

PREPARATION OF THE DEAD.

An Address Delivered Before the "Western Undertakers' Convention at Colorado Springs, Sept. 17, 1902, by Joseph E. Taylor, Showing How Disposed of in the Past, and Referring Briefly to Present Methods, With Some Thoughts in Relation to the Future.

I regret that sacred history is silent in regard to the disposition that was made of the body of Abel, who was slain by his brother Cain; his being the first recorded death upon the earth. There is nothing said as to whether he was buried or cremated. It was done with the body of Adam, the father of the human race, who died at the advanced age of 930 years. Had he been, it would have served as a precedent for all future time; for the reason that the Almighty in the beginning so fully detailed even to the smallest minutia, everything pertaining to man's early conduct.

The first recorded burial is that of Sarah, wife of the Patriarch Abraham, who purchased from the Hittite nation in ancient Canaan a certain cave called Machpelah, for a sepulchre for his dead. Also the field in which the cave was situated, paying therefor about \$448 of ancient money. This sepulchre was afterwards used as the burial place of Abraham himself; also Isaac, his son; Leah, his wife; also Jacob, and after Jacob, Joseph, the son of Jacob. In all the prominent members of the family. Although this cave was used as the resting place of the dead, the manner of the preparation of the bodies of those who were laid there, except the two last named, is left to conjecture.

The purchase of this cave by Abraham was, in his own language, "That I have not my dead out of my sight." Therefore, we may consistently conclude that if the bodies were placed in niches within the cave, that they were homesteaded and sealed. The disposition made of the human body after death was from the manner of the preparation of the bodies of those who were laid there, except the two last named, is left to conjecture.

It is beyond question; for sacred writ amply justifies this conclusion. No greater mark of dishonor could be shown a man in ancient times than to refuse him what would be termed today "a Christian burial."

The Prophet Jeremiah declared concerning Jehoiakim, a wicked king of Israel, "He shall be buried with the burial of an ass," (the common beast of burden in those days). Thus honoring upon him even in death the indignity which his extreme wickedness had merited.

Come now to the consideration of the present absorbing subject, that of embalming the dead. We will endeavor to cull from the misty past some little data that will, I think, be interesting and instructive also, to those members of our fraternity whose reflections and researches reach beyond mere social considerations, and who take delight in contemplating past usages and customs along this line as well as versing themselves in present methods.

We are compelled to fall back upon the sacred record for the first authentic mention that is made of embalming, which was about seventeen centuries before the Christian era, when Joseph, the ruler of Egypt, who stood next in authority to King Pharaoh, commanded his servants, the Egyptian physicians, to embalm his father Jacob, who died in Egypt; preparatory to his being taken to the cave heretofore mentioned for burial. Joseph afterwards died; his body also was embalmed.

Ancient history both sacred and profane establishes the fact that the land called Egypt was inhabited centuries before Abraham first visited it, which was about 1,920 years before Christ. While I am firmly convinced that the early Egyptians limited to a great extent the religion, customs and habits of the ancient patriarchs, I can find no reliable data as to whether the art of embalming originated with the Egyptians or whether it antedated their existence, and like their religion and government, was largely copied from others.

It would seem that it was peculiarly Egyptian at the time Joseph ordered the physicians of Egypt to embalm his father, for Joseph undoubtedly had employed physicians or others who possessed a knowledge of the art. The lack of reliable data has resulted in various conjectures as to its origin. Some have supposed that it may be traced to the discovery of the preservation of bodies buried in soils which were largely charged with saline properties. The most unique idea of its origin used by some of the advocates of cremation is, that the scarcity of fuel rendered cremation impossible, hence embalming was resorted to from a sanitary standpoint. I am strongly of opinion that the practice originated in Egypt and grew out of a sort of sentimental superstition, for this reason; that cats, crocodiles, ichneumon, and other animals that were held sacred by the Egyptians were preserved by embalming as well as human bodies.

Herodotus the historian of the fourth century B. C. gives three methods of embalming which he says were practiced in Egypt. The first costing about \$1,000 of our money and included the following treatment:

The brains were in part removed through the nostrils by means of a bent iron implement and partly by the injection of prepared drugs to dissolve the parts remaining, then allowing them to run out.

The intestines having been drawn out through an incision made in the left side, the abdomen was cleansed with palm wine and filled with myrrh, cassia, (a species of cinnamon) and other materials; then the opening was sewed up. Afterwards the body was steeped for 70 days in a solution of nitron or natron, (chemically explained, a sort of neutral carbonate of sodium called in the scripture niter and used for cleansing purposes). This article was found at the natron lakes in the Libyan desert also in upper Egypt.

After having been steeped 70 days the body was washed; then, handed over to the swimmers; a low order of Priests who bandaged it in gum cloth. It was now ready for the coffin. Mummies thus prepared were considered to represent Osiris, an Egyptian God, who, while not having lived upon the earth, his tomb was here. It was to Osiris that the graves and offerings for the dead were made.

Another mode of embalming, costing in our money about \$350 was: By injecting the abdomen with what was called cedar tree pitch, which Piny in

his natural history says was a liquid distilled from the pitch pine. Herodotus says, the application of this liquid had a corrosive and solvent action on the viscera or abdominal contents. After injection the body was steeped several days in natron. The abdomen by this process was entirely cleansed and the operation complete.

In many cases among the wealthy the viscera was embalmed in a mixture of sand and asphalt, then put in glass and placed near the mummy. The abdomen being filled with chips and sawdust of cedar also a small quantity of natron.

In a few cases all the soft parts of the body were removed, then properly prepared and put in four separate jars. In one jar were placed the stomach and large intestines. In another, the small intestines. In a third the lungs and heart. In the fourth the gall-bladder and liver.

Porphyry mentions another custom. That of placing the intestines in a box and consigning them to the Nile, the embalmer uttering a prayer at the same time. This, however, is questioned by some historians.

The bodies of poorer persons were steeped for several days in natron after a previous rinsing of the abdomen. In some cases embalming was effected by immersing the body in a bath of molten bitumen. Tanning, the body was also resorted to. The body of Alexander the Great is said to have been embalmed with honey. Herodotus says, The Ethiopians dried the body, rubbed it with gypsum (or chalk), painted it, then placed it in some transparent substance. The obsequies of the islands filled the vacuum caused by the removal of the viscera with salt and an absorbent vegetable powder.

In more modern times, certain essential oils, cedar, cinabar, camphor, salt petre, pitch and resin have been used. Bonnet embalmed with tan, asphalt, salt, Peruvian bark, camphor, cinnamon and other aromatics, also corrosive sublimate.

The material used for bandaging in those early days was of linen only; some of it being as fine as the finest India muslin. Each limb, toe and finger was separately swathed; then the whole body. The contours of the shrunken form were skilfully restored by means of padding. The body of the Saviour was bandaged in a mixture of myrrh and aloes and would have received further treatment had not his resurrection taken place so soon after his death. The statement that from 700 to 1,000 yards of bandage in strips from two to four inches in width were used on one body seems almost incredible; yet it is claimed that this amount by actual measurement has been found on a similar mummy. The mummies of Memphis are black, dry and brittle; while those of the Theban period are yellow, flexible, and so elastic that the flesh readily yields to the touch of the finger; while the limbs can be bent without breaking. Champollion attributes this exquisite softness and elasticity to the injection of costly chemicals into the veins. The natron process on the contrary destroyed the flesh, leaving only the skin and bones.

Embalming in those early times was not qualified in so short a time as now. Certain ones were specially selected by government agents and after a very careful and thorough training which reached into years they were then authorized to practice the art. The labor of embalming a body was divided among these learned practitioners. No one would presume to interfere with the duties of another.

Diodorus relates (although the after part of the story seems not only ridiculous but altogether anomalous, especially in regard to the touch of the finger) that the cutters whose particular business it was to make the incision for the removal of the intestines would not have performed this duty than those about him would pursue him with stones and curses; it being held by the Egyptians a detestable thing to inflict a wound on a body.

As we have already quoted: Joseph commanded not one physician but "the physicians," which would imply that several of them were engaged in embalming his father's body; thus sustaining our position that each one had a certain special office to perform in each individual case.

It is generally conceded that embalming as practiced in Egypt and elsewhere is a lost art. We admit this; and reply thereto, that the finding it would be of no particular advantage to the present generation. There is little indeed in the ancient practice that would recommend itself for utilization by us.

If, as many of the learned claim the object of embalming a few thousand years ago was to preserve intact as possible the human frame until the time of the resurrection which was placed at a period varying from 3,000 to 10,000 years; we are certainly much nearer that important point now than then.

Christianity teaches that a literal resurrection of the body will take place at heaven's appointed time, and that the constituent elements of each individual body will rise from the dead, matter to what extent dissolution has taken place or how widely scattered the parts. The agnostic on the other hand denies the resurrection altogether and offers scientific reasons for such denial.

Consequently, viewing the subject from either of these standpoints there is little demand of the modern embalmer beyond the preservation of a life-like appearance for a short or longer period according to the desire of relatives (which seldom exceeds 30 days) and the destruction of every element that would produce contagion or infection.

All this the intelligent embalmer is prepared to do. And whenever conditions shall exist or individuals who shall demand more than this, he will be found fully prepared to meet such demand; for the skilled embalmer is, to some extent at least, an anatomist as well as a physiologist; also a practical sanitarian, and withal somewhat versed in chemistry.

There is, however, another phase of the question of disposing of the dead which I wish now to consider.

Cremation, which was practically resuscitated some 30 years ago; it having been abandoned about the fourth century, is now engaging the attention of the scientific world. Its advocacy has become a popular theme with its adoption is steadily but surely on the increase. Cremation is of very ancient date. But like embalming, historians are unable to trace it to its origin. Consequently no satisfactory reason can be given for its adoption. We are therefore left in this instance as well as many others to mere conjecture.

The Egyptians embalmed; the Jews buried in sepulchres and in the earth, except in times of plague when cremation was resorted to. The Chinese buried in the earth almost exclusively. While in Greece cremation was so universal that none except suicides, unteethed children, and persons struck by lightning were denied the right to be burned. Cremation was also practiced in other nations both Christian and heathen.

While I am no advocate of cremation for many reasons which I could assign but which I shall not burden you with upon this occasion; yet I cannot shut my eyes to the facts that are plainly visible along this line. I am therefore strongly inclined to the opinion and so express it here that in the not very distant future it will become almost a universal practice throughout the civilized world. The undertaker finding his occupation so seriously interfered with will then have to look to other channels to supply his necessities. You are in this indeed poor encouragement, yet it seems to me to be inevitable.

My reason for this opinion is based upon the fact that science is fast supplanting Christian influence which has

held paramount sway for so many centuries of time. Nothing short of an entire revolution in Christian creeds and dogmas can prevent it (if even then) from losing the hold which it has held so long and with so firm a grasp upon the human mind and heart; determining and dominating as it has not only human thought but human conduct throughout. Instead of the term now used "Christian burial" another will be substituted appropriate to the changed manner of disposing of the dead.

Let me say in conclusion. Although firmly convinced as I have said that cremation will eventually supplant to a great extent every other mode of burial, yet the change will be gradual, giving us ample time to adapt ourselves to other pursuits equally as profitable and quite as agreeable as undertaking and which, will require no greater ability nor skill than is demanded of us in our present calling. Meanwhile, in the language of one of our oft used mottoes, we will "Rest in Peace."



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