

[Report of the Medical Officer of Health for St. Martin-in-the-Fields, Vestry of].

Contributors

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HALF YEARLY REPORT

TO THE VESTRY OF

ST. MARTIN-IN-THE-FIELDS,

ON THE

SANITARY CONDITION

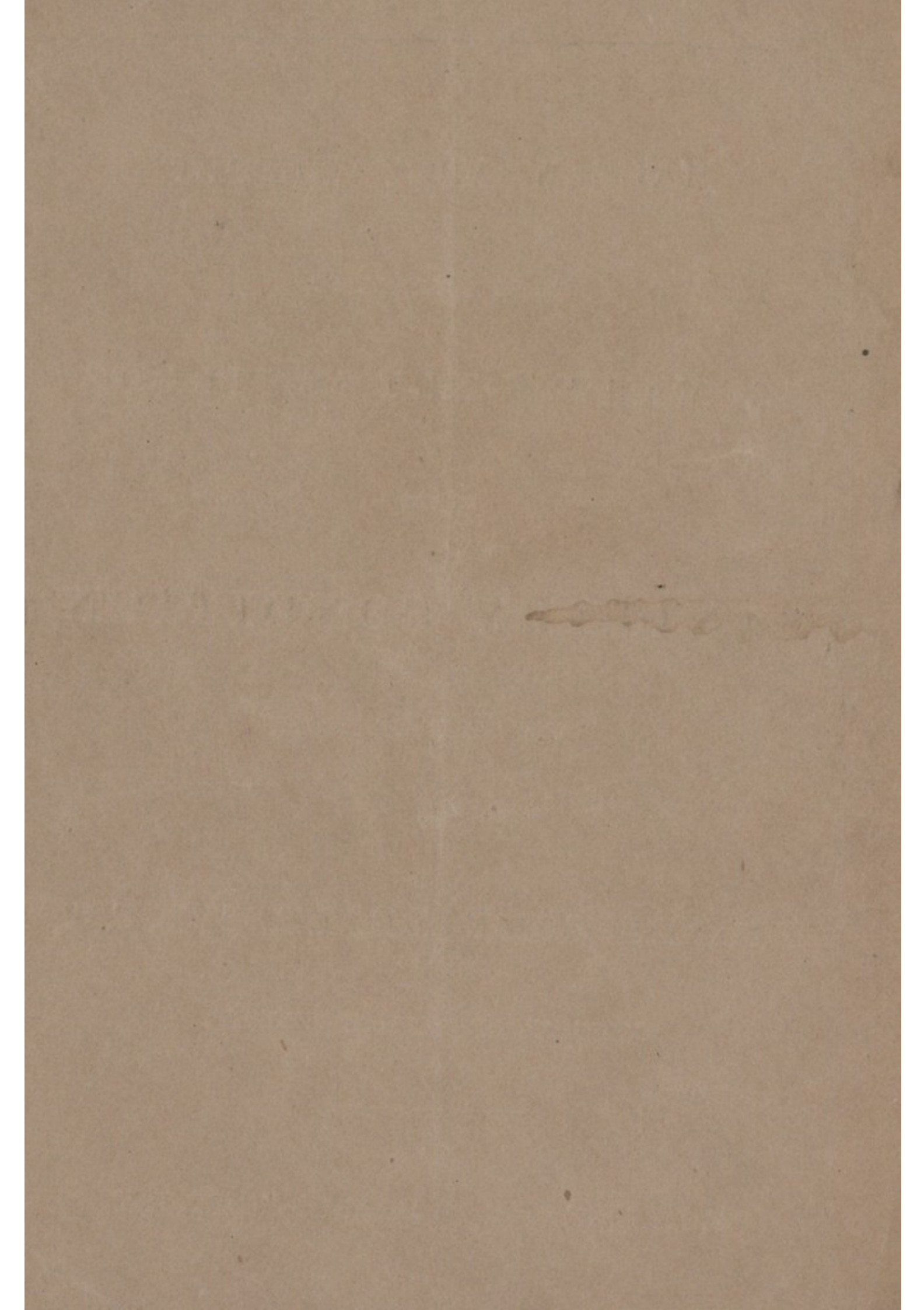
OF THE PARISH,

BY

LIONEL JOHN BEALE, M.R.C.S.,

MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH.

Ordered by the Vestry to be Printed, July 10, 1856.



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Printed by JOHN SMITH & Co., 52, Long Acre, London.



GENTLEMEN,

IN the first six months of 1856, the total number of deaths in the Parish was 302, of which, 52 occurred in the Workhouse, and 60 in Charing Cross Hospital. The public health has continued to be remarkably good through the whole period—the number of deaths per week in this Parish having only reached the average on two occasions, and in both cases were augmented by an accumulation of deaths from Coroners' Inquests, these not being reported week by week.

Since I have received the Weekly Reports of the Registrars, (10 weeks) there have been 79 deaths; of these, 8 have died within 1 month after birth; 11 under 2 years; and 6 above 70 years; 11 have died from consumption; 12 from diseases of the heart; 9 from bronchitis and pneumonia; 5 from erysipelas and carbuncle; 4 from fever; 4 from hooping cough; and 2 from measles. There has been a remarkable immunity from epidemic diseases.

I purpose taking advantage of my first half-yearly Report, to call your attention to some of the objects to be gained by the appointment of Health Officers.

We must all see that an important part of the wealth and happiness of a nation will depend on

the power of the whole of its people to aid in multiplying its resources ; and, in order that they may be able to do so, there is no one element more important than health, and the resulting vigour of mind and body. A labouring man, who does not retain his full vigour, cannot command good wages ; with the decline of his health he is reduced to less and less frequent employment, and ultimately becomes a burthen on the ratepaying classes of the community. If we had no higher motive than pecuniary interest, we should do well to maintain our working population in health, but we have also much higher motives. As Christians, it is our belief, that in a religious point of view, all men are equal. All are children of the same parent, all equally interesting to his Providence, and all destined to the same futurity. With such convictions, can those persons who are blessed with wealth and leisure properly fulfil their duties, if they neglect any means of elevating the moral condition of their less fortunate brethren, whose fate in this world is severe and almost uninterrupted labour. That severe and continuous labour diminishes the value of human life by prematurely exhausting vital power, and that those who follow the most laborious employments are the most shortlived, we know by observation and experience, as well as by the returns of the Registrar General.

In the complicated state of society in which we live, especially in towns, there are too many circumstances which injure the health of all ; but the

educated classes have opportunities of learning, and of carrying out the means of preserving health, while, if the poorer do ever learn these means, they have not equal power of putting them into execution ;—hence, the duty of doing all we can to aid them in this respect. In christian countries, for many centuries, hospitals have been endowed for the cure of disease ; in our own day, we are called upon to direct our attention to another and an equally noble obligation, how to prevent disease. Of the two objects of the Medical Act, the prevention of disease, and the cure of disease, the former is, perhaps, the more valuable for the welfare and happiness of mankind. For centuries we have continued to supply our hospitals with fevers and other preventible diseases engendered by bad habits of life, and indeed, our hospitals themselves were for centuries so ill-managed as to engender disease within their own walls. The great Howard first drew attention to this subject in relation to prisons, which were the first institutions to be placed under the Laws of Health.

True economy of National and Parochial funds has led to the conclusion that prisons, workhouses, schools, and all buildings where large numbers of people live, must be regulated in regard to the supply of air and water, drainage and cleanliness, as well as to the diet and regimen of their inmates. We are now beginning to apply the same laws to the habitations and habits of the people themselves.

Those who have had opportunities of seeing how

the working classes live in their homes, have for many years lamented over the prostration of mind and body, which has resulted from unwholesome, overcrowded dwellings. Our clergy are but too well aware that the great masses of our town inhabitants neglect altogether their religious duties, and many believe this must continue to be the case while the homes of the people are such as they now are. By improving the habitations and modes of living among the labouring classes, we shall at once raise them in the social scale, and teach by example, in a way that must impress and elevate their moral sense. The interference of the wealthier classes in these matters, during the last few years, has generated a feeling among the people, that they are looked after, cared for, and their social interests made the subject of legislation. The feelings thus engendered, must improve the character, and we may hope, elevate large numbers above the mere animal sensuality to which they have been driven almost by necessity.

Those who interest themselves in this subject must not be impatient for immediate results, at least, they must not be disappointed if purity, temper, morality, and religion be not rapid in their growth. Such effects are slow of development in all classes. Education itself, has not yet realised the hopes of its more ardent advocates, but it is progressing, and the new laws which it is our duty to carry out, by increasing cleanliness and health of body, will raise a feeling, and create a desire for mental and moral improvement.

However, while the legislature, the clergy, and the parochial authorities are endeavouring to do so much for the benefit of the people, success will not be great until the efforts of the people themselves are enlisted in the work, and, that by their own exertions they do something to help themselves and their children out of the unhappy and unwholesome condition into which too many have fallen. They must personally aid in the efforts making for the diminution of disease and death among them. All parents must have a desire for healthy offspring, and attention to a few general laws, will diminish the number of rickety, scrofulous, and sickly children, who abound in the most confined districts of all towns. Cleanliness of person, house and clothing, fresh air, simple, but wholesome food, order and regularity of meals, refreshing sleep, and some recreation for mind and body, may be mentioned as the most important Laws of Health, which all can, if they choose, to some extent, carry out. Difficulties in such matters occur in a town population, but for a large city, there is none so healthy as London, the inhabitants of which are better located in regard to health, than those of many country towns. The air of London, even of its streets, is not bad, as is proved by the appearance of those of its inhabitants who are much out in the open air. Workmen whose occupations are out of doors, carters, omnibus and cab drivers, people who stand in markets, &c., are generally healthy, in spite of over-indulgence in fermented spirits and other causes of bad health.

Cleanliness of the skin is of primary importance in regard to health, a daily bath is desirable, but all, men, women, and children, should take advantage of the baths and washhouses, and purify the whole skin, at least once in a week. A healthy skin engenders a healthy constitution, and no skin can be healthy which is not purified in all its parts by bathing and friction. People do not appreciate fully the institution of baths and washhouses—one of the greatest boons of modern beneficence for health and comfort; as yet, they are not taken advantage of by a tenth part of those who ought to use them.

While children are not in school, their whole time should be spent in the open air; many of the courts in which they live are available for this purpose, any place being better for them than a close room. If we carry out all the means necessary for the Public Health, it will become our duty to establish public playgrounds and gymnasias, for, while attending in our schools to mental and moral improvement, we must not neglect physical development, as well as recreation.

The employment of wholesome food is of first importance in relation to health, and, in spite of what has been published about adulterations, wholesome food may be obtained if people will use their senses and their understandings. Many of the adulterations which exist, result from the mistake that cheapness is the principal thing to be observed by purchasers. The article of milk, so

important to the health of children, is scarcely to be had genuine, especially in neighbourhoods occupied by the poor; it is often more than half water, but any other kind of adulteration is very rare. Most people submit to this deception, believing that there is no remedy, but submission is one great encouragement to dishonesty, while the exercise of discrimination would encourage the honest dealer, of whom there are numbers in every line of business, who would scorn knowingly to sell an adulterated article. Milk, as well as other food, may be had genuine, if people will not only learn to distinguish the bad from the good, but also determine only to use commodities that are unsophisticated. It requires no Sanitary Commission to teach people that milk is nearly always diluted, everybody has known this for years, so that something more than mere knowledge of the fact of adulteration is required for its suppression. Indeed, all exertions of the legislature will be useless, if in this matter people will not help themselves, for similar exposures have been made on former occasions, and after a little temporary excitement have sunk into oblivion, productive of no results. The whole question of food, its condition, its wholesomeness, its adulteration, will be one of the most important duties of Health Officers.

The ventilation of houses and rooms is most essential to health. I know no point requiring more reform. In most of the houses which are let in tenements, the upper sash of the window is fixed, so that

the rooms cannot be rapidly and completely purified. Every one should see to this, and insist upon the necessary alteration. Generally, at the top of the staircase of a house, there is no means of ventilation, the skylight is fixed, and no thought has been bestowed on the necessity of any contrivance for the entrance of good, and the exit of bad air. In densely inhabited houses, some aperture at the top and bottom of the staircase should be open day and night. Persons shut up in a house or room, become accustomed to its confined and tainted atmosphere, but if those who enter from the open air perceive the fact, it should be remedied. The same remark applies to the smell of drains, cess-pools, dust receptacles, &c., for all bad smells result from gases more or less injurious to health. Therefore, whoever lives in a house subject to smell of any kind, should not rest satisfied until it has been rectified, for, although many may live on without any present apparent injury, a victim to such causes of bad health will sooner or later occur, and that victim may be the most important member of the family.

The water supplied by the New River Company has been latterly clear, and much better in appearance than it was. A very simple process will make water wholesome—let it be first boiled and allowed to cool and settle—by this means organic matter, upon which mainly unwholesomeness depends, will be destroyed or deposited. In Cholera times this should never be neglected.

The water from all superficial wells in large towns, must contain some of the soluble and impure matter of the soils through which it percolates. Water from any deep well should be preferred for drinking.

We have nearly succeeded in having clean streets, with equal attention to cleanliness in houses and persons, much may at once be accomplished for the health of all, and if all will unite in promoting these objects, we shall not only better resist another invasion of Cholera, but we shall find the ravages of many other diseases diminished.

I remain, GENTLEMEN,

Your obedient Servant,

LIONEL J. BEALE,

Medical Officer of Health,

St. Martin-in-the-Fields.

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It is a great pleasure to find that the public mind is so generally enlightened, and that the people are so generally disposed to do good.

I remain, Gentlemen, your obedient servant,
J. J. BEALE

Medical Officer of Health,
St. Martin-in-the-Fields.

Yours truly,
J. J. BEALE



