

Health of St. George, Hanover Square : a letter to a vestryman of St. George's, Hanover Square / by one of the Medical Officers of Health.

Contributors

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HEALTH OF ST. GEORGE, HANOVER SQUARE.

(7)

A

L E T T E R

TO A

VESTRYMAN

OF

St. George's, Hanover Square.

J. Smith

BY

ONE OF THE MEDICAL OFFICERS OF HEALTH.

LONDON:

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1857.

SIXPENCE.

REPORT OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

J. E. T. E. R.

WESTMAN

21 October 1900

ONE OF THE MEMBERS OF THE BOARD

REPORT OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

1900

A LETTER,

&c. &c.

SIR,

I willingly comply with your request for information ; and will try to show as shortly as possible, first, what it is that Medical Officers of Health have to do : secondly, what scope there is for their duties in the Parish of St. George, Hanover Square : and thirdly, what they have done during the last twelve months.

In the first place, then, as to our duties. We take the 132nd section of the Metropolis Local Management Act as our text. Let me direct your attention to the circumstance, that this Act strictly enjoin us "to ascertain the existence of diseases, more especially, epidemics increasing the rate of mortality ;" and, as it goes on to say, "to take cognizance of the fact of the existence" of diseases.

As one branch of our duty, then, we are bound to make ourselves acquainted as far as possible, with the degree and kind of sickness which prevails in our respective districts.

In order to acquire this information, we have recourse to the weekly Registers of Deaths, copies of which are now sent to us regularly, and gratuitously by the Registrar General. Last year we procured them from the District Registrars, and paid for them, rather dearly, out of our own pockets. From these Registers we know the place, date, and alleged cause of every death, and the age, sex, and condition of every deceased person ; and thus we are able to construct monthly, quarterly, and annual tables, shewing the loss of life in every part of the parish from every cause.

The possession of these Registers is most essential, in order to direct our attention to the points at which disease is most prevalent. Cases too are constantly registered, which make it our duty to make personal enquiry as to the real cause of the disease, the salubrity of the premises, the circumstance whether the deceased person was a parishioner or a stranger, and so forth ; for I need scarcely say, that if it is our duty to ascertain the existence of diseases which increase the rate of mortality, we are bound, first of all, to learn what the rate of mortality is without such increase ; and this, as I shall shew presently, can only be learned by a somewhat minute analysis of the Registers.

In the next place, we derive our information of the existence of sickness, from the books of the Parochial Surgeons, and of the Charitable Institutions ; by means of which, we now learn exactly the amount of sickness and the kind of it, whether fatal or not, that prevails amongst the humbler classes in every part of the parish.

Now you will ask, what use is made of this information ? I reply, more statistical tables, of sickness, as well as of

death. Every week now, government issues a report on the Health of the Metropolis, derived from information collected by the Medical Officers of Health, and on a plan which, if thoroughly carried out, will create a most useful store-house of *facts*, as to the chief diseases that cut short human life. And facts, I assure you, are very much needed in this, as well as in every other subject of research.

But, you may say, all this statistical matter may be very interesting to some persons, or may be of use to the next generation; but of what use is it to us now?

I reply, that in collecting these facts, we learn the existence of evils which admit of instant remedy. For example, in the course of last month, the small-pox, after having been absent from this part of the parish for some time, appeared suspiciously in three places. Before the appointment of Medical Officers of Health, this circumstance may have been noticed, or it may not; at all events, it would have been nobody's special business. But it became the duty of the Medical Officer of Health to instruct the inhabitants of the infected houses as to the best means of preventing contagion; to cause the premises to be properly cleansed; to examine the children in the various parochial schools, so as to find out whether they were vaccinated or not, and to preach a crusade in favour of vaccination, so that all the young children might be subjected to the operation at once. This last point was accomplished so effectually, that the number of vaccinated children has been doubled in the succeeding weeks; and so quietly, that although every poor family in the parish must have been apprized of it, yet nothing was done that could excite the alarm of the fashionable world.

One of the places where small-pox appeared, was the room of a journeyman, who—in this room, surrounded by his sick children—was making coats for the customers of a

fashionable tailor, in a fashionable street. Another was the room of a laundress, employed in getting up gentlemen's *white ties*. Another was inhabited by the family of an upper servant at a house in Berkeley Square. I mention this, in order to show that there is no class, however elevated, which may not be concerned somehow in the healthiness of the poor man's home.

Here is another case. In a certain street, containing 13 houses, I learn from the register that there were 5 deaths in the last year—three in one family. I find, from the dispensary and other quarters, that sickness has been very prevalent in the house, and I visit it, and the Inspector visits it; and we discover nothing particularly wrong—nothing which would give the local authority a legal right of interference. Nevertheless, I represent the facts to the owner of the house, and receive his promise that the house shall be emptied and thoroughly cleansed, and the drains examined.

I give this as an instance of the manner in which information collected respecting the existence of sickness and mortality, may be made useful. But I must observe, that, whether useful or not, the thing is ordered by the Act, and *must be done*.

So much, then, for one branch of our duties, which consists in 'taking cognizance' of the loss of life and health in the district under our charge.

A second branch of duty consists in inspection. Every house in the poorer parts is undergoing inspection. This is conducted mainly by the Inspector, under our direction; but we go when there is especial complaint, or unusual sickness, or other cause for accurate observation; and likewise, we personally examine samples of the houses in every street; whilst we leave it to the Inspector to make a regular visita-

tion from house to house. This is a very tedious process, and sometimes there is little or nothing to show upon paper for a great deal of labour. Yet it will happen that, here and there, amidst houses outwardly clean, some nuisance is hit upon which might have bred a pestilence. Either a lodger has stolen the leaden pipe, and there has been no water; or the lessee has not paid the rates, and the water has been cut off by the company; or some old cesspool, or other nuisance. Even when there is nothing that can be legally required to be altered, a few hints about opening the windows, cleaning the house, and emptying the dust, are not always thrown away; and for my own part, when I go into houses, each of which would furnish inhabitants for an Australian or Canadian village (such as 18, North Bruton Mews, or 18, South Bruton Mews, or 21, Grosvenor Market, or 27, Clarges Street—each with its 30 or 50 inhabitants), I never fail to throw in a few words in favour of a *move* to some part of the world where there is more room for the industrious. Depend on it, that it is a good thing to send to the poor some one to whom they can make complaints that they dare not utter to a landlord, to whom they are in arrears for rent. I only wish landlords could see as clearly as I do, that the people who live in sickly houses cannot pay their rents.

A third branch of our duties consists in acting in combination with the Medical Officers of Health of other districts, in investigating matters in which all London is interested. Whilst I am writing, I receive a report on the nuisances connected with gas works, to which Dr. Aldis's name is attached, as one of a committee to investigate trade nuisances. Last summer, I drew up the report of a committee which undertook the disgusting task of investigating the subject of the meat of diseased animals; and all these occupations take up time.

As another branch of our duties, let me refer to the examination of the water used in the parish, which was voluntarily undertaken last year by Dr. Aldis and myself—a costly and laborious process enough.

Another branch of our duties, is the drawing up Reports, which possibly are sometimes dry enough, containing matters interesting to those who care for vital statistics. I will only say that the verification of some of the facts stated in the registers, and the compilation of the Death-table (the very elaborate and useful table, I will call it, though I made it myself), which we send in monthly to the vestry, requires more work than most people would imagine.

Now for the second question. What scope is there for the labours of a Medical Officer of Health in the parish of St. George, Hanover Square? In dealing with this, I shall confine myself to that half of the parish known as the Inwards (that part north of the Green Park), inasmuch as I am better acquainted with the facts and documents relating to it.

It appears that a body of parochial economists have made the discovery, that the duties of a Medical Officer of Health are quite unnecessary, and have circulated a statistical table, showing that the parish is the healthiest in the metropolis, and the mortality only 18 per thousand, and so forth.

Now pardon me if I digress for a moment into the subject of statistics.

This very much misused science is divisible into two parts. In the first place, facts are collected and reduced to figures. In the second place, from the facts and figures so collected, inferences are drawn as to cause and effect. The first requires a certain amount of industry, rather rare, inasmuch as most people get their figures at second hand. The second requires some amount of common sense, or, at least,

common honesty ; and, if these qualities be wanting, there is no end to the outrageous absurdities and falsehoods which a few plain facts and figures may be tortured into giving a kind of support to.

This is more particularly the case when very small or very complex quantities are dealt with ; and, in either of these cases, whoever attempts to draw inferences without taking the whole of the circumstances into consideration, is sure to fall into some absurdity.

Nowhere is this more certain than in the attempt to show a relation between the healthiness of a district and its mortality ; a thing simply impossible, unless every fact connected with that mortality be fairly weighed.

For example, a list of deaths as they have occurred within a twelvemonth in the several streets of this parish would seem to prove then that a certain small part of George Street, Hanover Square, of Maddox St., and of Lower Grosvenor St., are particularly fatal to persons in the prime of life, until it were shown that several of the deaths in these streets were deaths of persons who had been attracted to the spot by the excellence of the medical and surgical advice to be had in the parish.

In fact, any one who attempts to deal offhand with the population and mortality of St. George's, Hanover Square, will soon find that he is dealing with two most complicated subjects. As to the population, about half of the parish is like a vast hotel, to which people resort for a time for certain purposes, but have their regular homes elsewhere. I learn from the bakers, that from twice and a half to four times as much bread is consumed here in the month of June, as there is in September. A large number of the inhabitants are absent regularly every autumn for change of air ; and if sick, go away at any time. Domestic servants, mil-

liners' girls, and shopmen, if they become ill here, do not often remain here to die.

So that whilst, on the one hand, deaths daily occur in the parish, which do not belong to it, on the other hand, multitudes of deaths which fairly belong to the parish, may be registered elsewhere.

I have been led into this digression, in order to show that I put no faith in petty bits of statistics on any subject; and that any inferences drawn from the number of deaths registered in this parish, must be most fallacious, unless the most minute care be taken to correct every detail. But, forasmuch as a statistical table has been paraded by the "dirty party," in order to show that there is no scope for sanitary reform in St. George's, Hanover Square, I will just show what the facts are respecting the mortality of the In-Wards of the parish.

As I have been a little more than a year in office, I am just now able to sum up the mortality of different parts; and here are some of the results arrived at:

Let any one start from Hanover Square, and walk along Lower and Upper Brook Street, into Hyde Park. He will pass on his right and left about 137 houses, inhabited almost entirely by one class of people, besides 13 mansions at the north of Grosvenor Square. In these 150 houses, in 52 weeks, from 1st of April, 1856, to 1st of April, 1857, there occurred nine deaths. What the population of these 150 houses may be, including as they do some large hotels, I do not know. Suppose the average to be no more than 10, that gives us 1,500 persons; but any man who knows the neighbourhood, may make a computation to please himself.

Now turn out of Upper Brook Street, into a court called Shepherd's Court, inhabited by another class of people. I know the population of this, because I have taken a Census

List of it personally. There are 9 houses, 30 families, and 107 inhabitants. During the above 52 weeks, there were 9 deaths, including that of 1 child, who was removed to St. George's Hospital.

George Street, Hanover Square, contains 35 houses, many of them large mansions, and including the establishments of eminent *modistes*. In the period before named, there were 6 deaths in it; 5 of them in a very few houses opposite the church. Of course, just as a steward is bound to enquire how money goes, when the expenditure seems extravagant, so a Medical Officer of Health is bound to enquire into loss of life when it seems excessive; and I soon ascertained that at least four of these deaths were those of strangers who had come almost dying, for the sake of medical advice.

George Street, Grosvenor Square, has also 35 houses. Some have been empty and in Chancery; one contains 38 inhabitants, one only 2; one I caused to be shut up as unfit for human habitation. I have not time to count the inhabitants, and one guess is as good as another; but my figures shew 14 deaths in the 52 weeks.

One side of Piccadilly is in our parish, from Bond Street to Apsley House. There we had 6 deaths; in the parallel part of Oxford Street, there were 11. Upper and Lower Grosvenor Street furnish 8 deaths; Grosvenor Square 4; Grosvenor Mews, in its various tortuosities, 18, including 2 in the Model Lodging House, and 2 in the other Model Lodging House, known as Blomfield Place.

I will give you a few more figures, as matters of curiosity, which will enable any one who knows the parish to see how the mortality is distributed.

Hanover Square gave 2 deaths; Hanover Place (a narrow passage near South Molton Street) gave 4. New Bond

Street, about 170 houses, 10 deaths. Davies Street, has perhaps 100 houses, 13 deaths. I say 'perhaps,' as to the number of houses, because in every part of the parish, houses are so subdivided, the back premises so detached and sublet, that it is as difficult to say what is a separate house, as to define an *individual* in zoology. Mount Street, about 134 houses, 15 deaths; 5 on the north side, 10 on the south side, 9 of the whole in the old part of the street near Hyde Park. Park Street 10 deaths; North Audley Street 7; South Audley Street 9; Duke Street, Grosvenor Square, 5; Charles Street, Grosvenor Square, 4; South Molton Street, 18; South Molton Lane, (that disgrace to the parish) 2; Grosvenor Market, (the Irish quarter) 2; North Row, 15, including 4 in Brown's Place, and one in St. George's Hospital; Thomas Street, 8; Robert Street, 13; Pollen Street, 5; Mill Street, 1; Maddox Street, 6, (chiefly persons who came to town for advice or operation); Globe Yard, 2; Green Street, 4; that part of St. James's Street which is in our parish, 4; Old Bond Street, 2; Three Kings' Yard, 3; King Street, Park Street, 5; Norfolk Street, 1; Union Street, Bond Street, 4; Avery Row, 4; Bruton Street. 6; North and South Bruton Mews, and Little Bruton Street, 7; Lancashire Court only 2.

The above are some jottings respecting the seats of death. Let me add that the entire mortality of the Hanover sub-district was 330, including 114 deaths under 5 years: births, 450. In May Fair there were 209 births, and 245 deaths, including 43 under 5 years, and 77 in the Mount Street Work-house. Moreover, during the above 52 weeks, 25 persons were removed from the In-wards into St. George's Hospital, and died there; 16 from poor streets; 9 from good streets—a housemaid from Curzon Street; butler from Bruton Street; footman from Lower Grosvenor Street; groom from South

Street; cook from Park Street; butler from Park Lane; shopman from Half Moon Street; servant from South Audley Street.

I trouble you with these details in order to show what immense knowledge of facts is necessary before concluding that because a certain number of people die *in* a place, therefore they die *of* it; or conversely, that a place is healthy because few people die in it; and likewise the number of accidental circumstances which always interfere to render little bits of statistics fallacious. But before dismissing this question, let me take another part of the parish a little in detail.

It is very gratifying to find in a statistical table, that our parish is a kind of blessed place, with a mortality like that of rural districts; that we have 8,792 houses standing in an area (exclusive of 400 acres of parks) of 761 acres, &c., &c.

But as any very large whole is made up of a number of little parts, which may vary immensely among themselves, let us dissect this complex quantity, the parish, and see what a bit of it is made of. For this purpose let us take the square block, bounded N. by Oxford Street, S. by the north side of Grosvenor Square, and E. & W. by one half of Duke Street, and of North Audley Street respectively.

This square block is a fair sample, and contains specimens of the fashionable, the professional, the trading, the artizan, and the promiscuous population of the parish. It includes a large church and schools, a cowhouse and brewery, and two large factories. One portion of this block, including Brown Street and part of Hart Street, was minutely described by me in a Report to the Vestry, dated 27th April, 1857. If that were printed and circulated, the parishioners might know something about one of the worst parts of the parish; but, as it is, this district lies in the way to nowhere; and I know

persons who have lived in the parish twenty years who never have entered it, or heard of it.

To resume. The square block, above described, measures $176\frac{1}{2}$ yards E. to W., and $230\frac{2}{3}$ yards N. to S. Therefore, it contains not quite $8\frac{1}{2}$ acres. Of this area, 13 mansions in Grosvenor Square, with their stables and dependencies (including about 20 premises in George Yard and Providence Court) and 3 houses in Duke Street, occupy a fourth. In this part there was no death in the 52 weeks before mentioned. Oxford Street in this part, yielded 2 deaths in about 26 houses, one of a non-resident. The half of Duke Street gave 2 deaths in about 22 houses ; half of North Audley Street, 3 deaths in about 22 houses ; Providence Court, 10 houses, 1 death ; George Street, 35 houses, 14 deaths ; Queen Street, about 20 houses, 4 deaths, (besides 2 in St. George's Hospital) ; Hart Street about 18 houses, 10 deaths ; Brown Street, 18 houses, 9 deaths.

I have taken this year, as I said, a census of Brown Street, and found that it contained less than 300 persons, ; 9 died there in the year, besides one in St. George's Hospital, and 159 had medical relief from the parish or dispensary. Let me say that the Model Lodgings contain 130 inhabitants ; 2 died, and 45 had medical relief ; Blomfield Buildings 135, 2 died, and 65 had medical relief.

Repeating then that I lay no stress on statistics of mortality in this case, yet I cannot help drawing the inference, that this parish contains two classes of persons, that the mortality of one class is very small, and that of the other far too large ; and, further, that the places in which cleanliness and drainage are most deficient, appear to be precisely those in which most deaths have occurred.

But the question before us, as to the scope for sanitary improvements in this parish, may be argued about for ever ; so,

instead of arguing, put on your hat, turn out of Bond Street into Lancashire Court and Avery Row, go up Globe Yard, across South Molton Street, into South Molton Lane and Grosvenor Market, just pause to regale the eye with the edifices at the top of Davies Street, along Robert Street, giving a look at Gilbert Street and Thomas Street before you pass through Tom's Court into Duke Street; then visit Hart Street, Brown Street, and Providence Court, and go along North Row, dropping as you go into Brown's Place and Weaver's Place; come home *via* Mount Street—(if you choose, ask the Rector to describe the condition of a house in Mount Street, that I took him into by chance one day), and finish by penetrating into Street's Buildings, and back by Grosvenor Mews.

Now what have we here? Certainly, none of the very debased scum of humanity that you read of in the City, where promiscuous herds of both sexes are crowded into pestilential dens; but a much more prosaic affair. A large struggling, industrious population, who deserve every help and sympathy, packed away into a space in which as much care and cleanliness are essential to preserve health, as they would be on board ship. But, unluckily, these ships have no captains; the owners of the houses too often take no trouble to enforce cleanliness, on the part of the inmates; they themselves allow their houses to get into a state of dingy dilapidation which renders cleanliness impossible; and the lodgers dare not complain, for in dirty houses the rent is always in arrear.

When we speak of preventible causes of sickness and mortality, it is very seldom we can point to any one thing as causing sickness and death by itself. I have met with one case this year, certainly, in which a severe attack of cholera was attributed by Mr. Bloxam, Jun., to the stinking state of

a dustbin at 18, South Bruton Mews, which dustbin was underneath an ill-ventilated staircase. More frequently what we meet with as preventible causes of sickness are a number of small things which undermine the health; so that, when measles, or scarlatina, or bronchitis, or diarrhoea comes, the patient is unable to withstand it, and dies.

Of such causes, the following are frequently met with:—

Roof of house not provided with opening for ventilation (no means of escape from fire).

Gutters around roof foul from emptying of slops.

Rain-water pipes stopped up; or stinking, and conveying foul smells into the windows in certain states of wind.

Closets used for bed-rooms, with no ventilation.

Ceilings and walls dirty, crumbling; rooms inhabited for years, and never whitewashed.

Floors so old and spongy that they cannot be cleaned.

Ground floor viciously constructed, from erection of buildings in yard, so as to cut off light and air.

Kitchens low and damp. (I believe that no children whatever can be reared healthily in kitchens).

Offensive and untrapped sinks.

Cellars or vaults filled with offensive rubbish.

Dust-bins, full and stinking, with no covers.

Water-butts old, and foul, and uncovered; water runs out as fast as it comes in.

Old privies with cesspools; or water-closets with no water; or water-closet offensive from not being cleansed; one water-closet to 40 or 50 people; no drains; drains choked, or leaky, or untrapped. Soil saturated with sewage; old spongy walls wet with stinking moisture.

Stables used for years as dwellings for servants and their families, with no provision for decency.

These are the chief things met with; or rather I should

say, not met with, but ferretted out. If anyone thinks that the chance of recovery from illness is not lessened by these causes, let him say so publicly.

I will add this yet. I don't care whether these things can be proved unhealthy or not. I will not attempt to show how this headache came from that stink, or these bleached and scrofulous children from that kitchen. Unhealthy or not, they are indecent, in the highest sense of the word. It is not fit that these should be added to the other temptations which the poor man has to laziness, dirt, and drinking.

Now for my third point, what has been done. I cannot pretend to give any idea of the amount of time and trouble each case has occasioned; some cases have caused a great deal, others little or none. Great nuisances have been got rid off easily; and tremendous complaints have been made in other places, where, after long search, nothing wrong could be discovered. The following is an account of some houses which have been made more wholesome, chiefly in drainage and cleanliness under notice from the local authority, and in most cases through my interference.

Avery Row, 1; Adams Mews, 5; Brick Street, 1; Brown Street, 7; Bond Street, New, 3; Bolton Yard, 1; Carrington Mews, 5; Charles Street, Berkeley Square, 1; ditto, Grosvenor Square, 1; Curzon Street, 1; Clarges Street, 1; George Street, Grosvenor Square, 6; Globe Yard, 2; Grosvenor Mews, 1; Grosvenor Market, 2; Gilbert Street, 1; Hart Street, 5; Lancashire Court, 9; Lee's Mews, 2; Mount Street, 1; Mount Row, 1; North Row, 3; Oxford Street, 2; Queen Street, Grosvenor Square, 5; Robert Street, 2; Reeves Mews, 2; Providence Court, 3; South Street, 5; Street's Buildings, 1; Thomas Street, 6; Tenterden Street, 1; Tom's Court, 4; Union Street, Bond Street, 2; Wood's Mews, 5; Shepherd's Court, 7; Shepherd's Market, 13; Snead's

Garden, alias Hertford Place, 9; George's Row, Brown Street, 1; John's Court, Farm Street, 2; Down Street, 1; Whitehorse Street, 2; Farm Street Mews, 1; South Audley Street, 1.

The cost of these alterations is very uncertain; at all events a very large sum of money has been spent for the comfort and health of the poor; in one case, a few shillings, in another, more than £60; in no case has there been any dispute or threat of litigation on the part of the owners of the houses.

I will add my conviction, that if the owners of houses inhabited by the poor were made responsible for the cleanliness of the houses; and that if they were to do conscientiously for their poor tenants what Mr. Newson, the builder of the Model Lodgings, does for his, the health and morality of the inhabitants would be greatly increased. Poverty has some evils that cannot be got rid of; but stinking, dirty homes need not be of the number.

I am, dear Sir,

Your very obedient servant,

ROBERT DRUITT.

39 A, Curzon Street, 28th May, 1857.