

CREMATION.

WHAT shall be done with the dead? This is a question that is pressing for an answer, and is increasing in importance every year. Radical youth is inclined to treat the subject with indifference; but conservative old age asks for the ancestral burial, the coffin, the mound, the flowers, and the marble headstone. Most of us are anxious to be buried beside our forefathers, and to be allowed to rest side by side with those of former generations—turning aside with some repugnance from the suggestion of cremation. But a short consideration of the question will perhaps tend to change our views materially. The grass-covered, flower-strewn cemetery seems a paradise for the dead—but only on the exterior. Could we remove the covering of earth, what a sight would meet our senses—crumbling into dust, putrefaction, dissemination of disease-germs, and (horror of horrors!) death-struggles renewed! The thought is too awful to contemplate, even in its most favorable aspect—the grave is too truly a Gehenna.

Cremation, however, presents a less repugnant sight; it accomplishes exactly the same chemical decomposition in a shorter period; it prevents grave-robberies and the possibility of live burials; it checks the spread of infectious diseases through the air and earth; it economizes space, which is one of its strongest arguments; it is more likely, by its proposed regulations, to prevent poisoning and foul crimes than the present method of burial.

We need not hesitate to adopt a custom which has been prevalent with other nations for centuries; for the bodies of those whom we prize the most in our history were thus treated—the martyrs were cremated at the stake.

An English poet has thus put his arguments in verse:—

“ Though our atmosphere is laden with the germs of fell disease,
 And the black, polluted river wafts its poison on the breeze;
 Though the filth of sium and alley spreads contagion far and wide,
 Still we look upon cremation as a horror—from our side.