

**ENGINEERS AND OFFICIALS; AN
HISTORICAL SKETCH OF THE PROGRESS
OF "HEALTH OF TOWNS
WORKS" (BETWEEN 1838 AND 1856) IN
LONDON AND THE PROVINCES; WITH
BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES**

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Engineers and Officials; An Historical Sketch of the Progress of "Health of Towns Works"
(Between 1838 and 1856) in London and the Provinces; With Biographical Notes by Edwin
Chadwick & F. O. Ward & John Thwaites

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EDWIN CHADWICK & F. O. WARD & JOHN THWAITES

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OF

THE PROGRESS OF

“HEALTH OF TOWNS WORKS”

(BETWEEN 1838 AND 1856)

IN LONDON AND THE PROVINCES.

With Biographical Notes

ON

LORD PALMERSTON.
THE EARL OF SHAFTESBURY.
LORD EBRINGTON.

EDWIN CHADWICK, C.B.
F. O. WARD.
JOHN THWAITES.

LONDON:
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1856.

INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER.

THE REVERSE OF WRONG FALLACY—RAILWAY COMMISSIONERS—ADMIRALTY INSPECTORS—BOARD OF HEALTH CLAIMS.

PACK-HORSES, mail-coaches, ancient Dogberries, water-carts, link-boys, sedans, small-swords, bag-wigs, highwaymen, oil-lamps, and four-bottle legislators, are out of date, and with them the laws and institutions framed for the dangerous days in which they flourished.

The school of stand-stillism—the intermediate school between active despotism and active reform—which worshipped abuses as Indians worship idols, the more hideous the more reverently—flourished under Lord Chancellor Eldon, and expired with Colonel Sibthorp.

We are all reformers now! The wholesale questions—the battles for the free speech, free press, free gospel, and free trade, are settled, and “Whig or Tory bred,” whoever wishes to cultivate a small field of popularity and political success, looks out for a waste to be drained and subsoiled, ploughed, harrowed, and cropped in the most approved style of modern legislative reform: one takes education, another criminals, a third coalheavers, a fourth sailors under his parliamentary charge; and it would seem as if a

considerable number of people were beginning to believe that the men who have made old England what she is, live, not on bread and beef, earned by industry, but on Acts of Parliament, with the help of official Commissioners; that no one is now capable of taking care of himself; that every community requires the horn-book and rod of a salaried professor, like he of the Black Rod who starved the Governor of Barataria, to save him from indigestion.

From that apathy that let the representatives of deserted towns rule the nation, and descendants of a small clique hold all municipal authority—from that apathy that permitted death to be the penalty for stealing a yard of calico, and left the safety of life and property dependent on superannuated Dogberries, we have rushed into the opposite extreme—tying up the originality, the private enterprise, the self-dependence that distinguish us from our spoon-fed Teuton neighbours, by exchanging the great “LET-ALONE” principle for OVER LEGISLATION, and aggravating “OVER LEGISLATION” by “IGNORANT ADMINISTRATION.” In a word, the favourite fallacy of the day is not fear of the mob or the monarch, but “*the reverse of wrong fallacy.*” Afraid of gout, we make sure of paralysis.

Englishmen are not Prussians, and certainly English officials are not German professors.

In Prussia, the State absorbs all the choice talent of the day. According to the Prussian system of education, everybody is educated to be fit for everything. On completing his university curriculum, the first prizeman has learned the rudiments of every science,

of every art, and is equally prepared to become a professor or a captain of military engineers, superintendent of a Government manufactory, a Government railroad, or of a Government dockyard; so well prepared that the chances are that in the whole course of his official life he never meets with a man out of Government employ better informed in his own special department than himself. The consequence of this system is, that the Government may be admirably and economically served by first-rate men, but the nation at large mentally emasculated—barren of private ambition or private enterprise—jogs on, contented to walk in leading strings, be fed with a spoon, smoke, read, muse, drink, and dance, except an unhappy few, who, disgusted at finding no free opening for their ambition and genius, madly rush into socialism or some other foolish *-ism*, ending in a prison or exile.

Now, in England, to begin at the beginning, we have no stock to draw upon for filling up the army of bureaucrats, which it seems the special object of recent minor legislation to create; so that when it is settled by Parliamentary wisdom that some trade or work wants regulating, the chances are ten to one that the Board or Commission selected to become the King Stork has to learn the rudiments of the business it is about to rule. To compensate for the general ignorance of English bureaucrats, the system of Blue Book Reports has been invented and brought to perfection.

Let us take as an instance a case of "cream tarts."
An M.P. of influence on his way to the House, steps

into a pastrycook's and eats a cream-tart; he thinks it detestable; he has an indigestion, consults his friends, and finds from their report a general deterioration in the character of cream tarts; thereupon, with the aid of a persevering and briefless barrister, a correspondent of the "Weekly Acidulator," he founds a private association for the Reform of the Cream Tart Manufactory. The association includes, besides the lawyers who swarm round festering jobs like flies in a butcher's shop, men of science in search of reputation, doctors in search of patients or a place, and is gilded by a suckling lord or two, not strong enough for real political life. The society gets up petitions and manufactures paragraphs, holds meetings, has dinners, abuses the pastrycooks and dairymen, and praises itself. Parliament catches the infection, and the idea of obtaining tarts equal to those described in the Arabian Nights, forms a staple of conversation for all the bores in the House. The Minister who at first pooh-poohed the question, finding some near and troublesome connection among the cream tartites, takes the petition into consideration, and promises to introduce a measure. At one time there are plans prepared in Whitehall for a Government Cream Tart Manufactory, but the country not being continentalised quite up to that degree, the idea is given up in favour of a Commission—the Cream Tart Commission, consisting of a president and two commissioners, secretary, assistant secretary, law clerk, physician, chemist, stove engineer, and staff of clerks. When the bill of these salaries is introduced in a

thin house, at the end of a weary session, the only opposition is from an M.P. not connected with the Temple, or the Minister, who admits that the cream tarts were bad a year back, but suggests that since the agitation of the Cream Tart Reform Society a great improvement has taken place ; in fact, that cream tarts are now excellent, and that in any case it would be sufficient to appoint one inspecting pastrycook for the metropolis. Of course, his opposition goes for nothing, the appointments are all made ! Lord Libbington extinguishes the Anti-Tart M.P. by a technical lecture on the tart manufacture. The Bill becomes an Act, and a small band of lords, lawyers, and doctors, perfectly innocent of the art of pastry, take their seats and their salaries, and proceed to regulate the confectioners of England. In due time a report appears, fluently written and neatly printed. It contains the history of cream tarts from the time of Mahomet to Chadwick—the statistics of their consumption ; an analysis of their contents by the Board's chemist ; a dissertation on the comparative value of the cream of the Yorkshire, the Dutch, the Alderney, and the Ayrshire cow ; a statement of the immense ameliorations, with extracts of evidence, produced by the labours of the Board ; and in an appendix, a copy of correspondence with the tart makers, and a letter from a special commissioner deputed to visit, taste, and report on all cream tart shops between Calais and Vienna.

When this "elaborate, curious, and most valuable report" is laid on the table of the House of Com-

mons, with an appropriate speech from Libbington, the second year's salary is voted as a matter of course; for the Board, though it could not manufacture a single cream tart, has succeeded in manufacturing an admirable Blue Book!

It is the instinct of Controlling Boards to seek to absorb and centralise far more detailed power than they can usefully exercise. So they write letters without end, and issue orders without stint. It is their weakness, unless checked by public opinion, to meddle with everything, object to everything, and finish nothing.

"The hood," says a mediæval proverb, "does not make the monk." But the British official of the nineteenth century often seems to consider that his office has clothed him with science, experience, and every other qualification for ruling over practical men and practical work.

Since 1831 we have had many Commissions and tons of Reports; but the results, as compared with volumes and the salaries, have been of the smallest when not most mischievous.

We have not space here to show the extravagance and laches of the Charity Commission; the many instances of over-meddling and useless interference of the Poor Law Board (a very useful Board, yet like all such Boards too greedy of power). The first Board of Health we have dissected in the body of this work, but we will give a few examples of "over legislation" from the records of railways, and from the proceedings of Admiralty Inspectors.