

**REPORT BY THE GENERAL BOARD OF
HEALTH, ON THE MEASURES ADOPTED
FOR THE EXECUTION OF THE
NUISANCES REMOVAL AND DISEASES
PREVENTION ACT, AND THE PUBLIC
HEALTH ACT, UP TO JULY 1849**

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Report by the General Board of Health, on the Measures Adopted for the Execution of the Nuisances Removal and Diseases Prevention Act, and the Public Health Act, up to July 1849
by Various

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VARIOUS

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REPORT

Great Britain - BY THE

GENERAL BOARD OF HEALTH,

ON THE

MEASURES ADOPTED FOR THE EXECUTION OF THE
NUISANCES REMOVAL AND DISEASES
PREVENTION ACT,

AND THE

PUBLIC HEALTH ACT,

UP TO

JULY 1849.

Presented to both Houses of Parliament by Command of Her Majesty.



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FOR HER MAJESTY'S STATIONERY OFFICE.

1849.

FIRST PROCEEDINGS.

MAY IT PLEASE YOUR MAJESTY,

As the Public Health Act and the Epidemic Diseases Prevention Act, which we, the members of the General Board of Health, were appointed to administer, constituted a new and untrodden field of legislation, we have felt it our duty to render an account of our first proceedings, and of the grounds on which we have asked for amended statutory provisions to carry out the views of the Legislature.

In presenting the following Report we beg leave to express our regret that the pressure of incidental and irregular demands and emergencies for the direction of measures to arrest the spread of Asiatic cholera, have prevented our submitting it earlier for practical consideration during the present session of Parliament. For this delay, and for unavoidable incompleteness in the Report, which may not be supplied by our published Notifications, and for any imperfections in the first exercise of the powers with which we are charged, we would bespeak a gracious consideration.

We deemed it our duty, in carrying into operation the Nuisances Removal and Diseases Prevention Act, to follow out the conclusions to which the Metropolitan Sanitary Commissioners had previously arrived respecting the mode of propagation, the localizing conditions, and the means of checking the spread of epidemic diseases—conclusions derived from the largest experience of such diseases at home and abroad, and which were generally acquiesced in. With reference especially to the pestilence which seemed at that time to be impending, it appeared to us to be established by the evidence which they had presented in their First and Second Reports, that Asiatic cholera differs in no respect from other epidemic diseases either in the circumstances which favour its localization and extension, or in the

classes that are peculiarly predisposed to it, and consequently that the means which experience has proved to be effectual in preventing the origin and spread of the most formidable of these common epidemics, typhus fever, would in the same manner be found effectual in the prevention of cholera.

The evidence also appeared conclusive that the character which, on its first appearance in Europe, was generally thought to be peculiar to cholera, and which gave it its chief terror—the absolute suddenness of its attack—was not true to the extent supposed; but that, on the contrary, with very few exceptions, and those chiefly on its first outbreak in a new locality, it gives distinct warning of its approach in time for the adoption of remedies capable of arresting its progress.

Though, when we entered on our office, cholera had not as yet broken out in any part of the United Kingdom, it appeared to be steadily approaching us from the Continent, advancing precisely in its former track.

The results of the experience of the disease which had been collected from so many sources, exhibiting its progress among populations in different climates and under widely different social conditions, indicated important practical measures of prevention; but it appeared to us to be desirable, before the adoption of any systematic plan of prevention, to ascertain whether the disease presented the same characters as on its former visitation, or, should it have undergone any change, in what respects it had become modified. In order to obtain authentic information on this point, we decided on sending our two Medical Inspectors to Hamburgh and Berlin, the nearest cities on the Continent in which the pestilence was at that time prevailing. They were on their way to Hamburgh, when they were stopped by an outbreak of cholera at Hull, which took place among a Prussian crew who had passed through Hamburgh on their way to England, whither they were coming to navigate a vessel which had been detained in the port of Hull owing to the Danish blockade. It appeared that these sailors had come from a healthy port in the Baltic, and that they had passed only a single night near the town of Hamburgh,

where cholera had been for some time epidemic. The appearance of cholera in the port of Hull excited considerable apprehension, which seemed to be justified by the position of the town on the east coast, in which cholera, in the year 1831, first broke out, namely, at Sunderland. The event appeared to us to be of so threatening a nature as to require a careful inquiry into the circumstances of the case as well as into the state of the town. This was undertaken by Dr. Sutherland and Mr. Grainger, who reported that the general sanitary condition of Hull at that time, as compared to former periods, was favourable; and they gave it as their opinion that, apart from the position of the town, it was in no particular danger of an outbreak of cholera; the correctness of which conclusion was confirmed by the fact that these imported cases did not spread, and that they were not followed by any appearance of the disease among the townspeople.

While engaged with the authorities of the town in advising on such provisions as seemed practicable for preventing the extension of the disease, if fresh cases of it should occur, the attention of the Inspectors was called to the subject of quarantine, and particularly to the cruel position in which certain quarantine regulations, as enforced at Hull, placed passengers and crews coming from infected ports; instances being brought under their notice in which experience had proved that it was impossible to afford to vessels under quarantine medical assistance until all hope of relief had passed away. The peril in which considerable numbers of persons were thus placed, and the loss of life which had actually occurred, induced us to address a special report on this subject to the Privy Council.

Having, as above stated, suggested what precautions seemed available for the town of Hull, the Inspectors were on the point of embarking for Hamburg, when we received information that an outbreak of cholera had occurred at Sunderland. This circumstance induced us to direct Dr. Sutherland to proceed to that town and Mr. Grainger to go on to Hamburg. Dr. Sutherland was prevented from joining Mr. Grainger on the

Continent, his presence, after his visit at Sunderland, being urgently required at Edinburgh, and subsequently at other towns in Scotland, where his labours have continued up to a recent period.

Meanwhile, on arriving at Hamburg, one of the first circumstances which attracted Mr. Grainger's notice was the great severity of the epidemic among the crews of numerous vessels lying in the harbour, a large proportion of the ships being English. He found that the number of English seamen amounted to upwards of 800, among whom, being in a foreign port, and often unable to obtain assistance until they were in a hopeless condition, the mortality was excessive. In order to afford what assistance seemed available, we requested Mr. Grainger to consult with the naval officers; and, with their advice, to draw up instructions for the guidance of the masters and crews of the English traders, to cause proper medicines to be provided at convenient stations in Hamburg, and to circulate notices of this among the brokers and others connected with shipping, as well as to the captains themselves.

These instructions were widely circulated among merchant seamen in different parts of the United Kingdom by authorities and companies connected with shipping, and, with the sanction of Lord Palmerston, among seamen in foreign ports.

It appeared, in the course of the investigation into the state of the colliers and other English vessels at Hamburg, that they were in a most defective condition, as to health; that the fore-castle, where the sailors sleep, was unprovided with any means of ventilation, and in fact that the men were, in those wretched berths, exposed to all the evils resulting on shore from filthy, crowded, and ill-ventilated dwellings; and in the instructions issued as above stated, especial attention was directed to the necessity of cleansing and ventilating these vessels, as constituting a much better security against the progress of the epidemic than any quarantine regulations. The evidence as to the greater efficiency of such measures of precaution and pre-

vention have been fully set forth in our Report on Quarantine.

From the observations made on the earlier groups of cases of the disease that occurred on its reappearance in this country, and still more from the information communicated in the reports of Mr. Grainger, as to its character and progress in Hamburgh (see Report in Appendix), it appeared that no essential change had taken place in the nature of the epidemic; but, on the contrary, the further and more recent experience of it afforded decisive confirmation of the views promulgated in the Metropolitan Sanitary Reports, as to the conditions which favour its localization and spread, and as to the general existence of premonitory diarrhœa.

Seeing that, when the mortality from the developed cases of this disease that have occurred in any country comes to be summed up, it is proved to be similar in all climates, and under all modes of treatment, we arrived at the conclusion that it was our duty to regard the impending epidemic less as a disease to be cured by medicine, than as a pestilence to be checked by measures of prevention. But the whole tenor of the evidence presented under the Metropolitan Sanitary Commission, corroborated by that subsequently received by us, led to the conviction that the same measures of prevention were applicable to cholera as to other epidemics, which, though less dreaded, increase the absolute mortality in a higher degree, and are regarded with less terror only because they are slower in their progress, and more constant in their presence. In order therefore to carry out what appeared to us to be the intention of the Legislature, we endeavoured to embody in our Regulations and Orders the results of the most extensive experience with reference to the entire class of epidemic diseases, and to found upon that experience practical measures of prevention. Among the most available and needful measures of this description were those of Cleansing. We therefore called the earnest attention of the Boards of Guardians, the authorities principally charged with the execution of the Nuisances Act, to this subject. In our First,

8 *Lists of Places where Epidemic Diseases prevail.*

Notification, bearing date October the 5th, 1848, we represented to them that experience having shown that preventive measures against cholera are also preventive against typhus and other epidemic and endemic diseases, it would be the duty of the Guardians to carry into immediate effect all practical measures of external and internal cleansing, especially in the ill-conditioned districts; and by an Order dated November 9th, 1848, we issued to the Parochial Boards of Scotland regulations requiring the immediate performance of such cleansings, and prescribing the mode in which they should be carried out. See Regulations of the General Board of Health, from I. to VIII.

The seats and subjects of cholera and the seats and subjects of typhus being the same, we issued on the 3rd of November, 1848, among other regulations, a Special Order to the Boards of Guardians (see Regulations IX., X., and XI.) requiring them to desire their clerks to make out from the register of deaths, or from the district medical relief books, and from any public books or other sources, from which information might be obtained within the Union or parish, a list of places where epidemic, endemic, and contagious diseases had of late been frequent. We further requested the Guardians to cause their medical officers forthwith to visit and examine the localities contained in such list, and to certify in writing all such places as they might find in a state dangerous to health, or which needed frequent and effectual cleansing, together with all such nuisances and matters injurious to health as ought to be abated, cleansed, and removed.

This appeared to be an essential preventive regulation, experience having shown that unless express obligations of the nature stated are enforced, extended and effectual cleansings, or other sanitary improvements in the power of the local authorities to effect, are rarely carried into operation. We believed that by the observance of this order the medical officers would be guided at once to the worst-conditioned places, where the inhabitants would be found to be in the greatest danger. This expectation has been realized, for wher-