

FILTH-DISEASES AND THEIR PREVENTION

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Filth-Diseases and Their Prevention by John Simon

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JOHN SIMON

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AND THEIR
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BY

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BOSTON, September 28, 1875.

To Boards of Health and Citizens of Massachusetts:—

THE undersigned members of the Massachusetts State Board of Health would respectfully, but earnestly, urge upon all persons the careful perusal of the following masterly essay by Mr. SIMON, Chief Medical Officer of the Privy Council and of the Local Government Board of England. If the practical suggestions made therein were acted on by all citizens, hundreds of lives now annually doomed to destruction would be saved, and the health and comfort of the people greatly increased.

HENRY I. BOWDITCH,
RICHARD FROTHINGHAM,
J. C. HOADLEY,
R. T. DAVIS,
DANIEL L. WEBSTER,
B. NEWHALL,
W. L. RICHARDSON, Sec'y pro tem.,

Members of the State Board of Health of Massachusetts.

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PREFATORY REMARKS TO THE
AMERICAN EDITION.

It would be impossible, without injury to its general effect, to remove from the body of this essay the various references to the authority under which Mr. Simon acted, also those to certain papers and certain laws, some of which may seem at first sight irrelevant for us in America. It has therefore been deemed wise to print the paper almost exactly as it was originally offered, viz., as a Preface to a volume of admirable reports made by Government Inspectors upon several epidemics which had occurred in various parts of England (*vide* Reports of the Medical Officer of the Privy Council and Local Government Board, New Series, No. 2). To that volume, every reader who desires to see how far England is in advance of us in thorough sanitary work, is respectfully referred.

In our Appendix will be found a few of the summaries given by Mr. Simon, as illustrations of the origin of various epidemics. Each one of them is very suggestive, not only to England, but to every

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householder in America. The Editors would urge upon every one the importance of a perusal of each one of these statements; and afterwards, if necessary, let him make due application of the instruction thereby gained, to the improvement of his own homestead.

A few notes only have been added, either explanatory of technical words, or in reference to the thoughts or suggestions in the text in their applicability to Massachusetts.

FILTH-DISEASES
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I.

1. IN the subject-matter of Preventive Medicine, considered with reference to the administrative needs of England at the present time, Enteric (Typhoid) Fever, with the diseases which are allied to it in mode of origin, must necessarily, I think, stand as first topic: and I avail myself of this earliest opportunity to submit to the Local Government Board some observations on that class of diseases.

2. In my recent Annual Report, the vast amount of injury which is suffered day by day in this country through diseases well known to be preventable was referred to in regard of the responsibility which it imposes on all who have undertaken to serve in the new sanitary organization of the country; and I submitted that "the Local Government Board, viewed as a Central Board of Health, and the more than fifteen hundred District-Authorities which, each with its Medical Officer of

That very much disease is preventable, is the *raison d'être* of sanitary authorities.

Health, locally administer the Health Laws, may be regarded as having had their respective functions assigned to them in special and systematic relation to that state of things."

3. I do not pretend to give any exact statement of the total influence which preventable diseases exert against the efficiency and happiness of our population; for it is only so far as such diseases kill, and even thus far but very imperfectly, that the effect can be represented in numbers. Of the incalculable amount of physical suffering and disablement which they occasion, and of the sorrows and anxieties, the often permanent darkening of life, the straitened means of subsistence, the very frequent destitution and pauperism, which attend or follow such suffering, death-statistics, to which alone I can refer, testify only in sample or by suggestion.

4. That the deaths which we in each year register in this country (now about half a million a year) are fully one hundred and twenty-five thousand more numerous than they would be if existing knowledge of the chief causes of diseases, as affecting masses of population, were reasonably well applied throughout England, is, I believe, the common conviction of persons who have studied the subject. The statistical considerations which in the

first instance suggest that conclusion have so long and so admirably been put before the public in the successive Reports of the Registrar-General that I need but very briefly, and only by way of illustration, advert to them. Looking at England as a whole, we see that of each one hundred persons who die, not quite ten have reached the standard old age of seventy-five years; and that of each one hundred children born hardly seventy-four complete five years of life. We next see what appears to be a widely different expectation of life in different districts of the country; that while, for instance, in a considerable proportion (about a seventh of the number) of the districts into which England is divided for registration purposes, the death-rate of infants in the first year of life ranges from eight to twelve per cent, there is a still larger proportion of districts in which it ranges even from nineteen to thirty; and that, under the influence of these Herodian districts, the infant death-rate of England as a whole stands at the high average of eighteen. Similarly, taking the death-rate of the population at all ages living, we find that the present general English death-rate of about twenty-two and one-half per one thousand per annum, covers on the one hand local death-rates ranging from thirteen to seventeen, and on the other hand local death-rates which range even to far above thirty. *Prima facie*, then, it would seem that influences hostile to life must be operating in parts of