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# ON PRECIPITATE BURIAL

AMONGST

THE JEWS,

Theologically, Physiologically, and Morally Considered.

(A REPRINT FROM A SERIES OF PAPERS PUBLISHED IN "THE  
FIRST FRUITS OF THE WEST.")

BY

LEWIS ASHENHEIM, M. D.

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PRINTED BY A. D. Y. HENRIQUES, 13, KING-STREET.

KINGSTON, JAMAICA.

## DEDICATION.

*TO THE MEMBERS OF THE KINGSTON JEWISH AND  
GENERAL LITERARY AND SCIENTIFIC  
INSTITUTION.*

GENTLEMEN,

THE following pages are a reprint of a series of papers published by me in "THE FIRST FRUITS OF THE WEST." They now appear for the first time in the form of a Pamphlet which I with much pleasure dedicate to you.

The subject, although but superficially treated, is of paramount importance both to yourselves and others. May I, therefore, trust, that it will engage your serious consideration, and that I shall have your hearty assistance in my endeavours to remedy the evil to which I repeatedly allude.

With best wishes for the prosperity of the Society to which we are attached, and also, permit to add, for your welfare individually,

I am,

Gentlemen,

Your obedient servant.

LEWIS ASHENHEIM.

*Kingston, Jamaica, Sept. 8th 1845.*

## ON PRECIPITATE BURIAL AMONGST THE JEWS.

THEOLOGICALLY, PHYSIOLOGICALLY, AND MORALLY CONSIDERED.

In the course of discussion on matters of a nature essentially Jewish, we have remarked that high authority is very frequently invoked, either in condemnation or approval of opinions which may have been elicited during the debate. We have also observed, that the mere citing of the authority suffices, in general, to silence one of the disputants who, regarding the quotation as apposite and conclusive, yields the palm of theological victory to his more ingenious, or, as the case may be, more erudite, antagonist, and thus ends the argument. It is seldom, indeed, that other proof is demanded; it is rarely that the validity of the relationship between the subject and citation is challenged. It may, or may not be, a garbled statement; it may be a solitary sentence or verse, detached from the context, and arbitrarily suited to meet immediate views; it may, in fact, have nothing whatever to do with the subject under debate; still, the mere sound of high authority carries weight along with it, and peremptorily suppresses all attempts at refutation. The one worsted in the moral or religious skirmish, either does not, or is afraid to submit the allegations advanced by the other to the test of analytical inquiry, lest he should be branded as one who is either sceptical of, or unlearned in, the true meaning of the passage brought forward by his opponent;

and thus it often happens, that the current of a disposition to be informed is checked, and attempts at self-culture and improvement rendered nugatory and unavailable. We have seen this again and again; nay, we ourselves have experienced feelings of this nature. We have, on several occasions, found ourselves compelled to abandon opinions founded on mature reflection and common sense, lest we should be denounced as a renegade to our faith, and a despiser of doctrines bearing the impress of antiquity and long-established custom.

Thus much, for the present, on the mode in which subjects of a Jewish character are often discussed. We shall now make a few brief observations on the inclination to sweeping conclusions, too frequently a prominent feature in arguments on themes of a general interest. There are individuals who will argue on points with which they are but superficially acquainted, and, at the same time, obstinately refuse to listen to reason founded on actual experience. Such persons are the worst to deal with; because, wedded to their self-sufficiency, a departure from their own opinions would be tantamount to a voluntary sacrifice of a portion of that egotistical love, without which they could not comfortably exist. With them, rational deductions, legitimate arguments, or startling proofs, exercise no sway. Eloquence may plead until she is exhausted, philosophy may drain her resources, facts may be re-enforced by facts, but all will not suffice to shake their confidence in themselves; and one may almost as well attempt to prove impossibilities with success, as to induce them to render up one fraction of their belief in their own infallibility.

There is another class of individuals who, although open to conviction on most subjects, are, at times, unwilling to give credence to the reasonable assertions of others, because such belief might possibly involve them in much mental anguish. These susceptible beings adopt a rather singular mode of objection. They say:—"It may be so; but it is too horrible to be credited. We are happy in our non-belief; and if, by non-credence, we can spare ourselves much misery, we should certainly be acting wrongly, were we, by believing, to entail upon us and our's unnecessary pain." This is another manner of expressing the old adage—"Where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise"; and its practical adaptation betrays an absence of mental cultivation, and a possession of moral cowardice to a great degree. But as we are not writing an essay on argument, our observations on the various modes of debate shall close here. Our reason for mentioning the three classes above alluded to, will at once become apparent to our readers, when we inform them that we purpose to treat our subject with reference to the afore-going remarks.

We cannot now find space to enter into the detail, or even to give a sketch, of the consequences possibly attendant on early burial. We can only, for the present, simply declare, that Apparent Death is a condition readily induced, and that, in the existing state of medical knowledge, there is but one sign by which Apparent, may be distinguished from Real, Death. If, then, interment is proceeded with, without the assurance of the existence of this mark, there is a risk of committing a body to the earth from which the spirit has not yet departed; and, if the facile induction of that state, called Apparent Death, can be proved, how

much more determinedly should we protest against the burial of those dear to us—of those with whom we have been associated by every tie precious to man—ere we shall have been convinced of the developement of this distinguishing sign. Still further, if the fact can be brought home to our own immediate neighbourhood, of an individual, now alive, having, at the very grave, been rescued from a situation whose mere thought checks our blood in its course, and chills us as we ponder—will this suffice to shake off the lethargic indifference which has too long been prevalent in this part of the world, and rouse its inhabitants to an appreciation of their peril? Will it be found wanting in power to bring them to the thought that a similar situation may, one day, be their own, their wives', their children's, or their friends'? Will the numerous instances of premature burial in other countries, which we could bring forward, supported by irrefragable evidence, and which stand as a monumental witness of human carelessness and barbarity, be found adequate to the removal of this reprehensible torpor which has, until now, weighed so heavily on their feelings of humanity? We shall make the trial; and although the limits prescribed to us by a Periodical will necessarily compel us to be brief, we trust that our effort will, in the end, triumph over abuses strengthened by custom, and induce that wholesome and requisite adoption of measures, which will effectually put a termination to the possibility of a fellow-creature's being placed in a condition too horrible for conception. Whether we shall succeed in this, we know not; but, at all events, we shall have satisfied our conscience, and freed it from reproach.

In our arguments on the subject of Premature Burial, we have had to contend with the three classes referred to in our preliminary remarks. The first class, we found amongst our co-religionists exclusively; the others, amongst our general acquaintance. We shall, therefore, as far as it is practicable, divide our treatment of this subject into three heads, and attempt to combat the legitimacy of—

1. The arguments in favour of Early Burial, founded on alleged authority.
2. The non-belief in Apparent Death, founded on mere opinion.
3. The non-belief in Apparent Death, founded on fear of belief.

First, then to

THE ARGUMENTS IN FAVOUR OF EARLY BURIAL, FOUNDED ON ALLEGED AUTHORITY.

The grand bulwark behind which those pertaining to this class, entrench themselves, rests for foundation on the following sentence in the Bible: "*Thou shalt in any wise bury him that day.*" These words are inscribed on the banner of opposition, which is so confidently and triumphantly unfurled to the gaze of those who advocate delay in burial. They are referred to with looks which plainly tell of coming victory, and which indeed almost seem to say—"Here we have God's own warrant for what we do. What care we for your supposed fears, even allowing that they are supported by physiological reasonings? We advance the Divine word, which is true and ever-enduring:

*You, human doctrines, which, from our nature, are liable to correction, or may rest on misconception."*

Highly appreciating, as we do, the importance of authority, we should, in accordance with our usual custom, renounce the views which have, on many occasions, led us to insist on delay on interment; but (and we confess it freely) as spurious authority has too frequently been foisted on us, we take the liberty of referring to the passage itself, in order to convince ourselves that no one-sided view of the question has been taken, that the sentence is apposite, and that it directly enjoins burial on the day of death. We now turn to the Scriptures, and lay the whole passage before our readers:

And if a man have committed a sin worthy of death, and he be to be put to death, and thou hang him on a tree,

His body shall not remain all night upon the tree, but *thou shalt in any wise bury him that day*, for he that is hanged is accursed of God; that thy land be not defiled, which the Lord thy God giveth thee for an inheritance.—DEUT. xxi, 23.

It is impossible that the Legislator could have expressed himself more clearly. He distinctly refers to the body of a criminal, not to that of one who has died a natural death; he speaks of him who has been suspended from a tree as *the accursed of God*, not of him who (to use a common expression) has died in his bed, and to whom, such words cannot, by any means, be applied. Our sticklers for authority may now perhaps find, that their strong-hold is not so impregnable as they supposed. They do not however abandon the contest, but bring up Rabbinical *authority*, as a sort of *corps de reserve*. The names of Maimonides and others are paraded—their advocacy for early burial, as-

serted—and the Talmudic expression—“*Where is a greater physician than Maimonides?*” glitteringly appears on the self-same standard which formerly bore their falsely applied quotation. We have never had the satisfaction of seeing or hearing the passages referred to, which directly ordain early burial; but this may be owing either to our own superficial acquaintance with the Talmudic writings, or to the general and loose terms, on *hearsay* merely, with which our arguments have been met. Nevertheless, we can meet this shifting movement, even on Talmudic ground. We happen to know that Maimonides translated a work by Galen, in which a case of recovery from Apparent Death is recorded; and we chance to be informed of the opinion of Mendelssohn, that our Rabbis were fully aware of the uncertainty of the signs of death, which opinion the German Philosopher founded on examples of resuscitation from a condition resembling death, cited by the Talmudists themselves. Still more, by a casual circumstance, we are enabled to make an extract from the Talmud, which unequivocally declares that it is our duty to *watch the dead for three days*.

“Watch the dead for three days; \* \* \* \* \* for it has occurred that one, so watched, recovered, and then lived for twenty-five years; and another, who afterwards begat five children.” (SEMACHOTH, *Perek*, 8. *Mishna*, 1.)

We have now disposed of the two leading objections advanced by our friends, (we coin the word) the *authoritalists*. But, although they are again beaten from their ground, they deem it fit once more to change their mode of defence, with the full knowledge, however, that their position is an untenable one; and, similar to the drowning wretch who grasps

at a straw in the vain hope of ultimate preservation, they, in their extremity, gaspingly inquire—" *Why, then, are the Jews in the habit of burying their dead so quickly?*" A similar inquiry, tinctured with reproach, has also been made by the philanthropist, Pineau, in his *Mémoire sur les dangers des Inhumations Précipitées*. He thus describes the Jewish funeral ceremonies—" *Si-tôt qu'un Juif est mort, on fait les préparatifs pour ses funérailles avec toute la diligence possible. Pour ne pas perdre de tems, pendant que l'on fait une fosse dans le cimetière, les uns sont occupés à laver son corps avec de l'eau, où l'on a fait bouillir des plantes odoriférantes, et d'autres font un bonnet, des chaussons, une chemise, des calçons, si c'est un homme ; ou un juppe si c'est une femme,—le tout de toile neuve. Si-tôt que cela est fait, on en habille le mort. Dans quelques endroits, on lui met par-dessus une espece de rochet de fine toile avec son Taleth.\* Dans cet état, on l'enferme dans une biere avec un linge au fond et un autre par-dessus le défunt ; on couvre le cercueil de noir, et on le porte toute de suite au cimetière.† Lorsqu'on y est arrivé, on lui met un petit sac de terre sous sa tête ; ou cloue ensuite le cercueil, et on le descend dans la fosse.*"

We cannot assign a positive reason why the Jews, so well known as strict adherers to their Rabbinical law,

\* Les Juifs donnent ce nom à un voile de laine quarré, au coin duquel pendent quatre houppes, et dont ils se couvrent lorsqu'ils font leurs prières dans les Synagogues. Quelques uns mettent ce voile sur la tête ; d'autres l'entortillent autour du col. *Taleth* signifie en Hébreu de Rabin, un *manteau*.

† Le lieu où les Juifs enterrent leurs morts, est ordinairement un champ qu'ils appellent *Betachaim*, ou *Maison des vivans*.

should have contracted this custom, which is in direct opposition to the commands of their sages. The shrewd conjecture of Rabbi Itzig Satenoff\* throws some light on this point. He attributes the origin of hasty burial among the Jews to politic motives ; and adduces, in support of this view, one of the many arbitrary acts of oppression to which the Jews were exposed under the dominion of the petty Polish princes. The act to which he refers, was the seizure of any corpse by these Lilliputian tyrants, who, taking advantage of the hallowed respect with which the Jews regard their dead, resorted to this iniquitous measure, as a means to extort money from them ; and they, to defeat this object, kept the deaths of their friends as secret as possible, and had recourse to Precipitate Burial. This view is also taken by Thiéry in his *Vie de l'homme respectée et défendue dans ses derniers momens*. He says—" *Quant à la différence des cultes, on sait que les Juifs enterrent trop promptement. Nous avons vu ci-dessus leur anciennes et respectables coutumes. S'ils les ont quittées, c'est que de longs malheurs changent aisément en mauvaises les meilleures polices.*"

We have now done with the class who advocate the propriety of early burial on the strength of authority. We flatter ourselves to have shewn that this alleged authority is but a shadow—a sand-hill which crumbles on mere touch. We have applied to it the test of truth, at whose contact it has vanished, leaving its adducers discomfited and without further means of defence. We now leave them with this parting word of advice given in the best of feeling:

\* *Vertheidigung der fruehen Beerdigung der Juden.*



either to convince themselves of the validity and appositeness of an authority, before they bring it to bear on any particular point; or, if they find themselves incompetent to grapple with a subject, not to go beyond the limits of their knowledge; in brief, to follow the counsel of our Sages—

“ Judge only according to your intelligence, and scrutinize according to your acquirements.”

## II. ON THE NON-BELIEF IN APPARENT DEATH, FOUNDED ON MERE OPINION.

If the slight sketch of the characteristics of those belonging to this class, as given in our introductory observations, is a true one—if the unbending obstinacy and blind self-love of which we have spoken, is a faithful picture—if the self-sufficiency with which we have charged them, exists to the degree we have represented—and if, “because they want the grace that others have, they judge” our subject “straight a thing impossible,”—then all our efforts to convince them of the occasional occurrence of Apparent Death, will be exerted to no purpose. But, if our sketch has been too highly colored, and if, in zeal for our subject, we have accused them to an extent they do not merit, we entertain some hope of proving to those sceptical on this topic, that our opinions thereon are genuine, that they are founded on legitimate reasoning, and borne out by facts. As our object is to convince, we trust to be excused if we enter into some details in this division of the subject. The plan we intend to follow, will be an inductive one; we shall first lay down established principles; from these we shall draw reasonable deductions: and from these, again, we shall advance our views relating to Apparent Death; and then leave our

readers to form their own conclusions. Were we strictly to follow the above plan, we should, in the first place, proceed to consider what LIFE is—to investigate its primary cause—to pass in review the opinions of ancient and modern philosophers—and to submit each to analysis for the purpose of determining its real value. The cause of life, however, is still unknown to us, notwithstanding the efforts which have for ages been made to discover it. It is here, as in many other instances, that Nature has thought fit to envelope her production in mystery, permitting us merely to perceive its operation, without vouchsafing to us the means by which we may comprehend it. She shews us her works, but surrounds the cause of their action with a darkness which has proved impenetrable to the most exquisite human ingenuity. She permits us to observe the various phenomena which are a *consequence* of vitality, but the ruling principle which influences these, is, we fear, an enigma which is destined never to be thoroughly solved. On this account, then, we shall abstain from the presentation of even a condensed view of the opinions which have, from time to time, been expressed by philosophers, who have fruitlessly devoted their talents to the elucidation of this interesting subject. Were we to attempt the sketch, we should be compelled to notice diametrically-opposed and, even, contradictory statements, together with a constant confounding of cause and effect, which would not only prove unsatisfactory, but also involve us in a labyrinth to extricate ourselves from which, might prove a matter of extreme difficulty. The limits which have been placed to our knowledge, leave us, therefore, no alternatives, but to bend submissively before the decree of the Great Creator, and to con-

sole ourselves with the reflection, that this ordination is a wise one, and framed expressly for our own good. We shall, therefore, pass over the theories on the vital principle in silence, and briefly notice the two great divisions of life acknowledged by physiologists, namely, the *Organic Life*, and the *Animal Life*. As we advance, we shall explain the reason which has led us to notice these two divisions.\*

The animal life is that which places the individual in relation with external objects: by means of which, his existence is associated with that of other beings, and by which he approaches or withdraws himself, according as his fears or necessities may induce. This life is *external*, and the functions which compose it, are—

1ST.—THE SENSES; such as hearing, seeing, smelling, etc.

2ND.—INTERNAL SENSATIONS; by which the impressions conveyed by the senses to the brain, are made perceptible.

3RD.—LOCOMOTION; by which the individual possesses the power of moving from one place to another, and is thereby enabled to minister to his wants, or to fly from danger, etc.

4TH.—VOICE AND SPEECH; by which he communicates his sensations and ideas to others.

5TH.—GENERATION; by which he provides for the propagation of his species.

The organic life, on the other hand, is completely *internal*, comprising—

\* The reader is requested to regard these two divisions, with some degree of attention; as much, hereafter to be said, hinges on the distinction existing between them.

1ST.—DIGESTION; the source whence strength and nourishment are derived.

2ND.—ABSORPTION; by which nutritious and other substances are conveyed into the great canal of circulation.

3RD.—CIRCULATION; by which the blood is carried to the different organs for their nourishment.

4TH.—RESPIRATION; by which the necessary changes in the blood which has already circulated through the body, are accomplished.

5TH.—NUTRITION; by which the blood is converted into the substance of an organ.

6TH.—CALORIFICATION; by which a degree of heat is formed, sufficient for the due performance of the vital functions.

If we look with an attentive and a philosophical eye on any of the natural changes which are daily going on, we shall perceive, that these are accomplished in a steady, but *gradual* manner. The transformations that we are continually witnessing, are prepared by the master-hand, and effected *step by step* only. This principle holds good, particularly in living bodies. Nature seems, as it were, to abhor sudden revolutions; and although it may be asserted, that subitaneous phenomena do occur, yet, if these be minutely investigated, we shall almost invariably discover, that they are the result of a wisely-regulated preparation. Out of the many examples of this which we could adduce, we shall simply refer to human life which, indeed, is all we require for the elucidation of our subject. We shall,

therefore, in very few words, trace the progress of life, from the time it lies, imperfect and unobserved in *embryo*, until the period when the individual ceases to exist, and returns to his primitive condition.

First, there is the period of Preparation which lasts nine months. Secondly, there is the period of Infancy which is divided into two epochs; the first of these terminates at the commencement of the first dentition, the second, at the end of the same. The third period is that of Childhood which extends from the completion of the first dentition, to the completion of the second. The fourth period is Boyhood or Girlhood, ranging from about the seventh year to the commencement of Adolescence. The fifth, that of Adolescence, extends from the fifteenth or sixteenth year to Adult Age which is the sixth, and is divided into two epochs, the first being *early* adult age, the second, *mature* age. The last period is Old Age, divisible into various epochs, such as declining age, ripe old age, *second* infancy, etc. This period commences from about the fiftieth year. We shall now suppose, that old age has come on, that the life of the individual has been a regular one, and that he has not suffered from disease, or any of the numerous and serious casualties to which we are subject. In such a case, the departure from this life, will take place in a very gradual manner. This is called *Natural Death*, which is thus consummated. The *sight* becomes dim, and, at length, ceases to transmit objects. *Sounds* fall on the ear in a confused manner, and, at last, *hearing* is completely abolished. The skin grows hard and dry, and the sense of *touch* is blunted. *Odours* make but little impression on the nerves.

of *smell*, and *taste* alone remains, although even that is impaired. The old man's *movements* are few, limited, and tardily performed. His *voice* changes and he speaks little; and, devoid of *internal sensations* and passions, he lives insensible to almost every thing around him, conscious merely that he still exists. After this gradual decay of the *animal life*, the *organic* commences in its turn to suffer. *Digestion* is impaired, *absorption* is languidly performed, *circulation* proceeds slowly, *respiration* becomes embarrassed, and *Nutrition* and *Calorification*, which are dependent on circulation, are gradually suspended. Finally, the individual dies.

We have now, rapidly and in an imperfect manner, traced man from his birth to his death. What is he in the first stage? A *vesicle*! How gradually, however, does that vesicle assume a more definite form—how, step by step, does it advance to the complete formation of the infant! How moist and soft to the touch is the new-born babe, and how, by degrees, does it acquire firmness in all its parts! How gradually do growth and strength of structure proceed in childhood, and how steadily are these continued in youth! In manhood, how beautiful is the progress which is developed in the attainment of manly and mental vigour, which continues until age commences its encroachments! *Then*, the same progressive action manifests itself in an inverse ratio. Step by step, does man return to his primitive condition: his juices dry up, and he becomes a rigid object; decrepitude steals gradually on him; he imperceptibly glides into a second childhood; he merges as it were, into a being neither of this world nor the next, and at last, without effort, he ceases altogether to exist.

It may now be inquired—what has the tracing of life to do with the subject under consideration? To this we answer, that this has not been done without an object. By making our readers acquainted with the gradual development of the vital organs, etc, we trust to establish a point long insisted on by writers on Apparent Death; viz: that, excepting those cases in which the parts most essential to life have been destroyed, *death is not so sudden an occurrence as it generally imagined*. Nature, in depriving an individual of life, follows the same progressive course as she did when bestowing it. This is attested, if the manner in which natural death comes on, be considered. This species of dissolution is very remarkable, in as far as it clearly demonstrates the extinction of the *animal* life before that of the *organic*. We now request the reader's attention to the causes which induced us to notice these two great divisions of life; first, that the grand distinction between the two, which is, that the one is external, and the other internal, might be clearly comprehended; secondly, that by an examination of the process of natural death, the *prior* destruction of the *animal* life might be proved beyond a doubt; and thirdly, that from these, how the occurrence of Apparent Death might be accounted for. It will require no great stretch of the imagination to picture to one's self an example of an individual who has laboured under a lingering disease, in whom the *animal* functions have been successively blunted, and in whom the *organic* have proportionately suffered. Under such circumstances, his appearance may resemble that of one from whom the vital spark has already fled; the difference, however, being, that the flame of life in the former is not extinguished, but flickers

imperceptible to our senses. Again, in proof of the gradual manner in which life departs from an individual, we may adduce even cases of violent death resulting from hanging, drowning, etc. Here death is not always so sudden as is supposed; for we have numerous examples of persons in whom the suspension or submersion has been considerable, who have been restored by the kind hand of art; and we believe, that in the generality of unfortunate cases of this nature, (excepting those in which the lapse of time was not too great, and those unattended by complications,) life was still present, but that, owing either to the degree of collapse, or the not sufficiently stimulating properties of the agents employed, it could not again be called into action.

The experiments of several eminent physiologists, have demonstrated the tenacity with which animals cling to life. Fontana and Spallanzani, submitted *wheel-animalcules* to the process of dessication, which recovered on being moistened with water. The latter gentleman assures us that he preserved several frogs for two years in a heap of snow; they had become dry, shrivelled, and even friable, and displayed no external appearance of motion or sensation; yet they were recovered from this state by a moderate and gradual heat. Animals belonging to the *Mollusca* tribe, have been kept for twenty-four hours under the exhausted receiver of an air-pump. A frog has lived for thirty hours after the removal of its lungs; and every one must have heard of the escape of living reptiles from blocks of trees and large calcareous deposits. The germ of the *ova* in many of the insect tribe, preserves its productive power throughout the whole of the winter season; and still more,

the *ova* of insects proper to transatlantic regions, have been hatched in Europe. This vital tenacity holds also good in the vegetable kingdom. Beans have been known to germinate after a lapse of two hundred years; and an onion, taken from the hand of an Egyptian Mummy, perhaps two thousand years old, has been made to grow. Enough has, we trust, been advanced to prove the possibility of the occurrence of Apparent Death, independent of the numerous cases of the same which have been recorded by men fully entitled to belief; a few of these, however, we reserve for the third part of our subject, and, for the present, we are satisfied if we have shown that the boundary-line between life and death is not so well-defined as many may have been led to believe. We feel that an apology is due to our readers for the introduction of physiological observations into a Periodical of a Religious and Moral character; our excuse is, that we could not have performed our task without these.\*

### III. ON THE NON-BELIEF IN APPARENT DEATH, FOUNDED ON FEAR OF BELIEF.

HAVING now disposed of the class who advocate the propriety of early burial on the strength of authority, and having, by a chain of Physiological reasoning, endeavoured to prove how Apparent Death may be induced, we now turn to the third class who found their non-belief on *fear* of belief. Here, we must change our plan of attack; for, as their mode of objection is somewhat singular, so must our course be. Were we to follow either of the lines of

\* This alludes to the Periodical in which this series of papers originally appeared (L. A.)

argument already advanced, our labour would be to no purpose; for we have now to combat neither against *authority*, nor against *non-belief founded on opinion*, but against *non-belief resulting from fear of belief*. As fear, then, seems to be the object which shuts this class from the light, we shall, in a manner, become *homœopathists*, and apply the *same* remedy which caused the disease.

Amongst the social duties of man, none ranks higher than that of visiting and tending the sick and dying; this laudable duty is practised nowhere so disinterestedly, with so little regard to personal inconvenience, and, we may add, *sacrifice*, as it is by the Jewish people. But, unfortunately, all sense of duty appears at an end, when the breath *seems* to have departed from the body. It is at this critical period, when more circumspection than ever is needed, that gross carelessness is the leading characteristic;—it is at this stage that, instead of redoubled exertion, confusion is the pervading principle. The existence of this state of affairs is clearly to be traced to the too generally entertained but fallacious belief, that death is certain on the cessation of respiration, circulation, heat, and motion. There is not a sign of those which are vulgarly acknowledged as indicative of dissolution, (excepting *one*) which can be regarded as certain, and which may not, in particular cases, deceive those who are ignorant of the nature of death, and unacquainted with the circumstances which are able to produce a state resembling it. An icy coldness—a stiffness of all the joints—the want of sensation—the absence of pulse and respiration—the absence of brilliancy in the eyes—the presence of livid spots, or even of a cadaverous odour—not one of these, regarded, *singly*, is a proof of death. It may, however, be

urged, that, although the signs of death, *taken individually*, may prove deceptive, two or more combined are sufficient to stamp the certainty of dissolution. There are cases, truly, in which a certain combination of the above signs may, without the slightest appearance of *putrefaction*, which is the only unequivocal mark of death, suffice to prove its occurrence; but there are also cases in which the most important functions have been suspended, and the individual has been but in a lethargic condition. The well-known case of Colonel Townshend, who could *voluntarily* suspend both pulse and respiration, fully testifies, that an individual may only be in a state of Apparent Death, notwithstanding the suspension of the most important functions of our existence. The combination of the above-mentioned signs of Death, is, therefore by no means sufficient to decide that the soul has parted from the body; and we must, in cases which admit of a shade of doubt, look for evidence more conclusive. This is only to be obtained by waiting for the presence of incipient putrefaction, which clearly denotes, when it is general, the triumph of chemical decomposition over vital action. Without this, we run a risk of converting an Apparent, into a Real Death—of rendering to the earth premature possession of that which, sooner or later, will be her's—and of conveying to the grave an individual conscious, perhaps, of the proceedings which are going on around him. It cannot be denied that persons, capable of hearing, seeing, and thinking, but unable to give a single sign of consciousness, have been shrouded and coffined, and would have been interred alive—had not the terrors of their situation burst the bonds that bound them, and the piercing shriek which horror wrung from them,

was the means through which they were rescued from their fearful situation.\*

If we attentively observe the manner in which death-bed scenes, among the Jews, are in general enacted, immediately after the seeming death of an individual—we shall not be surprised to find ourselves borne along by the conviction, that Apparent Death may be more readily induced than had been previously imagined. We shall often find the personages attendant on a death-bed, to consist principally of those of the other sex, who, from circumstances, have the credit of being thought experienced in such cases, and whose services are called into requisition, when the unfortunate one is supposed to be *in extremis*. The pulse has hardly ceased to beat, the respiration has scarcely become imperceptible, ere these well-meaning, but woefully mistaken, individuals proceed to close the eyes and mouth, bind up the jaws with a handkerchief, and, sometimes, place a load on the breast. And what reasons are assigned for so doing? Why, the following:—*That the body may not swell up, and that the horrible appearance occasioned by the mouth and eyes remaining open, may be thereby prevented.* But it is not considered that should the case be one of Apparent Death, the probability of resuscitation is destroyed by their thus precluding the access of the atmospheric air to the lungs, and the transmission of light into the eye, by means of either of which, the latent vital powers, should they happen to exist, might again be called into action. In addition to the above treatment, the pillows are removed from

\* Cases of this nature will, at no distant day, be published in a work which is nearly ready for the press.

under the head, which makes the chances of recovery still less; and, as if ingenuity were racked to render a return to life a matter of impossibility, the body is almost immediately taken out of bed, placed on the ground or boards, and there allowed to lie. Under these circumstances, presuming it to be a case of Apparent Death, it is hardly to be supposed that such a one can be easily restored to life. It is not very unusual to see persons who have been pronounced beyond the power of Medical art, recover; but such an event will, indeed, prove rare, if these proceedings continue to be tolerated. Whatever the circumstances may be, the abbreviation of an individual's existence, be it but by one minute, is as great a murder as if it were shortened five years; and it is chiefly to this point that we wish to direct the attention of the proper authorities. In the present day, when so much is spoken of the general diffusion of cheap, useful, and moral knowledge—how comes it, that such dangerous infatuation is allowed to continue? How comes it, that the scanty hope of recovery in an individual, whose preservation may hereafter enable him to be of service to his country, his family, and his friends—is passively permitted to be destroyed by ignorance and gross superstition? If we are to attribute the existence of this outrage, to a want of proper information on the part of those whose duty it is to watch over the morals and welfare of the community, then it is high time that they be made acquainted with the truth; if, on the other hand, a non-belief in its existence, resulting either from a supposed conviction of its impossibility, or an hereditary prejudice, has retarded their investigations—then, also, is it time that they bestir themselves to eradicate this crying evil. Humanity demands it; the public

welfare demands it; all the better feelings inherent in man, rigorously call for the exaction of this sacred duty. Many of the Continental States have already seriously considered this subject; and all proceedings, such as those already enumerated, have been strictly forbidden. Still more, many Governments have expressed the desire, that all Physicians and true Philanthropists should spare no trouble in making such of their fellow-citizens as are ignorant of the nature of death, acquainted with the same—and also with the necessary and proper remedies which should, in doubtful cases, be applied.\*

As we are on this subject, and as the opportunity may not again so conveniently present itself, we shall offer a few observations on the highly reprehensible imprudence which characterizes the last preparations, prior to interment, of those supposed to be dead, and which are, for the most part, confided to an illiterate class of individuals.† That the remains of those dear to us, should be consigned to such a class, appears to us to exhibit a want of feeling, for the manifestation of which we are, certainly, at a loss to account. We have, more than once, quitted a chamber of death with sentiments of disgust on beholding the hardened demeanour and *business-like* manner in which this sacred duty, entrusted to them, is performed, to say

\* We believe that the most recent official document on this subject is the one issued by the Minister of the Interior, dated Paris, 3rd May, 1839.

† We beg to state, that these remarks do not refer to any particular congregation. We speak generally, and from what we ourselves have seen.