

## SEPULTURE OF THE LIVING.

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IN the eighteenth century whole nations believed in vampirism. In Greece, Russia, Poland, and Hungary, unnumbered corpses were dragged from their graves, the heads cut off and burned, and the bodies left at cross-roads with stakes driven through the hearts. The superstition of the time taught that these were ghouls, who prolonged an unnatural and hideous existence within the tomb by subtly absorbing for their nourishment the vital energies of those yet living. Their ghastly careers could only be terminated by the disinterment and mutilation of their carcasses.

Our first impulse is to abhor such brutal treatment of the dead, while we marvel at the ignorance that sanctioned it as legal procedure. Yet the cruel folly was not wholly without excuse. The accused dead were put on trial, and the sentence was determined by circumstantial evidence. When the living sickened without apparent cause and wasted away, the secret source of their affliction was believed to be the vampire ghosts that came forth from the sepulchres to suck the blood of life for their own uncanny nourishment. Thereupon the suspected bodies were taken from their graves for examination. If they had suffered corruption they were declared innocent. But if they retained their flesh untainted by decomposition, with the blood fluid in their veins, they were adjudged guilty, and the final penalties of their crimes were visited upon them. The official records of the time prove to us that many were thus condemned by reason of their unchanged bodies, though they had been weeks entombed.

The inevitable conclusion to which we are forced is that in vampirism we find a ghastly witness to the extent of living sepulture. In the written account of the punishment of vampire corpses, there are statements to the effect that some of the bodies were convulsed at the last moment as if in torture, that the blood flowed, the eyes unclosed; that one shrieked as if in agony. We need not question the truth of such assertions. They are authoritatively made, and are to be accepted as credible. We cannot doubt that many, if not all, of the victims of vampirism were of those most afflicted of all human beings, those tormented by fate, who are numbered with the dead, and cast into the earth, while yet the breath of life is in them.

My own observation, pursued for a number of years, prepares me to assert that in this country one person each week is buried alive.

This is the mildest statement possible, since it refers only to the cases where bodies are exhumed, indubitable traces of life in the grave detected, and the facts are reported in the public press. When we consider that hardly one in a thousand of the bodies buried is ever again examined, when we consider that weekly one of the few examined is found to have been buried alive, we are appalled at the awful possibilities — aye, the awful realities — as to the extent of living sepulture.

Physicians are not partial to public utterances on the subject. The theme is too horrible for popularity. They hesitate to declare the facts, since the facts are rather injurious to themselves, as showing their inability, under certain conditions, to distinguish between life and death. Moreover, in the generality of cases, the remedial methods are doubtful, or difficult of execution. I have discussed the subject with many men prominent in the medical world, and, without exceptions, they refuse to be quoted on the subject, but in their confidences most of them have admitted the accuracy of the facts I have already set forth, and a few have agreed with me in the theories which I shall now detail.

My attention was first seriously called to the subject at the time of Washington Irving Bishop's death. I was well acquainted with the celebrated mind-reader, and was with him once when he fell into a cataleptic state and when the physicians who were summoned pronounced him dead. I have no wish to revive the question as to whether or not the haste of the physicians who performed the autopsy on Bishop was satisfied in operating on a corpse or on a living body. It is enough for my present purposes to say that the inquiry incident to his death attracted my particular attention to the phenomena of catalepsy, and, in consequence, to the subject of living sepulture.

It should be understood that when a person is in the cataleptic trance every test of death known to medical skill may warrant the belief that the person is dead. To mention but one example: a woman, now living, was twice pronounced dead, prepared for burial, and saved from being buried alive by accident. In this case the fallibility of tests is dreadfully apparent, because the first mistake was known to the physicians when they made their second examination. On this account they used every precaution and painstakingly proved her to be dead, — though she is not yet.

Self-induced catalepsy is a possibility. We need not consider the Oriental fakirs, who are claimed to possess the ability to suspend animation for almost any length of time. Regarding these as doubtful, despite the formal evidence in their favor, there are persons living to-day who can at will enter into a condition of trance, and in some the trance is so profound as to present all the appearances of death.

Catalepsy is not a disease. Physicians admit that they know little concerning it, but one eminent authority has asserted that, of itself, it is never fatal. Indeed, from an elaborate examination of a large number of cases, I may declare that disease is hardly ever fatal when the patient falls into a cataleptic state.

Now, from the two paragraphs above we may deduce two propositions of extreme importance to the subject of living sepulture :

First, catalepsy is a form of hypnotic trance ;

Second, catalepsy is a nature's method of combating disease.

Both of these propositions deserve our thoughtful attention. They are, I believe, supported by enough evidence to render them highly probable, and, therefore, to be accepted as true until scientific investigation shall have become exact. Let us, then, examine the proposition that catalepsy is a form of hypnotic trance.

In the hypnotic trance the subject's will slumbers. In the deep trances there is a suspension of activity in the vital functions. The vital organs rest. Voluntary movement is an impossibility. The Nancy and Paris schools alike unite in believing so much, and we may regard that much of hypnotism as determined.

But that much of hypnotism in which all the experts are agreed, exactly applies to cataleptic trance.

Catalepsy is caused by nervous exhaustion or disease ; it is caused by the hypnotic influence of another person ; it is caused by auto-suggestion in the case of certain individuals ; it is caused, in what is known as epidemic catalepsy, by auto-suggestion that takes the form of persistent fear lest the cataleptic condition should come, — the physicians say caused by imitation. In all of these the resemblance to the causes of hypnotic trance are so marked as to need no comment.

In the cataleptic trance ordinarily the subject is aware of that which goes on round about. One ignorant of hypnotism might believe that this fact differentiated the cataleptic from the hypnotic condition. In truth, the hypnotized person ordinarily is aware of that which goes on round about. Only in the most profound sleep is this not the case, apparently, but in a number of very careful investigations the apparent variation has been shown to be merely apparent, and not real.

Having said so much to establish the probable identity of catalepsy with hypnotic trance, I shall proceed to my second proposition that catalepsy is a nature's method of combating disease.

Many have a mistaken notion to the effect that the hypnotic trance is peculiarly exhausting to the subject. On the contrary, the slumber itself is absolute rest for the subject. Of course, while asleep he, like any somnambulist, may go through fatiguing exercises, but if left to repose, that repose is more restful than ordinary sleep, inasmuch as it is

more profound than ordinary sleep. Any number of experiments, in and out of the hospitals, prove conclusively that hypnotic trance is most refreshing to the subject, and restores from the consequences of fatigue or exhaustion more rapidly than any other known means.

Applying our knowledge of this fact to catalepsy, which we may now believe to be identical with the hypnotic trance, we are prepared to suspect that the patient who falls into catalepsy would thereby receive rest and succor against the exhaustion of disease. Such is the inevitable conclusion from our theory. Turning to our facts for confirmation, we find that, almost without exception, the patient who enters into the cataleptic state recovers from his disease. The only requirement is intelligent treatment when the cataleptic condition supervenes. It would seem that nature, in using the cataleptic trance, makes its final effort to save the patient from death. Through it, the torment or the atrophy of disease is succeeded by repose the most peaceful, the most profound, that the mortal body experiences. The time during which the slumber continues is determined by the patient's requirements. It may be short, it may be long.

It is obvious that, if catalepsy is a nature's method of combating disease, no effort should be made to arouse the patient from the healing slumber. Evidently, to do so would be to thwart nature's last effort. If the means employed, usually violent, are successful, the nervous shock must be tremendous, the result disastrous. On the other hand, if the means employed are not successful, the patient will probably be buried alive.

One other phase of the subject is most important. We know that the cataleptic subject is, ordinarily, conscious of that which occurs in his presence. The subject is in an hypnotic trance, and, therefore, is powerfully influenced by suggestion. The testimony of persons thought to be dead is to the effect that often they, too, believed that they were dead. They heard themselves declared to be dead, and accepted the declaration without question. In view of this, it is apparent that, when the physicians solemnly pronounce the patient dead, when the family wail over the supposed corpse, and the undertaker makes it ready for burial, the unhappy victim, in his trance incapable of any exercise of will, bound, like the puppet of a mesmerizer, to believe whatever is said to him, however unreasonable, — that unhappy victim may, though living and conscious, be assured of his own decease, may accept as eminently reasonable his descent into the grave, the falling of the clods on his coffin, may be undeceived only when nature's thwarted effort to combat disease ends, and he awakes to know the horror of his fate, to die, indeed, unheeded, bound to a brief but awful torment in the blackness of the tomb.

To suggest means for lessening the present evils is a difficult task. Cremation of the dead is of no particular benefit. To be burned alive in an instant, is better, doubtless, than to die in the ground, but what we desire is a death unassisted by our friends' mistaken haste.

In the first place, the apparent death of the person should not be commented on in the presence of that person, on account of the influence of such suggestion in delaying or preventing the return to a normal condition. The patient should be regarded as sleeping, and whatever is said or done in his presence should not contradict the idea that he will awake.

As to the other phase of the question, the avoiding of living sepulture: The tests for determining death as they are made by physicians to-day are *not* conclusive, so far as cataleptic subjects are concerned. To bury the living is, indeed, a grave crime against humanity's rights. It requires a grave preventive measure. My own researches and those of many others make me positive that there is but one sure proof of death—the corruption of the body. Other tests fail; that test never fails. It is the only certain means, and should always be awaited as the proof of death, before the body is treated as a corpse. Artificial means of preventing that corruption should be done away; autopsies should forego their scientific haste, for the sake of giving the patient every chance of life; in fine, until the visible and undeniable evidence of death appears, the patient has a supreme right to be treated as one who lives, despite all superficial signs to the contrary.

The remedy is repugnant to us, but it need not be. Assuredly, at the worst, it is incomparably less repugnant than living sepulture. If all thus buried could come forth from their graves to tell us of their horrid death within the sepulchre, as many have come already, could we hesitate for a moment before that ghastly phalanx of the tortured? Could we wilfully increase that grewsome and accusing company, for the sake of a sentiment? Let us retain our dear ones as living, until death shows us, by his own plain signet of corruption, that they are his.