

Introductory report, suggesting the outline of a scheme for extramural interment : submitted to the Improvement-Committee of the Hon. the Commissioners of Sewers of the City of London / by the Medical Officer of Health.

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INTRODUCTORY REPORT,

SUGGESTING THE OUTLINE OF A SCHEME FOR

EXTRAMURAL INTERMENT;

SUBMITTED TO THE

IMPROVEMENT-COMMITTEE

OF THE


HON. THE COMMISSIONERS OF SEWERS

OF THE

CITY OF LONDON,

BY THE

MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH.



LONDON:

PRINTED BY C. DAWSON, 148 $\frac{1}{2}$, FENCHURCH STREET.

1853.

INTRODUCTORY REPORT

OF THE

EXTRAMURAL SYSTEM

PRESENTED TO THE

COMMISSIONERS

OF THE

OF THE

OF THE COMMISSIONERS OF SEWERAGE

OF THE

CITY OF LONDON

BY

MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH

LONDON

PRINTED BY G. BARNES, 10, FLEET STREET

1881

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*At a Meeting of the Committee upon Improve-
ments of the Commissioners of Sewers
of the City of London, Wednesday,
April 27th, 1853—*

The Medical Officer of Health, pursuant to the Resolution of this Committee of the 10th December, 1852, laid before the Committee the following Report, which, having been read, was ordered to be printed forthwith, and a copy to be sent to every member of the Commission.

JOSEPH DAW,

Principal Clerk.

CITY INTERVIEW

At a Meeting of the Committee upon the

Report of the Commissioners of Health

of the City of London, held on the

14th July 1853.

THE OFFICE OF HEALTH

The Medical Officer of Health, pursuant to the

Resolution of this Committee of the 14th Decem-

ber 1852, laid before the Committee the following

Report, which, having been read, was ordered to

be printed forthwith, and a copy to be sent to

every member of the Committee.

JOSEPH DAW.

I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 14th inst. in relation to the report of the Commissioners of Health, and in reply to inform you that the same has been forwarded to the proper authorities for their consideration.

CITY INTERMENTS.

INTRODUCTORY REPORT

BY

THE OFFICER OF HEALTH.

TO THE IMPROVEMENT-COMMITTEE

OF THE

HON. THE COMMISSIONERS OF SEWERS OF THE
CITY OF LONDON.

Lancaster Place; March, 1853.

GENTLEMEN,

Under the several clauses of the Metropolitan Burials Act, and under certain clauses of the City Sewers Act 1848, the Commissioners of Sewers, acting as a Burial-Board for the City of London, will be subject to the following responsibilities; viz:—

person buried there, however humble his previous station in life, may in death claim a grave to himself. It has been the opprobrium of our previous system that, in the poorer classes of interments, many bodies have been huddled together into a single pit. Probably you will think, as regards your future burial-place, that no consideration of cheapness can justify this indecency: probably you will be unwilling that, in a presence which confounds all social comparisons, there should be drawn, with your sanction, between rich and poor any so disrespectful distinction. But at all events, on sanitary grounds, I feel bound to assure you that these multiple burials are quite inadmissible. With such concentration of organic remains in very narrow compass, the soil grows utterly foetid; and it becomes impossible to guard against nuisance arising to the public, or against danger to those who are occupied in digging and tending the ground. These evils, indeed, are so glaring, and the indecorum of crowded interment has long been so notorious, that nothing could have given them continuance except the necessities of our narrow accommodation under the system of intramural burial: and it would of course be without excuse to perpetuate them under the changed circumstances of extramural Cemeteries, where space can so readily be obtained for all legitimate requirements of the public. So far as the experience of other countries may help to determine your judgment in this matter, I may inform you

that, in every foreign interment-system which can deserve to be considered an establishment of public authority, the right of single burial is universally recognised.

Next—as regards the *succession of interments*; according to the burial-usages of modern times, no public Cemetery with fixed limits can be permanently useful, except on a full recognition of the fact that it is a decaying place for the dead, not a place for their embalment or mummification. For hence it follows, that ground once used for burial becomes equally fitted for a second use, whenever by gradual decomposition the bodies first interred there have thoroughly vanished from the soil.

This principle has given the common rule of burial; and for obvious reasons. Under any other plan, the entire area allotted for interment would presently be in holding. No portion, however remote the date of its first occupation, could be resumed for a second series of interments; and the provision of a new Cemetery would be indispensable. Pushed to its extreme consequences, such a system must eventually convert the entire country into its burial-ground.

Under the practice of intramural interments—that practice which the new law supersedes, the principle of temporary tenure has been made to cover all manner of brutal abuses. Graves have been disturbed—within metropolitan churchyards and other burying-grounds, in which the transforma-

tions of decay had not half accomplished themselves ; and public decency has been outraged—here, in the centre of civilisation, by the spectacle of human remains being tossed about like offal. It is one chief advantage of extramural sepulture, that, while the inevitable decay of the dead will be removed from the vicinity of the living, and the latter will no longer have their atmosphere tainted by this hideous contamination ; so likewise for the dead—however humble, that in this new resting-place, room will be allotted them with no indecent stint ; that the dwellings and market-places of the living will no longer hem them in, grudging their narrow requirements ; that their return to dust will be respected, as beseems the last phase of mortal existence ; and that, against any desecration of their repose, there will be given every security which piety and affection can demand.

There may be difference of opinion as to the precise time when a grave can with truth and decency be thought to have become distenanted. The rapidity of decay varies in so extraordinary a degree according to soil, that some inhumations are almost equivalent to embalming ; while, in other cases, the process is comparatively rapid. Only experience of a particular soil will enable you to know with precision, what length of tenure is needed there for the purposes of interment to accomplish themselves ; but on general principles one can approximate pretty nearly to the truth. Assuming

the site of your Cemetery to have been selected with due regard to those qualities of soil which determine the differences adverted to, I think it unlikely that any adult grave can properly be re-opened within twenty years* of the time when interment shall last have occurred in it. Very long within this time, however, all soft textures of the body would have completed their decay. Remains of the coffin and of the skeleton—materials insusceptible of putrefaction, would alone occupy the grave, and with gradual crumbling blend themselves in the soil. Not till this final disintegration of the skeleton is complete—not till the identity of its different elements is destroyed, can the first occupant of a grave be fairly deemed to have abdicated his tenure. From this time only, can his interest in it be held as having reverted to the public, for whoever next may claim a similar usufruct of the ground.

Taken for granted that, as regards the general public, your Cemetery will be established on the principle of a temporary tenure of graves;—it remains for you to determine to what extent you will permit wealthier applicants to purchase exemption from this rule, and obtain a freehold interest in

* Twenty years would probably represent at least four times the average period during which the bodies of the poor have been left at rest in many grave-yards of the metropolis. Yet I would willingly advocate a longer term of years as the personal tenure of a grave, if public opinion would sanction the heavier expense which must thus be entailed on the living.

particular portions of your ground. I have little to say on this point, because it is of no sanitary importance, provided that privileges so purchased do not in any degree interfere with the general economy of your plan. Barring any risk of this kind, it comes before you simply as a question of finance.

A precaution, however, which I would suggest, is, that, first of all, you should provide a cemeterial space sufficient for the interment purposes of your population, on the principle of temporary tenure; that no portion of this space should, under any circumstances, be alienated from its public destination; that the whole of it should remain in perpetuity the common burying-ground of the City of London. This prime necessity of your plan being secured, it will be competent for you to include in your purchase a certain redundant number of acres; and out of these you can allot, at your discretion, such quantities of ground as may be desired in freehold, either for the purposes of family interment, generation after generation, or for the fiction of perpetual tenure by some single occupant.*

* In regard of these exceptional burials, it will be requisite to fix certain regulations; especially for the construction of family graves, wherein it will be desired that many who during life have been united, shall after death have their ashes mingled together in the soil. A frequent custom in private Cemeteries for fulfilling this purpose, has been, for graves to be dug to a considerable depth—sometimes such that twelve coffins could be piled there, one on the other; and these deep pits have

In thus selling portions of your land for private and privileged employment, you would be satisfying what has become a habit, and may be considered a legitimate claim of the wealthier classes. Beyond this, it is also evident, that you would virtually be competing with the ordinary Cemetery-companies of the metropolis, in the most lucrative department of their trade. It would probably be easy for you, by varying your fees according to circumstances, either on the one hand to diminish, and almost prohibit,

commonly been provided with brick walls. Now, for the same reason as determined my opinion against the multiple burial of the poor, I would argue against this arrangement, as one which might occasion excessive accumulation in single spots of your Cemetery, and as being in principle bad. In preference, I would venture to recommend the endeavour to introduce an interment-custom, which is prevalent abroad, of family plots of ground instead of family pits. Under ordinary circumstances, all the accommodation heretofore sought in the one arrangement would be found superiorly in the other; and in a well-projected suburban Cemetery the larger superficial extent could probably be afforded at much less cost than is usually paid for the pit. Persons familiar with the details of Cemetery-burial would easily devise an arrangement of such plots, whereby they should be separate and secluded, admitting of appropriate decoration, and altogether likely to prove more acceptable to public opinion than many existing arrangements. In regard of such plots, too, there might be conceded a privilege, which I believe has not been allowed in private Cemeteries; namely, an hereditary right to refill the ground for any successive number of times, subject only to such restrictions as will determine the succession of interments in other parts of the Cemetery.

the frequency of applications for exceptional interment; or, on the other hand, to attract such applications. Even, if you thought it desirable, you might admit purchasers from other classes than those having right of burial in your municipal Cemetery;—in short, you might manage it commercially, with a view to profit, looking to its proceeds for covering many expenses of the general establishment.

With respect to the ordinary arrangement of your ground for public purposes, and the distribution of burials therein, you may estimate that, taking one grave with another, and allowing for the marginal spaces of each, the average size of a grave will be twenty-eight square feet. For illustration's sake, I will suppose the ground to be laid out in plots—say the third of an acre in extent. Each such plot would contain four hundred single graves, mixed adult and young, with what foot-paths might be requisite for approaching them. The City mortality of twenty years (assuming this period to be the ordinary leasehold of a grave) might be reckoned at sixty-four thousand deaths; for the accommodation of which number there would be wanted one hundred and sixty plots of the above mentioned size—say fifty-four acres of ground. I would propose that throughout each line of every such space, adult and infant graves should, as far as possible, lie alternately; and that, instead of filling all the graves together at stated periods (say every twenty years)

half of them, taken alternately, should be filled at each semi-period—say every ten years. By this arrangement, half the complement of burials would take place in each plot, at a time when the decomposition of the preceding half-complement had finished itself, so far as putrefaction is concerned; and whatever contamination of air might be liable to occur under the best-considered sanitary arrangement, would certainly be reduced to the lowest conceivable amount. Or—as an alternative equal to this arrangement for the purposes of health, you might adopt the plan of filling in immediate succession all the burial-spaces of a plot; provided the surface could then at once be devoted to the growth of appropriate vegetation.

Fifty-four acres being then the quantity of ground which would suffice, on sound principles, for the ordinary interment of your entire annual mortality during a period of twenty years; at the expiration of which time (assuming your soil to be appropriate) one may reasonably expect that the ground will admit of a second similar occupation; and so forth in perpetuity: it will be requisite to add a considerable allowance of space for other accessory purposes.

Thus, room would be required for the various buildings that belong to the institution of a Cemetery: partly for the dwelling of such officers as you may require to be there resident, partly for the temporary accommodation of persons resorting

thither for the burial of their friends, partly for the religious services of different congregations.*

Something likewise must be added for such main-ways as will be wanted along various lines of the burial-ground, for the carriage traffic which belongs to funeral ceremonies among the richer classes of society, and for other like purposes.

Further, I daresay you would think it inexpedient that your Cemetery should be entirely without decoration and elegance. Fifty-four acres of head-and-foot stones, or the same extent of bare mounds, might vulgarise even the aspect of death. By the judicious introduction of trees and turf and shrubs, of bends and undulations, you would probably seek to interrupt the long perspective of so many tombs, and, by these artificial resources of planning and planting, to enhance the native solemnity of the spot. Amid such ornamental portions of your ground might be scattered irregularly the various sites of exceptional interment,—family graves, personal graves in perpetuity, long leasehold graves, and the like ; and the interposition of these large portions of comparatively un-occupied soil, with as much appropriate vegetation as could conveniently be introduced, might not only allow much tasteful

* The distinction of the ground into a consecrated and an unconsecrated portion, as required by the Act of Parliament, will require no addition to its total area ; and therefore the proportion which these parts should bear to one another need not now be discussed.

decoration of the ground, but would likewise conduce to the healthful accomplishment of those purposes for which the Cemetery is established.

In respect of these and many other details of your plan, you will doubtless be guided by the direct and responsible advice of men specially skilled in the subject. I have, therefore, confined myself to the mention of those points which may determine your judgment merely as to the quantity of land required for your purpose.

Without offering any opinion as to the possible claims of non-resident parishioners, on which liability I would again suggest your obtaining a legal opinion; and without pretending to advise what allowance should be made for purely decorative purposes; I may yet conclude from such information as I have collected, that, with a hundred acres of suitable soil at your disposal, you would be amply able to meet all legitimate burial-requirements of your population in perpetuity, and would likewise (for many years at least) have a considerable excess which might be applied to the uses of ornamental arrangement.

From what I have said on the influence of soil, in determining the period after which burying-grounds may be resumed for a second series of interments, it will be obvious to you that this condition is an important element in deciding the sufficiency of any area for given burial purposes. And the site of your Cemetery might be such as some-

what to lessen, or greatly to increase, the suggested extent of your estimate. It would be fruitless, however, now to detain you with any endeavour to trace the several influences which different soils exert over animal decay. Such remarks, at the present time, could only be addressed to hypothetical cases, or stated in the most general form. Therefore, instead of attempting this anticipative argument on the subject, I hold myself ready to report to you, specifically, on the suitableness of whatever soil may be proposed to you for the purposes of your Cemetery.*

There is yet one other consideration which may affect the extent of your purchase. The law restricts you from approaching within 200 yards of any dwelling-house, without the previous written consent of its owner, lessee, and occupier. But there is no law restricting the nearness within which any builder may approach your wall with his design for new habitations; and it might easily occur to you, within a short time of establishing

* For similar reasons, I defer any discussion of the depth at which bodies may most properly be deposited in the ground. The thickness of superjacent soil, which will deodorise, before their escape, the gaseous products of any given decomposing mass, or which will retain these gases more or less permanently in combination, varies most importantly with certain chemical and mechanical qualities of the soil: and on these it would be useless to dwell by anticipation. For accurate results, it may be necessary, after the selection of a site and during its preparation, to institute experiments on the subject.

your Cemetery, to find a new town growing in close proximity around it. If there be any meaning and value in the clause, which forbids your undue approach to inhabited houses—if it truly represent that this approach would be a sanitary evil, then obviously the law is deficient in the respect adverted to. It would be in your power to guarantee the continuance of a belt of unoccupied ground, as an immediate circuit to your Cemetery, in either of two ways:—either, namely, you might purchase a considerable extent of ground beyond the actual requirements of your Cemetery, might devote its central hundred acres to interment, and might let its remaining circumference for agricultural purposes; or, if you were fortunate enough to be treating for the central portion of some considerable estate, you might stipulate, as a condition of purchase, that no building should be reared within such distance of the wall of your Cemetery, as you, on due consideration, may deem fit.

II. In the provision of a Cemetery, it is required by the Act of Parliament, that “the Burial-Board shall have reference to the convenience of access thereto from the Parish or Parishes for which the same is provided;” and it is legalized, that “any Burial-Board may make such arrangements as they may from time to time think fit, for facilitating the

conveyance of the Bodies of the Dead from the Parish, or the place of Death, to the Burial-ground which shall be provided."

It cannot but be obvious to you, that the choice of a site for your Cemetery might be such as to interpose very serious obstacles in the way of interment, even for the richest classes; and under the most favorable circumstances, the removal of the dead to a distance of some miles from their previous residence, cannot but threaten serious difficulty to the poor. Assuming—what various conditions of the Act of Parliament render almost inevitable, that your Cemetery must be distant at least six miles from the centre of the City, the present funeral charges can hardly be maintained without increase, if the traffic is to be conducted on the same principles as heretofore. The price for which an artisan could procure the decent funeral of his wife or child, within a stone's throw of his door, will unavoidably be augmented by every mile you add to the distance, if the conveyance is still to depend on the old means and arrangements.

When I consider the classes of persons likely, as inhabitants of the City, to claim interment in your Cemetery—classes, among which the predominance of narrow, if not necessitous, circumstances will be frequent; when, for instance, in a year's official returns, I see that artisans and paupers make more than two-thirds of your entire classified mortality;

I cannot but think this aspect of the matter a very important one. From some years' experience of your death-register, I should say that, of City funerals, there would not be one in ten where the friends could afford to disregard an additional expenditure of half a sovereign; and, in the majority of instances, I am persuaded that a much smaller addition would be enough to cause inconvenience and distress. It therefore seems to me certain, that your plan for extramural sepulture, however perfect at all other points, might either entirely fail of its purpose, or become cruelly oppressive to the poor, by the simple expensiveness of approaching the burial-place. And I suppose it was in anticipation of the difficulties here adverted to, that the framers of the Metropolitan Burials Act introduced the permissive clause, which I just quoted, empowering Burial-Boards "to facilitate the conveyance" of the dead, and thus virtually rendering them responsible, so far as the poorer classes are concerned, for the cheapness and efficiency of such conveyance.

I would therefore submit, that, in your decision as to the site of your Cemetery, so soon as the indispensable conditions of appropriate soil are given, the first point to examine is accessibility; that the spot to be chosen should have, in addition to its carriage roads, the utmost facility of railway approach; and that, for those with whom small differences of price are an important consideration,

you should be able to guarantee a rate of transport for coffin and mourners, not in excess of existing charges.

From observation of arrangements which have lately been made with Railway-Companies by the Directors of Cemeteries, and from inquiry of persons engaged in such undertakings, I entertain little doubt that you might make a contract to the following effect with the authorities of any line convenient for your purpose:—viz., that every day, at a fixed hour, there should be a train, or some portion of a train, exclusively adapted to the funeral purposes of the poorer classes; that for this train there should be issued funeral tickets, franking the conveyance of a coffin with some stated number of mourners, who should also be entitled to return; that the introduction of funeral traffic should be by a special entrance, and its exit at a special terminus.

Such contract supposed;—in connexion with this funeral train, you might further arrange, to maintain public hearses; which, at the option of persons concerned, and on due requisition being made, should convey any coffin from its former home to the railway terminus; and which again, if necessary, at the distal station, should complete its conveyance to the grave. This facility might even be extended, if the distances were considerable, to the similar conveyance of a certain number of mourners, with the undertaker in charge of their procession.

Also, if desirable, it could no doubt be arranged, with a view to economy, that the undertaker's responsibility for a funeral should terminate at the railway terminus, up to which he would have conducted it; and that its reception at the distal station should be entrusted to servants of your Cemetery, who would then fulfil all remaining duties in respect of it.

Arrangements to the above effect would be much simplified in working, and their general adoption much promoted, if all disbursements for funeral tickets, and for such other facilitations of conveyance as I have adverted to, were made by your Burial-Board,—their cost to be included in an uniform Cemetery fee; so that the friends of the deceased, after paying for his grave, should, without further payment, be entitled, if they desired it, to claim conveyance for his coffin from home to the Cemetery, and for themselves (in stated number) by a funeral ticket, at least for the railway portion of their transit. Thus to have one single and inclusive price for all that belongs to the new system—for the extramural grave, namely, and for conveyance thereto, would enable your Burial-Board to maintain its total cost at a level within reach of the poorer classes, and probably below that of existing prices.

In addition to what I have here suggested, there are many other steps which might be taken, if unforeseen circumstances should render them neces-

sary, to diminish the pressure of new burial-charges on the poor. Time will develop, better than one can foretell, the exact operation of our reformed system; and for such inconveniences as it may bring, you will have no difficulty, I think, in finding appropriate cures. Nor could it be otherwise than easy, if you thought it desirable, to extend to the comparatively few funerals of wealthier classes which occur from within the City of London, those same arrangements for facilitating conveyance, which I have here deemed it requisite to consider only in their relation to the poor.

For the latter, it has seemed indispensable that your scheme should provide assistance, equivalent at least to the difficulty which its adoption must occasion them. Beyond this, I believe you would wish to disturb as little as possible the ordinary routine of interment; and I have aimed, therefore, at suggesting assistance only in such kind, and in such degree, as may least interfere with any interests of trade, least derange any established habits, least offend any prejudices of the people.

III. There is no part of the subject which I have considered with more anxiety than that which relates to delays of interment, and to the prolonged keeping of dead bodies in the rooms of their living kindred.

Evils arising in this source are unknown to the rich. Soldered in its leaden coffin, on tressels in some separate and spacious room, a corpse may await the convenience of survivors with little detriment to their atmosphere.

Not so in the poor man's dwelling. The sides of a wooden coffin, often imperfectly joined, are at best all that divide the decomposition of the dead from the respiration of the living. A room, tenanted night and day by the family of mourners, likewise contains the remains of the dead. For some days the coffin is unclosed. The bare corpse lies there amid the living; beside them in their sleep; before them at their meals.

The death perhaps has occurred on a Wednesday or Thursday; the next Sunday is thought too early for the funeral; the body remains unburied till the Sunday week. Summer or winter makes little difference to this detention: nor is there sufficient knowledge on the subject, among the poorer population, for alarm to be excited even by the concurrence of infectious disease in a room so hurtfully occupied.

I have no means of telling you, with statistical precision, in how many of your annual deaths the corpse is detained in dangerous proximity to the living. But I have already quoted an official classification of deaths, by which it would appear that more than two-thirds of your deaths are of the

artisan class or below it. Among them at least, it would be exceptional for the corpse to have a room to itself. On an average then, there would probably be lying within the City at any moment, from thirty to forty dead bodies in rooms tenanted by living persons.

This very serious evil is well known to all persons who have taken interest in the sanitary advancement of the poor ; and ineffectual endeavours have been made for its diminution. The law does indeed empower your Officer of Health, under certain circumstances, to order the removal of a corpse from any inhabited room. And, under the Nuisances Removal Act, the General Board of Health may be authorized, during times of epidemic disease, to issue directions and regulations for the speedy interment of the dead. Both laws have remained inoperative, and are likely to remain so.

If one were starting anew—legislating for a people with unformed habits, nothing might be easier than to devise regulations of a perfect kind with regard to the sanitary management of the dead. But our case is widely different. The evils against which we have to contend are among the deepliest-rooted habits of the country. In defence of what exists there are many stupid and ignorant prejudices: but, interwoven with these are feelings of tenderness and affection, to which all consideration and reverence are due ;—feelings which would be shocked and outraged by any abrupt endeavour

to reduce the care of the dead to a system of fixed regulations.

For myself, having the deepest sense of the evil in question, and having officially the power to order removal of the dead, I may repeat that I have never yet exercised my authority. Practically speaking, I can hardly conceive an instance in which I should attempt to do so. It would require the strongest case that could be shown of actual mischief in progress—of disease and death multiplied day by day through the presence of some particular dead body, to justify interference even in that single instance. Nothing like the operation of a general law would be tolerated ;—nothing like including the dead in a compulsory plan of hygienic police.

After very careful consideration of the subject, I may confess myself even more impressed with its difficulties than when I first began to give it my attention ; and in the few suggestions which follow I cannot pretend to do more than intimate where, in my opinion, a beginning may usefully be made towards an improvement which will take many years to accomplish.

Legislative remedies, proposed for the evils which I am bringing under your notice, have been of two kinds ; viz. *first*, to restrict the time during which it should be lawful to keep a body unburied ; *secondly*, to promote the use of reception-houses (as they have been called) whither bodies might

be removed from within all dwelling-places, and be kept under certain regulations during the days preceding their interment.

As regards the first point;—there are many foreign countries (and even some parts of the United Kingdom) where either law or custom has made it imperative to bury within two, three, or four days of death. Our habit, unfortunately, is to keep the corpse unburied for twice as long. A week may probably be considered our medium interval between death and interment; and with this delay, I need hardly tell you, the body becomes putrid—sometimes intensely so, before the time for its removal arrives.

Among the wealthier classes, as I have said, this delay is practically unimportant; except in so far as every repetition maintains the pernicious custom. Scarcely on account of any risk arising to themselves in emanations from the dead, but mainly for the sake of influence and example, would one wish the educated classes of the community to adopt the usage of earlier burial. Our present practice is upheld by no law of necessity; nor for the most part does it represent any extravagance of grief, or fond reluctance of separation. Chiefly it subsists by our indolent acquiescence in a habit, which former prejudices and former exigencies established. Fears of premature interment, which had much to do with it, are now seldom spoken of but with a smile. The longer interval, once rightly insisted on

as necessary for the gathering of distant friends, has now, in the progress of events, become absurdly excessive: in a vast majority of cases, all whose presence is needed, live within a narrow circle; and the more distant mourner, who, fifty years ago, would have spent several days in coming from Paris or Edinburgh, can now finish his journey in twelve hours. It is much to be wished that, under these changed circumstances, an altered practice might ensue in the upper classes of society, fixing their time of burial within three or four days of death. Such example of wealthier neighbours, aided by greater enlightenment and education among themselves, would greatly tend to detach the poor from many observances and delays, in relation to the dead, which, in their narrow dwellings cannot continue with impunity.

But, as regards these poorer classes, cannot anything be done in connexion with your new arrangements, to abridge the period of delay? As for any positive regulation, limiting the time during which it should be allowed to retain dead bodies in certain dwelling-houses,—such could only be enforced by an extensive organization of sanitary police, which you would have to call into existence for the purpose, and which, in the present state of public opinion, would encounter insurmountable difficulties on every occasion of its authoritative interference.

It is by indirect means and inducements alone, that I can hope at present to effect the desired

alteration ; and by them, I think, something can be ensured toward shortening the delays of interment.

First, I believe that every thing which cheapens the cost of burial, will conduce to such a result ; for, among the poor, one considerable cause of procrastination must often be the immediate absence of money. The plan of conveyance and payment which I have suggested, would at least ensure you against any increase of this difficulty, and might readily be applied to diminish it. For, under such a system of single payment for grave and conveyance, it would be practicable, and, I think, most advantageous, to fix two prices, with a difference of at least five shillings between them ; to charge the lower fee whenever the funeral should occur within eighty hours of death, the higher whenever this period should be exceeded. If, by the general adoption of the former alternative, the Cemetery receipts should be diminished in respect of artisan funerals, even to the utmost extent—say five or six hundred pounds per annum—this money, or much more, would have been advantageously expended in purchasing so great a reform. If, on the contrary, the immediate option of the working classes should be in favour of continuing a system so injurious to themselves and to their neighbours, there would be no injustice in leaving them the incumbrance of a cost, from which it would require only their own will to escape. The difference of

price would soon be recognised as a municipal tax on delays of interment ;—a tax, rendered legitimate by the public evil which it is designed to correct, and guarded against remonstrance, because any man may avoid it who will. And since the delays in question often arise in a passive habit of the people, founded on no deliberate intention or reason, I cannot but believe that a well-marked difference of fee would, as it were, startle the poor into considering the question, which would come to be of daily argument in their houses :—“Is it worth while that our funeral cost should be increased by the amount of one or two days wages, in order that we may retain within our dwelling-rooms four days longer, that which every one tells us is hurtful to ourselves and to others ?”

It has been suggested to me, that many delays occur owing to Sunday being considered specially as a funeral-day among the labouring classes ; that an equal distribution of burials over the week would not involve waiting for a particular day ; and that the closure of your Cemetery on Sundays might accordingly be beneficial for the purposes under consideration. Many arguments will doubtless occur to you, both for and against the prohibition of Sunday interments ; but this probably may be regarded as a point of detail, more fitly to be considered when your scheme is complete, or even when it has actually given you some experience of its operation.

As regards the second point adverted to—the establishment of special reception-houses for the dead, I do not hesitate to say that, if they could be brought into general use, their institution would confer great advantages on the poor. But against this event, at least as an immediate one, I grieve to see strong probabilities.

A first proposal made to some mourning household, that they should trust to strangers' hands the custody of their unburied dead, would in most instances greatly and suddenly clash with their customs, and prejudices, and affections. Whatever success you might have in conquering this difficulty would of necessity be slow: and my practical familiarity with the poorer classes makes me so little hopeful of their immediate acquiescence in the plan, that I should hardly feel justified in urging you to incur any very large expense, or to embarrass yourselves at starting with any elaborate machinery, for the sake of so scanty an expectation.

The reception-houses of Germany, as you probably know, are founded with a double intention; partly for the purpose which I am here chiefly considering—that the dead may be removed from an injurious contiguity to the living; partly also that the bodies may be vigilantly observed, in case of suspended animation. With the latter view, many of them are specially furnished and specially officered. In that at Frankfort, for instance, each body is placed in a separate, warmed and ventilated

cell; cords are attached to the fingers in such manner that the slightest movement occasions the ringing of an alarum; night and day watch is kept in a central apartment which looks into each cell, and has the several alarum-bells hung round it; adjacent is a room designed for acts of resuscitation, with bath, galvanic apparatus and the like, always in readiness for instant use; and, so long as any corpse lies within the reception-house, the medical superintendent of the establishment never goes beyond its walls. Dr. Sutherland, whose report to the General Board of Health is full of interesting information on the burial-institutions of the Continent, praises the completeness and ingenuity of these contrivances; adding, however, that "after careful inquiry at all the cities where he found them to exist, he could not learn that any case of resuscitation had as yet occurred." I may add too, as regards my own personal experience in this country, that, with extensive opportunities, it has never happened to me, either to see any case of suspended animation where doubts of death and question of interment could arise, nor to hear in professional circles of any such occurrence. I therefore think it quite unnecessary to recommend any arrangement of reception-houses, with reference to the resuscitation of persons apparently dead.

The object for which I would desire their institution, is exclusively that of receiving dead bodies out of the houses of the poor, in order to

mitigate those evils which arise in prolonged retention of the corpse. That this object is in itself very desirable, and that under the prevalence of epidemic disease its accomplishment might be of urgent necessity, you will not doubt; and the responsibility for fulfilling it—or at least for giving all facilities to its fulfilment, is so distinctly imposed on you by the letter and spirit of the law, that you will probably wish to take measures accordingly.

The extent, then, to which my information on the subject would lead me to recommend provision to be made, is this;—I would advise that accommodation of an appropriate character (savoring in style rather of an ecclesiastical construction, than of the workhouse or dissecting-room) be arranged for the reception of fifty coffins. For this purpose I would suggest—not the building of several separate reception-houses within the City of London, in order to their being respectively adjacent to the portions of population which might use them,—but rather the establishment of one only, and that on the site of your Cemetery. Thus the conveyance of bodies which would take place under your auspices, might be made with greater economy, since it could work into the plan I have already suggested. The advantage of having only a single edifice (especially since its use is likely to be limited) and of including its superintendence in the general organization of your Cemetery, cannot be questioned. And it seems to me likewise that a building designed for the re-

ception of many dead bodies, cannot conveniently be established in the heart of the City.

I would of course recommend that the use of this building should be entirely optional with the poor, and that its advantages should be allowed gratuitously to persons burying in your ground: so that any one who, in respect of his cemetery-fee, would be entitled to have a corpse conveyed thither for funeral purposes, might claim this conveyance as soon as he choose after the occurrence of death, and might have the coffin kept with all proper formalities in the reception house, till the moment fixed for its interment.

On further particulars connected with this part of your arrangements, I do not think it requisite at present to dwell; especially because, while I regard the establishment of a reception-house to be quite indispensable to the complete fulfilment of your new responsibilities, I still look upon it as an institution to be gradually developed in the course of years, and according to circumstances yet undetermined, rather than as something which ought at once to assume its permanent character and proportions.

Here too, in concluding this introductory report, I may observe that I have endeavoured as far as possible to avoid encumbering it with detail. For

myself, in its construction, I have thought it indispensable to pursue the subject into minuter ramifications, to consider a vast number of circumstances here scarcely mentioned, to make myself acquainted with the burial-customs of other countries, to review a great variety of opinions and arguments which have been advanced on the several matters alluded to, and to consult with persons practically versed in them. But to have brought all this material before you, would have prolonged my report to an inconvenient extent with no proportionate utility.

Further, as regards these details of the subject, there are many parts on which I cannot address you with the confidence that belongs to personal knowledge. The general principles which I have set before you, do indeed lie within range of my official and professional observation. But the next stage of your inquiry relates to matters of special pursuit with which I am only indirectly conversant: and whatever information I may have compiled for myself from other sources, you will probably best obtain at first hand. Practical experience in the construction and working of Cemeteries has now for many years been the growing knowledge of persons connected with their administration by ties of business, or by official appointment. In many instances it has been dearly purchased, and notorious failures have arisen from its absence. Regard being had to the magnitude of your undertaking—hitherto unprecedented in the country, and to the

immense interests involved in your success, I cannot but earnestly hope that such experience may be made available for your information.

At an early period you will have to determine what appointments will be requisite, with a view to the architectural and other designs of your cemetery, to its economical planning and decorations, to the superintendence of its daily working, to its financial management, to the conveyance of bodies, and to all intramural organisation connected therewith. Minute details will be best considered when these appointments are made, and when you will naturally have the benefit of such practical experience as may best assist your deliberations.

For the task on which you are engaged extends, I need hardly say, far beyond the purchase of certain acres for your burial ground. It implies for its completion, that you shall possess an adequate plan on which the interment of your population may be managed during many succeeding generations; a plan constructed, first of all, with entire regard to the general good of the public, and next, with as little violence as may be to those habits, prejudices, and interests, which are involved in the present system of interment.

The construction of such a plan constitutes a very large question of municipal policy;—one which because of its solemn subject, and because of the degree in which human feelings and affections are involved in it, requires to be handled with peculiar

discretion and delicacy; but which not the less requires to be contemplated in a large and comprehensive manner.

I have therefore thought I should best fulfil the object of your reference, by bringing before you those general principles which lie at the root of all minute considerations: in order that having first determined on them, and having taken one collective view of the subject, you may better know at what time, and in what order, and to what extent, you would wish the minor details to be developed for your information.

I have the honour to remain,

Gentlemen,

Your obedient faithful Servant,

JOHN SIMON.