

History of the Plague in London.

Publication/Creation

[London] : [publisher not identified], [1850?]

Persistent URL

<https://wellcomecollection.org/works/yvybvd8>

License and attribution

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
<https://wellcomecollection.org>

1840 G. xx. 13
28971/P

47559



HISTORY OF THE PLAGUE IN LONDON.

ONE of the most striking facts presented to us by history, is the recurrence, at irregular intervals of time, of virulent diseases of an extraordinary character, which, breaking out unexpectedly in particular localities, have spread sometimes over certain defined districts, sometimes over entire countries, sometimes over all the civilised world, and sometimes even, it would appear, over the whole surface of our planet, everywhere defying the power and skill of man, and sweeping off myriads to their graves. To these awful visitations men have given the name, at once vague and appropriate, of the Pestilence or the Plague; reserving the name, however, especially for those cases in which human beings are the victims, and distinguishing similar recorded instances of unusual mortality among the lower animals by the name of the Murrain.

Of a general or universal plague, the best known instance in modern times is the famous pestilence, or "Black Death," as it was called, of 1348-9; which, taking its rise in Asia, spread westward into Europe, and raged fearfully for many months. The best account we have of this pestilence is that given by the celebrated Italian writer Boccaccio, in the introduction to his Decameron, where there is a vivid description of its ravages in the city of Florence. Of all the other narratives of a pestilence extant, the two most celebrated are that of the Plague at Athens in the year 430 before Christ, by Thucydides, and that of the Great Plague of London in 1664-5, by Daniel Defoe. No other narrative of the same description can be compared for truthfulness.



ness and accuracy with these two accounts, which, though written at an interval of two thousand years, the one by an ancient Greek, the other by an Englishman of the reign of Queen Anne, yet resemble each other in many points. There is this difference, however, between them, that while Thucydides was an actual eye and ear witness of what he describes, and was himself ill of the plague, Defoe wrote his account upwards of fifty years after the calamity to which it refers, and could have been but a mere infant in the arms when the plague was raging. Still there is abundant evidence that Defoe took pains to make his account an authentic one, by collecting such anecdotes and minute particulars as could be obtained from acquaintances who had survived the plague, as well as by consulting all the public and parish records and printed pamphlets by medical men and others relative to the plague year. His account, accordingly, may with perfect confidence be taken as, what it pretends to be, that of an eye-witness, who describes from personal recollection. In the following tract, therefore, we will present our readers with an abridgment of Defoe's "Journal of the Plague-Year in London;" retaining the whole substance of that inimitable account, and interweaving, as we proceed, such additional particulars as we can obtain from other sources.

BREAKING OUT OF THE PLAGUE IN LONDON.

During the early part of the seventeenth century, London had been repeatedly, if not almost yearly, visited by the plague, the generally confined thoroughfares, and the absence of any proper sanitary regulations, affording it on all occasions more or less scope. These visitations, common as they were, usually created some degree of alarm; and therefore, when it was announced in the month of September 1664 that plague had made its appearance in the metropolis, a certain excitement in the public mind was created. Little, however, appears to have been done to avert the contagion, and it may be said to have existed till the ensuing spring without any decided means being taken for its suppression.

At length, in March 1665, things became more alarming; it was ascertained that in St Giles and the neighbouring parishes several persons had died of plague. In May the weather became warm, so as to aggravate the complaint; and "in June," proceeds Defoe, "the infection spread in a dreadful manner. I lived without Aldgate, about midway between Aldgate Church and Whitechapel Bars, on the left-hand or north side of the street; and as the distemper had not reached to that side of the city, our neighbourhood continued very easy. But at the other end of the town their consternation was very great; and the richer sort of people, especially the nobility and gentry, from the west part of the city, thronged out of town, with their families and servants, in an unusual manner; and this was more particularly

seen in Whitechapel; that is to say, the broad street where I lived. Indeed nothing was to be seen but wagons and carts with goods, women, servants, children, &c.—coaches filled with people of the better sort, and horsemen attending them, and all hurrying away. This hurry continued some weeks; and the more so, because it was rumoured that an order of the government was to be issued out to place turnpikes and barriers on the road, to prevent people's travelling; and that the towns on the road would not suffer people from London to pass, for fear of bringing the infection along with them; though neither of these rumours had any foundation but in the imagination, especially at first."

These accounts by Defoe of the rapid spread of the plague, and the alarm which it caused, are borne out by other authorities. Thus, on the 13th of May, we find a privy-council held at Whitehall relative to the infection, and a committee of the lords appointed to consider the means of checking its progress. Under the auspices of this committee, the College of Physicians drew up a small pamphlet containing directions for the cure of the plague, as well as for preventing infection. One of the articles of this precious medical code is somewhat amusing. It is as follows:—"Pull off the feathers from the tails of *living* cocks, hens, pigeons, or chickens; and holding their bills, hold them hard to the botch or swelling, and so keep them at that part till they die, and by this means draw out the poison. It is good also to apply a cupping-glass, or embers in a dish, with a handful of sorrel upon the embers."

An extract from Pepys's Diary will help to give an idea of the excitement in London at the time the plague was beginning to rage. "June 7, the hottest day that ever I felt in my life. 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 on us!*' writ there; which was a sad sight to me." Again, on the 17th of the same month, Pepys writes, "This afternoon, going with a hackney-coach from the Lord Treasurer's house down Holborn, the coachman I found to drive easily and easily, at last stood still, and came down, hardly able to stand, and told me that he was suddenly struck very sick, and almost blind; he could not see; so I alighted, and went into another coach with a sad heart for the poor man, and for myself also, lest he should have been struck with the plague."

To resume Defoe's account—"I now began," he says, "to consider seriously with myself concerning my own case, and how I should dispose of myself; that is to say, whether I should resolve to stay in London, or shut up my house and flee, as many of my neighbours did. After much anxious considering, sometimes resolving one way, sometimes another, I came to the conclusion that, upon the whole, it was my duty, and expedient for me in my trade and business, being that of a saddler, and though a

single man, with a house and shop full of goods to take care of, to remain in town, casting myself entirely upon the goodness and protection of the Almighty. I had an elder brother, however, a married man, who with his wife and children went out of town. During the month of July, and while our part of the town seemed to be spared in comparison of the west part, I went ordinarily about the streets as my business required, and generally went once in a day or in two days into the city to my brother's house, which he had given me charge of, and to see it was safe. But the city also began to be visited with the disease; and all this month of July people continued to flee. In August they fled in still greater numbers, so that I began to think there would be really none but magistrates and servants left in the city.

“Business led me out sometimes to the other end of the town, even when the sickness was chiefly there; and as the thing was new to me, as well as to everybody else, it was a most surprising thing to see those streets, which were usually so thronged, now grown desolate. One day being at that part of the town on some special business, curiosity led me to observe things more than usually, and indeed I walked a great way where I had no business; I went up Holborn, and there the street was full of people, but they walked in the middle of the great street, neither on one side nor other, because, as I suppose, they would not mingle with anybody that came out of houses, or meet with smells and scents from houses that might be infected. The inns of court were all shut up, nor were very many of the lawyers in the Temple, or Lincoln's Inn, or Gray's Inn, to be seen there. Whole rows of houses, in some places, were shut close up; the inhabitants all fled, and only a watchman or two left.

“It must not be forgot here that the city and suburbs were prodigiously full of people at the time of this visitation, I mean at the time that it began. The town was computed to have in it above 100,000 people more than ever it held before; the joy of the restoration having alone brought a vast number of families to London.

“The apprehensions of the people were strangely increased by the error of the times, in which, I think, the people, from what principle I cannot imagine, were more addicted to prophesies and astrological conjurations, dreams and old wives' tales, than ever they were before or since. People took to reading Lily's Almanac, and other such exciting works, almost all of which foretold the ruin of the city. Many persons, frantic from these or other causes, ran about the streets predicting all sorts of horrors. The trade of fortune-telling became so open, and so generally practised, that it became common to have signs and inscriptions set up at doors. ‘Here lives a fortune-teller,’ ‘Here lives an astrologer,’ &c. Certain it is that innumerable attendants crowded about their doors every day; and if but a grave fellow,

in a velvet jacket, a band, and a black cloak, which was the habit those quack-conjurors generally went in, was but seen in the streets, the people would follow him in crowds, and ask him questions as he went along.

“Gay and luxurious as the court then was, it began to put on a face of just concern for the public danger; all the plays and interludes which, after the manner of the French court, had been set up and began to increase among us, were forbid to act; the gaming-tables, public dancing-rooms, and music-houses, which multiplied and began to debauch the manners of the people, were shut up and suppressed; and the jack-puddings, merry-Andrews, puppet-shows, rope-dancers, and such-like doings, which had bewitched the common people, shut their shops, finding indeed no trade, for the minds of the people were agitated with other things, and a kind of sadness and horror at these things sat upon the countenances even of the common people; death was before their eyes, and everybody began to think of his grave, not of mirth and diversions.

“On the other hand, it was incredible, and scarcely to be imagined, how the posts of houses and corners of streets were plastered over with doctors’ bills, and papers of ignorant fellows quacking and tampering in physic, and inviting people to come to them for remedies, which was generally set off with such flourishes as these; namely, ‘Infallible preventive pills against the plague:’ ‘Never-failing preservatives against the infection:’ ‘Sovereign cordials against the corruption of air:’ ‘Exact regulations for the conduct of the body in case of infection; anti-pestilential pills:’ ‘Incomparable drink against the plague, never found out before:’ ‘A universal remedy for the plague:’ ‘The only true plague water:’ ‘The royal antidote against all kinds of infection:’ and such a number more that I cannot reckon up, and if I could, would fill a book of themselves to set them down.

“Others set up bills to summon people to their lodgings for direction and advice in the case of infection; these had specious titles also, such as these:—‘An eminent High-Dutch physician, newly come over from Holland, where he resided during all the time of the great plague last year in Amsterdam, and cured multitudes of people that actually had the plague upon them.’ ‘An Italian gentlewoman, just arrived from Naples, having a choice secret to prevent infection, which she found out by her great experience, and did wonderful cures with it in the late plague there, wherein there died 20,000 in one day.’”

But there was another madness beyond all this. “This was in wearing charms, philters, exorcisms, amulets, and I know not what preparations, to fortify the body against the plague, as if the plague was not the hand of God, but a kind of a possession of an evil spirit; and it was to be kept off with crossings, signs of the zodiac, papers tied up with so many knots, and certain words or figures written on them, as particularly that famous word

HISTORY OF THE PLAGUE IN LONDON.

ABRACADABRA, with the letters arranged in a triangle or pyramid." In short, all remedies were grasped at that quackery or ignorance could suggest; the plague, meanwhile, spreading far and wide.

THE PLAGUE INCREASES—PRECAUTIONS TAKEN BY THE MAGISTRATES—HOUSES SHUT UP.

The mortality increased as the summer advanced. Thus, for the week ending the 13th of June 1665, the number of burials, according to the bills of mortality, were 558, and of these 112 were from plague; in the following week, the deaths from plague were reported at 168; in the week ending the 27th of June, they had risen to 267; and in that ending the 4th of July, they were 470; and to all these returns would require to be added the numbers of those who had really died of plague, but whose deaths had been attributed by their friends to other diseases.

It was at the beginning of July that the lord mayor and magistrates of the city of London—whose conduct during the whole period of the plague was as noble and praiseworthy as the conduct of public officers in a great emergency could be—published their orders for the regulation of the city. By these orders were appointed, in every parish, persons with the title of *examiners*, who were to be citizens of good repute, and whose office was to last two months. These examiners were to "be sworn by the aldermen, to inquire and learn from time to time what houses in every parish be visited, and what persons be sick, and of what diseases, as near as they can inform themselves; and upon doubt in that case, to command restraint of access until it appear what the disease shall prove; and if they find any person sick of the infection, to give orders to the constable that the house be shut up; and if the constable shall be found remiss and negligent, to give notice thereof to the alderman of the ward."

Besides these examiners, there were to be "women-searchers in every parish, such as are of honest reputation, and of the best sort as can be got in this kind; and these to be sworn to make due search and true report, to the utmost of their knowledge, whether the persons whose bodies they are appointed to search do die of the infection, or of what other diseases, as near as they can. No searcher, during the time of visitation, to be permitted to use any public work or employment, or keep a shop or stall, or be employed as a laundress, or in any other common employment whatsoever."

Surgeons were also to be appointed in each parish. "And forasmuch as the said chirurgeons are to be sequestered from all other cures, and kept only to this disease of the infection, it is ordered that every of the said chirurgeons shall have twelven-pence a body searched by them, to be paid out of the goods of the party searched, if he be able, or otherwise by the parish."

Lastly, there were to be nurses or keepers to attend the sick persons in their houses, and watchmen to prevent ingress into or egress from the infected houses. The order for the watchmen was as follows:—"That to every infected house there be appointed two watchmen, one for every day, and the other for the night; and that these watchmen have a special care that no person go in or out of such infected houses whereof they have the charge, upon pain of severe punishment. And the said watchmen to do such further offices as the sick house shall need and require; and if the watchman be sent upon any business, to lock up the house, and take the key with him; and the watchman by day to attend until ten o'clock at night, and the watchman by night until six in the morning."

The general regulations to be observed by householders were as follow:—"Orders concerning Infected Houses and Persons sick of the Plague.—Notice to be given of the sickness. The master of every house, as soon as any one in his house complaineth either of blotch, or purple, or swelling in any part of his body, or falleth otherwise dangerously sick without apparent cause of some other disease, shall give notice thereof to the examiner of health within two hours after the said sign shall appear.

"Sequestration of the sick.—As soon as any man shall be found by this examiner, chirurgeon, or searcher to be sick of the plague, he shall, the same night, be sequestered in the same house; and in case he be so sequestered, then, though they die not, the house wherein he sickened should be shut up for a month, after the use of the due preservatives taken by the rest.

"Airing the stuff.—For sequestration of the goods and stuff of the infection, their bedding, and apparel, and hangings of chambers must be well aired with fire, and such perfumes as are requisite, within the infected house, before they be taken again to use. This to be done by the appointment of the examiner.

"Shutting up of the house.—If any person shall visit any man known to be infected of the plague, or entereth willingly into any known infected house, being not allowed, the house wherein he inhabiteth shall be shut up for certain days by the examiner's direction.

"None to be removed out of infected houses.—That none be removed out of the house where he falleth sick of the infection into any other house in the city (except it be to the pest-house, or a tent, or into some such house which the owner of the said house holdeth in his own hands, and occupieth by his own servants), and so as security be given to the said parish whither such remove is made, that the attendance and charge about the said visited persons shall be observed and charged in all the particularities before expressed, without any cost of that parish to which any such remove shall happen to be made; and this remove to be done by night: and it shall be lawful to any person

that hath two houses, to remove either his sound or his infected people to his spare house at his choice, so as if he send away first his sound, he do not after send thither the sick, nor again unto the sick the sound; and that the same which he sendeth be for one week at the least shut up, and secluded from company, for fear of some infection at first not appearing.

“Burial of the dead.—That the burial of the dead by this visitation be at most convenient hours, always before sunrising, or after sunsetting, with the privity of the churchwardens or constable, and not otherwise; and that no neighbours nor friends be suffered to accompany the corpse to church, or to enter the house visited, upon pain of having his house shut up, or be imprisoned. And that no corpse dying of the infection shall be buried, or remain in any church in time of common prayer, sermon, or lecture; and that no children be suffered, at the time of burial of any corpse, in any church, churchyard, or burying-place, to come near the corpse, coffin, or grave; and that all graves shall be at least six feet deep. And further, all public assemblies at other burials are to be forborne during the continuance of this visitation.

“No infected stuff to be uttered.—That no clothes, stuff, bedding, or garments, be suffered to be carried or conveyed out of any infected houses; and that the criers and carriers abroad of bedding or old apparel to be sold or pawned be utterly prohibited and restrained; and no brokers of bedding or old apparel be permitted to make any public show, or hang forth on their stalls, shop-boards, or windows towards any street, lane, common-way, or passage, any old bedding or apparel to be sold, upon pain of imprisonment. And if any broker or other person shall buy any bedding, apparel, or other stuff out of any infected house, within two months after the infection hath been there, his house shall be shut up as infected, and so shall continue shut up twenty days at the least.

“Every visited house to be marked.—That every house visited be marked with a red cross, of a foot long, in the middle of the door, evident to be seen, and with these usual printed words; that is to say, ‘Lord have mercy upon us!’ to be set close over the same cross, there to continue until lawful opening of the same house.

“Every visited house to be watched.—That the constables see every house shut up, and to be attended with watchmen, which may keep in, and minister necessaries to them at their own charges, if they be able, or at the common charge if they be unable. The shutting up to be for the space of four weeks after all be whole. That precise order be taken that the searchers, chirurgeons, keepers, and buriers are not to pass the streets without holding a red rod or wand of three feet in length in their hands, open and evident to be seen; and are not to go into any other house than into their own, or into that whereunto they

are directed or sent for, but to forbear and abstain from company, especially when they have been lately used in any such business or attendance.

“Inmates.—That where several inmates are in one and the same house, and any person in that house happens to be infected, no other person or family of such house shall be suffered to remove him or themselves without a certificate from the examiners of the health of that parish; or in default thereof, the house whither she or they remove shall be shut up, as is in case of visitation.

“Hackney-coaches.—That care be taken of hackney-coachmen, that they may not, as some of them have been observed to do, after carrying of infected persons to the pest-house and other places, be admitted to common use till their coaches be well-aired, and have stood unemployed by the space of five or six days after such service.

“For the better execution of these orders, and such other rules and directions as upon further consideration shall be found needful, it was ordered and enjoined that the aldermen, deputies, and common-councilmen should meet together weekly, once, twice, thrice, or oftener, as cause should require, at some one general place accustomed in their respective wards, being clear from infection of the plague, to consult how the said orders may be put in execution.”

These orders extended of course only to that part of London called the City, which was under the jurisdiction of the lord mayor and aldermen; similar precautions, however, were put in force by the authorities in the other parts of the metropolis.

From the date of the publication of these orders, all the houses in which any one was ill of the plague were shut up and watched. How fearful to have walked along the deserted streets, seeing at every few paces a door boarded up, with a huge red cross painted on it, and the awful words, “Lord have mercy on us!” written beneath. But to gain an idea of these horrors, we must return to Defoe. “The shutting up of houses,” he says, “was at first counted a very cruel and unchristian method, and the poor people so confined made bitter lamentations; complaints of the severity of it were also daily brought to my lord mayor, of houses causelessly, and some maliciously shut up. I cannot say, but upon inquiry, many that complained so loudly were found in a condition to be continued; and others again, inspection being made upon the sick person, and the sickness not appearing infectious; or if uncertain, yet, on his being content to be carried to the pest-house, was released.”

The precautions adopted to keep the infected in their houses in many cases failed; for they got out, by the connivance of neighbours, through gardens or courts in the rear of the dwellings. Many who thus escaped were driven to dreadful exigencies and extremities, and perished in the streets or fields for

mere want, or dropped down by the raging violence of the fever upon them. Others wandered into the country, and went forward any way as their desperation guided them, not knowing whither they went or would go, till, faint and tired, and not getting any relief—the houses and villages on the road refusing to admit them to lodge, whether infected or not—they have perished by the roadside, or gotten into barns and died there, none daring to come to them, or relieve them, though perhaps not infected, for nobody would believe them.

“To come back to the case of families infected and shut up in their houses. The misery of those families is not to be expressed; and it was generally in such houses that we heard the most dismal shrieks and outcries of the poor people, terrified, and even frightened to death, by the sight of the condition of their dearest relations, and by the terror of being imprisoned as they were.

“As for myself, I went all the first part of the time freely about the streets, though not so freely as to run myself into apparent danger, except when they dug the great pit in the churchyard of our parish of Aldgate. A terrible pit it was, and I could not resist my curiosity to go and see it. As near as I may judge, it was about forty feet in length, and about fifteen or sixteen feet broad, and, at the time I first looked at it, about nine feet deep; but it was said they dug it near twenty feet deep afterwards in one part of it, till they could go no deeper for the water, for they had, it seems, dug several large pits before this; for though the plague was long a-coming to our parish, yet when it did come, there was no parish in or about London where it raged with such violence as in the two parishes of Aldgate and Whitechapel.

“I say they had dug several pits in another ground when the distemper began to spread in our parish, and especially when the dead-carts began to go about, which was not in our parish till the beginning of August. Into these pits they had put perhaps fifty or sixty bodies each; then they made larger holes, wherein they buried all that the cart brought in a week, which, by the middle to the end of August, came to from two hundred to four hundred a-week; and they could not well dig them larger, because of the order of the magistrates confining them to leave no bodies within six feet of the surface; and the water coming on at about seventeen or eighteen feet, they could not well, I say, put more in one pit; but now, at the beginning of September—the plague raging in a dreadful manner, and the number of burials in our parish increasing to more than was ever buried in any parish about London of no larger extent—they ordered this dreadful gulf to be dug; for such it was, rather than a pit.

“They had supposed this pit would have supplied them for a month or more when they dug it; and some blamed the churchwardens for suffering such a frightful thing, telling them that

they were making preparations to bury the whole parish, and the like. But time made it appear the churchwardens knew the condition of the parish better than they did ; for the pit being finished on the 4th of September, I think they began to bury in it on the 6th, and by the 20th, which was just two weeks, they had thrown into it 1114 bodies, when they were obliged to fill it up, the bodies being then come to lie within six feet of the surface. I doubt not but there may be some ancient persons alive in the parish who can justify the fact of this, and are able to show even in what place of the churchyard the pit lay better than I can. The mark of it also was many years to be seen in the churchyard on the surface, lying in length parallel with the passage which goes by the west wall of the churchyard, out of Houndsditch, and turns east again into Whitechapel, coming out near the Three Nuns Inn.

“It was about the 10th of September that my curiosity led, or rather drove me, to go and see this pit again, when there had been near 400 people buried in it ; and I was not content to see it in the daytime, as I had done before, for then there would have been nothing to have been seen but the loose earth, for all the bodies that were thrown in were immediately covered with earth by those they called the buriers, which at other times were called bearers, but I resolved to go in the night, and see some of them thrown in.

“There was a strict order to prevent people coming to those pits, and that was only to prevent infection ; but after some time that order was more necessary, for people that were infected, and near their end, and delirious also, would run to those pits, wrapt in blankets or rugs, and throw themselves in, and, as they said, bury themselves. I cannot say that the officers suffered any willingly to lie there ; but I have heard that, in a great pit in Finsbury, in the parish of Cripplegate—it lying open then to the fields, for it was not then walled about—many came and threw themselves in, and expired there, before they threw any earth upon them ; and that, when they came to bury others, and found them there, they were quite dead, though not cold.

“This may serve a little to describe the dreadful condition of that day, though it is impossible to say anything that is able to give a true idea of it to those who did not see it, other than this, that it was indeed very dreadful, and such as no tongue can express.

“I got admittance into the churchyard by being acquainted with the sexton who attended, who, though he did not refuse me at all, yet earnestly persuaded me not to go, telling me very seriously, for he was a good religious and sensible man, that it was indeed their business and duty to venture, and to run all hazards, and that in it they might hope to be preserved ; but that I had no apparent call to it but my own curiosity, which, he said, he believed I would not pretend was sufficient to justify my running

that hazard. I told him I had been pressed in my mind to go, and that, perhaps, it might be an instructing sight that might not be without its uses. 'Nay,' says the good man, 'if you will venture upon that score, 'name of God go in; for depend upon it, it will be a sermon to you, it may be the best that ever you heard in your life. It is a speaking sight,' says he, 'and has a voice with it, and a loud one, to call us all to repentance;' and with that he opened the door, and said, 'Go, if you will.'

"His discourse had shocked my resolution a little, and I stood wavering for a good while; but just at that interval I saw two links come over from the end of the Minories, and heard the bellman, and then appeared a dead-cart, as they called it, coming over the streets; so I could no longer resist my desire of seeing it, and went in. There was nobody, as I could perceive, at first in the churchyard, or going into it, but the buriers and the fellow that drove the cart, or rather led the horse and cart; but when they came up to the pit, they saw a man go to and again, muffled up in a brown cloak, and making motions with his hands under his cloak, as if he was in great agony; and the buriers immediately gathered about him, supposing he was one of those poor delirious or desperate creatures that used to pretend, as I have said, to bury themselves. He said nothing as he walked about, but two or three times groaned very deeply and loud, and sighed as if he would break his heart.

"When the buriers came up to him, they soon found he was neither a person infected and desperate, as I have observed above, nor a person distempered in mind, but one oppressed with a dreadful weight of grief indeed, having his wife and several of his children all in the cart that was just come in with him, and he followed in an agony and excess of sorrow. He mourned heartily, as it was easy to see, but with a kind of masculine grief that could not give itself vent by tears; and calmly desiring the buriers to let him alone, 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 promiscuously, which was a surprise to him, for he at least expected they would have been decently laid in, though, indeed, he was afterwards convinced that was impracticable; I say no sooner did he see the sight, but he cried out aloud, unable to contain himself. I could not hear what he said, but he went backward two or three steps, and fell down in a swoon. The buriers ran to him and took him up, and in a little while he came to himself, and they led him away to the Pie Tavern, over against the end of Houndsditch, where it seems the man was known, and where they took care of him.

"As the plague increased, there was but one shift that some families had, and that not a few, when their houses happened to be infected; and that was this: the families who, in the first

breaking out of the distemper, fled away into the country, and had retreats among their friends, generally found some one or other of their neighbours or relations to commit the charge of those houses to, for the safety of the goods, and the like. Some houses were indeed entirely locked up, the doors padlocked, the windows and doors having deal-boards nailed over them, and only the inspection of them committed to the ordinary watchmen and parish officers; but these were but few. It was thought that there were not less than 1000 houses forsaken of the inhabitants in the city and suburbs, including what was in the out-parishes, and in Surrey, or the side of the water they called Southwark. This was besides the numbers of lodgers, and of particular persons who were fled out of their families, so that in all it was computed that about 200,000 people were fled and gone in all.

“For my own part, I had in my family only an ancient woman that managed the house, a maid-servant, two apprentices, and myself; and the plague beginning to increase about us, I had many sad thoughts about what course I should take, and how I should act. The many dismal objects which happened everywhere as I went about the streets, had filled my mind with a great deal of horror, for fear of the distemper itself, which was indeed very horrible in itself, and in some more than others: the swellings, which were generally in the neck or groin, when they grew hard, and would not break, grew so painful, that it was equal to the most exquisite torture; and some, not able to bear the torment, threw themselves out at windows, or shot themselves, or otherwise made themselves away; and I saw several dismal objects of that kind: others, unable to contain themselves, vented their pain by incessant roarings; and such loud and lamentable cries were to be heard, as we walked along the streets, that would pierce the very heart to think of, especially when it was to be considered that the same dreadful scourge might be expected every moment to seize upon ourselves.

“Terrified by those frightful objects, I would retire home sometimes, and resolve to go out no more; and perhaps I would keep these resolutions for three or four days, which time I spent in the most serious thankfulness for my preservation, and the preservation of my family, and the constant confession of my sins, giving myself up to God every day, and applying to him with fasting, and humiliation, and meditation; such intervals as I had, I employed in reading books, and in writing down my memorandums of what occurred to me every day.

“I had a very good friend, a physician, whose name was Heath, whom I frequently visited during this dismal time, and to whose advice I was very much obliged for many things. Dr Heath coming to visit me, and finding that I ventured so often out in the streets, earnestly persuaded me to lock myself up, and my family, and not to suffer any of us to go out of doors; to

Keep all our windows fast, shutters and curtains close, and never to open them; but first to make a very strong smoke in the room, where the window or door was to be opened, with rosin and pitch, brimstone and gunpowder, and the like: and we did this for some time; but as I had not laid in a store of provision for such a retreat, it was impossible that we could keep within doors entirely. However, I attempted, though it was so very late, to do something towards it; and first, as I had convenience both for brewing and baking, I went and bought two sacks of meal, and for several weeks, having an oven, we baked all our own bread; also I bought malt, and brewed as much beer as all the casks I had would hold, and which seemed enough to serve my house for five or six weeks; also I laid in a quantity of salt butter and Cheshire cheese; but I had no flesh-meat, and the plague raged so violently among the butchers and slaughter-houses on the other side of our street, where they are known to dwell in great numbers, that it was not advisable so much as to go over the street among them.

“It is true people used all possible precaution; when any one bought a joint of meat in the market, they would not take it out of the butcher’s hand, but took it off the hooks themselves. On the other hand, the butcher would not touch the money, but have it put into a pot full of vinegar, which he kept for that purpose. The buyer always carried small money, to make up any odd sum, that they might take no change. They carried bottles for scents and perfumes in their hands, and all the means that could be used were employed; but then the poor could not do even these things, and they went at all hazards. Innumerable dismal stories we heard every day on this very account. Sometimes a man or woman dropped down dead in the very markets; for many people that had the plague upon them knew nothing of it till the inward gangrene had affected their vitals, and they died in a few moments; this caused that many died frequently in that manner in the street suddenly, without any warning; others perhaps had time to go to the next bulk or stall, or to any door or porch, and just sit down and die. These objects were so frequent in the streets, that when the plague came to be very raging on one side, there was scarcely any passing by the streets, but that several dead bodies would be lying here and there upon the ground: on the other hand, it is observable that though at first the people would stop as they went along, and call to the neighbours to come out on such an occasion, yet afterwards no notice was taken of them; but that if at any time we found a corpse lying, go across the way, and not come near it; or if in a narrow lane or passage, go back again, and seek some other way to go on the business we were upon; and in these cases the corpse was always left till the officers had notice to come and take it away, or till night, when the bearers attending the dead-cart would take it up and carry it away.”

THE PLAGUE AT ITS HEIGHT—AUGUST AND SEPTEMBER 1665.

During the month of July the plague had been fearfully increasing. The deaths by plague for the week ending the 4th of July had been, as we have mentioned, 470; the deaths, however, for the week ending the 1st of August were reported at 2010; and this, as usual, was far below the real number.

“I had,” continues Defoe, “taken my friend the physician’s advice, and locked myself and my family up, and resolved to suffer the hardship of living a few months without flesh-meat, rather than to purchase it at the hazard of our lives.

“But though I confined my family, I could not prevail upon my unsatisfied curiosity to stay within entirely myself; and though I generally came frightened and terrified home, yet I could not restrain; only that, indeed, I did not do it so frequently as at first.

“In these walks I had many dismal scenes before my eyes, as, particularly, of persons falling dead in the streets, terrible shrieks and screechings of women, who, in their agonies, would throw open their chamber windows, and cry out in a dismal surprising manner. It is impossible to describe the variety of postures in which the passions of the poor people would express themselves.

“Passing through Token House-yard, in Lothbury, of a sudden a casement violently opened just over my head, and a woman gave three frightful screeches, and then cried, ‘Oh death, death, death!’ in a most inimitable tone, and which struck me with horror, and a chilliness in my very blood. There was nobody to be seen in the whole street, neither did any other window open, for people had no curiosity now in any case, nor could anybody help one another; so I went on to pass into Bell-alley.

“Just in Bell-alley, on the right hand of the passage, there was a more terrible cry than that, though it was not so directed out at the window; but the whole family were in a terrible fright, and I could hear women and children run screaming about the rooms like distracted, when a garret-window opened, and somebody from a window on the other side the alley called and asked ‘What is the matter?’ Upon which, from the first window, it was answered, ‘My old master has hanged himself!’

“It is scarcely credible what dreadful cases happened in particular families every day. People, in the rage of the distemper, or in the torment of their swellings, which was indeed intolerable, running out of their own government, raving and distracted, and oftentimes laying violent hands upon themselves, throwing themselves out at their windows, shooting themselves, &c. Mothers murdering their own children in their lunacy; some dying of mere grief, as a passion; some of mere fright and

surprise, without any infection at all; others frightened into idiotism and foolish distractions; some into despair and lunacy; others into melancholy madness.

“The pain of the swelling was in particular very violent, and to some intolerable; the physicians and surgeons may be said to have tortured many poor creatures even to death. The swellings in some grew hard, and they applied violent drawing-plasters or poultices to break them; and if these did not do, they cut and scarified them in a terrible manner. In some, those swellings were made hard, partly by the force of the distemper, and partly by their being too violently drawn; and were so hard, that no instrument could cut them; and then they burnt them with caustics, so that many died raving mad with the torment, and some in the very operation. In these distresses, some, for want of help to hold them down in their beds, or to look to them, laid hands upon themselves, as already stated; some broke out into the streets, perhaps naked, and would run directly down to the river, if they were not stopped by the watchmen, or other officers, and plunge themselves into the water wherever they found it.

“We had at this time a great many frightful stories told us of nurses and watchmen who looked after the dying people; that is to say, hired nurses, who attended infected people, using them barbarously, starving them, smothering them, or by other wicked means hastening their end; that is to say, murdering of them. And watchmen being set to guard houses that were shut up, when there has been but one person left, and perhaps that one lying sick, that they have broken in and murdered that body, and immediately throwing it out into the dead-cart; and so it has gone scarcely cold to the grave.

“I cannot say but that some such murders were committed, and I think two were sent to prison for it, but died before they could be tried; and I have heard that three others, at several times, were executed for murders of that kind. But I must say I believe nothing of its being so common a crime as some have since been pleased to say.

“The robberies extended chiefly to wearing-clothes, linen, and what rings or money they could come at, when the person died who was under their care, but not to a general plunder of the houses; and I could give you an account of one of these nurses, who, several years after, being on her deathbed, confessed, with the utmost horror, the robberies she had committed at the time of her being a nurse, and by which she had enriched herself to a great degree; but as for murders, I do not find that there was ever any proof of the facts, in the manner as it has been reported, except as above.

“A neighbour and acquaintance of mine having some money owing to him from a shopkeeper in Whitecross Street, or thereabouts, sent his apprentice, a youth about eighteen years of age, to endeavour to get the money. He came to the door, and find-

ing it shut, knocked pretty hard, and, as he thought, heard somebody answer within, but was not sure, so he waited; and after some stay knocked again; and then a third time, when he heard somebody coming down stairs. At length the man of the house came to the door; he had on his breeches or drawers, and a yellow flannel waistcoat, no stockings, a pair of slipt shoes, a white cap on his head, and, as the young man said, death in his face. When he opened the door, says he, 'What do you disturb me thus for?' The boy, though a little surprised, replied, 'I come from such-a-one, and my master sent me for the money, which he says you know of.' 'Very well, child,' returns the living ghost; 'call as you go by at Cripple-gate church, and bid them ring the bell;' and with these words shut the door again, and went up and died the same day, nay, perhaps the same hour.

"This puts me in mind of John Hayward, who was at that time under-sexton of the parish of St Stephen, Coleman Street; by under-sexton was understood at that time gravedigger and bearer of the dead. This man carried, or assisted to carry, all the dead to their graves which were buried in that large parish, and who were carried in form; and after that form of burying was stopped, went with the dead-cart and the bell to fetch the dead bodies from the houses where they lay, and fetched many of them out of the chambers and houses; for the parish was, and is still remarkable, particularly above all the parishes in London, for a great number of alleys and thoroughfares, very long, into which no carts could come, and where they were obliged to go and fetch the bodies a very long way, which alleys now remain to witness it; such as White's-alley, Cross-Key-court, Swan-alley, Bell-alley, White Horse-alley, and many more. Here they went with a kind of handbarrow, and laid the dead bodies on, and carried them out to the carts; which work he performed, and never had the distemper at all, but lived about twenty years after it, and was sexton of the parish to the time of his death. His wife, at the same time, was a nurse to infected people, and tended many that died in the parish, being for her honesty recommended by the parish officers; yet she was never infected. He never used any preservative against the infection other than holding garlic and rue in his mouth, and smoking tobacco; this I also had from his own mouth; and his wife's remedy was washing her head in vinegar, and sprinkling her head-clothes so with vinegar as to keep them always moist; and if the smell of any of those she waited on was more than ordinary offensive, she snuffed vinegar up her nose, and sprinkled vinegar upon her head-clothes, and held a handkerchief, wetted with vinegar, to her mouth.

"It was under this John Hayward's care, and within his bounds, that the story of the piper, with which people have made themselves so merry, happened, and he assured me that it was

true. It is said that it was a blind piper; but, as John told me, the fellow was not blind, but an ignorant weak poor man, and usually went his rounds about ten o'clock at night, and went piping along from door to door; and the people usually took him in at public-houses where they knew him, and would give him drink and victuals, and sometimes farthings; and he in return would pipe and sing, and talk simply, which diverted the people; and thus he lived. It was but a very bad time for this diversion while things were as I have told; yet the poor fellow went about as usual, but was almost starved; and when anybody asked him how he did, he would answer, 'The dead-cart had not taken him yet, but that they had promised to call for him next week.'

"It happened one night that this poor fellow, whether somebody had given him too much drink or not, John Hayward said he had not drink in his house, but that they had given him a little more victuals than ordinary at a public-house in Coleman Street; and the poor fellow having not usually had a bellyful, or perhaps not a good while, was laid all along upon the top of a bulk or stall, and fast asleep, at a door in the street near London Wall, towards Cripplegate, and that upon the same bulk or stall, the people of some house, in the alley of which the house was a corner, hearing a bell, which they always rung before the cart came, had laid a body really dead of the plague just by him, thinking too that this poor fellow had been a dead body as the other was, and laid there by some of the neighbours.

"Accordingly, when John Hayward with his bell and the cart came along, finding two dead bodies lie upon the stall, they took them up with the instrument they used, and threw them into the cart; and all this while the piper slept soundly. From hence they passed along, and took in other dead bodies, till, as honest John Hayward told me, they almost buried him alive in the cart; yet all this while he slept soundly. At length the cart came to the place where the bodies were to be thrown into the ground, which, as I do remember, was at Mount-mill; and as the cart usually stopped some time before they were ready to shoot out the melancholy load they had in it, as soon as the cart stopped, the fellow awaked, and struggled a little to get his head out from among the dead bodies, when, raising himself up in the cart, he called out, 'Hey, where am I?' This frightened the fellow that attended about the work; but, after some pause, John Hayward, recovering himself, said, 'Lord bless us, there's somebody in the cart not quite dead!' So another called to him, and said, 'Who are you?' The fellow answered, 'I am the poor piper: where am I?' 'Where are you!' says Hayward. 'Why, you are in the dead-cart, and we are going to bury you.' 'But I aint dead though, am I?' says the piper; which made them laugh a little, though, as John said, they were heartily frightened at first: so they helped the poor fellow down, and he went about his business."

The number of weekly deaths had fearfully increased during the month of August. In the week ending the 1st of August, as we have already mentioned, the deaths from plague were 2010; the following week they had risen to 2817; the week after they were 3880; the week ending the 22d of August they were 4237; and the last week of August they were no less than 6102; and all these numbers were known to be under the reality. The state of the town at the end of August cannot be described: the doors and windows of houses boarded up, some because the owners had left town, others because the plague was within—the latter all having the conspicuous mark of the red cross upon them; the grass growing in the once crowded streets; no bustle of buying and selling as formerly; the country people afraid to venture into town, and selling their produce at its outskirts to persons appointed by the magistrates to receive it. All silent, dismal, and death-like. One item in the universal misery to which we have not yet alluded, was the distress caused by the cessation of industry. Defoe thus specifies the classes who suffered most in this respect:—"1st, All master workmen in manufactures, especially such as belonged to ornament and the less necessary parts of the people's dress, clothes, and furniture for houses; such as ribbon-weavers and other weavers, gold and silver lace-makers, and gold and silver wire-drawers, seamstresses, milliners, shoemakers, hat-makers, and glove-makers; 2d, all the extraordinary officers of the customs, likewise the watermen, carmen, porters, and all the poor whose labour depended upon the merchants; 3d, all the tradesmen usually employed in building or repairing of houses, such as bricklayers, masons, carpenters, joiners, plasterers, painters, glaziers, smiths, plumbers, and all the labourers depending on such; 4th, as navigation was at a stop, our ships neither coming in nor going out as before, so the seamen were all out of employment, and many of them in the last and lowest degree of distress; and with the seamen were all the several tradesmen and workmen belonging to, and depending upon, the building and fitting out of ships, such as ship-carpenters, calkers, ropemakers, dry coopers, sailmakers, anchor-smiths and other smiths, block-makers, carvers, gunsmiths, ship-chandlers, ship-carvers, and the like; 5th, all families retrenched their living as much as possible, as well those that fled as those that stayed; so that an innumerable multitude of footmen, serving-men, shopkeepers, journeymen, merchants' book-keepers, and such sort of people, and especially poor maid-servants, were turned off, and left friendless and helpless without employment, and without habitation; and this was really a dismal article. The women and servants," he adds, "who were turned off from their places, were employed as nurses to attend the sick in all places; and this took off a very great number of them."

The mortality reached its height in the month of September. In the beginning of that month the citizens were in a frenzy;

they thought God had resolved to make an end of the city. Whole families, and indeed whole streets of families, were swept away together; insomuch that it was frequent for neighbours to call to the bellman to go to such and such houses and carry out the people, for that they were all dead.

“As the desolation was greater during those terrible times, so the amazement of the people increased, and a thousand unaccountable things they would do in the violence of their fright, as others did the same in the agonies of their distemper; and this part was very affecting. Some went roaring, and crying, and wringing their hands along the streets; some would go praying and lifting up their hands to heaven, calling upon God for mercy. I cannot say, indeed, whether this was not in their distraction; but, be it so, it was still an indication of a more serious mind, when they had the use of their senses, and was much better, even as it was, than the frightful yellings and cryings that every day, and especially in the evenings, were heard in some streets. I suppose the world has heard of the famous Solomon Eagle, an enthusiast; he, though not infected at all, but in his head, went about denouncing of judgment upon the city in a frightful manner, sometimes quite naked, and with a pan of burning charcoal on his head. What he said or pretended, indeed, I could not learn.

“There were some people, however, who, notwithstanding the danger, did not omit publicly to attend the worship of God, even in the most dangerous times. And though it is true that a great many of the clergy did shut up their churches and fled, as other people did, for the safety of their lives, yet all did not do so; some ventured to officiate, and to keep up the assemblies of the people by constant prayers, and sometimes sermons or brief exhortations to repentance and reformation; and this as long as they would hear them. And dissenters did the like also, and even in the very churches where the parish ministers were either dead or fled; nor was there any room for making any difference at such a time as this was.

“It pleased God that I was still spared, and very hearty and sound in health, but very impatient of being pent up within doors without air, as I had been for fourteen days or thereabouts; and I could not restrain myself, but I would go and carry a letter for my brother to the post-house; then it was, indeed, that I observed a profound silence in the streets. When I came to the post-house, as I went to put in my letter, I saw a man stand in one corner of the yard, and talking to another at a window, and a third had opened a door belonging to the office. In the middle of the yard lay a small leathern purse, with two keys hanging at it, with money in it, but nobody would meddle with it. I asked how long it had lain there; the man at the window said it had lain almost an hour, but they had not meddled with it, because they did not know but the person who dropped it

might come back to look for it. I had no such need of money, nor was the sum so big that I had any inclination to meddle with it, or to get the money at the hazard it might be attended with; so I seemed to go away, when the man who had opened the door said he would take it up, but so, that if the right owner came for it, he should be sure to have it. So he went in, and fetched a pail of water, and set it down hard by the purse, then went again and fetched some gunpowder, and cast a good deal of powder upon the purse, and then made a train from that which he had thrown loose upon the purse—the train reached about two yards—after this he goes in a third time, and fetches out a pair of tongs, red-hot, and which he had prepared, I suppose, on purpose, and first setting fire to the train of powder, which singed the purse, and also smoked the air sufficiently. But he was not content with that; but he then takes up the purse with the tongs, holding it so long till the tongs burned through the purse, and then he shook the money out into the pail of water; so he carried it in. The money, as I remember, was about thirteen shillings, and some smooth groats and brass farthings.

“Much about the same time I walked out into the fields towards Bow, for I had a great mind to see how things were managed in the river, and among the ships; and as I had some concern in shipping, I had a notion that it had been one of the best ways of securing one’s self from the infection to have retired into a ship; and musing how to satisfy my curiosity in that point, I turned away over the fields from Bow to Bromley, and down to Blackwall, to the stairs that are there for landing or taking water. Here I saw a poor man walking on the bank, or sea-wall, as they call it, by himself. I walked a while also about, seeing the houses all shut up. At last I fell into some talk, at a distance, with this poor man. First I asked him how people did thereabouts. ‘Alas! sir,’ says he, ‘almost desolate—all dead or sick. Here are very few families in this part, or in that village, pointing at Poplar, where half of them are not dead already, and the rest sick.’ Then he, pointing to one house, ‘There they are all dead,’ said he, ‘and the house stands open; nobody dares go into it. A poor thief,’ says he, ‘ventured in to steal something, but he paid dear for his theft, for he was carried to the churchyard too last night.’ Then he pointed to several other houses. ‘There,’ says he, ‘they are all dead, the man and his wife, and five children. There they are shut up; you see a watchman at the door;’ and so of other houses. ‘Why,’ says I, ‘what do you here all alone?’ ‘Why,’ says he, ‘I am a poor desolate man; it hath pleased God I am not yet visited, though my family is, and one of my children dead.’ ‘How do you mean, then,’ said I, ‘that you are not visited?’ ‘Why,’ says he, ‘that is my house,’ pointing to a very little low boarded house, ‘and there my poor wife and two children live, if they may be said to live; for my wife and one of the children are visited, but

I do not come at them.' And with that word I saw the tears run very plentifully down his face; and so they did down mine too, I am sure.

'But,' said I, 'why do you not come at them? How can you abandon your own flesh and blood?' 'Oh, sir,' says he, 'the Lord forbid; I do not abandon them; I work for them as much as I am able; and, blessed be the Lord, I keep them from want.' And with that I observed he lifted up his eyes to Heaven, with a countenance that presently told me I had met with a man that was no hypocrite, but a serious, religious, good man; and his ejaculation was an expression of thankfulness that, in such a condition as he was in, he should be able to say his family did not want. 'Well,' says I, 'honest man, that is a great mercy, as things go now with the poor. But how do you live then, and how are you kept from the dreadful calamity that is now upon us all?' 'Why, sir,' says he, 'I am a waterman, and there is my boat, and the boat serves me for a house. I work in it during the day, and I sleep in it at night; and what I get I lay it down upon that stone,' showing me a broad stone on the other side of the street, a good way from his house; 'and then,' says he, 'I halloo and call to them till I make them hear, and they come and fetch it.'

'Well, friend,' says I, 'but how can you get money as a waterman? Does anybody go by water these times?' 'Yes, sir,' says he, 'in the way I am employed there does. Do you see there five ships lie at anchor?' pointing down the river a good way below the town; 'and do you see,' says he, 'eight or ten ships lie at the chain there, and at anchor yonder?' pointing above the town. 'All those ships have families on board, of their merchants and owners, and such like, who have locked themselves up, and live on board, close shut in, for fear of the infection; and I tend on them, to fetch things for them, carry letters, and do what is absolutely necessary, that they may not be obliged to come on shore; and every night I fasten my boat on board one of the ships' boats, and there I sleep by myself; and, blessed be God, I am preserved hitherto.'

'Well, friend,' said I, 'but will they let you come on board after you have been on shore here, when this has been such a terrible place, and so infected as it is?'

'Why, as to that,' said he, 'I very seldom go up the ship-side, but deliver what I bring to their boat, or lie by the side, and they hoist it on board; if I did, I think they are in no danger from me, for I never go into any house on shore, or touch anybody, no, not of my own family; but I fetch provisions for them.'

'Nay,' says I, 'but that may be worse, for you must have those provisions of somebody or other; and since all this part of the town is so infected, it is dangerous so much as to speak with anybody, for the village is, as it were, the beginning of London, though it be at some distance from it.'

‘That is true,’ added he; ‘but you do not understand me right. I do not buy provisions for them here; I row up to Greenwich, and buy fresh meat there, and sometimes I row down the river to Woolwich, and buy there; then I go to single farm-houses on the Kentish side, where I am known, and buy fowls, and eggs, and butter, and bring to the ships, as they direct me, sometimes one, sometimes the other. I seldom come on shore here; and I came only now to call my wife, and hear how my little family do, and give them a little money which I received last night.’

‘Poor man!’ said I, ‘and how much hast thou got for them?’

‘I have got four shillings,’ said he, ‘which is a great sum as things go now with poor men; but they have given me a bag of bread too, and a salt fish, and some flesh; so all helps out.’

‘Well,’ said I, ‘and have you given it to them yet?’

‘No,’ said he; ‘but I have called, and my wife has answered that she cannot come out yet, but in half an hour she hopes to come, and I am waiting for her. Poor woman!’ says he, ‘she is brought sadly down; she has had a swelling, and it is broke, and I hope she will recover, but I fear the child will die; but it is the Lord!’ Here he stopped, and wept very much.

‘Well, honest friend,’ said I, ‘thou hast a sure comforter, if thou hast brought thyself to be resigned to the will of God; he is dealing with us all in judgment.’

‘Oh, sir,’ says he, ‘it is infinite mercy if any of us are spared; and who am I to repine?’

‘Sayest thou so,’ said I; ‘and how much less is my faith than thine!’ And here my heart smote me, suggesting how much better this poor man’s foundation was on which he stayed in the danger than mine; that he had nowhere to fly; that he had a family to bind him to attendance, which I had not; and mine was mere presumption, his a true dependence and a courage resting on God; and yet, that he used all possible caution for his safety.

“I turned a little way from the man while these thoughts engaged me; for indeed I could no more refrain from tears than he.

“At length, after some further talk, the poor woman opened the door, and called ‘Robert, Robert;’ he answered, and bade her stay a few moments, and he would come; so he ran down the common stairs to his boat and fetched up a sack, in which was the provisions he had brought from the ships, and when he returned, he hallooed again, then he went to the great stone which he showed me, and emptied the sack, and laid all out, everything by themselves, and then retired; and his wife came with a little boy to fetch them away, and he called, and said such a captain had sent such a thing, and such a captain such a thing; and at the end added, ‘God has sent all, give thanks to him.’ When

the poor woman had taken up all, she was so weak she could not carry it at once in, though the weight was not much either; so she left the biscuit, which was in a small bag, and left a little boy to watch it till she came again.

‘Well, but,’ said I to him, ‘did you leave her the four shillings too, which you said was your week’s pay?’

‘Yes, yes,’ says he; ‘you shall hear her own it.’ So he calls again, ‘Rachel, Rachel,’ which it seems was her name, ‘did you take up the money?’ ‘Yes,’ said she. ‘How much was it?’ said he. ‘Four shillings and a groat,’ said she. ‘Well, well,’ says he, ‘the Lord keep you all;’ and so he turned to go away.

“As I could not refrain contributing tears to this man’s story, so neither could I refrain my charity for his assistance; so I called him, ‘Hark thee, friend,’ said I; ‘come hither, for I believe thou art in health, that I may venture thee;’ so I pulled out my hand, which was in my pocket before. ‘Here,’ says I, ‘go and call thy Rachel once more, and give her a little more comfort from me. God will never forsake a family that trust in him as thou dost;’ so I gave him four other shillings, and bade him go lay them on the stone, and call his wife.

“I have not words to express the poor man’s thankfulness; neither could he express it himself, but by tears running down his face. He called his wife, and told her God had moved the heart of a stranger, upon hearing their condition, to give them all that money, and a great deal more such as that he said to her. The woman, too, made signs of the like thankfulness, as well to Heaven as to me, and joyfully picked it up; and I parted with no money all that year that I thought better bestowed.

“I then asked the poor man if the distemper had not reached to Greenwich. He said it had not till about a fortnight before, but that then he feared it had; but that it was only at that end of the town which lay south towards Deptford Bridge; that he went only to a butcher’s shop and a grocer’s, where he generally bought such things as they sent him for, but was very careful. I asked him then how it came to pass that those people who had so shut themselves up in the ships had not laid in sufficient stores of all things necessary? He said some of them had, but, on the other hand, some did not come on board till they were frightened into it, and till it was too dangerous for them to go to the proper people to lay in quantities of things; and that he waited on two ships, which he showed me, that had laid in little or nothing but biscuit, bread, and ship beer, and that he had bought everything else almost for them. I asked him if there were any more ships that had separated themselves as those had done? He told me yes; all the way up from the point, right against Greenwich, to within the shore of Limehouse and Redriff, all the ships that could have room to ride two and two in the middle of the stream; and that some of them had several families on board. I asked him if the distemper had not reached them?

He said he believed it had not, except two or three ships, whose people had not been so watchful to keep the seamen from going on shore as others had been; and he said it was a very fine sight to see how the ships lay up the pool.

“When he said he was going over to Greenwich as soon as the tide began to come in, I asked if he would let me go with him, and bring me back; for that I had a great mind to see how the ships were ranged, as he had told me. He told me if I would assure him, on the word of a Christian and of an honest man, that I had not the distemper, he would. I assured him that I had not; that it had pleased God to preserve me; that I lived in Whitechapel, but was too impatient of being so long within doors, and that I had ventured out so far for the refreshment of a little air, but that none in my house had so much as been touched with it.

‘Well, sir,’ says he, ‘as your charity has been moved to pity me and my poor family, sure you cannot have so little pity left as to put yourself into my boat if you were not sound in health, which would be nothing less than killing me and ruining my whole family.’ The poor man troubled me so much when he spoke of his family with such a sensible concern, and in such an affectionate manner, that I could not satisfy myself at first to go at all. I told him I would lay aside my curiosity rather than make him uneasy, though I was sure, and very thankful for it, that I had no more distemper upon me than the freshest man in the world. Well, he would not have me put it off neither, but, to let me see how confident he was that I was just to him, now importuned me to go; so, when the tide came up to his boat, I went in, and he carried me to Greenwich. While he bought the things which he had in charge to buy, I walked up to the top of the hill under which the town stands, and on the east side of the town, to get a prospect of the river; but it was a surprising sight to see the number of ships which lay in rows, two and two, and in some places two or three such lines in the breadth of the river, and this not only up quite to the town, between the houses which we call Ratcliff and Redriff, which they name the Pool, but even down the whole river, as far as the head of Long Reach, which is as far as the hills give us leave to see it.

“I cannot guess at the number of ships, but I think there must have been several hundred sail, and I could not but applaud the contrivance; for ten thousand people and more, who attended ship affairs, were certainly sheltered here from the violence of the contagion, and lived very safe and very easy.

“I returned to my own dwelling, very well satisfied with my day’s journey, and particularly with the poor man; also I rejoiced to see that such little sanctuaries were provided for so many families in a time of such desolation.”

The conduct of the magistrates during this awful season cannot be too much praised. In the first place, the lord mayor, Sir

John Lawrence, and the sheriffs, the court of aldermen, and a certain number of the common councilmen, or their deputies, came to a resolution, and published it, namely, "that they would not quit the city themselves, but that they would be always at hand for the preserving of good order in every place, and for doing justice on all occasions; as also for the distributing the public charity to the poor; and, in a word, for the doing the duty and discharging the trust reposed in them by the citizens to the utmost of their power."

In pursuance of these orders, the lord mayor, sheriffs, &c. held councils every day, more or less, for making such dispositions as they found needful for preserving the civil peace. Consulting with each other, and with some physicians, it appeared to the magistrates that the kindling of large fires in the streets might have some effect in purifying the air and abating the plague. Accordingly, on the 2d of September, a proclamation was issued by the lord mayor to this effect, "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; and this to be observed in all streets, courts, lanes, and alleys; and great care to be taken where the streets, courts, lanes, and alleys are narrow, that the fires may be made of a proportionable bigness, that so no damage may ensue to the houses."

The effects of these fires do not appear to have been very beneficial, if we may judge from the continued increase of the number of deaths. "We, the physicians," says Dr Hodges in his *Loimologia*, or Account of the Plague, "opposed the kindling of the fires with all our authority. But the magistrates, over-anxious for the health of the city, and preferring the authority and example of our great Hippocrates, notwithstanding our expostulations, caused fires everywhere to be lighted. Alas! the three days had scarcely elapsed, when the mourning heavens, as if weeping for the innumerable funerals, extinguished the flames with profuse showers. Whether through the suffocating effluvia of the coals, or of the dampness of the rainy atmosphere immediately following, that very night brought unheard-of destruction, for truly more than 4000 perished before the morning." The night of this dreadful mortality appears to have been that of the 3d or 4th of September; and the weekly return of deaths on the 5th of the month was 8252, of which 6988 were by the plague. According to Defoe, however, at least 10,000 died that week of the plague; and as many in each of the two following weeks. "The plague," he says, "now raged beyond all that I have expressed, and came even to such a height, that, in the extremity, they began to break into that excellent order

of which I have spoken so much in behalf of the magistrates; namely, that no dead bodies were seen in the streets, or burials in the day-time; for there was a necessity, in this extremity, to bear with its being otherwise for a little while. And it is here to be observed that, after the funerals became so many, people could not toll the bell, mourn, or weep, or wear black for one another as they did before; no, nor so much as make coffins for those that died.

“In our parish of Aldgate, the dead-carts were several times, as I have heard, found standing at the churchyard gate full of dead bodies, but neither bellman nor driver, nor any one else with it. Neither in these nor many other cases did they know what bodies they had in their cart; for sometimes they were let down with ropes out of balconies and out of windows, and sometimes the bearers brought them to the cart, sometimes other people; nor, as the men themselves said, did they trouble themselves to keep any account of the numbers.

“Here, also, I ought to leave a further remark, for the use of posterity, concerning the manner of people’s infecting one another; namely, that it was not the sick people only from whom the plague was immediately received, but from those who, though infected, were apparently well. When people began to be convinced that the infection was received in this surprising manner, they began to be exceedingly shy and jealous of every one that came near them. Once, in a public day, whether a Sabbath-day or not I do not remember, in Aldgate church, in a pew full of people, on a sudden one fancied she smelt an ill smell; immediately she fancies the plague was in the pew, whispers her notion or suspicion to the next, then rises and goes out of the pew; it immediately took with the next, and so with them all, and every one of them and of the two adjoining pews got up and went out of the church, nobody knowing what it was offended them, or from whom.

“This immediately filled everybody’s mouth with one preparation or other, such as the old women directed, and some perhaps as physicians directed, in order to prevent infection by the breath of others; insomuch that if we came to go into a church, when it was anything full of people, there would be such a mixture of smells at the entrance, that it was much more strong, though perhaps not so wholesome, than if you were going into an apothecary’s or druggist’s shop; in a word, the whole church was like a smelling-bottle. In one corner it was all perfumes, in another aromatics, balsamics, and a variety of drugs and herbs; in another salts and spirits, as every one was furnished for their own preservation; yet I observed that after people were possessed with the belief, or rather assurance, of the infection being thus carried on by persons apparently in health, the churches and meeting-houses were much thinner of people than at other times before that they used to be; for this is to be said of the people of

HISTORY OF THE PLAGUE IN LONDON.

London, that, during the whole time of the pestilence, the churches or meetings were never wholly shut up, nor did the people decline coming out to the public worship of God, except only in some parishes, when the violence of the distemper was more particularly in that parish at that time, and even then no longer than it continued to be so."

OCTOBER 1665—THE PLAGUE ABATES, AND GRADUALLY
DISAPPEARS.

The plague, as we have already stated, was at its height during the five weeks which elapsed between the 22d of August and the 26th of September. The following are the entries in the bills of mortality for this period :—

	Burials.	Deaths by Plague.
August 22 to August 29,	7496	6102
August 29 to September 5,	8252	6988
September 5 to September 12,	7690	6544
September 12 to September 19,	8297	7165
September 19 to September 26,	6460	5533
	<hr/>	<hr/>
	38,195	32,332

It will be observed from this table that there was a considerable decrease in the number of deaths for the week ending 26th September as compared with the four weeks preceding; and although the number was still enormously great, this symptom was eagerly grasped at by the citizens as perhaps indicating the abatement of the plague, and the next week's returns were looked for with extraordinary anxiety. What delight, what hope spread through the city when it was known that the return stood as follows :—

	Burials.	Deaths by Plague.
September 26 to October 3,	5720	4929

But we must leave Defoe to describe the gradual abatement, of which these diminished returns were the proof. "The last week in September," he says, "the plague being come to a crisis, its fury began to assuage. I remember my friend Dr Heath, coming to see me the week before, told me he was sure that the violence of it would assuage in a few days; but when I saw the weekly bill of that week, which was the highest of the whole year, being 8297 of all diseases, I upbraided him with it, and asked him what he had made his judgment from? His answer, however, was not so much to seek as I thought it would have been. 'Look you,' says he, 'by the number which are at this time sick and infected, there should have been 20,000 dead the last week instead of 8000, if the inveterate mortal contagion had been as it was two weeks ago; for then it ordinarily killed in two or three days, now not under eight or ten; and then not above one in five recovered, whereas I have observed that now

not above two in five miscarry; and, observe it from me, the next bill will decrease, and you will see many more people recover than used to do; for though a vast multitude are now everywhere infected, and as many every day fall sick, yet there will not so many die as there did, for the malignity of the distemper is abated;’ adding that he began now to hope, nay, more than hope, that the infection had passed its crisis, and was going off: and accordingly so it was; for the next week being, as I said, the last in September, the bill decreased almost 2000.

“It is true the plague was still at a frightful height, and the next bill was no less than 6460, and the next to that 5720; but still my friend’s observation was just, and it did appear the people did recover faster, and more in number, than they used to do. And indeed if it had not been so, what had been the condition of the city of London? for, according to my friend, there were not fewer than 60,000 people at that time infected, whereof, as above, 20,477 died, and near 40,000 recovered; whereas had it been as it was before, 50,000 of that number would very probably have died, if not more, and 50,000 more would have sickened; for, in a word, the whole mass of people began to sicken, and it looked as if none would escape.

“But this remark of my friend appeared more evident in a few weeks more; for the decrease went on, and another week in October it decreased 1843, so that the number dead of the plague was but 2665; and the next week it decreased 1413 more, and yet it was seen plainly that there was abundance of people sick; nay, more than ordinary, and many fell sick every day, but, as above, the malignity of the disease abated.”

The best idea of the rapidity of the progress of the city towards health will be obtained from the bills of mortality, which, continued from the last entry quoted, were as follows:—

	Burials.	Deaths by Plague.
October 3 to October 10,	5068	4327
October 10 to October 17,	3219	2665
October 17 to October 24,	1806	1421
October 24 to October 31,	1388	1031
October 31 to November 7,	1787	1414
November 7 to November 14,	1359	1050
November 14 to November 21,	905	652

from which period the numbers decreased regularly; till, on the week ending the 5th of December they stood thus—burials, 428; deaths from plague, 210.

Those who had left town now began to flock in again; the shops began to be opened; and the bustle of trade recommenced. “It is impossible,” says Defoe, “to express the change that appeared in the very countenances of the people that Thursday morning when the weekly bill came out. It might have been perceived in their countenances that a secret surprise and smile of joy sat on every-

body's face; they who would hardly go on the same side of the way with one another before, now shook each other by the hands in the streets. Where the streets were not too broad, they would open their windows and call from one house to another, and ask how they did, and if they had heard the good news that the plague was abated; some would return, when they said good news, and ask, 'What good news?' And when they answered that the plague was abated, and the bills decreased almost 2000, they would cry out, 'God be praised!' and would weep aloud for joy, telling them they had heard nothing of it; and such was the joy of the people, that it was, as it were, life to them from the grave. I could almost set down as many extravagant things done in the excess of their joy as of their grief, but that would be to lessen the value of it."

Counting from the 20th of December 1664, when it was first rumoured that the plague had broken out in Drury Lane, to the 19th of December 1665, when the plague had so far abated that the weekly deaths were about 250, the entire number of victims swept off by the pestilence in the city of London in these twelve months was, according to the official returns, 68,596; but according to the computation of Defoe and others, at least 100,000. In order to give as accurate a notion as possible of the symptoms, and its mode of attacking people, we may add, in conclusion, one or two particulars of an interesting kind, from a manuscript account of the plague preserved in the British Museum, and written by Mr William Boghurst, a medical practitioner in London during the fatal period.

"In the summer before the plague," he says, "there was such a multitude of flies, that they lined the insides of the houses; and if any threads or strings did hang down in any place, they were presently thick-set with flies, like ropes of onions; and swarms of ants covered the highways, that you might have taken up a handful at a time, both winged and creeping ants; and such a multitude of croaking frogs in ditches, that you might have heard them before you saw them. The plague was ushered in with seven months of dry weather and westerly winds. It fell first upon the highest grounds, as St Giles's and St Martin's, Westminster; but afterwards it gradually insinuated and crept down Holborn and the Strand, and then into the city; and at last to the east end of the suburbs; so that it was half a year at the west end before the east end and Stepney were affected. The disease spread not altogether by contagion at first, nor began only at one place, and spread farther and farther, as an eating and spreading sore doth all over the body; but fell upon several places of the city and suburbs like rain, even at the first. Almost all that caught the disease with fear died with tokens (spots on the body) in two or three days. About the beginning, most men got the disease with drinking, surfeiting, overheating themselves, and by disorderly living. Some died eight, ten, twelve, or

twenty days after they had been sick ; yet the greatest part died before five or six days. In the summer, about half of those who were taken sick died ; but towards winter, three parts in four lived. None died suddenly, as though struck with lightning or apoplexy. I saw none die under twenty or twenty-four hours.* Spots appeared not much till the middle of June, and carbuncles not till the latter end of July, and seized mostly on old people, choleric and melancholy people, and generally on dry and lean bodies. Children had none. If very hot weather followed a shower of rain, the disease increased. Many people, after a violent sweat, or taking a strong cordial, presently had the tokens come out, so that every nurse would say, 'Cochineal was a fine thing to bring out the tokens.' Authors speak of several kinds of plagues—some which took only children, others maids, others young people under thirty ; but this of ours took all sorts. Yet it fell not very thick upon old people till about the middle or slack of the disease. Old people that had the disease, many of them were not sick at all ; but they that were sick, almost all died. I had one patient fourscore and six years old. Though all sorts of people died very thick, both young and old, rich and poor, healthy and unhealthy, strong and weak, men and women, of all constitutions, of all tempers and complexions, of all professions and places, of all religions, of all conditions, good or bad—yet, as far as I could discern, more of the good people died than of the bad, more men than women, and more of dull complexions than of fair. Black men of thin and lean constitutions were heavy-laden with this disease, and died, all that I saw, in two or three days ; and most of them thick with black tokens. People of the best complexions and merry dispositions had least of the disease ; and, if they had it, fared best under it. This year in which the plague hath raged so much, no alteration nor change appeared in any element, vegetable or animal, besides the body of man. All other things kept their common integrity, and all sorts of fruit, all roots, flowers, and medicinal simples were as plentiful, large, fair, and wholesome, and all grain as plentiful and good as ever. All kine, cattle, horses, sheep, swine, dogs, wild beasts and tame, were as healthful, strong to labour, and wholesome to eat, as ever they were in any year. Hens, geese, pigeons, turkeys, and all wild fowl were free from infection.†

* There is an apparent contradiction on this point between Boghurst and Defoe ; probably, however, Defoe's cases of sudden deaths were cases of persons who had been ill for some time without being fully aware of it.

† There would seem to be a difference in this respect between the plague of London and the plague of 1348 at Florence, regarding which Boccaccio tells us that "such was the quality of the pestilential matter, as to pass not only from man to man, but, what is more strange, and has been often known, that anything belonging to the infected, if touched by any other creature, would certainly infect, and even kill that creature in a short space of time : and one instance of this kind I took particular

The summer following the plague very few flies, frogs, and such-like appeared. Great doubting and disputing there is whether the plague be infectious or not; because some think if it were infectious, it would infect all, as the fire heats all it comes near; but the plague leaves as many as it takes. Generally, every one is apt to judge by his own experience; and if any one may draw his conclusion from this, I have as much reason as any to think it not infectious, having passed through a multitude of continual dangers, being employed every day till ten o'clock at night, out of one house into another, dressing sores, and being always in the breath of patients, without catching the disease of any, through God's protection; and so did many nurses that were in like danger. Yet I count it to be the most subtle infectious disease of any."

Strange as it may appear, the doubts which were entertained in 1665 respecting the contagious nature of the plague remain till the present day unsettled; some inquirers arguing that the disease is communicated by touch, or infection from proximity with the diseased, while others consider it extends its influence by other means. The subject of this controversy is of little practical consequence. It is sufficient to know that plague, like its modern prototype cholera, is aggravated by insalubrious conditions of the atmosphere, and is intimately connected with neglect of cleanliness. In old London, as till the present day in eastern cities, it found scope for its ravages in confined alleys and courts, or wherever there was any lack of ventilation, sewerage, or a plenteous supply of water. The great fire which half destroyed London in 1666, twelve months after the disappearance of the pestilence, may be said to have banished plague from the metropolis; for the city was rebuilt on a more open scale, with some degree of reference to the health of the inhabitants. Much, however, still remains to be done. Many thoroughfares require to be opened up in densely-crowded neighbourhoods, streets and lanes need to be widened, slaughter-houses to be removed; besides not a little as respects improved dwellings for the humbler classes of society. It is gratifying to know that attention is now very generally directed to this important subject, and that ere long considerable improvements, calculated to insure the health of the metropolis, are likely to be carried into execution.

notice of; namely, that the rags of a poor man just dead, being thrown into the street, and two hogs coming by at the same time, and rooting amongst them, and shaking them about in their mouths, in less than an hour turned round and died on the spot." Of the plague at Athens also, Thucydides tells us that "the birds and beasts which usually prey on human flesh either never approached the dead bodies, of which many lay about uninterred, or if they tasted, died." Possibly, however, Mr Boghurst did not mean to deny that, under certain circumstances, the infection might be communicated from a sick patient to any brute with whom he might come in contact, but only that the contagion did not spread among the lower animals.