

THE LIFE AND DEATH QUESTION.

THE OUTBREAK IN BERWICK-STREET.—A WOUND OR TWO ON PROTECTIVE MEASURES.

MANY months ago we referred to the bad condition, in a sanitary point of view, of houses in the neighbourhood of Wardour-street, Berwick-street, Broad-street, and Marlborough-street, the absence of proper drainage, and the want of water.*

On Friday, the first of September, this district was attacked by a pestilence which has unfortunately swept away a large number of persons, who were, the day before, in perfect health. The people in this district were, no doubt, reading in the newspapers, or learning from others, that the cholera had reached London, but felt, notwithstanding the cautions which have been given, and the accounts of deaths from other parts, that they were themselves safe. On Friday morning, however, says an informant, people might be seen before the break of day running in all directions for medical advice. "The angel of death had spread his wings over the place," and by mid-day, groups were standing in the street, looking the picture of wonder and consternation. We have paid several visits to this neighbourhood since the cholera has come upon it. We will not particularly describe the cadaverous and frightened countenances meeting us at every step—women weeping in the street, and children who, but a few hours before, saw their parents in seemingly perfect health, and are now without a protector on the earth. Our object is not to excite alarm; but it becomes the duty of all who have an interest in the welfare of the community, to investigate the causes of this sudden and frightful attack in the midst of the metropolis.

Taking the Pantheon, in Oxford-street, as a starting place, we pass down Berwick-street to Broad-street: this is a wide street, well paved, and most of the people who live near say well drained. "We have capital drainage," say many, and the general impression over the whole district is, that the disease has been caused, not from ill sanitary condition, but, as they say, "by the hand of God." Strongly believing, however, that an all-wise Providence sends the pestilence and other evils upon us for the general good, we, nevertheless, feel certain, that much is left in the hands of man. We must insist; as we have done again and again, that the lives and health of thousands are sacrificed for want of proper sanitary measures.

In Broad-street few houses have escaped the disease; and in looking along it on Wednesday last, we counted seventeen shops closed and about twenty open. On some of the closed shops written papers were posted, stating that, "In consequence of the death of the proprietor, this business would be closed," until a certain day, &c. Groups of people were standing at the doors of private houses, seemingly let in tenements, speaking of losses which they had sustained. A baker said that on Tuesday morning he counted nine persons whom he knew, close at hand, who had died on Monday, and were buried. Mr. Jones, the active City missionary, told one of our inquirers, "that on the same day he knew that sixty had perished in his district, which did not extend far. It was like a plague." We made numerous inquiries, and although the first answer usually was that the drainage was good, further examination showed the existence of cesspools everywhere.

At one house in Broad-street, the people said that they had had no ill smell to complain of until only a week back, and then it was very bad. The dust-heap was nearly full of refuse. The condition of the atmosphere within the house was bad in the extreme. This, and the discolouration of the paint of the doors, seemed to show that a cesspool was close at hand. "Have you had cholera here?" we asked. "Yes; a person lies dead in the kitchen; and two have died upstairs." In the closet there was a glazed pan, but the water was not laid on.

"You see," said an intelligent man in the same street, "that these closets are only a disguise—the cesspool is still there; and I would like to know how many cesspools there

are in this street that have been partly filled in, not emptied, but covered up. There was a great deal of wet weather at the early part of this year; and, in fact, for some time past the earth has been saturated, and now the hot sun gathers the moisture, and of course where cesspools are, the evaporation from the earth is poison. It is almost unnecessary to tell you that these disguised water-closets, with surface drains only carrying off the liquid matter, pass through the kitchen; and it is a sad fact, that very often in the kitchens of the houses around here there are more human beings lodged than in the whole house besides. But what can the poor creatures do?" Next door, and the next, and almost in every house in this street, there has been disease and death.

The most careful examination of this street by the proper authorities should immediately be made. An exciting cause there must be, and this should be traced out. Some attribute the outbreak to the opening of the sewers. A correspondent of the *Times* speaks of the plague-pit near Regent-street. Let us get at the truth.

"Pray go and look at St. Ann's-court and Place, not far off," said one; "you will there find the people almost swept away." On proceeding there, we found the place—as in fact all the streets near were—strewn with quick lime. This court and place are not what may be considered dilapidated, in comparison with many other spots in London. The same appearance of panic showed itself here as in other places: many houses were closed, and the tradespeople, having no business to attend to, stood conversing at their doors with their neighbours. In a passage opposite, the lime-washers were at work, and different kinds of purification going on. This was St. Ann's-place; here the cesspools could not be overlooked; the houses are small. The inhabitants all complained of the bad smells, particularly "against rain," and were in distress, as they said, at receiving a notice to quit. "Where can we go to, sir, although here is not very good, we cannot get better; here is the notice, but none of us can read, no more can the landlady who receives the rent,—will you please to read it to us." The paper was not a notice to quit, but a warning to the landlord to empty the cesspool in twenty-four hours, to limewash the place, and do other matters. We put again the usual question. There had been two deaths in this house, and in the next four had occurred in one room, "a number of people lived in it." There was a cesspool there also. Now that death has taken off the inhabitants of the place, notices are sent respecting the removal of the cause. We have barely patience to ask,—why this was not done before the plague came? To empty the cesspools now will do more harm than good.

In St. Ann's-court the drainage of the closets is most imperfect: many of the people complain of bad smells in the kitchens. So numerous were the deaths in this place, that the bodies were carried away without ceremony, five or six at a time. Mr. Allen, one of the medical officers of the district, states that he made four applications to the Commissioners of Sewers to stop up three gully-holes. One was after a time done—the other was left until the people around it all died; the third still remains.

So imperfect seems the drainage of this district; so far as the water-closets are concerned, that it would be tedious to mention the various particulars which we gathered after several hours' painful investigation by more than one person.

Passing into the back yard of a house in Berwick-street; where the shop was closed, we found a cesspool; the dust-place full; the sink dirty. At the back of the yard, we climbed up a ladder staircase, and found two elderly women. "Have you had any deaths from cholera?" "Yes, two; the smell is very bad here at times. You see my room is just above the closet; and there is no ceiling. This lady lives in the cellar," into which we accordingly descended with the tenant: "Here, sir, you see I am obliged to live. I pay 3s. a-week rent. I have a mangle, you see; and cannot very well leave my bread, and so many people object to

mangles; but you see the floor is rotten, and the smell at times is dreadful in the winter, when we are obliged to shut up close. When I sit beside that fireplace, it is almost as bad as being in a water-closet."

In some of the places, already alluded to in the *Builder*, surrounding the model buildings now in course of erection, the condition of the yards is as bad as ever, the same broken pavement and filth. "They should take away the dust, governor," said a man; "there has been nobody here for it for a month."

Our journey through this scene of death more than ever convinces us that to remove the cesspools would be the means of greatly lessening cholera and fever: we say this in perfect confidence; and ask all in their respective neighbourhoods to do what they can to effect this: it is to be feared, however, that nothing effectual will be done until we get an enactment of Parliament much more stringent than those now in operation. Thousands, like the poor mangling-woman, are tied to their cellars and back rooms, and disease, and they need protection.

We saw some distressing cases of deprivation and poverty, and would suggest that a subscription for their relief should be immediately commenced.

Let us now look to the more general question.

Air and water are the two great diluents and distributors of those poisonous emanations from decaying animal and vegetable substances to which so much preventible disease has been circumstantially traced, and whether such plagues as "the black death" of past times, or "the blue death" of the present—as by parity of nomenclature we may term the modern choleraic plague,—be attributable to such organic causes as those more ordinary ones which are so well known as originators, or, at least, as predisposers to various malignant forms of fever, or whether it be to less ordinary ones that such plagues are attributable, as to mineral vapours arising from the interior of the earth, or pervading and traversing the heavens, and met with by the earth in her course; still both the air and the water will be not only their diluents and palliatives, but their dissolvents and diffusers; so that while mitigating their local intensity, these grand menstra must extend the malevolent influence far and wide. It is a matter of the utmost importance, therefore, not only to choose, where such choice is possible, the freshest air and the purest water within the reach of those who wish to guard against the occurrence of disease, but where such choice, as but too often happens, is not possible, to act on such air as they must breathe, and such water as they must drink or otherwise internally use, so as to neutralize, as far as they can, all malignant impregnations, whether mineral, vegetable, or animal. Now, it is known that the most poisonous agencies with which, in the course of nature, either air or water are defiled, consist of certain elements made gaseous, vaporuous, or volatile, by means of hydrogen. Such are phosphuretted and sulphuretted hydrogen. As regards mineral emanations, it is also known that sulphuretted hydrogen itself pervades many portions of the earth's interior; and it may be recollected that, in a case of poisoning and death which occurred some years since at Long-acre, from breathing sulphuretted and phosphuretted hydrogen suddenly liberated from a mass of ordure, the unfortunate who died exhibited an exact similitude of the blue stage of cholera. We do not, however, in here instancing so striking and instructive an occurrence, mean thereby to decidedly attribute cholera to sulphuretted hydrogen, whether that so plentifully generated in stagnant drains and sewers, especially in the heats of summer and autumn, when cholera does most prevail, or whether emanating from the earth's interior; but simply to point to what seems to indicate something like the sort of agency which is capable of producing the worst choleraic symptoms, and which we but too well know is not only capable of producing death under somewhat milder or less appalling forms, but actually does so, yearly, and regularly, in all ordinary seasons, while it is, in all probability, no less capable, in seasons which may possess some such peculiarity as that of a defi-

* See also "London Shadows."

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ciency in the scavenging or purifying ozone, to which Liebig is inclined to attribute cholera, of producing death under a form far more appalling, and with a speed far more rapid, and liker to the death which the poor fellow at Long-acre died.

We desire, then, to say a few words on the purification of the air we breathe and the water we drink, with the view of destroying any malignant agencies with which they may be impregnated.

To this end it would appear that the most potent disinfectants are likely to be those which are most certain to destroy those hydrogenous combinations to which we know that so much evil *must* be attributed. Now the most celebrated and most effectual disinfectants and preventives of disease under various forms, whether febrile or choleraic, are precisely those which do deprive of their hydrogen such substances as the "dire" and deadly "*Hydras*" we have just been indicating. Theory is thus corroborated and confirmed by facts and practice. There are a few most useful and most beneficial disinfectants which ought just now to be almost literally in every one's hands. This is no mere medical question which ought to be left to the family physician to recommend. It is a preventive measure which it is the duty of every one both to himself and to his fellow creatures at the present crisis daily at least to practise. Clouds of sanitary incense ought, morning, noon, and night, to arise within and around every domicile in every town for the purification of its atmosphere. The disinfection of its water may not be so readily effected; yet here too, much may be done at the moment of peril, and far more in time to come.

Sewers commissioners, moreover, ought to be compelled to flood the drains and sewers of their respective towns with aqueous solutions of tons weight of approved deodorizers.

Let us see what even one solitary individual can do, with a will and a way, to benefit a town.

In a printed and published report, of date 11th October, 1848, by Mr. Herapath, of Bristol, the well-known chemist, in which he states, as the result of numerous experiments, that the cause of cholera is a putrid animal poison, the only effectual neutralizer of which is chlorine gas, it is reported that after a gratuitous distribution of 1,200 small quantities of materials for its evolution in Bristol during three days in 1832, the deaths from cholera suddenly fell from 10 to 1 a day!

Along with the packages of materials, Mr. Herapath appears to have given instructions for their use, and presented the following recipe (the usual one, in fact), containing the names and quantities of the ingredients:—

"Black oxide of manganese, 1 part, say 1 oz.
Common salt 3 do. " 3 oz.
which mix.

Oil of vitriol, 2 or 3 teaspoonfuls: stir with a stick, in a gallipot: place in room or stair, in hall or yard, close to back door, so that the fumes may pervade the whole house, three times a day."

The sanitary power of chlorine gas indeed is so well ascertained and so undoubted, that we are surprised municipal and parochial authorities have not long ere now been instructed and compelled by the legislature to use it, or some other equally well known disinfectant or deodorizer, both largely and continually, throughout the districts under their authority, whenever either cholera or fever prevail. There is even a cheaper and simpler disinfectant which Dr. Graham very strongly recommends as still better than chlorine, at least for typhoid fevers, namely, the fumes of burning sulphur, which are also used by the Government itself (or used to be so) under quarantine regulations, as a disinfectant both in plague and in cholera. Both of these agents, we need scarcely observe, are powerful destroyers of hydrides, the chlorine by directly abstracting their hydrogen, the sulphurous acid by neutralizing it with oxygen. To those who do not mind a little cost, a glass stoppered phial full of bromine would be a useful substitute for chlorine. It is fluid, evaporates spontaneously, and is nearly as potent as chlorine. We wonder if

bromine in drop doses in alcohol has never been tried inwardly in cholera.

There are various more or less excellent purifiers for sinks, drains, sewers, ponds, ditches, &c. such as chloride of lime (which, too, is often used in houses instead of manganese and salt in the elimination of chlorine gas), chloride of zinc, sulphate of iron (or common green vitriol), and even common quick lime. For the purification of water in cisterns or water-butts, pieces of charcoal may be introduced. As we once before hinted, however, probably very small quantities of sulphuric (or of sulphurous) acid might disinfect or detoxicate water as the fumes of sulphur do air. Sulphuric acid taken internally is now declared to be a certain corrective of that laxity in the bowels which precedes cholera, and even a cure for more advanced stages of the disease. This is quite a modern discovery. Yet we recollect reading a recommendation of it by that curious old chemist Van Helmont, as a cure much used in olden times for plague. Sulphur itself, in small doses, the writer has quite recently discovered to be a complete cure for slight or premonitory attacks of cramp in the limbs,—a fact well worthy of note at the present moment. It also mitigates laxity in the bowels.

In connection with the subject of chlorine as a disinfectant too, and especially in its form of evolution from common salt, of which it is the actuating halogenous principle, we observe it stated by Mr. Wakely, and, indeed, as a current topic of the day, that salt taken freely with the food is a certain preventive of cholera. We know too, that in 1832, a physician, (Dr. Latta, of Leith), cured many desperate cases of cholera by infusing aqueous solution of salt into the patient's veins, and, perhaps, had the talented originator of this idea still lived, we might have heard more about it than we now do. If it be true, as alleged, that no one who partakes largely of salt has ever been seized with cholera, such a fact strongly countenances Dr. Latta's practice. It must not be supposed, however, that salted meats are equivalent to salt used with fresh meats. This is very far from being the case. Whilst thus hovering on the regional boundary of the medical province, on which province our readers need not fear our actual encroachment, we cannot help alluding to another curious circumstance connected with salt, especially as it is *apropos* of pigs, which are "unclean things," but too much *apropos* of cholera in more senses than one.* It is a singular fact, that while fresh pork produces something like choleraic symptoms in certain constitutions, a simple sprinkling of it with salt over-night before its culinary preparation, completely prevents the occurrence of such symptoms in those thus otherwise liable to them. Another notable fact in reference to pigs we must also note. By the Jewish Scriptural law of God as given through Moses, swine are prohibited as unfit for human food. This is only one of numerous sanitary laws of vital import to which the Jewish community is subject. To some extent these sanitary laws are still observed; and it is a curious fact that no community or class of people, it is said, are so free from cholera as the Jews! What a noble subject we have here for our clergy to expatiate upon at the present moment! In fact there is one "clerk in orders," namely, the Rev. Charles Richson, M.A. who has enlarged upon it in a sermon preached in Manchester Cathedral on 30th April last, and published by request, with notes by Dr. Sutherland of the General Board of Health, the proceeds of the sale to be very appropriately applied to the funds of the Manchester and Salford Sanitary Association.† It would be well were hundreds of our clergy, who do not seem to have ever dreamt themselves of preaching from such fitting and timely texts

* It is a remarkable circumstance, not only that none of the lower animals have till now been known, so far as we are aware, to have ever been seized with cholera, but also that now it is declared that pigs in Armagh, in Ireland, are dying with all its worst symptoms. Swine's flesh is said to be the likeliest to human flesh of any animal in flavour and other peculiarities. Would that men had too a little less like to filthy swine. Like all other animals but swine, they might thus escape the cholera, to which in many instances the filth of swine, no less than swine-like filth of other kinds, in no small degree contribute.

† This useful Association is at present issuing a series of little tracts on health and cleanliness, &c. for distribution amongst the working and other classes in Manchester and Salford, and which appear to be capable of doing a great deal of good.

as those connected with the Jewish sanitary laws, to purchase the sixpenny tract containing this sermon, and to read it to their congregations throughout the country. Had the Scottish clergy who denounced Lord Palmerston's reference to sanitary laws and to their infringement as promotive of cholera, only looked to the law of Moses, they would have surely hesitated ere they brought their "forty parson power" of "odium theologium" to bear upon his lordship's pungent and salutary recommendations. As to the Scriptural prohibition of swine, as unclean animals, it would be well if every community as well as the Jewish were still compelled to observe this very important sanitary law, at least so far as regards the beastly habit of breeding swine in the vicinity of human dwellings, and even in human dwellings themselves. Were cholera or the devil to enter forthwith into every such sow, and secure its speedy destruction, it would be fortunate.

Not one whit better than the Irish pig-breeder, is the landlord who builds rows of "houses" without the necessary means of cleanliness to each. In Blakeney's buildings, to which our correspondent, "W. H. B." who asked, "What is a house," alluded last week, there are nine houses—if we can so call them,—each containing on an average fifteen persons, and amongst all these 135 human beings, there is but one paltry arrangement for common cleanliness and decency. Could any other result be expected from such a state of things than the fact that, although Islington has always been comparatively free from cholera, and is at present in the enjoyment of the like immunity, for which it is indebted in great measure, we believe, to its elevation, and hence to its natural drainage; nevertheless, there have recently been, we are informed, no less than five cases of cholera in Blakeney's buildings!

For the present we shall conclude with a selection from recent communications, bearing more or less on the subjects of which we have just been treating.

One correspondent, signing "The Hermit in London," while adducing the experience and recommendation of Mr. Herapath, of Bristol, in reference to chlorine, remarks that—

"Until landlords and parishes provide proper house and street drainage, no place can be safe against cholera. But if people would only take the trouble to obtain (through the parish authorities when too poor), and use some of the above preventive materials in their sinks, drains, privies, and houses, and practise cleanliness in premises and person—if all foul waters, such as the docks, ditches, sewers, and their river mouths, had chloride of lime, &c. frequently thrown in, and all offal and carrion were speedily buried with lime; and if all offensive trades were compelled constantly to keep in use some purifying ingredient on their premises,—much mischief might be warded off.

"And all this might be done at a very trifling expense, perhaps a penny rate—if Boards of Health and Guardians would only do their duty and act; in default of which a fearful amount of responsibility will lie at their doors."

Another correspondent, "W. L. G." recalls attention to a precaution we have repeatedly urged, as to cleansing cesspools and drains, either in summer or while cholera or fever is prevalent:—

"Is it not important," he remarks, "in these serious times, to point out to the commissioners the necessity of choosing some other periods of the year for opening the sewers? The following streets in Westminster are and have been for these two months past, laid open for improvement:—Marsham-street, Tufton-street, Romney-street, Little Peter-street, the Horseferry-road, and Strutton-ground—the locality is well known to be bad enough to generate disease, but I think it is imperative and important to the public not to augment it by the dreadful stench of these pestiferous sewers."

The authorities ought at least, in every case, first of all thoroughly to deodorize, or cause to be deodorized, all offensive matter before its removal. Each day shows more fully that if vigorous measures be forthwith adopted in every parish, we may yet escape, under providence, much of the sorrow and loss which threatens us.

DEMAND FOR MASONS IN CORNWALL.—Such is the scarcity of masons in Cornwall, that the town-crier of Liskeard has been put into requisition to offer 5s. a-day.