On the comparative healthiness of the parish of Hackney / [Samuel Roper].

ON THE COMPARATIVE

HEALTHINESS

OF THE

PARISH OF HACKNEY.

BY

SAMUEL ROPER.

"What everybody wishes to know is the mortality of his own town or village."
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ON THE HEALTHINESS

OF THE

PARISH OF HACKNEY.

It has been established by incontestible evidence that Great Britain is the most healthy country with which we are acquainted. It is not less certain that London is far more so than almost any city in Europe; and my present object is to show that the parish of Hackney surpasses, in point of healthiness, any other of those districts into which London and its suburbs are divided. The materials for doing this are afforded by the Annual Reports of the Registrar-General; although, in the complicated tabular statements and congregated masses of figures which compose the principal part of these documents, such specific and local conclusions are very apt to escape notice.

The mean rate of mortality throughout the metropolitan districts, which comprise, according to the census of 1831, a population of 1,594,890,[a] is 2·367 in every 100 of the inhabitants, or, without decimals, 2367 in every 100,000. This rate of mortality varies greatly in the different districts, from the maximum

of 3·528 which occurs in Whitechapel to the *minimum* 1·674 *at Hackney*. About one person in every 43 therefore dies annually throughout the districts taken together; but in the Whitechapel district, which includes the London Hospital, the annual mortality is as high as *one in* 30, while in Hackney it does not exceed *one in* 60. The adjoining district of Islington is the next lowest in point of mortality, being about *one in* 56.

The Table from which these results are taken[b] shows also the annual rate of mortality per cent. by different diseases throughout the same districts, and the following is the *mean rate* as well as the *rate in the parish of Hackney*:—

DISEASES.	Mean Rate	Rate at Hackney.
Of the Epidemic class	·504	·245
" Nervous system.....	·393	·222
" Respiratory system	·694	·493
" Digestive organs	·157	·101
Of all other classes	·619	·613
Total mortality per cent. ..	2·367	1·674

Two additional columns in the above quoted Table show separately the rate of mortality by those fatal

scourges of the human race, *typhus*, and *phthisis*,[c] or consumption; but which are, of course, included with their respective classes of disease. Of these the following is the

MEAN RATE OF THE DISTRICT AND THE RATE AT HACKNEY.		
Typhus.....	·096	·042
Phthisis	·373	·306

From the preceding Table it appears that the mortality from diseases of the epidemic class is not half so great in Hackney as throughout the metropolitan districts; and that, in diseases of the nervous and respiratory systems, the mortality of Hackney is only about two-thirds of the mean rate in the several districts. Looking at phthisis or consumption separately, the difference, although still considerable, is much less decisive in favour of Hackney, the mean rate being ·373, and the parochial rate, ·306; Camberwell being, in this instance, rather less, viz., ·304, and Islington nearly the same, viz., ·307.

Disorders of the digestive organs are less fatal at Hackney by 50 per cent. than in the districts generally, the *rate* being in the former ·101, and the mean of the latter ·157; while at Camberwell it is ·121,

at Kensington ·141, and at Islington ·144. In the unclassified diseases on the other hand, Hackney treads closely on the *mean*, viz., ·613 to ·619, being surpassed in this respect by many of the other districts which, nevertheless, fall greatly behind it in the enumerated classes of diseases.

This striking superiority of Hackney, as a healthy locality, is abundantly confirmed by another Table, (*vide* p. 244 of the same Report,) which, as it extends over a longer period, may be appealed to as still more satisfactory evidence even than that which has been previously adduced. This Table shows the mean annual mortality of females in the metropolitan districts, during the *two years and a half*, ending 31st December, 1839. The districts are divided into three classes, according to their relative mortality, the mean rate per cent. in the ten highest being 2·936,—in the ten medium districts, 2·495,—and in the ten lowest, 1·961,—Hackney being the *lowest of all*, viz., 1·728. To accumulate more testimony upon this point would be altogether superfluous after such unimpeachable statements.

The annual mortality of Hackney having already been shown to be one in every 60 persons, or more accurately perhaps, one in 55, it may now be interesting to compare it with that of many cities, whose position, under clearer skies and warmer suns, seems to render them more attractive residences; but which

are really found to be far less favourable to health and longevity than our more variable climate,

"Our sullen skies, and fields without a flower."

The mean rate of mortality at[d]

PLACES.		
London is	One in	43
Paris	"	32·5
Lyons	"	32
Amsterdam	"	24
Bordeaux	"	29
Dresden	"	27.7
Brussels	"	34
Vienna	"	22·5
Madrid	"	35
Leghorn	"	35
Lisbon	"	31·1
Naples	"	29
Rome	"	24·1
Venice	"	19·4
Nice	"	31
Geneva	"	43

So that Hackney is 30 per cent. more healthy than any one of these various places; and the comparison, as will be seen, is greatly more in its favour with most of them. Let those numerous persons who are but too ready, when they return home from their continental rambles, to avail themselves of the traveller's privilege,—

"To damn the climate, and complain of spleen,"

and especially to reproach the atmosphere of the metropolis, and its vicinity, dwell for a few minutes on the above statements. Let them observe, that "the places which have long been selected as the resort of invalids, and the fountains of health, are far more fatal to life than even this great city itself;"[e] the rate of mortality in which, however, is full 40 per cent. greater than in some of its suburbs.[f]

Taking a more general view, we shall find the mortality of Europe to be as follows:[g]—

EUROPE.		Inhabitants.
North of Europe	One death for	41·1
Central Europe	"	40·8
Southern Europe	"	33·7

Or, looking to kingdoms[h] in

KINGDOMS.	The Rate of Mortality.
Sweden from 1820 to 1829	2·46
Prussia from 1820 to 1834	2·80
France from 1817 to 1836	2·52
England and Wales from 1838 to 1839 ..	2·17

That of Hackney, as already stated, is 1·674.

It would be very satisfactory to be able to enumerate the causes on which the superior salubrity of this Parish depends; but this is a problem, the solution of which is not altogether within our power. We shall probably not err, however, in ascribing considerable influence to the following local circumstances:—First to a less crowded population, or its diminished *density*, as shown by the number of square yards to each person, which varies in the metropolitan districts from its maximum, 16 yards to each individual in the East and West London districts, 18 in the Strand district, and 19 in Holborn; to 434 in Hackney, and its minimum density of 557 at Camberwell, which alone exceeds Hackney in this respect. This fact of itself might convince us that the mortality does not always increase with the density of the population; for Hackney, possessing a greater degree of density than Camberwell, is still distinguished for a lesser rate of mortality. "The mortality," says

Mr. Farr, "increases *cæteris paribus*, as the density of the effluvial poison generated in cities, and not strictly as the density of the population."[1] Hence, we find the mortality of females in the Strand district, with 18 square yards only to each person, to be 2·605 per cent., while in Rotherhithe, with 249 square yards to each person, it is 2·592, or *nearly the same;* and in Bermondsey, with 88 yards to each person, the mortality is greater, viz., 2·755,—still in Hackney little doubt can be entertained, that the diminished density contributes greatly to its salubrity. The second cause to be assigned for this, is better ventilation and drainage, arising from greater elevation and the geological character of the district.

How much the rate of mortality is affected by situation and local accidents is strikingly shown by M. Bossi, in the "Statistique du Department de l'Ain." He divided the department into four portions, and from documents carefully collected, he deduced the following results:—

DEPARTMENTS	Inhabitants to one death annually.
In Mountain Parishes	38·3
On the Sea Side	26·6
In Corn Districts	24·9
In Stagnant and Marshy Districts.....	20·8

Now Hackney is more elevated than most of the metropolitan districts. Church Street, nearly the lowest part of the parish, is still 95 feet above the level of the Thames; and there is a gradual but considerable rise from thence to Clapton Terrace, on the north, a distance of two miles, as well as on the west, to Dalston, now rapidly increasing its habitations; while from Homerton, and other portions of the parish on the east, there is still a rapid fall to the Marshes and the River Lea. Not only do these circumstances favour the ventilation, and greatly promote the drainage of the parish, but the *latter* is especially facilitated by the beds of drifted gravel, which are so largely dispersed in cavities, in and over the surface of the London clay, which is the uppermost stratum throughout *this* and all the other metropolitan districts. Whether these beds of fragmentary rocks were brought into their present position by the action of glaciers, which at some former period may have over spread the surface of the land, or whether they are derived from currents of water sweeping violently across the country from the north-west, is a question which may be left to geologists to determine.[k] But wherever they occur, they effectually prevent the accumulation of stagnant and noisome waters, which are the frequent and prolific source of malaria and disease.

The same combination of circumstances equally contributes to the healthiness of the adjoining parish

of Islington, which stands next to Hackney also in the rate of mortality; the former giving 1·780 per 100, and the latter 1·674, but in this case we find a more crowded population, which may, perhaps, account for the difference in the rate of mortality,—Islington possessing but 271 square yards to each person, and Hackney 434.

The great improvements recently made in the sewerage of the parish of Hackney, and the contemplated formation of the Victoria Park, in the south-east of it, combined as this is with the possession of large open spaces on the south-west and north-west, which are permanently secured against the invasion of the builder; all lead to the conviction that the well-established salubrity of the district is not likely to be diminished in future years.

To those persons who have selected Hackney as a residence, the foregoing facts and details may propably prove interesting; while to those, whom circumstances have fixed there, they can scarcely fail to be very satisfactory.

Clapton Square,
July, 1842.

NOTES.

[a] 1,867,810 by the Census of 1841; but all the statements in the Registrar General's Report were made before this return was known.

[b] G. p. 242, 3[d] Report. All the Tables and calculations in the Reports of the Registrar General are based upon the supposition that the population has kept on increasing at the same rate as between 1821 and 1831, which, however, proves not to be the case. During that decennial period the increase was 16 per cent.; but in that, from 1831 to 1841, it is but 14·5, or 1½ per cent. less. The population of Hackney increased 38 ℔ cent in the first period, but only 21⅔ in the latter. The rates of mortality, therefore, in the Table above-quoted will probably prove to have been stated too low generally; but as this will affect the whole of the districts equally, it leaves their *comparative* rate untouched, and consequently does not affect the healthiness of Hackney. In order to test the accuracy of this supposition, I have obtained, through the kindness of C. H. Pulley, Esq., the Superintending Registrar of the district, a return of the actual deaths that occurred in this parish during the years 1840 and 1841, which are as follow:—

QUARTERS.	1840	1841
March Quarter	179	201
June	173	196
September	208	187
December	171	134
	749	691

These statements closely resemble each other, except that the severe weather at Christmas 1840, added to the mortality of that quarter. Now, on comparing the deaths in 1841, with the population as ascertained by the census in that year, viz , 38,000 in round numbers, we shall find the annual mortality to be one in 55, instead of one in 60, as deduced from the Registrar General's Report; and a similar result will, I doubt not, be found to occur in all the other districts.

[c] In the year 1839, 7643 males and 8023 females died of typhus fever in England and Wales. In the same period, 28,106 males, and 31,453 females died of consumption, and these are about the usual and average numbers. For it is one of the most curious and startling results of statistical inquiries, that the march of society is almost as uniform, and nearly as much amenable to general laws, as are the motions of the heavenly bodies. Not only do we find in the same society the same annual recurrence of births, deaths, and marriages, and about the same proportion of diseases, but even the same number of suicides, and of crimes, whether against persons or against property. Vide "Quetelet sur l'Homme," and "Guerry, Essai sur la Statisque Morale."—p. 69.

[d] The authorities for these statements are "Quetelet sur l'Homme," "Hawkins's Medical Statistics," and a very able article in the 131st Number of the Quarterly Review.

[e] Hawkins' Medical Statistics, page 31.

[f] Large Towns have been emphatically called "the Graves of the Human Race."* The mortality of Liverpool, in 1839, was as high as One in 33½; that of Glasgow, which in 1821 was One in 39, had increased to One in 26 in 1838, a frightful augmentation in only 17 years.† In this country, it appears, that the annual mortality of cities is to that of the Agricultural Counties as 1·44 is to 1·00, or nearly

* By Sussmilch and Dr. Price.

† Report on the Health of Towns, pp. 8 and 13.

one half more. This difference is principally felt in early life. Cities, however, have always been the centres of civilization, intelligence, and freedom, the great marts of commerce, aud the nurseries of the arts and sciences. It was in them that Christianity was first planted and from them it gradually, but slowly, spread into the surrounding country.‡ Thus their moral advantages compensate in some degree for the physical evils incidental to their crowded population. Experience, has shewn, too, that these evils may be greatly mitigated "by securing more cleanliness, and a moderate supply of pure air,"§ that is by better drainage and ventilation.

[g] Quetelet.

[h] 3d Report Registrar General, page 101.

[i] 3d Report, page 101.

[k] Those readers who feel any interest in this question may be referred to Dr. Buckland's Anniversary Address to the Geological Society, February 1841 ; and to a comprehensive and excellent article in the 151st Number of the Edinburgh Review.

‡ Vide Chalmers Lectures on Religious Establishments, Lecture 2.

§ 3rd Report Registrar General, p. 100.