

**On hydrophobia and distemper madness : a plea for the canine race, showing the inutility of the Muzzling Order, and the folly of creating needless panic / by the editor of Health news.**

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# HYDROPHOBIA AND DISTEMPER MADNESS;

A PLEA FOR THE CANINE RACE.

*Showing the inutility of the Muzzling Order, and the folly of creating  
needless panic.*

BY THE EDITOR OF *Health News*.



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ON  
Hydrophobia and Distemper Madness.

A Plea for the Canine Race.

*"Mad Dog!"*—VOX POPULI.

**F**OR some years past a sort of panic has prevailed throughout the Kingdom, concerning hydrophobia, this panic breaking out epidemically in various districts at different times; the consequences being that an excessive scare has been created, and that hundreds of thousands of harmless dogs have been subjected to the torture of muzzling, with the presumed object of eradicating hydrophobia. But panic is commonly engendered of ignorance or misapprehension, and cruelty in some form or other often follows in the wake of a panic. In this instance the cruelty has taken the form of the muzzle, which our Legislature decided some eight years back should, on being ordered by the Local Authority, be worn by every dog "whene'er he takes his walks abroad," lest he might become the medium of communicating hydrophobia to some



passing man, woman, or child. The Act enforcing this decision was rushed through Parliament at the end of a long, wearisome session, when the attendance of members was small; and, even then, its promoters would have failed in carrying it through both Houses but for the bait thrown out to the country party by the exemption of foxhounds and other classes of sporting dogs. No special reason could be adduced in support of these exemptions save the imaginary ridiculous picture which was drawn, of a pack of muzzled foxhounds in full cry. "Perish the thought!" fox-hunting members exclaimed. One can imagine a country squire inspired with horror at such an idea, giving utterance to the following paraphrase of the late Lord John Manners' well-known lines :—

"Let arts and commerce, laws and learning die,  
But leave us still our old *Tantivity*."

But then, the Act of Parliament in question was not intended for the protection of sport, only for the prevention of hydrophobia; and no one has ever even attempted to prove that sporting dogs are less liable to this disease than any other species of the canine race. As the law stands, however, thirty or forty excited foxhounds, passing unmuzzled along a village street, may bite any human being, or unfortunate dog, that happens to be in their way. Of course we shall be told by the advocates of one-sided law that the hounds are constantly under control; but how can a huntsman, or two, riding some distance behind the pack, prevent a hound from making such an attack, if viciously disposed? Hounds often stray, too, and are lost for days; under whose control are they then?

Another weak point in the Act, assuming that muzzling is a



certain means of stamping out hydrophobia,—which we are not prepared to admit, except for the sake of argument—is that dogs are required to be muzzled only when away from their masters' houses. While on their owners' premises, in their gardens, or back-yards, they can, unrestrained, bite (possibly conveying hydrophobia to) any persons coming near them,—the postman, or people calling for orders, for instance ; yet, say the advocates of muzzling, “ see how a wise Legislature protects you ! ”

From the days of Oliver Goldsmith (whose elegy on the death of a mad dog should be read by every hydrophobia alarmist), and even long before his time, it has been the custom, whenever a dog has been strange in his manner, to raise grave doubts as to whether he is not suffering from madness; and, as a natural consequence, many thousands of dogs have been cruelly destroyed through labouring under this false imputation, while hundreds of persons who have been bitten by dogs only temporarily affected with distemper (as would have been proved by the recovery of the animals, had the malady been allowed to run its due course) have either died of fright, arising from the shock caused to the nervous system by the erroneous idea that they had been bitten by hydrophobic dogs, or have been rendered miserable and ailing for months and years through the dread of hydrophobia lurking in their systems.

Our belief is that many persons said to die of hydrophobia really succumb to nervous shock produced by constant apprehension of that disease. The same thing may be said of some other cases where the feeling of fear works powerfully upon the individual. In this connection, we are reminded of the following Persian fable :



A certain holy man, it is said, travelling from a Persian city, encountered the Spirit of Cholera, about to enter. The holy man implored Cholera to lightly afflict the inhabitants, and Cholera promised to do so. Returning some months afterwards, the holy man was horrified at learning that hundreds of people had died in an epidemic, which occurred soon after he had left. Incensed at what he considered a gross breach of good faith, he sought out the Spirit of Cholera, with bitter upbraidings for broken promises. To these the Spirit calmly replied : " Only ten died of cholera, the rest died of fright."

A singular instance of the effects of fear on the nervous system was reported from abroad some years ago. A young woman, having had a quarrel with her sweetheart, arrived (as young women occasionally do in such circumstances, in all countries) at the conclusion that life was no longer " worth carrying on," and deliberately set about poisoning herself. With this object in view, she cut off the igniting ends of a number of matches ; these she steeped in water, and then drank the deadly infusion. In the course of a short time the poison commenced to pervade her frame ; she sank helpless to the floor, seized with frightful spasmodic pains, cramp, and other " unmistakable symptoms " of phosphorus poisoning, to the great horror and consternation of relatives, whom her cries and groans had brought to her room. Medical aid was hastily summoned. After administering some general remedies, the doctor inquired for the box whence the matches had been taken, in order that he might form an idea of the quantity of poison that had been swallowed. Upon examination he discovered that the matches were of Swedish manufacture, and



contained no phosphorus; this gratifying information was at once imparted to the patient (already sorry for her rash deed) and she made a rapid recovery.

A series of similar instances of the effect of fear, bearing on our present subject, was observed at Macclesfield, in 1873, during an apparent outbreak of hydrophobia. Several persons were bitten by a strange dog, and, as the Macclesfield people were at that time in a state of great alarm and excitement in consequence of the alleged prevalence of hydrophobia in the district, the persons bitten were at once removed to the Infirmary. Here they began to rapidly exhibit all the symptoms attributable to hydrophobia, and most of them would doubtless have died of nervous shock, had not Dr. Bland, the Medical Officer of Health, fortunately made a post-mortem examination of the delinquent dog, which had been killed, as a matter of course, and discovered just at the proper nick of time that the animal's irritability of manner, and snapping at people who molested him, could be readily accounted for by the circumstance that a large pin, probably swallowed accidentally, had found its way into the dog's stomach, naturally causing intense pain to the dog as he was hunted about by the crowd. This fact and various conclusive proofs, derived from the perfectly healthy state of all the other organs, that the animal was not affected with hydrophobia, were soon communicated to the unhappy sufferers at the infirmary, who were anxiously reckoning the few short hours left to them in this world. Within a very brief period, almost as if by magic, all their fear was gone, and so had the patients, away from the hospital to their respective homes and sorrowing relatives—suddenly restored to health as well as to their friends.



We have of late years heard a great deal about the increase of hydrophobia, but is there any real ground for thus alarming an easily panic-stricken public? The statistics upon which this assertion is based have been mainly made out by the police, who can scarcely be regarded as infallible on this point. A policeman sees a strange-looking dog, and fails to understand the animal's actions, while the dog, instinctively distrusting the policeman's movements, behaves still more singularly, from the policeman's point of view; the latter quickly decides in his mind that the dog is mad, in accordance with the universal axiom of the Force, that everything unintelligible to the constable must be wrong. The next thing which occurs to the policeman is the desirability of beating the animal to death with his truncheon. The deed done, down goes another dog in the Returns, under the heading of "Destroyed, suffering from hydrophobia." The natural result is that such a formidably long list is made out, that hydrophobia would seem to be the most common disorder of the canine race, instead of one of the rarest. One police report actually gave an average of one dog hydrophobic, in every seven, out of a very large number thus destroyed. Every seventh dog suffering from hydrophobia! We venture to strongly hint that the charge of madness should rather be brought against those who make such an astounding statement, than against the animals thus sweepingly denounced and ruthlessly destroyed.

Let us turn from these reckless assertions to a real and undeniable authority on this vexed question, the late Hon. Grantley Berkeley. Nearly twenty-five years ago, when there was a hydrophobia scare throughout the kingdom, such as happened at



Macclesfield in 1873, and has of late prevailed in many localities, Mr. Berkeley and ourselves made considerable researches and enquiries, which served to prove to a great extent the groundlessness of the scare, largely induced then, as now, by newspaper paragraphs based on hearsay. Mr. Berkeley's personal experience had been of a most extensive character. For sixty years an ardent sportsman—during a long period he was Master of one of the largest packs of fox-hounds in England—he had an immense number of dogs under his observation; yet in this more than half a century's experience he had seen only one hydrophobic dog. But he had had under his supervision hundreds of dogs—he put the total, roundly, at one thousand—suffering from a different disorder altogether, namely, distemper, which in bad cases causes the animal to be temporarily so peculiar in his manner as to convey the idea of madness to a casual, inexperienced onlooker.

Distemper is a disease which attacks nearly every dog, commonly in the earlier period of its existence; sometimes so slightly as to escape notice, unless it is closely watched for; at other times very severely, and then occasionally ending in the animal dying, with its brain affected. Distemper is, indeed, as frequent in the canine race as chicken-pox or measles in the human. It soon runs its course, and in its nature and ordinary results is as far removed from hydrophobia (or rabies, as some call it, preferring the shorter name derived from the Latin, to that taken from the Greek language), as chicken-pox is from the virulent forms of small-pox.

When dogs are severely affected with distemper, they will snap at anything that chances to be in their way, a fellow dog, the



trunk of a tree, or even the leg of an obtrusive meddler ; but their bites are not of themselves productive of serious consequences. For instance, Mr. Berkeley's men at the kennels were often (when incautious) bitten on the hands by these dogs—deranged, but not hydrophobic—and yet no infection of any kind was thus communicated. The only men who suffered more than temporary inconvenience from their wounds not healing quickly were the few who were in a bad state of health previously ; persons in whom the scratch of a pin or the sting of an insect would have produced untoward results, through unhealthy inflammatory action.

It is impossible to ignore such evidence as this, and, therefore, we can arrive at only one conclusion, namely, that as Mr. Berkeley remarked, the hundreds of dogs annually said to be hydrophobic (or rabid), are merely suffering from a severe form of distemper, rendering them temporarily deranged. If, instead of being hunted for many hours, and chased often for many miles, by thoughtlessly or wilfully cruel men and boys, and goaded to distraction by the inhumane use of sticks and stones, these maltreated animals could be shut in a secure place, where they could be quiet and have access to a plentiful supply of fresh water, with food, nearly all of them would soon get well.

In penning these remarks we are led to deal with the subject partly through our feelings of regret at the frequent instances of unjust and cruel treatment to which “man's best friend, the dog” is exposed, under the suspicion of hydrophobia. But there is another point of view from which we regard it, namely, the mischief resulting to the public mind, through the needless panics so easily produced by



the fallacious notion that hydrophobia is common amongst dogs, and consequently often imparted to human beings.

Owing to the erroneous doctrines that prevail in connection with this matter, no sooner does a man get a bite from a dog—perhaps even so slight as not to break the skin—than the direst forebodings are conjured up, and in many cases the dog is killed. As Goldsmith wrote in his *Elegy* :—

“ The wound it seemed both sore and sad  
To every Christian eye ;  
And while they swore the dog was mad,  
They swore the man would die.  
But soon a wonder came to light  
That showed the rogues they lied ;  
The man recovered from the bite,  
The dog it was that died.”

In the whole course of human conduct there is nothing more senseless or inexplicable than this practice of destroying a dog upon suspicion only of hydrophobia. If it should ever fall to our lot to get bitten in similar circumstances we should be most anxious that the dog should be kept alive. As long as he was living we should, at any rate, have an unfailing means of ascertaining the real condition of the animal, and we should derive much more pleasure from seeing him gradually recover from his illness than we possibly could if we were in a state of uncertainty as to the nature of his disease, owing to his having been vindictively and stupidly put to death directly after the occurrence of our injury.

We reproduce from Mr. Grantley Berkeley's book “ *Fact and Fiction* ” (worthy of careful perusal) the very complete table of



# THE CHIEF POINTS OF DIFFERENCE BETWEEN HYDROPHOBIA AND DISTEMPER MADNESS.

*From the Hon. Grantley Berkeley's Book.*

## Hydrophobia, or Rabies.

DEFINITION.—A fatal form of madness, communicable from the lower animals to man; characterised, as the name denotes, by an intense dread of water.

PREMONITORY SYMPTOMS.—Begin two days before the attack; loss of spirits, and of appetite; general depression.

GENERAL APPEARANCES DURING THE ATTACK.—When let alone, the dog lies sullenly, as if "out of sorts" and depressed, notices little, but recognises his master by wagging his tail. Violently insane only on water being placed near to him.

FITS.—Absent.

FOAM AT THE LIPS.—Absent.

WATER.—Sprinkled near the dog, causes violent convulsions.

THIRST.—Absent.

## Distemper Madness.

DEFINITION.—A form of temporary insanity, *not* communicable to man; characterised by foaming at the mouth, impairment of deglutition, and a desire to vomit.

PREMONITORY SYMPTOMS.—Loss of appetite, and a slight husking in the throat.

GENERAL APPEARANCES DURING THE ATTACK.—He bites at any of his fellow-dogs, gnaws at his bed or kennel, eats straw,\* and snaps at his attendant.

FITS.—Present in a marked degree in most cases.

FOAM AT THE LIPS.—Very much, and the dog leaves it on the surface of the water he tries to drink (the foam being caused by the futile efforts to swallow).

WATER.—Has no effect on the dog.

THIRST.—Intense, insatiable.



### Hydrophobia, or Rabies.—Continued.

DESIRE FOR WATER.—Absent, on account of dread.

APPEARANCE OF THE EYES.—Dull and heavy.

HOWLING AND BARKING.—Absent.

MUSCULAR AFFECTION OF THE THROAT, CAUSING INABILITY TO SWALLOW ANYTHING.—Absent, or not observable.

CAUSES.—None (appreciable.)

PROGNOSIS.—Very bad, always fatal, no chance of recovery.

TERMINATION.—The symptoms do not vary to any extent towards the termination.

PATHOLOGY.—Intense inflammation of the brain, extending to the throat and lungs.

PROPHYLACTIC TREATMENT.—None.

### Distemper Madness.—Continued.

DESIRE FOR WATER.—Very great.

APPEARANCE OF THE EYES.—Dull and green in their reflection.

HOWLING AND BARKING.—Present.

MUSCULAR AFFECTION OF THE THROAT, CAUSING INABILITY TO SWALLOW ANYTHING.—Well marked.

CAUSES.—Inflammatory action internally pervading the system.

PROGNOSIS.—Good or bad, according to the severity of the fits.

TERMINATION.—A fit.

PATHOLOGY.—Inflammation of the brain, extending to the throat and lungs, and often to the intestines.

PROPHYLACTIC TREATMENT.—Vaccination is an almost certain preventive.

\* *In connection with this point we may mention that in the inflamed stomachs of all dogs which have died while mad from distemper, there will almost invariably be found bits of straw and chips of wood, a sign that nature led them to try to bring on vomiting as a means of relieving the disordered state. On the contrary, if a post mortem examination be made of the stomach of a dog which has died of hydrophobia, that organ will be found nearly, if not quite, empty.*



the chief points of distinction between hydrophobia and distemper madness. Some of these call for special notice. In severe distemper fits occur to a considerable extent, but in hydrophobia this symptom is absent ; in the former affection there is a copious foam about the mouth,\* and in hydrophobia there is none ; if water is placed near a dog suffering badly from distemper no effect is produced upon the animal, whereas the same thing in a case of hydrophobia would lead to violent convulsions of a paroxysmal character ; thirst and an eager desire for water are intense in the distempered dog, but absent in the hydrophobic ; barking and howling are present, and often very persistent in a dog with distemper, but wanting in one with hydrophobia ; in distemper there is often much inability to swallow, owing to inflammatory dryness and muscular spasm of the throat (see foot-note), but this symptom is not observable in the hydrophobic animal.

The practice of muzzling all dogs, except those used for sporting purposes, is, at the best, a clumsy device, inflicting an incalculable amount of unnecessary torture and pain upon healthy, well-cared for animals, whilst not touching stray, ownerless dogs. Instead of issuing directions for general muzzling, the authorities would contribute far more to the public safety (while re-assuring, instead of alarming, the public mind), if they made stringent regulations as to licensing and registration ; requiring every owner to have affixed to the dog's collar a small officially supplied metal badge giving the registration number of the licence taken out. This rule would not only enable the owner of any lost dog to be promptly

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\* The dog leaves some of this foam on the water when drinking, the foam being produced by futile efforts to swallow the saliva, owing to dryness of the throat ; but this must not be confounded with hydrophobia.



communicated with, but would reduce to a minimum the number of stray dogs. It is from these wandering, starving animals—unable in towns to obtain even water, much more a sufficiency of food—that the chief danger arises. Every man's (and boy's) hand is against them; often brutally treated, and consequently ready to evince resentment under such continuous provocation, they become vicious and uncertain; they are generally canine waifs, and so diseased that it would be a kindness to put them out of their misery. As for temporarily lost dogs, it would be fair to impose a definite fine upon restoration to their owners, who could not object to the payment of a moderate amount as a penalty for their negligence in not keeping them under proper control. In short, there should not be a single unlicensed or unregistered dog. Under the present imperfect system, no license is taken out for the vast majority of dogs.

Returning, for a moment, to the subject of distemper madness, we may mention what, perhaps, is not very generally known, namely, that vaccination, performed on young dogs, is an almost positive preventive of distemper, and if distemper should occur after vaccination, it will be only in a mild form, the worst symptoms, such as temporary mental derangement, being absent.

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P.S.—The foregoing remarks were written with a view to insertion in "HEALTH NEWS" for February, but the article was allowed to stand over, owing to pressure of other matter. More recently, however, the London County Council have brought the subject prominently to the front, by passing at their meeting on Feb. 4th, a resolution adopting the recommendation of the Public Control



Committee, that a muzzling order should be issued for the Metropolis, such order to come into force on the 17th of February. If the matter be so urgent, why delay a fortnight? Only a few weeks had elapsed since the same committee had reported that an order of this kind was uncalled for. The rapidity with which the committee changed its opinion reminds one of the famous conversion of Colonel Quagg, the difference being apparently that, in the latter case, physical whipping was the agency employed, whereas in that of the committee moral suasion was doubtless resorted to. The discussion on the recommendation was short and presumably conducted on the traditional lines of giving a dog a bad name, and then doing the worst with him. Only one member of the Council, Dr. Cooper, raised his voice against the recommendation; pointing out that only one human being was said to have died of hydrophobia in London during 1895, and urging that "no reason had been shown for such an unnecessary and unpleasant method of persecuting dogs;" to which we would add, or of needlessly annoying and irritating their owners. Dr. Cooper further made the sensible observation that the police had the remedy in their own hands, if they would seize all stray dogs, among which class the disease appeared. But of those who cried "hear, hear," in approval of Dr. Cooper's views, none rose to support him; and consequently after a subsequent speaker had spoken of the discontinuance of muzzling in 1891 as a "retrograde step," quoting the opinion of Professor Victor Horsley (an authority who can hardly be cited as a "friend of the dog") and some other scientists, and stated that rabies was unknown in Egypt, Cyprus, and India (countries where muzzling is certainly unknown too) the recommendation of the Committee was promptly adopted, and the Council adjourned, with-



out more arguments. The discussion was hurried through and almost entirely one-sided. This may have arisen from the Council Chamber gradually emptying towards the close of the sitting, or because the subject lacked to many of the Councillors the intense interest displayed in a debate, earlier in the evening, on the exciting question whether the Councillors should wear their hats. A division showed that 45 were in favour of the introduction of this practice—"apeing the House of Commons," as one speaker put it,—while 61 voted against it. So that, as no other business of importance was brought under consideration, the results of the meeting might be summed up as follows:—Councillors, though nearly half of them are anxious to do so, indeed, declare it to be necessary, either to show their dignity or to conceal their baldness, are not to be allowed to wear hats; dogs, though the necessity was far from clearly demonstrated, are to be compelled to wear muzzles. It almost looks as if the hatless humans had vented their spite on the nearly championless canines.

We believe, from the dissatisfaction already expressed with so hastily carried a resolution as the latter, that the public—who do not care a jot whether the councillors wear their hats or not—will have a great deal to say on the subject of muzzling, *alias* torturing, innocent harmless dogs, merely to gratify faddists who are bent on gaining their point, even at the expense of creating unfounded and widely-spread panic.

If, as alleged, a very large number of mad dogs are in existence, it is a remarkable thing that none of the persons bitten by them have gone mad. Perhaps some light may be thrown on this singular fact by the circumstance that Sir Charles Warren,



Head of the London Police, stated in his evidence before the House of Lords Committee on Hydrophobia that, although statistics had been prepared of several thousand cases of policemen who were bitten in the discharge of their duty in capturing stray and supposed mad dogs, there had never been brought to his knowledge a single case of hydrophobia in any member of the force. But, as soon as the panic created by the muzzling order has become general, should anyone (policeman or civilian) receive a chance dog-bite, it will at once be assumed that the animal is mad, and, after dispatching him, the terrified victim of presumed canine madness will be dispatched also—to the Pasteurian Institute, and there treated as if suffering from hydrophobia, while the case will be published in hundreds of journals as further evidence of the alarmingly wide spread of hydrophobia.

In conclusion, we venture to assert that if proper licensing regulations were enforced, if ownerless dogs were promptly seized and humanely destroyed, there would be no excuse for raising an unnecessary public scare; and if owners generally would see that their dogs had wholesome food, plenty of fresh water, and sufficient exercise, with cleanly bedding, we should hear less of any other diseases in dogs.