

THE DISPOSAL OF THE DEAD.

In his annual report on the mortality in England, just issued, the Registrar-General enters at some length into the consideration of the disposal of the dead. Dismissing embalming as a failure, and moreover as forbidden by nature, Dr. Farr reviews the system of cremation advocated by Sir Henry Thompson and combated by Dr. Holland, the Medical Inspector of Burials. On the whole, the Registrar-General seems about equally balanced in favor of burial and cremation. He says:—

“In comparing the two methods, their cost in ceremonial and monuments may be set down as equal, it may be either great or small, but the indispensable outlay in inhumation and cremation will differ to an extent that experience alone can determine. On the side of the public health cremation has the best of it; it destroys the germs of zymotic diseases, of offense, and of corruption at once. It is especially suitable to the dead by epidemic diseases. The present abuses of a barbarous burial system must cease. But there is no reason why a well-devised inhumation and perfected cremation should not go on side by side; the one or the other being adopted so as to meet the exigency of each case, creed, place and climate. Habits change slowly, and if trials are made experience will decide. Neither of the systems when once in use will excite in common minds more repugnance than Nature, desiring her creatures to love life, has thrown over the contemplation of dissolution. Some will prefer a house of rest in the earth; others a home in the sky. It is easily conceivable that a woman of refined mind might choose cremation to escape what she dreads of worms, mould, eremacausis, putrefaction, or any kind of profanation. The question of interment is, as the population increases, becoming every day more urgent; it is not a mere question of sectarian grievance; it is a prime question of public health. Churchyards infect cities. Burial must be shorn of its dangers. It is vain to attempt to throw all the blame of existing abuses on undertakers. Their occupation is not attractive; it is unhealthy. They do very fairly what they are required to do by families who are swayed by fashion. Nor is it in England a matter of great reproach against the proprietors of cemeteries that they are ‘trading companies’, that is, companies which advance capital, and offer to perform certain services on certain terms. What would the state of London be without its fourteen cemeteries, some of which are now full? The day will probably soon come when the several municipalities and sanitary authorities may, after due inquiry, and on equitable