

Annotations.

THE DISPOSAL OF THE DEAD.

The advantages of cremation are becoming more and more widely recognised each year, and the recent Report issued by the Medical Officer of Health for London contains many interesting facts on the matter. In 1902 there were five cases in which human remains were disinterred in the City of London under Dr. Collingridge's supervision and re-interred elsewhere, and in these operations it is estimated that the remains of no less than 4,051 persons were dealt with. The following is a summary of these proceedings, the numbers being those of the bodies exhumed:—Allhallows', London Wall, 2,368; St. Ethelburga, Bishopsgate, 80; Christ's Hospital, 91; St. George's, Eastcheap, 1,420; Newgate Gaol, 92.

Of these, perhaps the most interesting exhumations were the two last-named. The task at St. George's, Eastcheap, was commenced on September 15th, 1902, and completed on December 13th. In all, 150 lead coffins, and 71 cases of bones—estimated to contain the remains of 1,420 bodies—were disinterred and re-buried at the Necropolis at Woking. As regards Newgate Gaol, a licence was granted in October last by the Home Secretary, under the provisions of the Burial Act, 1857, and the work of removal, which lasted from November 11th to January 7th, resulted in the disinterment of 73 baskets of bones, 57 skulls, and 35 bodies, representing in all the remains of 92 persons, which were placed in 46 cases and re-buried. Dr. Collingridge was in constant attendance at Newgate during these operations, which afforded an excellent opportunity of ascertaining whether the existing method of intramural burial in cases of capital punishment is attended with danger to the public health. His opinion, based upon this experience, is couched in very significant words:—

"Without going into unnecessary and undesirable details, it suffices to state here that the condition of the remains of the exhumed malefactors in Newgate Gaol forced the conclusion that the present system of burial is fraught with danger to the living, being lacking in every essential conducive to the public health.

"It would not become your Medical Officer to discuss here whether or not that part of the death sentence relating to the place of burial of a murderer is a remnant of a vindictive and

barbaric age, but there can be no impropriety in urging the cessation of a system that the experience gained at Newgate has proved unmistakably to be both ineffective and dangerous."

Dr. Collingridge shows, by a long quotation from Brooke Little's work on the "Law of Burial," that intramural burial rests with the Secretary of State, who may, by writing, appoint some other place for that purpose. There is no need to discuss whether the method of burial within the prison walls is or is not "a remnant of a vindictive and barbaric age," because there can be no doubt that it is so. The hygienist sees in it an ignorant custom highly injurious to the health of the community; the theologian cannot but recognise the futility of punishing the body when the soul which made it an instrument of crime has left it, and the legislator cannot but feel a conviction as to the inefficacy of vindictiveness as a preventive of murder. With properly framed and carefully administered laws as to the Registration of Deaths, cremation could be the general, as it is certainly the best, method of disposal of the dead. The only real objection to cremation is the sentimental one, and a proper knowledge of physiology and hygiene, such as one hopes may one day be universally gained in our schools, will easily remove it.

HOLIDAYS FOR POOR CHILDREN.

Lord Avebury and the Earl of Erroll appeal as trustees of the Children's Country Holidays Fund for aid to enable it to send poor children from fifty-six districts in London for a fortnight's holiday in the country. The fund works through the day schools of London. It includes schools of every class—Board schools, Church schools, Roman Catholic schools, and others. Parents contribute towards the cost according to their means, from a few pence up to the full amount required. The only test demanded is the need for the change and the impossibility of obtaining it in any other form than through the fund, and the average cost of a child's holiday, including all expenses, is about 13s. The average payment by the parent for each child is 5s. Every additional 8s. subscribed will ensure an additional child receiving a fortnight's holiday. No expenditure of money by the charitable results in greater good than sending town children into the country in summer-time, where, closely in touch with Nature, they realise how sweet and wholesome life may be. It is a moral, mental, as well as a physical refresher.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)