

Burial of the Dead.

By Rev. James Macleod

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WE cannot be too often reminded of our duty, as we, like other generations who quickly and sinfully forgot the mighty power of God in delivering them from the dominion of Satan will forget like the ancient Israelites that God brought them out of the furnace of Egypt. Before the blessed Reformation in Britain, the inhabitants of these islands were living like savages in Church and State. History records the facts. We are fast returning to the same old and abominable habits in our minds, words and actions. The Reformers were instrumental (under the hand of God) in directing the minds of the people to the Word of God. The Bible was accepted as the Word of God; the German Rationalists and destructive Higher Critics were as dumb as the Egyptian dogs, by the divine authority of the truth of the gospel. The Reformers in Scotland adhered most faithfully to the inspired Bible, and handed it to the people as God's Book without at any time suggesting that a verse, chapter or book of it was not given by the immediate inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The Reformers were scholars of the first order (some of them excelled in parts, and natural gifts), but they were all eminent in scholastic attainments.' They were profound in their knowledge of the ancient tongues-Hebrew, Greek and Latin; in fact, some of them were more conversant with Greek and Latin than, with the Scottish and English language. It is not necessary to mention them by name as there' were many of them that attained to all the learning of the age, and the various branches of knowledge in the sciences, as well as language, Above all this, they were men of conscience - a conscience purged from dead works to serve the living God. They were not the slaves of their own intellectual knowledge-they served God in the gospel of His Son, and instructed the people in the fear of God according to knowledge. The Bible was their text-book. They were deeply taught by the Holy Spirit in gospel. They knew by experience the infinite preciousness of the gospel that set themselves free from the curse of the law, dominion of sin, and malice of Satan. They set their faces against idolatry, ancient and modern worshippers of Baal, and papal paganism. They saw and believed that God is a Spirit and they that worship Him must worship Him according to His own Word. They found the places of worship with altars, images of saints, walls painted all over with pictures of monks, nuns, animals and beasts of various kinds. When a parishioner died, the priest and people

collected, and made the most hideous noise singing, weeping (or pretending weeping), dancing, drinking, and the same unseemly orgies went on the day of the burial _ "the committal service" was often mingled with the blood of the living. The priest and people prayed for the dead, and to the dead, to angels, the so-called "saints," and the people in millions were in heathen darkness throughout the whole of Europe. When God raised up the Reformers, all this was changed in Germany, in England and Scotland. We are now going back to the old pagan customs - as we depart from the Word of God and forget His mighty work in our nation. It was the Reformers who abolished praying at the grave. The people accepted the directions of the Reformers, and until recent times no "committal service" was to be seen in any part of Scotland. It is not so now - the Church of Scotland, Free Church, Baptists and Papists pray at the mouth of the grave, and commit "dust to dust" in the hope of a glorious resurrection - a handful of dust is thrown on the coffin as it is lowered in the grave, and the clergyman "offers prayer." The "committal service" is the first part of this pagan performance - that is "dust to dust" for that proceeds the "prayer at the grave." They are back to the pagan-papal custom from which our nation was mercifully delivered at the Reformation. They try to reason and defend this papal custom and practice on the ground that they are praying for the living and not for the dead, nor to the dead. The priest can argue on equal terms with the Protestant minister that he too is praying for the living - and if for the dead, that ancient tradition and practice is on his side. Why this noise and excitement about returning the dust (just dust) of a fellow-mortal back to mother earth! The Freemasons are another sect that make a great show as well as Papists and Protestant pagans. They have a "committal service" and a crude ritual which is common to Jews, Hindus, Christians and Mohammedans. It is pagan in its origin and ritual. Do they believe in the resurrection at the Great Day 'of Judgment It appears not. As far as we know the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland is the only Christian body which in this land adheres to the Reformed practice - "no prayers at the grave," and does not countenance the pagan ritual of a Committal Service," when burying their dead. This is in keeping with the Confession of Faith in its Directory for Public Worship. Let us not be moved nor perturbed that we are alone of all the Protestant denominations in Britain. The Reformed Presbyterians have fallen victims to the present-day pagan custom of "praying 'at the grave" - dust to dust stunt, Some weak-minded people think that it is absolutely essential that a minister should be present to conduct the family worship before the remains

are removed to their last resting place. No! The family worship in the bereaved family can be conducted by the Missionary, Elder, Deacon, or the member in full communion in our Church as well as by a minister. It is no more necessary for a minister to be present on such an occasion than for the Elder or Missionary to be present. It is family worship that is conducted and not a "burial family worship," which service would appear to be on par with the "committal service." That is what we must jealously guard against in adhering to the Confession of Faith of the Reformed Church of Scotland. It is purely and simply family worship, and not a burial service. If the pastor of the congregation or a neighbouring minister is present on such an occasion, let him preside, read the Word, pray with the bereaved and seek to console them in the fear of the Lord. We have known ministers leaving communion services and rushing off by steamers, cars and trains to attend funerals and conduct "funeral services" - dangerously like "committal services." Let us watch, and be sober! Satan is the same old malicious serpent. We respect our dead; we love their memory; we believe all who die in the Lord are with God in the moment their precious souls leave the tabernacle of clay! We believe that they shall rise again, as to their bodies-spiritual bodies and then, and not till then, soul and body re-join perfectly holy in their complete persons to glorify God for ever. The handful of clay or dust that we lay in the grave will for ever be consumed when the material universe shall burn with a fervent heat-all material substance will then die, and pass away. Our tabernacle of clay is made up of material substance, and it will pass away. We will possess a spiritual-for the "body" will be as spiritual as the soul at the final resurrection - "It is sown a natural body; it is raised up a spiritual body." We have a natural body but "there is a spiritual body." Why then make noise, show, and pomp, in burying a handful of dust which once it mingles with mother earth passes out of sight for ever? What happened to the soul is no concern, of the most of ministers, Jews and Freemasons. All they are concerned with is just a handful of dust-like silly children playing with tiny, pebbles! How foolish! Where is the soul, in heaven or in hell, is not their concern - it is the body. It is a deep and grievous concern with some poor families that they cannot put an expensive head-stone over the grave of their departed friends and relations. It does not make the slightest difference nor benefit the dead whether a headstone is placed over the grave or not. It is a matter of sentiment-and what is written on tomb-stones is very often false- "stolen property." The truth twisted, and the great name of the Most High taken in vain! It is often money used for wrong ends. The great

question should be "am I in Christ," or "am I not in Christ," if not, the "grave" is a lost eternity! Do not worry whether an expensive headstone is placed over your grave or none at all! It does not matter! Christ by His resurrection from the dead left the grave ready for Joseph to enter into it in the sure hope of a glorious resurrection at the great day. Let our daily and constant concern be to be in Christ - as for the rest we need not worry. *Note.* - Dr. Hay Fleming, the eminent Scottish ecclesiastical historian, requested that no silly prayers be offered at his funeral. -- *James Macleod*, Greenock.