

**LONDON VESTRIES, AND THEIR  
SANITARY WORK: ARE THEY WILLING  
AND ABLE TO DO IT? AND MAY THEY  
BE TRUSTED IN THE FACE OF A SEVERE  
EPIDEMIC? [P.S. PP.33-34]**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649257720

London Vestries, and Their Sanitary Work: Are They Willing and Able to Do It? And may they be trusted in the face of a severe epidemic? [P.S. pp.33-34] by W. Rendle

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Cover @ 2017

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**W. RENDLE**

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W. Rendle

London Vestries & their Sanitary Work:

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epidemic? -- a Speech -- Aug. 8. 1865 --

Repr? from the 'South London Journal'.

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ARE THEY WILLING AND ABLE TO DO IT?  
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BRING

A SPEECH DELIVERED AUGUST 8TH, 1865, AT A MEETING OF  
THE VESTRY OF ST. GEORGE-THE-MARTYR, SOUTHWARK.

BY

W. RENDLE,

VESTRYMAN, AND LATE THE MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH OF THE PARISH; HONORARY MEMBER  
AND A VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE ASSOCIATION OF MEDICAL OFFICERS OF HEALTH, &c.

*[Reprinted from the 'South London Journal.']*

LONDON:

JOHN CHURCHILL AND SONS, NEW BURLINGTON STREET.

MDCCLXV.

Med 4119.26

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## TO THE READER.

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It may be thought, as the speech here republished refers to but one parish in London, that it scarcely bears out the title. But in this case, directly or indirectly, *ex uno disce omnes*; and as from sad experience the conditions of local invitation to Fever are known to be the conditions of invitation to Cholera also, the second and third clauses of the title may be considered as more or less completely answered. The records of the Fever Hospital, and the letters of Dr. Jcaffreson and others to the 'Times,' tell of fever, coming usually (and occasionally in something like shoals) from the same places, year after year. The general complaint is that the obstructive and self-interested power in the London Vestries is immense and almost irresistible; and that so the better and unfortunately weaker element is usually swamped, and that the conditions here complained of naturally follow. I wish, however, to give the Vestries the advantage of the testimony of our very highest authority. Mr. Simon says, "My own seven years' experience in the service of a local sanitary authority has given me a strong belief in the general disposition of such authorities to exert themselves efficiently against the causes of premature death, when but once they have become fully and publicly informed of the existence and fatality of such causes. Fully informed, I say; because the non-removal of evils which occasion so much human misery commonly depends much less on the supineness of the local authority, as its primary cause, than on the absence of local consciousness as to the real facts of the case. Publicly informed, I say; because local sanitary authorities, exercising their powers virtually without control, and being, like individual men, not incapable of indolence and

error, peculiarly require that their fulfilment of very important duties should be subject to public criticism. Failing this check, it is unquestionable that the existing constitution of such authorities must sometimes endanger the objects for which they are constituted. Elected on the principle of being the representatives of rate-payers, the members are sometimes a little apt to forget that, for sanitary purposes, they are also the appointed guardians of masses of human beings whose lives are at stake in the business. They do not always recollect that the interests of life are at least as sacred as the interests of wealth. And this danger especially deserves to be guarded against; for it has not unfrequently happened that local owners of low house property," and others, "have procured themselves to be elected members of sanitary boards with a view to the protection of their own unworthy interest, by a systematic resistance to sanitary improvement."\* In mitigation of an unfavorable judgment in the case of my own parish, let me also mention that the poorest people are very numerous there (our annual poor-rates are not far from £30,000); that fortunes are very scarce; that people well-to-do are so only by hard work; and that large numbers who contribute are but a few steps above the paupers. Thus it appears difficult among us to encourage a real and liberal sanitary improvement. Of course we feel, when the rich pay only a little out of their abundance to the poor-rates, and we in many instances give like the widow in the Gospel, that if this could be mended, our hearts and our pockets would be more open to the poor and to their sanitary and social welfare. This, however, acts as an excuse to the mean-spirited and short-sighted only, because it must be obvious to all that it would be cheaper to keep a district of poor people healthy than unhealthy. I will only add further that after a most searching discussion upon this statement at a more recent meeting of Vestry, I hold to its absolute truthfulness in every important particular.

\* Pages xliii and xlv, "Papers relating to the Sanitary State of the People of England," 1858.

# LONDON VESTRIES,

AND THEIR

## SANITARY WORK.

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VESTRY OF ST. GEORGE-THE-MARTYR, SOUTHWARK.

PROPOSED IMPROVED SANITARY ARRANGEMENTS.

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MR. RENDLE made the following statement :—As we are a body appointed chiefly for sanitary and similar purposes, the question of fever is of the highest importance to us, and demands the most patient investigation. The presence of this disease continuously or to any extent in a district is, in the opinion of all the highest authorities, a proof of very great evils, which all concur in thinking more or less removable. A proof also that the particular locality is unhealthy in every sense. The recent notice from the Privy Council as to preventive measures, couples cholera and typhus together. The continued presence of fever tells of causes which aid in producing other diseases and in sapping the stamina of all within reach of the fever poisons. The great French physician, contemplating what he saw in the Crimea, was not far wrong when he said it could be produced or destroyed at will. The question for us is, having a large power, which may be increased if we wish it, have we the will to try? I cannot imagine in such an inquiry as this, which must, if it succeeds at all, be for the public benefit, and cannot by any chance wrong any one, that there should be any cause for party feeling or for anger. If we discuss it calmly and with judgment we shall better understand the conditions which give rise to fever and many accompanying evils in our locality—how much of the causes we may, and how much we may not, remove. Unhappily, we in this parish are always among the heaviest afflicted. In five years we