

# LETTERS FROM THE PEOPLE.

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## Rabbi Frey Explains.

Editor News Tribune.

The sensational story "A Jewish Lady Buried Alive," (reported in the News Tribune), given in the Friday's Herald, must receive some explanation in order that non-Jews may not increase their lore of "fiction about the Jews."

I shall start with speaking about sickness. Let every one understand that the Jews never embraced the idea of the "Christian Scientists," from I xxi. 19, "and shall cause him to be thoroughly healed," the Rabbis inferred that a physician is meant, hence, they deducted, a physician is God's instrument to heal or alleviate pain (Berakboth 60 a.) He that suffers from pain shall send for a physician (Baba Kama 46 b.)

In every Jewish congregation there was an association called "Hebra Kedisha gomlal hasadim Congregatio sancta benefactorum." The duty of its members consisted in watching with the sick to summon ten members at least when the symptoms of death were approaching, to recite the last prayers with the dying to wash the body and to dress it in shrouds which had been prepared by women. Men were not allowed to perform the ablution on female bodies, which please notice, is done in our civilized countries. No recompense was taken for those acts of love. The body was then removed from its couch, and buried after six hours, which had its good reasons. This was ordained about 1,800 years ago in Babylon. In hot climates the corpse could perhaps not have been kept for a longer time. As our Rabbis sought for every opinion they expressed a passage in the Bible as support; they interpreted v xxi. 23, "but thou shalt in any wise bury him that day" (which clearly refers there to a culprit); everybody shall be interred the same day (Lanchedrin 46 C.) Perhaps they wished to efface the disgrace from the criminal after he had suffered death for his misdeeds, as they, even in the lost man, respected the image of God.

There is a more valid reason for the hurried burial. Among the Greeks it was customary to leave a corpse as a pawn or a pledge to a creditor until the debt was paid. The Jews, that were not inclined to trifle with principles that are the highest to religious people, beheld in such a deed a profanation of sacred impressions and hallowed representations, and accordingly the Rabbis passed the ordinance to hasten the removal of the body to its everlasting repose. The early Christians, too, buried the dead after six hours. However, as we live in countries where such practice would be severely punished the ordinance has no application. Moreover, the fundamental doctrine of Samuel "Dina demalkhutha dina" the law of the country (in which we live) is (our) law (Baba Bathra 55 a), is our guidance. In a compilation of opinions set forth by our Rabbis of a later period we read: Persons ought to be the cemetery (at a house where bodies are deposited) and watch for three days, for it happened that a man (was thought to be dead) and then came to life and lived for 25 years (Lamaboth chap. xiii.)

The early France was well known to the Rabbis of yore, which is visible from many passages of the Talmud and rabbinical literature. In one of our prayers on the second day of the New Year we make supplication to the Lord that "he may show the grace (miracle) to us that we be not considered as dead" (while

perhaps being in a trance.)

The sage's dealing on death of woman in delicate condition give the surest sign of death ( Niddah 69 b) mention the reason why to wait for that sign and use a word which Rashi (born 1040 d. 1105) explains with the French word *pasdunir-gamer*—fainting tetanus—and continues it is a condition which resembles death. Some European states were legislating on such cases and the laws read that such bodies must be buried after six or eight hours, because decay is progressing. I presume such had been the case with the lady that died Tuesday at Superior. It takes indeed a great deal of imagination to believe that a body in thin shrouds exposed to the cold of a winter day for several-hours, should be alive yet when lowered into the grave. That Jews bury at night, except in time of epidemics, is entirely unknown to me. The non-Jew must not confound Jewish customs as obligations binding upon all of Israel. If, for instance, a Jewish congregation of Wilna or Smyrna has introduced some rites, it is as little incumbent upon a congregation in Duluth or elsewhere to practice them as it is with American Christians to observe ceremonies and customs of exotic Christians.

If I have been more explicit in these remarks than the case may call for I was urged by my wish to have Jews as well as non-Jews understand some of the Jewish customs better than they do at present—then such sensational stories as have been circulated lately will not be credited any more.

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