination of a locality that first excited my attention, and led to my subsequent inquiries.—

The Portugal Street burial-ground, known also by the singular name of the "Green-ground," is a small patch of land about one-third of an acre in superficial extent. In this place the father of jokes, Joe Miller, has a gravestone erected to his memory. Situated at the top of Clement's Lane, Strand, in the vicinity of Clare Market and a shambles, and immediately behind one of our metropolitan hospitals, it has been used as a burying-place beyond the memory of man.

As the numbers annually buried in this ground are nearly ten times as many as they ought to be, you will not be surprised to hear that it is saturated with human putrescence,—that the necessity of obtaining room gives rise to the most revolting indecencies. Of some of them I have been an eye-witness. I have seen the heaps of coffin wood—of wood with perfectly fresh cloth covering; I have seen bones on the surface ready for removal; and I have experienced the effects of the effluvia which the ground almost constantly throws off from its surface. Others have witnessed similar desecration. A writer in the *Times*,† who states that twelve of his nearest and dearest relations were buried in that ground, saw two men employed in carrying baskets of human bones from one portion of the burial-place to a small gate; and pertinently asks, where does this gate lead to?

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\* Interment and Disinterment, p. 4.

† Gatherings from Grave-yards, p. 151.

James Lane, of No. 30, Clements Lane, who gave evidence before the Parliamentary Committee (question 717), being asked, What is the mode of interment practised? answered, digging a shallow grave at times, and then a few weeks afterwards they will go a good depth. There was one occasion when my wife noticed it more than at any other time; there was a corpse buried on a Sunday from the hospital; there were two females following it; what made us take particular notice of it was, that they came from the hospital, and went out at the gate across the ground towards Clare Market, and then came back again to the hospital. In the course of about a month afterwards they opened this grave again, and when they opened it they brought the coffin up in pieces, not split, but the sides were taken from the head and foot-board; they brought it up without splitting, just as you might take a case to pieces, or the lid off a box. After they had brought up the lid, and laid it on the ground, they brought up the bones with the flesh hanging in tatters upon it; then about four shovels full of soft substance came up, and my wife called to the person in the next room to witness the thing; they called out to the men; the men made them no answer, but turned their backs towards the houses to try to avoid the people seeing it, but the window being high, we could see every thing that came out of the grave as plainly almost as if we had been close to them; they were not far off.\*

Lane also stated that he has been repeatedly awakened in the morning by the noise of men breaking up the coffins in order to make room for the dead and fire-wood† for the living. Many times he and his wife have seen a coffin disturbed; that is to say, cut through and broken up within six weeks after it was put down. Colonel Fox asked him, "What became of the contents of the coffin?" The answer is worthy of record,—“It is mixed with the mould. The body, which was brought up piece-meal, with the flesh hanging to the bones, and stuff brought up in shovels without bones, was let down in a solid lump again on the top of the coffin; and the women called out to the men, and told them they had better take people's money out of their pockets, and not bury the dead at all, or bury them without a coffin. It is a shocking place for disturbing the dead.”

Michael Pye,‡ the grave-digger, fully corroborated the evidence given by Lane; and, here let me remark, that if reference is so frequently made to grave-diggers, it is because persons of that class are precisely those most likely to be acquainted with the *day* and *night* doings of the "managers" of the dead. This Pye proved that in the "Green-ground" the diggers were compelled to find a grave, no matter how, or where, or what lay beneath the spade. When even these wretched men evinced some compunction, some faint glimmering of decency or moral feeling, epithets the most disgusting and approbious were applied to them.

William Chamberlain,§ who was connected with this same ground for many

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\* Parliamentary Report, p. 32. † *Idem*, p. 34. ‡ *Idem*, p. 62. § *Idem*, p. 129.



years, enables us to reveal its secrets still more completely. The evidence of this man, an eye-witness of all that he relates, is so crushing that I must beg permission to refer to it at some length. For seven years Chamberlain never opened a grave in the Portugal Street ground "without coming into other coffins of children, grown persons, and what are termed in grave-yard *parlance*, 'odd sizes.'" These were indiscriminately cut through, and the bodies in them so perfect that males were distinguishable from females, were chopped and cut up, with tools specially made for the purpose. Oftentimes were the mutilated remains thrown up behind the boards on which the mourners were supported, and after the farce of burial was concluded, the flesh was thrown into the recent grave, and the coffins taken away for fire-wood. This abominable practice, it seems, was peculiarly applied to children.

"I have taken up," says Chamberlain, "the children and moved them within a week after they were buried, and placed them in a different spot, not above a foot-and-a-half deep; sometimes I have placed them nowhere. It was done by orders."

This placing "nowhere" consisted in breaking up the coffins, cutting the flesh into pieces, and then burying it wherever a hole could be found. For the above horrid purpose, there were, as I have informed you, suitable instruments provided, instruments never required for digging a grave.

In 1843, a disgraceful scene, which nearly gave rise to an outbreak of public violence, occurred in this ground. The body of a man named Jacob Burns, respectable and once wealthy, was brought for interment; as he was poor, the grave-diggers thought that "a hole" would suffice instead of a grave. They endeavoured by means of heavy logs of wood to force the coffin into the place they had prepared for it, but were prevented by the spectators, whose indignation became aroused; and no wonder that indignation should manifest itself, for when the eldest daughter of the deceased, with tears in her eyes, implored the grave-digger not to insult the remains of her father, the only reply she received was, "where is your black?"

Fearing violence from the excited multitude, they thrust the coffin upright into the hole, and having covered it with a sprinkling of earth, left it with the head close to the surface. This unseemly method of disposing of an old and respectable inhabitant of the parish so irritated the numbers who had crowded into the church-yard, that the officials became alarmed, sent for the authorities, and gave a public promise that the body of Mr. Burns should be interred on the following day in a decent manner. The gravediggers were at work before daylight on the following morning; yet, with their best "management," the lid of the coffin was only one foot eight inches from the surface.

Such is the condition of the "Green-ground,"—such the deeds perpetrated in a so-called sanctuary of the dead. Yet at one extremity of this ground, so situ-

ated that the living invalids are compelled to breathe the putrid miasmata of this charnel-house, has an hospital been established for the cure of disease.

How long will those in authority violate the simplest laws of Public Health? If the atmosphere of a grave-yard be disgusting to persons in health, and injurious to all who inhale it, what shall we say of the policy that exposes the sick and the dying to its influence?

From the "Green-ground" in Portugal Street, permit me to lead you to a distant part of the town, to the "New Bunhill Fields." And here it may be asked *in limine*, if the disgraceful proceedings which I have just recorded take place in our parochial grounds, with the cognizance of high dignitaries and respectable officials, what may we not expect from the "management" of private burial-places where the dead are received without limitation as to number, without control as to locality, where the extent of desecration is proportioned to the insatiable appetite of the unscrupulous proprietors?

The NEW BUNHILL FIELDS burying-ground is situated in Devereux Street, Great Dover Road. It contains about two-thirds of an acre of ground, and receives every year about 1,560 bodies. This gives an annual average of 2,32 interments to the acre, the proper, the decent, average being, as I have so often endeavoured to impress on you, 136. We thus find that 17 times as many bodies are buried every year in this ground as ought to be; and thus are you prepared not only to believe the statements which I am about to submit to you, but to foresee that violation of the tomb *must be inevitable*—must be a work of *daily necessity*.

And now for the statements. Valentine Haycock informed the Parliamentary Committee of the condition of the ground, and the practices carried on therein. Haycock worked as grave-digger in that ground during ten years. Let us examine his evidence, for he being dead yet speaketh. He says, the place had been open during eighteen years, and had received nearly 21,000 bodies in the year 1842. Twenty-one thousand corpses in an acre of ground and in the vault of the chapel where the living worshippers assemble! Perhaps 12 out of the 1,500 bodies in the vault may be placed in lead! The original proprietor of this place, named Hoole, was resting by the side of his daughter in an inner vault, separated by iron railings from the masses of bodies in the larger one, when I visited the place some years since.\*

Haycock is asked for an explanation of the mode by which 20,000 coffins had been placed in an acre of ground. He says, we dig 10 feet, and if we can get 12 we do, and then we pile them one upon the other as many as the grave will hold, perhaps six or eight or nine in it; then, when that is full, we dig another grave close by the side of it, and put another nine or ten therein; that they were piled one on another, just as if you were piling up bricks. He says the smell was

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\* Gatherings from Grave-yards, p. 181.

“dreadful beyond all smells;” that he, himself, raised the ground all over the place about six inches; that the burial-service was read over the graves by a patten-maker, who lived close by. “He has £20 a year,” says Haycock; “he is a patten-maker; he lives close by, so it suits him very well.”\*

But this is not all. Haycock stated, that, at one time, bodies were stacked in the vault at the rate of £1 each for six months,—Lodgings for the dead!!! What became of them after the expiration of the six months’ tenancy he does not say; but the history of London grave-yards will readily suggest to you what was the process of ejection.

The ways of the wicked, however, are not always prosperous, and a just Providence sometimes demonstrates his wrath by the nature of the punishment which overtakes the guilty. This same Hoole—this letter of lodgings to the dead, at the rate of six months certain, fell a victim to his beastly occupation. A report appeared in a morning paper that “his vault was over the shoes in human corruption.” The fear of the press inspired him with a sudden desire to set his house in order; he came in from the country, worked in his shirt sleeves at the piles of decaying matter heaped up in the vault, went home ill, and, together with his “head man,” died in a few days. So may the unrighteous perish!

Haycock, who died of consumption about nine months ago, told me some years since that “the stench in digging graves in that ground was horrible; that he had frequently scrambled out of the hole he was making,—that his eyes struck fire,—his brain seemed in a whirl, and that he vomited large quantities of blood.”† Haycock, although an exceedingly strong man when he commenced grave-digging, offers another evidence, amongst too many others, of the power of emanations from the dead over the health of the living. I knew him, and attended him occasionally, during many years. I saw him droop, die inch by inch; and although the disease was held under control during a short period, his life paid the forfeit.

This wholesale clearing out of vaults and grave-yards to which Hoole and others have fallen victims, is not, I regret to say, confined to private speculations of the kind we have undertaken to consider. It exists in our parochial burying-grounds; it has been deliberately sanctioned,—nay, practised by men calling themselves Christians, whose “management” of the poor when dead is, in some instances, a fit counterpart of the treatment which they vouchsafe to them whilst living.

There is a place in the Borough called “Cross Bones,” the *poor-ground* attached to St. Saviour’s church, Southwark. This ground had been closed for a short time, because it was impossible to find space in it for a single body.

\* Report on the Effect of Interment of Bodies, p. 51.

† Burial-Ground Incendiarism, or the Minute Anatomy of Grave-digging in London, p. 6.

On the 20th February, 1839, a vestry was holden for the purpose of considering the propriety of re-opening it, as *two years* (the time generally allowed for the destruction of the bodies) had elapsed. It was moved that it be re-opened, the mover of the resolution stating, that in consequence of the aversion generally manifested to bury in what is named the “Irish corner,” many bodies were taken out of the parish to be buried. *This corner, however, had been cleared, and room made for about a thousand bodies.* One gentleman urged, that “if the graves had been made deeper, hundreds more corpses might have been buried there.” Another admitted that it really was too bad to bury within 18 inches of the surface in such a crowded neighbourhood; and it was even hinted that “*the clearing,*” viz., the digging up and the removal of *the decayed fragments of flesh and bones, with the pieces of coffin, &c., would be the best course, were it not for the additional expense.*”

The *funds* of the vestry and the HEALTH of the living were here placed in opposite scales,—the former had the preponderance.\*

In the various investigations which have been made for the purpose of discovering the actual condition of our grave-yards, and of bringing to light the practices carried on within their boundaries, very great difficulty, as you may well suppose, was experienced in obtaining the evidence of respectable witnesses. Men of station and character were unwilling in some instances to come forward and acknowledge the existence of abominations which, however unwillingly they witnessed, they had not the moral courage to endeavour to suppress.

I would direct your special attention to the testimony of the Rev. Dr. Knapp.† This gentleman is an impartial, though, perhaps, an unwilling witness. For 27 years he was curate of St. Andrew’s, Undershaft, and during the whole of that period, as he informs us, his mind constantly dwelt on the distressing state of the church-yard.

“I have had (says the Rev. Doctor) very many opportunities of observing the accumulated mass of bodies and matter decomposed or in a putrescent state, with abominable exhalations, to the annoyance frequently of myself while performing my duty and of those attending the funeral.”

The grave-yard here alluded to is, I may mention, a miserable hole, measuring 795 square feet, a surface not larger than a good sized drawing-room. Yet, in this narrow spot are Christian burials yearly performed in the proportion of 1,278 interments to the acre.

Keeping this fact in mind, you will readily believe the witness when he states that “his friends and the faculty advised him to leave town altogether if he wished to save his life;” that the stench which pervaded the church—the house of God—was so great as frequently to drive members of the congregation home, attacked by sickness; that scarcely a grave could be made without digging up

\* Gatherings from Grave-yards, p. 177.

† Parliamentary Report, p. 45.

coffins; that the church-yard stands three or four feet *above* the level of the church, raised up by bodies; that holes were dug behind the church, into which were cast, in order to keep them out of sight, the bones which were perpetually thrown up on the surface; and, finally, to crown all, that 10 tons of lead, taken from coffins removed from the vaults of the church in order to make room—10 tons of lead were sold, and the proceeds paid over to the church-wardens.

On this humiliating fact I shall make no comment. Words would only weaken the deep and lasting impression which it must leave on your minds. Of the fact there cannot be a shadow of a doubt, for Mr. Harvey, the parish-clerk, when asked—"What do they do with the dead bodies or the coffins they cut through?" replied, "a great deal of wood has been consumed in the fire-places." In what fire-places?—In the church, and the lead has been taken away and sold. For whose profit?—The parish. The money has been paid over to the church-wardens.

That the dead disappear thus rapidly a few weeks—a few months—after their committal to the earth, which we have been accustomed to regard as a resting-place, there can be no longer a doubt; but some facts described before the Parliamentary Committee, clouded it is true by suspicion and surmise, would lead to the horrible conclusion, that the dead bodies of the poor may be disposed of *before* they can reach their last abode. This suspicion, which I can only designate by the word horrible, was thrown out, not by a "degraded" grave-digger, nor in a moment of zealous excitement, it was solemnly and deliberately expressed by a clergyman of the Established Church; by the Rev. Dr. Russell, rector of Bishopsgate.\* To prevent any mistake, I shall give the reverend gentleman's own words:—

"It struck me (says Dr. Russell) in making inquiry into the matter, that it may be worth the consideration of this Committee to ascertain, with regard to persons who die, where they are buried? I sent to the registry-office to inquire how many persons have been returned as dead in the parish for the last four years; in the year 1838, 360 deaths were registered, but we only find 261 burials, and 99 therefore are not at all accounted for; in the year 1839, 356 deaths were registered, but only 202 were buried in the parish, leaving 154; in the year 1840, there were 288 deaths registered, and 138 only were buried, leaving 150; in the year 1841 there were 340 deaths registered, but only 194 buried. This has raised in my mind a great inquiry as to what has become of all these bodies; it has created considerable doubts in my own mind as to the way in which the bodies have been disposed of."

The "undisposed" could not have been buried in the cemeteries, because the returns from them showed that only nine persons from Bishopsgate had been interred in those extra-mural grounds during the period alluded to.

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\* Parliamentary Report, p. 138.

From this account, then, it appears, that of 1,244 persons who died in the parish of Bishopsgate, only 795 were buried; at least, no trace of the burial of the remainder could be discovered.

I have so frequently insisted on the self-evident proposition that **BULK MUST OCCUPY SPACE**, that I am almost tired of repeating it. Yet upon this axiom the whole question rests. When you fill a limited space of ground with a certain number of bodies, it is *impossible* to obtain room for a single additional body without displacing and dismembering many others. When ten times more than the proper number are buried, you cannot continue the same rate of interments without clearing out the whole of the graves, without removing or cutting up the bodies, each year. Hence, I say, and I repeat it, that indecent, immoral, and unchristian practices are inevitable so long as we continue our present custom of interring the dead in the midst of the living. I shall subsequently demonstrate to you, that the same consequences must follow the same causes; and although in this brief disquisition we have no space to speak of the inevitable result of these brutal upturnings of dead men who are so foully and shamefully ejected, you will, I trust, ere this series of Lectures are completed, be convinced that the immorality of such practices is only to be equalled by their unhealthiness.

The moral and physical evils of intra-mural sepulture are not confined to London. They exist in all our large towns; and if they have hitherto escaped exposure and denunciation, it is because few are found who will devote the days of their youth and the fruits of their industry to the unrequited toils of a benefactor of the public.

The evils of intra-mural sepulture, I repeat, exist in all large towns. Take Birmingham for example. In the parish of St. Mary, which is situate in the very heart of the town, there is a grave-yard of an about an acre in extent. It is surrounded by a square of dwelling-houses. In this acre of ground the Rev. Mr. Hewson, curate of the parish, proved that 60,000 bodies had been interred. For many years he had been accustomed himself to inter 1,200 annually, just nine times as many as should have been received. Let us hear Mr. Hewson's description of the results produced by this violation of policy and decency:—

“I have myself buried between 1,100 and 1,200 in the course of a year there. On Sundays there are from twenty to thirty buried; all those corpses are brought within the church between the services, and I can safely say that the smell and effluvia is most abominable and disgusting, and very much calculated to keep away a great many persons from the afternoon service, which immediately followed the burials.”\*

And, again, he says—

“The church-yard is so very full that in digging for a fresh grave they frequently turn up bones and pieces of human flesh; and I am convinced that the

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\* Parliamentary Report, p. 97.

health of the square in which this stands, which is a very important square in Birmingham, cannot be improved by that."

Struck by this answer, Colonel Fox asked—

"You say there were pieces of human flesh; would not the coffin protect them?—They were sometimes obliged to go very deep, and to try every possible means of finding room for fresh coffins."

Finally, the reverend gentleman observed—

"I have heard persons constantly complain of their friends' coffins being disturbed, coming and crying and lamenting to me and other clergymen, that the bodies of their children and their friends were constantly knocked about by seeking for fresh ground; but, as far as my information goes, this extends to all other large towns, and not only to other large towns, but to many country parishes."

From Birmingham let us proceed to Leeds, where we obtain evidence of similar practices from the testimony of Mr. Robert Baker, Surgeon, who has resided in Leeds for the last twenty years.

In the parochial burial-grounds, instead of 28,000 interments, which there ought to have been, no less than 142,293 burials have taken place. Hence the necessity of constant desecration to make room for new tenants, hence the repetition of acts which shock the feelings of survivors, while they spread disease and death amongst the surrounding population. In illustration, Mr. Baker related the following case, which I shall give you in his own words:—

"I was in the ground last Wednesday (April, 1842) collecting information, and the sexton took me to a grave which they were then digging for the interment of a female; two feet below the surface they took out the body of a child, which was said to be an illegitimate child, and it had been buried five years; below that, and two feet six inches from the surface, were two coffins side by side, the father and the brother of the person who was then going to have the interment; the father was buried in 1831; the coffins were opened, the bones were in a state of freshness; the matter had been putrified off the bones, but they were perfectly fresh; they were thrown on the surface; and at that time the person came in who was going to have the interment; he spoke to me about it, and made use of this expression, 'Look! these are the skulls of my father and my brother, and the bones of my relations, is not this a bad business? It cannot, I suppose, however, be helped.' He was very much shocked; he stayed there a short time, and then went away a little distance."\*

"I examined the grave," continues Mr. Baker. "The bottom part of the coffin was chopped up and thrown on the surface, and I examined it; the residue was in an effervescent, putrescent state; after the bottom part of the coffin had been taken out, a little soil was taken out again, and there were two other coffins side by side, containing the mother and the grandmother of the same person. These coffins were broken up in my presence and thrown out, and then there was gravel underneath; all these bodies had been buried at the short distance of two feet six inches; and then, at a depth of one foot six inches more, lay other coffins

\* Parliamentary Report, p. 143.

below them on gravel, and they were thrown on the grave side in the way I have described to the Committee. I asked the sexton whether it was absolutely necessary that this should be, and his answer was, that it was quite impossible it should be otherwise; that it was not a single occurrence, but was an every-day occurrence when they had to inter in that grave-yard; he mentioned two or three other cases of an exactly similar nature, which it is not needful to repeat, but which had occurred within the last ten days."

A case somewhat analogous to the one just related occurred in the "Green-ground," Portugal Street, Lincolns Inn Fields. The father of John Eyles, a grave-digger in this ground, was buried there. "One day I saw them," says Eyles, "chopping the head of his coffin away; I should not have known it if I had not seen the head with the teeth; I knew him by his teeth; one tooth was knocked out and the other was splintered; I knew it was my father's head, and I told them to stop, and they laughed, and I would not let them go any further, and they had to cover it over."

Let us now take a passing glance at two places which have obtained an infamous notoriety,—Enon Chapel and Spa Fields burying-ground.

We will commence with the former. ENON CHAPEL is situate on the western side of Clement's Lane, Strand. It is surrounded on all sides by houses, which are crowded with inhabitants, chiefly of the poorer class. The upper part of the building was opened for the purposes of public worship on the 16th April, and the first body was deposited on the 6th of October, 1822.\* A boarded floor separates the chapel from the cellar beneath, which has been devoted to the dismemberment and desecration of the dead.

This lower part, kitchen, cellar, or "DUST-HOLE," call it what you will, which used to be entered by a crazy flight of five or six wooden steps from the inside of the chapel, its dim and murky area being illuminated by the miserable light of a few candles, which served to render its horrors and its darkness more apparent, was for many years the cheap burying-place of this miserable, this wretched district. The révérend proprietor thinking himself as much entitled to a vested right in pestilence as some others, stuffed his chapel in the very midst of human habitations, and, as I have informed you, commenced his exhortations to the living, and his "management" of the dead, almost at the same time.

The burial-place measures in length 59 feet 3 inches, or thereabouts, and in width about 28 feet 8 inches, so that its superficial contents do not exceed 1,700 square feet. Now, allowing for an adult body only 12 feet, and for the young, upon an average, 6 feet, and supposing an equal number of each to be there deposited, the medium space occupied by each would be 9 feet; if, then, every inch of ground were occupied, not more than 189 (say 200 in round numbers) could be placed upon the surface; and admitting (an extravagant admission most cer-

\* Burial-ground Incendiarism, or the Minute Anatomy of Grave-digging in London; by G. A. Walker.



tainly) that it were possible to place six tiers of coffins upon each other, the whole space could not contain more than 1,200; and yet it is stated with confidence, and by credible authority (as you shall presently see), that from 10,000 to 12,000 bodies have been deposited in this very space within sixteen years!

The "dust-hole," as it is familiarly called by undertakers, is entered from the inside of the chapel by a trap-door, and the joists which support the floor of the chapel are not even covered with the usual defence—lath and plaster.

Let us now proceed to reveal from the mouths of competent witnesses the modes of "management" which enabled the reverend proprietor to derive during a period of about six years, that is, from October 6, 1822, to December, 1828, the sum of NINE HUNDRED AND FIFTY-ONE POUNDS FIVE SHILLINGS for burials in a cellar measuring 59 feet by 29 feet, while he rendered it perhaps the most infamous of the charnel-houses of this Metropolis.

Mr. Samuel Pitts, cabinet-maker, of 14, Catherine Street, Strand, thus describes the place:—At the time I attended it, which was from about the year 1828, for six or seven years, there were interments, and the place was in a very filthy state; the smell was most abominable and very injurious; I have frequently gone home myself with a severe headache, which I suppose to have been occasioned by the smell, more particularly in the summer time; also, there were some insects, something similar to a bug in shape and appearance, only with wings, about the size of a small bug. I have seen in the summer time hundreds of them flying about the chapel; I have taken them home in my hat, and my wife has taken them home in her clothes; we always considered that they proceeded from the dead bodies underneath; there was nothing but the thin boards between the depository and the chapel, and there were openings between owing to the shrinking of the boards.\*

In order to explain the difficult problem of placing in such a receptacle 10,000 or 12,000 bodies, Mr. Pitts stated that numbers of the bodies had been removed to make room for others; that the minister's copper, employed for the purposes of washing, was warmed with coffin-wood, and his kitchen fire was kept going with the same material: that a sewer ran through the very centre of the vault, so situate that any inconvenient surplus might be quietly disposed of; and, finally, that a SUNDAY SCHOOL for children was held over this abominable receptacle of putrid and decaying mortality.

But our evidence does not rest here. The removal of human remains—the clearing out of the place, was distinctly proved by Mr. William Burn, the master carman who did the job. The sewer, to which I have just alluded, was enlarged and made more secure by the Commissioners of Sewers. Mr. Burn says the work was superintended by persons connected with the office of the Commissioners; that he removed upwards of sixty loads of "dust" from the hole—so

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\* Parliamentary Report, p. 8.

much "rubbish," as he called it, which was shot at the foot of Waterloo Bridge. The rubbish (among which, he says, was a human hand as perfect as his own, and which did not appear to have been buried a month,) consisted of human bodies in a state of putrefaction. This rubbish assisted to fill up inequalities where "rubbish might be shot." Mr. Burn says that, to him, the work was most disgusting and repulsive. "He never saw such a sight, with coffins broken up." When questioned touching the sewer, Mr. Burn replied, "I have no doubt whatever that bodies have been slipped down the sewer."

Another witness, Mr. George Whittaker, undertaker, was examined by the Parliamentary Committee as to the condition and "management" of this same Enon Chapel. I shall, with your permission, read a portion of Mr. Whittaker's evidence—

"I have seen coffins broken in the graves, and shovelled away to make room for fresh comers.

"And the bodies cut to pieces?—Decidedly so.

"How do you mean?—Cut with the spade.

"Were those very old coffins, or had they been placed in the grave only a short time?—I have seen both old and nearly new coffins destroyed.

"To make room in the grave-yard?—In the places where funerals were to take place.

"Has this often occurred?—Yes, it is a case of almost every-day occurrence.

"To what grave-yards are you particularly alluding?—The one I particularly allude to, is that of Enon Chapel.

"You mean the vault under Enon Chapel?—Yes; it is more like a cellar.

"Have the kindness to describe to the Committee the state of that vault?—It is dreadfully full. On one occasion when I went there, a covered coffin was brought up to the surface; the body seemed as though it had been scarcely buried a week; the hair was on the head; the flesh was fresh, and the inside of the coffin was strewn with quick-lime apparently; it looked like white dust.

"Colonel Acton.] When was that?—Some time ago.

"Can you mention the year?—It is within these two years.

"Chairman.] It has been stated by a former witness that 12,000 people were buried there in a space not above 59 feet by 29 feet; do you confirm that evidence, or do you dispute it?—I should consider that there had been fully that amount.

"How do you account for so many bodies being placed in so small a space?—I cannot account for it.\*"

You thus perceive that the "management" of Enon Chapel receptacle chiefly consisted in the simple process of breaking up the coffins, the application of quick-lime to hasten the destruction of the bodies, and the carting them off by wholesale to the nearest available spot of ground. But these facilities did not keep pace with the cupidity of this "manager." He seemed to be desirous of saving the cost of carting away the human "rubbish" even at the charge of

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\* Parliamentary Report, p. 20.

half-a-crown a load. He made a nearer cut; having disposed of the soft parts of the bodies by the application of quick lime in the place where they were deposited, under the flags of his kitchen-floor, the fire of which was fed by coffin-wood, were the bones of the disturbed concealed. This fact was brought to light in the month of August, 1844.

A man named Fitzpatrick, in the employment of Messrs. Firmins, button-makers, was in occupation of the house attached to the chapel, formerly the residence of the late Mr. Howse, the minister. The man, desirous of deepening the kitchen of the house, the ceiling being very low, employed John Mars, who proceeded with the work during several successive Sundays. The flags composing the floor, extending from back to front, and occupying the whole length of the house, were taken up, and a vast quantity of human bones were found, covering the whole of the floor of the kitchen. The labour, although persisted in, was hopeless; for, after thrusting an enormous quantity of bones through a door made in the brick wall dividing the burying-place from the kitchen, the man gave up the work in disgust and despair. He found the less destructible portions of this army of dead, although passive in their resistance, beyond his "management." Having dug upwards of two feet in depth, in various directions, having literally filled, as far as the space would permit, the cellar, and even the opening, with human bones, finding, after his utmost efforts, his labour must be interminable without actual removal of the enormous masses of bones by which he was surrounded,—the man, although willing perhaps to fulfil his engagement, yet failed to do so.

I should inform you, that the door above mentioned was made many years since, but was hidden from the view of persons attending the funerals of their deceased relatives or friends by a screen made principally of the same materials of which the sides of the font in the chapel are composed, viz., the wood of coffins.\*

I have several times visited this Golgotha, and have as often asked myself,

" Can such things be,  
And overcome us, like a summer cloud,  
Without our special wonder."

I was struck with the total disregard of decency exhibited,—numbers of coffins were piled in confusion, large quantities of bones were mixed with the earth, and lying upon the floor of this cellar (for vault it ought not to be called); lids of *coffins* might be trodden upon at almost every step.

My reflections upon leaving the masses of corruption here exposed, were painful in the extreme; I want language to express the intense feelings of pity, contempt, and abhorrence I experienced. Can it be, thought I, that in the nineteenth century, in the very centre of the most magnificent city of the

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\* Burial-ground Incendiarism; or, the Minute Anatomy of Grave-digging in London; by G. A. Walker.

universe, such sad, very sad mementos of ignorance, cupidity, and degraded morality, still exist? Possibly I am now treading over the mouldering remains of many, once the cherished idols of the heart's best and purest affections; here, thought I, may repose one who has had his cares, his anxieties,—who, perchance, may have well fulfilled life's duties, and who has tasted its pleasures and its sorrows,—here he sleeps as I must sleep; yet I could not but desire that I might have a better resting place—a *Christian* burial.

Having thus far disclosed to you the vile and immoral practices engendered in many of our Metropolitan grave-yards, let me close this Lecture with a very brief account of the circumstances connected with the Spa-Fields prosecution—the discomfiture of “MANAGER” Bird, and the establishment, for the first time at least in this country, of the important principle, that grave-yards, such as I have described them to you, and such as they inevitably are in all crowded towns, are PUBLIC nuisances, not only indictable, but punishable at common law. This I consider to be the greatest triumph yet obtained, and if the principle were more frequently carried into practice by those having authority, abominations most disgraceful to our character and most destructive of our health would soon cease to exist amongst us.

Of the result of the contest, although protracted and severe, I never doubted an instant. There is an individual, of whom it is impossible to speak too highly, who, sharing the annoyance, insult, and expense of this exposition, was constant and persevering to the last. To that gentleman, Mr. Robert Watt, of 14, Exmouth Street, Clerkenwell, I desire to return my sincere thanks for his able assistance and unflinching co-operation; and I cannot help observing, that if men of his stamp were less rare amongst us, such abominations would be swept away with a force and frequency, that would leave the locality of similar plague-spots to be pointed at as the curses of an age that permitted their existence, only because it was so little informed of the “MANAGEMENT” of their proprietors.

The Spa Fields burying-ground contains 42,640 square feet, and would inter (decently) about 1,361 *adult* bodies. Within a period of fifty years, about 80,000 bodies have been deposited there. The number of burials was, on an average, 1,500 per annum. Now, under any circumstances, the digging of 1,500 graves *yearly* in the midst of such a mass of human remains, in every stage of decomposition, would be most injurious to the PUBLIC HEALTH. I repeat, that *such material constantly being upturned and offered in successive surfaces to the atmosphere*, establishes a charge of great and gross dereliction of duty, and obligation; but as, in addition to daily and nightly practices the most scandalous and depraved, a *systematic* and utterly unjustifiable process of *rapid consumption of human bodies had been for many years in full and unchecked operation*, it was quite time that it should be

exposed, for it was impossible perhaps to overrate the serious consequences that must have resulted to the HEALTH of the district.

One of the witnesses before the Parliamentary Committee of 1842 having given a qualified opinion as to the practices pursued *then* in that place, came in for his share of commendation, whilst the Committee and myself were thus spoken off in one of a series of letters, which were subsequently published in a collected form by the Committee of a Society for opposing the Bill brought into the House of Commons by Mr. Mackinnon, the Chairman of the Parliamentary Committee. With that Bill I have nothing whatever to do. I am a collector of facts, not a legislator. From facts collected by myself I drew certain conclusions; those conclusions may or may not be correct; however, there does not live the man who can invalidate my statements. The language of an anonymous reverend gentleman, however coarse or offensive, may curl the lip with contempt, but will not satisfy conviction. Here is an example of sensitive special pleading—the language of the man who in defending the conduct, sanctioned the practices of the proprietor of Enon Chapel, and of the managers of the Spa Fields receptacle.

Let us hear what this man says of the latter place.—

“We also (says he) charged the Parliamentary Committee at the outset with fatuous incompetency or most reprehensible unfairness in the examination. They not only allowed the witnesses to babble and talk at random upon all sorts of subjects, but actually *prompted them to improprieties!* When Mr. Robert Carr was examined in reference to a certain very serious point connected with Spa-Fields burying-ground, he was questioned thus:—

“Q. 648. How do you account for that?—I cannot account for that.

“649. What is your *suspicion*?—I cannot say anything on *suspicion*, unless I know the positive fact.”

“This manly and merited rebuke might have silenced the Committee; but they persevered as follows in their disgraceful course:—

“650. You *surmise* something?—That which I think, I may think wrong; and, therefore, it would not be right to state it.”

“Even this honest declaration did not abash them. They went on:—

“651. Still, if you think anything wrong, and by giving your opinion (by lying?), the public might benefit by inquiring into the matter, it would be right that you should state it?—Unless I know a thing *positively*, I cannot speak to it; in whatever I may think, I may be wrong; but if there was anything I *knew*, I would speak plainly and openly.”

“654. Is there any doubt that there is *burning* sometimes?—I never saw any.

“661. You do not like to speak without *being sure*?—Certainly not.”

“Friends! (he continues) ponder this passage; you may hence learn both the complexion and the object of the Committee. Surely, the gentlemen forgot that they were a court of solemn inquiry. They also failed to remember that such inquiry, at every stage, necessarily affected both the property and the character of a large portion of her Majesty’s subjects, ‘What is your suspicion?’ Suspicion has no right to a place in a good man’s breast, especially in a court of justice.

“ ‘What is your suspicion?’ Only think of Lord Denman thus interrogating a witness relative to the conduct of a fellow-citizen! In the event of such an enormity, the thunders of the metropolitan press would have roared and rolled to the heavens! And shall a Committee of the House of Commons claim as their high prerogative, the right to do as whim, caprice, passion, or prejudice may dictate? In the name of law, justice, liberty, and honour, we denounce such conduct! Are ‘suspicion’ and ‘surmise’ henceforth to constitute the bases of enactments by which the lawful property of thousands is to be confiscated, and the highest privileges of millions of free-born Englishmen impaired or abrogated?

“Another point merits notice; the witnesses were as far as possible culled and selected to serve a purpose. With the clerical witnesses Mr. Mackinnon and Mr. Walker could not well tamper; they could only speculate regarding the gentlemen that were the most safe and the most likely to serve them; and to a great extent they erred in their speculation. It was somewhat otherwise with the Medical witnesses, friends of Walker, most of whom wanted not the will, but only the power, to sustain this most extravagant project. The weapon of the one class was opinion; the weapon of the other, fact. The Medical men said church-yards must be pernicious to health; the Clergyman contended that they were wholly innocuous. The former reasoned from the principles of chemistry; the latter, from personal experience. The Bishop of London alone pounded all the Doctors of Medicine as if in a mortar! They discoursed of the mortal gases which emanate from the tombs, and maintained that they must be fatal to all residents in their vicinity; the calm Prelate only smiled at their simplicity, and replied, that both he and his household had lived many years in one of our most crowded church-yards in the enjoyment of perfect health. The rest of the witnesses were mostly men of lower grade, and more easily managed; but the bulk of them knew so little of the subject as to be of a slender service on either side. The grave-diggers, who were easily managed, and not easily detected, were the last and only hope of our Hannibal! Take away the foolish and monstrous fabrications of these poor degraded men, and what would be the effect of all the remaining evidence.”

You will perceive that the writer of the above insolent passages, was, at the time he penned them, either grossly ignorant or audaciously unprincipled. He has wilfully placed himself in a most unenviable position. The Committee whom he so foully accuses, was distinguished for their patient attention to a series of most offensive facts, and are, I think, entitled to high praise from their countrymen, rather than deserving of unqualified censure. As to the “poor degraded men,” the grave-diggers (of whom the writer speaks), who degraded them?—Such men as the reverend writer, whose reckless and disgusting cupidity has educated, aye, and organized, too, large bodies of men, not grave-diggers, but grave-desecrators, who, on the winking of authority, commit—daily commit, acts at which humanity shudders, and which religious professors should indignantly repudiate.

The witness Carr, in 1842, "suspected" the existence of what the month of January, 1845, *demonstrated* to be a reality. The burning,—not occasional,—but the *regular, nightly, systematic* burning of coffins, I *knew* had been carried on in the so-called BONE-HOUSE, in the Spa Fields burying-ground, for very many years. I *knew* that practices the most foul, inhuman, and atrocious, had been—must be, pursued TO MAKE SPACE. I *knew* from repeated personal observation, that the SOIL WAS PECULIAR, that the "MANAGEMENT" WAS PECULIAR, that the very shoring-boards employed in keeping up the holes that were daily being *scratched out*,—for it would be wrong to call such holes graves,—were kept up to answer the temporary purpose of masking the so-called burying, the mere farce of "committing," accompanied by, and concluded with, the most impious and disgraceful prostitution of the burial-service. I *knew*, I say, that the very boards necessary, absolutely necessary, to serve the purpose of preventing the earth from falling in, previous to the arrival of the expected *temporary* occupant, had been made from dead men's coffins; that the wood was sawn into shape; the nails knocked out, the boards "painted" with a compound of road-drift and water, and that a "wiper," employed as a brush, was invariably the product of robbery, the most disgusting and abominable.

I knew this and much more when Carr was under examination, and could, had I deemed it necessary, have adduced it in evidence before "the Committee," whom this pamphleteer so insolently charges "at the outset with fatuous incompetency or most reprehensible *unfairness* in the examination."

I hoped, however, and indeed expected, that my mission was ended,—that the exposition then made would have been sufficient to convince those whom it concerned of the necessity, if not the policy and decency, of withdrawing from a contest, for the maintenance of practices which must, if persisted in, inevitably bring on themselves disgrace and dishonour, degrade RELIGION, corrupt PUBLIC MORALS, and inflict irreparable injury on PUBLIC HEALTH.

I knew that I had done my duty, and trusted that the honest execution of a self-imposed, laborious, nauseous, and unprofitable task once completed, I might retire into the ranks as a simple citizen, and once more steadily follow pursuits more congenial to my habits and feelings.

A single connecting link only was required to complete a chain of evidence of such a character, as would have shaken (had the trial been proceeded with) the system of intra-mural burial and its frightful abominations to the very centre. This link was found. George Walters, the engine-keeper of the parish of Clerkenwell, an honest, active, and determined man, did his duty, although a bribe was offered him. Called upon to extinguish a fire in the BONE-HOUSE, and being refused admission, he seized a crowbar, and would have broken in the door had it not been opened.

He observed a great quantity of coffin wood piled round the room drying, a fire made entirely of coffins in the grate, and portions of human bones also. The engine-keeper particularly noticed the appearance of the chimney, and charged the grave-digger with having used water to extinguish the flame, which was denied; and he was told that what he 'thought was water, was pitch;' and this was the *fact*. Thick flakes of pitch were adhering to the inside of the chimney, thus giving palpable evidence of the material consumed, viz., coffin wood, about 2 lbs. of pitch being used in 'pitching' round the inner joints of an ordinary coffin.

The inhabitants of Exmouth Street, Fletcher Row, Vineyard Gardens, and Northampton Row, in the immediate neighbourhood, frequently complained of "a tremendous stench" of a peculiar kind, which they said proceeded from the burning of human remains and coffins.

On another occasion, when Walters proceeded with the engine on an alarm of fire in the *bone-house*, he was surrounded by a great crowd composed chiefly of women, who declared that "the stench was abominable," and adjured him "for God's sake to do all he could to get rid of this."

Wheel-barrow loads of *coffin wood* had frequently been removed across the ground from an opposite building to the bone-house, and *hot ashes* conveyed from it in return and thrown into the graves.

The grave-diggers in this ground have committed the most fearful and unheard-of atrocities on the bodies of the dead. The long hair of the women has been cut off and sold to the hair-dressers; "rails" (teeth) have been taken from every corpse affording them of sufficient quality to stimulate their cupidity; whilst the materials in which the bodies of the dead had been clothed by the hand of affection have been, in hundreds of instances, torn off by these midnight prowlers.

A statement, of which the above is an outline, was transmitted to the press of the United Kingdom. The *Builder* and the *Era*, among the London press, gave it insertion. The "managing man" of the proprietors of the grave-yard, Bird, acting no doubt under their advice, obtained insertion of the following in the two journals above named:—

#### "SPA FIELDS BURIAL-GROUND.

"To the Editor of the *Builder*."

"Sir,—Seeing in your paper of last week an article under the head of 'Burial-ground Nuisance,' containing an account of infamous practices taking place in this ground, the whole of which is grossly false, and as proceedings are about to be commenced against the author, I hope you will, in justice, find a corner in your next *Builder* for this communication.

"I am, Sir, your obedient servant, C. BIRD, MANAGER.

"February 12, 1845."



Despising the threat of this wretched agent as we abhorred his practices, we repeated our assertions, and defied him and those who employed him. The vilest and most unprincipled abuse was now unsparingly and unscrupulously heaped upon those who had grappled with the men guilty of the hideous abominations of which this charnel had been the scene.

About this period, the following posting-bill was extensively placarded:—

“ SPA FIELDS BURYING-GROUND.—FIVE POUNDS REWARD.

“ *Whereas hand-bills, without the Printer's name and address, have been circulated, containing false and scandalous statements with reference to this burying-ground; the proprietors therefore feel themselves called upon to give the most positive denial to the revolting charges set forth in the said hand-bills, and to state that THE MELANCHOLY DUTIES CONNECTED WITH THE SEPULTURE OF THE DEAD in the Spa Fields burying-ground are, and invariably have been since the ground has been in their possession, conducted with the strictest regard to decency and the health of the surrounding inhabitants. As they have every reason to believe that these reports have been maliciously circulated, they hereby offer a reward of £5 for such information as shall lead to the discovery and conviction of the Printer or Printers of the said hand-bills, such reward to be paid on conviction. Application to be made to the Superintendent of the ground, Mr. C. Bird, 7, Fletcher Row, Spa Fields.*”

It had been deemed necessary to repeat publicly the allegations made in my first communication by a large circulation of hand-bills and posters, which were a re-issue of my first statement, word for word, with the addition of the threat of legal proceedings on the part of the agent of the proprietors.

The “management,” it appears, could not resist or decline, after writing so eloquently, yet withal so pithily, on “THE MELANCHOLY DUTIES CONNECTED WITH THE SEPULTURE OF THE DEAD” in their first essay, another attempt, in *another* direction, of a perfectly distinct and separate character.

The “old ground” was to reciprocate with the CONSIDERABLE PIECE OF FRESH GROUND, IN WHICH BUT FEW BODIES HAD BEEN DEPOSITED.

The MIDDLE, the WORST, and the BEST grounds were, although long artificially divided, NOW to be made co-partners in capability. This projected scheme was thus announced:—

“ SPA FIELDS BURYING-GROUND.

“ *The charges which have been made against the mode of conducting this ground having been repeated, the proprietors deem it advisable to court the most ample inquiry as to the truth or falsehood of those charges. They therefore beg to say, that the ground will be open to the inspection of the public at any reasonable hour; and that any person, having RECENTLY\* buried any relative or friend,*

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\* The following advertisement may assist you in forming your opinions on the subject,—whether the announcement of the finding twenty-seven bodies out of the army of dead deposited in SPA FIELDS BURIAL-GROUND was worth the paper on which it was printed? It is worth something, however, in this little history as a connecting link in the chain:—

shall be at liberty to have the ground opened, free of expense, to satisfy himself that the coffin, &c. have not been removed.

"The proprietors further beg to state, that a considerable piece of fresh ground\* has recently been added, in which but few bodies have been deposited, and which is open to the selection of any parties who may object to the old ground on account of the number of bodies already buried there,—a circumstance of itself amply sufficient to refute the charges made, and to prove the malicious intentions of the parties who make them."

The complaints of some of the neighbours living in the immediate vicinity of this place, brought these creatures, bearing the image of man,—these traders in, and trampers upon, some of the holiest sympathies connecting time with eternity, before Mr. Combe, at the Police Court of Clerkenwell. An indictment was preferred against them at the Sessions House by order of Sir James Graham. The cause, at the instance of the defendants, was removed by *certiorari* to the Court of Queen's Bench, and there, before the judge, Lord Denman, whose "interrogations" the reverend and anonymous disputant so much desired, did these very men plead guilty to the sixth count of an indictment, which demonstrated the entire truth of all that had been urged during many years, and covered them with confusion, shame, and disgrace.

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"SPA FIELDS BURIAL-GROUND.—WHEREAS certain persons styling themselves 'The Provisional Committee of the Society for the Abolition of Burial in Towns,' have, by hand-bills and various other methods, circulated statements (not made on oath) of a nature (more especially those made by a discharged grave-digger) tending to inflame the public mind and to harrow up the feelings of all persons who have at any time selected the above-named ground for the interment of their deceased relatives. The Lessees of the ground take this means of making known to the public that, in vindication of their own character and of the persons in their employ, and also to allay the distressed feelings of such surviving relatives, they published hand-bills, in which they offered, at their own expense, to open such graves as might be desired, for the satisfaction of the latter persons; and that in consequence, up to the present period, twenty-seven graves have been opened, and that in every instance the coffins have been found undisturbed, and the parties requiring to have such graves opened have left the ground fully satisfied that the reports circulated are without any foundation."—WEEKLY DISPATCH, March 7, 1845.

Although I had demonstrated the *actual* condition of the MIDDLE, the WORST, and the BEST GROUNDS, and subsequently insisted publicly upon the utter unfitness of the latter for the purposes of burial in consequence of the soil—the water coming in at a few feet from the surface, it is at this time employed for the purposes of inhumation. Water which must have percolated through soil incorporated with human bodies, is almost daily pumped up in large quantities by a moveable machine, and passes into the drain.

A most vile recipe this for compounding a pestilence,—a most undeniable medium for the diffusion of septic gases through the surrounding atmosphere, the subsoil of the district, or the remoter gully-holes.

And so disease is manufactured by wholesale to be treated by retail; and Englishmen who would unflinchingly defy the visible means of destruction employed on the field of battle, have, in the 19th century, yet to learn the great truth, that invisible and non-tangible causes of disease are, especially in our larger towns, in operation, and that they are more destructive, more deadly, more terrible, in their consequences, than the results of the bloodiest battle-field, from the bullet or the bayonet.

\* This "CONSIDERABLE PIECE OF FRESH GROUND" immediately behind Spa Fields Chapel, measures 72 by 72 feet, and would inter (*decently*) ONE HUNDRED AND SIXTY-TWO adult bodies.

I shall not fatigue and disgust you with a detail of the practices disclosed during the various investigations just alluded to; it is a sad and melancholy history,\* an epitome will suffice. Here it is.—

The practice of burning the coffins and portions of their contents has been carried on in Spa Fields burying-ground for upwards of a quarter of a century; a fire has been continually burning day and night. It has not been possible for a very long period of time to obtain a grave without mutilation and disturbance of previous deposits.

Stephen Bishop, the WATCHMAN (?) of the ground, has performed the double office of calling the hour of the night and burning coffins, &c. in the BONE-HOUSE. This person has executed the above-named, compound functions during seventeen or eighteen years. Some years since he was accustomed to eat his food in the *bone-house*, during the performance of his nightly tasks. Of late he became more fastidious, and wore a "hand-leather," to avoid contamination from the contact of the coffin-wood. Some time ago he told one of his associates that "'pon his soul he couldn't eat his grub in the *bone-house* now." The relief-guard (the grave-diggers) entered upon their *daily* work in the grave-yard as Bishop had concluded his *night-work* in the *bone-house*. The man has frequently "let his fire down," and has been chidden by his employer for so doing. He has replied, that "*the wood was wet.*" His master has rejoined, "*You ought to save all the deal wood you can for the purpose of keeping up the fire.*"

The coffins of "still-born" children have been broken up and used for the purpose of lighting the fire in the bone-house; deal, of which they are composed, being more combustible than the elm coffin of the adult.

A late "manager" of the ground has entered the bone-house at various hours in the morning, and has observed, "Ah, Steevy," Stephen Bishop, the so-called watchman of the ground, "has been asleep. He's let his fire out. Why don't you take care of the deal for lighting the fire?"

It has frequently occurred that the poor creatures who have brought children to be buried ("still-born") have left, as a pledge for the eighteenpence fee they lacked, a shawl, an apron, or even duplicates, whilst the following Machiavelian trick has been often practised:—The corpse being taken into the parlour of the "manager," he has removed it from the coffin, and has endeavoured, by the exercise of a little tact, to elicit from the attendant or nurse, as the case might be, whether the child had breathed; if so, he refused to bury the child unless the fee of four shillings was paid, threaten-

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\* For a full account of the "management" pursued in London burial-places, see "The Last Fire at the Bone-House in the Spa Fields Golgotha; or, the Minute Anatomy of Grave-digging in London;" by G. A. Walker. Longmans, Paternoster Row; Highley, 32, Fleet Street; and all booksellers.

ing the party, if they demurred, that he "*would compel them to bury it in a regular way, by an undertaker.*"

It has been a common practice to remove the gravestones from the "common" into the "best" ground. A double object was thus accomplished—the ground had a more respectable appearance, in consequence of the array of tombstones; freer space was left for the digging-up, *levelling*, and *raking* over the "worst" ground, whilst an additional charge was demanded from the relatives of every new-comer.

Such were the disclosures made, and, as you may imagine, they produced a most extraordinary excitement. I visited the ground frequently for the purposes of observation and inquiry in the early part of the year 1845, and witnessed much of what I have stated to you. The upturned mounds of soil, the exposed coffins, the filthy aspect of the whole place, the exclamations of bystanders, the cunningly guarded threats of "manager" Bird, and his scarcely human crew of assistants, filled with astonishment and amazement the crowds of people who thronged the place.

Groups of relatives and friends might be heard requesting and demanding of Bird that the graves of their deceased friends might be opened for their satisfaction. In a few cases the request was complied with; in others, where the pertinacious memory of the applicant insisted on the exact spot in which was deposited a once loved object, it was declined on various pretexts or brutally refused. On the 10th of March, 1845, Bird was respectfully solicited by a widow, Harret Jessie Nelson, to open a spot of ground exactly pointed out by her as the resting-place of her deceased husband. The poor creature waited about an hour and a half before one of the grave-diggers made his appearance. He had scarcely begun opening the ground when Bird, whom I myself noticed watching every movement, stepped up and refused to allow him to go on with the work, alleging that "the ground thereabout had not been opened for 10 years;" and, as a climax to his brutality, told the woman "she had got teeth enough to dig a grave herself." The disconsolate widow pressed her sad history on the notice of three young men who chanced to be present, and they volunteered to open the grave. During three-quarters of an hour they continued their labour, but were compelled to desist in consequence of the intolerable and overpowering stench, arising from the earth turned up, although no coffins were visible. The coffin sought for could not be found. The grave-diggers tell the people with a jeer, that "if the bodies they want have been buried *within a year*, or perhaps *two years*, they could find them; but how could people expect that they could lay longer than that?"

On Sunday, the 9th March, 1845, many hundreds of persons were present in the grave-yard; here and there were groups of individuals listening to the

indignant remonstrances of the friends or relatives of deceased persons, whose bodies had been deposited there, whilst the disgusting language and worse demeanour of the degraded creatures who have executed the work of grave-digging, or are now employed (many of them mere boys) in filling in the graves, struck the hearers with disgust, terror, and amazement. The very aspect of the place was terrible. Desolation seemed triumphant. Bodies recently inhumed, and others deposited at periods varying from one to two years, were indiscriminately exposed. In a pit situated at the north-eastern side of the grave-yard, were exposed to public view fourteen coffins; there lay they, in every conceivable position, about TWO FEET from the surface, cheek by jowl, packed as closely as possible, forming a human pavement.

A place that amongst the infamous of this class was perhaps the most infamous—a place from the contemplation of which, some months since, a strong man would have turned with the most intense loathing, disgust, and alarm, had been arraigned before the bar of public opinion. The system of INHUMATION and CREMATION, followed in all its hideous and deadly detail for so many years, suddenly ceased,—the scandalous fraud was unmasked and stood unveiled in all its terrible deformity. The grave-digging, the farce of “committing,” the nightly smashing up of coffins, the preparation for their fiery ordeal in the BONE-HOUSE, were promptly arrested, and the “management” pursued and tacitly submitted to during half a century, was suddenly changed into order and decency.

You will now judge whether practices so deadly, so detestable, so disgusting should be permitted to continue for a single hour amongst us, and whether, as they have been crushed in *one* locality, they should not cease in all? Is it not time that the public voice should be raised in aid of private exertion? Is it not the bounden duty of every man to come forward, each according to the means and the ability that God has given him, and labour unceasingly until the good work be accomplished?

There are many places, I assure you, in this town where “management” of a similar character to that I have unveiled to you is still pursued. Let no man say, this matter does not concern me; for, if indiscriminate mutilation and disturbance of previous deposits, and consequent desecration of the last resting-places of those who have preceded us are still to be permitted; if the ashes of our deceased countrymen are entitled to, or obtain too frequently under the present order of things, no respect; if the ties of relationship and affection, and the best feelings of the heart, are to be outraged by a trading sexton or a brutal grave-digger; if a system has too long been, and continues to this hour, in operation, which most unequivocally tends to brutalise, to unchristianise, the officials who execute the disgusting work, and the crowds of people exposed constantly to such scenes; if our beautiful burial-service has been too frequently

disgraced by the acts perpetrated previous or subsequent to its performance, it is more than time that such an evil were crushed, and for ever! It degrades religion, brings its ministers into contempt, tends to lower the standard of morality, and is a foul blot upon our boasted civilization.

THE END OF LECTURE II.

## APPENDIX.

SINCE the delivery of this Lecture, the following communication has been forwarded to me. The honesty of purpose of the reverend writer is so evident, and the circumstances he so graphically details so important, that I have deemed it desirable to bring it under the notice of my readers:—

## BURIALS IN CHURCHES.

Roxby Vicarage, Jan. 29, 1847.

DEAR SIR,—I am the curate of a country parish beautifully situated on the side of a hill in the north of Lincolnshire, containing 339 inhabitants. The church in which the Sunday-school is held is small. For a great number of years, probably two or three centuries, interments have constantly taken place in the church, to such an extent, that the chancel and body of the church are entirely full of human remains. It appears almost impossible to open any part without interfering with some one's bones lying mouldering beneath. Until within very few years, scarcely any have been interred in lead; only one, I believe, of those interred by me was thus enclosed. It is now well known that lead does not possess the power of preventing the escape of destructive gases from the decomposing dead.

The soil of the church-yard is raised two feet above the level of the church-floor by accumulated interments.

I entered upon the curacy in October, 1837. In December of the same year, a vault was made in the chancel; in constructing it, eighteen skulls were found, together with a proportionate number of bones; these were buried underneath the newly made vault, occupying a space of 6 feet in length, 2 feet in width, and  $2\frac{1}{2}$  feet in depth. The removal of these human remains, causing the church to have an unhealthy and unearthly smell (for the disturbance of common soil will not produce it), forced upon me the conviction of the great danger of burying inside the church. I determined for the future, as far as my power would extend, to allow no more interments to take place therein. However, a gentleman, not resident in the parish, in November, 1845, obtained the incumbent's permission to bury his wife inside the church. Knowing how improper and dangerous it would be to the worshippers and myself who attend there on the Sabbath, I urged the necessity of burying outside, and offered, if he would do so, to give up any fee I might be entitled to. Having, however, the permission of the incumbent, he was determined to build a vault. In making this vault, situated part in the chancel and part in the church, fifteen skulls and a proportionate number of bones were exhumed, and afterwards placed underneath the vault. I insisted that the material, consisting of decomposed animal matter, should be buried in the church-yard, and that fresh earth should be brought in. The tombstone, with an inscription upon it containing the names of the former occupants, was cut in two, and part taken away. On January 13, 1847, the same gentleman having again obtained permission of the incumbent to bury his sister inside the edifice, sent a ground plan of the church to the bricklayers, and directed where, regardless of any prior interments, he would have another vault built. In constructing this vault, four skulls, together with a proportionate number of bones, were exhumed; to some of the bones the flesh was still adhering. The two bricklayers employed, who are natives of the village and cousins, declare they have exhumed the bones of their own grandmother to make room for the present occupant. At one end of this vault were found piled a number of bones to within 6 inches of the surface; the stench from them was horrid; these remain undisturbed. One person,

an old man, visited the church during the building of this vault, but so overpowering was the destructive gas emanating from the bones and disturbed soil, that he was compelled to leave, vomiting violently. I staid a few minutes, but feeling the approach of sickness, I was glad to hurry out of the church. The workmen told me the material thrown out in order to make room for the vault was one mass of corruption, heating like manure, and smelling most offensively. The whole of this was buried in the church-yard, and replaced with fresh soil.

After the interment in November, 1845, I noticed the absence of several persons from the church, who had been annoyed by the offensive smell, and who feared their health might be injured.

During the building of the vault, many parishioners expressed their determination of not visiting the church for some time; and however much I may regret it, I cannot blame them, since no one having any regard for himself would willingly sit an hour in such a church.

Surely such a state of things ought no longer to exist. The voices of humanity, decency, and religion, raise their united cry against so dangerous and so unchristian a practice. What! must the bones of former occupants be thrust unceremoniously out of their sepulchres by their own descendants to make room for strangers, that again the same decomposition may take place, the same defilement go on, and disease and death walk hand in hand amidst unconscious victims, the humble worshippers in God's earthly temple? Does our holy religion require her votaries to carry the seeds of their own dissolution from her sacred altar? No! it is not religion, but the cravings of ignorance, and a vain and ill-placed ambition.

The dead of past generations have changed our churches into charnel-houses, in the belief that they would rest more securely, ashes returning to ashes and dust to dust, and that their descendants in after ages might stand upon their tombs and say, here rests my father, here lies buried my mother. What mockery of all that is solemn! We behold in the present instance the house appointed for all living violated, and the trowel and pickaxe of the mason deal as rudely with the church-sepulchred dead in a country village as the spade of the unscrupulous sexton with the overcrowded occupants of the London burial-places.

My small church is not a solitary instance; many churches in the neighbourhood are in as shocking, if not worse, condition; and some of the church-yards are so crowded with grave-stones, reclining in every possible degree, as at once to convince an impartial judge of the utter impossibility of interring any more without removing the present occupants.

For such a state of things no partial remedy will be of any avail; it must be a compulsory and sweeping measure, not left to the discretion of a parish, but executed at the command of a government inspector.

I am sorry to find the apathy of my reverend brethren, from the bishop to the curate, so universally prevalent. It must arise either from ignorance or interest. Amongst the many thousands in our Church,—men of observation, leisure, and education, we look in vain for a single champion in so righteous a cause. I fear, on the contrary, they are upholders of the practice; the sight of gold acts as an "open sesame" to the marble floors of our cathedrals and churches; and the practice of burying clergymen under the altar where they have served, tends to perpetuate the dangerous custom.

Honour, all honour, to the men who have stood forth boldly and fearlessly in this righteous cause. But you stand foremost in the ranks. To you alone belongs the merit of having devoted many years, much labour and money, in endeavouring to convince us of the dangerous, the indecent, the deadly, and unholy practice of interring the dead in the midst of the living. You have grappled with this monstrous abomination; I hope my countrymen will hasten to your assistance, and complete its overthrow.

I remain, dear Sir, yours faithfully,

ADAM NELSON.

To G. A. Walker, Esq., Surgeon.



In Lecture No. I., I made certain statements in connection with the graveyard and vaults of St. Ann's, Soho. The following Report of the Committee of ratepayers of that parish, taken from the *Daily News* of Saturday, January 23, 1847, will be found to fully justify my allegations:—

**DESECRATION OF THE CHURCH-YARD OF ST. ANN'S, SOHO.**—In September last, much excitement was created in the parish of St. Ann's, Soho, in consequence of the continued acts of desecration of the graves, and revolting scenes of disturbing the remains of the dead in the church-yard of that parish, arising from the crowded state of the ground. A public meeting was held, and a Committee appointed to report on the subject; that report has just been made and ordered to be printed. It states, that the complaints of the inhabitants of houses adjacent to the ground, with regard to injury to health, and the respect due to the dead, is borne out by ample evidence; that in future no coffin be allowed to approach nearer the surface than 5 feet; that no interment shall be made except at the lowest depth in each grave, and the depth of every interment be correctly entered in a book kept for the purpose. A Standing Committee has been appointed to inspect and carry into effect these resolutions.

