Bills of mortality [London].

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[Death and the Old Man. From Holbein's Dance of Death.]

CXL.—BILLS OF MORTALITY.

In the week ending the 18th of November, 1843, the number of deaths in the metropolis exceeded the average mortality by upwards of three hundred. There was once a time when a fact like this would have produced a panic among the citizens, and have arrested the gaieties of the West End; for an increase in the fatality of ordinary diseases was generally regarded as a precursor of the Plague: but, excepting members of the medical profession, undertakers, and sextons (whom it must not be considered ungracious thus to link together), this increase of one-fourth in the number of deaths is unknown to nearly all the world besides —a sure sign of the little interest which it excites, when scarcely common gossip adopts it as a "topic of the day." It was with the view of communicating to the inhabitants of London, to the Court, and the constituted authorities of the City accurate information respecting the increase or decrease in the number of deaths, and the casualties of mortality occurring amongst them, that the Bills of Mortality were first commenced. London was then seldom entirely free from the Plague, and the publication of the Bills was calculated to calm exaggerated rumours; and to warn those who could do so conveniently to leave London whenever the pestilence became more fatal than usual. The Bills were first commenced in 1592, during a time when the Plague was busy with its ravages, but they were not continued uninterruptedly until the occurrence of another Plague, in 1603, from which period up to the present time they have been continued from week to week, excepting during the Great Fire, when the deaths of two or three weeks were given in one Bill.

In 1662, Captain John Graunt, a citizen of London, who appears to have lived in Birchin Lane, published a work entitled 'Natural and Political Observations

on the Bills of Mortality,' in which he gives an account of the manner in which they were prepared. "When any one dies, then, either by tolling or ringing of a bell, or by bespeaking of a grave of the sexton, the same is known to the searchers corresponding with the said sexton. The searchers hereupon (who are ancient matrons sworn to their office) repair to the place where the dead corpse lies, and by view of the same, and by other inquiries, they examine by what disease or casualty the corpse died. Hereupon they make their report to the parish clerk, and he, every Tuesday night, carries in an account of all the burials and christenings happening that week to the clerk at the Parish Clerks' Hall. On Wednesday the general account is made up and printed, and on Thursdays published and disposed to the several families who will pay four shillings per annum for them." Maitland, in his 'History of London,' says that the Company of Parish Clerks was strictly enjoined by its charter to make report of all the weekly christenings and burials in their respective parishes, by six o'clock on Tuesdays in the afternoon; but a bye-law was passed, changing the hour to two o'clock, on the same day, in order, says Maitland, "that the King and the Lord Mayor may have an account thereof the day before publication." About 1625, the utility of the Bills having been generally recognised, the Company of Parish Clerks obtained a licence from the Star Chamber for keeping a printing-press in their Hall, for printing the Bills; and it was ordered that the two masters and the warden of the Company should each of them have the keeping of a key of the press-room door. In 1629 there were two editions of the Weekly Bills printed, one with the casualties and diseases, and the other without. The former was a foreshadow of the newspaper of later times, which devotes a column instead of a line, to "dreadful accidents" and other casualties. Graunt says, "Having always been born and bred in the City of London, and having always observed that most of those who constantly took in the Bills of Mortality made little other use of them than to look, at the foot, how the burials increased or decreased; and among the casualties, what had happened rare and extraordinary in the week current, so as they might take the same as a text to talk upon in the next company, and withal, in the Plague time, how the sickness increased or decreased, that so the rich might judge of the necessity of their removal, and tradesmen might conjecture what doings they were likely to have in their respective dealings" —he conceived that the wisdom of the City had designed them for other uses, and began to examine them; and the result was the work already mentioned, which is curious, and not without value as a step towards just conclusions. He had to combat some singular notions, first, that the population of London was to be reckoned by millions; "which most men do believe, as they do that there be three women to one man." He speaks of "men of great experience in this City who talk seldom under millions of people to be in London;" and all this he was himself apt enough at one time to believe, "until on a certain day one of eminent reputation was upon occasion asserting that there was, in the year 1661, two millions more than in *Anno* 1625, before the Great Plague"—a notion about as reasonable as the idea which prevailed amongst intelligent persons fifty years ago concerning the population of Nankin and some of the other cities of China. Turning to the Bills, he showed that if there were *only* six millions of inhabitants of London, the deaths being about 15,000, the proportion was only 1 in 400, which common

experience at once disproved; and as to the proportion of men and women, there were, he says, fourteen men to thirteen women; in which he was wrong on the other side, the number of females being always in the larger proportion; at the present time, for example, being about nine to eight. The population of London he reduced from millions, according to the popular notion, to 384,000, or 199,112 males and 184,886 females. The deaths were about 1 in 24. In 1605 the parishes comprised within the Bills of Mortality included the ninety-seven parishes within the walls, sixteen parishes without the walls, and six contiguous out-parishes in Middlesex and Surrey. In 1626 the city of Westminster was included in the Bills; in 1636 the parishes of Islington, Lambeth, Stepney, Newington, Hackney, and Redriff. Other additions were made from time to time. At present the weekly Bills of Mortality include the ninety-seven parishes within the walls, seventeen parishes without the walls, twenty-four out-parishes in Middlesex and Surrey, including the district churches, and ten parishes in the city and liberties of Westminster. The parishes of Marylebone and St. Pancras, with some others, which at the beginning of last century had only a population of 9150 persons, but now contain 360,113, were never included in the Bills.

The nosology of the old Bills of Mortality is not without interest as an index of the state of medical knowledge at the time when they were commenced. Some of the obsolete heads would puzzle a medical practitioner of the present day. In 1657 we have "chrisomes and infants," 1162 deaths; in this instance the age of the deceased being substituted for the disease. By "chrisome" was meant merely a child not yet a month old, the appellation being derived from the chrisom, or cloth anointed with holy unguent, which infants wore till they were christened. In 1699 the number entered under this head was only 70; but as they decreased the number set down to convulsions increased, the name of the disease which carries off so many infants being at length substituted for the term indicative merely of age. In 1726 there were but three "chrisomes," being the last time this entry appears; and "infants" occurred for the last time in 1722. "Blasted and planet" is another curious entry, under which we find five deaths in 1657, five in 1658, three in 1659, and eight in 1660, after which it does not reappear, and soon afterwards "blasted" no longer occurs. "Planet-struck," however (of which "planet" was an abbreviation), occurs during the casualties for several years afterwards; and it is most likely that these appellations were bestowed on persons who wasted away without any very obvious cause. Dysentery, the disease of camps, and of those who live as if in camps, carried off its thousands annually in the crowded and dirty parts of old London; though it did not appear in the Bills under this name, but in one more homely and expressive than delicate. Scarlet fever, the deaths in which amount at present to about two thousand a-year, is not found in the old Bills till 1703, when the number of deaths from it is stated to be only seven, and the next year only eight, the fact being that it was long confounded with measles, even by physicians. The old synonymes for water in the head (hydrocephalus) were "headmouldshot" and "horseshoehead," and both referred to changes produced by this disease in the shape of the head. In 1726 they very properly began to be classed together. The head "rising of the lights," which was never omitted in the old Bills, has puzzled the medical historian; since the choking sensation in the throat (globus

hystericus), to which it seems to bear the nearest affinity, is by no means a fatal or even dangerous disease. "Tissick" is used for phthisis or consumption. Graunt has some curious speculations on the introduction of the "rickets" for the first time in 1634. Some of the casualties recorded are not likely to recur amongst us. In 1724 there was one "died from want in Newgate;" in 1732 one "murdered in the pillory;" in 1756 one "killed in the pillory." Graunt congratulates his fellow-citizens that "few are starved," the number of entries which occur under the head "starved" in the course of twenty years being fifty-one; but then he seems to have exempted "helpless infants at nurse, which being caused rather by carelessness, ignorance, and infirmity of the milch-women, is not properly an effect, or sign of want of food in the country, or of means to get it." Then again he observes that "but few are murthered; not above eighty-six of the 229,250 [the deaths in twenty years] which have died of other diseases and casualties; whereas in Paris few nights escape without their tragedy."

The chief value of the Bills of Mortality for upwards of a century after their first institution consisted, in the public estimation, of the warning which they afforded as to the existence or progress of the Plague, which during the Middle Ages and to the end of the seventeenth century was at all times either an active agent in the work of destruction or apparently suspending its ravages only to recommence them with greater fury. Sir William Petty, in his 'Essay on Political Arithmetic concerning the Growth of the City of London,' published in 1682, says: "It is to be remembered that, one time with another, a Plague happeneth in London once in twenty years, or thereabouts; and it is also to be remembered that the Plagues of London do commonly kill one-fifth of the inhabitants." Again he remarks: "The Plague of London is the chief impediment and objection against the growth of the City." Within the hundred years preceding the period when he wrote there had been five great Plagues, namely, in 1592, 1603, 1625, 1636, and 1665. In the four last years the total number of deaths in London, from all diseases and from the Plague, was as follows:—

	Total Deaths.	Died of the Plague.		Total Deaths.	Died of the Plague.
1603	37,294	30,561	1636	23,357	10,400
1625	51,758	35,417	1665	97,306	68,596

The above are the figures given in another work of Graunt's relating to the mortality of the Plague. In 1603 the deaths from the Plague were three out of every 3·7 deaths from all diseases, which was a higher proportion than in 1665. In 1625 there were eight times as many deaths as there were christenings in the previous year. If such a proportion were to occur now, the number of deaths in the metropolis would be raised from about 46,000 to nearly 400,000. But even in the intermediate years, between the occurrence of Great Plagues, the mortality was frequently reckoned by hundreds and thousands. In the five years from 1606 to 1610 the deaths from the Plague exceeded 2000 in three separate years, 4000 in one year, and in 1610 they amounted to 1803. This Plague, says Graunt, lasted twelve years. The number diminished until 1624, when not one death from the Plague was recorded; but in the following year the deaths rose to 35,417. Between 1625 and 1636 there occurred three years, at intervals, in which there were no victims to the destructive pestilence, one of these years being 1635; but in 1636 the deaths amounted to 10,400, and in 1639 to 3082; in the two following

years they were under 400; in 1641 they rose to 3067; in 1642 they amounted to 1824; in 1644 to 1492; in 1645 to 1871; in 1646 to 2436; in 1647 to 3597, diminishing after 1648 from 611 to 67 in the following year, and then only twice rising above twenty in the interval between 1650 and 1664. In 1663 there were nine deaths from the Plague, and in the following year only six. Immediately followed the Great Plague, with its 68,596 victims. With the exception of 1670 there were a few deaths from the disease in each year until 1679. After this the heading "Plague" in the Bills up to 1703 inclusive was filled up by 0 marked opposite. "So long had this desolating malady been a denizen that the terrified Londoners could not believe in its permanent absence: for more than twenty years they retained a place for its shadow—its name—like the chair at Macbeth's banquet, filled by a spectre guest!"*

The excessive mortality occasioned by the Plague must naturally have affected many interests, and have had a general influence on the ordinary course of life in those times. The supply and demand of labour, for instance, experienced its operation; but the equilibrium was soon restored. Graunt notices how quickly the greatest plagues of the City are repaired from the country. He estimated the yearly supply of strangers to London at six thousand, and shows how speedily the births rose to more than their ordinary height after the Plague. The years 1603 and 1625, it will be recollected, were plague years; and it will be seen that two years afterwards the christenings each time rose higher than the number in the year preceding the Plague.

	Christenings.		Christenings.
1602	6000	1624	8299
1603	4789	1625	5247
1604	5458	1626	6701
1605	6504	1628	8408

The accounts of the havoc made by the spasmodic cholera in London in the year 1348 appear scarcely credible, although, according to the late Mr. Rickman ('Statement of Progress under the Population Act of 1830'), they are supported by circumstantial evidence which appears to be conclusive. The disease began its ravages in London early in November, and "Death was so outrageously cruel" that it soon became necessary to set apart fields for additional places of burial. The Lord Walter Manny at this time purchased thirteen acres and a rod of land, in which one place, says the historian (Barnes's 'History of Edward III.,' printed in 1688), there were buried within one year more than fifty thousand persons, besides those interred in churchyards, churches, and monasteries. Stow says that he had seen and read an inscription fixed on a stone-cross which attested that the number of burials was as above-mentioned.

We pass over the plagues of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and those of 1603, 1625, and 1636, already mentioned, until we come to the Great Plague of 1665, the history of which has been made familiar to us by the vigorous and graphic pen of De Foe.† Notices of the approaching pestilence occur in Pepys's 'Diary.' Under the date of October 19, 1663, he says:—"To the Coffee-house in

* 'Companion to the British Almanac for 1835,' p. 28, on the Bills of Mortality.

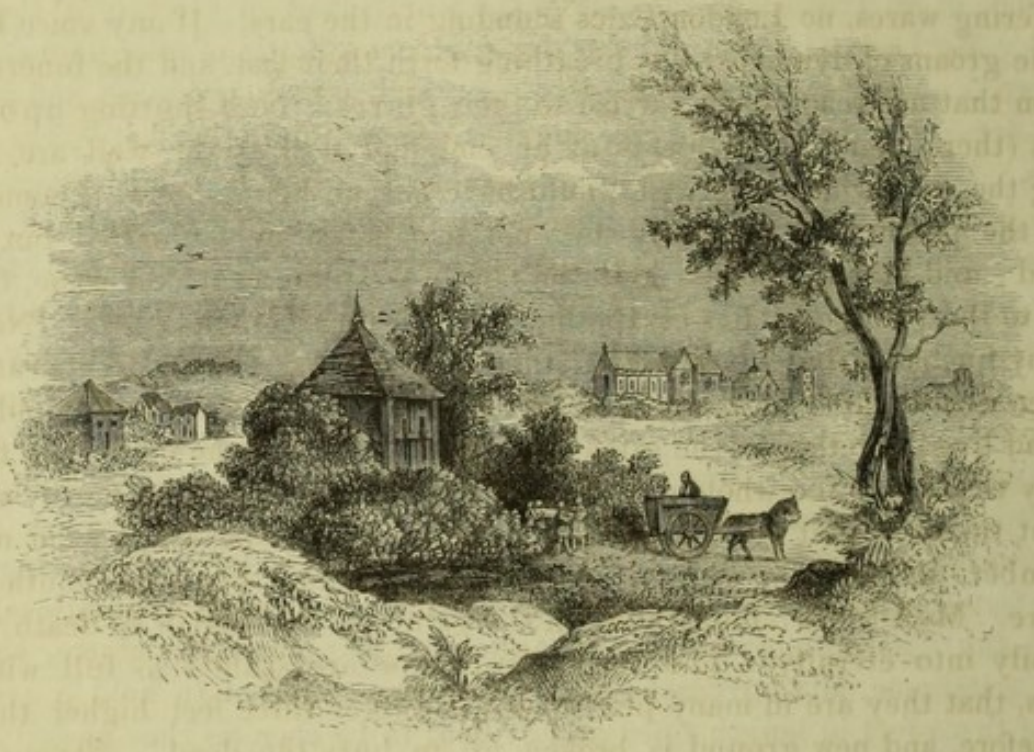
† In most modern editions of De Foe's work it is called the 'History of the Great Plague;' in Mr. Brayley's excellent edition the title is properly given, 'A Journal of the Plague Year.'

Cornhill, where much talk about the Turks' proceedings, and that the Plague is got to Amsterdam." October 30th :—" The Plague is much in Amsterdam, and we in fear of it here, which God defend." Ships from Holland were enjoined, by an Order in Council issued in June, 1664, to perform a quarantine of thirty days in Holehaven. Between the 20th and 27th of December, 1664, the Weekly Bill of Mortality gave intimation that one person had died of the Plague in London. No other death from the same disease occurring until the second week in February, not much alarm was excited. In the last week in April two deaths from the Plague were reported in the Bills, but in the following week there were none. In the second week in May the return was nine deaths and four parishes infected, but in the following week only three persons died. The next three weeks, from May 16th to June 6th, the numbers were fourteen, seventeen, and forty-three. At "the Coffee-house" Pepys found (May 24th) all the news is "of the Plague growing upon us in this town, and of remedies against it, some saying one thing and some another." Early in June the weather was remarkably hot; the 7th "the hottest day," says Pepys, "that ever I felt in my life;" and he adds:—"This day, much against my will, I did in Drury Lane see two or three houses marked with a red cross upon the doors, and 'Lord have mercy upon us' writ there." Under the influence of a hot and stagnant atmosphere the pestilence rapidly extended in the month of June, the number of deaths rising from 112 to 168, and in the last week to 267. A general panic seized the inhabitants, especially those at the West End, the infection having spread from its centre in St. Giles's over the adjacent parishes. The nobility and gentry began to leave town, and the Court soon followed. The following entries are from Pepys: June 20th.—"This day I informed myself that there died four or five at Westminster of the Plague, in several houses, upon Sunday last, in Bell Alley, over against the Palace-gate." June 21st.—"I find all the town going out of town, the coaches and carriages being all full of people going into the country." June 25th.—"The Plague increases mightily; I this day seeing a house, at a bitt-maker's, over against St. Clement's Church, in the open street, shut up, which is a sad sight." June 28th.—"In my way to Westminster Hall, I observed several plague-houses in King's Street and the Palace." June 29th.—"To Whitehall, where the court was full of waggons and people ready to go out of town. This end of the town every day grows very bad of the Plague. The Mortality Bill is come to 267, which is about ninety more than the last. Home, calling at Somerset House, where all were packing up too." Lingard says, "For some weeks the tide of emigration flowed from every outlet towards the country: it was checked at last by the refusal of the Lord Mayor to grant certificates of health, and by the opposition of the neighbouring townships, which rose in their own defence, and formed a barrier round the devoted city."

The mortality was for some time confined chiefly to the poorer classes, the greater proportion of victims being children and females. On the 13th of May a Court of Privy Council had been held at Whitehall, when a Committee of the Lords was formed for "prevention of the spreading of the infection;" and, under their orders, directions drawn up by the College of Physicians were issued, which contained instructions for the treatment of the Plague, and for preventing infection, one of which was as follows:—"Pull off the feather from the tails of

living cocks, hens, pigeons, or chickens; and holding their bills, hold them hard to the botch or swelling, and so they keep them at that part till they die, and by this means draw out the poison. It is good to apply a cupping-glass, or embers in a dish, with a handful of sorrel upon the embers." "High-Dutch physicians," "famous physicians," and quacks of all kinds, were busy at work distributing their invitations for people to come to them for "infallible preventive pills against the Plague," "never-failing preservatives," "sovereign cordials against the corruption of the air," "universal remedies," the "only true plague-water." "Constantine Rhodocanaceis, a Grecian," advertised that he "hath at a small price that admirable preservative against the Plague, wherewith Hippocrates, the Prince of all Physicians, preserved the whole land of Greece." Pepys tells us that "My Lady Carteret did this day give me a bottle of plague-water home with me." Many persons wore amulets; and others produced inflammation of the tonsils by keeping myrrh, angelica, ginger, and other hot spices in their mouths. By the end of July, however, so destructive had the ravages of the disease become, that the faith in quacks was pretty nigh extinguished. In the first week the deaths were 470, and in the last they had risen to 1843. The disease was at its height in St. Giles's-in-the-Fields, St. Andrew's, Holborn, St. Clement's Danes, St. Martin's-in-the-Fields, and in Westminster, in July. Then decreasing in these parishes, and travelling eastward, it raged in Cripplegate, St. Sepulchre's, St. James's Clerkenwell, and St. Bride's, and Aldersgate; while the City, Southwark, Stepney, Whitechapel, Aldgate, Wapping, and Ratcliffe remained comparatively free. Early in July the City authorities, availing themselves of an Act of James I., "for the charitable relief and ordering of persons infected with the Plague," established the following regulations. They divided the City into districts, and appointed surgeons, examiners, searchers, nurses, watchmen, and buryers in each, who were required to hold a red rod or wand of three feet in length, open and evident to be seen, as they passed through the streets. They ordered that every house which the disease might enter should be marked by a red cross, a foot in length, painted on the door, with the words "Lord have mercy upon us" placed above it. The house was then to be closed, and all egress prevented for the space of one month. The order directed, "That the constables see every house shut up, and to be attended with watchmen, which may keep them in, and minister necessaries unto them at their own charges (if they be able), or at the common charge, if they be unable." Many who were thus shut up, communicating infection one to another, eluded the vigilance of the watchmen, or bribed them, and by their escape disseminated the contagion. Regulations were also issued for the speedy burial of the dead. In the daytime officers were appointed to remove the bodies of persons who died in the public streets. The dead-cart went its rounds during the night only, and the tinkling of a bell, and the cry of "Bring out your dead!" intimated to the living the necessity of performing the last offices for their friends. At the end of alleys which the dead-cart could not enter, it remained, while the buryers, with links in their hands, carried forth the victims of the preceding twenty-four hours. Uncoffined, unaccompanied by mourners, the corpses in the dead-cart were carried to a common grave capable of holding a large number of persons, and dug in the churchyard, or, when that was already full, a pit was dug in the outskirts of the parish. In the 'Newes' of August 29th a complaint is made that

in some of these burial-places "the bodies are piled even to the level of the ground, and thereby poison the whole neighbourhood." None but the refuse of society could be procured to bury the dead. Besides the two principal pest-houses, one in the fields beyond Old Street, removed in 1737 (the site of which was long afterwards indicated by a small street called Pest-house Row), and one at Tothill Fields in Westminster, there were other temporary ones in different parts of London; but they were not general receptacles for infected persons, but only for those who could pay for being allowed to remain.



[Pest House in Tothill Fields, Westminster. From a Print by Hollar.]

Early in August the Plague began to make its way more rapidly in the City. In the same space of ground which now contains a population of 54,000, there were at this period nearly three times that number crowded in narrow and badly ventilated streets. The general condition of the City, except in one or two great thoroughfares, resembled the worst-conditioned "rookeries" of the present day. Less attention was paid to personal cleanliness, and refuse accumulated in the streets, and both the sewerage and the supply of water was defective. The poorer population might not be scantily fed, but their diet was less favourable to health and of a less wholesome variety than the same classes can now obtain. These were predisposing causes of the Plague. From the 25th of July to the 1st of August the deaths in the ninety-seven parishes, of all diseases, were only 228, but by the end of the month and the beginning of September the pestilence swept over the City with a fury which had not marked its visitations in the out-parishes. The general return of deaths in the weekly Bills rose from 2010, for the week ending August 1st, to 7165, in the week ending Sept. 19th. From August 22nd to September 26th the number of deaths from all causes was 38,195. The Rev. Thomas Vincent, in his tract entitled 'God's Terrible Voice in the City,' gives a fearful picture of the rapid progress of the Plague in August and September.

"In August," he says, "how dreadful is the increase! Now the cloud is very black, and the storm comes down upon us very sharp. Now death rides triumphantly on his pale horse through our streets, and breaks into every house almost where any inhabitants are to be found. Now people fall as thick as the leaves in autumn when they are shaken by a mighty wind. Now there is a dismal solitude in London streets; every day looks with the face of a Sabbath-day, observed with a greater solemnity than it used to be in the City. Now shops are shut in, people rare and very few that walk about, insomuch that the grass begins to spring up in some places, and a deep silence in every place, especially within the walls. No prancing horses, no rattling coaches, no calling in customers nor offering wares, no London Cries sounding in the ears. If any voice be heard it is the groans of dying persons breathing forth their last, and the funeral knells of them that are ready to be carried to their graves. Now shutting up of visited houses (there being so many) is at an end, and most of the well are mingled among the sick, which otherwise would have got no help. Now, in some places, where the people did generally stay, not one house in a hundred but what is affected; and in many houses half the family is swept away; in some, from the eldest to the youngest: few escape but with the death of one or two. Never did so many husbands and wives die together; never did so many parents carry their children with them to the grave, and go together into the same house under earth who had lived together in the same house upon it. Now the nights are too short to bury the dead: the whole day, though at so great a length, is hardly sufficient to light the dead that fall thereon into their graves." Speaking of the month of September, Mr. Vincent says:—"Now the grave doth open its mouth without measure. Multitudes! multitudes, in the valley of the shadow of death, thronging daily into eternity. The churchyards now are stuffed so full with dead corpses, that they are in many places swelled two or three feet higher than they were before, and new ground is broken up to bury the dead." Strong-minded men were bewildered amidst the harrowing scenes which surrounded them. Awful predictions and tales of supernatural calamities increased the horrors of the time. A sword of flame, stretching in the heavens from Westminster to the Tower, was seen by crowds; for disorders of the mind and morbid fancies follow in the train of a great pestilence. Fanatics walked through the streets denouncing the judgments of heaven on the inhabitants; one bearing on his head a pan of burning coals; another proclaiming—"Yet forty days and London shall be destroyed;" a third constantly going about uttering as he past, in deep and solemn tones, "Oh the great and dreadful God!" The ravings of the delirious, the paroxysms of persons struck with the Plague, the wailings of those who had lost all their relatives and friends, were common sights and sounds in the public streets.

On the 2nd of September the Lord Mayor issued a proclamation by the advice of the Duke of Albemarle and of the Aldermen, enjoining fires to be kindled in every street, court, and alley of London and Westminster, to purify the pestilential air; "every six houses on each side of the way, which will be twelve houses, are to join together to provide firing for three whole nights and three whole days, to be made in one great fire before the door of the middlemost inhabitant; and one or more persons to be appointed to keep the fire constantly burning, without suffering the same to be extinguished or go out all the time aforesaid." These injunc-

tions were followed, and the fires were lighted on the 6th of September and kept burning until a heavy and continuous rain extinguished them. In the week ending September 12th there was a slight decrease in the number of deaths, but in the following week they were higher than they had yet been. Dr. Hodges, a physician practising at the time in London, who wrote a history of the Plague, entitled 'Loimologia,' states that on one night of this week more than four thousand deaths occurred. The disease had now reached its point of culmination; and in the week following the deaths (from the Plague) diminished 1632, or from 7165 to 5533; and for the remainder of the year they were, for each week, as follows:—Weeks ending 3rd October, 4929; 10th, 4327; 17th, 2665; 24th, 1421; 31st, 1031; in the week ending November 7th, they rose again to 1414, as many persons who had removed now returned, and there was less caution used in avoiding the contagion. In the following week the number declined to 1050; in the week ending 21st, to 652; 28th, to 333; and in the first week of December they were only 210; but in the weeks ending 12th and 19th they again rose to 243 and 281. But the citizens had now become reassured, and returned to their homes or resumed their wonted employments. The total deaths of the year were 97,306, of which 68,596 were of the Plague; but most writers assert that the number was greater, as in the confusion and consternation which prevailed, and the frequent deaths of clerks and sextons by whom the returns were made, an exact account could not be kept. Evelyn, Pepys, and a few other writers give us a picture of the external appearance of London during this period of desolation. Several thousand houses were shut up, the inhabitants of which had either died or fled into the country. Many thousand servants were left homeless, and artisans and labourers were deprived of employment. Some found employment as nurses, watchmen, and in the performance of other duties created by the necessities of the time. Charity was dispensed with a free hand, the King giving 1000*l.* a-week; the City 600*l.*; and the Archbishop of Canterbury and others were free with their bounty. The markets, throughout all the time of the Plague, were supplied, through the exertions of the City authorities, much better than could have been expected. The west-end of the town was the first to be deserted, and, July 22nd, Pepys, returning from St. James's Park, which was "quite locked up," met but "two coaches and two carts, from Whitehall to my own house, that I could observe, and the streets mighty thin of people." St. Bartholomew's fair was forbidden in August. The Courts of Law were adjourned to Oxford in October; and the Exchequer Court was removed to Nonsuch, in Surrey, about the middle of August. September 7th, when the Plague was at its height in the City, Evelyn says, "I went all along the City and suburbs, from Kent Street to St. James's, a dismal passage, and dangerous to see so many coffins exposed in the streets, now thin of people; the shops shut up and all in mournful silence, as not knowing whose turn it might be next." September 14th Pepys visited the Exchange, which he wondered to see so full, "about two hundred people, but plain men all. . . . . And Lord! to see how I did endeavour, all I could, to talk with as few as I could, there being now no observation of shutting up of houses infected, that to be sure we do converse and meet with people that have the Plague upon them." September 20th, Pepys has an entry as follows:—"To Lambeth:—but Lord! what a sad time it is, to see no boats upon the river, and grass grows all up and down Whitehall Court,

and nobody but wretches in the street!" Many of the churches were forsaken by the parochial clergy, and their pulpits were frequently occupied by those ejected by the Act of Uniformity. February 4th, Pepys and his wife went, for the first time after the Plague, to their church in St. Olave, Hart Street, where the clergyman, who had been the first to leave and the last to return to the parish, "made a very poor and short excuse and a bad sermon." The Archbishop of Canterbury remained at his post. By the end of November, according to Pepys, the York waggon recommenced its journeys to London, after having discontinued travelling for several months. Early in December the town began to fill, so much so that Pepys feared it would cause the Plague to increase again. On the 31st of December he writes that the shops begin to be open. The West End still continued comparatively empty; and on the 19th of January Pepys observes—"It is a remarkable thing how infinitely naked all that end of the town, Covent Garden is, at this day, of people; while the City is almost as full of people as ever it was." Again we quote Pepys, who, under date January 31st, writes—"To Whitehall, and to my great joy, people begin to bustle up and down there." Early in February the Court returned to Whitehall, which tended greatly to the revival of confidence, and "the town every day filled marvellously," according to Clarendon, who adds, that "before the end of March, the streets were as full, the Exchange as much crowded, and the people in all places as numerous as they had ever been seen."

It is evident that the apprehension or existence of the Plague conferred upon the Bills of Mortality their chief value and interest. The Lord Mayor every week transmitted a copy to the Court; and on one of his visits to Whitehall Pepys says, the Duke of Albemarle "showed us the number of the Plague this week, brought in last night from the Lord Mayor." The reports are still professed to be made weekly "to the Queen's Most Excellent Majesty and the Right Honourable the Lord Mayor." They profess, moreover, to report the christenings and burials at the parish churches within the City of London and Bills of Mortality; that is, to have any utility at all, they should give the weekly and annual number of births and deaths (marriages they have never pretended to give) in a population of about 1,350,313, a contribution to statistical knowledge much to be valued. Not less important is it to ascertain the "diseases and casualties" in the population of the metropolis, and the ages "of the number buried." In the year 1842, then, it would appear at the first glance that, in a population of 1,350,313, there occurred 15,245 births, and the average duration of life for each person should be above 80 years to keep the population at its present height; but as we find in the Bills, that of those born nearly one-third are cut off before they attain the age of five, what must be the average age necessary to keep a population of 1,350,313 from declining, making ample allowance for immigration? Once upon a time the deaths in the City population were about 1 in 20, but now, apparently at least, they are not 1 in 100, a great extension of human life from an average duration of twenty years to above a century! Nosology is a branch of medical knowledge which has been greatly improved within the last few years; but out of 13,142 deaths, only 8504 are assigned to the fifty-five heads of disease which have a place in the Bills, and 538 are attributed to the vague term "inflammation." We have stated that the deaths in the week ending the 18th November amounted to upwards of 300 above the

average mortality; but the 'Weekly Bill of Mortality,' issued by the printer "to the Worshipful Company of Parish Clerks," and applying to a population of 1,350,313, instead of 1,870,727, gives us the comfortable assurance that "the decrease in the burials reported this week is 149;" and this is the report made to the Queen's Majesty and the Lord Mayor. Now, without being unduly censorious, we may be allowed to express regret that an institution which once justly claimed respect and gratitude should not at once have been put an end to when its functions ceased to be useful and its authority was no longer entitled to respect. The Bills of Mortality are now utterly valueless. In 1832 they reported 28,606 deaths, and in 1842 only 13,142, while the population had been constantly increasing at a rapid rate. In 1833, out of 26,577 deaths, the causes of decease were returned as unknown in 887 cases, or 1 in 30; and in 1842, out of 13,142 deaths, 4638 are returned in which the cause of decease was unknown, or less than 1 in 3. The Company of Parish Clerks might at least have expected to have been supplied with the returns of mortality from the clerks of the metropolitan churches; but this is not the case. The parish of St. George's, Hanover Square, ceased to make returns in 1823; and in 1832 the parishes of All Saints, Poplar, and St. John's, Wapping, followed its example; and in 1834 the clerks of St. Bartholomew the Less and St. George's, Queen Square, became defaulters. The fact is, that instead of 13,142 deaths being reported annually, there should be about 33,000. Besides the contumacious parishes which refuse to contribute to the formation of correct Bills of Mortality for the metropolis, there are no means by which the Parish Clerks' Company can procure returns of the burials in cemeteries and in the places of interment belonging to dissenters; and the defects from this cause, in Maitland's time, now above a century since, exceeded 3000 a-year.

As we would speak with real respect of the past exertions of those who for above two centuries have had the preparation of the Bills of Mortality, so we may be allowed to compare the 'Table of Mortality in the Metropolis' issued weekly from the office of the Registrar-General at Somerset House with the old 'Weekly Bill' still issued by the parish clerks. The new system of registration commenced July 1st, 1837, and under the Act for establishing it the registration of all births, marriages, and deaths became compulsory. In the case of deaths the funeral ceremony cannot be performed unless the clergyman or minister has received a certificate from the district registrar stating that proper information has been given respecting the person who has died, the age, and the cause of decease. Thus the 'Table' cannot be rendered defective by contumacious parish clerks, nor by the interment of dissenters in burial-grounds attached to their meeting-houses: the inference is, that it is as perfectly accurate as it is possible to be—a reality and not a sham. The Registration Act has necessarily put to the rout those ancient matrons called "searchers," who until within the last half-dozen years were accustomed to go, as in Graunt's time, to inspect the bodies of deceased persons for the purpose of enabling the Parish Clerks' Company to compile their weekly and annual medical statistics. At the foot of the Bill of Mortality for 1837 there was a notice to the following effect:—"By the operation of the new Registration Act much difficulty has occurred in obtaining the reports of christenings and burials; in consequence of which, in some parishes, the reports have been wholly withheld; and in those of several other parishes where

the office of searcher has been discontinued, the diseases of which deaths have taken place have been necessarily omitted:" they were added to the "unknown causes." In the Bill for 1842, as already noticed, the difficulty here spoken of has increased. The only "true Bill" therefore is that prepared at the Registrar-General's office. The first of these Weekly Bills was commenced January 11th, 1840, and the series has been continued from that time without interruption. The total number of deaths in the week, in a population of 1,880,727, ranges from 734 to upwards of 1300. The registrars who officiate within the districts which comprise this population amount altogether to 124. They are supplied with blank forms, in which they are required at the termination of the week to copy from the register-books the age and cause of death in every entry which has been made during the week. The forms are then immediately forwarded to the office of the Registrar-General. Notes are here taken of any extraordinary forms of disease, and of all cases in which the circumstances attending death appear to be of a remarkable character. The department of Vital Statistics is superintended by Mr. Farr, whose valuable reports are well known. The deaths are next carefully counted, noticing the distinction of sex, and the numbers are then entered in a book opposite the several districts in which they occurred. The ages and diseases are now transferred by means of *marks* to a printed and ruled sheet prepared for the purpose, and which contains entries of ninety-four distinct diseases and casualties. The very valuable articles on 'Nosology' in the First Annual Report of the Registrar-General, and the 'Statistical Nosology' in the Fourth Report, have been printed separately, and copies sent to all the registrars in England and Wales. They show the principle on which the innumerable varieties of disease are classified, and are calculated to render the returns more accurate. The weekly 'Table' shows the number of deaths under each of ninety-four heads, and to a certain extent distinguishes the ages by a comprehensive classification, as "under 15," "60 and upwards," &c., the minuter specification of ages being given in the 'Annual Report,' which instead of being a demy half-sheet is a tolerably sized volume. We annex an *abstract* of the 'Table of the Mortality in the Metropolis, showing the Number of Deaths from all Causes registered in the week ending Saturday the 18th November, 1843;' to which we have added an additional column showing the number of deaths in one year:—

	Week ending 18th Nov.	Weekly Average During		Total Deaths in 1840.
		5 Autumns	5 Years.	
Epidemic, Endemic, and Contagious Diseases	227	183	182	8,361
Diseases of the Brain, Nerves, and Senses	170	140	148	7,907
Diseases of the Lungs, and other Organs of Respiration	459	278	268	13,985
Diseases of the Heart and Blood-vessels	30	20	18	997
Diseases of the Stomach, Liver, and other Organs of Digestion	75	59	62	3,405
Diseases of the Kidneys, &c.	9	5	5	244
Childbed, Diseases of the Uterus, &c.	9	10	9	473
Diseases of the Joints, Bones, and Muscles	11	6	6	312
Diseases of the Skin, &c.	3	1	1	63
Dropsy, Cancer, and other Diseases of Uncertain Seat	107	106	105	5,612
Old Age, or Natural Decay	100	69	68	3,471
Deaths by Violence	26	23	24	1,253
Privation, or Intemperance	2	11	11	43
Causes not specified	2	8	5	155
Deaths from all causes	1230	908	903	46,281

The second and third columns present the weekly average for five *seasons* and for five *years*, namely, 1838-39-40-1-2, comprising, with the exception of the present year, and the latter half of 1837, the whole period during which the Registration Act has been in operation. We are thus furnished with a standard by which the rise or fall of mortality from any disease (it must be recollected that we only present an *abstract* of ninety-four different heads) may be detected at a glance.

In fixing the limits of the metropolitan registration district the Registrar-General determined to apply the term metropolis in the most extensive sense of which it was susceptible, including every Superintendent-Registrar's district into which the suburbs extended continuously, and which, with the exception of inconsiderable portions, assumed throughout the character of town. At the office there is a map of the metropolis, in which the boundaries of the thirty-three Superintendent-Registrars' districts and those of the Registrars' districts, into which the former are subdivided, are accurately traced. We are informed that Wandsworth and Clapham will next year be added, as a thirty-fourth district. The following is a rough classification of the metropolitan district into five great divisions, with the population and number of deaths in each, for the week ending 18th November.

	Population Enumerated, 1841.	Average Weekly Deaths, 1838-39-40-1-2.		Deaths in the Week ending 18th Nov.	No. of Inhabitants out of which one Death happened in 1840.
		5 Years.	5 Autumns		
WEST DISTRICTS.					
Kensington; Chelsea; St. George, Hanover Square; Westminster; St. Martin in the Fields; St. James . .	300,705	135	130	183	44·6
NORTH DISTRICTS.					
St. Mary-le-bone; St. Pancras; Islington; Hackney .	365,660	162	162	230	43·3
CENTRAL DISTRICTS.					
St. Giles and St. George; Strand; Holborn; Clerkenwell; St. Luke; East London; West London; City of London	373,806	184	183	224	39·2
EAST DISTRICTS.					
Shoreditch; Bethnal Green; Whitechapel; St. George in the East; Stepney; Poplar	392,496	203	206	285	38·5
SOUTH DISTRICTS.					
St. Saviour; St. Olave; Bermondsey; St. George, Southwark; Newington; Lambeth; Camberwell; Rotherhithe; Greenwich	438,060	219	227	308	38·6
Total for the Week ending 18th November: Males, 615; Females, 615. (Weekly average 1838-39-40-1-2, Males, 461; Females, 442.)	1,870,727	903	908	1230	40·4

This is scarcely the place even to glance at the advantages of an accurate registration of the most important events of existence,—birth, marriage, and death. If it shows that in such a district as Whitechapel the deaths of females are annually 1 in 28, and in other districts of the metropolis 1 in 57, or not one-half so many; if it points out that the average age at which the largest class of persons die is in one district 16 years only, while the whole of another class in the same district attain the average age of forty-five, surely it will cause a mighty effort to be made to elevate those who are depressed by moral and physical evils, the causes of which are to a considerable extent remediable.

The remarkable accuracy of the Mortality Tables of the Registration Office is shown by the fact that in the one we have abstracted only two cases occur in which the causes of deaths are not specified, that is 1 in 615. In the old Bill for the same week the number of unspecified cases is 51 out of 210, or more than 1 in 4. In compiling the New Table, it is in some instances found impossible, in consequence of the death or dismissal of a registrar, to obtain a return from the district in which he served until his successor has been appointed. In this event, which is of rare occurrence, it is usual to substitute an average (say 6 or 10) calculated on a few weeks preceding, and to explain the circumstance in a marginal note. Or it happens that the coroner, who is required by a provision of the Act to give information in all cases in which inquests have been held, fails to transmit his returns to the registrars within his bounds until the end of the quarter. But these are the only irregularities which are incidental to the preparation of these Bills; and fortunately they are inconsiderable in extent, unimportant as affecting the weekly results, and, moreover, are of such a nature as to admit of correction in the general summary of the Bills drawn up at the end of the year.

The engravings used as the head and tail pieces in the present number are taken from that fine series of compositions, improperly attributed to Holbein, called 'Imagines Mortis,' and also the 'Dance of Death,' &c. Of this 'Dance' there were many representations, as Douce tells us, in his work on this subject, "not only on the walls, but on the windows of many churches, in the cloisters of monasteries, and even on bridges, especially in Germany and Switzerland. It was sometimes painted on church screens, and occasionally sculptured on them, as well as upon the fronts of domestic dwellings. It occurs in many of the manuscript and illuminated service-books of the Middle Ages. Most of the representations of the Dance of Death were accompanied by descriptive or moral verses in different languages." Paintings of the 'Dance of Death,' or Dance of Machabree, as it was sometimes called, constituted a popular picture gallery of the Middle Ages. There was one in the cloisters of St. Paul's, which is said by Stow to have been executed at the cost of one Jenkin Carpenter, who lived in the reign of Henry VI. It was commonly called the 'Dance of Paul's,' and was destroyed by the Protector Somerset, who took down the cloisters as described in vol. iv. p. 276. Dugdale says that the painting at St. Paul's was in imitation of that in the cloisters of the Church of the Innocents at Paris. A painting of a Death's Dance, in the church of Stratford-on-Avon, probably suggested more than one passage in Shakspere. The poem on this subject by Lydgate, the monk of St. Edmund's Bury, who lived in the first half of the fifteenth century, was doubtless a welcome addition to the popular literature of England. It was entitled 'The Daunce of Machabree, wherein is lively expressed and showed the state of Man, and how he is called at uncertain times by Death, and when he thinketh least thereon;' and at the end it is said to be translated from the French,—

"Not word by word, but following in substance."

From the number of characters introduced and the dialogues between each of them and Death, the poem has all the interest of a drama: "Death fyrst speaketh to the Pope, and after to every degree." The characters introduced are the

Pope, Emperor, Cardinal, King, Patriarch, Constable, Archbishop, Baron, Princess, Bishop, Squire, Abbot, Abbess, Bayly, Astronomer, Burgess, Councillor, Merchant, Chartreux, Sergeant, Monk, Usurer, Physician, Amorous Squire, Gentlewoman, Man of Law, Parson, Juror, Minstrel, Labourer, Friar, Child, Young Clerk, Hermit. The head "Death speaketh to the King," or other character, is repeated throughout, and also the words—"The King (or other person) maketh aunswer." The verses are simple, and not without touches of natural feeling coupled with impressive truths delivered in homely but striking language. They could not fail, as well as the paintings to which they referred, to make a deep impression on the popular imagination. We give one verse of Lydgate's, in which, after Death has spoken to the Child, bidding it join the solemn dance—"The young Childe maketh aunswer:"—

"A—a—a—[crying]—a worde I cannot speake,
I am so yonge, I was borne yesterday;
Death is so hasty on me to be wreak,
And list no longer to make no delay.
I am but now born, and now I go my way,
Of me no more to tell shall be told;
The will of God no man withstande may,
As soon dyeth a yong as on old."

[Death and the King.]