

CREMATION (up to date Heathenism)

By Rev James S. Sinclair

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ONE of the latest developments of present-day heathenism is the burning, or as it is called, cremating of dead bodies instead of burying them. It is claimed that this treatment of the deceased is more healthful for the living, and quite as respectful to the dead. This is the claim: but is it supported by Scripture and right reason? We trow not. Nevertheless this heathenish practice has obtained a footing on the Continent and in America, and likewise among ourselves. There are now furnaces for devouring the dead at Maryhill, Glasgow, and at Woking, in Surrey. Whether the new practice is cheaper than the old, we cannot tell. That it will, if carried on upon a great scale, be any more healthful we much question; that it is a violation of human instinct and natural affection is very plain, and that it is contrary to the Scriptures, both of the Old and New Testament, can be easily proved. For not to insist on the example of a long line of prophets and righteous men who were laid unto their fathers in the ordinary human manner, we have the action of the Lord Himself towards His servant Moses. It is written, "So Moses, the servant of the Lord, died in the land of Moab, and the Lord buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, and no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day." And when this same Lord of Glory took mortal flesh, and when He died He did not choose to separate Himself from the great company of His saints who sleep in the dust; for He was laid by reverent hands in a grave of hewn stone, as the manner of the Jews is to bury. His example, therefore, in this matter must be to Christian people an end of all strife. Therefore, when His doctrine began to leaven the heathen nations, we find that it also brought to nought this practice of burning the dead. For the heathen Celts, Germans, and Greeks in the pre-Christian ages were wont to cremate, but, after they learned Christ, the practice was altogether given up, not to be resumed till these last degenerate days. There are strong reasons derived from the character of the union between Christ and His redeemed which make it impossible that this practice can ever obtain a footing in families or communities really Christian. For seeing that the soul and body of one who has died in the faith—though separated from each other—are still united to Christ, and that these lifeless members are still His members, we may then say, " Shall we take the members of Christ and make them fuel for the fire ? " By no means. Further, as right reason and natural affection teach us to arrest, by all

means in our power, the hand of death, so by the same prompting are we absolutely deterred from having any hand in hastening the progress of decay in the lifeless form. It is true we are fain to bury our dead out of our sight, but to mar and destroy the remains has hitherto been deemed sacrilegious. We may also consider that the apostle has likened the disposal of the pious dead to a sowing of seed. "It is sown," saith he, "in dishonour; it is raised in glory." To this type will the manner of Christian burial be conformed throughout all ages. Wherefore they who introduce cremation declare themselves heathen and not Christian in their sentiments, and their arguments of sanitary reform, however plausible, are so many preferences of the voice of short-sighted human reason to the finer, surer, and more heavenly teachings of faith.