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# GATHERINGS FROM GRAVEYARDS;

## PARTICULARLY THOSE OF LONDON.

By **GEORGE ALFRED WALKER, Surgeon.**

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## THE GRAVE YARDS OF LONDON;

With Mr. Walker's Evidence specially referred to by the Select Committee of the House of Commons, in their Report on the Health of Towns.

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### OPINIONS OF THE PRESS.

The grave yards, too, in large and populous places require attention; and though Mr. Walker has most *outrageously overstated* the case, yet there can be no doubt that burials among the dense population of a large town are undesirable in the highest degree.—Churchman (Ecclesiastical Report), April, 1842.

\* \* \* The Report of the Select Committee appointed by the House of Commons to inquire into this subject, will prove that Mr. Walker has considerably (as he was well aware) *understated* the case. The "Report," price 2s. 10d., may be had of Messrs. Harsard.

We will not attempt to offer any comments on the facts which have here been detailed; they speak for themselves. \* \* \* Having now completed our review of this work, it only remains for us to say, that it will be found well worth the perusal of every person at all interested in the preservation of the health, decency, and cleanliness of the metropolis, and may, perhaps, prove not unacceptable to the general reader, as presenting a complete and curious history of the different modes of interment which have been resorted to among different nations, as well as for its novel description of the burial places of London, which, we believe, have never, until now, formed the subject of any work.

In taking our final leave, we must, in justice to Mr. Walker, state, that the book is clearly and vividly written, and the author deserves great credit for the industry and zeal which he has displayed in his by no means agreeable researches among the grave yards; we hope, however, that he may reap a full reward for his labors, by seeing the disgusting nuisance, against which he has declared war, at least mitigated, even if not altogether put a stop to.—Dr Johnson's Medico Chirurgical Review, Jan 1, 1840.

In the third section of his Treatise, Mr. Walker takes a rapid view of the state of the principal burying grounds in the metropolis. The loathsome scenes, which a sense of duty compels him to disclose, are enough to excite the disgust of the most apathetic, and their exposure must, sooner or later, have the effect of working out the salutary reformation for which Mr. Walker has labored with such praiseworthy diligence, energy, and talent. Mr. Walker has personally examined the principal burying grounds, and shown, in the clearest manner, that thousands of bodies are annually interred in places which are barely calculated to contain as many hundreds. The effects of this on the *morale* and *physique* of the surrounding population are vividly depicted by the author. We recommend the general reader to meditate on them. With this recommendation we close our notice of Mr. Walker's Treatise. It is in every respect a remarkable production, and reflects the greatest credit on the qualities of his head and heart. Notwithstanding the labors of an extensive general practice, Mr. Walker has found time to investigate a subject of *very great importance to the health of the public*; he has succeeded in the work now before us in awakening an unusual degree of public attention to the subject of intramural sepulture; and we trust that Mr. Walker will not weary in his well-doing, but continue his exertions until this blot be wiped from our national character.—Lancet, 3rd Notice, January, 1840.

Mr. Walker's book is decidedly the most startling that has for some time past issued from the press; and if his opinions and suggestions are carried out, it will be the most useful to the public health that has appeared for years.—Medical Times, 3rd Notice.

These statements are quite sufficient to establish the fact of a great and intolerable nuisance in the heart of a populous city, and which ought by every means to be abated without delay.

It is not necessary to prove that the practice is capable of producing positive disease. \* \* \* But if the public authorities in London and other large towns are not satisfied of the slow and progressive, but certain homicide which they are authorising among the inhabitants, they have only to look into the present volume to obtain satisfactory evidence of the truth.—The Edinburgh Medical and Surgical Journal, April 1, 1840.

The grave is truly now a grave subject. The present writer does not even philosophise upon it; but he does better, perhaps—he lays before us some interesting historical records touching the funeral ceremonies of different nations and ages, and some important facts that come still more home to our bosoms and business, regarding the dangerous and detestable practice of burying the dead in the hearts of our great cities.—Colburn's New Monthly Magazine.

A work which has just been published under the somewhat quaint title of "Gatherings from Grave Yards" is likely, we think, to attract no small share of attention from the medical profession and the public generally. It is from the pen of G. A. Walker, Esq., a metropolitan surgeon, and has for its object to expose the "dangerous and fatal results which arise from the custom of inhuming the dead in the midst of the living." The facts brought forward by Mr. Walker in support of these positions are of the most startling character, and deserve the earliest and deepest consideration of all who are interested in the physical and moral well-being of their fellow men. The grave yards of the metropolis have particularly attracted the notice of the author, and from forty to fifty of such receptacles for the dead are described from personal examination. Some of these places, more particularly in the author's own immediate neighbourhood (Drury-lane), and other densely populated districts, would seem to be in a condition the most disgusting and dangerous that can be imagined. Mr. Walker ably exposes the iniquities of what are called private burying places; that is, vaults underneath, or grounds connected with, Dissenting meeting houses. \* \* \* Mr. Walker has manifestly given much labour and research to the subject of which he treats, and has brought together a vast body of facts of the most important character, very many of them from his own professional experience. \* \* \* Mr. Walker has performed, and performed well, an important duty in calling attention thus prominently to a matter so nearly relating to public health. He argues strenuously and eloquently for legislative interference to compel the adoption of a safer and more decent system in these places of sepulture, and it appears has made application to Government on the subject.—Morning Post.

This, work, though painful and repulsive in its details, is yet one which the exigencies of our crowded metropolis have loudly called for. \* \* \* The moral consideration of this question might be pursued to indefinite length; but there is another, more likely to have weight with the world, which the author of the work before us most powerfully adduces. It is that of the pernicious effect upon health to which the contiguity of the grave yard exposes the inhabitant of the city. Mr. Walker has demonstrated in the clearest and most forcible manner, that disease in its worst form is generated by the pestilential atmosphere of these wretched receptacles for the dead, and has strenuously urged the adoption of general measures for enforcing the prohibition of interment in the vicinity of the living. His appeal is made to the executive, with the conviction that ultimately the question must become one for consideration of the Government; we join in that appeal, and concur in that opinion, in the earnest hope that this necessary reform may speedily be effected.—Morning Herald.

The public in general, but more especially his professional brethren, are under considerable obligations to Mr. Walker for the publication of this work. He entered upon a painful and loathsome inquiry, and though exposed, in the course of his investigations, to many annoyances arising from the cupidity of interested individuals, or the apathy of those satisfied with the existing state of the grave yards, because, in their blindness, they see no danger, he has displayed much ability and sound medical knowledge. \* \* \* The subject is one from which a less original and humane mind would have shrunk. We sincerely trust that the public will not be slow to acknowledge the obligation they owe Mr. Walker, who, we repeat, has evinced perseverance, and a calm spirit of philosophical inquiry and judgment in the treatment of his subject.—Polytechnic Journal.

In England, at this day, there are modes of sepulture which would almost disgrace, as they would certainly disgust, a cannibal. \* \* \* The details, for which we refer to Mr. Walker, ought to awaken the minds of the inhabitants of the metropolis especially to their shocking nature, and tend, we should hope, to a speedy and effectual remedy.—Literary Gazette.

This is a learned and practical work of great merit.—Hull Packet.

Who would expect from such a title a detail of highly important facts, in which not only the humanity, civilisation, and polity of the national character, but the health of the metropolis, is deeply interested? \* \* \* \* On the whole this is the most important work, as respects the health, comfort, humanity, national character, and religion of the country, that has been published for many a day.—Satirist.

## PROVINCIAL MEDICAL ADVERTISER.

Mr. Walker's work collects into a small compass details the most horrifying, as affects the repose of the dead and the health of the living; but he accompanies this awful exposure with suggestions which, if attended to, will work its cure. It is the positive duty of the Government to enter on the business of purification; a duty from which no Government, after the publication of this book, can be suffered to shrink.

Mr. Walker has here laid the foundation of a reform of the most important and indispensable character, and in so doing has raised a monument to his own philanthropy.—*Church of England Quarterly Review.*

This gentleman deserves the highest praise for the pains he has taken in investigating personally the actual state of our burial-grounds and system of burying, and in collecting all the facts that bear upon the important though repulsive subject. We have read every line of his book, and, if it affect others only half as much as it has done us, it must inevitably produce an excitement which will end in a thorough reform of the horrors complained of, in spite of parsons' fees, vestry room economics, or the profits of companies or individuals, who would care not if they made all London one Golgotha, provided only they made money by it. We trust, indeed, that the next session of Parliament will not be allowed to pass without removing this foul blot from the national escutcheon. In the meanwhile, we earnestly call the attention of our legislators to Mr. Walker's book. Many of them will find horrors in it which they never dreamed of in their rose-coloured and sweet-scented philosophy. Our author's account of the manner in which the dead were first allowed to make foul and horrible the most recesses, the vaults, aisles, and galleries of the very house of God, is exceedingly curious, and is correct to the letter. Indeed, more than half his book is amusing as a literary essay, and interesting as a piece of antiquarianism.—*Metropolitan Magazine.*

Under the quaint title of "Gatherings from Grave Yards" Surgeon Walker exhibits such a picture of the repulsive associations and pestilential influences connected with the burial of the dead in the vicinity of the living, as to occasion some very natural astonishment that the subject has never been taken up by Government. \* \* \* \* Mr. Walker is well entitled to the gratitude of the public, for the ability with which he has penetrated the subject in all its details. \* \* \* \* He has entered elaborately into the different methods of interment employed in former ages by different nations of the earth, so that his book is really a historical treatise, as well as a medical essay, embracing the entire range of all the illustrative matter that can be brought to bear upon the inquiry. It will amply repay perusal.—*Monthly Chronicle.*

This is a book which we earnestly recommend to the philanthropist, to the general reader, and to those in authority. To the first it furnishes the means of benefiting the working classes especially by pointing out one great source, if not the greatest source, of contagious disease and death in all crowded cities; to the second it will, independent of its utility, afford considerable interest from its literary merit; to the third it points out a duty incumbent on them to be stirring in the removal of a great evil.—*Weekly Chronicle.*

Public attention—we wish we could add the attention of those in authority—has latterly been called more than once to the all important subject of which this volume treats; and his fellow citizens owe a heavy and lasting debt of gratitude to Mr. Walker, for the energy, knowledge, sound reasoning, and patient and laborious investigation, which he has employed in the execution of a most painful task—a task, we can readily believe, self-imposed, from motives of stern and inexorable duty.—*Era.*

The scope and character of this singular and valuable work will be inferred from the above generally descriptive notice; and we cannot too emphatically repeat our opinion that its contents and tendencies are alike of the most beneficial nature. It cannot fail, and most deservedly, to excite great attention; we certainly shall again look into the book, and again speak thereof.—*Morning Advertiser.*

The very interesting, as well as really important, work of Mr. Walker, the surgeon, on the subject of the "Grave Yards" of London, and on the consequences to the living from the present still too general system of burying the dead, deserves further notice. The public health is of public importance, and he who points out existing evils is doing national service. There are very full and really appalling details illustrative of the dangers arising from the decomposition of animal matter, and the diseases generated by it but after the above general descriptions, we must content ourselves with referring those to the work who wish for more extended particulars; and we trust that the number may be neither few nor unimportant.—*Morning Advertiser*, (second notice).

A work which deserves to be attentively studied by all who would preserve the health of the living, and honor the remains of the dead.—*Britannia.*

This is an extraordinary book, and as useful as extraordinary. \* \* \* \* We recommend this work to the serious attention of all classes.—*Sunday Times.*

We close this book with an earnest recommendation to our fellow citizens, for their health's sake, to make themselves acquainted with its facts, that they may be convinced of the evil.—*Weekly True Sun.*

We have great pleasure in referring to a volume just published by Mr. G. A. Walker, a surgeon of experience, entitled "Gatherings from Grave Yards, particularly those of London," in which the horrible consequences resulting from the modes of interment practised in almost every part of the metropolis, is clearly and practically demonstrated. Mr. Walker has been most industrious in the collection of his facts, and furnishes a vast number of anecdotes, highly interesting not only as to the modes of burial from the earliest periods, but as to the *revolting practices in modern times*, and close to the very thresholds of the unsuspecting.—*Bell's Life.*

This is a strange book—a very strange book—and must make a sad and solemn impression upon every reader who peruses it with proper feelings. It is full of facts of an appalling nature, and the reasoning of the author upon them carries conviction with it. His object is to show, that burial places in the neighbourhood of the living, are in his "opinion a natural evil, the harbinger, if not the originators of pestilence, the cause direct or indirect of inhumanity, immorality, and irreligion;" and well and forcibly does he make out his position. The book will create a sensation. We advise our readers to look into it, for, assuredly, it contains a very great deal, meriting their most serious consideration.—*Derby Mercury.*

The object of the author is to impress upon the public at large, and upon the legislature in particular, the dangers which arise to the living from the practice of inhuming the dead in the midst of crowded cities. His facts (having reference principally to the metropolitan grave yards) are of the most startling character, and the reasonings based upon them, able and conclusive. Mr. Walker has done the state no slight service, in calling attention to a fruitful source of disease hitherto all but overlooked. Were it not that everything connected with public health is so entirely neglected by the constituted authorities, we should have strong hopes that this excellent work would tend to speedy reform, in a matter of infinitely more moment than many of the quack "reforms" of the day.—*Railway Times.*

Mr. Walker's work comes most acceptably to us, as providing us with strong arguments, and confirming us in our already expressed opinions, that burying our dead within the busy haunts of men, is *irrational, unhealthy, and offensive*. Some books are written for the purpose of imparting instruction to a class, or classes, or affording amusement to a comparative few. But this work is "universal"—husband and wife—parent and child—brother and sister—and all the relations in the great family of man must be deeply interested in it. The details in the "Gatherings" are of a most appalling nature. A deep debt is due to Mr. Walker for his labors. We intend frequently to quote from this work, and once again earnestly entreat our readers in this city to procure a copy.—*Chester Gazette.*

To all those who are curious about Christian burial, we recommend the perusal of this work. Lugubrious as the subject is, the ingenious writer has contrived to divest it of much of its revolting details, and to present to the reader information which is interesting, and to bring before the public in a forcible manner, some useful practical suggestions. To the medical man it is a manual of facts necessary to be borne in mind; to the legislator it is the exposure of evils which peremptorily demand a remedy.—*Courier.*

The author of the present work, Mr. G. A. Walker, a surgeon, of Drury-lane, discusses the fatal effects arising from the effluvia of bodies in decomposition, the evasion of the law with respect to the depth of graves, the insecurity of leaden coffins, and the danger to churches by undermining walls and towers for the purpose of constructing vaults. An immense mass of important facts is collected on the subject, and the descriptions of the state of the church yards in the crowded parts of our metropolis may make foreigners rank us as the very worst of savages.—*Weekly Dispatch.*

If anything were yet wanting to convince the living of the dangerous and fatal results produced by the unwise and revolting custom of inhuming the dead amidst their dwellings and places of common resort, this work would inevitably have that effect. The fatal consequences attending the practice are stated to conviction in the arguments of the author, and the various facts of pestilence and sudden death given by way of illustration afford horrible evidence of their truth. The work also affords some very curious information on the practice of ancient nations in the disposal of their dead, in which the curious reader will not fail to find much that will inform and amuse him. It is a production which deserves the serious consideration of the public.—*Argus.*

We have not for a length of time perused a work more full of sound sense and proper feeling. We defy any one to read Mr. Walker's extraordinary accumulation of facts without being convinced of the importance of the case which he so fully makes out. The account given of the various churches, and the anecdotes, biographies, &c., which are introduced, are singularly interesting; but even without these the book is so startling in its details, that it must command attention. Mr. Walker's history of the modes of interment among different nations, from the earliest periods, is highly elucidatory of his subject, for introducing which to public notice he deserves the greatest praise.—*Age.*

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August, 1842.

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EDMUND BELFOUR, Sec.

August 3, 1842.