

# SCIENCE.

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## COMMENT AND CRITICISM.

THE RECENT COMPLETION of the new crematory at Mount Olivet, near Brooklyn, has again revived the subject of 'cremation *versus* inhumation.' An article by Dr. Rohé of Baltimore, recently published, takes the ground that there is no necessity of any radical change in our method of burial. While we are inclined to agree with him in his conclusions, we must take exception to a number of his statements. He says that, although the impression is general that cemeteries have an unfavorable influence upon the health of those living in the vicinity, there is very little trustworthy evidence to that effect. There is, we think, abundant evidence that in times past great injury to health has been caused by the burying of the dead in great numbers within city walls. Within recent times, when cemeteries are, as a rule, removed from the abodes of men, and are maintained in a far more sanitary way than formerly, these injuries have been reduced to a minimum. The history of New York City gives us proof of this. What is now Washington Square was seventy years ago the potter's field: from it arose most sickening odors at times. Troops stationed near it were seized with diarrhoea and fever, from which they did not recover until removed to another place. Trinity church cemetery was always regarded by the late Dr. Elisha Harris as contributing to the spread of cholera during epidemics of that disease in New York. He says, "Trinity churchyard, New York, has been the centre of a very fatal prevalence of cholera whenever the disease has occurred as an epidemic near or within a quarter of a mile of it." Other instances, almost without number, might be quoted as tending to show the prejudicial effect which some cemeteries have had upon the public health.

Dr. Rohé further states that "the generally observed good health of workmen in cemeteries and knackeries contradicts the opinion that the gaseous emanations from decaying animal matter are necessarily dangerous to health." This argument is one which needs great caution in its

handling. It is one which is applied to every pursuit in life when for any reason that pursuit is charged with being detrimental to health. Thus scavengers, factory hands, and even children brought up on swill-milk, are, by those whose interest it is to make the claim, always represented as being in typical health. Statistics are appealed to oftentimes to bear evidence to the fact that the mortality in such a business is very small, when, as a matter of fact, the occupation of the decedent is stated as 'clerk' or 'laborer,' and the particular line of his occupation does not appear. Dr. Wicker, in his 'Sepulture and its methods,' calls attention to the depreciation in health of those who spend much time in the dissecting-room, suffering also from derangements of the digestive organs and diarrhoea. He has also found that those engaged about knackeries suffer similarly. "They begin to emaciate and present a cadaverous appearance, slight wounds fester and become difficult to heal, and, upon the whole, they are a short-lived class." That there is some danger to be apprehended from the fouling of water in wells situated near cemeteries, is shown by the fact that sanitary authorities find it necessary to limit the distance within which wells may be dug. Dr. Rauch believed that the water-supply of Chicago was at one time affected by the proximity of an old cemetery to its source. This question, like all others, has two sides; and while there is at the present time no urgent reason why earth-burial should be abandoned, in this country at least, there are many reasons why cremation should not be discouraged. The sentiment in its favor is certainly growing, and many of its promoters are among the best thinkers of our day. We certainly believe that those who prefer incineration to inhumation should have every opportunity to gratify their wishes, and, if necessary, that they should be protected by legal enactment.

IN VOLUME XIX. of the new edition of the 'Encyclopaedia Britannica,' published during the present year, in the article 'Polar regions,' by Clements R. Markham, p. 326, we find the following paragraph on the geographical work of the Greeley arctic expedition: "Lieutenant Lockwood made a journey along the north coast of Greenland, and reached

a small island in  $83^{\circ} 24'$  [N. Lat.] and  $44^{\circ} .05'$  [W. Gr.]. Dr. Pavy and another went a short distance beyond the winter quarters of the Alert, and a trip was made into the interior of Grinnell Land. *But all this region had been explored and exhaustively examined by the English expedition in 1875-76.*" The italics are our own. Attention has recently been called to this statement by the author, Charles Lanman, of a little memorial volume on the life and arctic work of Lieut. James B. Lockwood.

It appears certainly most astonishing that a writer on geographical subjects, especially those relating to the arctic regions, should allow haste, international feeling, or any other impulse, to lead him to make a statement in an authoritative publication which is not only untrue, but unjust in the highest degree to an explorer who died of privation in the very field of his labors. No explanation seems possible. It has long been a matter of record that Lockwood's farthest was not only the highest latitude reached by civilized man, but more than one hundred geographical miles in a direct line beyond Beaumont's farthest, and that the English expedition neither mapped nor 'explored and exhaustively examined' that part of the Greenland coast, nor the interior of Grinnell Land westward from Lady Franklin Bay and Archer fiord. It would seem a duty for the publishers, in another volume of the encyclopaedia, to place on record some disclaimer of this falsification of history.

THE AMERICAN ECONOMIC ASSOCIATION, which was recently organized at Saratoga, is represented as obtaining hearty support and co-operation, not only from professional students in political economy, but also from business men, who take a wide interest in the financial and industrial questions of the day. Among its members there are already professors representing more than a score of colleges and universities in all parts of the country, several college presidents, lawyers, editors of some of the most influential journals in the country, and a large number of clergymen, among whom may be named Dr. Barrows and Newman Smythe, not to mention Dr. Gladden and Lyman Abbot, who are actively engaged in the council of the association. Leading manufacturers are interested in its success, one of whom employs several thousand working-people, and another has more than a thousand names on his pay-rolls. The spirit of

this broad and diversified support is well expressed in a letter from Dr. Elisha Mulford, the author of 'The nation,' in which he remarks that "in the transitions of human thought none has been more significant than the humanization of political economy." Committees are being organized for investigation on the co-operative plan. Under the leadership of Dr. Henry C. Adams, of the university at Ann Arbor, the committee on municipal finance is engaged in the special consideration of productive city property. It is collecting information concerning the relations of American municipalities to corporate institutions, such as railways, telephone lines, gas and water works, in order to determine the nature of the franchises which have been so freely bestowed by our cities. It will seek to learn, for instance, in what way rates of lighting-companies are controlled, and if any attempt is made to raise revenues from such institutions. This strikingly resembles the system of Le Play, and is thoroughly scientific in method. By such means an immense amount of economic data can be collected and synthesized in the light of economic science.

THOSE WHO ARE ANXIOUS to draw attention to themselves as claiming possible consideration from other scientific men too frequently have recourse to the use of all the titles which by accident or otherwise may have fallen to them. This tendency appears to have increased somewhat of late years, and, so far as this country is concerned, is doubtless an importation from Europe. It is, nevertheless, a tendency which should be deprecated. Aside from the very bad taste which it usually reveals, the indiscriminate use of all the titles which a man may possess, argues, in the first instance, a weakness which is thereby confessed to his scientific *confrères*. That titles have a definite value when properly used cannot be denied, and their attachment to a name on a business-card or in official correspondence is quite allowable; but even then, unless in exceptional cases, they should be reduced to the lowest terms consistent with the object in view. On the other hand, for one to go beyond his college and university degrees, and append the initials of all the scientific societies of which he may have become a member, savors of the methods adopted by the sciolist to gain cheap reputation. The modesty which usually characterizes true merit always shrinks from an undue display of the rewards which may have fallen to it.