

**Sanitary measures and their results ; being a sequel to "The history of cholera in Exeter in 1832." / by Thomas Shapter.**

**Contributors**

Shapter, Thomas.

London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine Library & Archives Service

London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine

**Publication/Creation**

London : John Churchill, 1853.

**Persistent URL**

<https://wellcomecollection.org/works/qpxhtmd5>

**Provider**

London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine

**License and attribution**

This material has been provided by This material has been provided by London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine Library & Archives Service. The original may be consulted at London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine Library & Archives Service. where the originals may be consulted. This work has been identified as being free of known restrictions under copyright law, including all related and neighbouring rights and is being made available under the Creative Commons, Public Domain Mark.

You can copy, modify, distribute and perform the work, even for commercial purposes, without asking permission.



Wellcome Collection  
183 Euston Road  
London NW1 2BE UK  
T +44 (0)20 7611 8722  
E [library@wellcomecollection.org](mailto:library@wellcomecollection.org)  
<https://wellcomecollection.org>

\*  
JZS

*Sm 8va*

*P. 7164*

# SANITARY MEASURES

AND

## THEIR RESULTS;

BEING A SEQUEL TO

"THE HISTORY OF CHOLERA IN EXETER IN 1832."

BY

THOMAS SHAPTER, M.D.

PHYSICIAN TO THE DEVON AND EXETER HOSPITAL;  
THE ST. THOMAS'S HOSPITAL, NEAR EXETER, FOR LUNATICS;  
THE LYING-IN CHARITY, ETC.

21 FEB. 1929

"A people who can understand and act upon the counsels which God has given it, is safe in the most dangerous crisis of its fate."—GUIZOT.

LONDON :

JOHN CHURCHILL, PRINCES STREET, SOHO.

EXETER: ADAM HOLDEN, HIGH STREET.

1853.

LONDON :

G. J. PALMER, SAVOY STREET, STRAND.

TO THE  
LORD VISCOUNT EBRINGTON,

IN  
TESTIMONY OF HIS LORDSHIP'S PUBLIC EFFORTS  
TO PROMOTE THE ADVANCEMENT OF SANITARY IMPROVEMENT,

*These Pages*

ARE DEDICATED.



Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2015

<https://archive.org/details/b24399425>



## P R E F A C E.

---

THE following pages were put together solely with the view of placing in a clear and strong light a very striking instance of the public benefit to be derived from the adoption of judicious sanitary measures; they do not profess to record the progress of the Cholera in 1849, nor in any way to discuss the nature of that disease. On the contrary, all mention of these topics has been purposely avoided, that the plain statement of the facts, as herein recorded, should not be interfered with.

The Appendix may appear somewhat disproportionate, and the two Reports, which form the chief part of it, are in certain respects repetitions of the text; nevertheless, some further details and collateral information are therein contained, which, though not necessary to the statement in chief, yet so illustrate and bear upon the subject, as to render their insertion in that place not altogether unprofitable.

Should these few pages assist, even in the slightest way, towards the advancement of the good cause of Sanitary Improvement, they will fulfil the purpose for which they are now published.

*The Barnfield, Exeter,  
January 19, 1853.*



# SANITARY MEASURES

AND

## THEIR RESULTS.

---

ON the first occurrence of the Asiatic Cholera in 1832, Exeter, in common with London, Bristol, and Plymouth, experienced a large amount of mortality. On the recurrence of the pestilence in 1849, London and Bristol suffered more than, and Plymouth as severely as, on the former occasion; while Exeter escaped with only a very small amount of disease and death. This fact is in itself remarkable, but when it can be shown that, in this case, the comparative immunity enjoyed was, under Divine Providence, the result of human agency, and that, in those, the neglect of proper precautions retained to them their previous liabilities, it is indeed a fact of the greatest moment, and worthy of the most serious consideration.

The means which tended to procure for Exeter this satisfactory result, it will be the purpose of these few pages briefly to point out.

From the most cursory observation of the progress, in 1832, of the Asiatic Cholera in this City, it was obvious that its ravages had taken place in localities which were eminently unhealthy; being those which were badly ventilated, undrained, and



but very scantily supplied with wholesome water. The chief inhabitants immediately combined with the public bodies in giving these questions a large consideration, and, through the years immediately ensuing, to such an extent were these evils abated and remedied, that previous to the outbreak of the Cholera in 1849, I ventured to state there existed sure grounds for hoping that what had been done towards improving the public health generally, would be advantageously felt should Cholera reappear; that this disease would not only be much mitigated in intensity, but less diffused in extent; or even, if further and special precautions were adopted, might pass over the City without causing any very serious amount of mischief.\* This hope, in every one particular, was so signally realised as to render some review of the salient points of the subject worthy of attention. To do this satisfactorily it will be necessary to consider the state of Exeter in 1832, compare the mortality which then took place with that which ensued in 1849, and then detail the measures which had been adopted towards improving the health of the City generally; to this may be appended some mention of those other measures specially devised and carried into effect towards alleviating the pestilence itself. To detail all this will occupy no great space, while the lesson that it offers may not only be treasured by this City, but may prove useful elsewhere.

1832.  
Physical condition of  
Exeter.

In 1832, the period which first engages our attention, the City, as regards its social relations, may be said to have consisted of a dense population of rather more than twenty-eight thousand persons, occupying the older houses, which had been built within the walls, and an airy suburb. The streets, for the most part, retained their ancient character, being generally narrow, and had leading from them numerous courts, lanes, and alleys. The pavement, except in the great thoroughfares, consisted of rounded pebbles, locally known as "pitching," so arranged as to secure a fall from the sides of the road towards its centre, and thus to form the gutter; this, in very nearly all the streets, was the only

\* "History of the Cholera in Exeter," Preface, p. xi.



means whereby the sewage and nuisances of the City were removed. In some of the principal thoroughfares and districts occupied by the more wealthy inhabitants, a few sewers had recently been constructed, but upon no general nor very perfect principle.

Beneficial as even this very small amount of sewerage may have been, the supply of water then enjoyed by the City, was so small as materially to curtail its possible advantages. At this period, independently of the private wells, which were numerous, the public supply of water consisted solely of that afforded by the ancient conduit, a few public pumps, and the water-works. The conduit yielded a tolerably copious and constant supply to such as waited for their turn at the cock whence it was delivered. The water-works were very limited in their power, and the reservoir supplied by them was but a large cistern, so that the supply thus derived was totally inadequate to the requirements of the people. Much of the water used was laboriously obtained, by dipping it from the river and adjacent streams, and carried thence in buckets or in small water-carts, to the distant parts of the City, at the cost of one halfpenny per bucket.

This inadequate and difficult supply of water, combined with the deficiency of drainage, offers ample evidence that the accommodation for the daily usages of the population must have been very limited. The fact is, that though in the houses of the more opulent this want had been remedied, amongst the poorer population conveniences for these purposes were almost entirely wanting. Doubtless much of the filth which prevailed in the lower parts of the City was thus inevitable, but much was also voluntary and immediately remediable;—the extent to which it obtained, and the mischief produced thereby, could now scarcely be credited. District Committees were formed to inquire into this state of things, and their reports detail histories beyond all belief. They speak of dwellings occupied by from five to fifteen families, huddled together in dirty rooms, with every offensive accompaniment; of slaughter-houses with their putrid heaps of offal; of pigs in large number;—the note appended to the description of one house states, “thirty-one pigstyes, kept in such a state as would beggar description;” and similar notes are frequent;—of



poultry kept in confined cellars and outhouses ; of dung-heaps everywhere ;—one cottage was visited in which the accumulated filth and soil of thirteen years was deposited, and esteemed so valuable a property that its removal was strenuously resisted. To add to this picture of filth and dirt, in many parts, the visits of the scavengers took place but once a week.

Mortality  
from Cholera  
in 1832.

Though the position and general characteristics of Exeter were those of health and pleasantness, such was the prevailing condition of its lower and neglected portions, when, on the 19th of July, 1832, the Cholera burst upon the City. Between this date and the 19th of October, in a population of 28,242, 402 deaths ensued from this disease, besides 142 attributed to other causes. This, doubtless, was a very large amount of mortality, especially when it is further considered that the former deaths were, as regards locality, very unequally distributed, amounting in four of the twenty parishes, which comprise the City, to three-and-a-half per cent. upon their population in the short period of three months. Now these four parishes, together with some few other isolated spots, were precisely those characterised by bad drainage and a generally ill-cared for and unwholesome state.

Mortality  
from Cholera  
in 1849.

We will now turn to the second period of our inquiry, and we shall find, on the recurrence of the Cholera in 1849 (when it is to be recollected that London, Bristol, and Plymouth, suffered as in 1832), that in Exeter, with an increased population of 31,312, the total deaths from the 19th of July to the 29th of October, the period during which this epidemic prevailed, amounted, from Cholera and from diarrhœa, to forty-three only ; and even this number should not be stated without some abatement and modification, for of these, eleven died, not in Cholera, but from the consecutive fever ; while thirteen, being travellers and strangers to the City, came into it ill and died within a few hours. Assuming, however, that the whole number of forty-three were deaths proper to the population, the very large proportion of twenty-six were amongst those located in the lower parts of the City, and near the streams which there traverse it, or they resided in houses conspicuously dirty and ill ventilated, and otherwise offering those



conditions which usually predispose to malignant and fatal disease.

Having thus stated the mortality from Cholera in 1849, the altered conditions of the City at this period, from those of the more fatal period of 1832, may now be detailed.

Immediately on the subsidence of the Cholera in 1832, when, as before observed, it had been rendered obvious that the disease was solely predominant and fatal in those districts of the City whose sanitary state was eminently imperfect, active means were taken by the Water Company towards affording a liberal supply of water, and, by the Commissioners of Improvement, for establishing a perfect and comprehensive system of underground drainage, and otherwise for ensuring, by the removal of narrow courts and old houses, free currents of a pure and wholesome air. In the autumn of 1847 the attention of the Public Bodies of the City having been called to the fact of the Cholera making progress westward, their zeal was excited towards further improvement and a general sanitary supervision. Parochial Committees made a household visitation, with the effect of exposing, besides much that was generally objectionable, the existence of many very serious nuisances. These were not only sought to be remedied, but on the General Board of Health declaring that "the Act for the more speedy Removal of Nuisances and the Prevention of Contagious and Epidemic Diseases" was in force, the public was, by handbills, advised "that in case any dwelling-house or building be in a filthy or unwholesome condition; or that there be any ditch, drain, cesspool, or ash-pit, in a foul or offensive state; or that there be kept swine, or any accumulation of dung, manure, offal, filth, refuse, or other matter, so as to be a nuisance, or injurious to health," any two householders might forward a written notice thereof to the Commissioners of Improvements, who would cause the premises, within twenty-four hours, to be examined; and if, after examination, or from the certificate of two legally qualified medical practitioners, it appears that the nuisance exists, they would lay the informations before two justices, who would make an order for its removal within two days. Shortly after this the Corporation of the Poor appointed five members from their body

1832-1849.  
Sanitary im-  
provements.

1847.  
December.

1848.  
Sept. 23.

1848.  
October 13.  
Sanitary  
Committee  
appointed.



to be a Special Committee to carry into effect the objects of this Act. This Special Committee, in conjunction with deputations from the Town Council and Commissioners of Improvement, constituted a Sanitary Committee (Vide Appendix A.), which, from Exeter being included in the schedule of the second notification of the General Board of Health, became invested with full powers, *proprio motu*, to carry into effect the provisions of this Act of Parliament.

1848,  
November 3.  
Exeter in-  
cluded in  
schedule.

The measures which it thus devolved upon the Committee to take, consisted of those conducive to the general health of the City, and those precautionary against the Cholera. For these purposes the Committee sat weekly,—the medical officers reporting to it the prevailing illnesses, and particularly specifying when these appeared to originate in, or to be influenced by, any defect of sanitary arrangement. These defects the Surveyor of the ~~Government~~ Commissioners was then directed to inspect and to report upon, and, if necessary, proceedings towards their abatement were immediately taken. The Committee, moreover, used the powers vested in it to compel a general and effective communication, by private houses, with the public sewers, and an efficient supply of water, both public and private, seeking by these, as well as other means, to ensure a wholesome state of the interiors of dwellings.

I can bear my own testimony that all this was pursued with the strictest impartiality, and to an extent which may be somewhat appreciated when it is stated that, in furtherance of these objects, upwards of one thousand notices were issued by the Committee. A very strict superintendence was, moreover, exercised over the markets, so as to prevent the selling of putrid meats and fish, and not without a cause, especially as regards this latter article of food.

Such were the means which, more or less, during seventeen years, had been devised towards benefiting and improving the general health of the City; and to such an extent had this been carried, that in 1849, previously to the recurrence of the Cholera, drainage had become comprehensive and efficient; water



gushing at all points yielded its ample supply ; narrow ways and confined courts had been pulled down, and, by the judicious removal of obstructing houses, whole streets had afforded to them a free ventilation ; nuisances generally, whether public or private, had been suppressed, &c. The immediate and very evident consequence of all this was the marked diminution in the former amount of diffused sickness, more especially of fever, which previously had been the almost constant occupant of the lower parts of the City.

The terrible experiences of 1832 were also duly considered by the Sanitary Committee, and all reasonable and practicable provisions made towards obviating them, should they again recur. These provisions may be briefly summed up. The City was portioned into ten districts, to each of which were appointed a medical officer and dispenser of medicines ; the distribution of medicines for the alleviation of the premonitory diarrhœa, free of all cost, was amply provided for ; a list of nurses kept ; depôts for hot air baths, blankets, &c., appointed ; and directions drawn up to facilitate the prompt application of these various means. There were also provided suitable accommodation for those “ destitute of home ” in buildings attached to the workhouse ; and, for the families of those that might die of the Cholera, two “ houses of refuge ; ” a site of ground for the erection of a temporary hospital, with the necessary plans and specifications ; as also a handbill (Appendix B) suggestive and precautionary against the Cholera.

1849.  
Precautions  
taken against  
Cholera.

It was in consideration of these various circumstances, viz., the improved physical condition of Exeter, and these precautionary measures, I ventured to offer the assurance, referred to at the commencement of these pages, that, should the Cholera recur, it might be expected to pass over this City, not only in a mitigated form, but to a less diffused extent. This anticipation, as has been seen, proved singularly correct, for while this disease was raging in all its former fury in London, in Bristol, and in Plymouth, and while indications of its epidemic influences were not wanting in Exeter, its prevalence here was so narrowed, and its fatal tendencies so far mitigated that, with the exception of the distribution of the handbill, and of the medicines against the premonitory diarrhœa,



and the calling into activity the services of the medical men of two of the districts, none of the above provisions were needed.

Numerical  
estimate of  
sanitary mea-  
sures.

This may all be stated in another and more striking way. The total deaths from Cholera in Exeter, in the two epidemics of 1832 and 1849, amounted to 445; of these 402, or 90 per cent., took place, with the concomitants of bad drainage and a deficient water-supply; while with, in great measure, an absence of these conditions, the complementary number of 43, or 10 per cent., only occurred. Can any more convincing statement be offered of the beneficial influence of sanitary improvements?

Money esti-  
mate of sani-  
tary measures

Again, let us estimate the relative bearings of sanitary provisions by the money test—one which Englishmen, if they do not consider conclusive, certainly regard as not irrelevant. In 1832, with neglected sanitary arrangements, the money absolutely expended in Exeter during the prevalence and in consequence of the Cholera amounted to upwards of £5,000; while in 1849, under sanitary provisions, it amounted to only £333 18s. 6d.; and it should be borne in mind that this comprised the whole of the expenses of the Sanitary Committee during the period of fourteen months (*i. e.*, from 18 Oct., 1848, to 8 Jan., 1850), in which it pursued the measures it deemed necessary. But the whole is not then stated; there must be added to the per contra account of 1832 the expenses incidental to the overplus of 359 deaths (*i. e.*, the difference between the 402 which took place in 1832 and the 43 in 1849). It is difficult to estimate to what these may amount, but looking at the widowhoods and orphanage necessarily attendant thereon, they cannot but form a very large item to set against the improvidence of a neglect in sanitary measures.

Moreover, in considering the above statement, it must not be forgotten that the public expenditure is alone referred to. That caused to private individuals, could it be ascertained, would only tell the same tale.

Before concluding these pages, two circumstances of some general interest, that took place during the occurrence of the Cholera, may be briefly mentioned; one, the arrival in the Port



of this City of a vessel, the other, at the barracks of a regiment of soldiers, both reported to be in an unhealthy state from Cholera.

The Sanitary Committee, having received information that the barque "Union" had left the Thames for this Port, and that the Captain had but just died on board of Cholera, sought instructions from the Board of Health, which referred the Committee to those given in the case of the "American Eagle" (Official Circular, No. 5, p. 77), at the same time "authorising and requiring" the Committee to take the necessary steps. On the arrival of this vessel, the two senior medical officers of the Corporation of the Poor were accordingly directed to repair on board, carefully to inquire into her sanitary condition, and report thereon. It was ascertained that the Captain had died on board, of Cholera, sixteen days previously, but that since then the mate, three men, and one boy, which comprised the crew, had continued in perfect health. It was not deemed requisite to interfere with the arrangements of this barque, and she proceeded to the quay to unload, &c.

1849.  
August 18.  
Barque  
"Union"  
arrives in  
the Port of  
Exeter.

During the early part of August the Cholera prevailed in some intensity in Plymouth. Amongst others, the military stationed there suffered. On the 2nd it broke out in the 82nd Regiment, and in the course of a few days many of the men died. The Barracks in which this regiment was quartered being eminently unhealthy, it was, on the 9th, forwarded by the railway to Exeter.

1849.  
August 9.  
82 Regiment  
arrives at the  
Barracks.

As this proceeding created throughout the City some excitement and an expression of public fear, I was commissioned, as Chairman of the Sanitary Committee, to solicit the commanding officer to march his men to the Barracks, not through the City, but by a nearer and more secluded route. Being at the railway station for this purpose, and during the few minutes previously to the arrival of the train, I entered into conversation with the officer, who had arrived on the previous evening to make the requisite arrangements for the arrival of the regiment at the Barracks. He informed me that nine men had died, and that when he left Plymouth the Major was most seriously ill. Whilst sitting by his side, I could not but observe that he was spasmodically affected (a symptom locally



designated as being "twicked"). Learning from him that he had been somewhat unwell during the previous twelve hours, I strongly urged him, on the arrival of the regiment, to immediately apply to the surgeon for advice. The regiment arrived. The first question asked was after the sick major; the reply, that he had died at midnight. Any others ill? A few men, and one taken ill in the train, and sent back. All care for and thought on these topics were soon absorbed in the report he had to make to his commanding officer. The men were quickly formed into line, and marched off to their quarters. Within two hours Mr. Webb and myself were summoned to the bed-side of this young officer, who had by this time passed into a state of the most abject collapse from Cholera. The scene I witnessed during the remainder of that day was such as I can never forget. The kindest attention was bestowed upon this young man by his brother officers, all ministering to him, in every particular, with the most cheerful, generous, and off-hand assiduity; nevertheless the neighbouring mess-table was as merry, and its jokes as loud, as it was wont to be. During all this time two soldiers stood, as on guard at the door of the sick chamber, obedient to every slightest command. This young officer eventually recovered.

To resume. Subsequently there were taken ill in the 82nd Regiment four men only; of these, one was the servant of the sick officer, and who had been watching for two days and nights at his chamber door: he also recovered. The history of the Cholera in this regiment, after its arrival in Exeter, may in fact be thus summed up: five men attacked, of whom two died.

It is worthy of remark, and of the most serious consideration, that there never existed the slightest grounds for suspecting that the arrival in this City of the barque, in which the captain had died, or of the regiment, in which so many cases and deaths had previously occurred, had been the means of propagating the disease in any one instance; while both as regards the former, and more particularly the latter, the most beneficial and satisfactory results were conspicuously evident. The change in their position was simply this: they had quitted districts where epidemic influences

were rendered fatal by local circumstances, to reside in one, also under the former, but where the latter had been obviated by sanitary measures.

On the 8th of January, 1850, the Sanitary Committee, considering that all risk from the disease, to provide against which it had been appointed, had passed away, concluded its labours, having previously drawn up and presented to the Corporation of the Poor and other public bodies of the City a Report (vide Appendix C), in which its proceedings, as above referred to, were somewhat more fully detailed.

1850,  
January 8.  
Sanitary  
Committee  
resign.





## APPENDIX.

---

### APPENDIX A.

EXETER SANITARY COMMITTEE, APPOINTED 18TH OCT., 1848.

Dr. Shapter, Chairman, Deputation from the Town Council.

Mr. Kennaway

Mr. W. P. Kingdon

Mr. Hooper

Mr. John Dymond

Mr. Wm. Drewe

} Members of the "Corporation of the Poor."

The Mayor, Mr. C. Arden, Deputation from the Town Council.

Mr. C. Brutton

Mr. R. Sanders

Mr. J. Wilson

} Deputation from the "Commissioners of Improvement."

### OFFICERS.

Mr. F. H. Warren

Mr. A. Kempe

Mr. J. S. Perkins

Mr. A. J. Cumming

Mr. C. H. Kingdon

Mr. W. W. James

Mr. J. T. Champion

Mr. H. Shaw

Mr. J. Webb

Mr. J. W. Harris

} Medical Officers of the Corporation of the Poor.

} Medical men retained for special services.

Mr. R. Hake, Clerk.

Mr. T. Whitaker, Surveyor.

Mr. T. Dobles, Messenger.



## APPENDIX B.

**THE SANITARY COMMITTEE**

Urgently calls the attention of the Public, and especially the Poor, to the following valuable suggestions for the Prevention of Cholera, which have been drawn up by a Committee of Physicians and Surgeons of Exeter, in conjunction with the Medical Officers of the Corporation of the Poor:—

- Unwholesome Food.** Avoid the use of Unwholesome Food, as Tainted Meat, Stale Fish, particularly Stale Shell Fish, Raw Vegetables, Unripe Fruit, Acid Drinks, and even the incautious use of Cold Water when the body is overheated.
- Intemperance.** Avoid Intoxication, or any approach to the intemperate use of Spirits, Wine, Beer, and Cider.
- Bad Habits.** Avoid Undue Fatigue, Late Hours, and all habits which weaken the powers of the constitution.
- Laxative Medicines.** Avoid the unadvised use of Laxative Medicines.
- Cleanliness.** Cleanse and Limewash your Houses and Out-buildings; remove all Animals, as Pigs, Poultry, Rabbits, &c., from your Premises.  
Never allow Stagnant Water or Filth of any kind to accumulate near your Dwellings; let the House-drains be well washed down every evening, even when they are well trapped; if any offensive smell prevail, examine the state of the traps, and if possible, discover and immediately remove the cause. Attend carefully to the cleanliness of your persons daily.
- Ventilation.** Admit Air freely into all your Apartments by day, and when practicable by night, and most especially into rooms in which many persons are working together; remove Chimney Boards, and all obstructions to the free current of Air; Beds should be freely exposed to the air during the day.
- Diet.** Let your daily diet consist of good wholesome solid food, as Meat, Bread, Rice, Sago, good Potatoes; and, drink moderately, Cocoa, Coffee, Tea, Milk.
- Clothing.** Let your Clothing be such as will keep the Body warm and dry. In damp cold weather, wear flannel belts round the Loins, which have been found by experience to be of the greatest advantage; keep your feet dry.
- Premonitory Symptoms.** During the prevalence of Cholera, indisposition more or less prevails, some are affected with Giddiness, general Coldness of the Body, Prostration of Strength or Faintness, others with Sickness, Pains in the Bowels, Cramps or Diarrhœa; experience has shown that if the Cholera be met at an early stage, it may be combated with every hope of success; and as all the above feelings and symptoms are premonitory of an attack, apply without loss of time to the District Surgeon or your own private Medical Attendant.
- N.B. District Surgeons are instructed to afford Advice and Medicines gratuitously, and such other means as the necessity and *emergency* of the case may require.

The Sanitary Committee have much satisfaction in stating, that after a careful consideration of the various improvements which have been from time to time adopted in Exeter, as well as of the measures which have now been devised, the Medical Gentlemen are of opinion this painful disease, should it again occur in this City, will not be attended with such fatality as on the previous occasion; nevertheless the necessity for carrying out the above precautions, cannot be too strongly enforced; for let it always be borne in mind that those who are temperate in all things, cheerful and free from alarm, active and regular in their habits, early in their hours, and clean in their persons and houses, are the least liable to be attacked with Cholera, or any other serious Disease; beyond this all must be confided to the care of an all-wise and most merciful Providence.

By Order of the Sanitary Committee,

R. HAKE, CLERK.

Exeter, 21st August, 1849.



## APPENDIX C.

## REPORT OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE SANITARY COMMITTEE.

A year having now elapsed since the first appointment of the Sanitary Committee by the Corporation of the Poor, and some of the immediate and chief incentives for its formation having, as it may be hoped, through God's blessing, passed away, the Committee think it right to submit to you some details of its proceedings. Before doing this, however, it may not be inappropriate briefly to allude to the circumstances of the first appointment of the Sanitary Committee, and to the provisions of the Act of Parliament specially enjoining it.

It will be recollected that in the autumn of 1847 the steady progress towards the west of the devastating pestilence of the age was duly appreciated by the public bodies of this City; and, consequently, a very extended street-by-street investigation of the sanitary state of the City was instituted by a conjoint Committee of the Town Council and Commissioners of Improvement. From this resulted an active suppression of many urgent and crying nuisances.

In the autumn of 1848, the Cholera having made its appearance on our own shores, an Act was hastily passed (September 4, 1848) by the Legislature, entitled "The Nuisances Removal and Diseases Prevention Act, 1848."

The provisions of this Act were twofold, in the one case being of general and immediate application, in the other of specific and occasional application only.

Those of general and immediate application gave the public and individuals, in the event of any nuisance, the power of representing it either to Town Councils, Commissioners of Improvement, or the Guardians of the Poor, which bodies shall by themselves, or their agents, or by Committees specially appointed by them, within twenty-four hours inspect the same, and procure its abatement; and the expenses of doing this are, in all cases, to be paid out of the poor-rates.

The special provisions of the Act provides that, in case of the existence, or probable occurrence of any epidemic or contagious disease after the issuing of an order in Council, the General Board of Health might issue directions, and by "such directions and regulations authorise and require" the Guardians of the Poor in England, by themselves, officers, or by those specially appointed by them, to see to the execution of these directions, and to provide for all matters connected with the



prevention, and measures necessary on the occurrence, of such epidemic disease.

Besides the direct power thus given by this Act of Parliament to the Central Board of Health to compel the Guardians to superintend or aid in the executions of their directions and regulations, the Act further empowers the Poor Law Commissioners to insist on their due performance by them. Finally, the Act empowers the Guardians, or those persons appointed by them, to carry out the provisions of the Act, and to charge all expenses of so doing upon the poor-rates.

Such are briefly the provisions of this Act ; on the 28th of September, 1848, its special clauses were, by an order in Council, declared to be in force and applicable to such places as might subsequently be specified ; this proclamation was followed up by various suggestions of the Board of Health (October 5, 1848), and by instructions from the Poor Law Board, apprising the Guardians of the Act of Parliament, of the duties they were thus called upon, by the Board of Health, to perform, and directing their compliance therewith.

It will, therefore, be seen that the Guardians of the Poor were directed, under the provisions of this Act, both by the Board of Health and by the Poor Law Commissioners, to carry out, not only its provisions, but such further measures as may be deemed requisite by the Central Board of Health. It was, moreover, suggested by the Poor Law Commissioners, that this should be done by a Committee of the Guardians, with whom might be associated, advantageously, members from the other public bodies. These instructions received from the Corporation a ready compliance, and the appointment (October 18, 1848), of the Sanitary Committee took place. The Central Board of Health subsequently issued (November 3, 1848) a series of regulations under their hands and seal, and amongst the places scheduled as those to which these regulations applied, was that of Exeter.

As it now became imperative upon your Committee to carry out these regulations, it may be as well briefly to enumerate them here. There was, first, enjoined the cleansing, by public bodies, of all public ways, and the keeping them free from nuisances, and the same of private ways and passages by individuals ; the Guardians being directed to appoint persons to see to the duly carrying out these provisions, or if not done to perform them themselves. The suppression of various nuisances is then enjoined, and the means whereby this is to be effected pointed out. Information on epidemic disease is directed to be procured, and the localities afflicted by them, as thus indicated, are to be visited by medical men, who are to report upon the same. The medical men are also to report to the Guardians the occurrence of Cholera, Typhus, or other epidemic and contagious diseases ; finally,



these regulations of the Central Board direct the appointment, if necessary, of additional medical officers, the making public by hand-bills the provisions of the Act, and of the regulations and instructions issued by the Central Board.

Besides the above directions the Central Board of Health issued, at various times, a series of notifications of their opinions and wishes, specifying further measures to be pursued for the maintenance of the public health, and more especially in respect to the anticipated occurrence of the Cholera.

To these various directions the Poor Law Commissioners specially directed the attention of the Guardians, the Sanitary Committee accordingly communicated to them their appointment by the Corporation of the Poor, and that they were implicitly following out the directions of the Central Board of Health, an intimation which received from the Poor Law Commissioners an expression of their satisfaction.

Having thus briefly explained the legal position, and instructions given to, and the duties required of, the Sanitary Committee, as the representatives of the Board of Guardians, it now becomes necessary to state their proceedings in pursuance thereof. Before doing this, however, it should be mentioned that the medical gentlemen of Exeter placed themselves, through Dr. Miller, in communication with this Committee—the result of which was that it was assisted in its labours by the advice and personal attendance, at its meetings, of the four senior physicians and four senior surgeons\* of the City. This co-operation is only to be named and its value will be appreciated. To proceed: the labours of the Sanitary Committee may be viewed under two heads; the one comprising the general maintenance of the health of the City by such means as appeared to them necessary; the other the precautions deemed requisite against the occurrence of the Cholera. In the first place, it especially sought the abatement of all nuisances injurious to health, and here your Committee would wish it to be particularly understood, that all interference with nuisances, unless there was direct evidence to this point, was particularly avoided—however great the nuisance may have been—if not proved to be injurious to health its suppression was not deemed cognizable by this Committee. In order to be fully assured upon these matters, the Sanitary Committee naturally sought for, and relied upon, professional assistance; and as it was empowered by Act of Parliament to procure this, it had, for many reasons, much satisfaction in finding that such could be afforded to it, most efficiently, by the medical officers of the Corporation of the Poor,

\* Dr. Miller, Dr. Granger, Dr. Pennell, Dr. Barham, Mr. Harris, Mr. James, Mr. Pridham, Mr. Tucker.



and by the surveyor and messenger of the Commissioners of Improvement.

The duties thus imposed upon these gentlemen were very extensive and drew largely upon their time. Besides the regularly reporting the existence of the sources of disease by the former, and the modes of putting down and abating them by the latter, there was rarely a meeting of the Committee at which representations of many substantial nuisances, requiring from these several officers special inspection and report, did not take place. The assiduous, fearless, and impartial manner in which these gentlemen carried out the duties thus imposed upon them, is deserving of the greatest praise and the fullest acknowledgment of the Sanitary Committee.

In order fully to render justice to the confidence which the Guardians of the Poor had placed in the Sanitary Committee, it endeavoured to carry out, in their fullest integrity, the instructions of the Central Board of Health, by placing the City in as healthy a state as the means in their power would allow. Besides issuing handbills and public notices cautionary and instructive, the Committee sought, by an uniform system of compulsion, to induce a general communication with the sewers, an efficient supply of water, both public and private, and otherwise enforced measures towards a wholesome state of the interiors of dwellings. The extent of the labours of the Committee, in these respects, may, however, be better appreciated by the fact that your surveyor was directed to make a general report on the state of houses in the more crowded parts of the City, and the result was the serving of upwards of 1,000 notices to cleanse and whitewash. In this way there has really been effected, as far as all practical and efficient purposes is concerned, a house-to-house visitation of the City, without the agitation which such a measure might have produced if more formally announced. There were, beside these, some other matters which occupied the attention of the Committee, such as the inducing an extreme vigilance against the sale of putrid meat, and more especially fish (August 18, 1849), a matter at one time of the extremest necessity. The noisome state of the river above Trews Weir has also seriously occupied the repeated attention of the Committee, and representations thereon have been made to the Town Council, and though some temporary alleviation of the nuisance complained of has resulted therefrom, no efficient measure for its abatement, satisfactory to the Committee, has been acted upon or even proposed. It is to be hoped the Town Council will not postpone the serious consideration of this subject. There is also another matter of some importance in relation to the well being of the western districts of the City, and which has been recently referred to the consideration of the deputation of medical men in conjunction



with your medical officers. This will, doubtless, receive their full and serious attention, therefore to refer more particularly to it here would be premature.

Besides these general matters the Sanitary Committee occupied themselves with making such arrangements as appeared to them suitable to alleviate and provide against the anticipated approach of the Cholera; and early called upon their medical officers to report what measures and further medical assistance, in case of its occurrence, it was probable might be required. After much anxious consideration it was decided that the City should be divided, including the workhouse, into ten convenient districts, to each of these districts there was appointed a medical officer (together with a druggist), consisting of your usual staff, and six additional medical gentlemen. Rules were drawn up ensuring, in case of need, prompt and efficient medical attendance, both by day and by night, and for the immediate supply of the requisite medicines, and for the administration of hot air baths, of which twelve were prepared on a convenient and approved plan. Ample provision was made, and a list of nurses kept, and such amount of remuneration guaranteed to them as should induce a full and competent supply. Besides these arrangements, the Committee also provided depots, with a person constantly in attendance, for the distribution of blankets, sheets, mattresses, the hot air baths, &c., and such other matters as might prove of immediate necessity; one of these depots was in the eastern, another in the western quarter of the City, and there was also a third and more central one, by permission of the Mayor, at the Guildhall.

The vast importance of alleviating the premonitory diarrhœa was not only suggested by the notifications of the Central Board of Health, but was pressed immediately upon the notice of the Committee by the medical officers. It was, therefore, resolved that every facility in providing and encouraging the use of the necessary medicines should be made. Besides general directions to this end, drawn up for the guidance of the medical officers themselves, it was proposed that the different district druggists should, on application, distribute medicines free of all charge. The Sanitary Committee also applied to the Governors of the Exeter Dispensary to assist them in this view; and which it was emboldened to do, as the surplus of the Cholera Fund (£547 8s. 4d.), raised in 1832, had been presented to that Institution.

Other subjects of great moment in connection with these arrangements, were pressed alike by the notifications of the Central Board of Health, as by the experience of a previous period, upon the consideration of the Committee, of these the chief were the making adequate provision, generally, for the sick and for those who might be in a state



of houseless destitution when attacked ; also for the reception of the healthy inmates of those houses in which deaths might occur, and whom, from the attendant circumstances, it would be advisable to remove, as also for the burial of those dying from this disease.

For the destitute of home, as you are aware, provision was made by "the Committee of nine," at the workhouse itself, and the shops adjoining the vagrant wards were fitted up for this purpose ; and had more extensive accommodation been required, plans for a hospital were prepared, and through the liberality of a member of your body, Mr. Hooper, ground for its erection was placed at the disposal of the Committee. A few hours only would have served for its erection and readiness for use.

For the purpose of a house of refuge for the reception of the friends of those who might die, under circumstances of peculiar misery and distress, (a measure much insisted on by the Central Board of Health, and doubtless of great probable benefit,) extensive premises at the bottom of Paris Street were prepared and put in such order as to afford, within twelve hours' notice, accommodation for fifty people, and if found requisite, with but some slight alterations, for thirty more ; and had even more accommodation of this kind been required, other premises were placed at the disposal of the Committee by the public spirit and liberality of Mr. Brutton.

Knowing how much and seriously the question of the burial of the dead had agitated the City on a former occasion, the Sanitary Committee was anxious that all due arrangements for this purpose should be completed before the necessity arose, and they are happy to say arrangements of the most unobjectionable and satisfactory kind were made with the Commissioners of Improvement, and those few who succumbed to this disease repose in grounds permanently dedicated to this purpose.

Besides these greater matters there were others which called for consideration and forethought on the part of the Sanitary Committee, such as the printing and issuing of 5,000 copies of a handbill of general instructions and precautions ; these were drawn up by the deputation of the medical profession, in conjunction with the medical officers of the Corporation of the Poor, the procuring to be printed the forms for the returns of cases, together with a circular for the guidance of the medical men, in accordance with the orders of the General Board of Health ; nor were such matters to be neglected, as the procuring a spot of ground where the clothes of those who had died could be burnt, arrangements regarding funerals, &c.

There were, also, other and accidental matters which necessarily occupied the attention of the Sanitary Committee, such as the fact of a



vessel supposed to be in an unhealthy state with cases of Cholera on board coming to the port of this City, and to meet which emergency, on application to the Central Board of Health, peculiar and very large powers were conferred upon this Committee. The arrival of four companies of the 82nd Regiment at the Exeter Barracks, likewise called for their active interference, in this they were cordially seconded by the Mayor. It is not too much to say, that the effect of the representations then made, if it did not conduce to prevent the undue spread of disease, tended to restore the quiet and confidence existing previously to its arrival.

Such are the general measures and arrangements which it appeared advisable to the Sanitary Committee to make.

The enumeration of these may appear to you voluminous, but it is requisite they should be stated, in order that the varied and difficult duties which the Committee, and the officers employed by them, had to perform, may be duly appreciated. While the Committee, on the one hand, have endeavoured to save all unnecessary expense, on the other they have done that which has prevented panic and alarm, and whereby, throughout a period of great peril the City has been preserved from that desolation, ruin, and vast expenditure of money, so seriously experienced elsewhere. The policy of the Committee may be thus shortly summed up,—at the smallest possible cost, to provide everything that was necessary to ensure and maintain the health of the City, whether under ordinary or special circumstances, and to spare it from agitating discussions and bootless terrors and alarm.

It now remains briefly to state, that though for a few weeks an amount of illness, very harassing to the medical officers prevailed, the Cholera itself has fallen so lightly as by no means to require the full employment of the extended measures provided; some few, however, have been acted upon, and with the greatest possible benefit and advantage; it must not, however, be forgotten, that though many of the arrangements above enumerated were done with the view of averting an evil which it may be hoped has now passed away, a general good remains in the permanent benefit thus rendered to the City.

In reference to this singular immunity from the ravages of the pestilence of the age, so contrary to the experience of a former period, and so different from that which has taken place during the present year in those neighbouring large towns, with which on the former occasion this City shared a more equal lot, the Sanitary Committee has this emphatic opinion to express, that, under God's blessing, it is solely to be referred to the various measures towards rendering this City healthy and ameliorating the condition of the poor which, since 1832, have been so extensively and judiciously carried out.



The Corporation of the Poor may now probably deem it expedient to recall the appointment of the present Committee, and either by themselves or by others of their body to carry out the directions of the Central Board of Health and Poor Law Commissioners. It is the duty of the Sanitary Committee, however, to state that the special clauses of the Act of Parliament, and the orders and regulations issued by the Central Board of Health, are still in force, and that duties similar to those performed by the Sanitary Committee are still demanded at the hands of the Corporation of the Poor, and that while these are thus rendered by law imperative to be followed out, they are no less so by every moral obligation; nor should it be disguised that though the peril of the day has for the present passed away, its recurrence is more than probable, and that measures towards its prevention and alleviation should still be held in view. In conclusion, the Sanitary Committee have to state, through the whole period of their existence, they have found ready, efficient, and valuable aid from their various officers. Those of the medical men have been specially set out and reported upon (vide Appendix D); those of Mr. Whitaker have been no less valuable, evincing great sagacity and an untiring earnestness in the cause of sanitary improvement; those of Mr. Hake are also worthy of the best acknowledgments, being characterized by great attention and a warm interest in all the measures entertained by this Committee. To each and all of these gentlemen the best thanks of the Sanitary Committee are most justly due.

T. SHAPTER, *Chairman.*

*Guildhall, 28th Nov., 1849.*

To the Governor of the Corporation of the Poor.

---

## APPENDIX D.

### REPORT ON THE SERVICES, &c., OF THE MEDICAL OFFICERS OF THE SANITARY COMMITTEE.

The Sanitary Committee having requested that, as their Chairman, I should state to it my opinion of the amount of remuneration which it should give to their medical officers, I have passed in review the various services rendered by these gentlemen, specially, to this Committee, and those they have had to perform in consequence of the epidemic tendencies of disease during the past few months.



The duties they have been thus called on to perform may be enumerated under the following heads :—

1. An attendance on this Committee during its various meetings.—As these meetings have, during the last twelve months, been generally held once a week, and occasionally for special purposes more frequently, the time thus occupied has been very considerable ; and it should be borne in mind that these meetings have generally been held at that season of the day which, to the medical man, is especially valuable.

2. The furnishing to this Committee various reports connected with the medical and general management of the City in case of the occurrence of the Cholera.—The preparing and drawing up of these reports must have occupied much anxious consideration and care, and involved the necessity of many private consultations and meetings amongst themselves.

3. The furnishing to the Committee weekly reports of the health of the City.—From these the Committee was enabled to judge of the aspect and threatenings of disease, of its special localities, &c., and to take measures accordingly.

4. The noting the existence, in the several quarters of the City respectively under their charge, of such nuisances and circumstances as were injurious to health, and reporting the same to this Committee.—This service was attended by the most salutary consequences, and by which a very vast amount of injurious offensiveness was detected and remedied ; virtually a “house-to-house inquiry” has been thus quietly and practically carried out, and the state of the city in relation to health ascertained.

5. The visiting and reporting on, by direction of this Committee, special nuisances and circumstances of disease, &c., such as the arrival at the Bight of the barque “Union,” the alleged nuisances at Mr. Tanner’s, Mr. Tuckett’s, &c.—The compliance with these various directions of the Committee occupied much time and anxious consideration.

6. The attendance upon a large amount of diffused epidemic sickness during the space of three months, consisting chiefly of diarrhœa, and partly of dysentery and Cholera.—This, besides calling for a largely increased expenditure in drugs of the more costly kind, as opium, aromatic spirits, &c., was necessarily a source of much solicitude and anxious care, and for a short period involved a considerable amount of fatigue. I learn that for a period of nearly six weeks these gentlemen had frequently to attend four or five times during the night to calls on these accounts.

Such is a general statement of the labours of your medical officers.



It will doubtless be said that in some respects these labours have not been altogether equally distributed. Probably this may be so ; nevertheless, on carefully reviewing them, it would appear that while those of one have been heavier in one respect, those of the others have been so in others ; moreover, in all the special and extraordinary duties of their office, they have been equally called upon. I am therefore induced to think that the most liberal and less invidious mode will be to enter into no distinction of this kind, but to view them as equally deserving your approbation ; and on referring this question to these gentlemen themselves, I am happy to say they most cordially coincide in this view. After a full consideration of the various special services they have rendered to this Committee, and the large amount of dispersed sickness attended by them, promptly, quickly, and effectively, and to which the absence of alarm and panic, so conspicuous in this City during the late very anxious season, is rather to be referred than to the absence of all cause for such alarm ; I am of opinion, in order to represent the liberal and just sentiments of the Corporation of the Poor, and of the citizens at large, that each of these gentlemen should be presented with a sum not less than 50*l*.\*—a sum which, on a previous and similar occasion, was deemed inadequate by the Corporation of the Poor for labours spread over a less protracted period, and less extended in their nature. I next took into consideration the services of the extra medical gentlemen retained by this Committee. Happily it has been necessary to call into activity but two of these, and they have been employed only during the space of six weeks—one portion of the time in direct attendance on cases of Cholera, the other in daily visiting, from house to house, those districts of the City in which the disease appeared particularly to linger. The consideration of the services of these two gentlemen must not be viewed exactly upon the same grounds as have been those of the regular medical officers of the Corporation of the Poor. Their special and extraordinary position call for rather a larger rate of remuneration. In determining this I have been guided mainly by the course which has been generally pursued elsewhere. I accordingly recommend that to each of these gentlemen the sum of 15*l*. be presented.

With respect to those remaining medical gentlemen whose services were retained, but, from the favoured circumstances of this City, have not been called into activity, it should be stated that not only were these gentlemen so retained, by which their minds were occupied with, and

\* The Corporation of the Poor did not, I regret to say, confirm this recommendation to its full extent.



their feelings involved in, the objects this Committee have had in view, but they really did attend various private meetings, called by your medical officers, in order to consider upon and make those arrangements for the management and service of the City, which appeared to you most judicious, and received your cordial approbation. Moreover, on emergencies occurring, they assisted in such cases as they were called to. To be enabled to avail ourselves of the services of these gentlemen at a moment's notice, and on the occurrence of the extremest emergencies, was of no small moment, nor to be lightly regarded, as the experience both of other cities and country towns in various parts of the country has so lamentably shown. I may mention that much higher pecuniary offers than those above recommended were made in this City to induce professional aid to a neighbouring town. I would advise that the sum of 5*l.* be presented to each of these gentlemen, with every acknowledgment of the promptitude with which they complied with the proposal of this Committee, and the confidence they reposed in its justice and liberality.

In the above I have endeavoured to advise that which, after much consideration, seems to be strictly just as between the rate-payers and these various medical gentlemen. At the same time I cannot but observe that a pecuniary remuneration will scarcely represent the debt due to them from this City, and that they most amply deserve the thanks of their fellow-citizens, and of this Committee in particular, for their unremitting attention to their duties, and for the value of the services rendered. Whilst thus referring to the services of the medical gentlemen, those rendered to the City by the Exeter Dispensary during the last few months, should not be omitted. It should be borne in mind that the free and facile supply of medicines for the relief of diarrhœa by that Institution, emanated in a suggestion made by this Committee, and that the ready acquiescence of the Governors has been the means not only of diffusing a very vast amount of good in this City, but also in the country villages, and even towns adjoining. Moreover, it should here be taken into consideration, that the eagerness with which these medicines were sought at that Institution, and the freedom with which they were distributed, entirely superseded the necessity for carrying out one of those judicious schemes recommended by your own medical officers,—viz., that medicines of this description should be distributed free of cost by the druggists retained by this Committee. Had this measure been requisite, it must have proved a source of considerable expense to this Committee.

I would, therefore, recommend, as our medical officers report the entire subsidence of all diarrrhœal or epidemic tendency, that this Com-

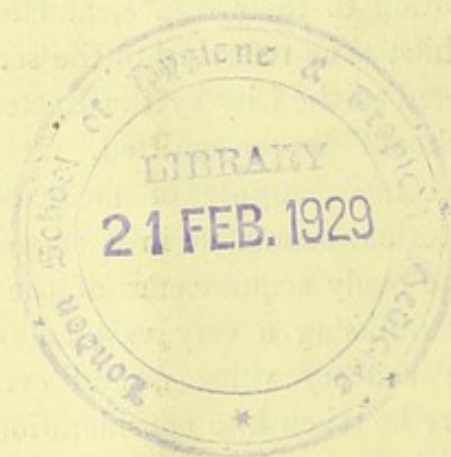


mittee do now tender their formal and most cordial thanks to the Governors of the Exeter Dispensary for their acquiescence with its wishes, and for the liberality with which they authorised the distribution of medicines applicable to the late emergencies.

T. SHAPTER, *Chairman.*

*Guildhall, Exeter, November 18, 1849.*

THE END.



LONDON :

G. J. PALMER, SAVOY STREET, STRAND.