

The pestilence in England : an historical sketch. / By John Netten Radcliffe.

Contributors

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THE
PESTILENCE IN ENGLAND :
AN
HISTORICAL SKETCH.

BY JOHN NETTEN RADCLIFFE,
CURATOR OF THE LEEDS SCHOOL OF MEDICINE.

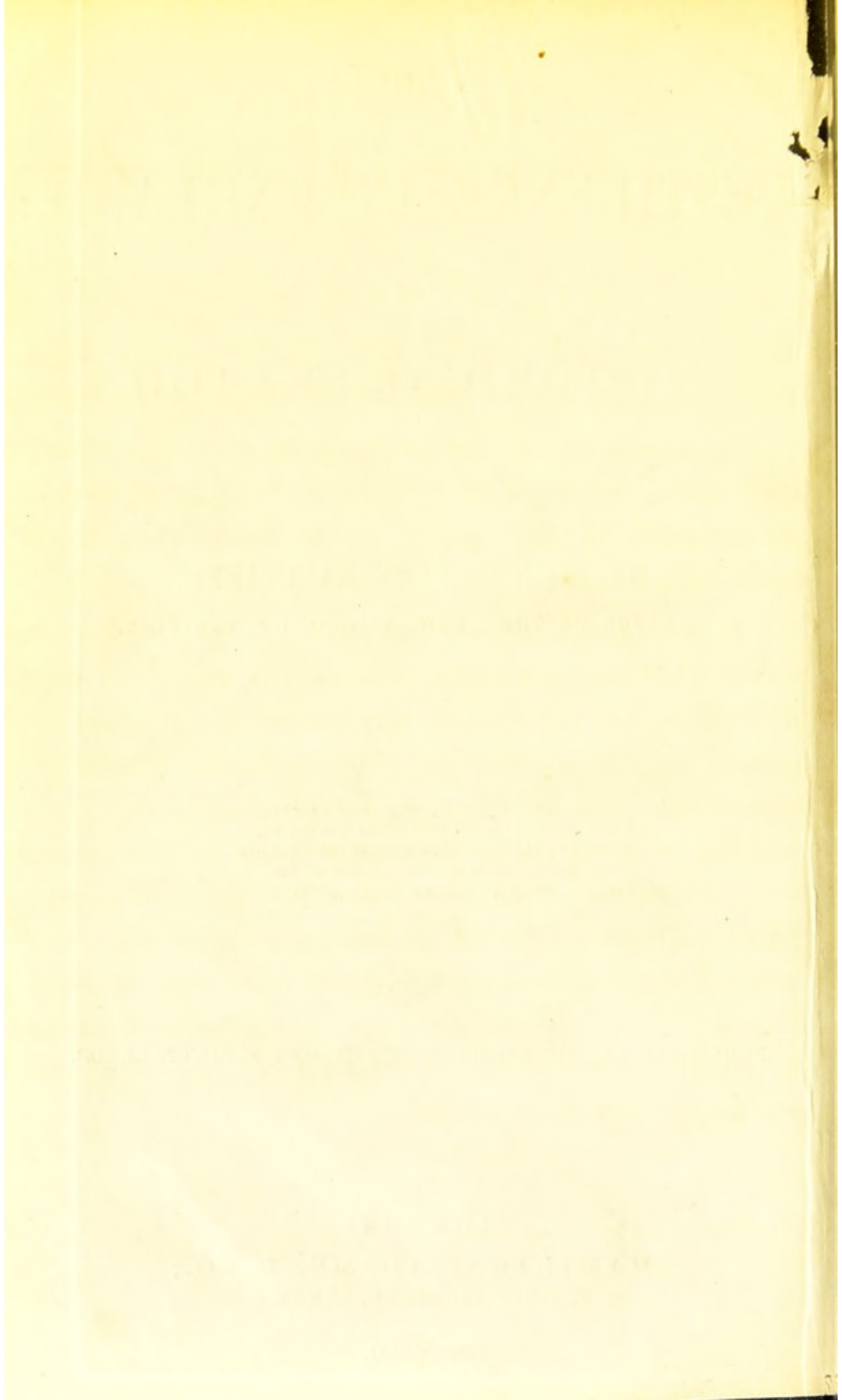
"Through every sign,
From morn all musical to blank starred night,
Death's wolf-like shadow haunts the vital orb ;
With spectral darkness and eclipse of life,
Freezing the fiery marrow of the world."

FESTUS.

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MDCCCLII.



NOTICE.

THE following sketch was read before the Hey Society, Leeds, February 3, 1852, and it is printed at the request of that society.

It was written shortly after the termination of the last visitation of the Cholera, and formed the substance of a public lecture given by the author early in 1850. At that time he was urged to publish it, but he declined to do so.

A work having recently been published by Dr. Bascome, entitled "A History of Epidemic Pestilences from the Earliest Ages," the publication of this fragment may be deemed unnecessary and uncalled for. As, however, Dr. Bascome's history embraces the whole world, and the information respecting England, contained in it, necessarily forms but an incidental portion; and as its object is a scientific elucidation of the nature, causes, and prophylaxis of pestilences, it is hoped that this isolated sketch, which has no other object in view than that of conveying to the general reader some information respecting a much neglected, but important and interesting subject, and respecting which the author believes little to be generally known, may not be altogether unacceptable.

SCHOOL OF MEDICINE, LEEDS,
February 27th, 1852.

According to the Compilers of the *Monumenta Historica Britannica*, pestilence prevailed in England at the following periods anterior to the Norman Conquest:—

A. D. 446. “A pestilent contagion fell heavily on the foolish people.” *Gildas*, sec. 22. (A. D. 450, in the text: see p. 7. There is no trustworthy record of the prevalence of pestilence prior to this date.)

A. D. 537. There was a mortality in Britain and Ireland.—*Annales Cambriæ*. A great mortality called ‘blefed.’ *Tigernachi Annales*. Anno 541.

A. D. 547. There was a great mortality called ‘*Crom conaille vel Flava scabies*.’ (A. D. 560–90 [?], see p. 8.)

A. D. 664. *Bede*, c. xvj: *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. (See p. 10.)

A. D. 681. A mortality prevailed in many provinces of Britain. (A. D. 685, in the text: see p. 11.)

A. D. 682. There was a great mortality. (A. D. 697, in the text: see p. 11.)

(A. D. 683. There was a mortality in Ireland.—*Ann. Cambriæ*.)

A. D. 685. There was a great pestilence.—*Florence of Worcester*.

(A. D. 809. There was a mortality among the cattle over the island of Britain.—*Chronicle of the Princes of Wales*. A. D. 810 according to the *Annales Cambriæ*.)

A. D. 987. There was a great mortality from famine.—*Annales Cambriæ*. A. D. 988, *Chronicle of the Princes of Wales*.

A. D. 1047. There was a great mortality throughout Britain.

NOTE.

The *Monumenta Historica Britannica*, or *Materials for the History of Britain from the Earliest Period*, was undertaken in pursuance of an address presented by the House of Commons, in 1822, to George IV. The first volume (the only one published) was edited by Hy. Petrie, Esq., the Rev. J. Sharpe, F. S. A., and T. D. Hardy, Esq.: and it contains extracts relative to Britain from Greek and Roman writers; the works of Gildas; Nennius's History of the Britons; Bede's Chronicon and Ecclesiastical History; the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle; Asser's Life of Alfred; the Chronicles of Æthelwerd, Florence of Worcester, Simeon of Durham, and Henry of Huntingdon; Gaimar's *L'Estorie des Engles*; the *Annales Cambriæ*; the *Brut y Tywysogion*, or, Chronicle of the Princes of Wales; and the *Carmen de Bello Hastingensi*.

THE PESTILENCE IN ENGLAND.

MODERN historians have, almost without exception, passed by unnoticed and uncared for the devastations of the Pestilence.*

This is the more remarkable when it is considered how oft the economy of nations has been disturbed during their prevalence, and effects produced which have endured through ages.

Thus it happens that an element necessary to the formation of a correct conception of the state of the periods at which this scourge prevailed is wanting.

The following sketch has been penned to show that the records of the Pestilence are not all unworthy of notice, and in some measure to fill up—or rather indicate—this hiatus in the History of England.

Our knowledge of the devastations of the Pestilence in England anterior to the Norman Conquest is, at the best, very imperfect and unsatisfactory.

About the year 753 B. C., according to Geoffry of Monmouth,

* “ Under the head *Pestilence*, I comprise certain maladies which have appeared as wide-spreading and devastating epidemics, but which have surpassed all other epidemics in their rapid extension, in their fatality, and in the duration of their prevalence. Nor have they appeared only as most fatal epidemics, for they have continued, in countries favourable to their perpetuation, to appear from time to time in a much less alarming and obtrusive manner; occurring for a time only in few or widely scattered instances, and at more distant intervals, until certain favourable circumstances, arising out of predisposition, atmospheric constitution, or some unknown, but more generally diffused influence, have arisen and rendered what had been either unsuspected, or but little feared, suddenly most manifest, diffused, fatal, and appalling. To these irruptions, to their rapid extension, and to their great fatality, the generic term *pestilence* may be justly applied: and the history of medicine, in recent times, furnishes *three maladies* to which this term is especially applicable, namely, the recent distemper, which has generally but injudiciously been called *cholera*, *yellow fever*, and the *plague* or *pest*. To these might be added, perhaps small-pox, scarlet fever, measles, and some other infectious fevers; but these diseases only occasionally, or even very rarely, and then only in peculiar circumstances and in certain races, assume forms which, as respects either malignancy, prevalence, or fatality, can entitle them to be placed in the same category.”
—*Dr. Copland's Dicy. of Pract. Medicine. Art. Pestilence.*

"it rained blood three days together, and there fell vast swarms of flies, followed by a great mortality among the people."*

At this period Italy was ravaged by a pestilence, and in 790 B. C., it broke out in Rome, and was accompanied by phenomena similar to those stated above.

From the occurrence of this pestilence until the middle of the first century of the Christian æra, history is silent upon this subject.

After the defeat of Boadicea, A. D. 61, a severe famine prevailed in England.†

A. D. 88, a pestilence broke out in the North of the kingdom and prevailed some time.

A. D. 92, Scotland was devastated by a pestilence and it is computed that 150,000 died. A severe Earthquake occurred in Shropshire, A. D. 110; and A. D. 114, after a hot Summer and inclement Autumn, a pestilence broke out in Wales carrying 45,000 persons. Great inundations, especially of the Severn, occurred also about this time.

A. D. 133 there was a great drought, the Thames was nearly dried up, and a pestilence followed.

A. D. 146 a pestilence prevailed in Scotland.

A. D. 173 a severe winter was followed by famine, and a pestilence broke out in the summer of 174 and continued until winter. Italy also suffered from a pestilence at this period.

A. D. 211 a pestilence occurred. This pestilence was preceded by an earthquake and a great inundation of the river Trent.

A. D. 222 a dire pestilence prevailed. In Scotland, throughout the kingdom this pestilence extended, 100,000 lives were destroyed.

A. D. 292 a pestilence accompanied by famine pervaded England and Wales; raging again A. D. 310 when in Wales alone 400,000 persons were destroyed.

A. D. 325 a pestilence preceded by famine swept over Britain. This pestilence prevailed generally throughout the world.

* Geoffrey of Monmouth's British History, B. ii., Cp. 16.

† Tacit: Annalen: b. 14, c. 39.—In this sketch those events which are considered to have an important bearing upon the etiology of pestilential outbreaks of every kind will be noticed. Their relation to this subject is too important to admit of omission even in a general outline.

"During the years 336, 355, 358, 362, 367, 368 and 375 deadly disease, with famine and earthquakes, were again experienced in the British Isles. In Wales alone, in the latter year 43,000 per-
sons died from pestilence."*

About A. D. 450 a severe pestilence broke out. At this period England had been abandoned by the Romans, and lay in a miserable state of prostration and confusion. The Picts and Scots taking advantage of the unprotected state of the kingdom, and aware of the dissensions which prevailed among the English nobility, poured into Northumbria and advanced almost unresisted as far as Adrian's wall. Here they met with a slight check, but this being overcome, and the defenders driven back, the whole land lay at their mercy. The Britons were mercilessly massacred, and to add to their miseries, a famine broke out, accompanied by a deadly pestilence. So great was the famine that the people robbed each other of the sustenance necessary to prolong life, and ultimately hunting was the only source in which they could obtain food. Of the devastations of this pestilence we are ignorant, but, that its ravages must have been very great, is indicated by a passage in the letter sent by the Britons to the President of Gallia, praying for help. This letter opens thus:—

"To Ætius, Thrice Consul, the groanes of the Britaines.

"The Barbarians drive us back to the Sea; the Sea again putteth us back upon the Barbarians: thus betwene two kindes of death we are either slaughtered or drowned.—We are the remnant that survive of the Britaines, and are your subjects, who besides the enemies are afflicted by famine and mortality which at this present extremely rageth in our Land."†

This request was refused and terror-stricken by the war of extermination, the increasing famine, and the deadly blight of the pestilence, numbers fled into France, while others endeavoured to escape these scourges by removing to the southernmost parts of the island.

In this strait, driven by despair, a few bolder spirits rallied,

* I am indebted to a work recently published by Dr. Bascome, and entitled "A History of Epidemic Pestilences from the earliest Ages," for the information respecting the occurrence of the pestilence in England from A. D. 88 to A. D. 375.

† "The Historie of Great Britaine" by Jno. Speed, Ed. 3, 1632, p. 192.

opposed the invaders, and after many skirmishes succeeded in driving them back and freeing the land. A plentiful harvest followed and "the land yielded such plentie and abundance as the like before no age had seene."* The pestilence ceased and prosperity and peace reigned everywhere.

This prosperity was, however, of short duration. The nation became mad with joy, and Gildas gives a revolting picture of the riot and excesses into which all classes plunged. But in the midst of these excesses, "a pestilent contagion fell heavily upon this foolish people, which tho' the enemies sword was gone, in a short space destroyed such multitudes that the living were not able to bury the dead.†

The date of the occurrence of this pestilence would probably be A. D. 470 or 473. During its prevalence the southern parts of the island were invaded by the Irish; Vortigern, Earl of Cornwall was elected King; and the assistance of the Saxons desired and obtained.

During the fifth century a pestilence prevailed in most parts of the world; devastating Asia and Africa at the commencement of the century, and Europe about the same period that it desolated England. It appeared in Scotland in the year 480; swept over that country again at the commencement of the 6th century (A. D. 502) destroying man and beast; and prevailed in Wales A. D. 527.

Towards the termination of the 6th century a pestilence broke out in England and Wales, which raged with terrific violence for seven years. The effects of this irruption in Wales are thus described by the author of the *Horæ Britannicæ*:—"In the days of Prince Maelgon (A. D. 560—590) the country was inflicted with the dreadful pestilence called *Y Fad Velen*, or Yellow Fever, which proved so very infectious, that it spread with destructive rapidity, and proved fatal to every one that once became subject to its power. The prince of the country himself, fell a prey to the disorder, and its progress was so alarming, that Teilio (or Teliaus)‡ the Welsh primate, with many of the clergy, and other persons of note, resolved to seek an asylum beyond the seas. They first betook themselves to Cornwall

* Speed, p. 194.

+ Speed, p. 194. The Works of Gildas, s. 18—22.

‡ Eliud.

in order to embark for the continent; and were hospitably entertained by Gereminus, the prince of the Cornish Britons. They were from thence conveyed to Britany, where they met with a kind reception; and continued to abide there, until they received accounts that their country was free from the ravages of the pestilence. Teliaus was no sooner apprised of the pleasing intelligence, than he sent to his countrymen who were dispersed over the land; and being collected together they were furnished with vessels to convey them to their native isle, where they arrived after an absence of seven years.*

A. D. 642 a mortality prevailed which made great havoc in Britain and Ireland. Bede relates that the pestilence attacked the monastery of Selsey and destroyed many of the monks. The remainder endeavoured to escape its devastations by holding a fast of three days. On the second day of the fast the apostles Peter and Paul appeared to a boy "lately called to the faith" and who had been seized by the disease, and "saluting him in a most affectionate manner" informed him that, on that day, the pestilence would cease, as a testimony to the merits of King Oswald, who was interceding in heaven for his distressed countrymen, the good king having been killed that very day. Hence "the name of Oswald" writes William of Malmesbury, "was from that period inserted among the martyrs, which before on account of his recent death, had only been admitted into the list of the faithful."†

A. D. 659, "there was a mortality." Cedd bishop of the East Saxons died from its effects in the monastery of Lestingnau (supposed to be Lastingham, Cleveland, Yorkshire). "When the brethren who were in his monastery, in the province of the East Saxons, heard that the bishop was dead in the province of the Northumbrians, about thirty men of that monastery came thither, being desirous either to live near the body of their father, if it should please God, or to die there and be buried. Being lovingly received by their brethren and fellow soldiers in Christ, all of them died there by

* *Horæ Britannicæ; or Studies in Ancient British History.* By John Hughes, Vol. 2, p. 244.

† Bede's *Eccl. Hist.*, B. iii. c. 13; B. iv. c. 14.

the aforesaid pestilence except one little boy, who was delivered from death by his father's prayers."*

A. D. 664, "a sudden pestilence depopulated the Southern coasts of Britain, and afterwards extending into the province of the Northumbrians, ravaged the country far and near, and destroyed a great multitude of men." Sighere, King of the East Saxons, and his subjects, terrified by its devastations, forsook Christianity, and returned to the worship of idols, "as if they might by these means be protected against the mortality." An eclipse of the sun occurred on the 3rd of May, in this year, and a pestilence prevailed also in Ireland.

This pestilence appears to have persisted several years as Bede records that, A. D. 676 it broke out in the monastery of Barking in Essex, "When the mortality," he writes, "which we have so often mentioned, ravaging all around, had also seized on that part of this monastery where the men resided, and they were daily hurried away to meet their God, the careful mother of the society began often to inquire in the convent, of the sisters, where they would have their bodies buried, and where a church-yard should be made when the same pestilence should fall upon that part of the monastery in which God's female servants were divided from the men, and they should be snatched away out of this world by the same destruction."†

Ethelwerd's Chronicle records—"A. D. 671. After one year more, there was a great pestilence among birds, so that there was an intolerable stench by sea and land, arising from the carcasses of birds, both small and great."

Holinshed states, further, that a great dearth prevailed, with a murrain among cattle, in the years 674, 675, and 676.

A. D. 678 a comet appeared.

A. D. 681 a very dreadful famine ensued in the kingdom of the South Saxons, in consequence of three years continued drought. "It is reported" writes Bede, "that very often, forty or fifty men, being spent with want, would go together to some precipice, or to the sea-shore, and there, hand in hand, perish by the fall, or be swallowed up by the waves."‡

* Bede, Ecc. Hist., B. iii., C. 23.

† Eccl. Hist. B. iii. Cs. 27—30; B. iv. C. 7.

‡ Eccl. Hist. B. iv. C. 13.

A. D. 685. Traces of a pestilence occurring at this period are found in Bede's History. Describing the state of the people under St. Cuthbert's care, when that saint was appointed to the bishopric of the church of Lindisfarne, he writes,—“and some also, in the time of a mortality, neglecting the sacraments of faith which they had received, had recourse to the false remedies of idolatry, as if they could have put a stop to the plague sent from God, by enchantments, spells or other secrets of the hellish art.”*

In the 12th year of the reign of Cadwallader (Cædwalla—about A. D. 697) the last king of the Britons, a terrible pestilence occurred, accompanied by famine. According to Speed “So great a dearth of corne and victuall raigned that herbes and roots were the Commons chiefest sustenance, whose third calamitie,—(the first being the illness of the king; the second, the famine)—was mortalitie and pestilence reigning so sore and so suddenly, that in their eating and drinking, walking and speaking, they were surprised with death, and in such number that the living were scarce able to bury the dead; which miseries lasted no less than *eleven yeeres* continuance whereby the land became desolate, and brought forth no fruit at all, in so much that the king and many of his nobles were driven to forsake their native country, and to seeke reliefe in foraine partes. Cadwallader repaired to the Court of Alan his cosen, and the King of Little Britaine in France where he was honorably received and maintained.”†

In the early part of the eighth century (703—713) Scotland was pervaded by a pestilence. In January 729 “there appeared two comets or blasing starres.”‡

Norwich was desolated by a pestilential outbreak of disease A. D. 732.

A. D. 733 an eclipse of the sun occurred; in 737 and 741 great droughts happened; and A. D. 756 in January an eclipse of the sun.

A. D. 760 “there happened a great tribulation of mortality,

* Eccl. Hist., B. iv., c. 27. Dr. Bascome states that a pestilence prevailed in England and Ireland in 669; England 672; England and Ireland 679; England 683; and Ireland 685.

† Speed, p. 281.

‡ Holinshed, Chron. Vol. 1., p. 642.

and continued almost two years, several grievous distempers raging, but more especially the dysentery."*

A. D. 762 Wales suffered from a pestilence. According to Short this pestilence subsequently spread all over England and continued until A. D. 771.

A. D. 764 "a marvellous great snow" occurred, and an extreme frost which endured until the middle of spring, killing the vegetation. At the same time large numbers of birds and beasts and fishes in the sea perished."†

An extreme famine affected the island A. D. 784; in Scotland it was accompanied by a pestilence. Canterbury was ravaged by a plague in 788; famine again prevailed in 791, and a shower of "bloody rain" fell; and in 884 a plague broke out in Oxford which affected man and beast

About the year 897, during the reign of Alfred the Great, and at the time when the Danes were desolating the land, a pestilence broke out which prevailed three years. This mortality affected man and beast, and terminated shortly before the death of the king. Many of the most eminent men in the island died from its effects. Speed very quaintly attributes the origin of this pestilence to pollution of the air by the foul breath of the Danes. It was preceded by a severe famine.‡

About this period several countries of Europe were affected by pestilence.

A. D. 902 a pestilential fever prevailed in Scotland; and in 929 there was an exceedingly severe winter. The Thames was frozen over for 13 weeks, and a dire famine followed.

After a period of great heat and long continued drought, a pestilence broke out A. D. 937 and raged for some time.

A. D. 954 Scotland was invaded by a pestilence, and it is computed that 40,000 died.

A. D. 962. "Within the year, there was a great mortality, and the great fever was in London."§

* Bede, Eccl. Histy. (Additions by another hand).

† Holinshed.

‡ Speed, p. 332. Asser's Life of Alfred the Great.

§ Anglo-Saxon Chronicle.

At the commencement of Edward the Martyr's reign, A. D. 975, "comets were seen, which were asserted certainly to portend either pestilence to the inhabitants, or a change in the government. Nor was it long ere there followed a scarcity of corn; famine among men; murrain among cattle."*

A. D. 982, during Ethelred's reign, and when the English were suffering greatly from the incursions of the Danish pirates, a pestilential disorder broke out, of a character until then unknown, "being a strong burning fever and bloody flux." At the same time scarcity of food and a murrain among cattle prevailed. Also, "London was miserably destroyed by fire."

A. D. 991. "A famine ravaged all England, and those whom war had spared perished from want."†

A. D. 1005, so severe a famine occurred that the Danes, unable to obtain sustenance, forsook England and returned to Denmark; and in 1015 several sea-coasts were overflowed, and numerous villages destroyed by the extraordinary high tides which took place at this period.

A. D. 1025 a pestilence prevailed, breaking out after a very wet and cold summer.

From 1029 to 1031 a pestilence prevailed, which spread throughout England and the North of Europe. It was preceded by very tempestuous weather and famine.

A. D. 1033 a pestilence swept over England.

In 1035 the fruit and corn were destroyed by excessive cold; in 1063 the Thames was frozen over 14 weeks; and in 1065 a comet appeared which continued seven years.

* Wm. of Malmesbury's Chronicle of the Kings of England, B. ii., C. ix.

† Wm. of Malmesbury, Chron., B. ii., C. 10.—In the 10th century a pestilence occurred in Wales of which the following interesting notice is found in Giraldus Cambriensis:—"A disorder called the yellow plague, and by the physicians, the ictiac passion, of which the people died in great numbers, raged throughout Wales, at the time when Sampson held the archiepiscopal see. Though a holy man, and fearless of death, he was prevailed upon by the earnest entreaties of his people, to go on board a vessel which was wafted by a south wind to Britannia Armorica, where he and his attendants were safely landed. The see of Dol being at that time vacant, he was immediately elected bishop: hence it came to pass, that on account of the pall which Sampson had brought thither with him, the succeeding bishops even to our time retained it,"—*Hoare's Girald. Camb.*, Vol. ii., p. 3.

A severe pestilence raged in York and Durham A. D. 1068. At the same time the South of Europe was pervaded by pestilential disorders.

A. D. 1086 a murrain prevailed among cattle, "and the weather was worse than may be easily conceived."*

A. D. 1087 at the period when Malcolm, King of Scotland, invaded England, incited by the English in consequence of the exactions of William the Conqueror, and his "depopulations,"† as the older writers term it, a pestilence broke out "strangely consuming the people."

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle contains the following notice of this pestilence :—

"After the birth of our Lord and Saviour Christ, one thousand and eighty-seven winters, in the one and twentieth year after William began to govern and direct England, as God granted him, was a very heavy and pestilent season in this land. Such a sickness came on men, that full nigh every other man was in the worst disorder, i.e., in a diarrhœa; and that so dreadfully, that many men died in the disorder. Afterwards came through the badness of the weather, as we before mentioned, so great a famine over all England, that many hundreds of men died a miserable death through hunger. Alas, how wretched and how rueful a time was there! When the poor wretches lay full nigh driven to death prematurely, and after came sharp hunger and dispatched them withal! Who will not be penetrated with grief at such a season? Or who is so hard-hearted as not to weep at such misfortune? Yet such things happen for folks' sins, that they will not love God and righteousness.

Preceding this irruption a "fearfull earthquake" occurred, and during the prevalence of the pestilence, it is stated that there prevailed, "Murrains devouring infinite numbers of cattle; abundance

* Anglo-Saxon Chronicle.

† "He pulled downe townes, villages, churches, and other buildings for the space of 30 miles, to make thereof a forrest, which at this daie is called New Forrest. The people as then sore bewailed their distress, and greatly lamented that they must thus leave house and home to the use of savage beasts. Which crueltie, not onelie mortall men living here on earth, but also the earth itself might seeme to detest, as by a wonderfull signification it seemed to declare by the shaking and roaring of the same which chanced about the 14 yeere of his reign (as writers have recorded.)"—*Holinshed.—Chronicles.* Vol. ii., p. 22.

of rain and concourse of waterfloods beyond credite, whereby the Hilles were so softened to the very foundations, that some of them fell, and overwhelmed the Villages that were in their way: most of the principall Cities of England much endammaged by fire: and London especially, where the Cathedrall Church of St. Paul (as much as was combustibile) was consumed to ashes; and if that may also be noted (which caused not the least wonder) tame and domesticke fowles, as Hennes, Geese, Peacockes, and the like, fled into the Forrests, and Woods, and became very wilde, in imitation of men degenerating then into savages:”—a striking illustration of the terrible desolation which must have prevailed.

Richard, William the Conqueror's son, appears to have died from the effects of this pestilence, as William of Malmesbury states that “he contracted a disorder from a stream of infected air,” while hunting in the New Forest, A. D. 1087.

A. D. 1089, “before the ides of August, a great Earthquake terrified all England with a horrid spectacle; for all the buildings were lifted up, and then again settled as before. A scarcity of every kind of produce followed; the corn ripened so slowly, that the harvest was scarcely housed before the feast of St. Andrew.”†

A. D. 1091 a remarkable and wide-extended storm occurred in the month of October and caused much damage.

A. D. 1093 “there was such a deluge from rain, and such incessant showers as none had ever remembered. Afterwards on the approach of winter, the rivers were so frozen, that they bore horsemen and waggons;” and in 1094 “on account of the heavy tribute which the king, while in Normandy, had levied, agriculture failed; of which failure the immediate consequence was a famine. This also gaining ground a mortality ensued, so general, that the dying wanted attendance, and the dead, burial.”‡

A. D. 1097 a comet appeared and many meteors were observed; and in 1098 an exceedingly high tide occurred in the Thames.

A. D. 1103, 4, and 5 a pestilence prevailed, preceded and accom-

* Speed, p. 400.

+ Wm. of Malmesbury's Chron., B. iv., C. 1.

‡ Wm. of Malmesbury's Chron., B. iv., C. 1.

panied by very tempestuous and inclement weather. Great multitudes of worms were also noticed during this period, and a famine added to the distressed state of the people.*

A pestilence, accompanied with similar inclemency of season, prevailed at the same period in Palestine and Holland.

A. D. 1112 the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle records that, "this was a very good year as to the crops, the trees and fields being very fruitful; but it was a very heavy and sorrowful time, by reason of a dreadful pestilence among men." The same Chronicle records also that, A. D. 1125, "there was a great flood on St. Lawrence's day, that many towns were deluged, and men drowned, the bridges were broken up, and the corn fields and meadows spoiled; and there was famine and disease upon men and cattle; and it was so bad a season for all fruits as had not been for many years before."

A. D. 1132, "a dreadful murrain among domestic animals extended over the whole of England. Entire herds of swine suddenly perished; whole stalls of oxen were swept off in a moment: the same contagion continued in the following years, so that no village throughout the kingdom was free from this calamity, or able to exult at the losses of its neighbours."†

In the month of August 1133, Henry I. being at the time preparing for a voyage to Normandy, an earthquake happened, preceded by a total eclipse of the sun,—a coincidence which added greatly to the terror caused by the earthquake.

A. D. 1140 a dearth occurred; and in April of the same year an eclipse of the sun.

The year 1149 was marked by very inclement weather; and in 1150 and 1169 a pestilence, which prevailed very extensively throughout the world, affected Scotland and Ireland.

A. D. 1172 tremendous tempests raged in England and Ireland; and in 1175 a great mortality broke out, its horrors being deepened by famine.

A. D. 1178 an eclipse of the sun occurred in the month of

* It was in the year 1100 that the lands of Godwin, Earl of Kent, were overwhelmed by the sea, forming the sands known as the "Goodwin Sands."

† Wm. of Malmesbury's Chron., Modern History, B. i.

September; and in 1179 certain convulsions of the earth affected several counties. At Oxen-hall, Durham, the earth was raised up like a lofty tower, and remained so for several hours, when it sunk with a hideous noise, and a deep pit remaining marked the seat of this phenomenon.

A severe pestilence prevailed in 1183: and the year following an earthquake occurred; Lincoln church was rent from the top downwards.

A. D. 1191 an eclipse of the sun happened, during which the stars appeared.

A. D. 1193—96. "I find that in the daies of King Richard (the 1st)," writes Holinshed, "a great dearth reigned in England, and also in France, for the space of three or four yeares during the wars betweene him and King Philip, so that after his returne out of Germanie, and from imprisonment, a quarter of wheat was sold at eighteene shillings and eight pence, no small price in those daies, if you consider the aloy of monie then current. Also immediatlie after, that is to say, in the yeare of our Lord, one thousand one hundred, nintie six, which was about the seventh yeare of the said king's reigne, there followed a marvellous sore death, which dailie consumed such numbers of people, that scarce there might be found any to keepe and looke to those that were sicke or to bury them that died. Which sickness was a pestilential fever or sharpe burning ague. The custome and manner of buriall was also neglected: so that in manie places they made great pits and threw their dead bodies into the same one upon an other. For the multitude of them that died was such, that they could not have time to make for everie one a severall grave. This mortalitie continued for the space of five or six months; and at length ceased in the cold season of winter."*

During the years 1200, 1, and 2 tempestuous weather, dearth and pestilential disease prevailed.

A. D. 1222 a famine occurred in consequence of the destruction of the crops by inclement seasons and high winds: a comet also appeared.

* Chronicles, Vol. ii., pp. 271, 272.

The year 1232 was ushered in by great winds, heavy rain, and high tides. The crops were destroyed by the extreme cold, and a famine followed which persisted three years. Many perished from want, and in London 20,000 are said to have died from this cause alone. In 1234 an earthquake occurred in November, and a "great death" followed. In 1239 the rain was excessive, and a pestilence broke out the following year, the weather continuing to be very tempestuous. Great numbers of fish died also on the coast. A.D. 1242 the rains were again excessively great; and in 1243 a drought occurred accompanied by a deadly pestilence. Brilliant meteors were observed during this period. A dearth prevailed in 1245, and a pestilence again burst forth in 1247 and infected the whole island. On St. Valentine's eve, of this year, an earthquake happened, and "a little before the earthquake, the sea had ceased from ebbing and flowing for the space of three moneths together, by a long tract neere by English shore, to the great marvell of many, for either it moved not at all or else so little that it might not be perceived."* In 1250 the weather was very tempestuous. "The sea, forced contrary to her natural course, flowed twice without ebbing."† Winchelsea was engulfed at this period. Pestilential disease prevailed in 1251; an earthquake also occurred, and thick fogs hid the sun for several days. The following year the whole of the vegetation was destroyed by a protracted drought; heavy rains fell in July, "and at Michaelmas the plague began to rage in London and pervaded all England, continuing until August in the following year, thus affording an instance of this disease beginning in Autumn, running through the winter, and terminating in the Summer."‡ A murrain prevailed also at the same time and destroyed much cattle. This was especially the case in Norfolk, and it is stated that the dogs and ravens feeding on the carrion died, and that the people durst eat no flesh. "Also apple-trees and peare-trees, now after the time of yielding their ripe fruit, began againe to blossome as if it had beene in Aprill. The cause of the death of cattell was thought to come hereof. After so great a drought (which had continued all the space of the moneths of Aprill, Mai,

* Holinshed's Chron. Vol. 2., p. 413.

† Idem, Vol. 2., p. 429.

‡ Dr. Bascome's Hist. of Epidemic Pest., p. 41.

June, and Julie, when there followed good plentie of rain,) the earth began to yeeld her increase most plentiouslie of all growing things, though not so wholesome nor of such kindlie substance, as in due time and season she is accustomed to bring forth, and so the cattell which before were hunger starved fed now so greedilie of this new grasse sproong up in undue season, that they were suddenlie puffed up with flesh, and such unnatural humours as bred infections amongst them whereof they died."*

In 1254 a murrain occurred among sheep by which great numbers were destroyed; and a mortal disease affected horses, called "the evil of the tongue."

Pestilence, famine and tempestuous weather prevailed in 1255, and 56. In London 15,000 died from hunger; and the mortality from disease continued until 1257.

A. D. 1264 a murrain broke out among cattle, and affected especially the horses; in 1266 the vegetation in Scotland was destroyed by palmar worms which appeared in great multitudes; and in 1274 a rot broke out among sheep which endured 25 or 28 years.

Sad as was the state of England during the period intervening between 1232 and 1274, a still sadder and more terrible period followed. From 1272 to 1340 inundations, famine, and pestilence ravaged the land.

Under the date 1289, Holinshed writes, "there issued such continual raine, so distempering the ground, that corne waxed verie deare, so that whereas wheat was sold before at three pence a bushell, the market so rose by little and little, that it sold for two shillings a bushell, and so the dearth increased still almost by the space of 40 yeares, till the death of Edward the 2nd, in so much that sometimes a bushell of wheat, London measure, was sold at ten shillings."†

In 1291 Scotland was scourged by a pestilence. The years 1307, 8, 9, and 10 were particularly marked by the intemperature of the seasons, the griping famine, and the great mortality.

During 1315 and 16 a terrific combination of famine and pestilence prevailed.

At this period the nation was already depressed by calamities.

* Holinshed, Chron.

† Chronicles, Vol. 2, p. 491.

All Edward's attempts on Scotland had failed, and the fatal field of Bannockburn; the defection of some of the nobility, and spoiling of the west of Northumberland by them, had apparently crowned the sad array of misfortunes. "But God," writes old Speed, "to humble the English, who through long prosperities had forgotten both themselves and him, drew not backe his heavy hand so; for seldome hath so terrible a famine beene heard of here, as succeeded to this overthrow: so that for moderation of prices, a parliament was assembled at London: but (saith Walsingham) as if God had been displeased at the said rates (which not long after were repealed) things grew scarcer day by day: and the dearth was generally such, that upon Saint Lawrences Eve, there was scarcely bread to be gotten for susten-tation of the King's own family. This famine, which lasted about two yeares, was accompanied with much mortalitie of people."

Notwithstanding these afflictions Edward persisted in celebrating Gaviston's funeral.

"Meanwhile (1316) the state of the kingdome was miserable, there being no love betwixt the King and the Peeres, nor any great care in him, or them of the common affaires: neverthesse they assembled at Parliament in London where no great matter was concluded: for the famine and pestilence increased. The famine was growne so terrible, that horse, dogges, yea men and children were stolne for food, and (which is horrible to think) the Theeves newly brought into the Gaoles were torne in pieces, and eaten presently half alive, by such as had been longer there. In London it was proclaimed that no Corne should be converted to Brewers uses, which act the King (moved with compassion towards his nation) imitating, caused to be executed thro' all the Kingdome, otherwise (saith Walsingham) the greater part of the people had died with penury of Bread. The Bloudy-flux or dissenterie, caused through raw and corrupt humours, engendered by evill meat and dyet, raged everywhere, and together with other maladies brought such multitudes of the poorer sort to their end, that the living could scarce suffice to bury the dead."*

In 1327 a Comet appeared; on the 21st and 24th May, 1328, an Earthquake occurred; 1330 was marked by a long period of tem-

* Speed, pp. 656, 657.

pestuous weather, and an eclipse of the sun took place on the 16th July; and in 1335 famine, murrain among cattle and pestilence again held sway.

Terrible as was the state of England during the period we have just recorded, prosperity soon followed. Every article of life became abundant, and under the rule of Edward III., England reached a pitch of glory which it had never before attained. The memory of late sufferings had, however, scarce been blunted, when a pestilence which had for some time been desolating Europe, extended its withering influence to our own shores.

This Pestilence, which received from the Northern nations of Europe the significant appellation of the *Black Death*, and which was termed by the Italians the *Great Mortality* (La Mortalega Grande), had at the period of its invasion of England, devastated the whole of Asia, the greater part of Africa, and South and Central Europe; and subsequently its influence extended over the North of Europe, and probably also Greenland,—for it is to the ravages of this plague that the complete destruction of the first Norwegian Colonies in Greenland is ascribed. During the prevalence of the plague in Europe, the communications with these colonies became entirely interrupted, and after its subsidence, when the shores of Greenland were again visited, not a trace of the colonists could be found—those spared by the pestilence having doubtless been extirpated by the natives.

In Europe and Asia this pestilence was almost universally preceded by a period of dreadful famine and drought, and broke out first in China in 1333. It proceeded gradually to the Western shores of Asia, and reached Constantinople in 1347. In 1348 it extended over nearly the whole of the S. of Europe and England; invaded Russia in 1350, and did not die out in some places, or continued to recur at intervals, until 1360 or 1361.

The mortality was frightful. In Kairo it is estimated that from 10 to 15,000 died daily, when the plague was raging with its greatest violence. In China more than 13,000,000 are said to have died. The Tartar kingdoms were nearly depopulated. “In Aleppo 500 died daily; 22,000 people and most of the animals were carried off in Gaza within six weeks. Cyprus lost almost all its inhabitants; and

ships without crews were often seen in the Mediterranean ; and afterwards in the North Sea, driving about and spreading the plague wherever they went on shore. It was reported to Pope Clement at Avignon, that throughout the East, probably with the exception of China, 23,840,000 people had fallen victims to the plague.*

“ Of all the estimates of the number of lives lost in Europe, the most probable is, that altogether one-fourth of the inhabitants were carried off. Now if Europe at present contain 210,000,000 inhabitants, the population, not to take a higher estimate, which might be easily justified, amounted to at least 105,000,000 in the 16th century. It may therefore be assumed, without exaggeration, that Europe lost during the Black Death 25,000,000 of inhabitants.”†

We possess tolerably exact accounts of the effects of this plague in England.

In the most serious cases, the invasion of the disease was indicated by spitting of blood, and death in some cases occurred almost immediately, in others in twelve hours, and within two days at the latest. It was evidently contagious. “ Every spot which the sick had touched, their breath, their clothes, spread the contagion : and, as in all other places, the attendants and friends who were either blind to their danger or heroically despised it, fell a sacrifice to their sympathy. Even the eyes of the patient were considered as sources of contagion, which had the power of acting at a distance whether on account of their unwonted lustre or the distortion which they always suffer in plague, or whether in conformity with an ancient notion, according to which the sight was considered as the bearer of a demoniacal enchantment.”‡

It first broke out in the county of Dorset in August, whence it advanced through Devon, Somersetshire and Bristol, and from thence to Gloucester, Oxford, and London, reaching the latter place in three months from its first appearance, and probably few if any places escaped.

“ Most of the great cities suffered incredible losses ; above all Yarmouth, in which, 7052 died : Bristol, Oxford, Norwich, Leicester,

* The Epidemics of the Middle Ages, by J. F. C. Hecker, M.D. Sydea. Socy. Ed. p. 22.

+ Hecker, p. 30.

‡ Hecker, p. 7.

York, and London where in one burial ground alone,* there were interred upwards of 50,000 corpses, arranged in layers in large pits. It is said that in the whole country scarce a tenth part remained alive; but this estimate is evidently too high. Smaller losses were sufficient to cause those convulsions, whose consequences were felt for some centuries, in a false impulse given to civil life, and whose indirect influence, unknown to the English, has, perhaps extended even to modern times.

Morals were deteriorated everywhere, and the service of God was, in a great measure, laid aside; for, in many places, the churches were deserted, being bereft of their priests. The instruction of the people was impeded; covetousness became general; and when tranquility was restored, the great increase of lawyers was astonishing, to whom the endless disputes regarding inheritances, offered a rich harvest. The want of priests too, throughout the country, operated very detrimentally upon the people (the lower classes being most exposed to the ravages of the plague, whilst the houses of the nobility were, in proportion, more spared,) and it was no compensation that whole bands of ignorant laymen, who had lost their wives during the pestilence, crowded into the monastic orders, that they might participate in the respectability of the priesthood, and in the rich heritages which fell to the church from all quarters. The sittings of Parliament of the King's Bench, and of most of the other courts, were suspended as long as the malady raged. The laws of peace availed not during the dominion of death. Pope Clement took advantage of this state of disorder, to adjust the bloody quarrel between Edward 3rd, and Philip 6th; yet he only succeeded during the period that the plague commanded peace. Philip's death (1350) annulled all treaties; and it is related, that Edward, with other troops indeed, but with the same leaders and Knights, again took the field. Ireland was much less heavily visited than England. The disease seems to have scarcely reached the mountainous districts of that kingdom; and Scotland too would, perhaps, have remained free, had not the Scots availed themselves of the discomfiture of the English, to make an irruption into their territory, which terminated in the destruction of their army, by

* The Cistercian, or Charter-house burial ground.—Speed, p. 694.

the plague and by the sword, and the extension of the pestilence, through those who escaped, over the whole country.

At the commencement, there was in England a superabundance of all the necessities of life: but the plague which seemed then the sole disease, was soon accompanied by a fatal murrain among the cattle. Wandering about without herdsmen, they fell by thousands; and, as has likewise been observed, in Africa, the birds and beasts of prey are said not to have touched them. Of what nature this murrain may have been, can no more be determined, than whether it originated from communication with plague patients, or from other causes; but thus much is certain, that it did not break out until after the commencement of the Black Death. In consequence of this murrain, and the impossibility of removing the corn from the fields, there was everywhere a great rise in the price of food, which to many was inexplicable, because the harvest had been plentiful; by others it was attributed to the wicked designs of the labourers and dealers; but it really had its foundation in the actual deficiency arising from circumstances by which individual classes at all times endeavour to profit. For a whole year, until it terminated in August, 1349, the Black Plague prevailed in this beautiful island, and everywhere poisoned the springs of comfort and prosperity.”*

Joane, the second daughter of Edward III., married by proxy to Alphonso, King of Castile and Leon, and entitled Queen of Spain, lost her life in Spain from the effects of this plague, as she was journeying to meet her husband.

It may not be impertinent to glance briefly at the moral effects of this plague in Europe.

“The mental shock sustained by all nations during the prevalence of the Black Plague, is without parallel and beyond description.” The whole world stood gazing, as it were, into Eternity, and the fearful prospect overwhelmed all with terror and dismay. At the first an awful sense of contrition seized the majority; and determined to repent, and make restitution for past offences, all looked towards the Church, and its shrines were heaped up with offerings of the most precious nature. The frightful devastation continuing, the mental

* Hecker, p. 26—28.

powers became paralyzed, by the all-absorbing terror. "All law human and divine was for a time at an end;"—the priests and judges had fled, and morals were almost subverted;—and in the end, says Boccaccio, "so completely had terror extinguished every kindlier feeling, that the brother forsook the brother—the sister the sister—the wife the husband; and at last even the parent his own offspring, and abandoned them unvisited and unsoothed, to their fate."

While the lamentations and woe pervaded all, there arose in Germany a body who took upon themselves the repentance of the people—offering prayers and supplications for the averting of the plague. "They marched through the cities in well organised processions, with leaders and singers; their heads covered as far the eyes; their eyes fixed on the ground, accompanied by every token of the deepest contrition and mourning. They were robed in sombre garments with red crosses on the back and cap, and bore triple scourges, tied in three or four knots, in which points of iron were fixed (and with which, as a penance, they flogged the bare skin, and were hence termed *Flagellants*).—Tapers and magnificent banners of velvet and cloth of gold were carried before them, and wheresoever they made their appearance, they were welcomed by the ringing of the bells; and the people flocked from all quarters, to listen to their hymns and to witness their penance, with devotion and tears."—They increased in numbers rapidly, and not lacking a perception of the mighty power they exercised over the minds of the people, they organised themselves so systematically and swiftly, and enunciated principles of so startling a nature, that not only several states, but even the Church itself became in danger from this rapidly grown up and irresponsible power. On the request, therefore, of several monarchs, the Pope interdicted their penance—the charm was dissolved, and they were subjected to a persecution, second only in its merciless pertinacity to that of the Jews.

The massacre of the Jews forms the darkest and most frightful feature of this fearful period. The suspicion sprang up amongst the lowest orders that the plague had arisen from the waters of the wells and springs having been poisoned, and that by the Jews,—the antipathy between Christian and Jew, at this period, being almost at its

highest pitch,—and this suspicion was fostered by feelings of the basest nature. Under the colour of a few confessions forced by torture, without any true evidence and scarce even the shadow of a trial, this race of men were exposed to a persecution perhaps the most horrible on record. It was considered an act of the highest Christianity to put them to death, and they were butchered without mercy. In Strasburg 2000 were burnt alive at one time in their own burial ground; and at Mayence it is computed that 12,000 were cut off.*

The devastations of the pestilence in England during the remainder of the 14th century were very great.

In 1361 the plague raged so violently that, at one time, 1200 died in London alone in two days. "This," writes Baker, "was called the second pestilence in which died Henry, Duke of Lancaster,

* Chaucer in "The Pardoner's Tale,"—Death and the Three Rioters,—alludes to a pestilence, and it is not improbable that this allusion has reference to the Black Death. As correctly as can be ascertained, Chaucer would be about 20 years of age at the time when this pestilence broke out in England, consequently he would be an eye-witness of its effects. The passage in which this allusion occurs is worthy of being quoted. It runs thus:—

"Thise riotoures three, of which I tell,
Long erst or prime rong of any bell,
Were set hem in a taverne for to drinke:
And as they sat, they herd a bell clinke,
Beforn a corps, was carried to his grave:
That on of hem gan callen to his knave,
Go bet, quod he, and axe readily,
What corps is this, that passeth here forthby?
And loke that thou report his name well.
Sire, quod this boy, it nedeth never a del;
It was me told or ye came here two houres;
He was parde an old felaw of yours,
And sodenly he was yslain to night,
Fordronke as he sat on his benche upright.
Their came a privee thief, men clepen Deth,
That in this contree all the peple sleth,
And with his spere he smote his herte atwo;
And went his way withouten wordes mo.
He hath a thousand slain this pestilence:
And, maister, or ye come in his presence,
Me thinketh that it were ful necessarie,
For to beware of such an adversarie:
Beth redy for to mete him evermore.
Thus taught me my dame, I say no more.
By Sainte Marie, sayd this tavernere,
The child sayeth soth, for he has slain this yere.
Hens over a mile, within a great village,
Both man and woman, child and hyne and page,
I trowe his habitation be there:
To ben avised great wisdom it were
Or that he did a man a dishonour."

also Reginald, Lord Cobham, and Walter Fitz-Warren, two famous men, and five Bishops, of Worcester, London, Ely, Lincoln, and of Chichester.*

In consequence of the ravages of this pestilence, a proclamation was issued by Edward III. in Parliament, forbidding the slaughter of cattle in the city of London, as it was considered that the pollution of the streets and sewers from this source was such as to foster the plague; and it was ordered, further, that the killing of meat, for the city, should be confined to the precincts of Stratford and Knightsbridge.

In 1367 the plague again swept over England, and continued to prevail with more or less intensity for four years. It is recorded that, in London, "multitudes died."

At this period a pestilence also prevailed in Ireland, Italy, and other parts of Europe.

In 1378 the North of England was "grievously visited with the stroke of the pestilence." The sufferings entailed by this irruption were greatly exaggerated by the outrages of the Scots. It was during its prevalence that they surprised and took Berwick, killing Sir Robert Boynton, the constable; and that, nine days after, the town was surprised and recovered by the Earl of Northumberland.†

The year following, 1379, London suffered severely from the plague.

In 1390 a pestilential disease broke out in York and carried off 1100 persons; and the following year it spread over the whole of England, "so that much youth died everywhere in cities and towns in passing great numbers."‡

This mortality was preceded by great swarms of flies and gnats, and, "in the end, they were swept away with brooms by heaps, and bushels were filled with them."§ Terrible winds and drought followed, and after the termination of the pestilence, "a great dearth."

A.D. 1399 a pestilence broke forth, affecting especially the

* A Chronicle of the Kings of England, by Sir R. Baker, 1730, p. 131.

+ Speed, p. 715.

† Holinshed.—Allan's History of the County of York, Vol. i., p. 78.

§ Baker's Chronicles, p. 154.

North of England. 'The same year the bay or laurel trees were blasted all over the island,'* and certain convulsions of the earth occurred. Near Bedford, the bed of the river, between Swelston and Hasleswood, was upheaved and bared for a distance of three miles.†

The year following, (1400), Humphrey, Earl of Buckingham, died of the plague at Leicester.

A. D. 1407, "The fearfull plague of pestilence slew multitudes of people through the realm, chiefly in London, where, within a short space, it destroyed 30,000.‡

In the month of September, 1426, an earthquake occurred; pestilential disease was rife in 1427, and, on the 14th July the same year, a severe earthquake traversed England. On the 14th November, 1434, a frost commenced which persisted until the 1st February, 1435; in 1438 a dearth prevailed consequent upon a protracted period of tempestuous weather; and a frost of nearly four months' duration occurred in 1443; indeed, about this period, intemperate seasons, famine, and pestilence, appear to have prevailed very generally throughout the world.

Gent states that a pestilence prevailed in 1472:§ probably it was confined to the North of England. A.D. 1477, the plague broke out and swept over the kingdom.

England, at this period, was ruddy with the bloody dissensions of the Houses of York and Lancaster. To use Shakespeare's words:—

"England had long been mad and scarr'd herself;
The Brother blindly shed the Brother's blood;
The Father rashly slaughter'd his own Son;
The Son, compell'd been butchers to the Sire."

This irruption of the pestilence is recorded by Holinshed in the following words:—

"After the death of this duke (of Clarence) by reason of great heat and distemperance of aire, happened so fierce and quicke a pestilence, that fiteene yeares warre past consumed not the third part of

* "The bay-trees in our country are all wither'd."

Richard II., Act 2, Sc. 3.

—— "My Master, God omnipotent,
Is mustering in the clouds on our behalf
Armies of pestilence.

Richard II., Act 3, Sc. 3.

† Speed, pp. 740—748.

‡ Speed, p. 760.

§ "Annales Regioduni Hullini," by Thos. Gent, 1735.

the people, that onelie foure moneths miserablie and pitifullie dispatched and brought to their graves. So that if the number had beene kept by multiplieing of unities, and out of them to have raised a complet number, it would have moved matter of great admiration. But it should seeme that they were infinit, if consideration be had of the comparison, inferred for the more effectuall setting forth of that cruell and ceaselesse contagion. And surelie it soundeth to reason, that the pestilence should fetch awaie so manie thousands, as in judgment by proportion of fifteene years' warre one may gather; and manie more too. For every man knoweth that in warres, time, place, persons, and meanes are limited: time of warre begun and ended; place circumscribed; persons imbattled, and weapons also whereby the fight is tried: so that all these have their limitations, beyond which they have no extent. But the pestilence being a general infection of the aire, an element ordained to maintaine life, though it have a limitation in respect of the totall compasse of the world; yet the whole climats may be poisoned; and it were not absurd to saie, that all and everie part of the aire may be pestilentlie corrupted; and so consequentlie not limited; wherefore full well it may be said of the pestilence (procuring so great a depopulation) as one saith of sur-fetting:

“Ense cadunt multi, perimit sed crapula plures.”*

A. D. 1479, there “was a greate mortalitie and death by pestilence, not onelie in London but in diverse parts of the realme, which begun in the latter end of September in the yeare last before passed, and continued all the yeare till the beginning of November, which was about fourteen moneths: in the which space died innumerable of people in the said city and elsewhere.”†

In 1485, while the memory of the pestilence of 1479 was yet green, a pestilential disease broke out, of a character never before observed.

After the fate of England had been decided by the Battle of Bosworth, and the first outbreak of joy had arisen, a mortal disease appeared, which, thinning Henry's victorious army, in a few weeks spread from the mountains of Wales to the metropolis. This disease

* Holinshed's Chronicles, Vol. iii., p. 346. + Holinshed's Chronicles, Vol. iii., p. 348.

was called the "*Sweating Sickness*," and the people were seized with consternation when they observed that scarce 1 in 100 escaped. "It was a violent inflammatory fever, which, after a short rigor, prostrated the powers as with a blow; and amidst a painful oppression at the stomach, headache, and lethargic stupor, suffused the whole body with a fetid perspiration."* Its course was very rapid, and the crisis was always over in thirty-six hours. Before the end of the year it had spread over England.

There are no authentic accounts of the loss of life, but it must have been very great from the extreme fear, in many instances amounting to maniacal excitement, which everywhere prevailed. The coronation of the king had to be delayed in consequence of the distress; two lord mayors and six aldermen of London died in one week, and many of rank, as well civil as ecclesiastical were cut off. Oxford was deserted six weeks,—the professors and students having fled. This pestilence was confined solely to England, not even passing the borders into Scotland.

In 1499† the plague again devastated England; in London 30,000 died from this disease. The king and court in May removed to Calais, returning to England in June. This outbreak did not cease until the year following, and in May, 1500, it ravaged Yorkshire. Thomas Scot de Rotherham, Archbishop of York, was among its victims.‡ Many parts of Europe were ravaged by the plague at this period; and, in 1504, a pestilence prevailed in Ireland.

In the summer of 1506, the Sweating Sickness broke out afresh. The mortality was not great, and it died away in autumn. The small mortality occasioned by this the second visitation of this disorder, was attributed to the restoration of peace, and to great improvements in the state of the houses and streets in towns, these being rendered more open and cleaner. The walls also, of fortified places had, in many instances, been thrown down, and the moats filled up.

We know not how far this visitation extended, as, in consequence of its mildness, local historians have paid little attention to it.

* Hecker, p. 181.

+ Speed, p. 971.

‡ He was buried in effigy in York Minster, near to the grave of Archbishop Scrope; and in the Chapter-House is exhibited a wooden head which was found close adjoining these graves a few years ago.—*Allan's History of York*, Vol. ii., p. 103.

In 1513 the plague again raged in England, and in connection with this pestilence Gent relates a curious legend, which illustrates most interestingly the fear and terror excited by the disease. This legend is rendered doubly interesting from the fact that its reputed hero is an important personage in the 1st Canto of Scott's "*Marmion*:" "Among the slain at Flodden Field," he writes, "was the renowned Heron, a gentleman on the Borders of England, who for slaying the Scots Warden, was sent for by King Henry up to London, to be beheaded, only to satisfy the Scots King. This Heron knew well, and to prevent it, in the Road (a plague raging at the time), he pretended himself infected; and being forsaken, except by three of his servants, they got a Coffin, and filling it gave out he was dead, and so the feigned Corps was interr'd. In the Darkness of the Night, he return'd to his own House, living privately, unseen by any, except his Wife and three faithful Servants, 'till the War broke out between England and Scotland. Then when the Armies were ready to join Battle, he came to the Earl of Surrey, offered his Assistance, and discovered himself to the Joy of all the English Captaines: For he was a valiant Gentleman, knew all the Sleights of War, had been often us'd to skirmish with the Scots; and in a Word being a Guide to the English, was a great Help to their obtaining the Victory, in which James IV., King of Scots was slain."*

This Heron, as I have already intimated, is the—

"Sir Hugh the Heron bold,
Baron of Twisell and of Ford,
And Captain of the Hold,"—

who figures prominently in the first Canto of "*Marmion*." Unfortunately, however, for the integrity of the legend, Scott states that Heron was delivered up by Henry to James, and confined in the fortress of Fastcastle.†

In 1517 a third visitation of the Sweating Sickness occurred.

Under the ordinances of Henry VII., trade had greatly increased, especially in the towns, but notwithstanding this commercial prosperity, extreme indigence and its accompaniment, filth, prevailed

* "*The Antient and Modern History of the Loyal Town of Ripon, by Thomas Gent,*" 1733, p. 143.

† Note xi., C. v., "*Marmion*."

among the labourers. This indigence was due to the conversion of large tracts of arable land into grazing tracts; and to the impulse given to works of a higher order, leading to the employment of a great number of foreign artizans. These hardships bore heavily upon the labourers, and so great did their distress become that at length they broke out into open insurrection in London. This, termed the "Insurrection of Evill May-day" by the chroniclers, was easily suppressed, and Henry VIII., seeing the cause of discontent, pardoned the leaders, and soon after caused restrictive alien laws to be enacted.

London and the large towns were excessively crowded; and the pestilence broke forth with terrific violence. It was oft fatal in two or three hours, and no precursory symptoms marked its onset. "Many who were in good health at noon, were numbered among the dead by the evening, and thus as great a dread was created at this new peril as ever was felt during the prevalence of the most suddenly destructive epidemic: for the thought of being snatched away from the full enjoyment of existence without any preparation, without any hope of recovery is appalling even to the bravest, and excites secret trepidation and anguish." Its fatality was greater than at its first visitation. "Of the common sort they were numberless that perished by it."* The nobility did not escape. Lords Grey and Clinton, as well as others in immediate attendance on the King, died. Some towns were half depopulated by it; and so great was the distress that the Michaelmas and Christmas festivals were unobserved. In six weeks the pestilence had extended over the whole land, and it persisted for a period of six months.

During its prevalence the King sought safety by moving from place to place, and the Princess Mary, afterwards Queen, was born (Feb. 11, 1518.)

This visitation was again almost solely confined to England. Calais was the only other place it attacked, and it is stated that even there the English alone were affected.

As the Sweating Sickness declined, the plague (1520) broke out. This irruption was not very deadly, but it prevailed in most of our cities and towns, keeping up the distress of the people during the

* Hecker, p. 209, and note.

whole of the winter. Many men of high station died in London from its effects, and among the rest Dr. Fitz James, Bishop of London, whom Dr. Tunstall succeeded. In London the plague was accompanied by famine.*

In the winter of 1525 "was great death in London." The term was adjourned, "and the king kept his Christmasse at Eltham with a small number, and therefore it was called the still Christmasse."†

In 1527 great rains and floods caused much damage, and destroyed the crops, in consequence of which a dearth followed.

A. D. 1528, a fourth visitation of the Sweating Sickness occurred. It burst forth at the latter end of May, with a virulence which surpassed even the visitation of 1517. This outbreak was not confined to England alone; and "in fourteen months it brought a scene of horror upon all the nations of Northern Europe, scarcely equalled during any other epidemic. It appeared at once with the same intensity as it had shewn eleven years before, was ushered in by no previous indications, and between health and death there lay but a brief term of five or six hours. Public business was postponed; the courts were closed; and four weeks after the pestilence broke out the Festival of St. John was stopped, to the great sorrow of the people, who certainly would not have dispensed with its celebration had they recovered from the consternation arising from its great mortality. The King's Court was again deserted; and to the various passions and mental emotions which had been clashing there since the year 1517, as for instance, those arising from the theological faith, was added once more the old alarm and distress, which seemed to be justified by the death of some favoured courtiers, particularly of two chamberlains,"—(Sir W. Compton and Wm. Carew, besides many other distinguished persons not named;)"—"and of Sir Francis Poynes, who had just returned from an embassy in Spain. The king left London immediately, and endeavoured to avoid the epidemic by continually travelling, until at last he grew tired of so unsettled a life, and determined to await his destiny at Tytinhanger. Here, with his first wife and a few confidants, he resided quietly, apart from the

* Baker's Chron., p. 298, &c.

† Holinshed.

world, surrounded by fires for the purification of the air, and guarded by the precautions of his physicians, who had the satisfaction to find that the pestilence kept aloof from this lonely residence."

"How many lives were lost in this which some historians have called the "*Great Mortality*," can be estimated only by the facts which have been stated, and which betoken an uncommonly violent degree of agitation in men's minds. Accurate data are altogether wanting, yet it is quite evident that the whole English nation, from the monarch to the meanest peasant, was impressed with a feeling of alarm at the uncertainty of life, to which neither the rude state of society, nor a constant familiarity with the effects of laws written in blood, had blunted the sensibility. Such a state does not exist without very numerous cases of mortality which bring the danger home to every individual, so that it is to be presumed that the churchyards were everywhere abundantly filled. Nor did this destructive epidemic come alone. Provisions were scarce and dear, and whilst hundreds of thousands lay stretched upon the bed of death, many perished with hunger"*

In 1529 this terrific pestilence infected Germany, the Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, and Norway. The first fitful gleams of the faggots by which Rome endeavoured to check the course of the Reformation, added to the terrors of the period; and even some monks triumphantly held forth that this plague was a scourge from God to punish the growing apostacy from Rome,—a short-lived triumph, for soon it whelmed Catholic and Protestant in one common death. At Marburg it raged with such virulence that it put an end to the violent disputes between Luther and Zunigle concerning the Eucharist, which were on the point of kindling a religious war.

A. D. 1540. "In the latter end of summer, was universallie through the most parts of this realme great death by a strange kind of hot agues and fluxes, and some pestilence, in which season was such a drought, that wells and small rivers were cleane dried up, so that much cattell died from lacke of water, and the Thames was so shalow, and the fresh water of so small strength that the salt water

* Hecker, pp. 238—240.

flowed above London bridge, till the raine had increased the fresh waters."*

A. D. 1542 a pestilential disease prevailed, accompanied by extreme drought and dearth, and caused great mortality.†

A. D. 1543. "In this yeare a great death of the pestilence reigned in London: Michaelmas term was adjourned to Saint Alban's in consequence, and kept there until it ceased. At the same time there was a murrain among cattle, and scarcity of food in consequence "of the intemperate wet summer last past."‡

On the 14th of January, 1544, an eclipse of the sun occurred.

In 1547, 48, the plague again prevailed. In the former year Ripon suffered severely;§ in the latter, London.

In 1551 the Sweating Sickness again appeared. This was the fifth and last visitation of this disease. It suddenly broke out in Shrewsbury on the 15th April, after the prevalence of dense and stinking fogs, arising from the banks of the Severn. In its attack and course it was as insidious and malignant as on former occasions, and in some cases one hour sufficed from the onset to its fatal termination, and "twenty-four hours were decisive as to the event." Scenes similar in terror and dismay to those of the previous visitations were re-enacted, and multitudes fled from the land. The feelings of delicacy were so blunted that females ran through the streets partially clad, and filling the air with lamentations; and the passing bell tolled day and night. In Shrewsbury, within a few days, 960 individuals died, "the greater part of them robust men and heads of families." The disease spread rapidly over England, and continued from the 15th of April to the 13th of September. It is remarkable that it did not reach London until the 9th July, and in the first week only 800 died in that city.

The deaths were very numerous: Godwin calls it a "depopulation." The nobleman and the beggar were equally seized by it, "and the same being whote and terrible," writes Grafton, "inforced the people greatly to call upon God, and to do many deeds of charity;

* Holinshed, Vol. iii., p. 819.

+ Baker, p. 299.

† Holinshed, Vol. iii., p. 831.

§ Gent's History of Ripon, p. 145. Maitland's History of London, &c.

but as the disease ceased so the devotion quickly decayed." Among those of note who were carried off from its effects were the two sons of Charles Brandon. They died within an hour of each other, so that both died Dukes of Sussex.

Such was the fifth and last visitation of this pestilential disease, and "to fill up the dolours of these doleful times," it occurred at a period when England was depressed by other causes—the King being but a child; the Nobles at variance; the Commons seditious; the English armies had been driven out of Scotland, and Boulogne shamefully yielded to the French.*

A. D. 1557 "hot burning agues and other strange diseases destroyed many people;" and in 1558 a great mortality prevailed. So many priests were lost during its prevalence that many churches were closed, and workmen were so scarce that a vast amount of corn was lost in consequence of not being shorn. A great scarcity necessarily ensued, and the price of corn became enormous.†

A. D. 1562 the plague again infected England. This irruption was attributed to the importation of the disease from Newhaven, after the surrender of that place. It broke out on the 1st of January, 1562, and continued until the last day of December, 1563. The mortality was very great, especially in London, in which city their died of the plague 20,136; of all disorders 23,732.

Holinshed writes,—“Forasmuch as the plague of pestilence was so hot in the citie of London, there was no tearme kept at Michael-massé. To be short the poore citizens of London were this yeare plagued with a threefold plague, pestilence, scarcitie of monie; and dearth of vittels, the miserie whereof were too long here to write: no doubt the poore remember it, the rich by flight into other countries made shift for themselves.”‡

A. D. 1563 an earthquake occurred.

A. D. 1569 the plague prevailed generally throughout England. Except in the metropolis, this outbreak was not very malignant. In London its devastations were considerable, and stringent measures were taken to check its diffusion. Among other means, it was ordered

* Hecker, Speed, &c.

† Baker's Chronicle, pp. 325, 26.

‡ Holinshed's Chron., Vol. iv., p. 224.

that no idle persons should be allowed to stroll about, lest they should convey the infection into the more healthy parts of the city.*

In the month of October, 1570, a terrible tempest occurred, and caused immense damage throughout England. In 1571 an earthquake happened in Herefordshire; and a dearth prevailed in 1577.

A. D. 1582 the plague was rife in London. "The Lord Treasurer sent an order to Sir Thomas Blanke the Lord Mayor, commonly known by the name of the Good Knight, to make a catalogue of all the victualling houses in London that were infected; which catalogue was to be set up publicly to be read, to the end that all strangers, that resorted to London about their occasions, might avoid setting up, or lodging at those houses, to prevent their carrying infection into the country; and so to do it from two months to two months."†

A. D. 1588 an earthquake occurred in Dorsetshire.

A. D. 1594 the plague raged in various parts of England, particularly in Shropshire. In London 17,890 died, and Michaelmas term was held at St. Albans. This irruption was preceded by great heat and drought; the Thames was fordable at London.‡

In 1596, 97, and 98 the plague prevailed in the North of England. Thoresby states that "it was very calamitous in Leeds; and an inscription on the north wall of the vestry of Penrith church records that, in 1598, there died of the plague in Penrith 2260; Kendal 2500; Richmond 2200; and Carlisle 1160.§ The parish register states that the plague broke out at Carlisle October 3, 1597, and raged at Penrith from September 22, 1597 to January 5, 1598, and that only 680 persons were buried there, so that Penrith must have been put for the centre of some district.

A. D. 1599 a pestilence raged in London.

A. D. 1602, 3, and 4 the plague prevailed throughout England. In London 30,578—a fourth of the inhabitants—died from this

* Maitland's History of London.

† Maitland's History of London, Vol. i., p. 283.

‡ Baker's Chron. p. 398, &c.

§ "A. D. 1598 ex grave peste quæ regionibus hisce incubuit obierunt apud Penrith 2260; Kendal 2500; Richmond 2200; Carlisle 1160. Posteriores avortite vos et vivite."—Camden's Britannia, Vol. iii., p. 189.

disease alone; the total number of deaths from the 23rd December, 1602 to the 22nd December, 1603, from all causes, being 38,244.*

A proclamation was issued forbidding the celebration of Bartholomew fair, as well as all other fairs within fifty miles of the metropolis.

A cotemporaneous writer, in a singularly interesting tract, written in 1604, immediately after the termination of the pestilence, gives some curious particulars of its effects.†

When gentlemen began to return to London after the cessation of the plague, so great was the dread of infection that they wore their

* The year following, when there was a great influx of strangers in the metropolis, the total number of deaths, from all causes, amounted only to 4263.

† "The Meeting of Gallants an an Ordinarie; or, The Walkes in Powles.—From an unique black-letter copy in the Bodleian Library.—Edited by J. O. Halliwell, Esq."—Reprinted for the Percy Society.—Only one copy of this curious tract is known to exist. Its author's name is unknown. It was written early in the year 1604, and opens with a poetical introduction.—"A dialogue betweene Warre, Famine, and the Pestilence, blazing their seuerall euills." In this dialogue the Genius of Pestilence is represented as saying

"I haue friends here in England, though some dead
Some still can shoue, where I was borne and bred;
Therefore be wary in pronouncing mee:
Many haue tooke my part, whose Carcases
Lye now tenne fadome deepe: many aliue
Can shoue their scars in my contagious Quarrell:"—

a sentiment not altogether inapplicable to the present period.

The text of the work assumes to be a conversation between several gallants who have met for the first time after the cessation of the pestilence in "The Walkes in Powles," and many interesting particulars are related of the effects of the plague in London, some of which I have quoted. Subsequently they retire to an Ordinary, where the "fatte host" tells them several singular tales of events occurring in the city during the period when the plague raged.

One of the stories in this tract is, in substance, similar to that of the piper related by De Foe, in his "History of the Plague," and, to use the words of the editor, "it satisfactorily proves that he was not the inventor of all the tales in the celebrated "History of the Plague," and gives us fair ground for conjecturing that he most probably adopted many of them from the oral anecdotes which had come floating down to his time on the stream of popular tradition."

Another story is to the following effect:—A drunken man, riding from a country-town, fell from his horse and lay insensible upon the road. Being perceived there, he was thought to have been stricken dead by the plague. The authorities ordered that the corpse should be removed and interred, but none dared to approach, and it was considered too dangerous to move it even by the aid of long poles and ropes. Whereupon one suggested that the body should be consumed by fire where it lay. Straw was accordingly brought and cast over it; "when presently they put fire to the strawe, which kept such a bragging and cracking, that vp started the drunkard, like a thing made of fire-works, the flame playing with his Nose, and his Beard looking like flaming Apolloes, as our Poets please to tearme it, who burst into these reeling words when he spied the fire hissing about his pate: 'What is the Top of Powles on fire againe? or is there a fire in the Powle-head? why then Drawers quench me with double Beere.'" Being recognized "by his staggering tongue," he was rescued from his perilous position; "euerie one laught at the Jest, closed it vp in an Alehouse, where before euening the most part of them were all as drunke as himselfe."

old and "ruinous" apparel, "for most of your choyce and curious Gallants came vp in cloathes, because they thought it very dangerous to deale with Sattin this plague-time, being Diuell ynough without the plague: beside there hath bene a great Dearth of Taylors, the propertie of whose deathes were wonderfull, for they were tooke from Hell to Heaven: All these were motiues sufficient to perswade Gentlemen as they loued their liues, to come vp in their old sutes. and be very respectiue and carefull how they make themselves new-ones, and to venture vppon a Burchen-lane Hose and Doublet, were euen to shunne the villanous Jawes of Charibdis, and fall into the large swallow of Scylla, the deuouring Catch-pole of the Sea: for their bombait is wicked ynough in the best and soundest season, and there is as much perill betweene the wings and the skirts of one of their Doublets, as in all the liberties of London, take Saint Tooles Parish, and all the most infected places of England." (p. 10.)

"There was neuer a Gilt-Spur to be seene all the Strand ouer, neuer a Feather wagging in all Fleetstreete, vnlesse some Country Forehorse came by, by meere chaunce, with a Raine-beaten Feather in his Costrill; the streete looking for all the world like a Sunday morning at sixe of the Clocke, three houres before seruice, and the Bells ringing all about London, as if the Coronation day had bene halfe a yeare long." (p. 12.)

"I could tell you now the miserable state and pittifull case of many Tradesmen whose wares lay dead on their hands by the burying of their seruants, and how those were held especially very dangerous and perilous Trades that had any woollen about them, for the infection being for the most part a Londoner, loued to be lapt warme, and therefore was said to skip into wollen cloathes, and lie smothering in a shag-hayrde Rugge, or an old fashionde Couerlid: to confirme which, I have hard of some this last Sommer that would not venture into an Upholsters shoppe amongst dangerous Rugges and Feather-bed-tikes, no, although they had bene sure to haue bene made Aldermen when they came out againe: such was their infectious conceyte of a harmlesse necessary Couerlid, and would stop their foolish Noses, when they past through Watling-street by a Ranke of Woollen Drapers. And this makes me call to memory the strange and wonderfull dres-

sing of a Coach that scudded through London the ninth of August, for I put the day in my Table-booke, because it was worthy the registering.

This fearefull pittiful Coach was all hung with Rue from the top to the toe of the Boote, to keepe the leather and the nayles from infection ; the very Nostrills of the Coach-horses were stopt with hearb-grace, that I pittied the poore Beasts being almost windlesse, and hauing then more Grace in their Noses, than their Maister had in all his bosome, and thus they ran through Cornewell just in the middle of the street, with such a violent Trample as if the Diuell had bene Coachman." (p. 13.)

" And it was not a thing vnknowne on the other side, that the Countries were stricken, and that very grieuously, many dying there: many going thither likewise fell downe suddainly and dyed, men on Horsebacke riding thither, strangely stricken in the midst of their iourneys, forced eyther to light off, or fall off, and dye: and for certain and substantiall report, many the last yeare were buried neare vnto hye-waies in the same order in their cloaths as they were, booted and spur'd; euen as they lighted off, rowld into Ditches, Pits, and Hedges so lamentably, so rudely, and vnchristianlike, that it would haue made a pittifull, and remorcefull eye blood-shot, to see such a ruthfull and disordered Object: and a true heart bleed outright,
* * * how commonly we saw here, the husband and the wife buried together, a weeping Spectacle containing much sorrow: how often were whole households emptied to fill vp Graves: and how sore the violence of that stroake was, that strooke tenne persons out of one house, being a thing dreadfull to apprehend and thinke vpon; with many maruellous and strange Accidents." (p. 28.)

York suffered severely from this irruption of the plague. The number of deaths, in that city, amounted to 3512: the markets were prohibited and "stone-crosses were erected in various parts of the vicinity where the country people met the citizens, and sold their commodities."* Several of these crosses yet remain. The Lord President's courts were removed to Durham during its prevalence. Chester also was desolated by this pestilence.

* Allan's History of the County of York, Vol. i., p. 125.

The plague lingered in the North ; and broke out in Beverley in 1610. In the register of St. Mary's parish, in that city, is the following entry : " June, 1610, here began the plague." Then, after the names of those buried,—“buried this month of the plague 23, besides 40 that was shuffled into graves without any reading over them at all.” In August, 32 were buried who had died of the plague; 12 in September; 2 in October; and 5 in November, then the register records, “here ends the plague.” No estimate can be formed of the fatality of the plague in Beverley, for the records of St. Mary's parish are imperfect; and at the Minster no record was kept.*

In 1625 the plague broke out afresh. In London 35,417 died,—the total mortality, from all causes, during its prevalence, being 54,265.

The King had to adjourn Parliament in consequence of the non-attendance of the Members from fear of contagion.†

In the life of Lilly, the astrologer, written by himself, is the following notice of this pestilence, as it occurred in London :—

“The year 1625 now comes, and the plague exceeding violent. I will relate what I observed the spring before it broke forth. Against our corner house every night there would come down, about five or six of the clock, sometime one hundred or more boys, some playing, others as if in serious discourse, and just as it grew dark would all be gone home; many succeeding years there was no such, or any concourse, usually no more than four or five in a company: In the spring of 1625 the boys and youths of several parishes in like number appeared again, which I beholding, called Thomas Sanders my landlord, and told him, that the youth and young boys of several parishes did in that nature assemble and play in the beginning of the year 1625. ‘God bless us,’ quoth I, ‘from a plague this year;’ but then there succeeded one, and the greatest that ever was in London. In 1625 the visitation increasing,” Lilly's master left London, and went into the country, leaving the house in the charge of Lilly and another servant, and during his absence, he states that he amused himself as best he might, and adds,—“Sometimes I went to church

* Allan's History of the County of York, Vol. iii., p. 212.

† Baker's Chronicles, p. 517.

and heard funeral sermons, of which there was then great plenty. At other times I went early to St. Antholine's in London, where there was every morning a sermon. The most able people of the whole city and suburbs were out of town; if any remained, it were such as were engaged by parish officers to remain; no habit of a gentleman or woman continued; the woeful calamity of that year was grievous, people dying in the open fields and in open streets. At last in August the bills of mortality so encreased that very few people had thought of surviving the contagion: the Sunday before the great bill came forth, which was of five thousand and odd hundreds, there was appointed a sacrament at Clement Danes; during the distributing whereof I do very well remember me we sung thirteen parts of the one hundred and nineteenth Psalm. One Jacob our minister (for we had three that day, the communion was so great) fell sick as he was giving the sacrament, went home, and was buried of the plague the Thursday following. Mr. James, another of the ministers, fell sick ere he had quite finished, had the plague and was thirteen weeks ere he recovered. Mr. Whitacre, the last of the three, escaped not only then, but all the contagion following, without any sickness at all; though he officiated at every funeral, and buried all manner of people, whether they died of the plague or not. He was given to drink, seldom could preach more than one quarter of an hour at a time, &c. In November my master came home. My fellow-servant's and my diet came weekly to six shillings and sixpence, sometimes to seven shillings, so cheap was diet at that time.*

Gent records the presence of the plague in Ripon at this period, in the following words:—"By Reason the Plague was at Rippon in August Mr. Mayor made no Feast."†

In 1630—31 the plague again prevailed widely. London and Cambridge suffered greatly. The Hull register of this date contains the following entry:—

"1630. For the relief of Cambridge, afflicted with the plague, £15 7s. 3d."‡

* William Lilly's History of his Life and Times from the year 1602 to 1681. Written by himself, Ed. 1822; pp. 45—48.

† History of Ripon, p. 149.

‡ Allan's York.

An interesting memorial of its existence in the North, at this period, is found at Mirfield, near Dewsbury. A latin inscription in the church of that village, records that in 1631, 130 persons died there of the plague.*

A. D. 1635 another irruption of the plague occurred. In London 10,400 died; and Bartholomew and Southwark fairs were prohibited.

In the sea-ports and neighbouring towns this pestilence prevailed with great severity. Gent gives the following curious and highly interesting account of its effects in Hull:—

“In the year 1635 the Plague (which had visited the inhabitants of many other Seaports) began to rage in this Town. No wise precaution was able to prevent the Contagion. The people fled into the Country. The Gates were soon ordered to be shut up. A strict Guard was placed Day and Night, in order to prevent any more from going out or coming in, and the Watchmen were only allowed to receive provisions, which soon became very dear, and were timorously thrust in at places made for the Purpose. No Societies were suffered to meet. The Churches and Schools closed up. Scarce any Body walk'd the Streets (except those who cry'd *for the Dead!*) where grass grew between the Stones of the Pavement, as a very Melancholy Scene; and all seem'd bury'd in profound Silence. In time of *Lent*, his Grace *Richd. Neil*, Lord Archbishop of York, was apply'd to for License that, upon this Occasion, the Inhabitants might eat Flesh. The good Archbishop told the Petitioners, *He could not conceive what Authority he had to grant it, but in all cases of extreme Necessity, as in Weakness, or Sickness, especially in such a deplorable State as there's was; the Ministers might on Certificate from the Physicians, grant such a reasonable Liberty during the Holy Season; Therefore, added the Pious Prelate, let the like Method be taken; And I earnestly beseech the Almighty God of Heaven and Earth, to heal, preserve, and strengthen, both the bodies and souls of our afflicted Brethren.* This condescending

* A. D. 1631.—Deo placuit Parochiam de Mirfield paniere acri sua castigatione ita CXXX. homines etc. gravissimo et violentissimo morbo et contágio pestilentie correpti obierunt.—Avertite vos et vivite. Esek. xviii. 32.—Joshua Ismay hujus Ecclesie. Vic. FF. A. D. 1752.

Advice being taken had good Effect for some Time: But, Alas! in 1638 the Sickness increasing by the intemperature of the Air, which seem'd to be in a Sort of Stagnation, without the least comfortable Gale or Breeze: the Markets were cryed down. To supply which want and further their Relief, the Justices of the neighbouring Places were oblig'd to send in Carts both Provisions and Necessaries to the Side of the Garrison; where they were bought by a few of the Town's Inhabitants, deputed on that Account and after sent in Sledges to the Town's Cross, to be dispensed of at the most reasonable Prices. But as all Trade and Mercantile affairs seem'd as it were under a gloomy shade, or rather might be deem'd as quite extinct; so the wretched consequences appear'd, in the deplorable circumstances of above 2000 Persons, who from Opulent Fortunes were now become the piteous objects of Christian Charity! Others that could afford it, were heavily assessed weekly, both in Town and in the Country, to support the afflicted: besides to maintain the Attendants of the Visited whilst they were living in languishing misery; and to reward those who took Care to bury the Dead. The number that perish'd were about 2,730 Persons, excluding those who fled, or died of other Distempers, which almost doubled the Number. This Pestilence continued till about the 16th of June, 1639, when it pleased God to cease."*

The same writer, in his History of Ripon, states that the plague prevailed, at this period, in Newcastle and Bedale.

The Hull Register contains the following entry:—

"1638. For those affected by the plague here and at Cottingham—£80 0s. 0d." :—

and the records of the Charter House, at Hull, contain an item of £50 given to the poor on account of a general pestilence.†

The next general irruption of the plague occurred in 1665. In the meantime, however, the disease lingered in several of the most densely populated cities, and broke out from time to time in isolated, and hitherto, almost unaffected towns.

Thus in 1644, Leeds, after suffering from all the horrors of the

* Annales Reg. Hullini, p. 39.

† Allan's History of the County of York, Vol. iii., pp. 53, 83.

civil war, was infected. Local histories and records repeat the same sad tale of other and similar visitations.

"March 11, 1644—5 was buried Alice, wife of John Musgrave, of Vicar Lane." This woman was the first that was suspected to die from the plague. "There was buried 131 persons in August, 1644, (What are we to think of the state of medicine from the words which follow?) *before the plague was perceived.*"

"July 2, 1645. The old church doors was shut up, and prayers and sermon only at new church, and so no names of burials came to be certified, but a few at St John's until Mr. Saxton came to be vicar, when prayers and sermon began again."

The disease spread into all parts of the town; and from March 12th, 1644, to December 25th, 1645, 1325 persons died.

As the pestilence increased the inhabitants fled from the town; grass grew in the streets; the markets were removed; and, if the testimony of contemporaneous witnesses is to be credited, the birds fell down dead as they flew over the town.*

A. D. 1646 the plague raged in many parts of England, especially London, Newark, Stafford, and Totness. It prevailed also in Ireland the same year. In 1649 the plague was again violent in London; and it was also very prevalent in Shropshire. In 1662 there was a great drought and a murrain among cattle; and in 1663 pestilential disease was rife.

A. D. 1665 the plague broke out afresh, swept over the kingdom, and raged with a virulence hitherto unsurpassed. So great were its devastations in the metropolis, that this outbreak is familiarly known as the *Great Plague* of London.† In that city alone 68,595 persons died from its effects; the total number of deaths, from all diseases, during its prevalence, being 97,306, or, according to some authorities, at least 100,000. This was the last pestilential outbreak

* Dr. Whitaker's *Loidis et Elmete*, Vol. ii., pp. 75, 76.

† It is necessary to note that from the commencement of the bills of mortality in 1603 until 1670, with the exception of three years, London was never entirely free from the plague. During this period there were four great pestilential outbreaks, viz., in the years 1603, 1625, 1636, 1665; but, in many of the intermediate years the mortality from this disease was great. Thus in 1604, 900 died from the plague; in 1605, 400; in 1606, 2000; the same the two following years, and so late as 1648 the number every year exceeded 1000.

of the plague in England, although the disease occurred from time to time in London and other towns, many years after.

'This irruption was preceded by seven months' dry weather and westerly winds; and it was noted that, in the summer of 1664, wild fowl and beasts forsook their accustomed haunts; few swallows made their appearance; flies, ants, and other vermin were generated in vast myriads; and the ditches and boggy ground swarmed with frogs and other insects; and that for many weeks, during the prevalence of the pestilence, so great a calm reigned, "as if both Wind and Rain had been expelled the Kingdom."*

We possess very imperfect information of the effects and devastations of this pestilence, except as it occurred in London.

In that city the plague broke out in March, and increased slowly and steadily until August—the fear of the people increasing in equal proportion—during the last week of which month no less than 6102 persons died.

At this period the city presented a frightful scene. Multitudes of the inhabitants had fled—business was at an end—the markets suppressed—houses boarded up—and the terrible mark of the red cross upon the door, or the sentence "Lord have mercy upon us," marked where the pestilence was pursuing its ravages. Grass had begun to grow in the streets, and a dismal, death-like silence brooded over the devoted city. The distress caused by the cessation of business also began to double the horrors of the plague.

But the pestilence had not even yet reached its height; and when it was ascertained that its devastations were increasing, the terror became a frenzy, and it was deemed that God had determined to make an end of the city. Whole families and streets were now swept off, and the death-like gloom that had hitherto prevailed was broken by the hideous laugh of debauchery as it stalked about the streets revelling in the annihilation of law; or the shrieks and cries of those who, in their frenzy, rambled raving from street to street shrieking to God for mercy; while the monotonous tinkle of the pest-bell rang its horrid theme unbroken, unwearied, amid the desolation.

* Maitland's History of London, Vol. i., p. 431.

The devastation continued six or seven months, after which time, the plague spread from town to town throughout the kingdom, with a malignity almost equal to that which it had manifested in London, and it did not thoroughly cease until the termination of 1666.

The Hull Register contains the following entry, having reference to this pestilence :—

“1665. Collected for people visited by the Plague in the diocese of York and in Hull (whence most of the better people had fled) —£25 0s. 0d.”

Several highly interesting memorials of its ravages, exist at Eyam, in Derbyshire, where it prevailed with great virulence.

From this period until the breaking out of the Cholera in 1832, no true pestilential irruption of disease occurred in this country.

The Cholera first made its appearance in Jessore, a large town in the centre of the Delta of the Ganges, in 1817, and in thirteen years it had extended over the whole of Asia, and invaded Europe. After attacking a number of places, it spread northward through Russia, Poland, Moldavia, and Austria, and in May, 1831, reached Riga and Dantzic ; in June and July, St. Petersburg and Cronstadt, and early in October, Berlin and Vienna.

It appeared in England on the 26th October, 1831, at Sunderland ; and in London, 13th or 14th of February, 1832. In Scotland the pestilence first appeared at Haddington about Christmas, 1831, and at Leith and Edinburgh about the 22nd of January following. From this country the pestilence extended to America, and broke out in Quebec on the 8th of June, 1832, and spread over nearly the whole of North and South America. On the 12th of March, 1833, it appeared in Calais, and on the 26th in Paris, where it carried off 20,000 persons. During 1833 and 1834 it raged in Spain, spread on the coasts of the Mediterranean, and in 1837 was very fatal in Rome. Few places were exempt from its ravages, and according to official returns, from the 18th of June to the 18th of October, 1831, the Cholera had appeared in nearly 3000 places, and had attacked more than 335,000 persons, of whom it destroyed upwards of 151,000—nearly one-half. The progress of the disease in England was at first slow. It was confined for nearly two months to a district bounded on the

south by Houghton-le-Spring, five miles from Sunderland; and on the north by Morpeth, about 30 miles distant. The number of places attacked in Great Britain was 422, of which number 295 were in England and Wales, and 127 in Scotland.

It persisted until the last day of December, 1832, when it disappeared both from England and Scotland. The mortality from the disease during this period, in the whole of Great Britain, was 31,376; in Ireland, 21,171. The number of persons stated to have been attacked in England and Wales is 71,606; the deaths, 16,437. These numbers are, however, very incorrect; as there were no means of obtaining accurate returns of the number of attacks and deaths during the prevalence of the disease.

In 1848 the Cholera again appeared in England. From the time of its first irruption in 1817, it had never completely disappeared in India. In 1845 it broke out with great violence, and rapidly spread over the North Western provinces of Hindostan, and then, as from a centre, swept over Affghanistan, Persia, and the South Eastern portion of Asiatic Turkey. Its course was arrested by the winter of 1846; and it remained localised in the North Eastern parts of Asia-Minor until the spring of 1847, when, breaking forth with renewed violence, it spread in all directions, attacking the cities of Asia-Minor, Persia, Egypt, Georgia, Circassia, and the Southern provinces of the Russian empire; then extended over European Russia, Finland, Sweden, the North-Eastern shores of the Black Sea, Austria, Germany, Hanover, and at the same time attacked Constantinople,—ravaging Berlin, St. Petersburg, and Cairo in the same month,—and it appeared in Edinburgh in the beginning of October, 1848.

“In every European city in which the pestilence prevailed, it gave distinct warning of its approach, and intimated by signs not to be mistaken, the severity of the impending attack. An extraordinary prevalence and mortality of the classes of disease which have been observed usually to precede it—influenza, diarrhœa, fever, &c.—foretold its approach and intensity.”*

The number of deaths from this visitation of Cholera was, in

* Report of the General Board of Health on the Epidemic Cholera of 1848—9, p. 9.

England and Wales, 72,180,—the deaths from Cholera being 53,293; from Diarrhœa, 18,887.

We have no correct data from which to judge of the mortality in Scotland, but it is supposed to have been between 7000 and 8000 from Cholera alone.

A sketch of the progress of the Cholera in London well illustrates the mode in which the disease usually breaks out and spreads.

“The former epidemic commenced in London on February 16th, 1832, and ended on September 7th, 1833, including a period of about seventeen calendar months. But it is stated that during this period there was a total cessation of deaths for eight months, so that if this be true, there were in fact two epidemics, the first commencing on February 16th, and lasting to November 30th, 1832, and the second commencing on August 1st, and lasting till September 7th, 1833. The disease in 1832 came to its height in the week ending July 27th, when the deaths were 445, which was the greatest weekly mortality recorded during the whole of that epidemic. In the late epidemic, the first attack is generally considered to have been on the 22nd of September, 1848, and the last death recorded in the return of the Registrar-General, is December 22nd, 1849; so that, according to this account the whole progress of the epidemic occupied a period of fifteen calendar months. During the first six months, namely from the end of September, 1848, to the end of March, 1849, the disease advanced progressively but irregularly, numbering in the whole of this period 988 deaths. During the following months of April and May, there was a lull in the disease; the deaths sinking to one in some weeks, and never in any week exceeding five; but there was never, as is stated to have been the case in 1832, a complete cessation of the disease, for there was never a single week without at least one death; a most significant fact, which had been previously observed during the suspension of the disease in Moscow. In the month of May, the total number of deaths did not exceed 13; but in the first week of June they suddenly rose to 9, increasing in the last week of the month to 124. From that period the epidemic went on rapidly and uninterruptedly increasing till it came to its height in the week ending September 8th, 1849; when the deaths, including cholera

and diarrhœa amounted to 2298. From this time the disease declined, and ultimately ceased December 22nd, 1849. There was thus one epidemic with two well marked periods; the first extending from September to March, and the second from June to December."*

On comparing the respective mortality and extent of these two pestilences it is found that the pestilence of 1849 was much more fatal and extensive than that of 1832,—due correction having been made for the increase of population in the interval between 1832 and 1849.

Thus, in the first the number of places attacked in Great Britain was 422; in the second the number was 803.

So also with the mortality, as the following table will show:—

	1831—2	1848—9
London	5,275	14,590
Rest of England and Wales	15,451	57,590
England and Wales, including		
London	20,726	72,180
Scotland	10,650	8,000 (Cholera alone)
Total	31,376	80,180

The number of deaths from Cholera alone in the whole of Great Britain may be estimated at 60,000.

The social effects of each of these visitations upon the nation were similar; and beyond the fear, there was but a slight approximation to the awful scenes exhibited during previous pestilences.

But although there was no glaring exhibition of fear and dismay, despair and ruin, let it not be conceived that none existed. There was a deep undercurrent of dark, frightful despair, known only to those who were intimately acquainted with the haunts and ravages of the pestilence. The deadliest blight fell upon the most debased and wretched portion of our nation, a portion whose dwellings are very sinks of poverty, filth, and disease, and whose habits are framed in that fell cycle where misery and disease are ever begetting crime and sin, and crime and sin, misery and disease; and where is ever being matured all that is most unnatural and abhorrent to our nature.

* Report of the General Board of Health on the Epidemic Cholera of 1848—9, p. 12.

It was in the centre of these gulfs of destitution and wickedness that the bolt fell. It was here that the frightful effects of the pestilence were seen. The grief, the misery, the terror of those classes raised above the centre of destitution was visible to all, and the mourning apparel formed an affecting criterion of the ravages committed there. But, here it was a shut book to all but those who entered and saw for themselves—here, was no mourning apparel—no drawn blinds—none of the ordinary signs which point out where Death has cast his dart—here was death in its most repulsive form.

The apathy which prevailed was, in many instances, frightful; and rarely was assistance sought until the first approaches of death were observed,—when, indeed, all aid was unavailing. I have seen men in the prime of life, struck by the forerunners of the pestilence, refuse in defiance of remonstrance, to allow any help to be given to them, waiting with stoical indifference the approach of death, and careless of eternity. I have witnessed the wife dying uncared for by the husband; and the husband in an agony of suffering forsaken by the wife. I have seen the brother calmly watch the sister pass through all the horrid stages of the disease, and refuse to use any exertion to alleviate her sufferings; and I have seen the sister act thus to the brother. I have seen the father and mother dying and their offspring would not administer even the slightest help, although threatened with condign punishment; and I have seen the parents so careless of their offspring that even when I have stood in the room where they lay, hid from view by darkness and clothing, and helpless from suffering, they would not point them out.

Not the less sad was the broad, deep, and ever-eddyng current of woe that marked the track of the pestilence through the homes of those who, though steeped in poverty and distress, yet lost not amid their sufferings the lineaments and affections of our nature. Think of the agonising watch of those who loving with all the ardency of affection, saw those most dear to them, pass from before them, withered by the awful disease, and could not provide the most common necessities of life, and when the scanty assistance doled out was oft a mere mockery. 'Twere vain to attempt to depict the scenes of woe, despair and ruin which marked the track of the destroying angel through

these abysses of misery. Give imagination the rein and it cannot picture forth sufferings exceeding the reality.

Sad as were these scenes, it is still more sad to recall the fact that, with few exceptions, no endeavour was made by the various local authorities to prevent the occurrence of this terrible scourge, and that too oft the efforts to check its progress were of the most ineffectual character. Notwithstanding the imperfect formation of the General Board of Health, the suggestions issued by that body, for the prevention of the Cholera, were of the most satisfactory and comprehensive nature, and fully equal to the emergency of the case. These suggestions were conveyed to every town and hamlet in the kingdom, and laid before the proper authorities by inspectors appointed by the board, or by other means; yet, although it was well known that the measures advised were most sure and certain—so much so that where similar measures had been fully carried out the mortality was reduced to so slight an amount that it appears as a fiction when compared with the deaths in those places where no such means were taken—but one town in the kingdom adopted them.* This apathy on the part of the local authorities is perhaps the most revolting feature in the history of the Cholera; and too oft it rendered the duties of the physician a mere mockery. In the haunts of this disease the medical

* Of the conduct of the authorities in Sheffield, the town signified in the text, Dr. Sutherland, one of the Inspectors of the Board of Health, makes the following remarks:—"Unlike other Boards of Guardians they had used the most available means for preparation, and they had nothing to seek when the emergency arrived. All their plans of operation were settled, and their machinery arranged. In this the Sheffield Board of Guardians stands almost alone. They are, I believe, the only body in the country who had the enlightenment to perceive the full extent of their duty, and the courage and energy to perform it. This I believe was done without regard to expense, and in the firm conviction that apart altogether from the humanity of the course they had taken the ratepayers would be large gainers in the ultimate saving of widowhood and orphanage, which was without doubt effected."—Dr. Sutherland's Report, p. 108. The number of cases of Cholera that occurred in Sheffield was 76, of which 46 died and 25 recovered. The number of cases of diarrhœa brought under treatment was, 5319. No doubt could be entertained that the small amount of Cholera occurring in this town was altogether due to the preventive measures adopted. It has been asserted that we cannot be certain that the cases of diarrhœa thus occurring would have passed into cholera had they not been placed under medical care. I am at a loss to conceive to what such an objection tends, as it has no bearing whatever upon the grounds upon which the idea is based, that diarrhœa under these circumstances, and at such periods, is a premonitory sign of Cholera. It is certain, that the amount of diarrhœa is one of the most sure indications, perhaps the most sure indication we possess, of the existence and degree of that influence which determines the development of Cholera; and it is equally certain that as our measures are directed to the remedying or not of this evil, the proportion of cases of Cholera is diminished or increased.

man's exertions are of no avail unless the local authorities co-operate fully with him ; and if the latter refuse to do so, or act imperfectly, his duties are but a horrid, unmeaning, and useless routine.

The enormous amount of money expended during this period, forms also a strange comment upon that economy which hesitated to carry out a scheme complete in almost every respect, and certain in its effects, and yet frittered away sum after sum in desultory and imperfect attempts without connection and without meaning, and of the uselessness of which the tables of mortality are the sad and painful indication.

It is equally painful to recall the indifference which was manifested by individuals to the adoption of preventive means, especially by the proprietors of dwelling houses. There were doubtless numerous exceptions, but, too oft, an utter carelessness was shown respecting the hygienic condition of dwelling houses by the proprietors ; and frequently even the local authorities were over-awed and their efforts rendered nugatory by the exercise of individual influence.

Nor let it be conceived that it is during the prevalence of the pestilence alone that such scenes as I have described occur. Year by year does the ever-gnawing Fever call forth a repetition, more or less great, of these harrowing scenes of misery, woe, and death.

Such is a sketch of the devastations of the Pestilence in England ; and my object being simply to convey some idea of the extent to which pestilential outbreaks of disease have prevailed in this country, my task ends here. I would repeat, however, what I have already stated, that our information respecting the earlier irruptions of the pestilence is very imperfect and doubtful. That the term *pestilence*, and the allied expressions met with in the writings of the old historians, have the signification which I have attached to that term may, I think, be admitted with safety. The dates which I have given as the periods at which outbreaks of the pestilence have occurred are to be considered merely as approximations, for, it is extremely difficult to ascertain the precise time of their

prevalence, as well as their duration. A more extended research may, probably, very considerably modify the conclusions which I have arrived at respecting the extent, duration, frequency, and periods of occurrence of these devastating periods of disease; and it is not improbable that we may find that an imperfect chronology has caused us to consider as separate events one and the same pestilence; or on the other hand one or more pestilences may have been confounded together. A correct history of the Pestilence in any country, especially in one so situated as our island kingdom, would afford most important data respecting the causes of these virulent manifestations of disease. This sketch has no pretensions to afford such a history (unless, indeed, it may be considered as an initiatory step in that direction), yet, as the historical details which I had collected, might possess some degree of interest in the eyes of the general reader, I have been tempted to throw them into this form. I have been careful to adhere strictly to the text of the authorities from which I have derived my information, for, to use Chaucer's words,—

“Who so shall telle a tale after a man,
He moste reherse, as neighe as ever he can,
Everich word, if it be in his charge,
All speke he never so rudely and so large;
Or elles he must tellen his tale untrewe,
Or feinen thinges, or finden wordes newe.”



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