

Outlines of a plan, calculated to put a stop to the progress of the malignant contagion, which rages on the shores of the Mediterranean, if ... it should ... make its way into this country / [Richard Pearson].

Contributors

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SOCIETY OF LONDON MEDICAL

OUTLINES

OF

PLAN,

CALCULATED TO PUT A STOP TO THE PROGRESS OF THE

MALIGNANT CONTAGION,

WHICH RAGES ON THE SHORES OF THE MEDITERRA-
NEAN, IF, NOTWITHSTANDING EVERY PRE-
CAUTION TO THE CONTRARY, IT SHOULD
UNFORTUNATELY MAKE ITS WAY
INTO THIS COUNTRY.

BY RICHARD PEARSON, M. D.

London:

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1804.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

IN the year 1720, when the Plague raged at Marseilles, it was thought that this country was exposed to much risk of importing the contagion ; and a physician of great eminence was required by Government to draw up some directions concerning the precautions which should then be observed.

Unfortunately our risk in this respect, is, at the present moment, considerably greater. Hence the author of the following pages has been induced to lay before the Public his suggestions on the subject. The measures he proposes are not very different in principle from those recommended by Dr. Mead ; but they form a plan or system, which is much more extended in its operation, and therefore calculated, as he imagines, to give a greater degree of security.

Bloomsbury-square, Nov. 30th, 1804.

ADVERTISEMENT

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raged at Marseilles, it was thought that
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Necesse omnino est, ut in tanti momenti ne-
gotio, ubi de regnorum hominumque ruina
agitur, tam ex parte politica quam medica pro-
batae fidei viri seligantur, qui conscientiam
omnibus mundi bonis intrepidi præferant; pub-
licæ saluti, et tanti (ut pestis est) mali amo-
litioni extinctionive nullam aliam utilitatem
anteponant.

CANESTRINI.

OUTLINES OF A PLAN,

&c. &c.

THE accounts which have hitherto been received, concerning the contagion which has made, and still continues to make, the most afflicting ravages on the shores of the Mediterranean, are too incomplete to enable medical men to determine whether the disorder to which it gives rise be the Plague, properly so called, or the Yellow Fever of America and the West-Indies.* It is, however, a matter of perfect indifference, in regard to the object proposed in the following pages, to whichsoever of these two forms of fever that Epidemic belongs; the main points of consideration,

* It is generally supposed to be the latter.

(that it is contagious and of a highly malignant nature) being but too well proved by the manner in which it has spread from one part of the Spanish coast to another, and by the very great mortality which it has occasioned.*

These facts being established, it follows that all nations which hold a communication by commerce, or otherwise, with the infected places, or with places contiguous to them, are exposed to the risk of infection; and that the risk is the greater, the more frequent this communication. If we except Italy and France, where geographical situation must increase the danger, no European nation seems to be more in the way of this contagion than ourselves; since, independently of our commercial in-

* The opinion of the non-contagious nature of the Plague, has lately been revived by one of the physicians (Mons. Assalini) attached to the French army which invaded Egypt. This doctrine, so pregnant with mischief to commercial nations, rests on no other support than a few negative facts, opposed to which, we have the positive accumulated evidence of a succession of ages.

tercourse and warlike operations along the whole tract of the Mediterranean, the garrison of Gibraltar, with which we necessarily hold frequent communication, is become one of the infected places.

Thus circumstanced, the first and most obvious precaution is the strict enforcement of *Quarantine*.

If all vessels coming from infected places shall be ordered to a convenient station, at a distance from every port, there to remain for the space of two, three, or six weeks, during which time all communication between the people on board, and the inhabitants on the coast, or on board of other vessels, shall be prohibited and intercepted under the severest penalties; while, at the same time, the goods and apparel shall be frequently unpacked, fumigated, and aired; these precautions alone may, on a first consideration, appear sufficient to keep off the evil. And sufficient

they might be,* could we be assured that the regulations in this respect would in no instance be infringed; but this we can hardly expect, seeing that in other countries, where similar regulations have been enjoined, they have nevertheless been violated; whence the most afflicting consequences have ensued.†

Now as the Quarantine alone does not afford a sufficient security against the danger to which we are exposed; it is obvious that some other precautionary measures should be joined with it; that

* In the case of persons; but in the case of merchandise and apparel, there will always be much uncertainty; the freeing of such merchandise and apparel from infection, depending not so much upon the length of the quarantine, as upon the mode and degree of fumigation and (what is of still greater moment) ventilation. If these operations shall be conducted in a partial and negligent manner, the quarantine will be of no avail.

† See Russell on the Plague, p. 327, and the note thereto belonging.

if, notwithstanding the utmost vigilance to the contrary, the contagion should get ingress into this country, it may be immediately detected and suppressed.

For the accomplishment of an object of so much moment, it is proposed that COMMITTEES OF HEALTH be established in all the principal sea-ports throughout the kingdom. They should consist of an adequate number of physicians and surgeons, assisted, according to circumstances, by the magistrates and clergy. Their business should be to examine into the health of the sea-port towns in which they reside; and whenever a febrile disorder breaks out, that seizes in succession three or four individuals residing under the same roof, or having had recent communication with each other; that is rapid in its course, and accompanied with symptoms of unusual malignancy,* immediately to resort

* A disorder is unusually malignant, when out of a given number of the sick, the proportion of deaths ex-

to the system of *separation, fumigation, &c.* strict orders being at the same time given, to burn all the bedding and clothes that had been used by the sick; and the house or houses in which such a disorder should occur should be thoroughly fumigated, white-washed, and cleansed. These precautions are the more necessary, inasmuch as the Plague, in some of its most fatal forms, and especially on its first breaking out, is not marked by its characteristic eruptions.*

ceeds the proportion of recoveries. At the beginning and during the height of a pestilential epidemic, it has often happened that more than two-thirds of the infected have perished. A disorder is rapid in its course, if it terminates fatally before the fifth day. In the worst forms of the Plague and Yellow Fever, many of the infected die on or before the third day. A disorder is contagious when it spreads in the manner above-mentioned,

* Hence the first cases of the contagion at Marseilles were denied to be the Plague, Mead, p. 9. The same thing happened at Moscow, as De Mertens has stated.

That the Plague, (says another author) under a form of all others the most destructive, exists without its characteristic eruptions, or other external marks, reckoned pestilential, can admit of no doubt; and it is

In like manner, there should be instituted a GENERAL BOARD OF HEALTH in London, not only as the capital of the united kingdom, and consequently maintaining a frequent communication with every other part, but likewise as the largest port-town. This General Board should use the same vigilance in their inquiries into the health of the port and city of London, as the provincial committees in their respective towns; and should resort to the same means of suppression, in case of a strong suspicion, or actual proofs of infection. All these committees should keep a regular journal of their proceedings, and transmit to government a statement of such proceedings as often as shall appear necessary. It would further be desirable that the General Board of Health should draw up a set of Instructions for the use of the before-

to be regretted that mankind have so often, from the absence of these, been betrayed into errors of fatal consequence on its first invasion; at which early period human prudence can only be exerted in the way of public defence, with any probability of success. Russell, p. 98.

mentioned committees, and of medical practitioners in all parts of the kingdom.

In the above proposals for instituting Committees of Health, I have merely hinted at the measures of *separation, fumigation, &c.* without entering into a description of the manner of doing them; these matters having been so amply detailed in various tracts which have been recently published.* Indeed, the directions in this respect will constitute a principal part of the business of the before-mentioned committees; and should be minutely set forth in the Instructions published by the General Board of Health in the metropolis.

Relative to this business, I shall only remark that the building or buildings hired as a receiving house or houses, (according to the number of the infected) should be

* By Drs. Haygarth, Ferriar, Clark of Newcastle, Blackburne, &c.

situated in open, and, if possible, elevated situations at the extremity of the town, or rather entirely out of it; and that in the event of a sea-port town or inland-port town becoming the seat of infection, *floating lazarettos* (as recommended by Dr. Blane) seem preferable to lazarettos within land.* As in the case of the above-mentioned receiving-houses there should be three distinct buildings (unless one building be sufficiently large; in which case, there should be three distinct ranges of apartments) for the *sick*, the *convalescent*, and the *suspected*;† so

* In the great plague of London, in 1665, it is said that many thousands of persons who withdrew to the shipping on the river, escaped the violence of the contagion.

† Three distinct ranges of apartments in one sufficiently large edifice might answer; yet to prevent the possibility of any intercourse between one class and another, it would certainly be advisable to have separate houses for all the three classes of persons. The convalescents should not be dismissed till they had undergone a fortnight's quarantine after their perfect recovery. The same length of quarantine will be proper for the suspected. Both classes should be pro-

in the case of floating lazarettos there should be as many separate vessels for these three different classes of persons. When the greater part, or the whole of a town becomes infected, other measures, besides those above-mentioned, will be requisite; but as it is presumed that this disaster may at all times be prevented by an early recourse to the precautions here suggested, it does not fall within the plan of the present pamphlet to notice them; more especially as they have been fully discussed by a variety of authors who have written on the subject of pestilential contagion. And with regard to the arrangements here proposed, it is readily acknowledged, that in principle they have been long known and approved;* and that if there be any thing

vided with new clothes on entering into the quarantine-house, should be frequently washed in a cold or tepid bath, &c. &c. As the suspected might think it hard to be removed to the same place with the infected, this is another reason why the buildings for both should be separate.

* Similar arrangements have been adopted, with the

novel in them, it is only in their application and extent.

There may be persons who think that the arrangements here proposed can only be necessary in the event of a pestilential contagion making considerable progress in some particular town or district ; and that to resort to them now would only serve to excite an alarm. They who entertain such opinions can have no adequate idea of the proximity and magnitude of the evil to which we are exposed. They must, indeed, be very little acquainted with the nature of malignant epidemics ; which although easily controlled by the adoption of prompt and vigorous measures in the beginning, too often baffle and defy all our efforts, after that period. If a house were on fire, would any one wait till the flames should

best success, against the contagion of the Yellow Fever, in some of the sea-port towns in America ; and upon a smaller scale in some parts of England, in cases of the common infectious fevers of this climate ; whose contagion is propagated precisely in the same manner,

get to a height, before he would attempt to extinguish them; or if so, might not all assistance prove ineffectual, and the building be totally consumed; though by proper exertions at the first moment of their being discovered, the flames might easily have been put out, and very little injury have been sustained? It is precisely thus with a pestilential contagion. Like a small spark, it is easily suppressed in the beginning;* but if once it be suffered

and is suppressible by the very same means as that of the Plague and Yellow Fever.

* The magistrates of the city of Ferrara, in Italy, in the year 1630, when all the country round about them was infected with the plague, observing the ill success of the conduct of their neighbours, who, from fear of losing their commerce, did all they could to conceal the disease, by keeping the sick in their houses, resolved whenever occasion should require, to take a different method. Accordingly, as soon as they received information, that one had died in their city of the pestilence, they immediately removed the whole family he belonged to into a lazaretto, where all, being seven in number, likewise died. But though the disease was thus malignant, it went no farther, being suppressed at once by this method. Within the space of a year, the same case returned seven or eight times; and this

to gain strength and spread, it becomes wholly unrestrainable, seizing upon, and destroying all before it. This comparison, of a malignant contagion to a spark of fire, has been frequently made by writers on pestilential diseases, and cannot (it would seem) be too often repeated.

As for any alarm which might possibly be excited by the immediate institution of such Committees of Health; *that* would readily subside when the public should be made to understand, that in our present management as often put a stop to it. The example of this city was followed more than once, by some other towns in the same territory, with so great success, that it was thought expedient, for the common good, to publish in the memoirs of the people of Ferrara, this declaration: *That the only remedy against the Plague is to make the most early discovery of it that is possible, and thus to extinguish it in the very beginning.* Mead, p. 113—115. Dr. Russell remarks, that there is an important addition in the original declaration (Muratori Governo Politico della Peste, lib. i. cap. 5.) omitted by Dr. Mead, viz. *to hold every accident for the Plague, which admitted of suspicion.* Russell, p. 512. In the present conjuncture, it is to be hoped that this

tuation these arrangements are indispensably necessary, by way of precaution ; and that without such provisional measures, the utmost degree of confusion would take place, in the event of the contagion making its way into the country.* If an enemy threaten us with invasion, do we delay raising and disciplining the forces necessary for his defeat—his total defeat,

last part of the admonition will not be slighted in this country, in the case of the sea-port towns particularly.

* If permanent Committees of Health should not be established upon the plan above suggested, at least precepts should be addressed by the magistrates residing at the principal sea-ports, to the medical practitioners in those places, requiring them whenever any cases should occur, answering to the description at page 5, to give them (the magistrates) immediate information thereof ; in order that a meeting of the rest of the faculty be forthwith convened ; and the most minute inquiry made into the symptoms and mode of attack ; together with an inspection of the dead body or bodies : for, on such occasions, it should not be left to any single individual to decide on the presence or absence of a malignant contagion. The city of Marseilles would probably have escaped all the horrors with which it was afflicted in the year 1720, if, instead of trusting to the declarations of one professional man, a

until he has set foot upon our shores? As little prudent will it be to postpone the regulations here suggested, or others equally calculated to answer the purpose, until the presence of a malignant contagion among us shall be declared by a sudden and unusual mortality.

Before I conclude, I wish to remark that a very intelligent physician,* to whose name I attach the greatest respect, has attributed our exemption from the Plague, ever since the 17th century, to our improved mode of living (in regard to diet, cleanliness, and clothing,) joined to the greater spaciousness and airiness of our buildings, the increased width of our streets, and the various contrivances and

committee composed of a proper number of medical practitioners had been appointed to examine into the first doubtful cases that occurred.

* Observations on the increase and decrease of different diseases, and particularly of the Plague, by William Heberden, jun. M. D. 4to. 1801.

regulations for the removal of filth, rather than to the absence of an exciting cause (contagion) derived from other countries. That the closeness and construction of the houses and the narrowness and filthiness of the streets, of which the city of London consisted before the great fire in 1666, contributed in a very great degree to the spreading of contagion, and rendering a pestilence epidemic, is a point which cannot be controverted; but it does not therefore follow that the contagion itself was originally bred at home, and not derived from some other country. And the fact recorded by Maitland, and quoted by Dr. Heberden, that for five-and-twenty years before the great fire, the city had never been clear of the plague, only proves that in consequence of the closeness of the buildings, and the narrowness and dirtiness of the streets, added to the defective modes of fumigation, it was not possible wholly to eradicate the contagion; whence it continued year after year to break out at the

bad

season most favourable for its action ; but was at length totally destroyed, together with the houses themselves, at the time of that memorable conflagration.

Hodges however, positively asserts that the contagion of 1665 was derived from Holland, where it raged the preceding year, and into which country it had been introduced in some cotton goods brought from the Levant.*

* Because Cadiz, Malaga and Gibraltar, have recently been depopulated by a pestilential disorder, it is not therefore to be inferred that the houses and streets of those places are worse constructed now, or abound more in filth than they did 20 or 30 years ago; or that in their diet and mode of living, the inhabitants have undergone any material changes. Now, if this be admitted, it must follow that the contagion was imported and not generated there; otherwise the same causes, (viz. closeness and filth) having existed before those periods of time in an equal degree, the plague or yellow fever, (to whichever of these two forms of disease the epidemic belongs,) should likewise have then prevailed. But while I contend that the plague is not produced by the same causes which give rise to typhus, or the common infectious fever of this climate, but that it is a sui generis contagion, as much

There is yet another circumstance which should not pass unnoticed. It is a common opinion, and one, which *generally* speaking, is true; that malignant contagions are enfeebled and suppressed by great degrees of cold. Hence many persons are disposed to infer that as the winter is set in, there is little or nothing to fear; and consequently that there can be no necessity for medical committees and such an extended system of precautions as here recommended. But admitting that the frost is capable of suspending the action of the contagion, it may nevertheless be harboured in goods or apparel not exposed to the air, throughout the severest season; and afterwards take effect and spread as the weather becomes milder. This, in fact, is

as the variolous and scarlatina contagions, I readily admit with Dr. Heberden, that it is liable to be modified and influenced by the constitutions of the atmosphere; and that its action and propagation are at all times promoted by close and crowded habitations, accumulation of filth, and the other circumstances above enumerated.

what happened in the London plague of 1665, and in that of Moscow, in 1771. In both places, the disorder existed sporadically notwithstanding the winter cold.*

* A very hard frost began in Dec. (1664,) which continued for three months, and seemed greatly to deaden the contagion, (a) and very few died during that season; although even then it was not extinguished; for in the middle of Christmas holidays, I was called to a young man, &c. &c. Quincy's translation of Hodges' Account of the Plague, p. 5. In the Vienna plague of 1713, (which was brought from Hungary) many cases of infection occurred in the months of January and February. (Chenot de Peste, p. 33.) It is related that sporadic cases of infection were observed during the winter months of December, January and February, at Eyam, in Derbyshire, whither the contagion had been conveyed in a parcel of clothes from London, in the autumn of 1665. See Howard on Lazarettos, p. 25. Lastly, on referring to the tables inserted in the collection of papers, published by Chicoyneau, p. 465, relative to the plague of Marseilles, it will be seen that the contagion was transported to several towns and villages situated in the mountainous parts of France, and first began to manifest its presence in those places, even in the midst of frost and snow. Des lieux environnés de montagnes et éloignés de la Provence, ne furent pas aussi heureux que le Languedoc; le

(a) The expression in the original is *rigore glaciali contagii vis exitialis constricta, elumbis evasit et CONSOPITA.* Hodges Loimologia sive Pestis Narratio Historica, p. 6.

These facts, combined with those mentioned in the subjoined note, sufficiently prove that the winter season gives us no security either against the introduction or propagation of this contagion. On the contrary, it is rather to be feared that we run a greater risk in this respect at such a season, when the Quarantine regulations may not be so strictly observed, in regard to vessels coming from Gibraltar or other places, where the pestilence shall for the present have ceased; and consequently where permission will probably be given to numbers of persons who have recovered from the disorder, to come away. Now, although it cannot be supposed that such passengers shall be capable of giving the infection from their own persons; yet it is possible that the contagion may be introduced by some of their packed up clothes, not so thoroughly purified as they may imagine. This, indeed,

Gevaudan fut ravagé par la peste; la rigueur de l'hyver; les neiges et les glaçons ne purent éteindre, dans son passage, l'activité de ce venin. Chicoyneau, p. 13.

has not unfrequently happened in other countries. Hence there is an evident necessity for continuing, in regard to goods or apparel brought by healthy persons coming from Gibraltar, and other places in the Mediterranean, the same precautions for a great length of time after the epidemic shall have ceased there, as were thought necessary while the disorder was raging with resistless fury.*

There is then, let it be repeated, nothing in our improved mode of living, nor in our superior degree of cleanliness, nor in the spaciousness of modern-built houses, nor in the greater cleanliness and width of our streets, nor in the season of

* Nor ought this farther caution to be omitted, that when the contagion has ceased in any place by the approach of winter, it will not be safe to open a free trade, [or communication] with it too soon ; because there are instances of the distemper being stopped by the winter cold, and yet the seeds of it not destroyed, but only kept inactive, till the warmth of the following spring has given them new life and force. Mead, pp. 97, 98.

the year, that should induce us to neglect, in addition to the Quarantine, such other precautions as appear calculated to save us from the dreadful calamity of a pestilence, and as have been found available, under similar circumstances, in other countries.

ADDITIONS.

TO the example afforded by the city of Ferrara, (quoted at p. 12.) may be added the following.

All travellers and goods coming into the Russian territory, from the adjoining parts of Turkey, are put under a strict Quarantine; a wise regulation, made perpetual under the reign of the Empress Catherine. To this circumstance is to be attributed the exemption from the Plague, which many parts of Russia, bordering upon the Ottoman dominions, have of late years enjoyed. Kiow or Kiof is the only exception to the contrary. But the last time the contagion found its way into

this place, it was immediately suppressed, by prompt and vigorous measures resorted to in the beginning. One family only, fell victims to it: for no sooner was it discovered than the bedding, clothes, furniture, and even the house* itself were ordered to be burnt; and the attendants upon the sick, together with every other person who had held communication with them, were put under Quarantine. After this, no further instances of infection occurred. Samoilowitz, p. 17.



The rapidity with which it terminates in death, is one of the characteristics of a pestilential disorder, (see p. 5) as is proved by the following instances: Out of thirty persons seized with the Plague, in the village of Zboina, in Hungary, in the

* Probably built of wood. The present improved methods of purifying by fumigation, white-washing, &c. would render the destruction of houses by fire, under such circumstances, unnecessary in this country.

year 1770, eighteen died on or before the fourth day ; viz. seven on the fourth day ; six on the third day ; five on or before the second day ; all the rest except three, died before the seventh day. Canestrini *Pestis Diagnosis*, p. 6. In the plague at Moscow, in 1771, most of the deaths took place, when the disorder was at its height, on the third or fourth day. De Mertens, p. 84.

It is another characteristic of a malignant or pestilential disorder, that in the beginning, and at its height, more die than recover. The statements obtained by Mr. Howard on this subject, differ considerably from each other, (See his *Account of Lazarettos*, p. 40.) In the plague at Moscow, when at its height, not more than four in a hundred recovered, (*ex centum ægris vix quatuor evadebant.*) De Mertens, p. 109. In the Vienna Plague of 1713, when at its height, not more than one in thirty sur-

vived; (Chenot de Peste, p. 33) but of the whole number infected at Vienna, from the beginning to the end of the epidemic, the proportion between the recoveries and deaths, was one to nine, (Id. p. 38.) In the plague which raged at Cronstadt, in Transylvania, in 1755 and 1756, and of which the author last quoted has given an accurate and interesting narrative, the average proportion of deaths was two-thirds. (Id. p. 27.) Although the proportions were widely different in different places; as appears from the following table. (Ibid, p. 26.)

District of Cronstadt.

	Infected	Died.	Reco- vered.
In the town of Cronstadt, and the two suburbs, Altstadt and Blumenau,	62	51	11
In the suburbs of the Wa- lachians.	2532	1711	821
At Tartlau.	114	62	52
In the four villages of Tur- kœs, Hoszuf, Czernat- falu and Batsfalu.	2777	1589	1188
In the village of Petersberg	178	128	50
In the village of Czernest	711	522	189
In the village of Zaizon. .	112	82	30
In the village of Honigsberg	10	9	1

District of Fogaras.

In the village of Projana Morului.	127	109	18
In the village of Holbach .	54	40	14
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Total number	6677	4303	2374

THE END.

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