

ART. IV.—*Mount Auburn Cemetery.*

*Report of the Massachusetts Horticultural Society upon the establishment of an Experimental Garden and Rural Cemetery. Boston. 1831.*

There is no feeling in our nature stronger or more universal than that which insists upon respect for the dead. It is found in every age and nation. The savage shows a kindness and reverence to the dead, which he never pays the living; and enlightened man ranks it among the most sacred of his duties, to offer the last sacrifice of affection at the grave. If the belief prevailed now, as in ancient days, that the spirits of the unburied suffered for the neglect of their friends, this feeling might be more easily accounted for; but it does not seem to partake of superstition; it is rather sentiment, enlightened, just, and manly sentiment, influencing not only the intelligent, but many beside, who in general seem to be strangers to strong and delicate feeling. The light-hearted soldier, at the grave of his comrade, feels a heaviness which makes him a better man for the time; the rough seaman leans thoughtfully over the side of his vessel, till the waters which the plunge of the corpse has broken, are calm and unconscious again. At every village funeral, when the dead lies in the midst of the living, with a fixed and calm serenity on his brow,—with an unsearchable depth of meaning in his features, which no mortal eye may read,—if it be only a child perishing in the daybreak of its existence, whose loss will be as little felt in the world at large as the withering of a garden-flower,—still he is for the time invested with the commanding majesty of death; children join their hands and look timidly around them; old men lean upon their staves and ponder; though *among them*, he seems no longer *of them*; the air of gentle and firm reserve on his countenance gives the impression that he sees what we cannot see, hears what we cannot hear, and is already acquainted with those mysteries of the future, which the living desire and yet tremble to know.

Neither does this interest in the dead cease when they are hidden from our eyes. It follows them to the grave, and makes us regard as sacred the place where we have laid them. The burial-place is the retreat of the thoughtful; the shoes of care and passion are put off by those who enter the lonely ground.

It has a good effect upon the feelings ; it makes the unfortunate more reconciled to this world, and the gay more thoughtful of another. The cold ghastliness of the sculptured marble,—the grey stone sinking, as if weary of bearing its unregarded legends of the ancient dead ; the various inscriptions showing, sometimes, what the dead were, but still oftener what they ought to have been, subdue the heart to sadness, though not to gloom. And what a lion in the path is the public feeling, to all who would disturb the repose of the tomb ! It is easier to rifle the mansion of the living, than the narrow house of the dead ; for the living can protect themselves, and therefore are less regarded, while the whole moral force of a wide region is at once in arms to resent an insult offered to the dead. This feeling may be excessive,—perhaps it is,—but no one can deny that it is energetic and strong. We do not condemn nor defend it ; but the thirsty vengeance with which it pursues offenders, shows how deep is the reverence of the living for the dead.

One reason why the home of the dead is thus sacred, is, that this is the place where we lose them. Up to this place we follow them through the changes of life and death ; but at the gates of the tomb, they are taken and we are left. We are forcibly driven back, and the mind loses itself in earnest conjectures respecting their destiny,—what it may be, now it is thus widely separated from ours. The most striking view we ever saw of the great cataract of our country, represented simply the waters above, and the long line where they lean to dash below ; the rest was left to the imagination, which made out for itself a more profound impression of the grandeur of the scene, than representation or description by measure could possibly have given. Thus it is with the surface of the ground where the dead are laid ; hitherto we come, but no further ; we see not how nor where they are gone ; this is the boundary, beyond which the living cannot go nor the dead return ; and it arrests and chains the imagination, like the place in the ocean where some gallant wreck went down.

This will account for the universal interest which the cities of the dead inspire ; but not for all the tenderness with which the dead are regarded. This is owing to what Adam Smith calls our sympathy with the dead. Where and what they are now we do not know ; we therefore still represent them to our minds with feelings like our own. It seems to us as if they

must be conscious when the light step of affection moves above, as if the stranger, rudely trampling above them, might disturb their profound repose. We are glad when we see a sunbeam on the green roof of their narrow mansion, as if it could light up the darkness below; and if we see a tree or a flower planted above them, we feel as if they must revive and rejoice in the pledge that their memory is still treasured by some who loved them. We feel bound to remember them, as we would wish ourselves to be remembered, after we have gone in that narrow way where there are no traces of returning feet.

Allow that all this is imagination. Still it is universal; it must and will be regarded. The man will lose the respect of the living, who does not venerate the dead. However much we disdain these feelings and fancies of our nature, we must submit to them, or the great verdict of mankind will be against us. If a stranger enter a village, he judges the character of its inhabitants by the aspect of their burial-ground; and if he see a place abandoned to decay, surrounded by a coarse enclosure of decaying materials,—a place where nature throws her verdure and flowers luxuriantly, as if upbraiding the cold neglect of man,—his most natural feeling is contempt for the living, and compassion for the dead. So too in our cities, where we see the place of death upon the busy street, where the sounds of life are brought into rude contrast with the silence of the grave, where towering mansions overlook the field, as if waiting impatiently for the elements to waste the marble of the tombs, that they may usurp the inheritance of the dead, it gives us a double feeling of regret, that the founders of the city had not foreseen it, and that the present inhabitants do not bring trees and flowers to take away the desolation of the spot, while they resolve to place the dead in future beyond the possible reach of violation.

It is interesting to observe the effect of this reverence for the dead in different ages of the world. How many mansions of death remain, when ancient houses of the living are gone! The tombs of Hadrian and Metella have outlasted the palaces of the Cæsars; the Egyptian tomb of the kings remains perfect, when the pyramids are nameless ruins. Even in this country, the moss-grown stone outlasts the most durable habitations of our fathers. It would seem as if man desired to re-assure himself, in the presence of death, that he is not all frailty, by raising monuments, which long after he is gone, may resist the waste

of time. Generally, the place selected for the repose of the dead has been chosen, in consistency with the sympathy of which we have spoken; in places lonely, but not deserted, where the beauty of nature is heightened by the care of man, where the gloom of death cannot sadden the hearts of the living, nor the labor of life stand in too close contrast to the stillness of the dead.

We find in the earliest authentic history of the human race, that Abraham, when Sarah died, buried her in a place of this description. There is a beautiful simplicity in the account of his intercourse with the children of Heth on this occasion. In their respect for his excellence and greatness, they besought him to take any of their sepulchres, but he declined the proposal. When he had signified what spot of ground he desired to have, the owner entreated him to accept it as a gift; but this also he declined; and the proprietor consented to accept four hundred pieces of silver for the field, and all *the trees that were within its limits and on its borders*. This circumstance, thought worthy of being noticed in a history so general, shows that he had some regard to the beauty of the place; and with a similar taste, groves and gardens seem to have been chosen as the burial-places of all the Hebrews, who were rich enough to possess them. When Jacob was dying in Egypt, he could not bear the thought of being committed to the earth in the distance and solitude of a foreign land, and he charged his children to secure to him the privilege of sleeping with his fathers. Joseph, when dying, exacted a similar promise from his children. Doubtless, this earnestness was in part inspired by associations connected with the place of death.

It is not improbable that the Israelites learned this reverence for the dead in Egypt, which Abraham had visited in his earlier days. It is certain that they borrowed the practice of embalming, in which the Egyptians excelled all other nations. This singular practice, doubtless, originated in a desire to preserve the features of the departed for the satisfaction of their descendants, and may have been serviceable in keeping up the memory and example of virtue. It is said, that the mummies were sometimes introduced at their festivals. Doubtless the bodily presence of those who were distinguished in their day, must have exerted a powerful influence on those who saw them; but the thought of death must be presented in such a manner as makes it welcome; if it come when unbidden or

unsuited to the place and time, it does more injury than good. And this is a reason for placing the tomb in the midst of the beauty and luxuriance of nature, from which the soul is always ready to look to the grand and solemn vision of death. The great Egyptian Cemetery was in a place of this description. It was on the farther shore of the lake Acherusia, near Memphis, ornamented with trees and water-courses, and answering to the Elysian fields of later times. On the nearer side of the lake was assembled the celebrated court, which sat in judgment on the dead. The more wealthy Egyptians sacrificed this true taste for nature to their ambition of splendor; their mummies were gathered in catacombs, whence, after an immortality of three thousand years, they are stolen as curiosities or plundered of their aromatic gums. The tomb of the kings, discovered by Belzoni, abounded in magnificence, and the plastering on its walls was so fresh and brilliant, that his richest colors were pale beside them. The pyramids do not seem to have been intended exclusively, if at all, as monuments of the dead. When Belzoni opened the second, bones were found in a *sarcophagus* in the central chamber, which turned out to be those of a sacred animal, and not of man.

What importance was attached to the rites of sepulture among the Hebrews, appears from the well known vision, in which Isaiah described the downfall of the Assyrian king; prophesying, how he should sink in all his glory beneath the mightier arm of death. The prophet represents the whole earth as rejoicing in his overthrow, and saying, with its thousand voices, 'How hath the oppressor fallen! the golden city fallen! The fir-trees, (which were the chiefs of Israel,) rejoice, saying, now thou art cut down, no destroyer will come up against us.' And where is he, whose ruin causes all this exultation? His corpse is cast out by the way-side, and thus visited with the deepest dishonor; there, way-farers find him, and triumph over him, as he lies helpless before them. They gaze earnestly upon him, saying, 'Is this the man that made the earth tremble; that did shake kingdoms; that made the world a wilderness?' They taunt him with his being thus cast out by the way-side like an accursed thing, and compare him with those whose remains enjoy the honors of the tomb. 'The kings of the earth,' they say, 'lie in glory, every one with his sword under his head; but thou art cast out from the grave, because thou hast destroyed thy land and slain thy people.'

And when, in the continued vision, he arrives at the entrance of the vast cavern, in which the embalmed remains of his royal race were laid, the whole realm of death rises up to meet him ; chiefs and kings break the slumber of years ; they bend their stern brows on their degenerate son, the last and most unworthy of their mighty line, and say, in anger and scorn, ' Art thou become weak as we ? art thou become like unto us ? How art thou fallen from Heaven, bright morning-star ! ' That the Assyrian oppressor should be thus deprived of funeral honors, is described as the last vengeance of the Almighty. ' The worm is spread under thee, and the worms cover thee. ' The whole vision shows in an impressive manner, what a reproach and misfortune it was then considered, to lose the shelter of the grave.

There is no doubt, then, of the importance attached by the Hebrews to the burial of the dead ; and this, as well as their patriotism, is a feeling which stands out in contrast to their usual hardness. In fact, the grave, in all countries and times, is the place where the best feelings are awakened ; the conflicts of passion cease there, and all other feelings are lost in sympathy and concern for those who sleep within its narrow bounds. Before Christianity came, it was all the world had to remind them, that all must be equal at last, and that the rich must come from his palace and the poor from his labor, to sleep side by side in death. And to their honor be it said, they welcomed the thought, and took pleasure in being reminded of their duties.

But while all ancient nations united in doing the utmost honor to the departed, there was no uniformity in the selection of their places of rest. Among the Hebrews, the sepulchre was sometimes, like our Saviour's, in a garden ; sometimes under a tree, and sometimes hewn from the sides of the rock. They were as various as the wealth and the ambition of the people ; but it seems clear, that where the ground would not admit of cultivation, they kept up a simple and expressive custom of strewing the grave with flowers. The Greeks and Romans, likewise, buried their dead in groves and gardens, sometimes by the borders of the public roads, where their names might be often brought to the remembrance of those who passed by. The Athenian Ceramicus, the cemetery which received those who had lived or died in the service of their country, was ornamented in such a manner as to make it a pleasant resort for all who wished to borrow inspiration to noble deeds. In the

registry of all antiquity, we find the same evidence of the fact, that death carried with it a title of respect ; the king of terrors imparted something of his own majesty to all the victims of his power. The grave was the place where the living looked their last upon the dead ; and to surround it with proofs of the interest with which it inspired them, was thought the least that affection or esteem could do.

On one point, the testimony of the ancient world seems to have been unanimous and decided ; we mean as to the propriety of removing the dead from the immediate vicinity of the living ; not that they apprehended injurious effects upon the health of their cities ; but guided by sentiment and propriety alone, they agreed in the necessity of this separation. The rule seems to have been generally observed, except in case of those whose wealth and vanity enabled them to break through it, or of public men, who were thought to have earned a right to sleep in the midst of the city for which they had shed their blood. Burying in churches is an invention of comparatively modern times. Constantine is said to have been the first, who ordered his sepulchre to be erected within the consecrated walls, and the superstition which attended the imperfect Christianity of the earlier ages, led others to follow his example ; the church being regarded as a fortress, whose spiritual defences would keep off the evil spirits, which were always striving to break the rest of the dead. We cannot speak confidently with respect to the danger to health which arises from such practices. It has probably been over-rated, if, indeed, it exist at all. But, apart from this, there are reasons of a different character, why the dead should be removed from the intrusive and engrossing neighborhood of the living, where their memory is sure to perish, and their remains, after being allowed to rest so long as friends can remember and defend them, are at last trampled under feet.

We know there are those, who say it is of little importance where dust returns to dust ; who say they care not what becomes of the body, when the soul has left it. But this philosophic contempt of such things is not a natural feeling. The least thing associated with the remembrance of a departed friend, is consecrated in every good mind ; and whoever treats such memorials with indifference, however he may boast his own freedom from prejudice, shocks the moral sense of mankind. If there are some, who reason themselves into indifference, with

many these thoughts are full of power. We know that Christianity has exalted the claims of the mind, and taught its disciples to deem lightly of the suffering and even the destruction of the body, compared with the welfare of the immortal part. But religion is never at war with nature; and the same religion, which requires the sacrifice of every thing at the call of duty, allows the fullest indulgence to every natural and innocent feeling.

There are examples in modern history, which show how important it is to guard and respect the quiet of the grave. It was an evil hour for the Stuarts, when their unmanly vengeance cast out Cromwell, Ireton and Bradshaw from their tombs; it turned the moral feeling of the world against them. And we doubt not that much of the interest which still attaches to the name of Napoleon, is owing to the circumstance of his lonely sepulchre in the heart of the seas, as if his remains were banished from the presence of men. Far better would it have been to let him rest in *Père-la-Chaise*, where the enthusiasm of his adorers could spend itself upon his grave. In his character, there was very little to admire or love; but his imprisonment on a rock in the ocean had made many feel for him as an exile, who cared nothing for his glory. They feel, too, as if the dead who can offend no longer, might be permitted to sleep in the land which is still covered with the blaze of his renown. Such, if we may depend on an ancient history, was the judgment of Louis XI., by no means the worthiest of the kings of France. No one can believe that he was influenced by any generous feeling; but when he was solicited to deface the monument of Bedford, the great Regent of France, he indignantly refused. 'What honor will it be to me,' said he, 'to deface the sepulchre of a man, whom my fathers could not prevail against while he lived; a man, whose wit and valor shame the proudest of us all? I rather say, May God have mercy on his soul!' This accomplished hypocrite had wisdom enough to know, that policy and his own interest, setting aside generosity, required of him to respect the dead.

The Report which has led us into these reflections, is signed by the President of the Horticultural Society, and it could not appear under better auspices; this gentleman, and those associated with him, having secured the respect of many in every part of our community, by their liberality in giving all kinds of aid to those, whose pursuits are similar to their own.



Their object is a very important one ; it is to teach those who have wealth and leisure, how they may make themselves happy not only without injuring others, but with direct benefit to their fellow-men ; to show them that in order to secure enjoyment for themselves, there is no need of inventing new pleasures ; that they have only to learn to value those which are always under their eye ; and that Nature,—‘this beautiful visible world,’—opens a never-failing paradise to those who are content to be innocent and well employed. The plan proposed to the community in this Report, comes naturally within the sphere of their liberal exertions. The design is, to teach the community to pay more respect to the dead. In this particular we are certainly behind other countries. In most nations of Europe there are at least a few public cemeteries, which a stranger can visit without feeling that the dead are neglected. We are told in the Report, that the Turks, half savage as they are, have long made it a practice to plant evergreens in their place of tombs. The modern cities of Europe have begun to feel, that it is not well that infidels should triumph over them in this respect. *Père-la-Chaise* in Paris is now celebrated throughout the world. The impression which it makes on the mind of every traveller, is the best proof of the good taste which designed it. The larger cities of England are beginning to follow this good example. In our country, New-Haven has the merit of making the first approach to this kind of improvement ; but the example was not followed. The burying-place continues to be the most neglected spot in all the region, distinguished from other fields only by its leaning stones and the meanness of its enclosure, without a tree or shrub to take from it the air of utter desolation. We cannot but hope that the cemetery about to be established will put our cities and villages to shame, and spread a better taste and feeling in this respect throughout the whole country.

The place selected for the cemetery is Mount Auburn, in Cambridge, about three miles from Boston, and easily approached either by the road or the river which washes its borders. It affords every variety of soil and elevation, which trees or flowers would require, with streams and meadows, from which ponds may be made for plants which love the water. The plants of every climate may find there a suitable home. It might be thought that it would require many years to cover it with verdure ; but Nature has anticipated this objec-

tion ; it being already clothed with trees and shrubs of almost all descriptions, which grow in this part of the country. The most striking part of this tract is a conical hill of considerable height, which commands an extensive and beautiful prospect. This is reached by a gentle ascent, which winds like a road round the hill, with valleys on each side, and is so exact in its bearing, that it is difficult to persuade one's-self that man had no agency in forming it. The top of the height is an admirable place for a monument intended to be seen at a distance, and the sides will afford room for the resting-place of many generations. The whole country would not afford a better spot for the purpose than this. It is consecrated already by many delightful associations in the memory of most of those, who have left the University for many years past ; and the plan proposed, instead of breaking up this favorite resort, would only render it better suited to aid the inspirations of science, feeling, or imagination. There is something unpleasant to many, in the idea of cultivating the place of death. This may be owing to the old prejudice, which regards nature and art as opposed to each other. Nature, under all circumstances, was meant to be improved by human care ; it is *unnatural* to leave it to itself ; and the traces of art are never unwelcome, except when it defeats the purposes and refuses to follow the suggestions of nature.

We trust that the public spirited authors of this design will consider themselves as giving a direction to the public taste ; and that they will therefore not suffer the ground to be disfigured with dungeon-like tombs, which are only suited to the cellars of churches and burying-places in cities, where the dead cannot find room to lie dust to dust. The monuments also deserve regard. The stiff and ungainly head-stone should be banished to give place to the *cippus*, or some simple form suited to resist the elements, and receive inscriptions. But the ornaments of the sepulchre should be trees and flowers. Let the monuments be found in the noble forests of our land ; let them not be such as the elements waste, but such as time only strengthens and repairs.