

**Pathetic history of the plague in London in the year 1665. Whereof three thousand died in one night, and an hundred thousand taken sick / [Daniel Defoe].**

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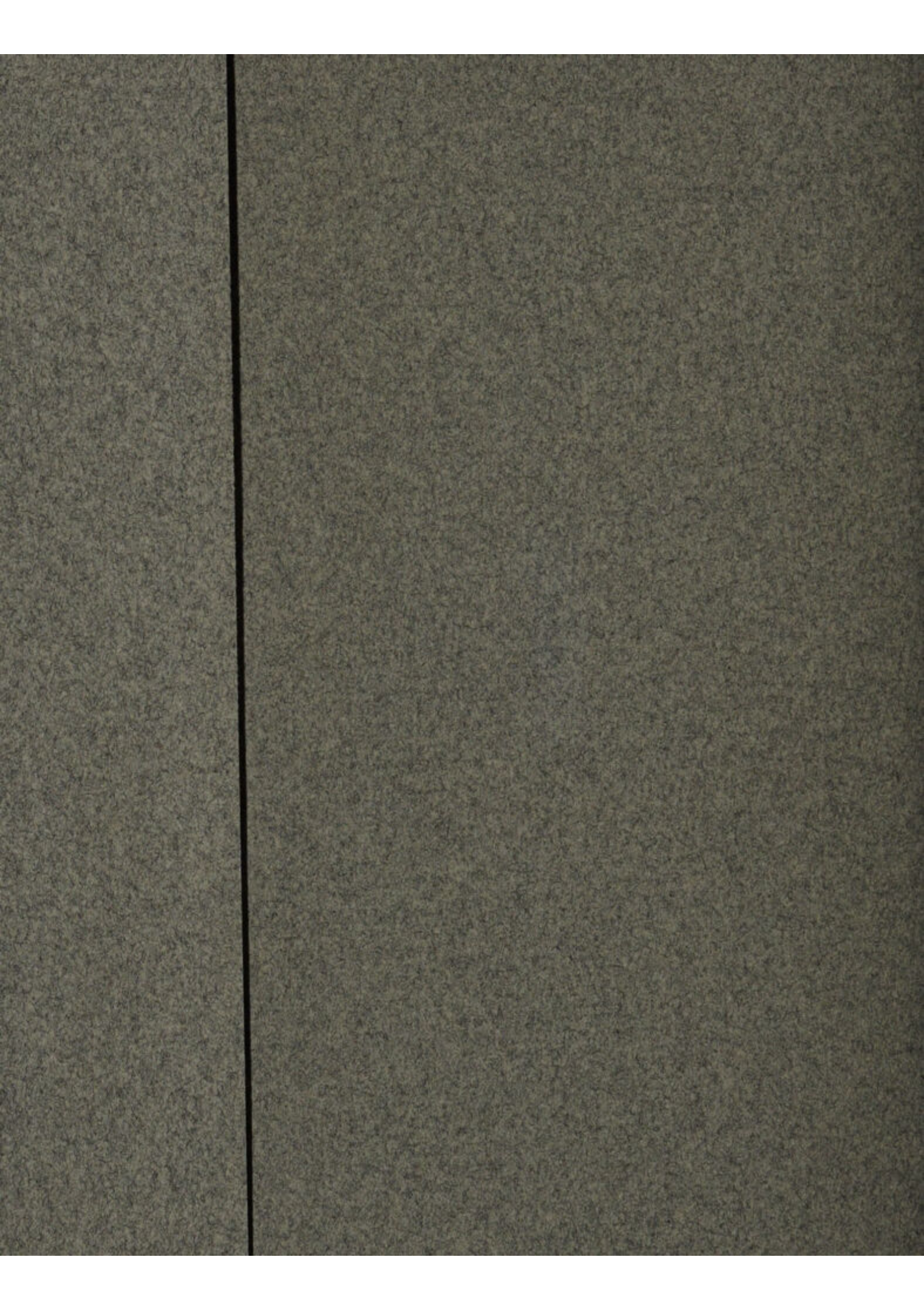
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CATHETIC HISTORY 111








P A T H E T I C H I S T O R Y  
O F T H E  
P L A G U E  
I N  
L O N D O N,  
I n t h e Y e a r 1 6 6 5 .

Whereof three thousand died in one night,  
and an hundred thousand taken sick.



Death, with his dread commission seal'd,  
Now hastens to his arms ;  
In awful state he takes the field,  
And sounds his dire alarms :  
Attendant plagues around him stand,  
And wait his dread command ;  
And pains and dying groans obey  
The signal of his hand.

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Printed and sold by J. WHITE, Charlestown.

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W. G. B. T. O. R. Y.

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HISTORY OF THE  
PLAGUE IN LONDON.



**I**N the year 1665, the city of London was sorely visited by the Plague; an account of the progress and effects of that visitation was kept by a citizen, who remained there during the whole time of the sickness, and who appears to have been true and just in his remarks. This dreadful contagion in London was introduced by some goods brought from Holland. It first broke out in the house where those goods were opened, from whence it spread to others. In the first house that was infected there died four persons: a neighbor who went to visit them, on returning home, gave the distemper to her family, and died with all her household. The disorder spread, and the physicians perceived the danger, and upon narrow inspection were assured that it was indeed the Plague, with all its terrifying particulars, and that it threatened a general infection. The people began to be alarmed all over the

town. The number of burials within the bills of mortality, for a week, was from three to four hundred. However, the frost continued very severe until the end of February, the bills decreased, and people began to look upon danger as over; but in May the bills greatly increased, and the weather becoming warm, the infection spread again in a dreadful manner.

Nothing was to be seen but waggons, carts and coaches, with goods, and people attending them, hurrying away. This was a very melancholy prospect. By the end of July the contagion had spread and increased to a great degree; sorrow and sadness sat upon every face; London might well be said to be all in tears. The voice of mourning was indeed heard in the streets; the shrieks of women and children at the windows and doors of their houses, was enough to pierce the stoutest heart.

It was a time, says the author, of very unhappy breaches among us, in matters of religion; but this dreadful visitation reconciled all parties; yet after the sickness was

over, that spirit of charity was lost, and things returned to their old bad channel.

It was worthy observation, as well as full of instruction, to remark with what eagerness people of all persuasions embraced the opportunities they had of attending upon the public worship, and other appointed times of devotion, as humiliations, fastings, and public confession of sins, to implore the mercy of God, and turn away the judgments which hung over their heads. The churches were so thronged, that there was often no coming near; no, not to the very door of the largest churches. All plays and public places, which had begun to increase among us, were shut up.

The infection continued to increase until the middle of August, when there died a thousand a day, by the account of the weekly bills, though they never gave a full account by many thousands; many of the parish officers were taken sick themselves, and died when their account was to be given in.

I had, continues the Author, the care of

my brother's house, which obliged me sometimes to go abroad. In these walks I had dismal objects before my eyes, particularly of persons falling dead in the streets, and heard terrible shrieks of women and children screaming about the rooms like distracted persons. People in the rage of the distemper, or in the torment of the swelling, (which indeed was intolerable) becoming raving and distracted, oftentimes laid violent hands on themselves, or threw themselves out of the windows; or, breaking out of the houses, would dance naked about the streets, not knowing one from another. Others would run directly down to the river, and jump into the water. Some died of mere grief, and some of fright and surprise, without perhaps having received the infection. The symptom of swelling was accounted the most promising in the disease, for if these swellings could be brought to break and run, the patient generally recovered; whereas those who were struck with death at the beginning of the distemper, and had spots come upon them, often

went about tolerable easy, till a little time before they died, and some until the moment they dropped down.

Watchmen were placed at the doors of infected houses, night and day, to prevent any going out to spread the distemper. Going out one morning, I heard a great outcry, which prompting my curiosity, I inquired the cause, of a person who looked out of the window. A watchman had been employed to watch at the door of a house, which was shut up; both himself and the day watchman, attended there a day and two nights. All this while no noise was heard, nor lights seen in the house. It seems that two or three days before, the dead cart had carried away a maid servant, wrapped only in a rug. The next day the watchman heard a great crying in the house; upon which he knocked at the door a great while; at last one looked out, and said with an angry, quick tone, "What d'ye want?" He answered, "I am the watchman, how do you do?" The person replied, "Stop the dead cart." Soon after the dead cart stop-

ped, and the bellman called several times, "Bring out your dead;" but no one answered. This they made known to the magistrate, who ordered the house to be broken open, and looking into the room, they saw a woman lying dead upon the floor, in a dismal situation.

Many more instances might be given to shew the deep distress of that day, People might be heard even in the streets, calling upon God for mercy through Jesus Christ; and saying, "I have been an adulterer, I have been a murderer," and the like; and none durst stop to make inquiry into such things, or to give comfort to the poor creatures. Many were the warnings that were then given by dying penitents, to others, not to put off and delay their repentance to a day of distress. I wish, says the author, I could repeat the very sound of those groans and exclamations that I heard from some poor dying creatures, when in the height of their agony and distress.

In the beginning of September, the number of burials increasing, the church war.

dens of Aldgate parish ordered a large pit to be dug, to hold all the dead which might die in a month ; it was about forty feet long and sixteen broad. Some blamed the church-wardens for suffering such a frightful gulf to be dug ; nevertheless, in two weeks, they had thrown more than a thousand bodies into it, when they were obliged to fill it up, as the bodies were come within six feet of the top. My curiosity drove me to go and see this pit, when there had been nearly four hundred people buried in it. I got admittance into the church-yard, by means of the sexton, who was a sensible and religious man. He would have persuaded me not to go, saying, that "it was indeed their duty to venture, and in it they might hope to be preserved ; but that as I had no particular call, he thought my curiosity could not justify my running the hazard." I told him "I had a great desire in my mind to go ; and that perhaps, it might be an instructive sight." "Nay," says the good man, if you will venture upon that score, in the name of God, go in ;

it will be a sermon to you ; it may be best that ever you heard in your life."

Hearing the bell-man and the cart loaded with dead bodies appearing, I went in. When I came to the pit, saw a man muffled in a cloak, who appeared in great agony. The buriers immediately gathered about him, supposing he was one of those poor delirious, or desperate creatures, who would sometimes run to the pit, wrapt in blankets, and throw themselves in. When the buriers came to him, they soon found that he was neither desperate nor distempered in mind, but one oppressed with a dreadful weight of grief, having his wife and several children, all in the cart that was just come in with him. He calmly desired the buriers to let him alone, and said he would only see the bodies thrown in, and go away ; so they left importuning him ; but no sooner was the cart turned round, and the bodies shot into the pit all together, which was a surprize to him, but he cried aloud, unable to contain himself, and fell down in a swoon. The buriers ran to him and took

him up; and when he came to himself, led him to a place where he was taken care of. The cart had in it sixteen or seven bodies. Some were wrapt up in linen sheets, some in rugs, some were little otherwise than naked, or so loosely clad, that what covering they had, fell from them in the shooting out of the cart, and they fell quite naked among the rest; they were huddled together into the common grave of mankind; for here was no difference, rich and poor went together. John Hayward, under sexton, grave digger, and bearer of the dead, never had the distemper at all, but lived about twenty years after it. His wife was employed to nurse the infected people, yet she herself never caught it. The only thing he used to keep off the infection, was holding garlick and rue in his mouth, and smoking tobacco; this account I had from himself; his wife used to wash her head in vinegar, and if the smell of any of those she waited upon was more than usually bad, she snuffed vinegar up her nose—put it over her cap, and held a handkerchief with it to her mouth.

And here I must not omit mentioning the disposition of the people of that day with respect to their charities, which indeed were very large, both in a public and private way. Some pious ladies were so zealous in this good work, and so confident of the protection of Providence, in the discharge of this great duty, that they went about giving alms, and visiting the poor families that were infected, in their very homes, appointing nurses and apothecaries to supply them with what they wanted. Thus giving their blessings to the poor, in solid relief, as well as hearty prayers for them.

From the middle of August to the middle of September, the infection still increased, and spread itself with wonderful power, and it was reckoned that, during that time, there died no less than sixteen hundred a day. It was then that the confusion and terror of the people was inexpressible; the courage of the persons appointed to carry the dead began to fail them. The watchfulness of the magistrates was now put to the severest trial. At last the violence of

the disorder came to such a height, that the people sat still looking upon one another, and seemingly quite abandoned to despair.

In a word, people began to give themselves up to fear that there was nothing to be expected but an universal desolation. This despair made people bold and venturous ; they were no more shy of one another, as expecting there was no avoiding the distemper, but that all must go : this brought them to crowd into the churches ; they no longer inquired what condition the people who sat near them were in, but came without the least caution, and crowded together as if their lives were of no consequence, compared to the work which they were about. Indeed their zeal in coming, and the earnestness and affectionate attention they shewed to what they heard, made it manifest what value people would put upon the worship of God, if they thought every day they attended upon the church might be their last.

It was in the height of this despair it

pleased God to stay his hand, and to flaken the violence of the contagion, in a manner surprising as that of its beginning ; and which shewed it to be his own particular hand. Nothing but Almighty Power could have done it ; the disorder despised all medicine, death raged in every corner, and had it gone on as it did then, a few weeks more would have cleared the town of all its inhabitants.

In that very moment, when thirty thousand died in three weeks, nay, when three thousand died in one night, and an hundred thousand were taken sick, then we might well cry, " Vain was the help of man ;" it pleased God to cause the force of the distemper to abate, and by his immediate hand, to disarm the enemy. It was wonderful & the physicians were surpris'd, where ever they visited, to find their patients better, and in a few days every body was recovering. Nor was this by any medicine found out, or by any new method of cure discovered ; but it was evidently from the secret invisible hand of Him, who

had at first sent this disease as a judgment upon us. Let wise men search for reasons in nature to account for it, and labor as much as they will to lessen the debt they owe their Maker ; even those physicians who had the least share of religion in them, were obliged to acknowledge the whole was the power of God. The streets were now full of poor recovering creatures, who appeared to be very sensible and thankful to God, for their unexpected deliverance ; yet I must own, that as to the generality of the people, it might be too justly said of them, as was said of the children of Israel, after they had been delivered from the host of Pharaoh : “ They sung his praise, but they soon forgot his work.”



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Lines written in a season of general Sickness.

FRAIL, on the verge of life we stand,  
Sustain'd by thine Almighty hand :  
Each passing day its danger brings ;  
Protection comes on mercy's wings.  
Around, how thick diseases fly !  
The young, the gay, the hopeful die :  
No age exempt, can life ensure,  
No place from death's attack secure.  
The infant's bloom, with morning smile,  
Did late the parents' heart beguile ;  
Faded in death, now pale he lies,  
And fills the parents' heart with sighs.  
The vig'rous youth on passions borne,  
From all his flattering prospects torn,  
Warm with full strength, a victim falls :  
No strength avails, when judgment calls.  
To middle age does man arrive ;  
In life's deep cares we see him strive ;  
But, while the world has all his heart,  
Thy summons comes, and says—DEPART.

FINIS.







