

A PLEA FOR CREMATION: THE PUBLIC HEALTH IMPLICATIONS OF CALAMITY & CRIME IN 19TH-CENTURY IRELAND

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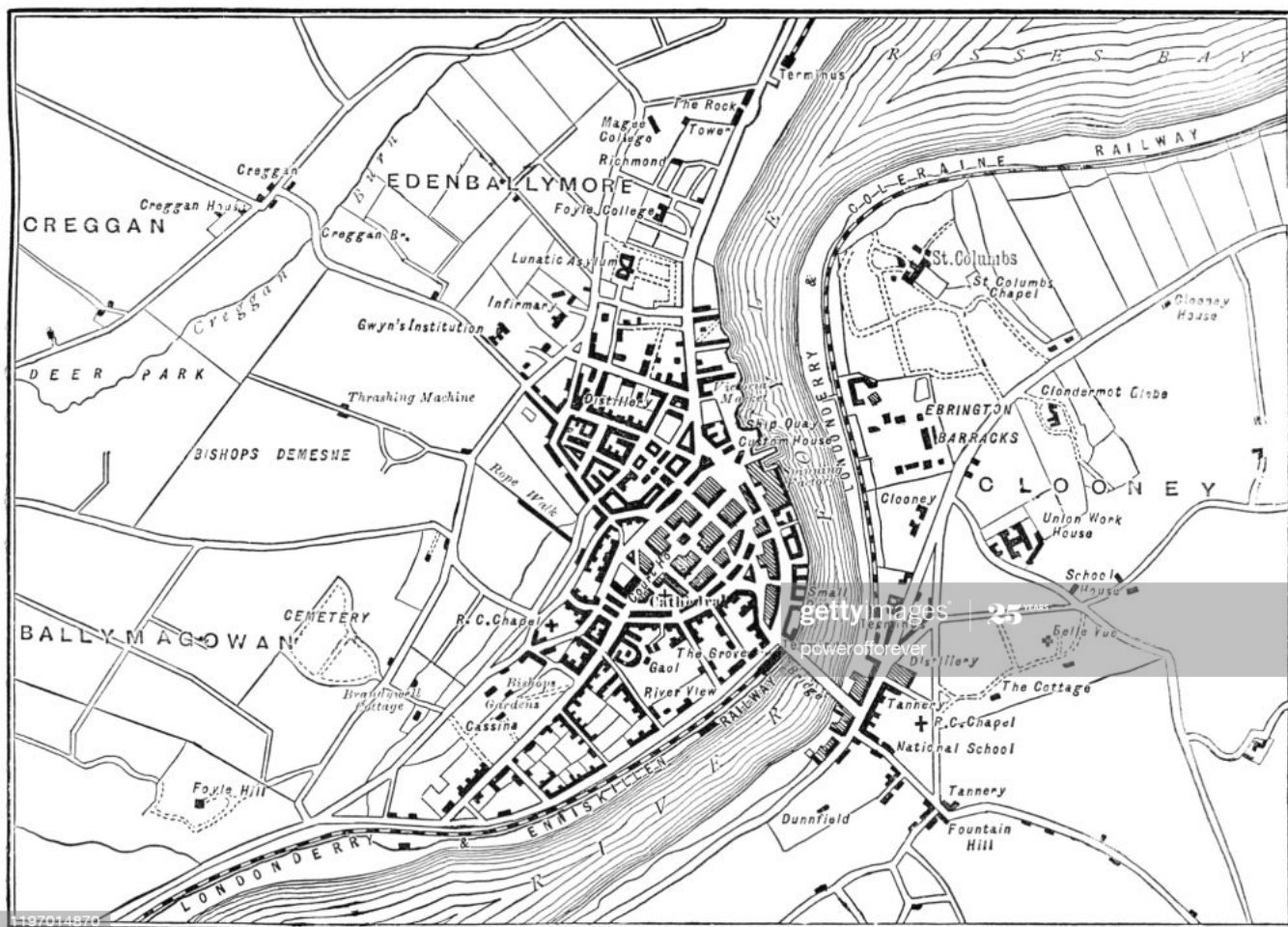
A PLEA FOR CREMATION.

From a sanitary point of view, we have from the beginning favoured in these columns the system of cremation. Although the earth is a great purifier, yet in view of the rapid increase of the population and the massing of thousands in our cities and towns, the soil may be overcharged with feculent matter, and the sources of our water supply in the future seriously endangered. It was found necessary several years since to pass an act to put a stop to intramural interments, except under certain conditions. It cannot for a moment be contended that to perpetuate the system of parochial graveyards would not be a monstrous nuisance and a danger to

not be allowed to be perpetuated by the State.

Since writing the above, some remarks in our medical contemporary the *Lancet* have met our eyes. It says the great difficulty about cremation, and the principal obstacle to its general adoption, is the danger of affording facilities for the commission of murder by poison. It thinks, however, that it would be possible to organise a system of post-mortem examination in every case, so as to get rid of the difficulty. It also thinks it would be a good social policy, so far as health is concerned, to burn bodies instead of burying them.

LUSK,
From Lusk, a cave, we enter by way of Grace Dieu, a townland which has its name from an ancient monastery of which only the foundations now remain, extending 81 ft. by 21 ft. Within the enclosure is a large flat tombstone to the memory of "Johannes Hurley, *cujus anima propitiatur Dominus Amen,*" but there is also, and at a short distance in the field adjacent is another ancient stone with inscription of the dead. The cemetery itself has been entirely destroyed, and the plot has long passed over and sown up the sacred earth where



Map of Londonderry, c. 1840

COST OF CREMATION.—The Paris Municipal Council has established a scale of prices for incineration ceremonies in the city's apparatus at the Père-Lachaise. For cremation proper the uniform price 50*l.* has been fixed, including the privilege of leaving for five years the ashes in the columbarium to be installed by the city. The urn to hold the ashes is to be supplied by the family. For the accompanying ceremonies a payment is to be charged varying according to the funeral decoration of the building. For funerals of the first, second, and third classes 200*l.* shall be due; fourth and fifth classes, and non-residents, 150*l.*; sixth, 50*l.*; seventh, 25*l.*; eighth, 12*l.*; and paupers gratis. The foregoing does not include the carriages and other expenses, for which the "Pompes funèbres" company have regular rates, according to each class mentioned above, well known to Parisians. So that, after all, the saving in cremation—since cremationists insist on this point—consists in economising the not inconsiderable cost of a cemetery plot.

The Chemist and Druggist, August 24, 1889, p. 262.

Turning from burial in our cemeteries and churchyards, and such places as I have described to you in Ireland, to burial in churches and abbeys and cathedrals, consider for a moment what incalculable advantages cremation would give over the present system of encasing the dead body in lead and oak, and leaving it beneath the floor where priests and people daily attend public worship, exposed to more or less great danger for months and years from the poisonous emanations which must escape so long as more than the dry bones remain. Last Saturday the

W. Robinson, *Cremation and Urn-Burial or The Cemeteries of the Future*
(London, Paris, New York & Melbourne: Cassell & Company, Limited, 1889), p. 168.