

cantly slow progress of the movement in other lands afford much ground for supposing that Wellington's new venture will prove at all a remunerative investment. In Paris, from 1889 to 1905, there were 73,330 cremations; but out of this seemingly large total only 3484 were by request, 37,082 were hospital débris, 32,757 were embryos. Of the requested cremations, there were 216 in 1894, and 354 in 1904—an increase of only 138 in ten years. The figures for Great Britain, so far as they are accessible to us, tell a similar tale. Crematories have been in operation in England since the year 1885, yet in 1907 for the whole United Kingdom the total number of cremations was only 706. At Woking, in Surrey, where the first English crematory was erected, the number of cremations dropped from 140 in 1906 to 108 in 1907.

Both in its ancient and in its modern form cremation has been chiefly used by the enemies of the Christian Faith, and on this ground the Catholic Church has from the first opposed the practice. Her attitude is clearly and unequivocally expressed in the decree of May 19, 1886. Two questions had been submitted to the Holy Office in the following form: (a) Whether it is lawful to become a member of any society whose object it is to spread the practice of cremation? (b) Whether it is lawful to leave orders for the burning of one's own body or that of another? Their Eminences the Cardinals, 'after serious and mature consideration,' answered both questions in the negative, and these decisions were formally approved and confirmed by Pope Leo XIII. There is no direct question of doctrine or dogma involved, and the Church's objections are partly practical, partly based on broad but everlastingly true general principles. The practical objections are: (1) The canonical processes required regarding the mortal remains of her saints, some of which—like those of St. Theresa, St. Charles, and St. Catherine of Bologna—have been preternaturally preserved; (2) her practice of venerating their relics; (3) cremation destroys all signs of violence or traces of poison, and would thus give a dangerous security to crime. There have been many poisoning cases, even in New Zealand, where the crime could never have been proved but for a judicial autopsy after exhumation; and this medico-legal impeachment of cremation has never yet been satisfactorily answered. The Church's objections on the ground of principle are: (4) That even the lifeless body of a Christian is something essentially sacred, and that it is in the highest degree unseemly that what was once the temple of the Holy Ghost, washed with the waters of Baptism, anointed with the Holy Oils, sanctified so often by the Sacraments, should finally be deliberately subjected to a treatment that filial affection or even mere friendship seems to revolt against as inhuman. And (5) That in its origin cremation was associated in the minds of the majority—and still is, by many of its chief supporters—with the denial of a belief in a future life. It was, in fact, a sort of open and public profession of disbelief in the resurrection. We are aware that there are many excellent people—beguiled into supporting cremation on account of its supposed sanitary advantages—who have no sympathy with these irreligious notions, and who would, so far as they are concerned, vehemently repudiate any anti-Christian significance in connection with the rite. But our statements regarding the origin and general trend of the movement are incontestably true. It was the Continental Freemasons who first obtained formal recognition of this practice from various Governments, and we have before us, as we write, quotations from official documents issued by the Brotherhood in Europe, in which the existence of God and the immortality of the soul are declared to be 'formulae which have no meaning,' 'nothing but a generic expression,' 'the product of ignorance.' It was chiefly because of this anti-religious significance that cremation was condemned in the past: it is chiefly because of its tainted history and its affinity for materialism that the Church condemns it to-day.

Almost the only argument of any weight advanced in favor of cremation is that derived from hygienic grounds—viz., that it will prevent the corruption of the soil, that drinking water will be safeguarded against contamination, and that corruption of the air will be avoided in localities bordering on cemeteries. This implies, of course, that cemeteries are an undoubted and unquestioned cause of the infection of the air. At first sight the contention seems entirely plausible; and that is how it happens that so many excellent citizens, without investigating the matter at all for themselves, have accepted the Cremation Society's version as gospel, and have promptly sent their donation along. As a matter of fact, careful scientific reasoning and actual practical experiments have both alike demonstrated that under ordinary conditions cemeteries are not a cause of the infection of the air, and are not in any way a danger to water wells. In this

connection we quote from a weighty and well-informed article in the latest (fourth) volume of that very admirable and scholarly publication, *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. 'In any well-ordered cemetery,' says the writer on Cremation, 'putrefaction takes place six or seven feet below the surface. In the open air, with abundance of oxygen, corruption proceeds more quickly, with continuous discharge of noxious gases, in large quantities highly deleterious to health; but it is not so in the grave. Mantegazza, a celebrated bacteriologist, has shown (*Civiltà Cattolica*, ser. IX., vols. X-XII.) that, where there is but a small supply of oxygen, bodies will decompose without the emanation of any odor whatever. Often, too, the human body is so reduced before death that in the earth it suffers little or no corruption at all, but is first mummified and then slowly reduced to dust. Again, earth pressure prevents chemical decomposition to a great extent, producing in the place of gas a liquid which enters into various combinations with the materials in the soil, without the slightest danger to the living. Earth is a powerful agent of disinfection. Even were noxious gases to escape in any quantity, they would be absorbed on their way upwards, so that a very small part would ever reach the surface, or were the soil not fit for absorption (as was said to be the case at Pere-Lachaise, Paris) the process would be taken up by the vegetable matter on the surface.'

'It is held, also,' continues our authority, 'that it is no more true to say that cemeteries are a menace to water wells. Charnock, Delacroix, and Dalton have proved that of three parts of rain water only one penetrates the soil, the other two either evaporating or flowing into rivers. Now, corpses in cemeteries are not so placed as to form continuous strata, but a moderate distance intervenes between any two bodies or rows of bodies. Of the third part of rain, then, which penetrates the soil of a graveyard a very little will touch the bodies at all, and what does will not all reach the water streams, but will be absorbed by the earth, so that the remaining drops that would ultimately trickle into the stream would have absolutely no effect, were the stream large or small. Two experiments have proved this. The doctors above mentioned selected a tank 6½ feet high, filled it with sand, and for many months filtered through it sewer water taken from the drainage pipes of Paris. The water received at the bottom of the vessel was always found pure, clear, and drinkable. A like experiment was made with a smaller vessel, with like results. To anticipate the difficulty, that what held for an experiment with small quantities would prove untrue were the amount of water very great, a large tract of ground near Genvillers was inundated for many months with the same putrid and reeking waters of the Seine after they had passed through the sewers of Paris. The result was the same. Wells were dry in the inundated portion, and the water was again found pure and clear—purer, as it chanced, than that of other wells outside the boundary of the place of experiments. In like manner, the waters in the cemeteries of Leipzig, Hanover, Dresden, and Berlin were examined and found purer and freer from organic matter than the wells of the town!'

As a matter of fact, all that is required in order to render the existing system free from the least vestige of danger on hygienic grounds is the adoption of a simpler grave-burial, with perishable coffins and the avoidance of such abuses as leaden caskets, family vaults, the bricked grave, and such other hindrances to the antiseptic action of mother-earth. A reform in this direction the Church would be the last to oppose. It is freely admitted, of course, that in exceptional, emergency cases—as, for instance, on the battle-field, or in plague-stricken cities, or in conditions such as have arisen in Messina, where large numbers of decaying bodies corrupt the atmosphere—cremation is both allowable and desirable. In such cases—as, for example, in the great plague at Milan—the Church not only permits, but urges, a departure from her ordinary rule. Nor does the least instructed Catholic need to be told that, intrinsically, incineration is no impediment to the fact of corporal resurrection and that the burned body is not thereby rendered in any way less fit for its rising—identical as to substance, but 'a spiritual body'—on the last day. 'In conclusion' (to quote the words of the high authority already cited), 'it must be remembered that there is nothing directly opposed to any dogma of the Church in the practice of cremation, and that, if ever the leaders of this sinister movement so far control the Governments of the world as to make this custom universal, it would not be a lapse in the faith confided to her were she obliged to conform.'

The drawing of the art union in aid of the building fund of the new Sacred Heart Church, Timaru, has been postponed until the second week after Easter.

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{ Just over Bridge and opposite Drill Shed. } Manufacturer and Importer of Every Description of Headstones, Cross Monuments etc., in Granite, Marble and other stones.