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Burying the Dead

Freedom Press

April 1, 1888

THE original free, unconsciously Anarchist, institutions of our country, which Kemble describes as during the Saxon period "supplying a mutual guarantee of peace, security, and freedom for the inhabitants of a district," have constituted down to the present day the boast of Englishmen. But how changed they are: oh I quantum mutatabillis I.

These originally free institutions of the English people have been attacked on both sides; by the over-growth of central government, and by the usurpations of that class whose fortune has been the misery of the people.

The process of such political "enclosures," as it were, was extremely varied. Now the committee of the people's assembly was substituted for the assembly itself; now the function of moderator or executor in such assemblies was invested in a permanent and authoritative official. Again, the oppressive centralized system of criminal justice has gradually grown out of the original "sworn inquest"; just as the police organization has grown out of the "frank pledge" and "hue and cry," and superseded the old methods of mutual responsibility.

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As property became more and more of a monopoly, property qualifications were more rigorously exacted as the basis of all claim to a right to fulfill public functions, and popular franchises gradually disappeared under a network of self-appointed rulers. Briefly, justice, administration, education, sanitation, roads—even charity—fell into the hands of the propertied class, and became their privilege. A part of the nation ceased to exist, or to appear in public life. The poor were eaten up or condensed in, or, as the language now runs, represented by the rich.

The process, however, having been brought about by successive encroachments on popular rights and slow alteration of early institutions, has at length become so cumbrous, so hampering, that it is thought fit to introduce in it a little order and uniformity. The Local Government Bill now under the consideration of our legislators, proposes to sink all the irregularities and anomalies of the present system in the more centralized one of 11 County Councils.”

Shall we therefore be better off I Not a wit. To the rule of country gentlemen is to succeed the rule of the trading bourgeoisie, the rule of political parties or big electors. This means the end of one illusion, the beginning of another This means the political Continentalization of England following on the economical Anglization of the Continent. This means, however, also that we approach the end, and therefore revert to the beginning—to the free organization, which was at the bottom of the early English institutions.