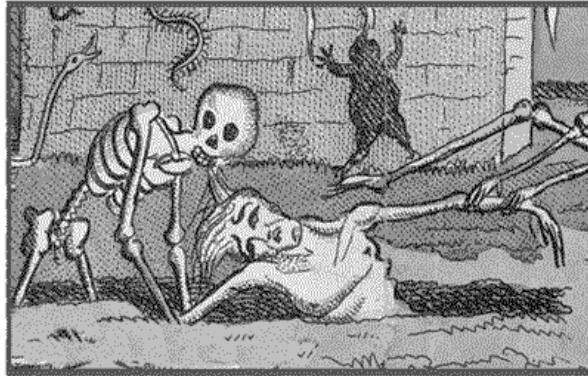


The Plague of 1665:



*Daniel Defoe's
Journal of the Plague Year,
Abridged
and other contemporary
accounts*

Compiled by Emma Laybourn

Commentary and this adaptation of Defoe's *Journal of the Plague Year*
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The Plague of 1665:

Daniel Defoe's *A Journal of the Plague Year*
abridged and adapted for the modern reader;
and other contemporary accounts

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Introduction

This book aims to give an overview of the Great Plague of London in 1665, outlining its pathology and history, and to gather and compare various accounts of it that were written at the time.

Chief among these accounts is Daniel Defoe's *A Journal of the Plague Year* (which, though written some years later, drew heavily on contemporary sources); this famous book is presented here in abridged form.

The other writers examined are diarists – notably Pepys – who lived through the plague, doctors who practised in London at the time, and would-be doctors who proposed their own remedies. These authors are represented by extracts and summaries of their work. One sermon is also included, as a particularly interesting example of its genre.

Finally, the Appendix contains the full text of the Lord Mayor's Orders for the city in 1665.

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The Plague: the disease and its history

The highly dangerous disease known as plague is caused by the bacteria *Yersinia pestis*, which normally lives on small mammals such as rats and other rodents. The bacteria causes three forms of the disease: bubonic (the most common form), septicaemic and pneumonic.

Plague can be transmitted in several ways. Fleas which bite an infected animal may spread the bubonic version of the disease to the next animals they bite, including humans. Humans can also catch plague from contact with infected body tissue or fluids, and by inhaling droplets from a person suffering from the pneumonic form of the disease.

After the initial infection, there is an incubation period of between one and seven days. Patients then begin to suffer from fever, an aching body, nausea and vomiting, and general weakness. The lymph nodes in the groin, armpits and neck may become inflamed, swollen and painful: these swellings are known as buboes. The bubonic form of plague is fatal in between 30% and 60% of people.

In historic epidemics of plagues, smaller spots, pustules and carbuncles were also recorded elsewhere on the victims' bodies and were frequently referred to as the 'tokens' (i.e. signs of the disease). Although these tokens were commonly seen by doctors in 1665 (for example, William Boghurst, whose list of symptoms appears later in this ebook) they seem to be largely absent from modern cases of the disease.

The bubonic form of plague may progress to infect the lungs, causing pneumonic plague. This causes difficulty in breathing and can rapidly lead to respiratory failure and shock. Pneumonic plague is likely to be fatal if untreated.

A further complication is septicaemic plague, which occurs when the bacteria multiply in the bloodstream. This causes bleeding from the mouth and other orifices, shock, and gangrene (the blackening and death of body tissue) in the patient's extremities. It frequently causes death on the same day that symptoms appear.

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All types of plague are treatable nowadays with antibiotics, as long as diagnosis is early enough. The World Health Organisation website <https://www.who.int/health-topics/plague> lists recent occurrences as well as other information about plague. It has become a very rare disease with only a few hundred cases a year worldwide.

However, this was not always so. Plague has ravaged human populations many times through the centuries, and has evidently been around for at least five thousand years. Researchers have found a form of plague DNA in a five thousand year old tomb in Sweden, and have suggested that it mutated from earlier infections in European settlements where sanitation was poor. As wheeled transport spread trade throughout Europe, the plague could well have been spread along with it.

(<https://www.livescience.com/64246-ancient-plague-swedish-tomb.html>)

By the time of the Greek historian Herodotus, plague had become a well-known disease. Book 6 of his *Histories* mentions how, in the year 494 BCE or thereabouts, a group of a hundred youths were sent from Chios to Delphi, of whom ninety-eight were struck down by plague. In 430 BCE plague spread to Athens from north Africa; and the Roman Empire was afflicted by an epidemic in 250 to 270 CE.

The ‘Plague of Justinian’ (542–546 CE) was the first great pandemic in which plague spread across the globe, arriving at Constantinople in 542 CE and killing thousands a day there, before advancing across the Middle East to Iran.

In the fourteenth century a second great pandemic ravaged China, India and Russia; Italian traders carried the disease to Europe in 1347. This was the outbreak known as ‘The Black Death’, which arrived in Britain in 1348. It may have killed over half of Europe’s population, and worldwide may have had almost 100 million victims (according to estimated world population figures from the US census: <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/international-programs/historical-est-worldpop.html>).

After the Black Death, outbreaks of the disease in Britain continued regularly, with major epidemics occurring in London every thirty years or so. There were serious epidemics in 1563, 1593, 1625 and 1665.

The outbreak of 1563 may have killed one-quarter to one-third of the city’s population – perhaps 18,000 people. In August of that year it caused over a thousand deaths a week, and forced Queen Elizabeth to leave London and set up her court at Windsor.

About the same number of people are thought to have died in the epidemic of 1592. In 1625, when London was again ‘visited’ (a term often used for a place that fell victim to plague,) it seems to have been with less devastating effect than previously. However, in 1665 the plague was to return in full virulence.

*

The main host for the plague in Britain is thought to have been the black rat, which passed it on to humans via rat fleas. English epidemics tended to start in spring, heighten through summer and decline with the colder weather, when rat fleas often hibernate, or in severe weather may even die. Outbreaks were usually worst in towns and cities with their higher density of population, especially in the over-crowded and unsanitary areas inhabited by the poor.

The outbreaks in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were all part of the second pandemic, which lasted for several centuries as plague continued to reappear sporadically throughout Europe, especially around the Mediterranean. The ‘Great Plague of Seville’, for instance, beginning in 1647, wiped out a quarter of that Spanish city’s population.

London’s most notorious outbreak, in 1665, became known as the Great Plague of London, and also killed about a quarter of the population. It was not in fact as severe as the Black Death of the fourteenth century, but it was better documented, and was the last such major outbreak of the disease in England.

However, globally plague did not go away. In 1738 a further epidemic afflicted Eastern Europe; and what is now known as the third pandemic began in China in 1855. This final pandemic caused many millions of deaths in India and China, and continued in smaller outbreaks throughout the world into the early twentieth century. Only with the discovery of antibiotics has plague become a minor cause of sickness and death, instead of a major and greatly feared one.

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The Great Plague of 1665 in England: an outline

The 1665 epidemic may have been started by flea-infested bales of cotton shipped over to London from Amsterdam, or by ships from Rotterdam which landed at Yarmouth. Certainly that town on England's east coast suffered several deaths from the plague in November 1664.

Whatever its source, the first serious indications of the outbreak in London seem to have occurred in the spring of 1665, in St Giles-in-the-Fields, a parish outside the city walls. The death rate there rose in April but the increased deaths were not officially attributed to plague until May, when the area was put into quarantine.

During the summer months the disease spread through London. Those who could afford to left in droves; King Charles II and his court moved first to Hampton Court and then to Oxford, and Parliament was also moved to Oxford.

Because London had already suffered several outbreaks of plague in the seventeenth century, there were standard measures that were put in place in such cases. Following the advice of the Royal College of Physicians, the Lord Mayor of London and his aldermen issued orders to try and halt the spread of the disease. (The Lord Mayor's orders are contained in the [appendix](#) to this book.)

The measures were strict and sometimes severe. In towns, infected houses were ordered to be shut up with all their inhabitants (both diseased and well) inside, and the doors were usually marked with a cross and the words 'Lord have mercy upon us'. Watchmen were appointed and posted outside such houses to buy food and run errands for the inhabitants, and to prevent them from leaving.

In 1665 the Earl of Craven suggested that the shutting-up of families in their houses was inhumane and of little use. Instead, he advocated the setting up of more pest-houses (isolation hospitals.) Although Daniel Defoe refers at one point to the city having only one pest-house, and later says two were used, at Old Street and Westminster, it seems certain that there were more, perhaps temporary ones, on the fringes of London's surrounding villages – for instance, Putney had two. (see <http://faded-london.blogspot.com/2011/02/putney-pest-houses.html>) Wooden pest-houses could be erected quickly in time of need.

Officials known as 'examiners' were appointed to check premises and people for any signs of disease, and to shut up houses where it was found. Bodies were checked to establish the cause of death; all bodies had to be removed and burials performed by night. Constables ensured that these rules were followed.

There were also regulations about keeping streets clean and free of beggars, and about disposing of infected household goods.

All the regulations and constraints that were put in place might have been useful for a different disease, but because plague was transmitted by rats and their fleas (which could not be shut up) the measures probably had little effect.

The numbers of deaths were published weekly in lists called Mortality Bills. These bills showed that deaths in London peaked in September, when 7,165 people died in one week. The true number was certainly higher as the deaths of many of the poor went unrecorded.

As the graveyards filled up, large plague pits were dug to hold the dead. Daniel Defoe's *A Journal of the Plague Year* contains a graphic description of corpses being tipped without ceremony into a mass grave by buriers fearful of infection. However, the excavation of one burial pit by the Museum of London Archaeology, which

uncovered 3,500 bodies, found that they had been respectfully buried in coffins. (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-37287715>) That is not to say that Defoe exaggerated; there were hundreds of plague pits all over London, although the exact location of many is not known. At the height of the plague it is unlikely that all the victims received a decent burial.

*

At the time the cause of the disease was unknown. There were various theories: it was attributed to bad air, 'effluvioms' or bad smells, animals, insects, weather or simply the will of God. A person's frame of mind was thought by some to make them liable to the disease; certain authors thought it was an affliction of the spirit that caused the physical symptoms.

Accordingly many different remedies were tried and touted. Few were likely to have given sufferers much relief, let alone have cured them. *The King's Medicines for the Plague*, an officially approved book first published in 1604, was re-issued in 1665 by government order. It contained a mixture of prayers and herbal remedies, largely innocuous. Much stranger and more extreme remedies were propounded by numerous other authors, whether medically qualified or not.

In the belief that dogs and cats were spreaders of the plague, tens of thousands were killed by official order. This particular measure may well have been detrimental as it removed the predators of black rats, and might thus have enabled them and their fleas to flourish.

In the widespread belief that contagion was spread through the air, public assemblies, apart from religious ones, were prohibited. Theatres and places of entertainment closed, as did many shops.

Although churches remained open, not all their ministers stayed. Some fell ill and some fled to the countryside. Nevertheless, prayer and repentance were seen by many people as essential in warding off the plague; congregations flocked to hear any ministers who were still preaching. Dissenting and Puritan ministers who had been ousted from their posts a few years previously now often filled the empty pulpits and were heard anew. Prayer and repentance for one's sins were thought by many to be the best protection against the disease.

The streets emptied of people and of traffic; grass began to grow in some. Pedestrians took to walking down the middle of the street, away from houses that might be infected (a habit noted by Daniel Defoe.) There was another reason for avoiding going outside: both Defoe and the doctor Nathaniel Hodges recorded how sufferers afflicted with pain or delirium might run out into the streets, 'staggering like drunken men', wrote Hodges, and would sometimes fall down and die there.

When autumn came on and the weather cooled, the outbreak ran less fiercely through the city. It is not known why the virulence of the epidemic lessened: its cessation has been attributed to the Great Fire of 1666, to the weather, or to mutations in the bacteria responsible.

As the number of deaths slowly declined, the large part of the population that had fled began to return to the city. Life took on a more normal aspect. Although sporadic incidences of plague recurred into the following year, their numbers were small compared to 1665. By the end of the outbreak, official records showed that around 69,000 victims had died in London. It is thought, however, that the true number of deaths many have exceeded 100,000.

*

London was not the only place to suffer. Other parts of the country also had many victims of the plague: these included Colchester, several towns in Kent, Salisbury, Cambridge and Derby.

It is worth noting the progress of the 1665 plague in Eyam, a Derbyshire village which has become famous for its actions after it was afflicted with the disease. The village is thought to have been infected when a bundle of clothes arrived from London infested with fleas, and was opened by the tailor's assistant.

As the disease spread through the village, the local minister, the Rev. William Mompesson, introduced measures to prevent its further spread into the neighbouring countryside. The villagers reduced contact with each other, attending church services out of doors, and the whole village put itself into quarantine and refused direct contact with those from the outside world. Villagers left money at a boundary stone, in holes drilled specially and filled with vinegar, to pay for supplies which were left there in turn.

As a result, although the majority of the inhabitants may have died – 273 according to the church record – the surrounding villages seem to have remained free of infection. Mompesson himself survived and did not die until 1709. A fuller account of the Eyam plague can be read in Charles Creighton's *A History of Epidemics in Britain*, (2 vols, Cambridge University Press 1891), a comprehensive work which is thoroughly researched on the history if not the science of the plague.

*

The plague lingered on in many parts of south-east England through 1666. In particular, Colchester, in Essex, suffered throughout that year. It is thought that the last epidemic in England was in Nottingham in 1667, although there continued to be occasional deaths from plague in London every year up until 1679.

The reason for the general decline of plague in Britain is not clear, since overcrowding and insanitary living conditions remained common in the cities until the twentieth century. However, one possible factor is a drop in the numbers of black rats and hence of the fleas that carried the disease. The black rat was largely superseded by the brown rat, which seems to have introduced into the country in the early 18th century, and whose particular fleas are less well adapted to biting humans. (<https://www.historytoday.com/archive/feature/plague-england>)

In the eighteenth century occasional cases of plague in England were reported, but it seems that such reports were probably false. Ireland, Scotland and Wales had already been free of the disease since about 1650. Plague in Britain had finally died out.

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Contemporary documents about the Plague

The Great Plague of 1665, as well as being the last major epidemic of the disease in Britain, is also notable for the number of contemporary documents concerned with it. The majority of writings about the plague tend to be scientific or medical studies, pseudo-scientific ‘cures’, or religious tracts, rather than historical or journalistic accounts.

This ebook contains extracts from works of several kinds, as discussed below.

Narrative:

Daniel Defoe and *A Journal of the Plague Year*

The next section of this ebook contains an abridged version of Defoe’s work *A Journal of the Plague Year*.

This book is by far the best-known account of the 1665 plague, and the first attempt at a journalistic narrative about it. In fact it was not written until many years after the event, in 1722, when there was a revival of interest in the subject following a major outbreak of plague in Marseilles in 1720.

Daniel Defoe (1660 to 1731) was an enterprising and energetic merchant, political activist and author who at one time was imprisoned for libel. His 1704 book *The Storm* is regarded as one of the first examples of modern journalism: it contained eyewitness accounts of a destructive storm the previous year. Defoe was a prolific writer of both fiction and non-fiction, and sometimes blended the two in his work. His most famous book, *Robinson Crusoe*, was based on the true story of a Scottish castaway. Of his many other works, the most widely known are the novels *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana*, and the semi-fictional *A Journal of the Plague Year*.

A Journal of the Plague Year is an account of one man’s experiences during the 1665 plague. Although it purports to be autobiographical, Defoe was only five years old during the Great Plague and is unlikely to have had any meaningful memory of the events then. However, he is thought to have drawn on the experiences of his uncle Henry Foe, who like the protagonist of the book was a saddler in East London; and there was probably no shortage of other tales that had been handed down orally since 1665.

In writing his book, Defoe made extensive use of the Weekly Bills of Mortality which were published throughout the plague year, although the figures he gave in his book differ from other sources. He also referred to the regulations set down by the Lord Mayor, describing them at length.

In addition, Defoe may have drawn on medical and other works written at the time of the plague. While there is no definite proof of this, there are certainly resemblances between his book and the account of events in *Loimologia* by Nathaniel Hodges (see below.)

Whatever his sources, Defoe’s ‘journal’ has the appearance of a carefully researched and generally credible narrative. It is vivid and even sensationalist in its description of some events, but adopts a more measured tone in reporting the rumours and theories that were rife at the time.

Note on this abridgement of Defoe's work

While Defoe's writing is vivid, it can also be prolix and meandering, going back and forth in time and place. His *Journal* is written as one long unbroken narrative, without chapters; and his eighteenth century vocabulary and style can be obscure to the modern reader (for instance, he refers to plague as *the distemper* throughout.)

To aid navigation through the book, the version presented here divides it into 18 parts. Defoe's sometimes repetitive narrative has been shortened, so that the book is reduced to a little over half of its original length.

The vocabulary, style and spelling have been modernised where appropriate to make the meaning clearer. Occasionally sentences have been paraphrased. Defoe quoted extensive lists of figures from the Bills of Mortality, which in this edition have been summarised or omitted.

Diarists

The most famous diarists of this time were Samuel Pepys (1600 – 1679) and John Evelyn (1620 – 1706), who both lived and worked in London during the plague. Pepys was a Navy administrator, while Evelyn was a Commissioner for the care of wounded seamen. The two men knew each other; and both refer to the plague in their diary entries for 1665. However, while Pepys mentions it extensively, for Evelyn it seems to have been very much in the background of life, and obviously did not affect him directly. For that reason, only extracts from Pepys's diaries are included here.

A less well known diarist of the day was the Essex vicar Ralph Josselin (1616 – 1683): although his diary is much less detailed than Pepys's, the plague and its effects were evidently much on his mind and were frequently referred to in his brief diary entries. Relevant extracts from his diaries are also included here.

Medical Men

At the time of the plague, medical men could be physicians, surgeons (or chirurgeons) or apothecaries; all these might be called upon to attend the sick, and several subsequently wrote accounts of the plague, mixing their personal experience with theorizing.

William Boghurst (c. 1630 – 1685) was a London apothecary who made a study of plague victims and their symptoms, and in 1666 wrote up his findings in *Loimographia or, an Experimentall Relation of the Plague*. (Loimos or Λοιμός is the Greek for plague). Extracts and a summary of his work are included here.

George Thomson (1619 – 1677), a London physician, also wrote about his experiences of the plague in his book *Loimotomia, or, the Pest Anatomized* (1666). Of particular interest is his description of his dissection of a victim's body; and of his attempts to cure himself after fearing he had caught the disease from the corpse. A summary and extracts from his work are also included here.

Nathaniel Hodges (1629 – 1688) was a London physician and medical adviser to the city during the plague, who in 1672 published an account of the outbreak, *Loimologia*. His book was written in Latin, and was not translated into English until

1720. Extracts from that translation (which was edited by John Quincy) are given here.

There was no general scientific consensus at the time about either the cause of the disease or its treatment. Authors frequently contradicted each other's assertions, and disagreement between doctors was common. As well as the above books, numerous other medical and scientific – or pseudo-scientific – books and pamphlets were published in 1665 and 1666, catering for a readership desperate for remedies and answers.

Three of these works, two written by the doctors William Simpson and Theophilus Garencières, and one by an anonymous author, are represented here by shorter extracts. They typify the range of attitudes, theories and proposed solutions to the disease.

Religious writers

As well as scientific explanations for the plague, religious explanations were propounded in many published sermons and written works. The authors of these were frequently ministers; they generally viewed the disease as a manifestation of God's judgement on a wicked society, and exhorted readers to religious devotion.

One of the more notable of such works was *God's Terrible Voice in the City*. This long sermon by Thomas Vincent (1634 – 1678), a dissenting preacher, paints a dramatic picture of London during the plague. Extracts are included here.

A range of other works, both scientific and religious, can be viewed via the British Library website at <https://www.bl.uk/>, at the Wellcome Library website at <https://wellcomelibrary.org/>, or at Harvard University's online collection at <https://curiosity.lib.harvard.edu/contagion>.

Newspapers

As for contemporary newspapers, they are of little use for information about the plague of 1665. Newspapers did exist; the *Intelligencer* and the *Newes* were weekly newspapers published in London from 1663 – 66, and when the court of King Charles II moved to Oxford to escape the plague, a newspaper called *The Oxford Gazette* was born, and renamed *The London Gazette* on its relocation in November 1665.

However, all these newspapers were set up by the government, which at the time kept an extremely tight rein on the press. They seem to have been mainly concerned with Court, military and naval news, and do not appear to have published any details of the plague outbreak other than numbers of burials.

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Daniel Defoe
A Journal of the Plague Year

(abridged and modernised; division into parts is by the editor)

*being Observations or Memorials
of the most remarkable occurrences,
as well public as private, which happened in
London during the last great visitation in 1665.
Written by a CITIZEN who continued
all the while in London.
Never made public before.*

Part 1
The Plague's Arrival and Spread

It was about the beginning of September, 1664, that I heard in conversation with my neighbours that the plague had returned to Holland. It had been very violent there, and particularly at Amsterdam and Rotterdam in 1663. Some say it was brought there from Italy, or among goods shipped from Turkey or the Levant; others said it came from Crete or Cyprus. Wherever it came from, all agreed it was in Holland again.

We had no such thing as printed newspapers in those days to spread reports, whether true or invented. But news was gathered from the letters of merchants and others who corresponded abroad, and was then spread by word of mouth; so that things did not spread instantly over the whole nation, as they do now.

But it seems that the Government had a true account of it, and several meetings were held about ways to prevent its coming here; but all very private. So this rumour died off again, and people began to forget it, as a thing that did not concern us, and that we hoped was not true; till late November or early December 1664 when two men, said to be Frenchmen, died of the plague at the upper end of Drury Lane in London.

The family they were with tried to conceal it, but it became known in the neighbourhood, and the Secretaries of State got knowledge of it; they sent two physicians and a surgeon to the house. On making an inspection they found signs of the sickness upon both the dead bodies, and gave their opinions publicly that they died of the plague. This news was given to the parish clerk, and it was printed in the weekly bill of mortality in the usual manner, thus—

Plague, 2. Parishes infected, 1.

People now began to be alarmed all over the town, especially when in the last week in December another man died in the same house, of the same illness. Then six weeks passed with no sign of infection, and it was said the illness was gone; but on about 12th February, another died in another house, but in the same parish and in the same manner.

As the weekly bills showed an increase of burials in St Giles's parish greater than usual, it began to be suspected that the plague was among the people at that end of the town, and that many had died of it, though they had tried to keep it hidden as far as possible. People avoided Drury Lane, or the other streets suspected, unless they had business that obliged them to go there.

The usual number of burials in a week, in the parishes of St Giles-in-the-Fields and St Andrew's, Holborn, were from twelve to nineteen each; but from the time that the plague first began in St Giles's parish, it was observed that burials increased in number, climbing into the twenties through January and February.

A similar increase in burials was seen in the adjoining parishes of St Bride's and St James's, Clerkenwell. In each of these parishes the usual numbers that died weekly were between four and eight, whereas at that time they doubled. This increase in the weekly bills of burial was observed with great unease by the people.

However, as the weather was cold, and the frost was very severe till the end of February, the mortality bills decreased again, the city grew healthy, and everybody began to look upon the danger as over; except that the burials in St Giles's continued to be high. From the beginning of April they stood at twenty-five each week.

This alarmed us all again, especially now the weather was growing warm, and summer was at hand. However, the next week there seemed to be some hopes again; the bills were low. But the following week the plague returned, and spread into two or three other parishes around Holborn.

This was the beginning of May, yet the weather was temperate, and cool enough, and people began to hope that, as the plague was chiefly among the people at that end of the town, it might go no farther. We continued in these hopes for a few days, but it was only for a few. People began to search the houses and found that the plague was really spread in every direction, and that many died of it every day.

Now it could not be concealed: the infection had spread itself beyond all hopes of abatement. In the parish of St Giles it had got into several streets, and several families lay all sick together; in the next weekly bill of burials only fourteen were set down as the plague, but this was deceit and collusion, for in St Giles's parish they buried forty in all, most of whom died of the plague.

The next bill was from the 23rd of May to the 30th, when the number dead of the plague was given as seventeen. But the burials in St Giles's were fifty-three – a frightful number! – and on an examination by the justices of peace, at the Lord Mayor's request, it was found there were twenty more who were really dead of the plague in that parish, but had been set down to other illnesses.

But those were trifling things to what followed immediately after. For now the weather grew hot, and in June the infection spread in a dreadful manner. All who could conceal their illness did so, to prevent their neighbours shunning them, and also to prevent authority shutting up their houses; which, though it was not yet practised, yet was threatened, and people were extremely terrified at the thought of it.

In the second week in June, the parish of St Giles buried 120, of which the bills said only sixty-eight died of the plague, though everybody said there had been 100 at least. Till this week the City of London had stayed free of the plague, but now four died within the City, one in Wood Street, one in Fenchurch Street, and two in Crooked Lane. Southwark was entirely free, not one having yet died on that side of the river.

I lived just outside Aldgate, about midway between Aldgate Church and Whitechapel Bars, and as the sickness had not reached 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 people and the gentry thronged out of town with their families and servants in an unusual manner. In Broad Street, where I lived, indeed nothing was to be seen but wagons and carts full of goods, women, servants, children, etc.; coaches filled with nobility, all hurrying away; then empty wagons and carts appeared, and spare horses with servants, who, it seemed, were sent from the country to fetch more people away. There were also innumerable men on horseback, alone or with servants, all loaded with baggage.

This was a very terrible and melancholy thing to see, and as it went on from morning to night, it filled me with very serious thoughts of the misery that was coming upon the city, and those left in it.

There was great pressing and crowding at the Lord Mayor's door to get passes and certificates of health, for without these, people were not allowed to pass through the towns upon the road, or to lodge in any inn. Now, as no-one had died in the City for all this time, my Lord Mayor gave certificates of health without any difficulty.

This hurry continued through May and June, all the more because it was rumoured that the Government was to order turnpikes and barriers to be placed on the roads to prevent people travelling, and that the towns on the road would not allow people from London to pass for fear of bringing the infection with them, though neither of these rumours had any foundation at first.

Part 2

The Narrator Considers Whether to Leave

I now began to consider seriously what I should do: whether I should resolve to stay in London or shut up my house and flee, as many of my neighbours did.

I had two important considerations: one was the carrying on of my business and shop, in which were invested all my wealth; and the other was the preservation of my life, as I saw calamity coming upon the whole city – but perhaps, I thought, my fears made things out to be worse than they really were.

The first consideration was of great importance to me; my trade was a saddler, and as my dealings were chiefly not through my shop, but among the merchants trading to the English colonies in America, so my wealth lay in their hands. I was a single man, but I had a family of servants; I had a house, shop, and warehouses filled with goods; and, in short, to leave them all without any overseer would have been to risk the loss of all I had in the world.

I had an elder brother in London, who had come over not many years before from Portugal. When I asked his advice, his answer was in three words: 'Master, save thyself.' In a word, he was all for my retiring into the country, as he resolved to do himself with his family. He told me that he had heard abroad that the best preparation for the plague was to run away from it. As to my argument of losing my trade and my goods, he told me that if I left I would trust God with my trade, but if I stayed I would trust Him with my life.

I could not argue that I was in any difficulty as to where to go, having several friends and relations in Northamptonshire, and an only sister in Lincolnshire, very willing to receive me.

My brother, who had already sent his wife and two children into Bedfordshire, and resolved to follow them, pressed me to go very earnestly. I resolved to do so, but at that time could get no horse; for there was hardly a horse to be bought or hired in the whole city for some weeks. So I resolved to travel on foot with one servant, and

carry a soldier's tent with us, and lie in the fields instead of staying at inns, for the weather was warm. Many men did this, especially those who had been in the army; and I must say that if more of the people leaving had done the same, the plague would not have been carried into so many country towns as it was.

But then my servant, whom I had intended to take with me, deceived me; being frightened at the increase of illness, he took other measures, and left me, so I was put off for that time. One way or other, some little accident always happened to stop me leaving; and this brings in a story which otherwise might be thought a needless digression, about these disappointments being from Heaven.

I mention this story to advise any person in such a case, to keep his eye upon the particular providences which occur at that time, and look at them all together. Then he may safely take them for guidance from Heaven about his duty, as to whether to go away or stay when his town is visited with an infectious disease.

It came very warmly into my mind one morning, as I was musing on this particular thing, that as nothing happened without the direction of Divine Power, so my little disappointments must mean that it was the will of Heaven that I should not go. It immediately followed in my thoughts, that in that case, God must be able to preserve me in the midst of the death and danger that would surround me; and that if I attempted to save myself by fleeing, it was a kind of flying from God, and that He could cause His justice to overtake me when and where He thought fit.

These thoughts quite changed my mind about leaving, and when I talked to my brother again I told him that I was inclined to stay for this reason.

My brother, though a very religious man himself, laughed, and told me several stories of such foolhardy people, as he called them, as I was; that I ought indeed to submit to it as a work of Heaven if I had been disabled and could not leave; but to take it as a sign from Heaven that I should not go out of town, only because I could not hire a horse, or because my servant had run away, was ridiculous, since I had my health and limbs, and other servants, and might easily travel a day or two on foot. Since I had a good certificate of health, I might hire a horse or take a post-chaise on the road.

Then he proceeded to tell me of the Turks in Asia, where he had been a merchant: how, presuming their destiny was predetermined, they would go unconcerned into infected places and talk with infected persons, and then died by the thousand; whereas the Europeans merchants, who kept themselves retired, generally escaped the contagion.

At this I changed my mind again, and began to resolve to go, and made all things ready; for the infection increased around me, and the death had risen to almost seven hundred a week, and my brother told me he would stay no longer.

I went home that evening greatly oppressed in my mind, irresolute, and not knowing what to do. I was all alone; for already people had, by a general consent, stopped going out of doors after sunset; for reasons I shall say more of by-and-by.

On this evening I endeavoured to resolve what it was my duty to do, going over the arguments in my mind. It occurred to me that if I had what I might call a direction to stay, it ought to contain a promise of being preserved if I obeyed. Turning over the Bible which lay before me, I cried out, 'Well, I know not what to do; Lord, direct me!'

At that moment I happened to stop turning the pages at the ninety-first Psalm, and casting my eye on the second verse, I read on to the seventh verse, and then the tenth: 'I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God, in Him will I trust. Surely He shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome

pestilence.... A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee. Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold and see the reward of the wicked. Because thou hast made the Lord, which is my refuge, even the most High, thy habitation; there shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling.'

I scarcely need tell the reader that from that moment I resolved that I would stay in the town, and casting myself entirely upon the goodness and protection of the Almighty, would not seek any other shelter. I was in His hands, and it was right that He should do with me as should seem good to Him.

With this resolution I went to bed; and I was further confirmed in it the next day by the woman being taken ill with whom I had intended to entrust my house. But the next day I found myself very unwell also, so that if even if I wanted to go, I could not. I was ill for three or four days; so I took my leave of my brother, who went away to Dorking, in Surrey, and then into Buckinghamshire, to a retreat he had found there for his family.

It was a very bad time to be sick in, for if any one complained, it was immediately said that he had the plague; and though I had indeed no symptom of that disease, yet I was very ill both in my head and in my stomach, and I feared that I really was infected. But in about three days I grew better; the third night I rested well, and was much refreshed, and went about my business as usual. However, I put off all my thoughts of going into the country.

It was now mid-July, and the plague, which had chiefly raged at the other end of the town, began to now come eastward towards the part where I lived. It did not come straight on towards us; for the City within the walls was fairly healthy still; nor had it got very much over the river. But in the outer-parishes, which were very populous, and fuller also of the poor, the plague found more to prey upon than in the City. It came through Clerkenwell, Cripplegate, Shoreditch, and Bishopsgate; and from there to Aldgate, Whitechapel, and Stepney, at length spreading its utmost rage and violence in those parts, even while it abated at the western parishes where it began. By the second week in August, Cripplegate parish alone buried 886, and Clerkenwell 155.

Before this, during the month of July, I went about the streets as usual, as my business required, and particularly went generally once a day into the City, to my brother's house, which he had given me charge of, and to see if it was safe. I used to go into the house, and over most of the rooms, to see that all was well; for though it is amazing that any should have hearts so hardened in the midst of such a calamity as to rob and steal, yet certainly all sorts of villainies went on.

But the City itself began now to be visited too, I mean within the walls; but the number of people there were fewer because so many had fled into the country. All July and August they continued to flee, until I began to think there would be really none but magistrates and servants left. The Court moved to Oxford, where it pleased God to preserve them; and the plague did not touch them, though I cannot say they ever showed any great thankfulness.

The face of London was now indeed strangely altered. Sorrow and sadness sat upon every face; and though some parts were not yet overwhelmed, yet all looked deeply concerned. We all regarded ourselves and our families as in the utmost danger. London might well be said to be all in tears; although the mourners did not go about the streets, their voices were heard. The shrieks of women and children at the windows and doors of their houses, where their dearest relations were perhaps dying, or dead, were enough to pierce the stoutest heart in the world. Tears and lamentations

were seen almost in every house, especially at first; later, men's hearts were hardened, for death was always before their eyes.

When I went out on business to the other end of the town, it was a most surprising thing to see those streets which were usually so thronged now grown desolate. There were so few people that I might sometimes go the length of a whole street and see nobody except watchmen set at the doors of houses which were shut up (of which I shall speak presently.)

One day, I walked up Holborn, and there the street was full of people, but they walked in the middle of the great street, neither on one side or the other; I suppose, so that they would not mingle with anybody that came out of the houses, or meet with smells from houses that might be infected.

The Inns of Court were all shut up; few of the lawyers in the Temple, or Lincoln's Inn, or Gray's Inn, were to be seen there. Whole rows of houses in some places were shut up, the inhabitants all fled, and only a watchman or two left.

When I speak of rows of houses being shut up, I do not mean shut up by the magistrates, but because great numbers of persons followed the Court, so that some of the streets became desolate. But the fear was not yet nearly so great in the City, particularly because the sickness was so intermittent that people were, as it were, alarmed and unalarmed again; and this happened several times, till it began to be familiar to them. Even when it appeared violent, on seeing that it did not spread into the City, the people began to take courage, and to be, as I may say, a little hardened.

It is true a vast many people fled, as I have observed, yet they were chiefly from the west end of the town, and from the heart of the city: that is to say, the wealthiest people, and those who were unencumbered with trades and business. But in Southwark, and in the east part, such as Wapping, Ratcliff, Stepney, and the like, the people generally stayed, except here and there a few wealthy families.

It must not be forgot here that the city and suburbs were prodigiously full of people at the time this all began. With the Restoration, a youthful and gay Court had made a great trade in the city, especially in fashion and finery, so it drew a great number of workmen, manufacturers, and the like, mostly poor people who depended upon their labour. For example, it was estimated that there were no less than a hundred thousand ribbon-weavers in and about the city. Indeed, I often wondered that, after the prodigious numbers of people that went away at first, there was still so great a multitude left.

Part 3 **Omens, Quacks and Mountebanks**

But I must go back again to the beginning of this surprising time. While the fears of the people were young, they were increased strangely by several odd accidents. I shall name only a few of these; but in fact there were many, and they were propagated by wizards and cunning people.

In the first place, a blazing star or comet appeared for several months before the plague, as there did another, a little before the fire. The old women and the hypochondriac part of the other sex, whom I could almost call old women too, remarked (especially afterwards) that those two comets passed directly over the city, and so very near the houses that it was plain they meant something peculiar to the city. They said that the comet before the pestilence was of a faint, dull, languid colour, and its motion very heavy and slow; but that the comet before the fire was

bright and sparkling, or, as others said, flaming, and its motion swift and furious; and that, accordingly, one foretold a heavy judgement, slow but severe, as was the plague; but the other foretold a sudden, fiery stroke, like the conflagration. Some people even said they had heard the comet before the fire; that it made a rushing, mighty noise, fierce and terrible, though at a distance.

I saw both these stars, and, I must confess, had so much of these notions in my head, that I was apt to look upon them as the warnings of God's judgements. But at the same time I knew that natural causes are assigned by the astronomers for such things, and that their motions are calculated, so that they cannot be perfectly called the forerunners or foretellers, much less the cause, of such events as pestilence, fire, and the like.

However, these things had a strong influence upon the minds of the common people. Their fears were likewise increased by the error of the times; in which people were more addicted to prophecies, dreams, and old wives' tales than ever they were before or since. Why this was, I do not know; but certainly, books such as Lilly's *Almanack* and Gadbury's *Astrological Predictions* frightened them terribly. Several pretended religious books, one entitled, *Come out of her, my People, lest you be Partaker of her Plagues*, foretold the ruin of the city.

Some people even ran boldly about the streets, pretending they were sent to preach to the city; and one in particular, who, like Jonah, cried in the streets, 'Yet forty days, and London shall be destroyed.' Another ran about naked, except for a pair of drawers about his waist, crying, 'Oh, the great and the dreadful God!' and said no more, but repeated those words continually. I met this poor creature several times in the streets, but he would not talk with me or anyone else, but continued his dismal cries.

Then there were the dreams of old women, or, I should say, the interpretation by old women of other people's dreams. Some heard voices warning them to be gone, others saw apparitions in the air; and I do not mean to be uncharitable when I say that they heard voices that never spoke, and saw sights that never appeared. The imagination of the people was really turned wayward and possessed. They who were peering continually at the clouds saw shapes which had nothing in them but air and vapour. They told us they saw a flaming sword held in a hand coming out of a cloud, they saw hearses and coffins in the air, and heaps of dead bodies lying unburied, and the like.

Everyone was so positive of their having seen what they pretended to see, that there was no contradicting them without breach of friendship, or without being called rude and unmannerly. Once, seeing a crowd of people in the street, I joined them to satisfy my curiosity, and found them all staring up into the air to see what a woman told them appeared plain to her, which was an angel clothed in white, waving a fiery sword. She described every part of the figure to the life, and the poor people agreed eagerly.

'Yes, I see it all plainly,' says one; 'there's the sword as plain as can be.' Another saw the angel's face, and cried out what a glorious creature he was! One saw one thing, and one another. I looked as earnestly as the rest, but perhaps not with so much willingness to be imposed upon; and I said, indeed, that I could see nothing but a white cloud. The woman turned from me, called me a profane fellow, and a scoffer; told me that it was a time of God's anger, and dreadful judgements were approaching, and that despisers such as I should wander and perish.

The people about her seemed disgusted too; and I found that I should be mobbed by them before I could undeceive them. So I left them; and this appearance passed for real.

I had another encounter near Bishopsgate Church, in the narrow passage between the two church-yards. Here stood a man talking eagerly to passers-by, and pointing now to one place, then to another, and affirming that he saw a ghost walking upon a gravestone there. He was amazed that everybody did not see it as well as he. Suddenly he would cry, 'There it is; now it comes this way'; till at length he persuaded the people into so firm a belief of it, that one and then another fancied he saw it.

He came every day making a strange hubbub, till Bishopsgate clock struck eleven, and then the ghost would seem to disappear. I looked earnestly every way, and could not see the least appearance of anything; but so positive was this poor man, that he gave the people the vapours in abundance, and sent them away trembling and frightened, till hardly anybody dared to go down that passage by night on any account.

To this, the astrologers added stories of the conjunctions of planets in a malignant manner, and they filled the people's heads with predictions of drought, famine, and pestilence. In the first two predictions, however, they were entirely mistaken, for we had no drought, but a hard frost till March, and after that moderate weather.

Some attempts were made to suppress the printing of such books as these; but I am informed that Government was unwilling to exasperate the people, who were, as I may say, all out of their wits already.

Neither can I acquit those ministers, who in their sermons rather sank than lifted up the hearts of their hearers. Just as God calls us to Him by invitations, and declarations of mercy, rather than driving us by terror and amazement, so I must confess I thought the ministers should have done also. But we had some good men whose sermons were full of terror, who spoke nothing but dismal things; and sent people away in tears and terrified.

It was, indeed, a time of very unhappy breaches among us in matters of religion. Since the Restoration, innumerable sects and divisions already prevailed among the people. The plague reconciled them for a time, and people flocked to hear the best ministers preach, regardless of which sect they belonged to. But after the sickness was over, that spirit of charity abated; things returned to their old channel again.

One mischief always introduces another. These terrors and apprehensions of the people led them into a thousand weak, foolish, and wicked things, such as running to fortune-tellers and astrologers to have their fortunes told. This folly soon made the town swarm with wicked pretenders to magic. This trade grew so open and so generally practised that it became common to have signs set up at doors: 'Here lives a fortune-teller', 'Here you may have your nativity calculated', and the like. With what blind, absurd, and ridiculous stuff these oracles of the devil satisfied the people I really know not, but certainly innumerable visitors crowded about their doors every day.

One mischief was, that if the poor people asked these mock astrologers whether there would be a plague or no, they all agreed to answer 'Yes', for that kept up their trade. If the people had not been kept in a fright about that, the wizards would have been rendered useless, and their craft would have been at an end. So they always talked of such-and-such influences of the stars, and conjunctions of planets, which must necessarily bring sickness and plague.

The ministers and most serious preachers, to do them justice, thundered against these and other wicked practices, and exposed their folly; and the most judicious people despised and abhorred them. But it was impossible to make any impression upon the middling people and the labouring poor. Their fears predominated their minds, and they threw away their money in a most distracted manner upon those whimsies.

Maid-servants especially, and men-servants, were the chief of their customers. After their first question of ‘Will there be a plague?’ the next question was, ‘Oh, sir, what will become of me? Will my mistress keep me, or will she turn me off?’ And likewise the menservants.

The truth is, the case of poor servants was very dismal, for a great number of them lost their jobs; and if public charity had not provided for these poor creatures, they would have been in the worst condition of any people in the city.

These things agitated the minds of the common people for many months, while the first fears were upon them but the plague was not yet broken out. The more serious inhabitants behaved in another manner. The Government encouraged their devotion, and appointed public prayers and days of fasting and humiliation, to make public confession of sin and to implore the mercy of God to avert His dreadful judgement; and people of all persuasions obeyed with alacrity. They flocked to the churches and meetings, which were thronged to the doors. There were daily prayers appointed at several churches, and days of private praying at other places; all of which the people attended with uncommon devotion. Several private families also kept family fasts. So, in a word, those people who were really serious and religious applied themselves in a truly Christian manner to the proper work of repentance and humiliation, as a Christian people ought to do.

Even the Court, which was then gay and luxurious, put on a face of concern for the public danger. All the entertainments which had set up since the Restoration, the gaming-tables, public dancing-rooms, and music-houses, were shut up and suppressed; and puppet-shows, rope-dancers, and such-like doings, which had bewitched the common people, shut up their shops, for a kind of sadness and horror at these things sat upon all faces. Everybody began to think of their graves, not of mirth and diversions.

But even those wholesome reflections – which, rightly managed, would have led the people to fall upon their knees, confess their sins, and look up to their merciful Saviour for pardon and compassion – had a quite contrary extreme in the common people, who, as ignorant and stupid as they were brutishly wicked and thoughtless before, were now led by their fright to extremes of folly.

As I have said, they ran to conjurers and witches, who fed their fears, and kept them always alarmed on purpose to delude them and pick their pockets. They ran after quacks and mountebanks for medicines, buying up such multitudes of pills and potions that they even poisoned themselves beforehand for fear of the poison of the infection; and made their bodies vulnerable to the plague, instead of preserving them against it.

The street-corners were full of doctors’ advertisements inviting people to come to them for remedies, such as these: ‘Infallible preventive pills against the plague.’ ‘Sovereign cordials against the corruption of the air.’ ‘Incomparable drink against the plague, never found out before.’ These were in such numbers that it would fill a book just to set them down.

Others set up bills such as these:—

‘An eminent High Dutch physician, newly come over from Holland, where he resided during the great plague last year in Amsterdam, and cured multitudes of people of the plague.’

‘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 plague there.’

‘An ancient gentlewoman, having practised with great success in the late plague in this city, in 1636, gives her advice only to the female sex.’

I could give you two or three dozen examples of the like and yet have abundance left behind. It is clear to see from these how a set of thieves and pickpockets not only robbed and cheated the poor people of their money, but poisoned their bodies with odious and fatal preparations; some with mercury, and some with other things as bad.

One of these quack operators gulled the people with his advertisement, which said in capital letters, ‘He gives advice to the poor for nothing.’

Crowds of poor people came to him accordingly, to whom he made a great many fine speeches, and examined their state of health. But the conclusion of all was, that he had a preparation which he swore would prevent the plague, and which cost half-a-crown.

‘But, sir,’ says one poor woman, ‘Your bills say you give the poor your help for nothing.’

‘Ay, good woman,’ says the doctor, ‘so I do. I give my advice to the poor for nothing, but not my physic.’

‘Alas, sir!’ says she, ‘that is a snare laid for the poor, then; for you give them free advice to buy your physic for their money.’

She stood at his door all day, telling her tale to the people that came, till the doctor, finding she turned away his customers, was obliged to call her upstairs again, and give her his box of physic for nothing, which perhaps was good for nothing when she had it.

There is no doubt that these quacks and pretenders raised great gains out of the miserable people, for the crowds that ran after them were greater than those who sought out the most famous doctors of the time. And I was told that some of them got five pounds a day from their medicine.

But there was still another and worse madness beyond all this. It lay in wearing charms, exorcisms, amulets, and I know not what preparations, to fortify the body with them against the plague; as if the plague was not the hand of God, but a kind of possession of an evil spirit, that could be kept off by certain combinations of letters. Many of these contained the word ABRACADABRA, formed in a triangle or pyramid.

How the poor people discovered the uselessness of those things, and how many of them were afterwards thrown into the common graves with these hellish charms and trumpery hanging about their necks, remains to be spoken of as we go along. For when the plague spread itself, they began to see the folly of trusting to those creatures who had gulled them of their money; and then they did not know what to do.

Indeed, the poor people were to be pitied, once death began not merely to hover over every one’s head, but to look into their houses and chambers and stare in their faces. Though some might be stupid and dull, yet there was a great deal of just alarm sounded in the inmost souls of others.

Many consciences were awakened; many hard hearts melted into tears; many a penitent confession was made of crimes long concealed. Many a robbery, many a murder, was then confessed aloud, with nobody surviving to record it. People might

be heard calling upon God for mercy, and saying, 'I have been a thief, 'I have been an adulterer', and none dared stop to inquire into such things or to give comfort to the poor creatures that in the anguish both of soul and body thus cried out.

Some of the ministers did visit the sick at first for a little while, but it was not to be done. It would have been death to have gone into some houses. The very buriers of the dead, who were the most hardened creatures in town, were sometimes so terrified at the onset of the plague that they dared not go into houses where whole families had been swept away together. Time inured them to it all, and they ventured everywhere afterwards without hesitation, as I shall have occasion to mention later.

Part 4 **Actions of the Lord Mayor**

After the plague began, the magistrates began to take the condition of the people into their serious consideration. The Lord Mayor, a sober and religious gentleman, appointed physicians and surgeons for relief of the diseased poor, and ordered the College of Physicians to publish directions for cheap remedies. This, indeed, was one of the most charitable and judicious things that could be done, for it stopped the people from haunting the doors of every advertiser, and from blindly taking poison instead of physic, and death instead of life.

I do not wish to lessen the capability of the physicians when I say that the violence of the plague in its extremity was like the fire the following year. The fire defied all remedies; the fire-engines were broken, and the power of man was baffled. So the Plague defied all medicines; the very physicians were seized with it, and dropped down dead with their own preservatives in their mouths. This was the case with several eminent physicians and skilful surgeons. Many quacks also died, who had the folly to trust to their own medicines.

It is no derogation of the physicians' labour to say they fell in the common calamity; it is rather to their praise that they ventured their lives and lost them in the service of mankind. They endeavoured to save the lives of others. But we were not to expect that the physicians could stop God's judgements, or prevent a plague sent from heaven.

Doubtless, the physicians assisted many by their skill and prudence. But they could not cure those who were mortally infected before they were sent for, as was frequently the case.

The magistrates acted with prudence and vigilance in many respects. But on the regulations they published, I need to say something of the shutting up of houses. This part of the history of the plague is very melancholy, but the most grievous story must be told.

About June, the Lord Mayor of London and the Court of Aldermen, as I have said, began to concern themselves for the regulation of the city. The Justices of Peace for Middlesex had begun to shut up houses in the parishes of St Giles-in-the-Fields, St Martin, St Clement Danes, etc., and with good success; for in several streets where the plague broke out, upon strict guarding of infected houses, and taking care to bury immediately those that died, the plague ceased in those streets. It was also observed that the plague decreased sooner in those parishes than in others; the early care taken being a great means to halting it.

This shutting up of houses was a method first used, as I understand, in the plague of 1603; and the power of shutting people up in their own houses was granted by Act

of Parliament at that time. The Lord Mayor and aldermen made the order on the 1st of July 1665, when the numbers infected within the City were but few; nearly one thousand a week had died in the whole area, but the number in the City was only twenty-eight.

These orders of my Lord Mayor's are detailed below.

Regarding Officers:

First, they stated that various officers should be appointed in every parish. First named were examiners, who were to inquire what persons were sick, and of what diseases. If they found any person sick of the plague, they were to give orders to the constable that the house be shut up.

Two watchmen were to be appointed to every infected house, one for day, and the other for night, to take care that no person should go in or out of such infected houses, upon pain of severe punishment. The watchmen were to do any errands and business that the sick house might require: and if the watchman was sent away upon any business, he must lock up the house and take the key with him.

Every parish was to appoint women searchers of good and honest reputation, who were to make true report to the utmost of their knowledge whether the bodies they searched had died of the infection, or of other diseases. The physicians appointed for cure and prevention of the infection were to review the searchers' work and consider whether they were fitly qualified. No searcher during this time of plague was permitted to keep any shop or stall, or be employed as a laundress, or in any other common employment whatsoever.

Additional able and discreet surgeons were to be appointed to each part of the parish, to join the searchers in examining the bodies, and to visit any person who sent for them or whom the examiners directed them to visit, to check the nature of their disease. These surgeons were to be paid twelve-pence for each body searched by them.

Infected houses and people:

If nurses left any infected house less than twenty-eight days after the death of any person from the plague, the house to which the nurse went should be shut up until the said twenty-eight days had expired.

The master of every house, as soon as anyone in his house fell ill with symptoms of the plague, or with an unknown disease, should notify the examiner within two hours.

Sequestration of the Sick:

As soon as any one was found by the examiner, surgeon or searcher to be sick of the plague, he or she must be isolated in the same house; and whether they died or not, the house must be shut up for a month, after the use of preservatives taken by the rest.

Any bedding, clothing and wall-hangings must be well aired with fire and suitable perfumes before being used again. They must not be taken out of any infected house, nor sold. If anyone bought such bedding or clothes within two months after the infection, his house should be shut up as infected, for twenty days at least.

If any person visited a man known to be infected of the plague, or entered into any known infected house, his own house where he lived should be shut up for some days by the examiner's direction.

No sick person was to be moved out of the house where they fell ill, except to the pest-house, or to another house he himself owned. Any such removal must be done by night. A house-owner might send either his sick people or his sound people to his second home, and any people seeming well whom he sent to a second home must then isolate themselves for at least one week in case infection should appear.

The burial of the dead was to take place always either before sun-rise or after sun-set, privately with only the churchwardens or constable; no neighbours nor friends were allowed to accompany the corpse to church, or to enter the house of the deceased, upon pain of having their own house shut up.

No corpse dying of infection should remain in any church in time of public prayer or sermon. No children should be permitted at time of burial to come near the corpse, coffin, or grave. And all the graves must be at least six feet deep.

If any one came to the parish from an infected place, the parish from which they had come should at their own charge cause the said person to be brought back again by night, and the house of the receiver of such a person was to be shut up for twenty days.

Every house visited with the plague was to be marked with a red cross a foot long in the middle of the door, and with these words, "Lord, have mercy upon us," set over the cross, to stay there until the lawful opening of the house.

Every house visited by the plague was to be watched and shut up for four weeks.

The searchers, surgeons and buriers were not to pass the streets without holding a red rod or wand three feet in length in their hands, clearly to be seen, and were not to go into any other house except their own or that to which they were directed or sent for. They were to abstain from company, especially when they had recently attended on the sick.

No inmates of any infected house might be permitted to move out without a certificate from the examiners of health of that parish. If they did not obey, the house to which they moved would be shut up as if in a case of plague.

Any hackney-coachmen who might have carried infected persons must air their coaches well and not use them for five or six days afterwards.

In the streets:

It was ordered that every householder should keep the street in front of his door clean and swept. Sweepings and dirt should be daily carried away by the rakers, who must give notice of their coming by blowing a horn. Waste-pits should be moved as far out of the city as possible.

Special care should be taken that no stinking fish, or unwholesome flesh, or musty corn, or rotten food of any sort was sold about the city. Brewers would be checked for musty and unwholesome casks.

No hogs, dogs, cats, tame pigeons, or ponies, were permitted to be kept within any part of the city. If swine strayed in the streets they would be impounded by the beadle, and stray dogs would be killed.

Since there were many complaints of rogues and wandering beggars that swarmed about the city, who were a great cause of the spreading of the infection, it was ordered that the constables should not permit any wandering beggars whatsoever.

All plays, bear-baitings, games, singing of ballads, and such-like causes of assemblies of people were utterly prohibited. All public feasting and dinners at taverns, ale-houses, and the like, were forbidden till further notice; and the money thereby spared was to be employed for the relief of the poor who had the infection.

Disorderly drinking in taverns, ale-houses and coffee-houses was frowned on, as a common way of spreading the plague. Nobody was to be allowed to enter or be in any tavern, ale-house, or coffee-house to drink after nine in the evening.

For the better execution of these orders, the aldermen, deputies, and councilmen were to meet weekly or oftener, as required, at some place clear of infection, to consult how the orders might be duly put in execution.

The orders were signed by Sir John Lawrence, Lord Mayor, and his sheriffs.

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These orders extended only to places within the Lord Mayor's jurisdiction, but the justices of peace in the outlying parishes took the same measures. As I remember, the orders for shutting up of houses did not take place so soon on our side of town, because, as I said before, the plague did not reach to these eastern parts of the town till the beginning of August.

Part 5 **On the Shutting up of Houses**

This shutting up of houses was at first counted a very cruel and unchristian method, and the poor people so confined lamented bitterly. Complaints of the severity of it were daily brought to my Lord Mayor, of houses causelessly (and some maliciously) shut up. Many households that complained so loudly were found to contain sickness, but if the sickness did not appear infectious, or was uncertain, the patient might be carried to the pest-house.

It is true that locking the doors of people's houses, and setting a watchman there night and day, looked very hard and cruel; and many people perished in these miserable confinements, who might not have fallen ill if they had had liberty, even though the plague was in the house. The people were very clamorous and uneasy about it at first, and several violences were committed and injuries offered to the watchmen; also several people broke out by force in many places, as I shall observe by-and-by. But the public good justified the private mischief, and the magistrates allowed no mitigation. This made people try all manner of stratagems in order to get out if they could, to deceive the watchmen, and to escape or break out from them, in which frequent scuffles happened.

As I went along Houndsditch one morning there was a great noise. It is true, indeed, there was not much crowd, because people were not very free to gather together. But the outcry was loud enough to prompt my curiosity, and I called to someone who was looking out of a window, and asked what was the matter.

A watchman, it seems, had been employed to keep his post at the door of a house which was shut up. He had been there for two nights, and the day-watchman had been there the previous day, and was now come to relieve him. All this while no noise had been heard in the house, no light had been seen; the inhabitants had called for nothing, and sent him on no errands. There had been no noise since the Monday afternoon, when he heard great crying and screaming in the house, which he supposed

was caused by someone in the family dying just at that time. It seems, the night before, the dead-cart had been stopped there, and a servant-maid had been brought down dead, and the buriers had put her into the cart, wrapped in a green rug, and carried her away.

The watchman had knocked at the door when he heard that noise and crying mentioned above, and nobody answered for a great while; but at last someone looked out and said with an angry, quick tone, and yet a kind of crying voice, 'What d'ye want, that ye make such a knocking?'

He answered, 'I am the watchman! What is the matter?'

The person answered, 'What is that to you? Stop the dead-cart.'

This, it seems, was about one o'clock. Soon afterwards the watchman stopped the dead-cart, and then knocked again, but nobody answered. He continued knocking, and the bellman called out several times, 'Bring out your dead'; but nobody answered, till the man that drove the cart would stay no longer, and drove away.

The watchman knew not what to make of all this, so he let them alone till the day-watchman came to relieve him. Together they knocked at the door a great while, but nobody answered; and they observed that the second-floor window at which the person had looked out before was still open.

Upon seeing this the two men got a long ladder, and one of them went up to the window and looked into the room. There he saw a woman lying dead upon the floor in a dismal manner, having no clothes on but her shift. But though he called aloud, nobody stirred or answered; neither could he hear any noise in the house.

He came down again, and they resolved to report this to the magistrate. The magistrate ordered the house to be broken open with a constable and other officials present, so that nothing might be plundered; and accordingly it was done.

Nobody was found in the house but that young woman. The rest had left her to die by herself, and were all gone, having found some way to delude the watchman, and to get out at some back-door, or over the tops of the houses, so that he knew nothing of it. As to those cries and shrieks which he heard, it was supposed they were the passionate cries of the family at the bitter parting from the dead woman, who was the sister to the mistress of the family. The man of the house, his wife, several children, and servants, had all fled.

Many such escapes were made out of infected houses, particularly when the watchman was sent on some errand by the family; to buy food and physic, for example, to fetch physicians or nurses, or to order the dead-cart. When he went he was to lock the outer door of the house and take the key away with him, To evade this, and cheat the watchmen, people got two or three keys made for their locks, or they found ways to unscrew the locks from the inside, and when they sent away the watchman to the market or elsewhere, they would open the door and go out as often as they pleased. But when this was discovered, the officers afterwards had orders to padlock the doors on the outside, and place bolts on them as they thought fit.

At another house, as I was informed, in Aldgate, a whole family was shut up and locked in because the maid-servant was taken sick. The master of the house had complained through his friends to the Lord Mayor, and had requested to have the maid carried to the pest-house, but was refused; so the door was marked with a red cross, with a padlock on the outside, as above, and a watchman set to keep the door.

After the master of the house found that he, his wife, and his children were to be locked up with this poor sick servant, he called to the watchman, and told him he must go and fetch a nurse to attend this poor girl, because it would be certain death to

them all if they nursed her, and he was resolved none of his family should go near her.

The watchman went and fetched a nurse, and brought her to them the same evening. During this interval the master of the house took his chance to break a large hole through his shop into a stall, where formerly a cobbler had sat, under his shop-window. Since the cobbler had gone, he had the key in his own keeping. The noise he was obliged to make would have alarmed the watchman; but having made his way into this stall, the man sat still until the watchman returned with the nurse, and all the next day also. The night following, having sent the watchman on a trifling errand to an apothecary's, he got himself and all his family out of the house, and left the nurse and the watchman to throw the poor girl into the dead-cart.

I could tell a great many such stories as these, which are true in general, though I could not at the time learn all the details. There was likewise violence used with the watchmen in many places; and I believe that from the beginning of the plague's visitation to the end, there were eighteen or twenty watchmen killed, or severely wounded, presumably by the people in the infected houses who attempted to come out and were opposed.

No less could less be expected, for people were effectively imprisoned in their own houses; and as they were guilty of no crime, it was all the more intolerable to them.

In addition, every house had only one watchman, and as many houses had several ways out, some into different streets, it was impossible for one man to guard them all so as to prevent the escape of desperate people. They would talk to the watchman on one side of the house, while the family made their escape at another.

For example, in Coleman Street there are an abundance of alleys. A house was shut up in White's Alley; and this house had a back-window into a court which led into Bell Alley. A watchman was set at the door of this house, and there he stood, or his comrade, night and day, while all the family escaped on the first evening, and left the poor fellows watching for nearly a fortnight.

Not far from the same place they blew up a watchman with gunpowder, and burned the poor fellow dreadfully; and although he made hideous cries, nobody would come near to help him. The whole family got out at the windows one storey high, except for two who were sick. The people who fled were never found, till after the plague was abated and they returned; but as nothing could be proved, nothing could be done to them.

Some let themselves down out of their windows, even in the face of the watchman, bringing swords or pistols, and threatening to shoot the poor wretch if he called for help.

Others had gardens between them and their neighbours, or yards or walls; and these, by friendship and entreaties, would get leave to get over to their neighbours' houses and out at their doors; or would bribe the servants to let them through in the night.

In short, the shutting up of houses was not to be depended upon. It served only to make the people more desperate to break out. And what was worse, those that did break out spread the infection farther by their wandering than they would otherwise have done. Some perished of hunger in the streets or fields, or dropped down by the raging violence of their fever. Others wandered into the country, going any way in desperation: till, faint and tired, with the houses and villages on the road refusing to admit them whether infected or no, they perished by the roadside or got into barns and died there.

On the other hand, when the plague first seized a family – that is to say, when anybody had gone out and caught the illness and brought it home – it was certainly known by the family before it was known to the officers. In this interval, between their being taken sick and the examiners coming, the master of the house had time to remove himself or all his family, if he knew where to go, and many did so. But the great disaster was that many who did this carried the disease into the houses of those who were so hospitable as to receive them; which was very cruel and ungrateful.

There was a general idea that the people infected had no scruple about infecting others. I cannot say how much truth there was in it, and I do not know what reason there might be for so wicked an attitude, which is contrary to religion as well as to generosity and humanity.

But I speak of those who escaped when infected. On the other hand, many had retreats and other houses to go to before the plague arrived, where they locked themselves up and kept hid till it was over; and many families, foreseeing the approach of the plague, laid up stores of enough food for their whole families, and shut themselves up so entirely that they were neither seen nor heard of till the infection was quite ceased, and then they came out sound and well. Doubtless this was the most effective step that could be taken for those who could not move away; for in being thus shut up they were as if they had been a hundred miles off. Among these families, several Dutch merchants were particularly remarkable, who kept their houses like little garrisons and allowed none to go in or out.

But I come back to the case of families infected and shut up by the magistrates. The misery of those families is not to be expressed; and we heard the most dismal shrieks and outcries of the poor people, terrified by the condition of their dearest relations, and by the terror of being imprisoned.

I remember, and while I am writing this story I think I hear the very sound of it, a certain lady had an only daughter, of about nineteen years old, with a very considerable fortune. They were lodgers in the house where they lived. The young woman, her mother, and the maid had been out; but about two hours after they came home the young lady complained she was not well; in a quarter of an hour more she vomited and had a violent pain in her head.

‘Pray God’, says her mother, in a terrible fright, ‘my child has not the plague!’ She ordered the bed to be warmed, and resolved to put her to bed, and prepared to give her things to make her sweat, which was the normal remedy at the first signs of the illness.

The mother undressed the young woman, and laying her down in the bed, immediately discovered the fatal tokens of plague on the inside of her thighs. Unable to contain herself, her mother shrieked out in a frightful manner, and then ran all over the house, up and down the stairs, like one distracted, and continued screeching and crying out for several hours void of all sense, and never came thoroughly to herself again. As to the young maiden, she was a dead corpse from that moment, for the gangrene which causes the spots had spread over her whole body, and she died in less than two hours. But still the mother continued crying out. I think the mother never recovered, but died two or three weeks after.

There were innumerable such-like cases, and the weekly bill of burials usually included two or three that may well be called frightened to death. There were also great numbers frightened out of their senses, some out of their memory, and some out of their understanding. But I return to the shutting up of houses.

Several people, I say, got out of their houses by tricking or bribing the watchmen. I must confess I thought it the most innocent bribery that any man could be guilty of,

and thought it was hard when three of those watchmen were publicly whipped through the streets for allowing people to go out of houses that were shut up.

Once families got out by such means, there were many ways of retreat. Some got tents and set them up in the fields, carrying beds or straw to lie on, and provisions to eat, and so lived like hermits in a cell, for nobody would come near them; and several stories were told of some who lived like wandering pilgrims in the deserts, and escaped by making themselves exiles.

I know a story of two brothers and their kinsman, single men, but poor, who did just this; and it shall be told a little farther on.

Part 6

The Burial Pits and the Pie Tavern

At first I went freely about the streets, though not into 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. It looked about forty feet in length, and about fifteen or sixteen feet broad, and about nine feet deep; but it was said they dug it nearly twenty feet deep afterwards in one part; for they had dug several large pits before this.

Into these pits they had put perhaps fifty or sixty bodies each; then they made larger holes to bury the numbers of dead, which, by the end of August, were from 200 to 400 a week. But now, at the beginning of September, with 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 of that size, 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. However, the pit being finished on the 4th of September, they began to bury bodies in it on the 6th; and by the 20th, which was just two weeks later, they had thrown into it 1,114 bodies, and were obliged to fill it up, since the bodies were by then within six feet of the surface.

It was about the 10th of September that my curiosity drove me to go and see this pit again, when there had been nearly 400 people buried in it; and I resolved to go in the night, when the burials took place, and see some of them thrown in.

There was a strict order to prevent people coming to those pits, to prevent infection. But after some time that order was even more necessary, because people that were infected and delirious would run to those pits, and throw themselves in, and, as they said, bury themselves. The officers did not allow them to lie there; but I have heard that in a great pit in Finsbury, which was not walled about, many came and threw themselves in, and expired there: when the officers came to bury others they found them there, quite dead, though not cold.

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

I got admittance into the churchyard by being acquainted with the sexton, though he urged me not to go, telling me very seriously (for he was a good, religious, and sensible man) that it was indeed their business to take risks, but curiosity was not sufficient to risk the danger. I told him that perhaps it might be an instructing and useful sight.

‘Nay,’ says the good man, ‘it will be a sermon to you, maybe the best that ever you heard in your life. ’Tis a speaking sight,’ says he, ‘and calls us all to repentance.’ With that he opened the door and said, ‘Go, if you will.’

His words had shocked my resolution a little, and I stood wavering, but just at that moment I heard the bellman, and then a dead-cart appeared; so I could no longer resist my desire to see it, and went in.

There was nobody there that I could perceive at first, except the buriers and the fellow that led the horse and cart; but when they came up to the pit they saw a man going to and fro, muffled up in a brown cloak, and making motions, as if he was in great agony.

The buriers immediately gathered about him, supposing he was one of those poor delirious creatures that used, as I have said, to try to bury themselves. He said nothing as he walked about, but groaned very deeply and loud, and sighed as if he would break his heart.

The buriers soon found that he was not infected, but rather oppressed with a dreadful weight of grief, having his wife and several of his children all in the cart that was just come in, and which he followed in an agony and excess of sorrow. He mourned with a kind of masculine grief that could not give way to tears; and calmly told the buriers he would only see the bodies thrown in and then go away, so they left him alone.

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 – no sooner did he see the sight but he cried out aloud, 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, where they took care of him. He looked into the pit again as he went away, but the buriers had covered the bodies immediately by throwing in earth, so that nothing could be seen.

This was a mournful and affecting scene indeed; but the other was awful and full of terror. The cart had in it sixteen or seventeen bodies; some were wrapt up in linen sheets, some in rags, some little other than naked; but it did not matter much to them, seeing that they were all dead, and were to be huddled together into the common grave of mankind, poor and rich together. For there was no other way of burials, and coffins could not be had because of the prodigious numbers that died in such a calamity as this.

It was reported by way of scandal upon the buriers, that if any corpse was delivered to them in a decent winding-sheet of good linen, tied over the head and feet, that the buriers were so wicked as to strip them in the cart and carry them quite naked to the ground. But as I cannot easily believe this, I can only relate it and leave it undetermined.

Innumerable stories also went about of the cruel behaviour of nurses who tended the sick, and of their hastening on the fate of those they tended. But I shall say more of this in its place.

I was indeed shocked with this sight; it almost overwhelmed me, and I went away with my heart most afflicted. Turning up the street towards my own house, I saw another dead-cart, and a bellman going before it, coming out of Harrow Alley; and being very full of dead bodies, it went directly toward the church. I stood a while, but I had no stomach to go back to see the same dismal scene over again, so I went directly home.

Here the poor unhappy gentleman's grief came into my head again, and indeed I shed tears in reflecting upon it. His case lay so heavy upon my mind that I resolved to go out again, to the Pie Tavern, to inquire what became of him.

It was by this time one o'clock in the morning, and yet the poor gentleman was there. The people of the house, knowing him, had kept him there despite the danger of being infected by him, though it appeared the man was perfectly sound himself.

It is with regret that I take notice of this tavern. The people were civil, mannerly, and obliging enough; but there was a dreadful set of fellows that used their house, and in the midst of all this horror, met there every night, and behaved with all the revelling and roaring extravagances usual at other times. Indeed, they were so offensive that the master and mistress of the house grew first ashamed and then terrified of them.

They sat generally in a room next to the street, and when the dead-carts came across the street-end in view of the tavern windows, they would frequently open the windows and look out at them; and when they heard the sad lamentations of people in the streets as the carts went along, they would mock and jeer impudently, especially if they heard the poor people call upon God to have mercy upon them.

These gentlemen, being disturbed with the clatter of bringing the poor gentleman from the burial-pit into the house, were at first angry with the master of the tavern for allowing such a fellow, as they called him, to be brought out of the grave into their house. On being told that the man was a neighbour, and healthy, but overwhelmed with grief for his family, they turned their anger into ridiculing the man and his sorrow, and taunted him with lack of courage to leap into the great pit and go to heaven, as they jeeringly expressed it, adding some very profane and blasphemous expressions.

They were at this vile work when I came back to the house, and, as far as I could see, though the man sat still and mute, yet he was both grieved and offended at their talk. Upon this I gently reproved them, for I knew two of them, and was well enough acquainted with their characters.

They immediately fell upon me with ill language and oaths, asked me what I did out of my grave when so many honest men were in it, and why I was not at home saying my prayers, and the like.

I was indeed astonished at their impudence, though not at all discomposed. I kept my temper. I told them that though I defied any man in the world to call me dishonest, yet I acknowledged that many better men than I were carried to their grave. But I believed that I was mercifully preserved by that great God whose name they had blasphemed by cursing in a dreadful manner, and I added that I believed I was preserved in particular so that I might reprove them for their behaviour, especially their jeering at an honest gentleman and neighbour who was overwhelmed with sorrow.

I cannot recall exactly the hellish, abominable raillery with which they answered: nor, if I could remember, would I fill my account with any of the horrid oaths and vile expressions which they used. Worst of all was that they were not afraid to blaspheme God and talk atheistically, making a jest of my calling the plague the hand of God; and saying that the people calling upon God as they saw the carts carrying away the dead bodies was absurd.

When I made them some proper reply, it only made them rail the more, so that I confess it filled me with horror and a kind of rage, and I came away, as I told them, lest the hand of God's judgement should glorify His vengeance upon them, and all that were near them.

They received all reproof with the utmost contempt, and scoffed at me in all the opprobrious, insolent terms that they could think of for preaching to them, as they called it. I went home very much grieved and oppressed with the horror of these men's wickedness, and to think that anything could be so hardened as to insult God at such a time as this, when He had, as it were, His sword drawn in His hand to take vengeance not on them only, but on the whole nation.

I was in some passion with them at first. However, I wondered whether my resentment was upon my own private account, because of their personal insults. Having a weight of grief upon my mind, I gave God most humble thanks for my preservation, and set my mind seriously and earnestly to pray for those desperate wretches, that God would pardon them, open their eyes, and effectually humble them.

The men continued their wretched course for three or four days after this, continually mocking all that showed themselves religious or serious, or that were in any way touched with the sense of the terrible judgement of God upon us. But after three or four days one of them was struck from Heaven with the plague, and died in a most deplorable manner; and, in a word, they were every one of them carried into the great pit before it was quite filled up.

The infection increased so violently at this part of the town now, that people began to be afraid to come to church. Many of the clergymen were dead, and others had gone into the country; for it really required a steady courage and a strong faith for a minister to come to the church and perform his offices to a congregation, many of whom might be infected with the plague; and to do this every day, or twice a day.

It is true the people showed an extraordinary zeal in religion, and as the church-doors were always open, they would go in singly at all times, whether the minister was officiating or no, and locking themselves into separate pews, would pray to God with great fervency.

Part 7

Tales of Some who Fled

But I must go back here to the time of shutting up of houses in the first part of the sickness.

During the shutting up of houses, as I have said, some violence was offered to the watchmen. There were no soldiers available to back them up, and this made the watchmen be less respected, and perhaps caused greater violence to be used against them. So the setting of watchmen was not effectual, firstly, because people broke out, whether by force or by stratagem, almost as often as they pleased; and, secondly, because those that did break out generally spread the infection. Perhaps their desperation, in running about from one place to another, gave birth to the report that infected people desired to infect others, which report was really false. I could give several accounts of good, pious people who, when infected, forbade their own family to come near them, and even died without seeing their nearest relations lest they should give them the sickness.

But people who broke out may certainly have tried to conceal their illness from others in order to get food or lodging, and may have involuntarily infected others in this way. I remember one citizen who, having broken out of his house in Aldersgate Street, went to Islington; he attempted to go into the Angel Inn, and the White Horse, but was refused. Then he came to the Pied Bull, and asked them for lodging for one

night only, pretending to be travelling to Lincolnshire, and assuring them of his being free from the infection.

They told him they had no lodging except one bed up in the garret, and that they could spare that bed for one night, since some drovers were expected the next day with cattle. He accepted that lodging, so a servant was sent up with a candle to show him the room. He was very well dressed, and when he came to the room he heaved a deep sigh, and said to the servant, 'I have seldom lain in such a lodging as this. Well, it is but for one night.'

So he sat down upon the bedside, and asked the servant to bring him up a pint of warm ale. Accordingly the servant went for the ale, but some hurry in the house put it out of her head, and she went up no more to him.

The next morning, seeing no appearance of the gentleman, somebody in the house asked the servant what was become of him. She started. 'Alas I,' says she, 'I never thought more of him. He bade me carry him some warm ale, but I forgot.'

Upon which, another servant was sent up to see after him, who, coming into the room, found him stark dead and almost cold, stretched out across the bed. His clothes were pulled off, his jaw fallen, his eyes open in a most frightful posture. It was plain he died soon after the maid left him. The alarm was great in the house, as anyone may suppose, they having been free from the plague until then. But this disaster, bringing the infection to the house, spread it immediately to other houses round about it. Whereas only two people in Islington died of the plague the week before, fourteen died the week after, from the 11th of July to the 18th.

The families who, in the first breaking-out of the plague, left their houses and fled away into the country, generally found some one or other of their neighbours or relations to commit the charge of those houses to. Some houses were, indeed, entirely locked up, with the windows and doors having boards nailed over them; but these were few.

It was thought that there were not less than 10,000 houses forsaken by the inhabitants in the city and suburbs. In all it was computed that about 200,000 people were fled and gone. Of this I shall speak again. But I mention here that it was a rule with those who had two houses in their keeping, that if anybody was taken sick in a family, before the master of the family let the examiners know of it, he immediately would send all the rest of his family to his other house, and then giving notice of the sick person to the examiner, have a nurse or nurses appointed, as well as another person to be shut up in the house with them (which many would do for money), to take charge of the house in case the person should die.

This was, in many cases, the saving of a whole family. But some of those who ran away with the rest of the family, though they were not quite sick, yet had the disease; and being at liberty to go about, but being obliged to conceal their circumstances, gave the infection to others, and spread it in a dreadful manner, as I shall explain later.

And here I make some observations of my own, which may be of use hereafter:

(1) The infection generally came into the houses of the citizens by the means of their servants, whom they were obliged to send out for food or physic, to bakehouses, shops, etc.; and who going through the streets, met with sick people, who conveyed the fatal breath into them, and they brought it home to the families to which they belonged.

(2) It was a great mistake that such a great city as this had only one pest-house. If there had been several pest-houses, each able to contain a thousand people, and if

every master of a family, as soon as any servant had been taken sick, had been obliged to send them to the nearest pest-house, and the houses had not been shut up, I am persuaded that thousands fewer people would have died. For it was observed that where a servant had been taken sick, and the family had been able to send him out, they had all been preserved; whereas when the house had been shut up, the whole family perished.

(3) This made it clear to me that the calamity was spread by infection; that is to say, by some certain steams or fumes, which the physicians call effluvia, by the breath, or by the sweat, or by the stench of the sores of the sick persons, or some other way, perhaps, beyond even the reach of the physicians themselves. These effluvia affected the heathy people who came within a certain distance of the sick, immediately penetrating their vital parts, putting their blood into a ferment, and agitating their spirits; and so those newly infected persons communicated it in the same manner to others.

And I am amazed to find some people, now the contagion is over, talk of its being an immediate stroke from Heaven, without the agency of means – which I look upon with contempt as the effect of ignorance; likewise the opinion of others, who talk of infection being carried on the air only, by vast numbers of insects or invisible creatures, who enter into the body with the breath, and there emit most acute poisons, or poisonous eggs, which mingle themselves with the blood, and so infect the body: but I shall say more about this in due course.

Part 8

August: the Plague Rages

I must here note that nothing was more fatal to the inhabitants of this city than the supine negligence of the people themselves, who, during the long notice or warning they had of the plague, made no provision for it by laying in store of food or other necessaries, by which they might have lived retired in their own houses. Others who did so were in a great measure preserved by that caution.

I acknowledge I was one of those thoughtless ones that had made so little provision that my servants were obliged to go out to buy every trifle by penny and halfpenny, just as before it began. I began to be wiser so late that I had scarce time to store myself enough food for a month.

I had in my family only an ancient woman that managed the house, a maid-servant, two apprentices, and myself; and when the plague began to increase around us, I had many sad thoughts about how I should act. The dismal sights everywhere had filled my mind with a great deal of horror and fear of the disease, which was indeed very horrible in itself.

The swellings, which were generally in the neck or groin, when they grew hard and would not break, became so painful that it was like the most exquisite torture; and some, unable to bear the torment, threw themselves out of windows or shot themselves. 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 we considered that the same dreadful scourge might be expected every moment to seize upon ourselves.

Now I began to faint in my resolutions; my heart failed me very much, and sorely I repented of my rashness in venturing to stay in town. I wished often that I had gone away with my brother and his family.

Terrified by those frightful sights and sounds, I would retire home sometimes and resolve to go out no more; and perhaps I would keep those resolutions for three or four days, which time I spent in the most serious thankfulness for my health, and the constant confession of my sins, giving myself up to God every day. I employed the rest of my time in reading books and in writing down my memorandums of what occurred to me every day, and out of which afterwards I took most of this work.

I also wrote other meditations upon divine subjects, such as occurred to me at that time, but not fit for any other view, and therefore I say no more of that.

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 things which he directed me to take to prevent the infection when I went out, and to hold in my mouth when I was in the streets. He also came often to see me, and his agreeable conversation was a very great support to me in the worst of this terrible time.

It was now the beginning of August, and the plague grew very violent in the area where I lived. Dr Heath, on coming to visit me, and finding that I ventured so often out into the streets, earnestly persuaded me to lock myself and my household up, and not allow any of us to go out of doors; to keep all our windows, shutters and curtains closed, and never to open them; but first, to make a very strong smoke in the room, with rosin and pitch, brimstone or gunpowder and the like; and we did this for some time.

However, first I went and bought two sacks of meal, and for several weeks we baked all our own bread; also I bought malt, and brewed as much beer as my casks would hold, enough 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 that it was not advisable to go among them.

And here I must observe again, that this necessity of going out of our houses to buy food was in a great measure the ruin of the whole city, for the people caught the disease on these occasions, and I have reason to believe that even the provisions themselves were often tainted; for I am certain the butchers of Whitechapel were dreadfully visited with plague.

However, the poor people could not lay up provisions, and had to go to market to buy daily, and others sent servants or their children; this brought abundance of unhealthy people to the markets, and a great many more took death home with them.

It is true people used all possible precautions. When any one bought a joint of meat in the market they would not take it from 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. The buyers always carried small coins, so that they might need no change. They carried bottles of perfumes in their hands; but then the poor could not do even these things, and they went at all hazards.

Sometimes a man or woman dropped down dead in the very markets, for many people that had the plague knew nothing of it till the inward gangrene had affected their vital organs, and they died in a few moments. Many died frequently in that manner in the streets, suddenly, without warning; others perhaps had time to go to the next stall, or to a door-porch, and just sit down and die.

This happened so frequently that when the plague was raging, you could scarce pass through the streets without seeing several dead bodies lying here and there upon

the ground. At first the people would stop as they went along; yet afterward no notice was taken of them, but if we found a corpse lying, we would go across the road and not come near it; or, if in a narrow passage, would go back again and seek some other route.

The corpses were left till the officers had notice to come and take them away, or till night, when the bearers attending the dead-cart would carry them away. Nor did those undaunted creatures fail to search their pockets, and sometimes strip off their clothes if they were well dressed, and carry off what they could get.

But to return to the markets. The fury of the plague increased to such a degree that even the markets had very few provisions, and very few buyers, compared to what they were before. The Lord Mayor caused the country people who brought in provisions to be stopped in the streets leading into the town, and to sit down there with their goods, where they sold what they brought, and went immediately away. This greatly encouraged the country people to sell their goods at the entrances into the town, and even in the fields beyond Whitechapel, and also in St George's Fields in Southwark, in Bunhill Fields, and in a great field near Islington. The country people came with great cheerfulness, and brought provisions of all sorts, and very seldom got any harm.

As for my little family, having thus, as I have said, laid in a store of bread, butter, cheese, and beer, I took my friend and physician's advice, and locked us all up, and resolved to suffer the hardship of living a few months without flesh-meat.

But though I confined my family, I could not overcome my unsatisfied curiosity and stay in myself; and though I generally came home terrified, yet I could not restrain myself; only I did not go out so frequently as at first.

Indeed, I needed to go once or twice a week to check my brother's house, which was in Coleman Street. In these walks I saw many dismal scenes, of persons falling dead in the streets, and heard terrible shrieks of women, who, in their agonies, would throw open their chamber windows and cry out.

Passing through Tokenhouse Yard, in Lothbury, suddenly a casement violently opened just over my head, and a woman gave three frightful screeches, and then cried, 'Oh! death, death, death!' Her tone chilled 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, nor could anybody help one another; so I went on into Bell Alley.

Just then, there was a more terrible cry, though it was not directed out of the window. I could hear women and children run screaming about the rooms. A garret-window opened and somebody from the other side of the alley called up, 'What is the matter?'

From the first window, it was answered, 'Oh Lord, my old master has hanged himself! He is quite dead and cold!' This person was a merchant and a deputy alderman, and very rich.

It is scarcely credible what dreadful cases happened every day. People in the rage of the disease, or in the torment of their swellings, raving and distracted, often laid violent hands upon themselves; mothers murdered their own children in their lunacy; some people died of mere grief or fright without any infection at all, while others were frightened into idiocy, despair and lunacy, or melancholy madness.

The pain of the swellings was in particular very violent; the physicians and surgeons may be said to have tortured many poor creatures to death. The swellings in some grew hard, and the surgeons applied poultices to break them, and if these did not work they cut them in a terrible manner, or burnt them with caustics, so that many died raving mad with the torment. Some patients broke out into the streets, perhaps

naked, and would run directly down to the river if they were not stopped by the watchman or other officers, and plunge themselves into the water.

It often pierced my very soul to hear the groans and cries of those who were thus tormented, but if these swellings could be brought to a head, and made to break, the patient generally recovered. Others often went about indifferent easy till a little before they died, and some till the moment they dropped down. Such people would be taken suddenly very sick, and would run to a bench, or to their own houses if possible, as I mentioned before, and there sit down, grow faint, and die. Those who died thus had very little notice of their being infected at all till the gangrene was spread through their whole body; nor could physicians themselves know how it was with them till they opened them up and saw the signs.

We had at this time a great many frightful stories told us of hired nurses who attended infected people, using them barbarously, starving them, smothering them, or by other wicked means murdering them; and watchmen, being set to guard houses that were shut up with only one sick person left, who broke in and murdered that body, and immediately threw them out into the dead-cart!

Some such murders were committed, and I think two were sent to prison for it; but I must say I believe it was nothing like so common a crime as some have said. There was no temptation to commit murder where people were sure to die so soon in any case.

That there were a great many robberies in this dreadful time I do not deny. The power of avarice was so strong in some that they would run any risk to steal and to plunder; and particularly in houses where all the inhabitants had died, they would break in without regard to the danger of infection, and take the bed-linen and even the clothes off the dead bodies.

This, I suppose, must be what happened to a family in Houndsditch, where a man and his daughter were found stark naked, one in one chamber and one in another, lying dead on the floor, and the bed-linen of the beds stolen and carried away.

Part 9

Robberies and Misadventures

It is indeed to be observed that the women were in this calamity the most rash, fearless, and desperate creatures, and as there were vast numbers that went about as nurses to tend the sick, they committed a great many petty thieveries; and some of them were publicly whipped for it. At length the parish officers were charged to recommend nurses to the sick, and always made note of whom they sent, so that they might call them to account if the house had been abused.

But these robberies extended chiefly to clothes, linen, and what rings or money they could see, not to a general plunder of the houses; and I could give you an account of one of these nurses, who, several years after, on her deathbed, confessed with the utmost horror the robberies she had committed when she was a nurse, and by which she had enriched herself to a great degree. But as for murders, I do not think that there was ever any proof of that.

They did tell me, indeed, of a nurse in one place that laid a wet cloth upon the face of a dying patient, and so put an end to his life, just before he would have expired; and another that smothered a young woman who was in a fainting fit, and some that starved their patients. But these stories were suspicious for two reasons. First, wherever we heard it, they always placed the scene at the farthest end of the

town. If you heard it in Whitechapel, it had happened at St Giles's. If you heard of it at St Giles's, then it was done in Whitechapel.

Yet the particulars were always the same, especially that of laying a wet double cloth on a dying man's face, so that it was apparent, at least to my judgement, that there was more of tale than of truth in those things. However, it had some effect upon the people, who grew more cautious whom they took into their houses, and whom they trusted their lives with.

But here again the misery of that time lay upon the poor who, when infected, had neither food or physic, neither doctor or nurse to attend them. Many of those died calling for help, and even for food, out of their windows in a most miserable manner; but it must be added that whenever the cases of such families were represented to my Lord Mayor they were always helped.

It is true, in some houses where the people were not very poor, yet perhaps had sent their wives and children away, and dismissed their servants, many such as these shut themselves in, and having no help, died alone.

A neighbour of mine, having some money owing to him from a shopkeeper in Whitecross Street, sent his apprentice to endeavour to get the money. He knocked pretty hard on the door; and, as he thought, heard somebody answer within, but was not sure, so he waited, and knocked again, and then a third time, when he heard somebody coming downstairs.

At length the man of the house came to the door; he had on his breeches, and a yellow flannel waistcoat, no stockings, and, as the young man said, 'death in his face'.

When he opened the door, says he, 'Why do you disturb me thus?'

The boy, though a little surprised, replied, 'My master sent me for the money which you know of.'

'Very well, child,' returns the living ghost; 'call as you go by at Cripplegate Church, and bid them ring the bell.' With these words he shut the door again, and went upstairs, and died the same day; nay, perhaps the same hour. This the young man told me himself. This was while the plague was not come to a height, I think towards the end of June, before the dead-carts came about, and while they still used the ceremony of ringing the bell for the dead.

I have mentioned numbers of thieves were abroad upon all occasions, and that these were generally women. One morning about eleven o'clock, I had walked out to my brother's house in Coleman Street, as I often did, to see that all was safe.

My brother's house had a little court before it, and a brick wall and a gate in it, and within that several warehouses where his goods lay. It happened that in one of these warehouses were several packs of women's high-crowned hats, which were designed for export.

I was surprised that when I came near my brother's door, I met three or four women with high-crowned hats on their heads; and, as I remembered afterwards, some had some hats likewise in their hands; but as I did not see them come out at my brother's door, and did not know that my brother had any such goods in his warehouse, I did not say anything, but crossed the road to avoid meeting them, as was usual at that time, for fear of the plague.

But when I came nearer I met another woman with more hats coming out of the gate.

'What business, mistress,' said I, 'have you had there?'

'There are more people in there,' said she. I hastened to the gate then, so she got away. But just as I came to the gate, I saw two more coming across the yard with

hats, at which I closed the gate behind me, and turning to the women, said, ‘What are you doing here?’ and seized the hats from them.

One of them says, ‘We were told they were goods that had no owner. Please take them back; and look yonder, there are more such customers as we.’ She cried and looked pitiful, so I took the hats from her and opened the gate, and bade them be gone, for I pitied the women indeed; but when I looked towards the warehouse, there were six or seven more women, fitting themselves with hats as unconcerned as if they had been at a hatter’s shop buying for their money.

I was surprised, not only at the sight of so many thieves, but at the circumstances I was in; being about to thrust myself in among so many people after shunning them for so many weeks.

They were equally surprised, though on another account. They all told me they were neighbours, that they had heard anyone might take the hats, that they were nobody’s goods, and the like. I talked big to them at first, told them they were all my prisoners, and threatened to lock them into the warehouse and go and fetch my Lord Mayor’s officers.

They begged heartily, protesting they found the gate open, and that it had no doubt been broken open by someone who expected to find goods of greater value. Indeed, the lock was broken.

At length I considered that this was not a time to be cruel and rigorous; and besides, it would oblige me to go much about and meet people whose circumstances of health I knew nothing of; so I contented myself with taking their names and addresses, and threatening that my brother should call them to account for it when he returned home.

Then I asked them how they could do such things in a time of such general calamity, in the face of God’s most dreadful judgements, when the plague was at their very doors?

My words did not seem to make much impression upon them, till two men of the neighbourhood, hearing of the disturbance, and knowing my brother, came to my assistance. They confirmed the names and addresses of the women.

One of these men was John Hayward, 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 the dead to their graves in that large parish, and later went with the dead-cart and the bell to fetch out the dead bodies from the houses where they lay. In the many narrow alleys they went with a kind of hand-barrow and laid the dead bodies on it, and carried them out to the carts; yet he never caught the disease at all, but lived about twenty years after it, and was sexton of the parish till the time of his death. His wife was a nurse, and tended many infected people, being recommended for her honesty by the parish officers; yet she never was infected neither.

He never used any preservative against the infection, other than holding garlic and rue in his mouth, and smoking tobacco. And his wife’s remedy was washing her head in vinegar and sprinkling her head-clothes with vinegar so as to keep them always moist. When her patients smelt worse than usual she snuffed vinegar up her nose, and held a handkerchief wetted with vinegar to her mouth.

It must be confessed that though the plague was chiefly among the poor, yet the poor were the most fearless of it, and went about their employment with a sort of brutal courage. They ran into any business which they could get employment in, even the most hazardous – such as tending the sick, watching houses shut up, carrying infected persons to the pest-house, and carrying the dead away to their graves.

It was under this John Hayward's care, that the story of the piper happened, and he assured me that it was true. The story said that it was a blind piper; but John told me the fellow was not blind, but an ignorant, weak, poor man, who at ten o'clock at night went piping along from door to door. People usually took him in at public-houses and would give him drink and food, and sometimes farthings; and he in return would pipe and sing and talk simply, which amused the people; and thus he lived. It was a very bad time for this diversion, yet the poor fellow went about as usual, but was almost starved. When anybody asked how he did, he would answer that the dead cart had not taken him yet, but had promised to call for him next week.

It happened one night that this poor fellow, having perhaps been given too much ale, was laid along the top of a stall, fast asleep, in a street near London Wall. Upon the same stall the people of some house nearby, hearing the bell which they always rang before the cart came, had laid a body dead of the plague just next to him, thinking that this poor fellow had been a dead body too.

Accordingly, when John Hayward with his bell and the cart came along, finding two dead bodies lying upon the stall, they took them up and threw them into the cart; and all this while the piper slept soundly.

They went along and took in other dead bodies, till, as honest John Hayward told me, they almost buried the piper alive in the cart; yet all this while he slept. At length the cart came to the burial place at Mount Mill. As it stopped the fellow awoke and struggled to get his head out from among the dead bodies. Raising himself up in the cart, he called out, 'Hey! where am I?'

John Hayward said, 'Lord bless us! There's somebody in the cart not quite dead!'

Another called to him, '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 an't 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.

I know the story goes he set up his pipes in the cart and frightened the bearers so that they ran away; but John Hayward did not tell the story so, and I am fully satisfied of the truth of his version.

It is to be noted here that the dead-carts in the city were not confined to particular parishes, but one cart went through several parishes, and carried the dead to the burying-ground in the out-parts.

Part 10

Charity and the Poor

I must now make some more serious observations. Surely a city of this size was never in a condition so perfectly unprepared for such a dreadful visitation. They acted, indeed, as if they had had no warning, no expectation, no apprehensions, and consequently the least provision imaginable was made for it. For example, the Lord Mayor and sheriffs had made no provision for the regulations which were to be observed. They had gone into no measures for relief of the poor. The citizens had no public storehouses for corn or meal for the subsistence of the poor, as is done abroad, which would have relieved many miserable families who were now reduced to the utmost distress.

The Chamber of London was said to be exceedingly rich, and it may be concluded that they were so, judging by the vast sum of money later used in rebuilding public edifices after the fire of London, and in building new works. But possibly the managers of the city's money were more reluctant to show charity to the distressed citizens than to beautify the city: though if they had shown more charity, the public faith of the city would have been less subject to scandal and reproach.

It must be acknowledged that the absent citizens, who fled for safety into the country, were still greatly interested in the welfare of those whom they left behind, and contributed liberally to the relief of the poor. Large sums were also collected among trading towns in the remotest parts of England; and the nobility and the gentry sent large sums of money to the Lord Mayor and magistrates for the relief of the poor. The king also, as I was told, ordered a thousand pounds a week to be distributed to the city and its surroundings.

Certain it is, that the greatest part of the poor, formerly labourers and retailers, lived now on charity; and had there not been prodigious sums of money given by charitable Christians, the city could never have subsisted. Accounts were kept of this, but most of the accounts were lost in the great fire the very next year.

Here let me give a brief state of the case of the poor at that time, from whence may be judged what may be expected if a similar distress should come upon the city in the future.

At the beginning of the plague, when all who had friends or estates in the country retired with their families – and when, indeed, one would have thought the very city itself was running out of the gates – from that hour all trade, except such as related to immediate subsistence, was at a full stop.

For example:

1. All master-workmen in the manufacture of ornament and the less necessary parts of people's dress and furniture, such as ribbon-weavers, lace makers, milliners, shoemakers, hatmakers, and glovemakers; also upholsterers, cabinet-makers, looking-glass makers, and innumerable trades which depend upon such as these – all stopped their work, and dismissed their journeymen and workmen.

2. As merchandising was at a full stop, very few ships ventured to come up the river and none at all went out, so all the customs-officers, watermen, porters, and all the poor whose labour depended upon the merchants, were at once put out of business.

3. All the tradesmen usually employed in building or repairing houses were at a full stop, for the people were far from wanting to build houses. This put out of business such men as bricklayers, masons, carpenters, joiners, plasterers, painters, glaziers, smiths, plumbers, and all the labourers depending on them.

4. The seamen were all out of employment, and many of them were in extreme distress; and along with them, the tradesmen depending upon the building and fitting out of ships, such as ship-carpenters, caulkers, ropemakers, dry coopers, sailmakers, anchorsmiths, gunsmiths, ship-chandlers and the like. All their workmen were discharged.

5. All families retrenched their living as much as possible; so that an innumerable multitude of footmen, serving-men, shopkeepers, merchants' bookkeepers, and such sort of people, and especially poor maid-servants, were turned off, and left friendless and helpless, without work or habitation, and this was really a dismal article.

Many of these poor people fled into the counties, but thousands of them having stayed in London till nothing but desperation sent them away, death overtook them on the road, and they served for no better than the messengers of death; carrying the

infection along with them, unhappily they spread it into the remotest parts of the kingdom.

Some of these miserable people might be said to perish not by the infection itself but by the consequence of it; namely, by hunger and distress: being without lodging, money, friends, or means to get their bread, all the support they had was by applying to the magistrates for relief. To give the magistrates their due, such relief was carefully and cheerfully administered as they found it necessary, and those that stayed behind never felt the want and distress of those who went away.

Had the sums of money contributed in charity not been so great, it would not have been in the power of the Lord Mayor and sheriffs to have kept the public peace. Nor were they without fears that desperation should push the people into rioting, looting and plundering the houses of the rich and the markets; in which case the country people, who brought provisions to town, would have been terrified away from coming any more, and the town would have sunk under famine. But by the prudence of my Lord Mayor and the justices of peace, the poor people were kept quiet, and their wants relieved as far as possible.

Two other things contributed to prevent the mob doing any mischief. One was, that the rich had not laid up stores of provisions in their houses as they ought to have done, if they were wise, and they made this apparent, so the mob had no notion of finding stores there. If they had broken in, as they were sometimes very near doing, it would have finished the ruin of the city, for there were no troops to have withstood them.

But the vigilance of the Lord Mayor and other magistrates prevented this by the most kind and gentle methods they could think of, by relieving the most desperate with money, and giving others employment, particularly in watching houses that were shut up. And as the number of these houses was very great (for it was said there were at one time ten thousand houses shut up, and every house had two watchmen to guard it), this gave the opportunity to employ a very great number of poor men.

The women and servants that were turned off from their places were likewise employed in great numbers as nurses to tend the sick.

The plague, which raged in a dreadful manner from the middle of August to the middle of October, carried off in that time thirty or forty thousand of these very people who, had they been left, would certainly have been an insufferable burden by their poverty. The city could not have supported the expense of them, and they would in time have been driven to the necessity of plundering the city or the nearby country, which would have put the whole nation into the utmost terror and confusion.

Part 11

The Desolation of the City Increases

Now for about nine weeks together there died nearly a thousand a day, by the account of the weekly bills. Indeed most of the people who died were carried off in these two months; for, as the whole number which died of the plague was 68,590, about 50,000 of them are shown by the bills to have died in two months.

The bills, I have been assured, never gave a full account, by many thousands; the confusion being such that in some places no account was kept at all. Consider how men could be exact in such a time of dreadful distress, and when many of them were taken sick themselves and perhaps died at the very time when their accounts were to be given in.

Indeed the work did not allow them leisure to take an exact count of the dead bodies, which were all huddled together in the dark into a dangerous pit. I observed often that in the parishes of Aldgate and Cripplegate, Whitechapel and Stepney, there were five, six, seven, and eight hundred in a week in the bills; whereas if we may believe the opinion of those that lived in the city at the time, there died sometimes 2000 a week in those parishes. One man who made a strict examination into the matter calculated that there really died a hundred thousand people of the plague in that one year, whereas in the bills it was only 68,590.

By what I saw, and heard from eye-witnesses, I believe the same, viz., that there died at least 100,000 of the plague, besides those who died in the fields and secret places, and who were not put down in the bills. It was well-known that many poor despairing creatures who had the plague, and were grown stupid or melancholy by their misery, wandered away into the fields and woods, and crawled into secret places anywhere to die.

The inhabitants of the nearby villages would, in pity, carry them food and set it at a distance, so that they might fetch it, if they were able. Sometimes they were not able, and the next time they went they would find the poor wretches dead and the food untouched. I know of many that perished thus, and I believe I could go to the very place and dig their bones up still; for the country people would dig a hole at a distance from them, and then with long poles with hooks at the end of them, drag the bodies into these pits, and throw the earth in over them from as far away as they could, taking notice of how the wind blew, so that the scent of the bodies might blow away from them. Thus great numbers went out of the world who were never known.

This, indeed, I know only from the stories of others, for I seldom walked into the fields. But when I did walk, I saw a great many poor wanderers at a distance. I could know little of their cases, for whether in the street or in the fields, if we saw anybody coming, it was a general method to walk away; yet I believe the account is true.

I cannot omit mentioning what a desolate place the city was at that time. The great street I lived in, which is one of the broadest of all the streets of London, was more like a green field than a paved street, and the people generally went in the middle with the horses and carts. The farthest end towards Whitechapel Church was not all paved, but even the part that was paved was now full of grass.

The great streets within the city, such as Leadenhall Street, Bishopsgate Street, Cornhill, and even the Exchange itself, had grass growing in them in several places; neither cart nor coach were seen in the streets from morning to evening, except a few country carts to bring roots and beans, or peas, hay, and straw to the market.

As for coaches, they were scarcely used but to carry sick people to the pest-house or to hospital, or to carry physicians around; for really coaches were dangerous things, and people did not care to enter them, because they did not know who might have been carried in them last; sometimes people being carried to the pest-houses expired in them. It is true, when the infection came to its height, very few physicians cared to stir abroad to sick houses. Indeed, very many physicians and surgeons were dead.

One of the worst days we had in the whole time was in the beginning of September, when, indeed, good people began to think that God was resolved to make a full end of the people in this miserable city. The plague had come fully into the eastern parishes. The parish of Aldgate, in my opinion, buried above a thousand a week for two weeks, though the bills did not say so many – but there was not one house in twenty uninfected in Houndsditch. Death reigned in every corner.

Whitechapel parish was in the same condition. Whole families, and indeed whole streets of families, were swept away together; it was frequent for neighbours to call to the bellman to go to such-and-such houses and fetch out the people, for they were all dead.

And, indeed, the work of removing the dead bodies by carts was now grown so very odious and dangerous that the bearers did not take care to clear such houses where all the inhabitants were dead. Sometimes the bodies lay several days unburied, till the neighbouring families were offended with the stench, and were consequently infected; and this neglect of the officers was such that the churchwardens and constables were summoned to look after it. Innumerable bearers died of the disease, infected by the bodies they were obliged to come so near. And had it not been that the number of poor people who needed employment was so great that they would do any job, they would never have found people to do it. And then the bodies of the dead would have lain above ground, and have rotted in a dreadful manner.

But the magistrates kept such good order for the burying of the dead, that as fast as any of these bearers fell sick or died, they immediately filled the places with others, which for the reasons above was not hard to do. Despite the infinite number of people who died, yet they were always cleared away and carried off every night, so that it was never to be said of London that the living were not able to bury the dead.

As the desolation increased during those terrible times, so the amazement of the people increased, and they would do a thousand unaccountable things in the violence of their fright. Some went roaring and crying and wringing their hands along the street; some would go praying and lifting up their hands to heaven, calling upon God for mercy. That was much better, at least, than the frightful yellings and cryings that every day were heard in some streets. I suppose the world has heard of the famous Solomon Eagle. He, though not infected at all except in his head, went about denouncing judgement upon the city in a frightful manner, sometimes quite naked, and with a pan of burning charcoal on his head.

A certain clergyman, whether distracted or simply zealous, went every evening through the streets of Whitechapel, and repeated part of the Liturgy continually: 'Spare us, good Lord; spare Thy people, whom Thou has redeemed with Thy most precious blood.'

These were the dismal objects which I saw as I looked through my chamber windows while I confined myself within doors, during that most violent raging of the pestilence, when, indeed, many began to think that no-one would escape. Indeed I began to think so too, and therefore kept within doors for a fortnight.

But some people, despite the danger, went to church even in the most dangerous times; and though a great many clergymen did shut up their churches, and fled, not all did so. Some kept up the assemblies of the people by constant prayers, and sometimes sermons or exhortations to repentance, for as long as any would come to hear them. And Dissenters did the like also.

It was indeed a sad thing to hear the miserable cries of poor dying creatures calling out for ministers to comfort them, calling to God for pardon and mercy, and confessing aloud their past sins. It would make the stoutest heart bleed to hear those groans and exclamations from poor dying creatures in the height of their distress; the sound seems still to ring in my ears.

It pleased God that I was still spared, and was healthy, 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 went to carry a letter for my brother to the post-house.

Then indeed I observed a profound silence in the streets. When I came to the post-house, I saw a man stand in one corner of the yard talking to another at a window, and a third had opened a door to the office. In the middle of the yard lay a small leather purse with two keys hanging from it, with money in it, but nobody would meddle with it. When I asked how long it had lain there; the man at the window said almost an hour, but that they had not meddled with it, because the person who dropped it might come back to look for it.

Then the man by the door said he would take it up, 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 by the purse, then went and fetched some gunpowder and threw it upon the purse, and made a trail of it from the purse about two yards long. Then he fetched some red-hot tongs and set fire to the trail of gunpowder, that singed the purse and also smoked the air sufficiently. But not content with that, he then picked up the purse with the tongs, which began to burn through it, and he shook the money out into the pail of water, and he carried it inside. There was about thirteen shillings. So you can see how careful people were.

Part 12

The Boatman and the Ships

At much about the same time I walked out into the fields; for I had a wish to see how things were managed in the river and among the ships; and had a notion that the best way of securing one's self from the infection might be to have retired into a ship. Musing how to satisfy my curiosity in that point, I walked down to Blackwall, to the stairs which 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. All the houses were shut up. I fell into some talk, at a distance, with this poor man; I asked him how people did thereabouts.

'Alas, sir!' says he, 'almost desolate; all dead or sick.' Pointing to one house, 'There they are all dead', said he, 'and the house stands open; nobody dares go into it. A poor thief 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. And there, they are shut up; you see a watchman at the door.'

'Why,' says I, 'what do you do here all alone?'

'Why,' says he, 'I am a poor, desolate man; I am not yet visited with the plague, though my family is. That's my house' (pointing to a very little house), 'and there my poor wife and two children live,' said he, 'if they may be said to live, for my wife and one of the children have the plague, but I do not come near them.' And I saw the tears run down his face; and so they did down mine too, I assure you.

'But,' said I, '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 I keep them from want.' Indeed he had the appearance of a serious, religious, good man.

'Well,' says I, 'that is a great mercy. 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's my boat, which serves me for a house. I work in it in the day, and I sleep in it in the night; and what I get I lay down

upon that stone,' says he, showing me a broad stone on the other side of the street, 'and then I call to them till they come and fetch it.'

'Well, friend,' says I, 'but how can you get any money as a waterman? Does anybody go by water in these times?'

'Yes, sir,' says he. 'Do you see there five ships lying at anchor' (pointing down the river below the town), 'and eight or ten ships at anchor yonder?' (pointing above the town). 'All those ships have families on board, who have locked themselves up and live shut in, for fear of the infection; and I fetch things for them, so that they may not be obliged to come on shore; and every night I fasten my boat to one of the ship's boats, and there I sleep by myself, and, blessed be God, I am preserved until now.'

'Well, friend,' said I, 'but will they let you come on board after you have been on shore here, so terribly infected as it is?'

'Why,' said he, 'I deliver what I bring alongside their boat, and they hoist it on board. Even if I did board, I think they are in no danger from me, for I never go into any house on shore, not even my own family's.'

'Nay,' says I, 'but you must get those provisions from somebody or other; and all this part of the town is infected.'

'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 farm-houses on the Kentish side, and buy fowls and eggs and butter. I seldom come on shore here, and I came now only to call on my wife and hear how my family do, and give them a little money – four shillings, and a bag of bread too, and a salt fish.'

'Well,' said I, 'and have you given it 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 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. I turned a little way from him, for, indeed, I could no more refrain from tears than he.

At length, the poor woman opened the door and called, 'Robert, Robert.' He answered, and ran down the stairs to his boat and fetched up a sack, emptied it by the great stone, and laid all out, and then retired; and his wife came with a little boy to fetch the things away. The poor woman was so weak she could not carry it all at once, though the weight was not much; so she left the little boy to watch the rest till she came again.

'Rachel, Rachel,' called the man, 'did you take up the money?'

'Yes,' said she. 'Four shillings and a groat.'

'Well, well,' says he, 'the Lord keep you all'; and so he turned to go away.

I called him, 'Hark thee, friend, come hither, for I believe thou art healthy. Here, go and call thy Rachel once more, and give her a little more comfort from me.' So I gave him four more shillings.

I have not words to express the poor man's thankfulness. He called his wife, and told her God had moved the heart of a stranger. The woman gratefully and joyfully picked up the money.

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, at the south end of town.

I asked him how it was that those people who had shut themselves up in the ships had not laid in sufficient stores. He said some of them had, but some did not come on board till it was too dangerous for them to buy stores. 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 to Limehouse and Redriff, some ships had several families on board, and he believed that the disease had not reached them.

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, because I had a great mind to see those ships. I assured him that I had not the disease, and that none in my house had been touched with it.

‘Well, sir,’ says he, ‘as your charity has been moved to pity me and my poor family, sure you would not have so little as to put yourself into my boat if you were not healthy.’ The poor man spoke with such a sensible concern that I told him I would lay aside my curiosity rather than make him uneasy. But he asked me to go with him; so when the tide came up to his boat, he carried me to Greenwich.

While he bought the things which he had been asked to buy, I walked up to the top of the hill, to get a prospect of the river. It was a surprising sight to see the number of ships which lay in rows down the whole river as far as I could see. I think there must have been several hundred ships; so that ten thousand people and more were sheltered here from the violence of the contagion, and lived very safe and very easy.

I returned to my own dwelling well satisfied with my day’s journey, and rejoiced to see that such sanctuaries were provided for so many families in a time of such desolation. I was told also that, as the violence of the plague had increased, so the ships which had families on board moved and went farther off, till some went quite away to sea, and put into harbours on the north coast.

But it was also true that the people who lived on board the ships were not entirely safe from the infection, for many died and were thrown overboard into the river, some in coffins, and some without, whose bodies were seen sometimes to drift up and down with the tide in the river. I believe they were thus infected when they flew to the ships too late, and had the plague already (though they might not know it) and so carried it with them.

And here I must note that the strange temper of the people of London at that time contributed greatly to their own destruction. The plague began, as I have observed, at the other end of the town, namely, in Long Acre, Drury Lane, &c., and came towards the city very gradually. It was felt at first in December, then advanced very slowly, until even in the last week in May there were only seventeen dead, and all at that end of the town.

All this while, the people in Wapping and Ratcliff, on both sides of the river, fancied that they should not be visited with the plague, or at least that it would not be so violent among them. Some people fancied that the smell of the pitch and tar and oil and brimstone, so much used by all trades relating to shipping, would preserve them.

This, I say, made the people of Redriff and Wapping, Ratcliff and Limehouse so secure, and flatter themselves so much with the plague’s going off without reaching them, that they took no care either to fly into the country or to shut themselves up. Rather, they took in their friends and relations from the city into their houses, and other people took sanctuary in that part of the town as a place of safety.

So when the plague came upon them with violence, as it did indeed in September and October, they were more surprised, more unprovided, and more at a loss than in other places; and they could not move out, for nobody would allow a stranger to come near them. I have been told that several that wandered into the country on Surrey side were found starved to death in the woods and commons.

When people on the ships had furnished themselves with provisions so that they had no need to go on shore for supplies or to allow boats to bring them, then they had certainly the safest retreat of any people whatsoever. But when people ran on board, in their fright, without food, these often suffered and were infected on board as much as on shore.

As the richer sort got into ships, so the lower rank got into smaller smacks, lighters, and fishing-boats; and many watermen lay in their boats; but in going about for provisions, and to earn money, the infection got in among them and made a fearful havoc. Many watermen died alone in their boats, and were not found sometimes till they were in no condition for anybody to touch or come near them.

Indeed, the distress at this seafaring end of the town was very deplorable. But, alas! this was a time when everyone's private safety lay so near them that they had no room to pity the distresses of others; for everyone had death at his door.

This took away all compassion; self-preservation appeared to be the first law. For children ran away from their sick parents. And in some places, though less frequently, parents did the same to their children. There were some dreadful examples of mothers, raving and distracted, killing their own children; one not far from where I dwelt.

It is not, indeed, to be wondered at: for the danger of immediate death took away all concern for one another. I speak in general, for there were many instances of immovable affection, pity, and duty.

For example, let me first mention that one of the most deplorable cases in all the calamity was that of women with child, who, when they came to give birth, could have neither midwife or neighbouring women come near them. Most of the midwives were dead, and others were fled into the country; so that the only midwives they could get were generally unskilful and ignorant.

In consequence, an incredible number of women were reduced to the utmost distress. Children without number were, I might say, murdered by these midwives' ignorance: pretending they would save the mother, whatever became of the child; and many times both mother and child were lost. If the mother had the plague, nobody would come near them and both sometimes perished. Sometimes the mother died of the plague with the infant only half born.

Something of this appears in the unusual numbers in the weekly bills of deaths in child-bed, the still-born, and infants, which increases with the plague, even though there were fewer people in the city.

There is no doubt that the misery of nursing mothers was just as great. Our bills of mortality could give but little light in this, yet I do believe that many hundreds of poor helpless infants perished of starvation, their mothers dying, and all their families. Secondly, some were not starved, but poisoned by their mothers through being infected by the milk, even before the mothers knew they had the infection themselves. I leave this warning upon record, if ever such another dreadful visitation should happen in this city: that all women that are with child or nursing should be gone, if possible, out of the place, because their misery, if infected, will so much exceed all other people's.

I could tell here dismal stories of living infants being found sucking the breasts of their mothers after they had died of the plague. Of a mother in the parish where I lived, who, having a child that was not well, sent for an apothecary: when the apothecary came close to her he saw the tokens of disease upon that breast with which she was suckling the child. Not willing to frighten the poor woman, he asked her to give the child into his hand; so he takes the child, and going to a cradle in the

room, lays it in, and opening its cloths, found the tokens upon the child. Both died before he could send for medicine. Whether the child infected the mother or the mother the child was not certain, but the latter is most likely.

It would make the hardest heart move at the instances that were frequently found of tender mothers caring for and watching their dear children, and sometimes dying before them, when the child got over it and escaped.

For instance, there was a tradesman in East Smithfield, whose wife was big with her first child, and fell into labour, having the plague upon her. He could get neither midwife nor nurse to tend her, and his two servants fled from her. He ran from house to house like one distracted, but could get no help; the utmost he could get was a watchman, who promised to send a nurse in the morning.

The poor man, with his heart broke, went back, assisted his wife as he could, acted the part of the midwife, brought the child dead into the world, and his wife in about an hour died in his arms, where he held her dead body fast till the morning, when the watchman brought the nurse as he had promised. Coming up the stairs (for he had left the door open) they found the man sitting with his dead wife in his arms, and so overwhelmed with grief that he died a few hours afterwards without any sign of infection, but merely sunk under the weight of his grief.

I have heard also of some who, on the death of their relations, have grown stupid with the insupportable sorrow; and of one, in particular, who was so overcome with the pressure upon his spirits that by degrees his head sank into his body, so that between his shoulders the crown of his head was very little seen; and by degrees losing both voice and sense, his face lay against his collarbone, unless held up by the hands of other people; and the poor man never came to himself again, but languished nearly a year in that condition, and died.

But I am now talking of the time when the plague raged at the easternmost part of the town, when people there had flattered themselves that they should escape, and were surprised when it came upon them as it did.

Part 13

The Three Poor Men from Wapping

I now come to the story of the three poor men, which I mentioned earlier. They were single men, two brothers and their kinsman, and had nowhere to go, and little money. One of them had been a soldier, and since being wounded, had been employed at a baker's in Wapping. His brother was a seaman, but had hurt his leg, so that he could not go to sea, but had worked for his living at a sailmaker's. The third man was a carpenter by trade, a handy fellow, and he had no wealth but his box of tools. They all lived in Stepney parish, which was the last that was badly infected; so they stayed there till the plague was coming towards them.

The sleepiness and security of that part, as I have observed, was such that they not only did not shift for themselves as others did, but they boasted of being safe; and many people fled out of the city and the infected suburbs, to Wapping and such places, bringing the plague with them.

For that is the bane and mischief of people fleeing, when they carry the plague from house to house in their very clothes. For this reason we were ordered to kill all the dogs and cats, as they are apt to run from house to house and from street to street, perhaps carrying the infection in their furs and hair. A prodigious number of those creatures were destroyed. I think they talked of forty thousand dogs, and five times as

many cats. All possible endeavours were used also to destroy the mice and rats, by laying poisons for them. If only proper steps had been taken early, disaster might have been avoided.

I return to my three men. Their story has a moral, and is a pattern for all poor men or women to follow, if ever such a time comes again.

Says John the biscuit-maker one day to Thomas his brother, the sailmaker, 'Brother Tom, what will become of us? The plague increases this way. What shall we do?'

'Truly,' says Thomas, 'I am at a great loss, for if it comes into Wapping I shall be turned out of my lodging.'

'Turned out of your lodging, Tom! If you are, I don't know who will take you in; for people are so afraid of one another now, there's no getting a lodging anywhere.'

'Why, the people where I lodge are good, civil people,' said Thomas, 'and kind enough; but they say I go out every day to my work, and it will be dangerous; and they talk of locking themselves up and letting nobody come near them. I might even resolve to stay within doors too, for apart from a suit of sails that my master has in hand, and which I am just finishing, I am likely to get no more work for a great while.'

'I am almost as bad as you, brother,' answered John. 'The people where I lodge are all gone into the country except for a maid, and she is to go next week, and to shut the house up, so that I shall be turned adrift.'

'We shall be starved if we try to go out of town. They won't sell us food, no, nor let us come into their houses.'

'I have only a little money in any case,' said John.

'I have some, though not much; but I tell you there's no stirring on the road. I know a couple of poor honest men in our street have attempted to travel, and people in Barnet threatened to fire at them. They came back again quite discouraged.'

'I would have faced up to them. If I had been denied food for my money I would have just taken it.'

'You talk your old soldier's language,' said Thomas; 'but this is a serious thing. The people have good reason to keep anybody off that may not be healthy, and we must not plunder them.'

'No, brother, you mistake me. I would plunder nobody; but for any town upon the road to deny me leave to pass through on the open highway, and deny me food for my money, is to say the town has a right to starve me to death, which cannot be true.'

Thomas answered, 'But they do not deny you liberty to go back again to where you came from.'

'But the next town behind me will, by the same rule, deny me leave to go back, and so they starve me between them. Besides, there is no law to prohibit my travelling wherever I want.'

'But it is too difficult for poor men to dispute with them at every town on the road.'

'Why, brother,' said John, 'if we stay here we are sure to die, and if we go away we can only die; I am resolved to be gone.'

'Where will you go, and what can you do? I would willingly go away, if I knew whither. But we have no acquaintance, no friends. Here we were born, and here we must die.'

'Look you, Tom, the whole kingdom is my native country. I was born in England, and have a right to live in it if I can.'

‘But you know vagrants may by law be taken up, and sent home,’ Tom pointed out.

‘How shall they make me vagrant? I desire only to travel, upon lawful occasions. Is not flying to save our lives a lawful occasion?’

‘But suppose they let us pass, whither shall we go?’ asked Thomas.

‘Anywhere, to save our lives; if I am once out of this dreadful place, I care not where I go. Consider it a little, Tom.’

This discussion was about the beginning of July; and though the plague was come forward in the west and north parts of the town, yet all Wapping and thereabouts was entirely free of it. A fortnight after this the two brothers met again, and then the case was altered; the plague was exceedingly advanced and the number of dead greatly increased. A few had begun to die in neighbouring areas, when the sailmaker came to his brother John in some fright; for he was absolutely warned out of his lodging, and had only a week to provide for himself.

His brother John was in as bad a case, for he was quite out, and had begged leave of his master, the biscuit-maker, to lodge in an outhouse, where he lay upon straw, with some biscuit-sacks to cover him.

Here they resolved (seeing all employment was at an end) that they would do their best to get out of the reach of the dreadful infection, and would try to live upon what they had for as long as it would last, and then work if they could get work anywhere.

While they were considering this, the third man, Richard the joiner, came to know of the plan, and asked to be one of the number; and thus they prepared to set out.

The sailmaker had the most money, but being lame, was the most unfit to get any work, so he was content that his money should all go into one public stock, on condition that whenever one of them earned anything, it should without any grudging be all added to the kitty.

They resolved to take as little baggage as possible because they planned to travel on foot. They had a great many consultations about which way they should travel, and even on the morning they set out they had not decided on it.

At last Thomas said, ‘The weather is very hot, and therefore I am for travelling north, so that we may not have the sun upon our faces; for I have been told that it is not good to overheat our blood when the infection may be in the air. Secondly,’ says he, ‘we should go the way that is contrary to the wind, so that we may not have the wind blow the air of the city on our backs.’ These two cautions were approved, so long as the wind might not be in the south when they set out to go north.

John the baker, who had been a soldier, then said, ‘We expect to get no lodging on the road, and it will be a little too hard to lie just in the open air. Though it be warm weather, yet it may be wet; and therefore, you, brother Tom, that are a sailmaker, might easily make us a little tent, and I will set it up every night, and a fig for all the inns in England; if we have a good tent we shall do well enough.’

The joiner opposed this, and said that he would undertake to build them a house every night with his hatchet and mallet, which should be as good as a tent.

They disputed this, but at last settled on a tent. The only objection against it was, that it must be carried with them, and that would increase their baggage too much; but Thomas had a piece of good luck, for his master gave him a little, poor horse that he had no use for; and also for three days’ work that Thomas did for him, he let him have an old top-gallant sail that was worn out, but more than enough to make a very good tent.

The soldier showed him how to shape it, and they soon made their tent, and fitted it with poles; and thus they were ready for their journey, viz., three men, one tent, one horse, one gun – for the soldier would not go without arms. The joiner also had a small bag of tools.

They pooled their money, and thus began their journey. In the morning when they set out the wind blew, according to their compass, at north-west by west. So they resolved to go north-west.

But then a difficulty came in their way; the plague was now very violent on the north side of the city, and they did not think it safe to go near those parts; so they went away east as far as Ratcliff Cross, and leaving Stepney Church on their left hand, they went the long way round to Poplar and Bromley, and came into the great road just at Bow.

Here the watch placed upon Bow Bridge would have questioned them, but crossing the road into a narrow street that led to Old Ford, they avoided any inquiry, and travelled to Old Ford.

The constables everywhere were upon their guard: not so much, it seems, to stop people passing by, as to stop them from taking up their abode in their towns, and because of a rumour that the poor people would come out to all the towns around to plunder for bread. Although this was only a rumour, it was not very far off from being a reality, for in a few weeks more the poor people became so desperate that they were with great difficulty kept from going out into the fields and towns; nothing hindered them except the plague that fell in upon them so furiously that instead they went to the grave by thousands. In five parishes alone there died over 5000 in twenty days, so there were probably three times that number sick all that time; great numbers fell sick every day. Besides, if the bills of mortality said five thousand, I always believed it was near twice as many in reality, for there was too much confusion to keep an exact account.

But to return to my travellers. As they seemed to be coming from the country rather than from the city, they found the people friendlier with them; they let them come into a public-house where the constable and his warders were, and gave them food and drink which greatly refreshed and encouraged them; and here they decided that, when they were asked, they would say they came not from London, but from Essex.

To forward this little fraud, they obtained from the constable at Old Ford a certificate of their passing from Essex through that village, which said that they had not been at London; which was literally true, Wapping being no part of the City.

This certificate was so useful to them that it procured them not only a free passage to Hackney, but a full certificate of health from a justice of the peace, who granted it without much difficulty; and thus they passed through the long town of Hackney (which lay then in several separated hamlets), and travelled on till they came into the great north road on the top of Stamford Hill. By this time they began to be weary, and so in the back-road from Hackney, before it opened into the great road, they set up their tent against a barn.

Here they went to sleep; but the joiner, a grave and sober man, could not sleep, and after a while resolved to stand sentinel and guard his companions. So with the gun in his hand, he walked to and fro before the barn.

Soon he heard a noise of people approaching, sounding as if there were a great number, coming, as he thought, directly towards the barn. In a few minutes more, their noise growing louder, the biscuit-baker came out of the tent too. The lame sailmaker, who was weary, lay still in the tent.

The people whom they had heard came towards the barn, when one of our travellers challenged them, like soldiers upon guard, with 'Who comes there?'

The people did not answer immediately, but one of them speaking to another, said, 'Alas! we are disappointed. Here are some people before us; the barn is taken up.'

They all stopped. There were about thirteen of them, including some women. They consulted together what they should do, and our travellers soon found they were poor, distressed people, like themselves seeking shelter and safety. They also heard the women say, as if frightened, 'Do not go near them. How do you know but they may have the plague? We have escaped thus far by the goodness of God; do not let us run into danger now, we beseech you.'

Our travellers found by this that they were a good, sober sort of people, so John said to the joiner, 'Let us encourage them.'

So the joiner called to them, 'Hark ye, good people, do not be afraid of us; we are only three poor men. If you are free from the plague you shall not be hurt by us. We are not in the barn, but in a little tent outside, and we will move for you; we can set up our tent somewhere else.' Then Richard the joiner began to talk to one of their men, who said his name was Ford.

Ford said, 'Do you assure us that you are all healthy?'

Richard told them not to be uneasy; and that they had not been in the barn in any case, and would move their tent away from it so that all might be safe.

'That is very kind,' said Ford, 'but if you are free from the plague, why should we make you move when you are settled there? We will go into the barn, if you please, to rest ourselves, and we need not disturb you. Blessed be God that we are preserved from the plague.'

'What part of the town do you come from? Was the plague there?'

'Ay,' said Ford, 'in a most terrible manner, or we would not have fled. We are most of us from Cripplegate parish, and two or three from Clerkenwell. We have been away some time, and kept together as well as we could in Islington, in an old uninhabited house; but the plague is come up into Islington too, and a house next door to ours was infected and shut up; and we are come away in a fright. We know not where we are going, but God will guide us.'

They entered into the barn, which was almost full of hay, and went to rest; but our travellers observed that before they went to sleep an ancient man prayed with all the company, recommending themselves to the blessing of Providence.

It was soon daylight at that time of the year, and when they talked more to the travellers they learned they had thoughts of going over the river in the marshes to Epping Forest. It seemed they had enough money to last them for two or three months, when, as they said, they hoped the cold weather would halt the infection, and it would abate, if only for want of people left alive to be infected.

Now our three travellers found themselves under an unexpected inconvenience: namely their horse. With the horse to carry their baggage they were obliged to keep in the road, whereas the people of this other band went over the fields, path or no path, as they pleased; and did not need to pass through any town, except to buy necessary food.

But if our three travellers crossed the country they would have to do a great deal of damage in breaking down fences and gates to go over enclosed fields, which they were reluctant to do if they could help it. However, they had a great mind to join this company; and after some talk they laid aside their first plan to go northward, and

resolved to follow the others into Essex. So in the morning they took up their tent and loaded their horse, and away they travelled all together.

They had some difficulty at the ferry, for the ferryman was afraid of them; but after talking at a distance, he was content to leave his boat for them to take. When they had ferried themselves over, he directed them to leave the boat, and he, having another boat, said he would fetch it again, which it seems, however, he did not do for eight days.

They paid the ferryman beforehand, but now were at a great loss and difficulty how to get the horse over, the boat being small and not fit for it. At last they had to unload the baggage and make him swim over.

From the river they travelled towards the forest, but when they came to Walthamstow the people refused to admit them. Everywhere the constables kept them at a distance and parleyed with them. The constables did not believe their story, saying that two or three companies had already come that way and made similar pretences, but had given the plague to several people in the towns where they had passed; and had afterwards perished in the fields – whether of the plague or of mere hunger they could not tell.

This was a good reason indeed why the people of Walthamstow should be very cautious of strangers. But, as Richard the joiner told them, it was no reason why they should block up the roads and refuse people who asked nothing of them but to go through the street; saying that if their people were afraid of them, they might go into their houses and shut their doors.

The constables and attendants remained obstinate, so the men went back to their fellows to consult what was to be done. It was very discouraging; but at last John the soldier and biscuit-maker, said, ‘Come, leave the parley to me.’

He set the joiner, Richard, to work cutting some poles out of the trees and shaping them as like guns as he could, and in a little time he had five or six apparent muskets, which at a distance would not be known; and about the part where the lock of a gun is, they wrapped cloth and rags, as soldiers do in wet weather to preserve them from rust; the rest was discoloured with clay or mud, such as they could get.

While this was being done John advanced with two or three men, and set up their tent in the lane within sight of the barrier which the town’s men had made, and set a sentinel to walk to and fro by it with the real gun, the only one they had. Also, he tied the horse to a gate nearby, and kindled a fire on the other side of the tent, so that the people of the town could see the fire and the smoke, but could not see what they were doing.

After the country people had looked upon them very earnestly for a while, they supposed that there were a great many in the company, and they began to be uneasy. Above all, perceiving they had horses and arms – for they had seen one horse and one gun at the tent, and they had seen others walk about with their supposed muskets – they were alarmed and wished they would go away and not stay. Towards the evening they called from the barrier to the tent.

‘What do you want?’ said John. Taking the gun upon his shoulder, he went and talked to them as if he had been placed on guard by some superior officer.

‘Why don’t you be gone?’ said the constable. ‘What do you stay there for?’

‘Why do you stop us on the king’s highway, and refuse us leave to go on our way?’

‘You know it was because of the plague.’

‘We told you we were all sound and free from the plague,’ said John, ‘and yet you stop us on the highway.’

The constable answered, 'We have a right to stop you, and our own safety obliges us to it. Besides, this is not the king's highway; there is a toll gate here, and if we do let people pass here, we make them pay the toll.'

'We have a right to seek our own safety as well as you, and you may see we are flying for our lives: and 'tis very unchristian and unjust to stop us.'

'You may go back from whence you came; we do not hinder you from that. Or you may go any other way.'

'No, no;' said John. 'I suppose you see we are able to send you packing, and come through your town when we want; but since you have stopped us here, we are content. You see we have encamped here, and here we will live. We hope you will furnish us with food. If you stop us here, you must keep us.'

'Why, you will not quarter yourselves upon us by force, will you?'

'We have offered no violence to you yet. Why do you seem to oblige us to it? I am an old soldier, and cannot starve.'

'Since you threaten us, we shall get reinforcements,' said the Constable. 'I have orders to raise the county upon you.'

'It is you that threaten, not we. And since you are for mischief, we shall begin our march in a few minutes.'

This frightened the constable and his companions, who immediately changed their note and asked John what he wanted.

John said, 'At first we desired nothing of you but leave to go through the town; we should have offered no injury to any of you. We are not thieves, but poor people in distress, and flying from the dreadful plague in London. We wonder how you could be so unmerciful!'

'Well, if you will pass over the fields on your left hand,' said the Constable, 'I will endeavour to have gates opened for you.'

'Our horsemen cannot pass with our baggage that way; it does not lead into the road that we want to go. Besides, you have kept us here all day without any provisions. I think you ought to send us some provisions for our relief.'

'If you will go another way we will send you some provisions. How many are you?'

John said: 'Nay, we do not ask enough for all three of our companies. If you will send us bread for twenty-six or seven people for three days, and show us the way over the field, we will go out of our way to oblige you. We do not wish to frighten your people.'

Here the constable called to one of his men, and bade him order Captain Richard and his people to march the lower way on the side of the marshes. He added to John,

'You must assure us none of your people shall come a step nearer than where the food we send you shall be set down.'

'I answer for it we will not,' said John.

Accordingly they sent to the place twenty loaves of bread and three or four large pieces of good beef, and opened the gates for them; but none of them had courage enough to look out to see them go, and, as it was evening, they would not have been able to see how few they were.

This was John the soldier's management. But this gave such an alarm to the county, that had they really been two or three hundred the whole county would have been raised upon them, and they would have been sent to prison. They soon learned this, for two days afterwards they found several parties of horsemen about, in pursuit of three companies of men, armed, as they said, with muskets, who were broke out from London and had the plague, and were spreading it and plundering the country.

They soon saw the danger they were in; so they resolved to divide themselves again. The first night they all encamped in the forest, but not setting up the tent, lest that should be seen. Instead Richard went to work with his hatchet, and cutting down branches of trees, he built three shelters, in which they camped with as much convenience as they could expect.

They ate the provisions they had got at Walthamstow, and now willingly made the old soldier their leader. He told them that they ought to be as careful the country did not infect them as that they did not infect the country; that they must be as frugal of their money as they could; and that they must not think of offering the country any violence. They all referred themselves to his direction, so they left their three houses standing, and the next day went away towards Epping.

When they came near Epping they halted a little north of the highway, under some trees, and pitched their little camp – three large huts made of poles. Their carpenter and his assistants cut and fixed the poles in the ground in a circle, binding all the small ends together at the top and thickening the sides with boughs of trees and bushes, so that they were close and warm. They had, besides this, a little tent where the women lay, and a hut to put the horse in.

It happened that the next day was market-day at Epping, when Captain John and one of the other men went to market and bought some bread, mutton and beef; and two of the women went separately, as if they had not belonged to the rest, and bought more. John took the horse to bring the supplies home, and the carpenter went to work and made them benches and stools to sit on, and a kind of table to dine on.

They were taken no notice of for two or three days, but after that many people ran out of the town to look at them, and all the country was alarmed about them. The people at first seemed afraid to come near them; and they for their part wished the people to keep away, for there was a rumour that the plague had reached Waltham and Epping; so John called out to them not to come near.

The parish officers came up and parleyed with them at a distance, and desired to know who they were, and by what authority they pretended to fix their stand at that place. John answered very frankly, they were poor distressed people from London who, thinking the people of Epping might have refused them entry into their town, had pitched their tents thus in the open field and forest.

At first the Epping people talked roughly to them, and told them they must move; that this was no place for them; and that they pretended to be sound and well, but that they might be infected with the plague for aught they knew, and might infect the whole country.

John argued very calmly with them, and told them that London was the place by which the townsmen of Epping made their living; and to be so cruel to the inhabitants of London was very hard, and they would not want to have it remembered hereafter how unkind they were to Londoners; for that would make the name of an Epping man hateful through all the city.

The Epping men told them that it was reported that there had been a great rabble of people at Walthamstow, who pretended to be healthy, as they did, but who threatened to plunder the town and force their way through; that there were near two hundred of them, with arms and tents like soldiers; that they extorted provisions from the town by threats, and that several of them being gone away toward Rumford and Brentwood, the plague had spread into both those towns. They accused them of being some of that party; and if so, they deserved to be sent to the county jail.

John assured them they were all of one company; that they had never been more in number than they were then; that they came out in two separate companies, but

joined along the way; that they were ready to give their names and addresses, so that they might be called to account for any disorder that they might cause; that the townsmen might see they were content to live frugally, and only desired a little room to breathe in the forest where it was wholesome.

‘Why, look you,’ said he, ‘if you will relieve us with provisions for our present necessity, we will be very thankful, and will fully repay you, if God pleases to bring us back to our own houses in safety, and to restore health to the people of London. On the other hand, if you show no compassion, we shall not extort anything by violence or steal from any one; but when what little we have is spent, if we perish for want, God’s will be done.’

He talked so rationally and smoothly that they went away; and though they did not give any consent to their staying there, yet they did not molest them; and the poor people continued there three or four days longer without any disturbance. They got some provision from a victualling-house at the outskirts of the town, to whom they called to bring things and set them down at a distance, and always paid for very honestly.

During this time the younger people of the town came frequently to look at them, and sometimes talk with some space between; and particularly it was observed that on the Sabbath-day the poor people worshipped God together, and were heard to sing psalms.

This, and their quiet, inoffensive behaviour, began to get them the good opinion of the country, and people began to pity them. In consequence, one very wet, rainy night, a gentleman who lived in the neighbourhood sent them a little cart with twelve bundles of straw, to thatch their huts and to keep them dry. The minister of a parish sent them also two bushels of wheat and half a bushel of white peas.

They were very thankful, to be sure, for this relief, and the straw was a very great comfort to them; for they lay damp and hard till this straw came, which was to them like feather-beds.

This gentleman and the minister having thus given an example of charity, others quickly followed, and they received every day some gift or other from the people. Some sent them chairs, stools, tables, and other household things; some sent them blankets and rugs, some earthenware, and some kitchen ware.

Encouraged by this, their carpenter in a few days built them a large shed or house with rafters, and a roof, and an upper floor, in which they lodged warm: for the weather began to be damp and cold in the beginning of September. But this house, being well thatched, kept out the cold well enough. He made an earthen wall at one end with a chimney in it, and another of the company, with a vast deal of trouble, made a funnel to the chimney to carry out the smoke.

Here they lived comfortably, though coarsely, till the beginning of September, when they heard the bad news that the plague, which was very hot at Waltham Abbey on one side and at Rumford and Brentwood on the other side, was also coming to Epping and to most of the towns around the Forest, and which, as they said, was brought down by people going to and from London with provisions. It cannot be proved that this is how the infection spread; but in any case the towns about them were now infected, and they began to be afraid to go and buy such things as they wanted.

This pinched them very hard, for now they had little or nothing but what the charitable gentlemen of the country supplied them with. But other gentlemen in the country, who had not sent them anything before, began to hear of them and supply them, and one sent them a large pig, and another two sheep, and another sent them a

calf. In short, they had meat enough, and sometimes cheese and milk. They were chiefly short of bread, for when the gentlemen sent them corn they had nowhere to bake it or to grind it. This made them eat the first two bushels of wheat that was sent to them as the Israelites of old did, without grinding or making bread of it.

At last they found means to carry their corn to a windmill near Woodford, where they had it ground, and afterwards the biscuit-maker made a hollow hearth where he could bake biscuit-cakes tolerably well; and thus they were able to live without supplies from the towns; and it was well they did, for the country was soon after fully infected, and about 120 were said to have died of the plague in the villages near them, which was a terrible thing.

Now the towns had no need to be afraid they should settle near them; on the contrary, some of the poorer families left their houses and built huts in the forest after the same manner. But it was observed that several of these poor people had the sickness even in their huts or booths; the reason of which was plain, namely, because they moved into the open air too late, when they had already mixed with neighbours who had the disease; or because they were not careful enough, after they moved out of the towns, not to come in again and mingle with the diseased people.

But whichever it was, when our travellers perceived that the plague was not only in the towns, but even in the huts in the forest near them, they began to be afraid, and to think of decamping; for if they had stayed they would have been in danger of their lives.

It is not to be wondered that they were greatly afflicted at being obliged to quit the place where they had been treated with so much humanity and charity; but they saw no remedy. John, however, thought that he would first tell that gentleman who was their principal benefactor about the distress they were in, and ask his assistance and advice.

The good gentleman encouraged them to leave the place for fear they should be cut off from any retreat at all by the plague; but where they should go, he found it very hard to say. At last John asked him whether he, being a justice of the peace, would give them certificates of health, so that they might not be repulsed now they had been so long from London. This his worship immediately granted, and gave them proper letters of health, saying they had resided in a village in Essex and retired from all conversation for above forty days, without any appearance of sickness, and so might be safely received anywhere.

With this certificate they moved, though with great reluctance, towards the marshes on the side of Waltham. But here they found a man who kept a weir on the river, who terrified them with dismal stories of the sickness having spread into all the towns along the river into Hertfordshire.

It seems this was not really true, but it terrified them, and they resolved to move across the forest towards Rumford and Brentwood. However, they heard that there were numbers of people fled out of London that way, who lay in Henalt Forest, and were said to be made so desperate by hunger that they robbed and plundered, and killed cattle, and the like; and that others, building hovels by the roadside, begged, and practically demanded relief; so that the county was very uneasy. They were told that the charity of the county would be hardened against them here; and that they would also be in danger of violence from others in their situation.

John went back to their good friend and benefactor, and laying their case before him, humbly asked his advice; and he as kindly advised them to take up their old quarters again, and to move a little further out of the road. As they really wanted some house rather than huts to shelter them at that time of the year, they found an old

decayed house which was so out of repair as to be scarce habitable; and by the consent of a farmer to whom it belonged, they got leave to make what use of it they could.

The ingenious joiner, and all the rest under his direction, went to work on it, and in a very few days made it habitable. There was an old chimney and oven, both in ruins; yet they made them both fit for use, and, raising sheds, and lean-tos on every side, they soon made the house capable to hold them all.

They chiefly needed boards to make window-shutters, floors, doors, and so on; but as the gentlemen showed them favour, and they were known to be in good health, everybody helped them with what they could spare.

Here they encamped for good and all, and resolved to move no more. They saw plainly how terribly alarmed that county was everywhere at anybody that came from London, and that they should have no admittance anywhere; at least no friendly assistance as they had received here.

Even so, they were put to great straits: for the weather grew cold and wet in October and November, and they got colds and illnesses, but never had the plague. And thus about December they came home to the city again.

I tell this story principally to explain the great numbers of people which immediately appeared in the city as soon as the sickness abated; for many who had retreats in the country fled to those places. The middling people who had not friends fled to all parts of the country where they could get shelter. Those that had money always fled farthest, because they were able to support themselves; but those who had none suffered great hardships, and were often driven to relieve their wants at the expense of the country. Often they were forced from place to place till they were obliged to come back again to London.

Since hearing this story of John, I have learnt that there were a great many poor people who fled into the country; and some of them got little sheds and barns and outhouses to live in. But many others built themselves huts and retreats in the fields and woods, and lived like hermits in holes and caves, where they suffered great extremities, so that many of them were obliged to come back again whatever the danger was.

So those little huts were often found empty, and the country people supposed the inhabitants lay dead in them, and would not go near them for fear. Indeed it was not unlikely that some of the unhappy wanderers might die so all alone. In one hut a man was found dead, and on the gate nearby was cut with his knife the following words:—

O mIsErY!
We BoTH ShaLL DyE,
WoE, WoE.

I have given an account already of what I found to have been the case down the river among the seafaring men; how the ships lay in rows as far as I could see. I have been told that they lay in the same manner quite down the river as low as Gravesend and elsewhere; nor did I ever hear that the plague reached any of the people on board those ships, although the people went frequently on shore to buy provisions.

Likewise I found that the watermen on the river above the bridge conveyed themselves away up the river as far as they could go, and that many of them had their whole families in their boats, furnished with straw for their lodging, and that they lay thus all along the shore in the marshes, some of them setting up little tents with their sails; as I have heard, the river-sides were lined with boats and people as long as they

had anything to live on. Indeed the country people were very willing to relieve them – but they were by no means willing to receive them into their towns and houses, and for that we cannot blame them.

There was one unhappy citizen who had been visited in a dreadful manner, so that his wife and all his children were dead, and himself and two servants only left, with an elderly woman, a relation, who had nursed the sick as well as she could. This disconsolate man went to a village outside the infected area, and finding an empty house there, inquired out the owner, and took the house. After a few days he got a cart and loaded it with goods, and carried them down to the house. The people of the village opposed him; but with some arguing and some force, they got the cart through the street up to the door.

There the constable resisted them again, and would not let them be brought in. The man caused the goods to be unloaded and laid at the door, and sent the cart away; upon which they commanded the man to go before a justice of peace, which he did. The justice ordered him to cause the cart to fetch away the goods again, which he refused to do; so the justice ordered the constable to fetch the carters back, and make them reload the goods and carry them away; and if they could not find the carters, and the man would not take his possessions away, they should pull them away from the door with hooks and burn them in the street.

The poor distressed man upon this fetched his goods again, lamenting the hardship of his case. But there was no remedy; self-preservation obliged the people to those severities. Whether this poor man lived or died I cannot tell, but it was reported that he had the plague at that time; and it was not unlikely that either he or his goods, or both, were dangerous, when his family had died so short a while before.

I know that the inhabitants of the towns adjacent to London were much blamed for cruelty to the poor people that ran from the contagion, and many very severe things were done; but I must say also that, where there was room for charity and assistance, without apparent danger to themselves, they were willing enough to help and relieve them. But there were infinite exclamations and outcries against the cruelty of the country towns, which made the clamour very popular.

And yet, there was not a town of any note within ten (or, I believe, twenty) miles of the city that was not infected and had not some deaths. Hertford, for instance, had 90 deaths, Windsor 103, Greenwich 231, and Deptford 623.

Another thing that might make the country stricter was what I hinted at before: namely, that there was a seeming propensity or wicked inclination in those that were infected to infect others.

There have been great debates among our physicians as to the reason of this. Some say it is in the nature of the disease, and that it impresses every patient with a kind of a rage and hatred of their own kind.

Others placed it to the account of the corruption of human nature, which cannot bear to see itself more miserable than others of its own species, and has a kind of involuntary wish that all men were as unhappy as itself.

Others say it was only a kind of desperation, not knowing or regarding what they did, and unconcerned even for themselves.

But I choose to give this grave debate a quite different turn, and resolve it by saying that I do not grant the fact. On the contrary, I say that the thing is not really so, but that it was a general complaint raised by the people living in the outlying villages to justify, or at least excuse, their severe behaviour.

Both sides may be said to have injured one another; that is to say, the citizens, pressing to be harboured in time of distress, and with the plague upon them, complain

of the cruelty of the country people in being refused entrance and forced back again with their families; and the inhabitants, finding themselves so imposed upon, complain that when they were infected they were not only regardless of others, but even willing to infect them; neither of which were really true.

There were frequent alarms about plunder and robbery; claims that people ran about the streets with the plague without any control; and that no care was taken to shut up houses, and confine the sick; whereas, to do the Londoners justice, they never practised such things, except in special cases. On the contrary, everything was managed with so much care by the Lord Mayor and aldermen, and such excellent order was observed in the whole city, that London may be a model to all the cities in the world for the good government and the excellent order that was everywhere kept, even in the time of the most violent infection.

Part 14 **More on the Shutting Up of Houses**

One thing that ought to be mentioned to the honour of the magistrates, is their moderation in the great and difficult work of shutting up houses. This was a great subject of discontent, and the complaints of people so confined were very grievous. They had no way to converse with any of their friends but out of their windows, where they would make such piteous lamentations as often moved the hearts of those passing by.

Those complaints often reproached the severity, and sometimes the insolence, of the watchmen placed at their doors, to which those watchmen would answer saucily enough, and perhaps affront their listeners. For this, or for their ill-treatment of the families, I think seven or eight of them in various places were killed, although I do not know the details. It is true the watchmen were on their lawful duty, and killing any public legal officer in the execution of his office is always, in the language of the law, called murder. But they were not authorised to injure or abuse the people who were under their observation; so when they did so, they might be said to act for themselves, not their office; and if they brought mischief upon themselves by such undue behaviour, that mischief was upon their own heads, and everybody was apt to say they deserved it. I do not remember that anybody was ever greatly punished for whatever was done to the watchmen.

The magistrates did ease families upon many occasions in this case, and particularly by allowing the sick persons to be removed either to a pest-house or other place; and sometimes permitting the well persons in the family to move out. The concern, also, of the magistrates for supplying such poor families with physic and food, was very great. The aldermen frequently rode in person to such houses and asked the people at their windows whether they were duly attended or not; also, whether they wanted anything, and if the watchmen had carried their messages and fetched them things they wanted. And if they answered in the affirmative, all was well; but if they complained that the officer did not do his duty, or did not treat them civilly, the man was generally replaced.

The magistrates usually chose to favour the people and remove the man, as this seemed to be the least wrong and of the least ill consequence. If the watchman was treated unjustly, they could easily make him amends by giving him another post; but if the family was injured, the damage might be irreparable, as it concerned their lives.

A great variety of these cases frequently happened between the watchmen and the poor people shut up, besides those I formerly mentioned about escaping. Sometimes the watchmen were absent, sometimes drunk, sometimes asleep when the people wanted them, and they were punished severely, as they deserved.

Apart from all this, the shutting up of houses with those that were well along with those that were sick, had very great inconveniences, and some tragic consequences. But it was authorised by law, and had the public good in view.

It is doubtful to this day whether, on the whole, it contributed anything to stopping the infection; and indeed I cannot say it did, for nothing could run with greater fury than the plague did at its height, though the houses infected were shut up as efficiently as possible. Certainly if all the infected persons were shut in, no sound person could have been infected by them. But the infection was propagated without knowledge, by such people who were not visibly ill, who neither knew whom they infected or who they were infected by.

A house in Whitechapel was shut up for the sake of one infected maid, who had only spots, not the tokens of plague, and recovered; yet these people obtained no liberty to stir, neither for air nor exercise, for forty days. Want of breath, fear, anger, and vexation cast the mistress of the family into a fever, and visitors said it was the plague, though the physicians declared it was not. However, the family were obliged to begin their quarantine anew, though their former quarantine was almost finished.

This oppressed them so with anger and grief, that most of the family fell sick of one disease or another, chiefly scurvy, and one of a violent colic; till, after several prolongings of their confinement, a visitor that came to inspect them brought the plague with them and infected the whole house; and all or most of them died. And this was a thing which frequently happened, and was indeed one of the worst consequences of shutting houses up.

I had about this time a little hardship put upon me, by which I was at first greatly afflicted, and very much disturbed; and this was being appointed by the alderman of Portsoken Ward as one of the examiners of the houses in the precinct where I lived. We had a large parish, and had no less than eighteen examiners; the people called us visitors.

I endeavoured with all my might to be excused from such an employment, and used many arguments: I alleged that I was against shutting up houses at all, and did not believe it answered the end it was intended for; but the only abatement I could get was that instead of two months, I should be obliged to hold the office for three weeks, on condition that I would then get some other suitable person to serve the rest of the time for me – which was not easy.

It is true that the shutting up of houses had one important effect: it confined the diseased people, who would otherwise have been very dangerous in their running about the streets – which, when they were delirious, they would do in a most frightful manner, till they were thus restrained.

An unhappy gentlewoman was (if the story be true) murdered by one of these creatures in Aldersgate Street. He was going along the street, raving mad and singing; people said he was drunk, but he himself said he had the plague, which it seems was true; and meeting this gentlewoman, he would kiss her. She was terribly frightened, but there was nobody near enough to help her. So she turned and gave him a thrust so forcibly that she pushed him down backward. But unhappily he caught hold of her and pulled her down also, and kissed her; and what was worst of all, told her he had the plague, and why should not she have it as well as he?

At that she screamed and fell down into a swoon, or in a fit, which killed her in a very few days; and I never heard whether she had the plague or no.

Another infected person came and knocked at the door of a house where they knew him; the servant let him in, and he ran upstairs to where the whole family was at supper. They began to rise up, a little surprised; but he bid them sit still, he only came to take his leave of them. They asked him, 'Why, where are you going?'

'Going,' says he; 'I have got the sickness, and shall die tomorrow night.' They were in consternation. The daughters, who were only little girls, were frightened almost to death and ran out, locked themselves into their chambers and screamed out at the window for help. The master, more composed, was going to throw the man downstairs; but then, considering the danger of touching him, he stopped in horror.

The poor man all this while, being diseased in his brain as well as in his body, stood still like one amazed. At length he says calmly, 'Are you all disturbed at me? Why, then I'll go home and die there.' And so he goes immediately downstairs and out of the door. It was some while before the family recovered from the fright, but no ill consequence followed. They burnt a great variety of fumes and perfumes in all the rooms, and made a great many smokes of pitch, gunpowder, and sulphur, and washed their clothes, and the like.

It is certain that, if the sick had not been confined by the shutting up of houses, multitudes of delirious and distracted sufferers would have been continually running up and down the streets. Even as it was a very great number did so.

I heard of one infected creature who, running out of his bed in his shirt in the anguish and agony of his swellings, got his shoes on and went to put on his coat; but the nurse snatching the coat from him, he threw her down, ran over her, ran down into the street, and went to the Stillyard stairs by the river Thames in his shirt; the nurse running after him, and calling to the watchman to stop him. The watchman, afraid to touch him, let him go on; upon which he threw away his shirt, and plunged into the Thames, and, being a good swimmer, swam right over the river to the Falcon stairs, where landing, he ran about the streets naked for a good while.

Then he took to the river again, and swam back to the Stillyard stairs, ran up the streets to his own house, went up the stairs and into his bed again. I heard that this terrible experiment cured him of the plague, for the violent motion of his arms and legs stretched the swellings under his arms and his groin, and caused them to ripen and break; and the cold water abated the fever in his blood.

This story may serve to confirm the many desperate things which the delirious people did, if not shut up in houses. On the other hand, the complaints against shutting up were very bitter. It would pierce the hearts of all to hear the piteous cries of those infected people, who, out of their mind with pain or fever, were shut in or perhaps tied in their beds and chairs, to prevent their doing themselves hurt.

This running about of sick people in the streets was very dismal, and the magistrates did their utmost to prevent it; but the officers did not care to meddle with them, because they were so infectious that it was dangerous to touch them. So they generally ran on, not knowing what they did, till they dropped down stark dead, or exhausted; when they might come to their senses, and make the most grievous lamentations for half an hour, before dying.

Had not the sick been restrained, London would have been the most dreadful place that ever was in the world; there could have been as many people died in the streets as died in their houses; for when the sickness was at its height it generally made them raving and delirious.

Because people did not talk to each other at that time of calamity, nobody could have knowledge of all the extraordinary cases that occurred in different families; and particularly I believe it was never known to this day how many people in their deliriums drowned themselves in the Thames, and in the Hackney River. Only a few drownings were set down in the weekly bills, but I believe many more really drowned themselves in that year, for many of the bodies were never found who yet were known to be lost. There was also one man in Whitecross Street burned himself to death in his bed; some said it was done by himself, others that it was by the treachery of his nurse; but that he had the plague was agreed by all.

It was a merciful disposition of Providence that no serious fires happened in the city during that year. If they had, either the people must have let them go unquenched, or have crowded together, risking infection. But no disaster of that kind happened. They told us a story of a house in a place called Swan Alley, where a family was infected in so terrible a manner that everyone in the house died. The last person lay dead on the floor, having died just in front of the fire; and the fire had taken hold of the boards, and burnt as far as to the body, and had then gone out.

I have been frequently asked how it happened that so many infected people appeared abroad in the streets when the infected houses were shut up and guarded.

I confess I know not the answer, unless it is that in so populous a city it was impossible to discover every house that was infected immediately, or to shut up all the infected houses. Indeed, sometimes people sickened so fast and died so soon, that it was impossible, and indeed to no purpose, to go about to inquire who was sick. Sometimes almost every house in a street was infected, and every person in some of the houses; and by the time the houses were known to be infected, most of the persons would be stone dead, and the rest run away; so that there was little reason to shut them up.

As it was not in the power of the magistrates, or of any human methods, to prevent the spreading of the infection, this shutting up of houses was ineffectual. Indeed it seemed to have no manner of public good in it, equal to the grievous burden that it was to the families that were so shut up. When I was asked, as a visitor or examiner, to inquire into the families which were infected, we scarce came to any house where the plague had appeared, without finding that some of the family were fled and gone.

The magistrates would resent this, and charge the examiners with being remiss. But houses were long infected before it was known. Now, as I was in this dangerous office for only half the appointed time, which was two months, it was long enough to learn that we could not find out the true state of any family except by inquiring at the door or from the neighbours. As for going into every house to search, that would have been exposing us to certain infection and death.

It is true that masters of families were obliged to inform the examiner within two hours of finding any person in his house had signs of the infection – but they found so many ways to evade this that they seldom gave that notice till they had made sure everyone had escaped out of the house who wanted to, whether they were sick or sound. It is easy to see that the shutting up of houses was an unreliable method for stopping the infection, because, as I have said elsewhere, many of those that left had the plague, though they did not know it. And some of these were the people that walked the streets till they suddenly fell down dead, the disease having preyed secretly on their vital organs, before seizing the heart with a mortal power, so that the patient died in a moment.

I know that some thought for a time that those people that died suddenly in the streets caught the infection only in the moment they fell, as if they had been struck by lightning – but upon examining the bodies of such people, they always either had tokens or other proofs of the disease having been longer upon them.

This was often the reason that we examiners did not learn about infection in a house till it was too late to shut it up, and sometimes not till the people that were left were all dead. In Petticoat Lane two houses together were infected, but the disease was so well concealed that the examiner, who was my neighbour, did not know of it till he was informed that the people were all dead, and that the carts should call there to fetch them away. The two heads of the families had so ordered matters that when the examiner was in the neighbourhood, they appeared one at a time, and lied for each another, till death made it impossible to keep it secret any longer. But when the examiner ordered the constable to shut up the houses there was nobody left in them but three people, just dying, and a nurse in each house who said that they had buried five before, that the houses had been infected nine or ten days, and that all the rest of the two families had gone, some sick, some well.

At another house in the same lane, a man having his family infected but very unwilling to be shut up, shut up himself; that is to say, he set the great red cross upon his door with the words, ‘Lord have mercy upon us’, and so deluded the examiner, who supposed it had been done by order of the other examiner in the district. By this means he could go in and out of his house as he pleased, although it was infected, till at length his stratagem was found out; and then he and his family made off and escaped, so they were not shut up at all.

These things made it very hard, if not impossible, as I have said, to prevent the spreading of an infection by the shutting up of houses. I got myself discharged of the dangerous office as soon as I could get a substitute, whom I paid to take the job; and so, instead of two months, I was only three weeks in it; and a great while too, considering it was in the month of August, when the plague began to rage with great violence at our end of the town.

In the execution of this office I could not refrain from speaking my opinion to my neighbours as to this shutting up of people in their houses. We agreed that a method of removing the sound from the sick would have been much more reasonable, leaving nobody with the sick persons but those who volunteered to be shut up with them.

Our scheme was only for such houses as were infected, and confining the sick was no confinement. Indeed, when they were delirious and light-headed, then they would cry out at the cruelty of being confined; but we thought it highly reasonable that healthy people should be removed from the sick, and be isolated a while, to see that they were free of disease; and we thought twenty or thirty days enough for this.

Now, certainly, if houses had been provided on purpose for this isolation, people would have much less reason to think themselves injured than in being confined with infected people in the houses where they lived.

However, after a while the fury of the infection appeared to be so increased and the funerals became so numerous that they shut up no houses at all. All the remedies of that kind had been found fruitless, and the plague spread itself with an irresistible fury; so that just as the fire the succeeding year burned with such violence that the citizens, in despair, gave up their endeavours to extinguish it, so the plague raged so violently that the people sat looking at one another, abandoned to despair.

Whole streets seemed to be desolated, and not only shut up, but emptied of their inhabitants; doors were left open, windows stood shattering with the wind in empty houses. In a word, people began to give themselves up to their fears and to think that

all regulations were in vain, and that there was nothing to be hoped for but a universal desolation. It was at the height of this general despair that it pleased God to stay His hand, and to slacken the fury of the contagion.

Part 15 **The City Despairs**

But I must still speak of the plague in its height, and the people in the most dreadful consternation and despair. What could be more affecting than to see a poor man come almost naked out of his house into the open street, run dancing and singing and making a thousand antic gestures, with five or six women and children running after him, crying and calling upon him for the Lord's sake to come back, and entreating the help of others – but in vain, because nobody dared to come near him?

This was a most grievous thing to me, who saw it from my own windows; for the poor afflicted man was in the utmost agony of pain, having (as they said) two swellings which could not be brought to break; so the surgeons had applied strong caustics to them, burning his flesh as if with a hot iron. I cannot say what became of this poor man, but I think he continued roving about in that manner till he fell down and died.

No wonder the aspect of the city was frightful. The usual crowds in the streets had shrunk. The fires that had been ordered to be burnt in the streets were almost extinguished for some days by rain. But that was not all; some of the physicians insisted that they were not only of no benefit, but injurious to people's health, and they complained to the Lord Mayor about it. On the other hand, other eminent doctors gave their reasons why the fires were useful to assuage the violence of the plague.

I cannot give a full account of their arguments on both sides; only this I remember, that they cavilled very much with one another about the fires and what sort of fuel ought to be burnt. Some were for particular sorts of wood, such as fir or cedar, because of the fumes of turpentine this produced; others were for coal, because of the sulphur and bitumen it contained. The Lord Mayor ordered no more fires, because they did not appear to check the plague. Nothing answered; the infection raged, and the people were now terrified to the last degree, and abandoned themselves to their despair.

But let me observe here that, when I say the people abandoned themselves to despair, I do not mean to what men call a religious despair, or a despair of their eternal state. I mean a despair of their being able to escape the infection or to outlive the plague. Indeed, few people that were touched with it in its height, about August and September, escaped. Previously, many who had been infected were ill for a long time before dying; but most of the people who were taken ill during the two last weeks in August and in the three first weeks in September, generally died in two or three days at most, and many the very same day they fell sick. At that time it was reported that above 3000 people died in one night; and some said all died within the space of two hours, between one and three in the morning.

There were innumerable instances of people dying suddenly, and I could name several in my neighbourhood. One family of ten, not far from me, were all seemingly well on the Monday. That evening one maid and one apprentice were taken ill and died the next morning – when the other apprentice and two children were touched; one died the same evening, and the other two on Wednesday. In a word, by Saturday

the master, mistress, four children, and four servants were all gone, and the house left entirely empty.

Many houses were then left desolate. Beyond the Bars, there were several houses together which, they said, had not one person left alive in them; and some that died last in several of those houses were left a little too long before they were fetched out to be buried, because there was nobody to tell the buriers about them. It was said, how true I know not, that some of those bodies were so corrupted and rotten that it was with difficulty they were carried out. I am sure that ordinarily it was not so.

This condition of despair had a strange effect among us for three or four weeks: it made people bold and venturous: they were no longer shy of one another, but went anywhere and began to converse, desperate for company.

It was surprising how it also brought them crowding into the churches. They inquired no more into whom they sat near, or what condition the people seemed to be in; but, looking upon themselves all as so many dead corpses, they came to the churches without the least caution, and crowded together as if their lives were of no consequence. Indeed, their zeal and earnestness made it clear what a value people would put upon the worship of God if they thought every day would be their last.

It took away all prejudice about the person they found in the pulpit when they came to the churches. Many ministers had died, and others moved into the country, so some parish churches were quite vacant and forsaken. The people made no scruple of asking Dissenters (who had been banned from preaching a few years earlier by the Act of Uniformity) to preach in the churches; so many whom they called 'silenced ministers' had their mouths opened on this occasion.

Here I hope it will not be amiss to observe that a near view of death would soon reconcile men of good principles to one another, and that it is chiefly owing to our easy situation in life and our putting these things far from us that our squabbles, prejudices, and lack of charity and of Christian union, are carried on among us. Another plague year would reconcile all these differences; a close conversing with death, or with diseases that threaten death, would remove the animosities among us, and bring us to see things with different eyes. As the people were reconciled at this time to admitting the Dissenters to preach to them, so the Dissenters were now content to conform to the worship which they did not approve of before; but as the terror of the infection abated, those things all returned again to their less desirable channel.

Yet 'tis evident death will reconcile us all; on the other side of the grave we shall be all brethren again. In heaven we shall find neither prejudice nor scruple; there we shall be of one principle and of one opinion.

I could dwell a great while upon the calamities of this dreadful time; how the streets began to be full of frightful objects, and families to be made even a terror to themselves. But what can be added to the stories I have already told?

I must acknowledge that this time was terrible, that I was sometimes at the end of all my resolutions, and had not the courage that I had at the beginning. After my voyage down to Blackwall and Greenwich, which I have related, I kept very much within doors. I have said already that I repented several times that I had not gone away with my brother and his family, but it was too late for that now; and after I stayed within doors a good while before my impatience led me abroad, then they called me, as I have said, to the ugly and dangerous office of examiner, which brought me out again.

After that, I retired for ten or twelve days more, during which I saw many dismal spectacles out of my windows and in our own street, Harrow Alley. Scarce a day or

night passed without some dismal thing or other happening at the end of Harrow Alley, which was a place full of poor people.

Sometimes throngs of people would burst out of the alley, mostly women, making a dreadful clamour, screeching and crying so that we could not conceive what to make of it. Almost all the dead part of the night the dead-cart stood at the end of that alley to receive bodies, for if it went in, it could not turn round. If it went away full it would soon be back again. It is impossible to describe the horrible cries the poor people would make on bringing the dead bodies of their children and friends out to the cart.

I believe it was everywhere thus as that time, for the plague raged for six or seven weeks beyond all that I have expressed, and came even to such a height that, in the extremity, the regulations broke down: namely, the rules that no dead bodies were to be seen in the street or burials in the daytime: for it needed to be otherwise for a little while.

One thing I thought extraordinary, or at least it seemed a remarkable hand of Divine justice, was that all the astrologers, fortune-tellers, conjurers, and the like, were vanished; not one of them was to be found. I believe that a great number of them fell in the heat of the calamity, having ventured to stay in the hope of earning a lot of money; and indeed their gain was all too great for a time, through the madness and folly of the people. But now they were silent; many of them went to their long home, not able to foretell their own fate.

But to return to my particular observations during this dreadful period. The month of September was the most dreadful, I believe, that ever London saw; for, by all the accounts which I have seen, nothing has been like it, the number in the weekly bill amounting to almost 40,000 from the 22nd of August to the 26th of September. The deaths reached a peak in the week from the 12th to the 19th September, when 8,297 deaths were listed.

This was a prodigious number, but I have no doubt that this account was deficient, and I believe that over ten thousand a week died for all those weeks. The confusion among the people, especially within the City, was inexpressible. The terror was so great that the courage of the people appointed to carry away the dead began to fail them; indeed, several died, some of them dropping down when they were carrying the bodies to the pit side, and were just ready to throw them in.

This confusion was greater in the City because they had flattered themselves with hopes of escaping the plague. One dead-cart, they told us, was going up Shoreditch when the driver died in the street; and the horses going on overthrew the cart, and left the bodies thrown out here and there, in a dismal manner. Another cart was, it seems, found in the great pit in Finsbury Fields, the driver being dead, or having abandoned it; and the horses running too near, the cart fell in and drew the horses in also.

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 with neither bellman or driver or anyone else. In these and many other cases nobody knew what bodies they had in their cart, nor did they trouble themselves to keep any account of the numbers.

The vigilance of the magistrates was now put to the utmost trial. Two things were never neglected in the city or suburbs either:

(1) Provisions were always to be had in plenty, and the price not much raised neither. In the first week in March, the penny loaf was ten ounces and a half; and in the height of the contagion it was nine ounces and a half, and never dearer, no, not all that season. And about the beginning of November it was ten ounces and a half again;

the like of which, I believe, was never heard of in any city under so dreadful a visitation.

(2) No dead bodies lay unburied or uncovered; and after the three first weeks in September, there were no funerals in the daytime.

Some accounts which others have published, wherein they say that the dead lay unburied, I am assured was utterly false. I am positive in this, having myself been employed a little in that direction, where there was as great a desolation as anywhere; and I am sure that no dead bodies remained unburied; that is to say, none that the officers knew of; for it is most certain they were buried as soon as they were found.

In all this dreadful visitation there were only two pest-houses made use of, one in the fields beyond Old Street and one in Westminster. No compulsion was used in carrying people thither. Indeed there was no need of compulsion, for there were thousands of poor distressed people who, having no help or supplies, would have been very glad to have been carried there and been taken care of.

Indeed, the only thing that I think was lacking in the whole public management of the city, was that nobody was admitted to the pest-house except where money was given, or security for money. Very good physicians were appointed to those places, so that many people did very well there. The principal sort of people sent there were, as I have said, servants who got the disease, and were removed to preserve the rest of the house; and they were so well looked after there that in all the time of the visitation there were only 156 buried at the London pest-house, and 159 at that of Westminster.

By having more pest-houses I am far from meaning forcing all people into such places. Had the shutting up of houses been omitted and the sick hurried out of their dwellings to pest-houses, as some proposed, it would certainly have been much worse than it was. The very removal of the sick would have been a spreading of the infection, and the rest of the family, being then left at liberty, might spread it among others. On the other hand, the prodigious numbers which were sick at one time would have exceeded all the capacity of public pest-houses to receive them, or of public officers to discover and remove them.

The magistrates had enough to do to bring people to submit to having their houses shut up. They would have found it impracticable to have gone the other way, for they could never have forced the sick people out of their beds and their dwellings. It could not have been my Lord Mayor's officers, but an army, that must have attempted it; and the people would have been enraged and desperate. As it was, the magistrates found it proper on several accounts to treat them with compassion, and not with violence and terror, such as dragging the sick out of their houses would have been.

Indeed, when the plague first began; that is to say, when people first took alarm and began to hurry out of town – the throng being so great that it looked as if all the city was running away – if any such terrifying regulations had been published, it would have put both the City and suburbs into the utmost confusion. But the magistrates wisely made very good bye-laws for regulating the citizens, keeping good order in the streets, and making everything as eligible as possible to all sorts of people.

In the first place, the Lord Mayor, the sheriffs, Aldermen, and councillors, came to a resolution that they would not leave the city themselves, but that they would be always at hand to preserve good order and do justice on all occasions; and also to distribute public charity to the poor.

In pursuance of these orders, the Lord Mayor held councils almost every day, for making dispositions to preserve the civil peace; and though they used the people with

all possible gentleness and clemency, yet presumptuous rogues such as thieves, housebreakers, or plunderers of the dead, were duly punished.

Also all constables and churchwardens were enjoined to stay in the city upon severe penalties, or to appoint housekeepers approved by the deputy aldermen or councillors, for whom they should give security.

These things steadied the minds of the people very much, especially in the first of their fright. And the magistrates performed their part boldly; for my Lord Mayor and the sheriffs were continually in the streets and at places of the greatest danger, and never denied the people access to them, and patiently heard all their complaints. My Lord Mayor had a low gallery built in his hall, where he stood a little removed from the crowd in safety when any complaint came to be heard.

The sheriffs and aldermen and other officers also constantly attended in their stations, so that justice was executed in all cases without interruption. It was one of their particular cares to see the orders for the freedom of the markets observed, and either the Lord Mayor or a sheriff went every market-day on horseback to see their orders executed and to see that the country people had all possible encouragement and freedom in coming to the markets and going back again, and that no nuisances or frightful objects should be seen in the streets to terrify them or make them unwilling to come.

Also the bakers were regulated, and the due weight of bread (which was weekly appointed by my Lord Mayor) observed; and all the bakers were obliged to keep their ovens going constantly, on pain of losing the privileges of a freeman of the city of London. By this means bread was always to be had in plenty, and as cheap as usual, as I said above; and provisions were never lacking in the markets.

It was indeed one admirable piece of conduct in the magistrates that the streets were kept constantly clear and free from bodies or all manner of frightful objects – unless anybody fell down suddenly or died in the streets; and these were generally covered with some cloth, or removed into the nearest churchyard till night. All the needful works that were dismal and dangerous, were done in the night; if any diseased bodies were removed, or dead buried, or infected clothes burnt, it was done in the night, and everything was covered and closed before day. So that in the daytime there was not the least sign of the calamity, except for the emptiness of the streets, and sometimes the passionate cries of the people at their windows, and the numbers of houses and shops shut up.

It was indeed a merciful disposition of God, that as the plague proceeded one way, it abated in another. For example, it began at St Giles's and the Westminster end of the town, but at the end of July it decreased in those parishes; and coming east, it increased prodigiously in Cripplegate and the parishes there. Meanwhile, the City and all the parishes of the Southwark side of the water were very little touched; so that people went about their business unconcerned, carried on their trades, kept open their shops, and conversed freely with one another, almost as if the plague had not been among us.

Even when the north and north-west suburbs were fully infected, yet still all the rest were tolerably well. For example, in the week from 25th July to 1st August forty eight more people died in the two parishes of Cripplegate and St Sepulcher than in all the City, all the east suburbs, and all the Southwark parishes put together. This caused the reputation of the City's health to continue all over England – and especially in the counties from whence our supply of food came.

For when people came into the streets from the country through Shoreditch or Smithfield, they would see the streets empty and the houses and shops shut, and the

few people that were stirring there walk in the middle of the streets. But when they came within the City, there things looked better, and the markets and shops were open, and the people walking about the streets as usual; and this continued till the end of August.

But then the case altered; the disease abated in the west and north-west parishes, and the weight of the infection lay on the City and the eastern suburbs, and the Southwark side, in a frightful manner. Then, indeed, the City began to look dismal, shops to be shut, and the streets desolate. These observations of mine were abundantly confirmed by the weekly bills of mortality. In the week from the 12th September to the 19th, the numbers of dead in the parishes within the walls and on the Southward side outnumbered the others.

Here was a strange and sad change of things indeed; but then by the mercy of God, the west and north part grew much better; and the next week or two altered it still more, so that the misery of the City and of the east and south parts was complete indeed; for the weight of the plague lay upon them. This was the time that the bills came up to such a monstrous height as I mentioned before, and that eight or nine, and, as I believe, ten or twelve thousand a week, died. Nay, one of the most eminent physicians says that in one week there died twelve thousand people, and that four thousand died in one night.

Part 16

How the Plague is Transmitted

And here let me again describe the miserable condition of the City itself, and those parts where I lived at this time. Although great numbers were gone into the country, the City was vastly full of people; and perhaps the fuller because people had for a long time a strong belief that the plague would not come there. They were so sure of this that many moved from the suburbs on the west and north sides, into the eastern and south sides, for safety; and, I believe, carried the plague with them.

Even apparently well people could transmit the plague. They had it in their blood, yet did not show it for many days, and were not aware of it. These people breathed death in every place, and upon everybody who came near them; their very clothes retained the infection, and their hands would infect the things they touched, especially if they were warm and sweaty.

These were the people that so often dropped down and fainted in the streets; for often they would go about the streets to the end, till suddenly they would sweat, grow faint, sit down at a door and die. Sometimes they would struggle hard to get home, where they might die instantly. Other times they might come home still seeming well, and die an hour or two afterwards. These were the dangerous people; these were the people of whom we ought to have been afraid; but it was impossible to know who they were.

And this is the reason why it is impossible to prevent the spreading of the plague by the utmost human vigilance: because it is impossible to know the infected people from the healthy.

I knew a man who met people freely in London all through the plague in 1665, and kept about him an antidote to take when he thought himself in any danger, and he had a rule to have warning of the danger such as I never met with before or since. How far it may be depended on I know not. He had a wound in his leg, and whenever he came among any people that were not healthy, and the infection began to affect

him, he said he could tell because the wound in his leg would smart, and look pale. As soon as he felt it smart, he withdrew, and took his antidote.

Now it seems his wound would often smart when he was in company with apparently healthy people; but he would rise up and announce, 'Friends, there is somebody in the room that has the plague', and so would immediately break up the company.

This demonstrates that the plague cannot be avoided by those that move freely about the town, because of the numbers of people who do not know they have it. Shutting up the well or removing the sick will not do it, unless they can go back and shut up all those that the sick had talked to, even before they knew themselves to be sick, and no-one knows how far to carry that back, or where to stop; for no-one knows when or where or how they may have received the infection, or from whom.

This I assume is the reason why so many people talk of the air being corrupted and infected, and say that they need not be cautious about who they talk to, because the contagion was in the air.

'I have come near no infected person,' a man will say; 'I am sure it is the air. We draw in death when we breathe, and therefore 'tis the hand of God; there is no withstanding it.' And this made many people, being hardened to the danger, grow less concerned at it, and less cautious than they were at first. They would say, if it pleased God to strike them, it was all one whether they went abroad or stayed at home; they could not escape it, and therefore they went boldly about, and visited sick people. And in consequence, they were infected too, and died by hundreds and thousands.

I do not wish to lessen the awe of the judgements of God. Doubtless the visitation itself is a stroke from Heaven upon a nation or city; a messenger of His vengeance, and a loud call to that nation or city to humiliation and repentance, according to the prophet Jeremiah (xviii. 7, 8): 'At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it; if that nation against whom I have pronounced turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them.'

I say, therefore, I reflect upon no man for attributing those things to the hand of God; on the contrary, there were many wonderful deliverances of people from infection, which suggest remarkable providence; and I think my own deliverance was next to miraculous, and record it with thankfulness.

But when I am speaking of the plague as a disease arising from natural causes, we must consider it as propagated by natural means; it is no less a judgement for being affected by human causes. For, as the Divine Power has formed the whole scheme of nature, so He thinks fit to let His own actions go on in the ordinary way of natural causes; and He is pleased to act by those natural causes, reserving to Himself nevertheless a power to act in a supernatural way when He sees fit.

Now 'tis evident that in the case of an infection there is no need for supernatural operation, but the ordinary course of things appears sufficiently armed. The secret conveyance of infection, imperceptible and unavoidable, is more than sufficient to execute the fierceness of Divine vengeance, without needing supernatural acts and miracles. I believe that no-one in this whole nation received the sickness except in the ordinary way of infection from somebody, or the clothes or touch or stench of somebody that was infected before.

The manner of its coming first to London proves this also, viz., by goods brought over from Holland, and brought there from the Levant; the first breaking out of it in a house in Long Acre where those goods were first opened; and its spreading from that

house to other houses by the unwary conversing with those who were sick. This it proceeded from person to person and from house to house, and in no other way.

In the first house that was infected four persons died. A neighbour went to visit the mistress there, and went home and gave the disease to her family, and died with all her household. A minister, called to pray with the first sick person in the second house, was said to sicken immediately and die with several more in his house. Then the physicians being sent to inspect the bodies assured the people that it was the plague, and that it threatened a universal infection, since so many people had already conversed with the sick that it would be impossible to stop it.

The danger was spreading insensibly, for the sick could infect none but those that came within reach of them; but one man who unknowingly had the infection and went around like a healthy person, might give the plague to a thousand people, and they to greater numbers in proportion, nobody knowing anything about it for several days after.

For many persons never perceived that they were infected till they found, to their unspeakable surprise, the tokens come out upon them; after which they seldom lived six hours. Those spots they called the tokens were really gangrene spots, or mortified flesh in small knobs as broad as a little silver penny, and hard as a piece of callus or horn; once they appeared, nothing could follow but certain death. But they must have been infected in a high degree before that for some time, and consequently their breath, their sweat, and their very clothes, were contagious for many days before. This caused many cases, of which I shall name a few.

A certain citizen who had lived safe and untouched till the month of September, was mighty cheerful, and somewhat too bold (as I think) in his talk of how secure he was, how cautious he had been, and how he had never come near any sick person. Says a neighbour to him one day,

‘Do not be too confident, Mr—; it is hard to say who is sick and who is well, for we see men alive and well to outward appearance one hour, and dead the next.’

‘That is true,’ says the first man; ‘but I have not been in company with any person that there has been any danger in.’

‘No?’ says his neighbour. ‘Was not you at the Bull Head Tavern in Gracechurch Street with Mr— the night before last?’

‘Yes,’ says the first, ‘I was; but there was no reason to think him dangerous.’

Upon which his neighbour said no more, being unwilling to surprise him; but this made him more inquisitive, and in a kind of warmth says he, ‘Why, he is not dead, is he?’

Upon which his neighbour still was silent, but cast up his eyes and said something to himself; at which the first citizen turned pale, and said only, ‘Then I am a dead man too.’

He went home immediately and sent for an apothecary to give him some preventive, for he did not yet feel ill; but the apothecary said no more than this, ‘Look up to God’; and the man died in a few hours.

It may be proper to ask here how long men might have the seeds of the contagion in them before it reveals itself in this fatal manner, and how long they might go about seemingly whole, and yet be contagious. I believe the most experienced physicians cannot answer this question any more than I can. The opinion of physicians generally seems to be that it may lie dormant in the spirits or in the blood-vessels a very considerable time. Why else exact a quarantine of those who come into harbours from suspected places?

Forty days is, one would think, too long for nature to struggle with such an enemy as this, and not conquer it or yield to it. But I think, by my own observation, that they cannot be contagious to others more than fifteen or sixteen days at most; and when a house was shut up in the city, but nobody appeared to be ill in the family for sixteen or eighteen days after, they were not so strict as to prevent their going out privately; nor would people be much afraid of them afterwards.

Following all these observations I must say that in my opinion the best physic against the plague is to run away from it. I know people encourage themselves by saying God is able to keep us in the midst of danger; and this kept thousands in the town whose carcasses went into the great pits by cartloads, and who, if they had fled from the danger, would, I believe, have probably been safe.

And if this were duly considered on any future occasion of a similar nature, I am persuaded they would take quite different measures for managing the people from those that they took in 1665. They would consider separating the people into smaller groups, and removing them farther from one another – and not let such a contagion as this, which is indeed chiefly dangerous to collected bodies of people, find a million people in a body together.

The plague, like a great fire, if a few houses only are close where it happens, can only burn a few houses; or if it begins in a lone house, can only burn that lone house. But if it begins in a close-built town or city and gets a head, there its fury increases: it rages over the whole place, and consumes all it can reach.

I could propose many schemes by which the government of this city might ease themselves of the greatest part of the dangerous people; I mean the begging, starving, labouring poor, and among them chiefly those who are called the useless mouths. If they were prudently and to their own advantage disposed of, and the wealthy inhabitants took away themselves and their households, there would not be a tenth part of the people left together for the disease to take hold upon. But suppose them to be a fifth part, and that two hundred and fifty thousand people were left: if it did seize upon them, they would be much better prepared to defend themselves against the infection, and be less liable to the effects of crowding.

It is true hundreds, yea, thousands of families fled at this last plague, but many of them fled too late, and not only died in their flight, but carried the disease with them and infected those to whom they went for safety; which confounded the thing. Such people infected the very towns they went through, as well as the families they went among; and that was why almost all the great towns in England had the plague, and would always tell you such or such a Londoner brought it.

When I speak of those people who were really dangerous, I suppose them to be utterly ignorant of their own condition; for if they really knew they had the plague, they must have been a kind of murderers if they had gone among healthy people. But I think it is untrue that the infected people were utterly careless as to giving the infection to others.

I could name several people who showed the contrary to an extreme. One man, a master of a family in my neighbourhood, caught the disease from a poor workman whom he employed. When he fell ill, he immediately caused himself to be carried into an outbuilding in his yard. Here he lay, and here he died, and would be tended by none of his neighbours, but by a nurse; and would not let his wife or children come into the room, lest they should be infected – but sent them his blessing and prayers for them by the nurse, who relayed it to them at a distance.

And here I must observe also that the plague, as I suppose all diseases, operated in a different manner on differing constitutions. Some were immediately

overwhelmed with it, and had violent fevers, vomitings, insufferable headaches, pains in the back, and ravings and ragings with those pains; others had swellings and tumours in the neck or groin, or armpits, which till they could be broke put them into insufferable agonies and torment; while others, as I have observed, were silently infected, the fever preying upon their spirits insensibly till they fell into swooning, and fainting, and death without pain.

I am not physician enough to enter into the reasons for these differing effects of one and the same disease; doctors have recorded that much more effectually than I can do. I am only relating what I know, or have heard of particular cases; though I might add that though those cases visited with fevers, vomiting, headaches, and swellings, were the worst as to pain, yet those without symptoms had the worst state of the disease; for the former frequently recovered, especially if the swellings broke; but for the latter death was inevitable; no cure, no help, was possible. And it was worse also for others, because it communicated death unperceived, insinuating itself into their blood in a manner which it is impossible to describe.

This infecting and being infected without its being known to either person is evident from two sorts of cases which frequently happened at that time:

(1) Fathers and mothers have gone about as if well, and have believed themselves to be so, till they have insensibly infected and been the destruction of their whole families, which they would not have done if they had the least apprehensions of their being dangerous themselves. One father, who discovered that he had unwittingly infected his family, went distracted, and would have laid violent hands upon himself, but was prevented, and in a few days died.

(2) Many people having been well to the best of their own judgement, and only finding a loss of appetite, or a light sickness upon their stomachs; nay, some whose appetite has been strong, and had only a slight pain in their heads, have sent for physicians to know what ailed them, and have been found, to their great surprise, at the brink of death.

It was very sad to reflect how a person such as this father mentioned above had been a walking destroyer perhaps for a week or a fortnight; how he had ruined those that he would have risked his life to save, and had been breathing death upon them, perhaps even in kissing his own children. Yet thus certainly it was, and often has been, and I could give many examples.

This frequently puzzled our physicians, who knew not how to tell the sick from the sound. My friend Dr Heath was of the opinion that it might be known by the smell of their breath; but then, as he said, who dared to smell that breath, when he might draw the stench of the plague up into his own brain?

I have heard others say that it might be distinguished by the party's breathing upon a piece of glass: where the breath condensed, living creatures might be seen by a microscope, strange, monstrous, and frightful shapes, such as dragons, snakes, serpents, and devils, horrible to behold. But this I very much doubt, and we had no microscopes at that time.

It was the opinion of another learned man that the breath of an infected person would poison and instantly kill a bird; or if it did not immediately kill it, any eggs that it laid would be all rotten. Some have proposed that such persons should breathe hard upon warm water, and that they would leave an unusual scum upon it. But those are opinions which I never found supported by any experiments. The nature of this contagion was such that it was impossible to discover it at all, or to prevent its spreading from one person to another by any human skill.

Here was indeed one difficulty which I could never thoroughly get over: the first person that died of the plague was on December 20th, or thereabouts, 1664, and in or about Long Acre; they caught the infection from a parcel of silks imported from Holland, and opened in that house.

But after this we heard no more of any person dying of the plague in that place, till 9th February, which was about seven weeks after, and then one more was buried out of the same house. Then there were no more entered in the weekly bill as dead of the plague till 22nd April, when there were two more buried, not out of the same house, but out of the same street. This was nine weeks asunder, and after this we had no more for a fortnight, and then it broke out in several streets and spread every way.

Now the question is: Where lay the seeds of the infection all this while? How came it to stop so long, and not stop any longer? Either the disease did not come immediately by contagion from body to body, or, if it did, then a body may be able to continue to be infected without the disease revealing itself for weeks together; not even a quarantine of forty days, but soixantaine; sixty days or longer.

It is true there was a very cold winter and a long frost which continued three months; and this, the doctors say, might check the infection; but from February to April, the weather was mild and warm.

But there is another way of solving all this difficulty, which is that the weekly bills are not accurate. I believe, upon very good grounds, that the fraud lay in the parish officers and searchers; and as people were very reluctant to have the neighbours believe their houses were infected, they gave money to make sure the dead persons would be listed as dying of other diseases. I know this was practised afterwards in many places, as will be seen by the vast increase of the numbers placed in the weekly bills under other diseases during the time of the infection.

For example, in the months of July and August, when the plague was coming to its highest pitch, there were from a thousand to twelve hundred, nay, to almost fifteen hundred a week listed dead of other illnesses. And as the plague increased, so did the numbers in the weekly bills recording as dying of other diseases—from 942 in the week 18th to 25th July, up to 1,439 in the week 8th to 15th August.

There is no doubt that a great number of these were dead of the plague, but the officers were prevailed upon to return them as dying of spotted fever, surfeit, teeth, and other ailments such as consumption, vomiting, gripes, and the like. As it was of the utmost consequence to families not to be known to be infected, so they took all the measures they could to have it not believed, and to get the dead returned to the examiners as having died of other causes.

This may account for the long interval between the dying of the first victim of the plague and the time when it spread openly and could not be concealed. For example, the bills for those weeks show an increase of the spotted fever to between eight and seventeen a week, instead of the usual three or four. Likewise, the burials increased weekly in that particular parish more than in any other parish, although none were set down of the plague; all of which tells us that the infection was being handed on.

It might also have happened that the infection remained in other parts of the same parcel of goods, which might not be fully opened, or in the clothes of the first infected person; for I cannot think that anybody could be seized with the contagion in a fatal and mortal degree for nine weeks without realising it. However, if it were so, that would be a strong argument for the infection being retained in bodies without it being known.

Great were the confusions at that time upon this account. When people began to think that the infection was received in this surprising manner from persons

apparently well, they began to be exceeding shy and jealous of everyone that came near them. Once, in Aldgate Church, in a pew full of people, one woman suddenly fancied she smelt an ill smell. Immediately she imagined the plague was in the pew, whispered her suspicion to the next person, then rose and went out of the pew. It immediately took with the next person, and so to them all; and everyone in the two or three adjoining pews got up and went out of the church, nobody knowing what it was that offended them, or from whom.

The people immediately began to take one preparation or other, in order to prevent infection by the breath of others; so that if we went into a church full of people, there would be such a mixture of smells at the entrance that it was stronger than an apothecary's or druggist's shop, though perhaps not so wholesome. In a word, the whole church was like a smelling-bottle; in one corner it was all perfumes; in another, balsamics and herbs; in another, salts and spirits.

The churches and meeting-houses became much thinner of people than they used to be. However, it must be said that in London during the whole time of the pestilence the churches or meeting-houses were never wholly shut up, nor did the people refuse to come to worship God, except in some parishes when the plague was particularly violent.

Indeed nothing was stranger than to see how courageously the people went to church, even when they were afraid to stir out of their houses for any other reason, at least before the time of desperation. This showed how populous the City still was, despite the great numbers that had gone into the country, and fled out into the forests and woods. For when we came to see throngs of people appearing on the Sabbath-days at the churches, and especially in those parts of the town where the plague was not at its height, it was amazing. But of this I shall speak again presently.

I return in the meantime to the matter of infecting one another. At first people were only shy of those that were really sick, or who had cloths round their necks, as if they had swellings there. But when we saw a gentleman properly dressed, with gloves and hat, and his hair combed, of such we had not the least fears; and people conversed freely, especially with people they knew.

But when the physicians assured us that the danger was as great from the seemingly healthy as from the sick, then they began to be jealous of everybody, and a vast number of people locked themselves up, so as not to come into any company at all. When they were obliged to converse at a distance with strangers, they would always have preservatives in their mouths and about their clothes to keep off the infection.

Certainly, when people began to use these precautions they were less exposed to danger, and the infection did not break into such houses so furiously as before; and thousands of families were preserved by that means.

But it was impossible to beat anything into the heads of the poor. They went on with their usual impetuosity, full of cries and lamentations when taken ill, but madly careless of themselves, foolhardy and obstinate, while they were well. Where they could get work they pushed into any kind of business, even the most dangerous and the most liable to infection, like burying the dead; saying, they would trust to God, for they must work, or beg, or starve.

This adventurous conduct of the poor brought the plague among them in a most furious manner; and this, joined to the distress of their circumstances, was the reason why they died so by heaps; for even when they had work and money they were as extravagant and as thoughtless for tomorrow as ever; so that when they came to be

taken sick they were immediately in the utmost distress, for lack of food as well as lack of health.

I frequently witnessed this misery of the poor, and also the charitable assistance that some pious people daily gave them, sending them food, physic, and other help; and indeed to do justice to the people of that day, very great sums of money were charitably sent to the Lord Mayor and aldermen for the support of the poor sick people, and many private people daily distributed large sums of money for their relief.

Some pious ladies were so transported with zeal in this charity, and so confident in the protection of Providence, that they went about in person distributing alms to the poor, and even visiting poor infected families in their very houses, appointing nurses, and ordering apothecaries and surgeons: the former to supply them with drugs or plasters, and the latter to lance and dress the swellings and tumours. And I never knew any one of them that fell ill, which I mention for the encouragement of others in case of similar distress. Doubtless, those that hazard their lives to comfort and assist the poor in such misery may hope to be protected in the work.

Indeed, so many rich people gave to charity that a prodigious number of people were supported, who must otherwise have perished from hunger as well as sickness. Though I do not know exactly how much was so contributed, yet I do believe that many hundred thousand pounds were given to the relief of the poor. One man affirmed that he could reckon up over one hundred thousand pounds a week, which was distributed by the churchwardens in the various wards and precincts, over and above the private charity distributed by pious groups; and this continued for many weeks.

This was a very remarkable providence, that it pleased God thus to move the hearts of the people so cheerfully to contribute to the relief of the poor in London. The good consequences of this were felt many ways, and particularly in preserving the lives and recovering the health of so many thousands, and keeping thousands of families from starving.

And now I am talking of the merciful disposition of Providence in this time of calamity, I must mention again the progression of the disease; how it began at one end of the town, and proceeded gradually from one part to another, like a dark cloud that passes over our heads, and as it overcasts the air at one end, clears up at the other end. Had the plague spread itself over the whole City and suburbs at once, raging in all places alike, as it has done since in some places abroad, the populace must have been overwhelmed, and there would have died twenty thousand a day, as they say there did at Naples, for people would not have been able to have helped one another.

It must not be forgot here to take note of the state of trade during this time.

As to foreign trade, little needs to be said. The trading nations of Europe were all afraid of us; no port of France, Holland, Spain, or Italy would admit our ships; indeed we were at war with the Dutch, though in a bad condition to fight abroad.

Our merchants were accordingly at a full stop; their ships could go nowhere; their merchandise would not be touched abroad. They were as much afraid of our goods as they were of our people, and with reason, for our woollen manufactures are as retentive of infection as human bodies, and would be just as dangerous. Therefore, when any English vessel arrived in foreign countries, they always caused the bales to be opened and aired in places appointed for that purpose.

But from London they would not allow them to come into port, much less to unlade their goods, upon any terms whatever, especially in Spain and Italy and Portugal. In Turkey, they were not so very rigid. There was a report that one of our

ships having by stealth delivered her cargo, among which were some bales of English cloth, the Spaniards caused all the goods to be burned, and punished the men with death who had carried them on shore.

I heard that the plague was carried into those countries by some of our ships, and particularly to the port of Faro in the kingdom of Algarve, belonging to the King of Portugal, and that several persons died of it there; but it was not confirmed.

On the other hand, though the Spaniards and Portuguese were so shy of us, it is most certain that the plague (as has been said) was at first at the Westminster end of the town, and that the merchandising part of the town was perfectly sound till the beginning of July, and the ships in the river till the beginning of August. But the bad news had gone over the whole world that London was infected with the plague, and nobody enquired as to which part.

Besides, after it began to spread, it increased so fast that it was pointless to lessen the report of it, or to try to make the people abroad think it better than it was; the numbers of dead on the weekly bills were sufficient to alarm trade worldwide, and put the whole world on their guard against it.

You may be sure, also, that although the plague was very terrible, the rumour was infinitely greater. My brother's correspondents in Portugal and Italy were told that in London there died twenty thousand in a week, and that the dead bodies lay unburied by heaps, and that all the kingdom was infected; and they could hardly believe us when we gave them an account how things really were, and that there were 500,000 left in London that lived all that time in the town. If inquiry were now to be made in Naples, they would tell you that there was a dreadful infection in London in which there died twenty thousand in a week, etc.; just as we have had it reported in London that a plague in Naples in the year 1656 killed 20,000 people in a day – which I understand was utterly false.

But these extravagant reports were very injurious to our trade, which did not recover for a long time in those parts of the world. The Flemish and Dutch took great advantage of it, having all the market to themselves, and even buying our manufactures in several parts of England where the plague was not, and selling them abroad as if they had been of their own making.

But they were detected sometimes and punished: that is to say, their goods confiscated and ships also; for they risked infecting the nations to whom they traded with those goods. I do not mean that any harm was done by those people. But the plague was sooner or later spread all over our kingdom, in all the cities and great towns, especially in the trading towns and seaports; and in Ireland in some places, but not so universally. How it fared in Scotland I had no opportunity to inquire.

It is to be observed that while the plague continued so violent in London, the outports, as they are called, enjoyed a very great trade, especially to neighbouring countries and to our own plantations. For example, the towns of Colchester, Yarmouth, and Hull, on the east side of England, exported to Holland and Hamburg for several months after the trade with London was entirely shut up; likewise in the west, the cities of Bristol, Exeter, and Plymouth, traded with Spain, the Canaries, Guinea, and the West Indies, and particularly Ireland. But as the plague spread itself every way, so most of those towns were infected; and then trade was under a general embargo or at a full stop.

One thing, however, must be observed: ships coming in from abroad included some that had been at sea a considerable while before, and knew nothing of an infection, or at least of one so terrible – these came up the river boldly, and delivered their cargoes, except just in the two months of August and September. During this

time the homeward-bound ships, especially those whose cargoes were not liable to spoil, anchored short of the Pool, or fresh-water part of the river, even as low as the river Medway; and others lay at the Nore, and in the Hope below Gravesend. So that by the end of October there was a very great fleet of homeward-bound ships, such as had not been known for many years.

Two particular trades were carried on by water during the infection, with little or no interruption, very much to the comfort of the poor distressed people of the city: and those were the coastal trade for corn and the Newcastle trade for coals.

The first of these was particularly carried on by small vessels from Hull and other places on the Humber, by which great quantities of corn were brought in from Yorkshire and Lincolnshire. The other part of this corn-trade was from Lynn, Wells and Burnham, and from Yarmouth, all in Norfolk; and the third branch was from the river Medway, and from Milton, Feversham, Margate, and Sandwich, and other ports round the coast of Kent and Essex.

There was also a very good trade from the coast of Suffolk with corn, butter, and cheese; these vessels kept a constant course of trade, and without interruption came up to that market known as Bear Key, where they supplied the city plentifully with corn when land-transport began to fail. Much of this was owing to the prudence of the Lord Mayor, who took care to keep the masters and seamen from danger, causing their corn to be bought at any time they lacked a market, and ordering their vessels to be immediately unloaded, so that they had very little need to come out of their ships. The money was put into a pail of vinegar and carried on board to them.

The second trade was that of coals from Newcastle-upon-Tyne, without which the city would have been greatly distressed; for not in the streets only, but in private houses, great quantities of coals were then burnt, even when the weather was hottest, by the advice of the physicians. Some indeed opposed it, and insisted that to keep the houses and rooms hot was a means to propagate fever; they alleged that all contagious distempers are the worse for heat, because the contagion gained strength in hot weather.

Others said they granted that heat in the climate might propagate infection – just as sultry, hot weather fills the air with vermin and nourishes innumerable venomous creatures which breed in our food, in the plants, and even in our bodies, by the very stench of which infection may be propagated. Also they said that heat in the air exhausts the spirits, opens the pores, and makes us more apt to receive infection; but that the heat of fire, and especially of coal fires, had a quite different operation; the heat being not of the same kind, but quick and fierce, tending not to nourish but to consume those noxious fumes which the other kind of heat did not burn up.

Besides, it was alleged that the sulphurous and nitrous particles that are often found to be in the coal, with that bituminous substance which burns, all assisted to clear and purge the air, and make it wholesome to breathe after the noxious particles were burnt up.

The latter opinion prevailed at that time, and I think with good reason; for many houses which had constant fires kept in the rooms were never infected at all. For myself, I found that good fires kept our rooms sweet and wholesome, and I believe made our whole family more wholesome than they would otherwise have been.

But I return to the coal-trade. It was with difficulty that this trade was kept open, because we were in an open war with the Dutch at that time, and the Dutch at first took a great many of our collier-ships. But after some time the Dutch ships grew afraid to take the collier-ships lest the plague should be among them, which made them fare better.

For the security of those northern traders, the coal-ships were ordered by my Lord Mayor not to come up into the Pool above a certain number at a time, and ordered other vessels to go down and unload the coals as low down the river as Deptford and Greenwich.

Others delivered great quantities of coals where the ships could come to the shore, at Greenwich, Blackwall, and other places, in vast heaps, which were then fetched away after the ships which brought them were gone, so that the seamen had no communication with the river-men.

Yet all this caution could not prevent the plague from getting among the collier-ships. A great many seamen died of it; and what was worse, they carried it back to Ipswich and Yarmouth, to Newcastle-upon-Tyne, and other places on the coast – where, especially at Newcastle and Sunderland, it carried off a great number of people.

The making of so many fires, as above, did indeed consume an unusual quantity of coals; the price of coals was exceeding dear, but it abated when the ships had a freer passage, and the price was very reasonable all the rest of that year.

The public fires which were made on these occasions, as I have calculated, must have consumed about 200 chalders of coals a week; but as it was thought necessary, nothing was spared. However, as some of the physicians cried them down, they were not kept alight above four or five days. There were at least fourteen of these fires, in various sites around the city. Some have said that more people died because of those fires; but I know of no evidence for this, and I do not believe it.

Part 17

Decreasing Deaths

It remains to give some account of the state of trade at home in England during this dreadful time, particularly in the city. At the first breaking out of the infection there was very great fright among the people, and consequently a general stop of trade, except in food and necessaries of life; and even in those things, as there was a vast number of people fled and a very great number always sick, there could not be more than two-thirds, or even half, of the consumption of provisions in the city as there used to be.

It pleased God to send a very plentiful year of corn and fruit, but not of hay or grass. So bread was cheap, and meat was cheap; but butter and cheese were dear, and hay was sold at 4 pound per load. But that affected not the poor. There was plenty of all sorts of fruit, such as apples, pears, plums, cherries, grapes, and they were cheaper because of the lack of people; but this made the poor eat them to excess, and this gave them fluxes and griping of the guts, surfeits, and the like, which often precipitated them into the plague.

But to come to matters of trade. First, foreign exports being stopped or at least made very difficult, there followed a general stop of all those manufactures which were for export; and though sometimes merchants abroad wanted our goods, the English ships would generally not be admitted into their ports.

This was felt all over England; yet, what was still worse, all trade for home consumption of manufactures, especially those which usually went through London, was stopped at once.

All kinds of craftsmen, tradesmen and mechanics were put out of work; and this caused the dismissal of innumerable journeymen and workmen of all sorts. Many

people and families were reduced to extreme misery; and it is to the honour of the City of London, that they were able to supply with charity the wants of so many thousands. It may be safely averred that nobody perished of hunger, at least that the magistrates were informed of.

This stagnation of our manufacturing trade would have put the people in much greater difficulties, were it not that the master-workmen, clothiers and others, as long as they had stocks of materials, kept on making their goods to keep the poor at work, believing that as soon as the sickness should abate they would have a quick rise in demand in proportion to the decay of their trade. But only rich masters could do this, and many were poor, so the manufacturing trade in England suffered greatly, and the poor were pinched all over England by London's calamity.

It is true that the next year made them full amends by another terrible calamity, the great fire; for an infinite quantity of household stuff, clothing, and whole warehouses filled with merchandise, were consumed in the fire. To supply that loss, all the manufacturing hands in the nation were set to work, and there was enough demand to last several years. There never was known such a trade all over England as was in the first seven years after the plague, and after the fire.

It remains now that I should say something of the merciful part of this terrible judgement. The last week in September, after the plague came to its 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 its violence would abate in a few days; but when I saw the bill of that week, which was the highest of the whole year, being 8,297 dead of all diseases, I upbraided him, and asked him what he had based his judgement on.

'Look you,' says he, 'by the number which are at this time sick and infected, there should have been twenty thousand dead in the last week instead of eight thousand. Two weeks ago the contagion usually killed in two or three days, now it is eight or ten; and then not above one in five recovered, whereas I have observed that now only two in five die. Take it from me, the next bill will decrease, and you will see many more people recover than used to do; for the malignity of the disease is abated.' He added that he now hoped that the infection had passed its crisis and was going off; and accordingly so it was; for the next week, the last in September, the bill decreased by almost two thousand.

It is true the plague was still at a frightful height, and the next bill was no less than 6,460 dead, and the next after that, 5,720; but still my friend's observation was just, and it did appear that people recovered faster and in greater numbers than they used to do.

Indeed, if it had not been so, what would the condition of London have been? For, according to my friend, there were no less than 60,000 people at that time infected, of whom 20,477 died, and nearly 40,000 recovered; whereas, had it been as it was before, at least 50,000 of that number would very probably have died.

The decrease went on for a few weeks more, and in another week in October the number dead of the plague was only 2,665; and the next week it decreased by 1,413 more, and yet it was seen plainly that there was an abundance of sick people. Indeed, an abundance fell sick every day, but the malignity of the disease lessened.

Such is the impulsive nature of our people (whether it is so or not all over the world, that's none of my particular business to inquire), that just as upon the first fright of the infection they shunned one another, and fled from the city, so now, upon this notion spreading, viz., that the disease was not so fatal as formerly, and seeing many people who fell sick recover daily, they took such a precipitant courage, and grew so entirely regardless of themselves and of the infection, that they went boldly

into company with those who had tumours and carbuncles, and ate and drank with them, and even went to visit them in the very rooms where they lay sick.

This I could not see as rational. It was plain that the disease was as catching as ever, and as many fell sick; and even if not so many did die, the illness itself was very terrible, the sores and swellings very tormenting, and the danger of death still present, though not so frequent as before. All those things would be enough to deter any man from mixing with the sick people, and make them almost as anxious to avoid the infection as before.

Nay, there was another thing which made the mere catching of the plague frightful, and that was the terrible burning of the caustics which the surgeons laid on the swellings to make them break and run, without which the danger of death was very great. Also, the insufferable pain of the swellings, though it might not make people rave as previously, still caused the patient inexpressible torment; and those that fell ill, though they survived, made bitter complaints of those that had told them there was no danger, and they sadly repented their rashness and folly in running into the reach of it.

Indeed, although many that thus cast off their cautions escaped, yet many died; and even as soon as the first great decrease in the bills appeared, we found that the two next bills did not decrease in proportion; the reason I take to be the people's running so rashly into danger, giving up all their former care and caution.

The physicians opposed this thoughtless mood of the people with all their might. They gave out printed directions, spreading them all over the City and suburbs, advising people to continue to be reserved, and to keep the utmost caution in their ordinary conduct, despite the decrease of the plague. They warned of the danger of bringing a relapse upon the whole city, telling them how such a relapse might be more fatal and dangerous than the visitation that had been already.

But it was all to no purpose; the audacious creatures were so possessed with the first joy of seeing a vast decrease in the weekly bills, that they were impenetrable by any new terrors, and would not be persuaded. You might as well have talked to the east wind. They opened shops, went about streets, did business, and talked with anybody that came in their way, without inquiring after their health or worrying about any danger.

This imprudent, rash conduct cost a great many their lives who had carefully shut themselves up and been preserved through all the heat of the infection. At last the ministers laid before the people the folly and danger of their behaviour; and this checked it a little, so that they grew more cautious.

But it had another effect, which they could not check; for as the first rumour had spread into the country, it had the same effect there: and the people were so tired with being so long away from London, and so eager to come back, that they flocked to town without fear, as if all the danger was over. It was indeed surprising to see it, for though there died still between 1,000 and 1,800 a week, yet the people flocked to town as if all had been well.

The consequence of this was that the bills increased again by 400 the first week in November; and if I might believe the physicians, over 3,000 fell sick that week, most of them new-comers, too.

One John Cock, a barber in St Martin's-le-Grand, was an eminent example of this hasty return of the people. John Cock had left the town with his whole family, and locked up his house, and was gone to the country, as many others did; and finding the plague decreased in November, he ventured home again. He had in his family ten persons; himself and wife, five children, two apprentices, and a maid-servant. He had

not returned to his house above a week, and began to open his shop and carry on his trade, when the disease broke out in his family, and within about five days they all died except the maid.

But the mercy of God was greater to the rest than we had reason to expect; for the plague's malignity was spent, the contagion was exhausted, and also the winter weather came on apace, and the air was clear and cold, with sharp frosts. The health of the city began to return.

There were indeed some recurrences of the plague in December, and the bills increased by nearly a hundred; but it went off again, and things began to return to normal. It was wonderful to see how populous the city was again all of a sudden, with few or no empty houses to be seen, or if there were some, there was no lack of tenants for them.

I wish I could say that just as the city had a new face, so the manners of the people had a new appearance. I am sure that there were many that were heartily thankful to that Sovereign Hand that had protected them; it would be very uncharitable to judge otherwise; but it must be acknowledged that the general behaviour of the people was just as it was before, with very little difference to be seen.

Some, indeed, said things were worse; that the morals of the people declined from this time; that, hardened by the danger they had been in, like seamen after a storm is over, people were more wicked and bolder in their vices; but I will not carry it so far neither.

Part 18

The Plague Ends in London

Some parts of England were now infected as violently as London had been; the cities of Norwich, Peterborough, Lincoln, Colchester, and other places were now visited by the disease; and the magistrates of London began to set rules for our conduct in corresponding with those cities. The Mayor could not forbid their people coming to London, because it was impossible to know them apart; so, after many consultations, the Lord Mayor and Aldermen were obliged to drop it. All they could do was to warn the people not to receive in their houses or talk to any people who came from such infected places.

But the people of London thought themselves so plague-free now that they were past all advice; they seemed to be sure that the air was restored, and that like a man that has had the smallpox, was not capable of being infected again. This revived that notion that the infection was all in the air, and that there was no such thing as contagion from the sick people to the sound. No-one could be more obstinate than the people of London; they that were healthy made nothing of going into the same houses and chambers, nay, even into the same beds, with those that had the disease.

Some, indeed, paid for their audacious boldness with their lives. Very many fell sick, and the physicians had more work than ever, only with this difference, that more of their patients recovered.

The people having thus returned in general, it was very strange to find in inquiring after their friends, that some whole families were so entirely swept away that there was no remembrance of them left, nor any of their possessions: for in such cases these were generally embezzled and purloined, some gone one way, some another.

It was said such abandoned effects came to the king, as the universal heir; and that the king granted all such to the Lord Mayor, to be applied to the use of the poor. For the distress of the poor was even greater now than it had been earlier, because all the sluices of general charity were now shut. People supposed the need for charity to be over, and so stopped their hands.

Though the health of the city was now very much restored, yet foreign trade did not begin to stir, nor would foreigners admit our ships into their ports for a great while. Trade with the Dutch was wholly interrupted by war; but Spain and Portugal, Italy and Barbary, Hamburg and all the Baltic ports were all shy of us a great while, and would not restore trade for many months.

The disease had swept away such multitudes, that many of the out-parishes were obliged to make new burying-grounds, some of which remain in use to this day. But others were converted into other uses or built upon afterwards; the dead bodies were disturbed, abused, dug up again, some even before the flesh of them was perished from the bones, and removed like rubbish to other places. For instance, these:

(1) A piece of ground beyond Goswell Street, being some of the remains of the old lines or fortifications of the City. This ground was later made a physic garden, and after that was built upon.

(2) A piece of ground just over the Black Ditch, as it was then called, at the end of Holloway Lane, in Shoreditch. It has been since made a yard for keeping hogs.

(3) The upper end of Hand Alley, in Bishopsgate Street, which was then a green field. This place I cannot mention without regret. It was, as I remember, about two or three years after the plague ceased that Sir Robert Clayton came to own the ground. The first house built upon it was a large fair house, still standing, which faces the wide street now called Hand Alley. The houses in the row are built on the very same ground where the poor people were buried, and on opening the ground for the foundations, the bodies were dug up. Some of them remained so plain to be seen that the women's skulls were distinguished by their long hair, and of others the flesh was not quite perished; so that the people began to exclaim loudly against it, and some suggested that it might cause a return of the contagion.

After that the bones and bodies, as fast as they dug them up, were carried to another part of the same ground and thrown all together into a deep pit, which is not built on, but is fenced off in a little square. There lie the remains of near two thousand bodies, carried by the dead-carts to their grave in that year.

(4) There was a piece of ground in Moorfields, by the entrance into the street which is now called Old Bethlem, which was enlarged much.

(5) Stepney parish had a piece of ground to bury their dead close to the Shoreditch churchyard, which is since, I suppose, made part of the same churchyard. And they had also two other burying-places in Spittlefields, one where since a chapel has been built, and another in Petticoat Lane. Stepney parish had no less than five other burial grounds at that time: one where now stands the parish church of St Paul, Shadwell, and the other where now stands the parish church of St John at Wapping.

I should have mentioned that the Quakers had at that time also a burying-ground set apart for their use, and which they still make use of; and they had also their own dead-cart to fetch their dead from their houses. The famous Solomon Eagle, who, as I mentioned before, had predicted the plague as a judgement, and ran naked through the streets, had his own wife die the very next day of the plague, and she was carried in the Quakers' dead-cart to their new burying-ground.

Great was the reproach thrown on those physicians who left their patients during the sickness, and when they came to town again nobody cared to employ them. They

were called deserters, and frequently bills were set up upon their doors, with the words, 'Here is a doctor to be let', so that several of those physicians had to move, and set up in new places. The same was the case with the clergy, whom the people were indeed very abusive to, writing verses and scandalous reflections upon them, and setting upon the church-door, 'Here is a pulpit to be let', or sometimes, 'to be sold', which was worse.

Unfortunately, when our infection ceased, there did not cease the spirit of strife and contention which had troubled the nation's peace before. Anyone who had seen the condition of the people during the plague, and how they caressed one another, and promised to have more charity in the future, and to raise no more reproaches; I say, anyone that had seen them then would have thought that they would have been reconciled in another spirit afterwards. But the quarrel remained; the Church and the Presbyterians were incompatible. As soon as the plague was removed, the Dissenting ministers who had filled the pulpits were again harassed and persecuted, as before, which we thought was very hard. But it was the Government's doing, and we could say nothing to hinder it.

On the other hand, when the Dissenters reproached ministers of the Church for going away and deserting their charge, and the like, this we could not approve; for not all men have not the same faith and the same courage, and the Scripture commands us to judge with charity.

A plague is a formidable enemy, and is armed with terrors that every man is not sufficiently fortified to resist. It is certain that a great many of the clergy withdrew and fled for the safety of their lives; but 'tis true also that a great many of them stayed, and many of them fell in the discharge of their duty. It cannot be said that all the Dissenting ministers stayed, any more than all Church of England clergy went away. And those that went left curates to do the offices and to visit the sick; so that, upon the whole, an allowance of charity might have been made on both sides.

Some that stayed not only boasted too much of themselves, but reviled those that fled, branding them with cowardice. I recommend all good people to look back and reflect duly upon the terrors of the time, and whoever does so will see that it is not an ordinary strength that could support it. It was not like appearing in the head of an army or charging a body of horse in the field, but it was charging Death itself on his pale horse; to stay was indeed to die, especially when the plague was at its height.

I think it ought to be recorded to the honour of such men, clergy, physicians, surgeons, apothecaries, and officers of every kind, as also all useful people who stayed and ventured their lives in discharge of their duty; several of all these kinds lost their lives on that sad occasion. I remember that there died sixteen clergymen, two aldermen, five physicians, thirteen surgeons, within the City before the beginning of September. But it can be no complete list.

As to inferior people, I think there died six-and-forty constables and head-boroughs in the two parishes of Stepney and Whitechapel; but it was impossible to keep the count when the violent rage of the disease came upon us in September. 'Tis certain that people died by heaps, and were buried by heaps, without count. If you believe some reports, there was buried those first three weeks in September 20,000 per week. However, I rather choose to keep to the public account; seven and eight thousand per week is enough to show the terror of those times.

Upon all these accounts, I could wish, when we were recovered, that we were more kind and charitable in remembrance of the past calamity, and did not so much value ourselves on our boldness in staying, as if all men were cowards that fly from the hand of God, or that those who stay do not sometimes owe their courage to their

ignorance, despising the hand of their Maker – which is a criminal kind of desperation, and not a true courage.

I must say that the civil officers, such as constables, sheriffs' men, and parish officers, whose business it was to take charge of the poor, did their duties in general with as much courage as any, and perhaps with more, because their work was more hazardous and lay more among the poor, who were more likely to be infected. It must be added, too, that a great number of them died.

I have not said one word here about the physic or preparations that we made use of on this terrible occasion; much of this was talked of in the books and advertisements of our quack doctors, of whom I have said enough already. It may, however, be added, that the College of Physicians were daily publishing several preparations; since they are in print, I avoid repeating them here.

One thing I could not help observing: what befell one of the quacks, who published that he had a most excellent preservative against the plague, and that anyone who kept it about them should never be infected. This man, we may reasonably suppose, did not go out without some of this excellent preservative in his pocket; yet he was taken ill, and carried off in two or three days.

I am not one of the physic-haters or physic-despisers; on the contrary, I respected the advice of my friend Dr. Heath; yet I must acknowledge I made use of little or nothing – except to keep a strong scent to have ready, in case I met with any offensive smells or went too near any burying-place or dead body.

Neither did I do what I know some did: keep the spirits always high and hot with wine and such things; and which remedy, as I observed, one learned physician used himself so much that he could not stop when the infection was quite gone, and so became a sot for all his life after.

I remember my friend the doctor used to say that there were certain drugs and preparations which were certainly good and useful in the case of an infection; with which physicians might make an infinite variety of medicines, as the ringers of bells make several hundred different rounds of music by changing the order of six bells, and that all these preparations shall be really very good.

'Therefore,' said he, 'I do not wonder that so vast a throng of medicines is offered, and that almost every physician prescribes a different thing; but if all the prescriptions of all the physicians in London were examined, it would be found that they are all compounded of the same things, with variations according to each doctor's own fancy and circumstances. Some recommend one thing as the best, and some another. Some,' says he, 'think that *pill. ruff.* is the best preparation that can be made; others think that Venice treacle is sufficient to resist the contagion; and I think that the latter is good to take beforehand to prevent it, and the first, if affected with plague, to expel it.' According to this opinion, I several times took Venice treacle, (which is a traditional compound of herbs, salts, wine and other ingredients) and sweated soundly, and thought myself as well fortified against the infection as anyone could be fortified by the power of physic.

As for quackery and mountebanks, of which the town was so full, I listened to none of them, and for two years after the plague I scarcely saw one of them about town. Some fancied they were all swept away in the infection, and called it a particular mark of God's vengeance upon them for leading the poor people to destruction, merely for a little money; but I cannot go to that length. That many of them died is certain – but I question whether they were all swept off. I believe rather they fled into the country and tried their practices upon the people there, who feared the infection before it came among them.

However, it is certain that none of them appeared for a great while in London. There were, indeed, several doctors who published advertisements recommending their various medicines for cleansing the body after the plague, for people to take who had been ill and had been cured; whereas the most eminent physicians thought that the plague was itself a sufficient purge, and that those who escaped the infection needed no physic to cleanse their bodies; so the quacks got little business.

There were, indeed, several little hurries which happened after the decrease of the plague. Whether they were contrived to frighten the people, I cannot say, but sometimes we were told the plague would return by such a time; and the famous Solomon Eagle, the naked Quaker I have mentioned, prophesied evil tidings every day. Several others told us that London had not been sufficiently scourged, and that severer strokes were to follow. Had they given us details, and told us that the City should the next year be destroyed by fire, then we should have paid great respect to their prophetic spirits. But as they generally told us of a relapse of the plague, we have had no concern about them. Yet those frequent clamours kept us in constant apprehension; and if anyone died suddenly, or if the spotted fevers at any time increased, we were alarmed; and much more if the number of the plague increased, for to the end of the year there were always between 200 and 300 cases of the plague.

Those who remember the city of London before the fire must remember that there was then no such place as we now call Newgate Market, but that in the middle of the street which is now called Blowbladder Street, (which had its name from the butchers, who used, it seems, to blow up their meat with pipes to make it look thicker and fatter than it was, and were punished for it by the Lord Mayor); I say, from the end of the street towards Newgate there stood two long rows of shambles for the selling of meat.

It was in those shambles that two persons fell down dead, as they were buying meat, and gave rise to a rumour that the meat was all infected; which, it appeared plainly afterwards, was false. But nobody can account for the possession of fear when it takes hold of the mind.

However, it pleased God, by the continuing of the winter weather, to restore the health of the city, so that by the February following we reckoned the plague had quite ceased, and then we were not so easily frightened again.

There was still a question of how to purge the houses and goods where the plague had been, and how to render them habitable again, if they had been left empty during the time of the sickness. Abundance of perfumes and preparations were prescribed by physicians; and the people who listened to them put themselves to a great, and in my opinion, unnecessary expense. The poorer people, who only set open their windows night and day, and burned brimstone, pitch, and gunpowder, and such things in their rooms, did as well as the best.

In general, prudent, cautious people did use some measures for airing and sweetening their houses, and burned perfumes, incense, benjamin, rosin, and sulphur in their rooms closely shut up, and then let the air carry it all out with a blast of gunpowder. Others caused large fires to be made all day and all night for several days and nights; by this means two or three set their houses on fire, and so effectually sweetened them by burning them down to the ground. One man's servant, I think it was in Thames Street, carried so much gunpowder into his master's house to clear it of the infection, and managed it so foolishly, that he blew up part of the roof.

But a little later the City was to be purged by fire; for within nine months I saw it all lying in ashes. Some of our quacking philosophers pretend that the seeds of the plague were entirely destroyed in the fire, and not before; a notion too ridiculous to speak of, since, had the seeds of the plague remained in the houses, how was it that it never broke out in those parishes where the fire never came, but where it had raged violently before?

However, it was certain that those people who were most cautious of their health did season their houses carefully with an abundance of costly things; which I must say filled the air with very grateful and wholesome smells, which others benefited from, as well as those who bore the expense of them.

Though the poor returned to town very quickly, yet the rich made no such haste. The men of business, indeed, came up, but many of them did not bring their families to town till the spring, when they felt surer that the plague would not return. The Court came back soon after Christmas, but the nobility and gentry, except those employed in the administration, did not come so soon.

I should note here that, despite the violence of the plague in London and in other places, yet it was never on board the fleet, even though they were pressing for seamen to man the ships. But that was in the beginning of the year, when the plague was scarce begun, and was not in that part of the city where they usually press and recruit for seamen; and though the seamen went with reluctance into the service, and many complained of being dragged into it by force, yet it proved in the event a happy violence to several of them, who would probably have perished otherwise. After their summer service was over, they often came back to find many of their families in their graves – yet they had room to be thankful that they were carried out of reach of the plague, though so much against their wills.

I would be glad if I could close the account of this melancholy year with some particular examples of thankfulness to God, our preserver, for our being delivered from this dreadful calamity. Certainly thankfulness was called for. Nothing but the immediate finger of God, nothing but omnipotent power, could have stopped the infection. The contagion despised all medicine; death raged in every corner; and a few weeks more of it would have cleared the town of everything that had a soul. Men everywhere began to despair; every heart failed them for fear; and the terrors of death sat in the faces of the people.

In that very moment it pleased God, with a most agreeable surprise, to cause the fury of it to abate; and the malignity declining, as I have said, though infinite numbers were sick, yet fewer died.

It is impossible to express the change that appeared in people's countenances when the weekly bill showed a decrease of death. A secret surprise and smile of joy sat on everybody's face. They shook one another by the hands in the streets, who would hardly walk on the same side of the street with one another before. 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; and cry out, 'God be praised!' and weep aloud for joy on hearing the news.

I must confess myself to have been very much dejected just before this happened; for the number that were taken sick the week or two before was so large, and the lamentations were so great everywhere, that it seemed impossible to escape; and as there was hardly a house but mine in all my neighbourhood that was not infected, before long I would have had no neighbours to catch the infection. Indeed it is hardly credible what dreadful havoc the last three weeks had made, for I believe there were not less than 30,000 people dead and near 100,000 fallen sick in that time.

The number that sickened was astonishing, and those whose courage had upheld them before, sank under it now.

In the middle of their distress, when the condition of London was so truly calamitous, just then it pleased God to disarm this enemy; the poison was taken out of the sting. It was wonderful; even the physicians themselves were surprised at it. Wherever they visited they found their patients better. Either they had sweated well, or the tumours were broken, or the carbuncles went down and the inflammations changed colour, or the fever was gone, or the violent headache was assuaged; so that in a few days everybody was recovering. Whole families that were infected, that had ministers praying with them, and expected death every hour, were revived and healed.

Nor was this done by any new medicine, or new method of cure; it was from the secret invisible hand of Him that had first sent this disease as a judgement upon us; and let the atheists say what they please, it was acknowledged at that time by all mankind. The disease was enervated and its malignity spent; and even those physicians who were the least religious were obliged to acknowledge that it was extraordinary, and that no explanation could be given of it.

If I should say that this is a visible summons to us all to thankfulness, perhaps it may be thought by some to be an officious canting, preaching a sermon instead of writing a history; and this restrains me from going on here as I might otherwise do. But if ten lepers were healed, and only one returned to give thanks, I desire to be as that one, and to be thankful for myself.

Nor will I deny that there were many people who appeared very thankful at that time. It was a common thing to meet people in the street that were strangers, expressing their surprise. Going one day through Aldgate, there comes a man out of the end of the Minories, and looking up and down the street, he throws his hands out, and says,

‘Lord, what an alteration is here! Why, last week I came along here, and hardly anybody was to be seen.’

I heard another man add, ‘’Tis all wonderful; ’tis all a dream.’

‘Blessed be God,’ says a third man, ‘and let us give thanks to Him, for ’tis all His doing, human help and human skill was at an end.’ These were all strangers to one another.

But such salutations as these were frequent in the street every day; and in spite of their loose behaviour, the common people went along the streets giving God thanks for their deliverance.

People now cast off their fears, and that too fast; indeed we were no more afraid now to pass by a man with a white cap upon his head, or with a cloth wrapped round his neck, or limping because of the sores in his groin, all which were frightful to the last degree only the week before. But now the street was full of them, and these poor recovering creatures were very conscious of their unexpected deliverance; I believe many of them were really thankful. But I must own that, for most people, it might too justly be said of them as was said of the children of Israel after their being delivered from the host of Pharaoh, when they passed the Red Sea, and looked back and saw the Egyptians overwhelmed in the water: viz., that they sang His praise, but they soon forgot His works.

I can go no farther here. I should be counted censorious, and perhaps unjust, if I were to reflect upon the unthankfulness and return of wickedness among us which I witnessed. I shall conclude the account of this calamitous year therefore with a plain but sincere stanza of my own, which I wrote at the end of that journal:

A dreadful plague in London was
In the year sixty-five,
Which swept an hundred thousand souls
Away; yet I alive!
H. F.

The End

*

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Extracts from the diary of Samuel Pepys

Samuel Pepys (1633 – 1703) is Britain's best-known diarist of the seventeenth and perhaps of any century, famous for his detailed, lively and frank descriptions of his doings. His diary entries are packed with dinners, dalliances and entertainments as well as his professional business. Pepys was a sociable, well-to-do married man living in London. At the time of the plague he worked as an administrator for the Admiralty: in 1665, the plague year, he became surveyor-general of the navy's victualling office.

The first mention of the plague in Pepys's diary seems to be at the end of April 1665.

In the extracts that follow, notes in square brackets [] are the editor's.

*

30th April 1665:

Thus I end this month in great content as to my estate and gettings: in much trouble as to the pains I have taken, and the rubs I expect yet to meet with, about the business of Tangier. The fleete, with about 106 ships upon the coast of Holland, in sight of the Dutch, within the Texel. Great fears of the sicknesse here in the City, it being said that two or three houses are already shut up. God preserve us all!

[There follow several weeks relating details of office work and Admiralty news, entertainment and gossip. The plague is not mentioned again by Pepys until 7th June 1665:]

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 upon us" writ there; which was a sad sight to me, being the first of the kind that, to my remembrance, I ever saw. It put me into an ill conception of myself and my smell, so that I was forced to buy some roll-tobacco to smell to and chew, which took away the apprehension.

10th June:

Lay long in bed, and then up and at the office all the morning. At noon dined at home, and then to the office busy all the afternoon. In the evening home to supper; and there, to my great trouble, hear that the plague is come into the City (though it hath these three or four weeks since its beginning been wholly out of the City); but where should it begin but in my good friend and neighbour's, Dr. Burnett, in Fanchurch Street: which in both points troubles me mightily. To the office to finish my letters and then home to bed, being troubled at the sicknesse, and my head filled also with other business enough, and particularly how to put my things and estate in order, in case it should please God to call me away, which God dispose of to his glory!

[On 15th June, there is a reference to moving his wife out of the town for her health's sake; he agrees with a friend, Mr. Sheldon, that she can spend a month or two at his house.]

17th June:

So hearing that my Lord Treasurer was gone out of town with his family because of the sicknesse, I returned home without staying there, and at the office find Sir W. Pen come home, who looks very well; and I am gladder to see him than otherwise I should be because of my hearing so well of him for his serviceableness in this late great action. To the office late, and then home to bed. It struck me very deep this afternoon going with a hackney coach from my Lord Treasurer's down Holborne, the coachman I found to drive easily and easily, at last stood still, and come down hardly able to stand, and told me that he was suddenly struck very sicke, and almost blind, he could not see; so I 'light and went into another coach, with a sad heart for the poor man and trouble for myself, lest he should have been struck with the plague, being at the end of the towne that I took him up; but God have mercy upon us all!

20th June:

This day I informed myself that there died four or five at Westminster of the plague in one alley in several houses upon Sunday last, Bell Alley, over against the Palace-gate; yet people do think that the number will be fewer in the towne than it was the last weeke! The Dutch are come out again with 20 sail under Bankert; supposed gone to the Northward to meete their East India fleete.

22nd June:

Up pretty betimes, and in great pain whether to send my mother into the country to-day or no, I hearing, by my people, that she, poor wretch, hath a mind to stay a little longer, and I cannot blame her, considering what a life she will through her own folly lead when she comes home again, unlike the pleasure and liberty she hath had here. At last I resolved to put it to her, and she agreed to go, so I would not oppose it, because of the sicknesse in the towne, and my intentions of removing my wife. So I did give her money and took a kind leave of her, she, poor wretch, desiring that I would forgive my brother John, but I refused it to her, which troubled her, poor soul, but I did it in kind words and so let the discourse go off, she leaving me though in a great deal of sorrow...

[The entry for 23rd June, which is full of naval business, ends thus:]

So home by hackney-coach, which is become a very dangerous passage now-a-days, the sickness increasing mightily, and to bed.

26th June:

...So, weary, home, and to my office a while, till almost midnight, and so to bed. The plague encreases mightily, I this day seeing a house, at a bitt-maker's over against St. Clement's Church, in the open street, shut up; which is a sad sight.

29th June:

...This end of the towne every day grows very bad of the plague. The Mortality Bill is come to 267: which is about ninety more than the last: and of these but four in the City, which is a great blessing to us.

[July finds Pepys increasingly concerned with the plague and its effects. Although the vast bulk of his diary entries are still concerned with his business and social life, awareness of the plague afflicting the town frequently creeps in:]

July 1st

Sad at the newes that seven or eight houses in Bazing Hall street, are shut up of the plague.

July 3rd:

...late at the office about letters, and so home, resolving from this night forwards to close all my letters, if possible, and end all my business at the office by daylight, and I shall go near to do it and put all my affairs in the world in good order, the season growing so sickly, that it is much to be feared how a man can escape having a share with others in it, for which the good Lord God bless me, or to be fitted to receive it. So after supper to bed, and mightily troubled in my sleep all night with dreams of Jacke Cole, my old schoolfellow, lately dead, who was born at the same time with me, and we reckoned our fortunes pretty equal. God fit me for his condition!'

July 5th:

I by water to Woolwich, where I found my wife come, and her two maids, and very prettily accommodated they will be; and I left them going to supper, grieved in my heart to part with my wife, being worse by much without her, though some trouble there is in having the care of a family at home in this plague time, and so took leave, and I in one boat and W. Hewer in another home very late, first against tide, we having walked in the dark to Greenwich. Late home and to bed, very lonely.'

July 10th:

[Pepys was sent to Hampton Court:]

...Here though I have not been in many years, yet I lacke time to stay, besides that it is, I perceive, an unpleasing thing to be at Court, everybody being fearful one of another, and all so sad, enquiring after the plague, so that I stole away by my horse to Kingston, and there with trouble was forced to press two sturdy rogues to carry me to London, and met at the waterside with Mr. Charnocke, Sir Philip Warwicke's clerke, who had been in company and was quite foxed. I took him with me in my boat, and so away to Richmond, and there, by night, walked with him to Moreclacke, a very pretty walk, and there staid a good while, now and then talking and sporting with Nan the servant, who says she is a seaman's wife, and at last bade good night.

July 13th:

...I and [my] wife, who by agreement met here, took leave, and I saw my wife a little way down (it troubling me that this absence makes us a little strange instead of more fond), and so parted, and I home to some letters, and then home to bed. Above 700 died of the plague this week.

July 18th:

Up and to the office, where all the morning, and so to my house and eat a bit of victuals, and so to the 'Change, [the Royal Exchange, later to become the Stock Exchange] where a little business and a very thin Exchange; and so walked through London to the Temple, where I took water for Westminster to the Duke of Albemarle, to wait on him, and so to Westminster Hall, and there paid for my newes-books, and did give Mrs. Michell, who is going out of towne because of the sicknesse, and her husband, a pint of wine, and so Sir W. Warren coming to me by appointment we away by water home, by the way discoursing about the project I have of getting some

money and doing the King good service too about the mast docke at Woolwich, which I fear will never be done if I do not go about it. After dispatching letters at the office, I by water down to Deptford, where I staid a little while, and by water to my wife, whom I have not seen 6 or 5 days, and there supped with her, and mighty pleasant, and saw with content her drawings, and so to bed mighty merry. I was much troubled this day to hear at Westminster how the officers do bury the dead in the open Tuttle-fields, pretending want of room elsewhere; whereas the New Chappell churchyard was walled-in at the publick charge in the last plague time, merely for want of room and now none, but such as are able to pay dear for it, can be buried there.

July 20th [A visit to friends ended:]

...So all the company broke up in most extraordinary joy, wherein I am mighty contented that I have had the good fortune to be so instrumental, and I think it will be of good use to me. So walked to Redriffe, where I hear the sickness is, and indeed is scattered almost every where, there dying 1089 of the plague this week. My Lady Carteret did this day give me a bottle of plague-water home with me. So home to write letters late, and then home to bed.

21st July:

...So home and late at my chamber, setting some papers in order; the plague growing very raging, and my apprehensions of it great. So very late to bed.

22nd July:

...I to Fox-hall, where to the Spring garden; but I do not see one guest there, the town being so empty of any body to come thither. Only, while I was there, a poor woman come to scold with the master of the house that a kinswoman, I think, of hers, that was newly dead of the plague, might be buried in the church-yard; for, for her part, she should not be buried in the commons, as they said she should. Back to White Hall, and by and by comes the Duke of Albemarle, and there, after a little discourse, I by coach home, not meeting with but two coaches, and but two carts from White Hall to my own house, that I could observe; and the streets mighty thin of people. I met this noon with Dr. Burnett, who told me, and I find in the newsbook this week that he posted upon the 'Change, that whoever did spread the report that, instead of the plague, his servant was by him killed, it was forgery, and shewed me the acknowledgment of the master of the pest-house, that his servant died of a bubo on his right groine, and two spots on his right thigh, which is the plague.

26th July [After a few frolicsome days, he writes:]

... After a little other discourse and the sad news of the death of so many in the parish of the plague, forty last night, the bell always going, I back to the Exchange, where I went up and sat talking with my beauty, Mrs. Batelier, a great while, who is indeed one of the finest women I ever saw in my life. After buying some small matter, I home, and there to the office and saw Sir J. Minnes now come from Portsmouth, I home to set my Journall for these four days in order, they being four days of as great content and honour and pleasure to me as ever I hope to live or desire, or think any body else can live.... The sicknesse is got into our parish this week, and is got, indeed, every where; so that I begin to think of setting things in order, which I pray God enable me to put both as to soul and body.

27th July:

...At home met the weekly Bill, where above 1000 increased in the Bill, and of them, in all about 1,700 of the plague, which hath made the officers this day resolve of sitting at Deptford, which puts me to some consideration what to do. Therefore home to think and consider of every thing about it, and without determining any thing eat a little supper and to bed, full of the pleasure of these 6 or 7 last days.

28th July:

...Set out with my Lady all alone with her with six horses to Dagenhams; going by water to the Ferry. And a pleasant going, and good discourse; and when there, very merry, and the young couple now well acquainted. But, Lord! to see in what fear all the people here do live would make one mad, they are afraid of us that come to them, insomuch that I am troubled at it, and wish myself away. But some cause they have; for the chaplain, with whom but a week or two ago we were here mighty high disputing, is since fallen into a fever and dead, being gone hence to a friend's a good way off. A sober and a healthful man.'

29th July:

At noon to dinner, where I hear that my Will [Pepys's clerk and friend Will Hewer] is come in thither and laid down upon my bed, ill of the headake, which put me into extraordinary fear; and I studied all I could to get him out of the house, and set my people to work to do it without discouraging him...

...fell to my Tangier papers till late, and then to bed, in some ease of mind that Will is gone to his lodging, and that he is likely to do well, it being only the headake.

30th July:

Up, and in my night gowne, cap and neckcloth, undressed all day long, lost not a minute, but in my chamber, setting my Tangier accounts to rights. Which I did by night to my very heart's content, not only that it is done, but I find every thing right, and even beyond what, after so long neglecting them, I did hope for. The Lord of Heaven be praised for it! Will was with me to-day, and is very well again. It was a sad noise to hear our bell to toll and ring so often to-day, either for deaths or burials; I think five or six times.

31st July:

...Thus we end this month, as I said, after the greatest glut of content that ever I had; only under some difficulty because of the plague, which grows mightily upon us, the last week being about 1700 or 1800 of the plague.

3rd August:

Up, and betimes to Deptford to Sir G. Carteret's, where, not liking the horse that had been hired by Mr. Uthwayt for me, I did desire Sir G. Carteret to let me ride his new horse, which he did, and so I left my 'hacquencee' [hack, an ambling horse] behind, and so after staying a good while in their bedchamber while they were dressing themselves, discoursing merrily, I parted and to the ferry, where I was forced to stay a great while before I could get my horse brought over, and then mounted and rode very finely to Dagenhams; all the way people, citizens, walking to and again to enquire how the plague is in the City this week by the Bill; which by chance, at Greenwich, I had heard was 2,020 of the plague, and 3,000 and odd of all diseases; but methought it was a sad question to be so often asked me....

...By and by met my Lord Crew returning, after having accompanied them a little way, and so after them, Mr. Marr telling me by the way how a maid servant of Mr. John Wright's (who lives thereabouts) falling sick of the plague, she was removed to an out-house, and a nurse appointed to look to her; who, being once absent, the maid got out of the house at the window, and run away. The nurse coming and knocking, and having no answer, believed she was dead, and went and told Mr. Wright so; who and his lady were in great strait what to do to get her buried. At last resolved to go to Burntwood hard by, being in the parish, and there get people to do it. But they would not; so he went home full of trouble, and in the way met the wench walking over the common, which frightened him worse than before; and was forced to send people to take her, which he did; and they got one of the pest coaches and put her into it to carry her to a pest house. And passing in a narrow lane, Sir Anthony Browne, with his brother and some friends in the coach, met this coach with the curtains drawn close. The brother being a young man, and believing there might be some lady in it that would not be seen, and the way being narrow, he thrust his head out of his own into her coach, and to look, and there saw somebody look very ill, and in a sick dress, and stunk mightily; which the coachman also cried out upon. And presently they come up to some people that stood looking after it, and told our gallants that it was a maid of Mr. Wright's carried away sick of the plague; which put the young gentleman into a fright had almost cost him his life, but is now well again....

15th August [after a visit to Greenwich:]

...It was dark before I could get home, and so land at Church-yard stairs, where, to my great trouble, I met a dead corps of the plague, in the narrow ally just bringing down a little pair of stairs. But I thank God I was not much disturbed at it. However, I shall beware of being late abroad again.

16th August:

Up, and after doing some necessary business about my accounts at home, to the office, and there with Mr. Hater wrote letters, and I did deliver to him my last will, one part of it to deliver to my wife when I am dead. Thence to the Exchange, where I have not been a great while. But, Lord! how sad a sight it is to see the streets empty of people, and very few upon the 'Change. Jealous of every door that one sees shut up, lest it should be the plague; and about us two shops in three, if not more, generally shut up....

20th August [Pepys calls on a Mr. Povy:]

Mr. Povy not being at home I lost my labour, only eat and drank there with his lady, and told my bad newes [about naval business], and hear the plague is round about them there. So away to Brainford; and there at the inn that goes down to the water-side, I 'light and paid off my post-horses, and so slipped on my shoes, and laid my things by, the tide not serving, and to church, where a dull sermon, and many Londoners. After church to my inn, and eat and drank, and so about seven o'clock by water, and got between nine and ten to Queenhive, very dark. And I could not get my waterman to go elsewhere for fear of the plague. Thence with a lanthorn, in great fear of meeting of dead corpses, carried to be buried; but, blessed be God, met none, but did see now and then a linke (which is the mark of them) at a distance. So got safe home about 10 o'clock, my people not all abed, and after supper I weary to bed.

[Travelling by night was a continuing source of worry. The following day, Pepys wrote:]

I was forced to walk it in the darke, at ten o'clock at night, with Sir J. Minnes's George with me, being mightily troubled for fear of the doggs at Coome farme, and more for fear of rogues by the way, and yet more because of the plague which is there, which is very strange, it being a single house, all alone from the towne, but it seems they use to admit beggars, for their owne safety, to lie in their barns, and they brought it to them; but I bless God I got about eleven of the clock well to my wife...

25th August:

Up betimes to the office, and there, as well as all the afternoon, saving a little dinner time, all alone till late at night writing letters and doing business, that I may get beforehand with my business again, which hath run behind a great while, and then home to supper and to bed. This day I am told that Dr. Burnett, my physician, is this morning dead of the plague; which is strange, his man dying so long ago, and his house this month open again. Now himself dead. Poor unfortunate man!

30th August:

Up betimes and to my business of settling my house and papers, and then abroad and met with Hadley, our clerke, who, upon my asking how the plague goes, he told me it encreases much, and much in our parish; for, says he, there died nine this week, though I have returned but six: which is a very ill practice, and makes me think it is so in other places; and therefore the plague much greater than people take it to be. Thence, as I intended, to Sir R. Viner's, and there found not Mr. Lewes ready for me, so I went forth and walked towards Moorefields to see (God forbid my presumption!) whether I could see any dead corps going to the grave; but, as God would have it, did not. But, Lord! how every body's looks, and discourse in the street is of death, and nothing else, and few people going up and down, that the towne is like a place distressed and forsaken....

31st August:

Up and, after putting several things in order to my removal, to Woolwich; the plague having a great encrease this week, beyond all expectation of almost 2,000, making the general Bill 7,000, odd 100; and the plague above 6,000. I down by appointment to Greenwich, to our office, where I did some business, and there dined with our company and Sir W. Boreman, and Sir The. Biddulph, at Mr. Boreman's, where a good venison pasty, and after a good merry dinner I to my office, and there late writing letters, and then to Woolwich by water, where pleasant with my wife and people, and after supper to bed. Thus this month ends with great sadness upon the publick, through the greatness of the plague every where through the kingdom almost. Every day sadder and sadder news of its encrease. In the City died this week 7,496 and of them 6,102 of the plague. But it is feared that the true number of the dead, this week is near 10,000; partly from the poor that cannot be taken notice of, through the greatness of the number, and partly from the Quakers and others that will not have any bell ring for them...

3rd September:

Up; and put on my coloured silk suit very fine, and my new periwig, bought a good while since, but durst not wear, because the plague was in Westminster when I

bought it; and it is a wonder what will be the fashion after the plague is done, as to periwiggs, for nobody will dare to buy any haire, for fear of the infection, that it had been cut off of the heads of people dead of the plague...

4th September:

...We to walk in the Park with Mr. Hammond and Turner, and there eat some fruit out of the King's garden and walked in the Parke, and so back to Sir J. Minnes, and thence walked home, my Lord Bruncker giving me a very neat cane to walk with; but it troubled me to pass by Coome farme where about twenty-one people have died of the plague, and three or four days since I saw a dead corps in a coffin lie in the Close unburied, and a watch is constantly kept there night and day to keep the people in, the plague making us cruel, as doggs, one to another.

6th September:

Busy all the morning writing letters to several, so to dinner, to London, to pack up more things thence; and there I looked into the street and saw fires burning in the street, as it is through the whole City, by the Lord Mayor's order. Thence by water to the Duke of Albemarle's: all the way fires on each side of the Thames, and strange to see in broad daylight two or three burials upon the Bankeside, one at the very heels of another: doubtless all of the plague; and yet at least forty or fifty people going along with every one of them. The Duke mighty pleasant with me...

7th September:

Up by 5 of the clock, mighty full of fear of an ague, but was obliged to go, and so by water, wrapping myself up warm, to the Tower, and there sent for the Weekly Bill, and find 8,252 dead in all, and of them 6,878 of the plague; which is a most dreadfull number, and shows reason to fear that the plague hath got that hold that it will yet continue among us. Thence to Brainford, reading "The Villaine," a pretty good play, all the way...

14th September:

...when I come home I spent some thoughts upon the occurrences of this day, giving matter for as much content on one hand and melancholy on another, as any day in all my life. For the first; the finding of my money and plate, and all safe at London, and speeding in my business of money this day. The hearing of this good news to such excess, after so great a despair of my Lord's doing anything this year; adding to that, the decrease of 500 and more, which is the first decrease we have yet had in the sickness since it begun: and great hopes that the next week it will be greater. Then, on the other side, my finding that though the Bill in general is abated, yet the City within the walls is increased, and likely to continue so, and is close to our house there. My meeting dead corpses of the plague, carried to be buried close to me at noon-day through the City in Fanchurch-street. To see a person sick of the sores, carried close by me by Gracechurch in a hackney-coach. My finding the Angell tavern, at the lower end of Tower-hill, shut up, and more than that, the alehouse at the Tower-stairs, and more than that, the person was then dying of the plague when I was last there, a little while ago, at night, to write a short letter there, and I overheard the mistresse of the house sadly saying to her husband somebody was very ill, but did not think it was of the plague. To hear that poor Payne, my waiter, hath buried a child, and is dying himself. To hear that a labourer I sent but the other day to Dagenhams, to know how they did there, is dead of the plague; and that one of my own watermen, that carried

me daily, fell sick as soon as he had landed me on Friday morning last, when I had been all night upon the water (and I believe he did get his infection that day at Brainford), and is now dead of the plague. To hear that Captain Lambert and Cuttle are killed in the taking these ships; and that Mr. Sidney Montague is sick of a desperate fever at my Lady Carteret's, at Scott's-hall. To hear that Mr. Lewes hath another daughter sick. And, lastly, that both my servants, W. Hewer and Tom Edwards, have lost their fathers, both in St. Sepulchre's parish, of the plague this week, do put me into great apprehensions of melancholy, and with good reason. But I put off the thoughts of sadness as much as I can, and the rather to keep my wife in good heart and family also. After supper (having eat nothing all this day) upon a fine trench of Mr. Shelden's taking, we to bed.

[In this month the plague in London reached its height.]

20th September:

...But, Lord! what a sad time it is to see no boats upon the River; and grass grows all up and down White Hall court, and nobody but poor wretches in the streets! And, which is worst of all, the Duke showed us the number of the plague this week, brought in the last night from the Lord Mayor; that it is increased about 600 more than the last, which is quite contrary to all our hopes and expectations, from the coldness of the late season. For the whole general number is 8,297, and of them the plague 7,165; which is more in the whole by above 50, than the biggest Bill yet; which is very grievous to us all...

3rd October:

This night I hear that of our two watermen that use to carry our letters, and were well on Saturday last, one is dead, and the other dying sick of the plague. The plague, though decreasing elsewhere, yet being greater about the Tower and thereabouts....

16th October:

...Thence I walked to the Tower; but, Lord! how empty the streets are and melancholy, so many poor sick people in the streets full of sores; and so many sad stories overheard as I walk, every body talking of this dead, and that man sick, and so many in this place, and so many in that. And they tell me that, in Westminster, there is never a physician and but one apothecary left, all being dead; but that there are great hopes of a great decrease this week: God send it!...

26th October

...The 'Change pretty full, and the town begins to be lively again, though the streets very empty, and most shops shut....

5th November:

...To dinner, where a great deale of silly discourse, but the worst is I hear that the plague increases much at Lambeth, St. Martin's and Westminster, and fear it will all over the city...

14th November:

Called up by break of day by Captain Cocke, by agreement, and he and I in his coach through Kent-streete (a sad place through the plague, people sitting sicke and

with plaisters about them in the street begging) to Viner's and Colvill's about money business, and so to my house...

22 nd November:

...I heard this day that Mr. Harrington is not dead of the plague, as we believed, at which I was very glad, but most of all, to hear that the plague is come very low; that is, the whole under 1,000, and the plague 600 and odd: and great hopes of a further decrease, because of this day's being a very exceeding hard frost, and continues freezing...

26 th November [Pepys had invited guests to dine at Woolwich:]

...But here, they tell me, one of the houses behind them is infected, and I was fain to stand there a great while, to have their back-door opened, but they could not, having locked them fast, against any passing through, so was forced to pass by them again, close to their sicke beds, which they were removing out of the house, which troubled me; so I made them uninvite their guests, and to resolve of coming all away to me to-morrow, and I walked with a lanthorne, weary as I was, to Greenwich...

13 th December:

...so away to the 'Change, and there hear the ill news, to my great and all our great trouble, that the plague is encreased again this week, notwithstanding there hath been a day or two great frosts; but we hope it is only the effects of the late close warm weather, and if the frosts continue the next week, may fall again; but the town do thicken so much with people, that it is much if the plague do not grow again ...

22nd December:

... The weather hath been frosty these eight or nine days, and so we hope for an abatement of the plague the next weeke, or else God have mercy upon us! for the plague will certainly continue the next year if it do not.

[His final entry for the year 1665 ends thus:]

... My whole family hath been well all this while, and all my friends I know of, saving my aunt Bell, who is dead, and some children of my cozen Sarah's, of the plague. But many of such as I know very well, dead; yet, to our great joy, the town fills apace, and shops begin to be open again. Pray God continue the plague's decrease! for that keeps the Court away from the place of business, and so all goes to rack as to publick matters, they at this distance not thinking of it.

[In 1666 Pepys's diary contains few references to the plague, which was then continuing to decline:]

23rd January:

Good newes beyond all expectation of the decrease of the plague, being now but 79, and the whole but 272. So home with comfort to bed.

[After this Pepys was occasionally troubled by reports of the disease, but in general his entries are given over to his naval business and social life.]

Source

The Diary of Samuel Pepys, ed. Henry B. Wheatley, 8 vols. London 1896.

Extracts From the diary of Ralph Josselin

Ralph Josselin (1616 – 1683) was for over forty years the vicar of Earls Colne, a quiet village in Essex.

From 1644 until 1681 he made regular (usually weekly) diary entries, a mixture of brief notes about rural parish business, wars, weather and expenses, and religious reflections. The plague was much on his mind from May 1665 right through to the end of 1666; the disease remained prevalent in neighbouring towns like Colchester after it began to decline in London.

Entries are reproduced verbatim. Notes in square brackets [] are the editor's.

*

May. 14. 1665. God good in manifold mercies, the plague certainly in London. 9 dyed last weeke, the drought doth not only continue, but the heat groweth very much. Lord helpe us to gett into the gap to turn away thy wrath.

May. 28. My personal illnes abateth blessed bee God ; the plague gott into o' land at Yarmouth, and London, 14 dying this weeke.

[After this the plague is regularly mentioned with an increasing number of deaths reported.]

June. 18. Plague increased to 112.

June. 25. Plague increasd to 168

July. 2. Plague increased to 267, bill 684 ; my son had leave to continue in the country. God in mercy preserve us, & heale the city; medicaments used, but no publiq call to repentance ; the king goeth to Wilton by Salisbury, the old Queen gone for ffrance: Lawson o'[our] brave seaman dead of his wound ; the season very moist. Lord send not all in anger.

July. 9. God good in o' preservacon, the plague feares the Londoners; they flie before it & the country feares all trade with London: died 1006, of the plague 470: the Lord stay his heavy hand

July. 16. London sad days increase. 1268 buried. 725 plague. Lord hold thy hand.

July. 23. My farm turnd into my hands; the plague hott, 1089, burials 1761: Lord hold thy hand, proceed not in wrath.

July. 28. Plague grows hott ; persons fall down in London streets, 1843 of plague, total 2785: Lord spare thy people.

Aug. 2. First publiq monthly fast; wee gathered for distressed London.

Aug. 6. God good in the season, harvest comes in well, a great rain with the earth needed to Aug: 1. A small increase of the plague beyond what feared, viz. 2010, burials 3014.

Aug. 13. To Aug: 9 a great increase of plague, 2817, total 4030. Giles Cripplegate 690. Lord bee not angry with o' prayers ; and now Colchester is infected, and when will Coln lay it to heart?

Aug. 16. Colchesters infection looketh sadly, by a joyner. Dedham clapt him into a pest house presently; God spare the place.

Aug. 20. Londons visitacon sad. 3880 plague, 5319 all diseases ; spread almost over the whole city, and much in the country ; Lord arise & helpe. Colchester seeke into the country for dwellings.

Aug. 27. God good in our preservacon, yet much endangered by Colchester. A lad of o' parish coming thence died in White Colne, feared of the infection; another among us of his company ; Lord preserve us: the weather sad, but the day cooling: died at London plague 4227, all 5568; God in mercy stop infection: the increase was small in comparison of what feared.

Sept. 3. God good in our preservacon. Halsted in danger, the plague rageth, 6102, total 7496, and twenty some days at Colchester.

Sept. 10. The season cooled and yet the bill Sept. 5 increased, 6978 plague, 8252 died; they ordered continuall fires in London for 3 days and nights at every doore; Lord cease thy hand.

Sept. 16. God good in Colnes preservation, yet Colchester increaseth in illnes being spread over the whole town ; after freq' reports of a most wonderfull increase this weeke it abated through mercy: from Sept. 5 to 12, 562 ; there dying in all 7690, of plague 6544, and towards the full of the moon.

Sept. 23 Thought there died at Colchester this weeke 184, from Sept. 12 to 19: the moon at full on the 14 ; though the weather cold, and winds stirring yet their was an increase again and esp. within the wals where there died 1493, of the plague 1189 ; this bill was 8297, of the plague 7165, and yet Coln preserved.

Oct. 1. Deaths at Colnehill, and hazards at Coln, and yet preserved, God inherit o' praises; the small pox with Coln at Potters: a great abatement of the plague at London, 5533, total 6460 ; and so at Colchester, 59 abated, there dying 1 26 or thereabouts.

Oct. 4 Wee remembred poore Colchester in our collection neare 30s. & sent them formerly 4/.

Oct. 8. To thy goodnes wee own it with praises that wee are preserved from the smal pox in our town & plague in the country, which is hott at Ipswich, Harwich an 100 dying in 3 weeks: the graves fill the church- yard already, and have called for a new burying place ; at Colchester it spreads exceedingly.

Oct. 22 A wonderfull sweet season, dry, cold and frosts ; God gave a great abatement to the plague, 3219 in all, plague 2665, decrease 1849 London ; praise God

Nov. 5. Abated at London again 408; burials 1388, 1031 of the plague, yet at Colchester it increased ; above 20 new houses infected; buried there about 147.

Dec. 9. Weather open & warm, the plague decreasing little at Colchester, there dying 45, but, blessed bee God, abated at London 116, bill being 428, and Colne still preserved, plague 210.

[January 1666:]

Increase in burials this yeare 79,009. The greatest plague in England since that in Edward the thirds time, and yett it continues, as very feirce in many places of England, this Jan. 26. What God may doe, the weather being now cold frostie, I know not, but hope well.

[However the plague continued to rumble on, albeit with smaller numbers of dead, which Josselin regularly reported.]

March 18 A cold, dry time at London, plague 29, burials 207, very low, blessed bee God; Colchester 43.

May. 13. Plague increased at London to 53, total 234, sad at Colchester. dying 174.

May. 20. London increased to 58, total 236 : its thinly peopled wheresoever persons speake ; most by-places empty & thought the deaths were beyond our counts by far. Lord spare. Feares of Spains quarrelling us. Sad still with poor Colchester, 161 dying. A trouble coming up street, where wee found another child stricken, & old Lea not well.

*

June. 24. The sicknes decaesd at Colchester 32, being 112 : at London to 23, total 179.

July 1. God good to admiracon in our towns preservation, when so sad in all other places, Cambridge, Oundle, Xeedham, Braintree, but above all at Colchester increasing to 180. London, 33, tot. 223.

July. 4. The land at a low ebbe, our enemies brave it on o' coast ; God in mercy, helpe & deliver.

[The plague continued to rise and fall in Colchester and elsewhere, until another event overtook it:]

Sept. 9. This weeke dolefull; a fire began in London in Pudding lane at a ffrench bakers about one of the clocke Sept: 2. being Lords day, and on the 3 & 4 burnt down almost the whole city but a litle quarter from the tower to Moregate, and as low as Leadenhall Street...

Sept. 23. London bill was 104 of the plague in 3 weeks. 16 parishes within walls, 14 without, by the compute 81 (sic) wholly burnt down within wals & 2 without besides peices of others.

Oct. 14. A wettish time ; plague abates at London 14 & Colchester 7; litle mention of it.

Nov. 4. My son was returnd safe from London : the Lord my God blesse him. Col: 4: London, 220, plague 14: many hearing, but few practicing.

Nov. 5. Paid my son 1s. for plums, the first he sold.

[As the year 1666 comes to an end, there are fewer references to the plague: after a report of seven dead in London on Dec. 2nd, Josselin turns his attention and his diary entries to other matters. He was to live a peaceful life in his parish for another seventeen years.]

Source

Hockcliffe, E. (ed.) *The diary of the Rev. Ralph Josselin*. Great Britain: Royal Historical Society, 1908.

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William Boghurst
Loimographia. An account of the Great Plague of London in the year 1665.

Summary and extracts

Spelling has been modernised. Comments in square brackets [] are the editor's.

William Boghurst (1630/31–1685) was an apothecary at St Giles-in-the-Fields, London, where the plague of 1665 first became rampant. During the epidemic of 1665 his medical practice expanded and he treated up to sixty patients a day. His observations, which he published in 1666 in his book *Loimographia*, are regarded as a reliable eyewitness account of the plague.

*

[In his book, Boghurst first outlines the history of plague before theorising as to its causes, which he attributes to 'venemous vapours and pestiferous effluvia' arising from the earth. However, he is on surer ground when he lists contributing factors such as over-crowding, lack of good diet and washing, the failure to bury corpses, and presence of vermin.

Boghurst lists the early diagnostic symptoms: 'shuddering cold', retching, headache, carbuncles and buboes, frenzy, weakness, breathlessness, etc.

He then gives a long list of more serious symptoms and indications of the progress of the disease:]

Evil Signs or presages of the plague

1. Spots appearing, either coal black, dark bluish black, clear blood-red colour, or scarlet.
2. Stopping of the stomach or oppression of it.
3. A Hiccough coming upon them.
4. Continual vomiting which will not be stayed.
5. Their Buboes or Carbuncles falling on a sudden.
6. A sudden looseness of 2 or 3 stools together, usually with black excrements.
7. Shortness and difficulty of breathing as if they were choked.
8. Stopping of veins, and a pain about the bladder and pubes.
9. Great inward burning heat and outward cold.
10. Faltering in the voice, stammering and speaking in the throat, and especially lispings, with a slight pulling in one side of the mouth when they speak.
11. Continual drowsiness and sleeping at the beginning of the disease.
12. Continual great thirstiness, causing to drink too much.
13. No eruptions or very late, low, hard, flat.
14. Sleeping with the eyes half open as it were dead and set.
15. An intermitting, halting, faltering pulse, a stopping pulse, a stealing pulse, a weak, low, trembling, shivering pulse.
16. Trembling of the lips, hands, and shaking of the head.

17. The neck swelling much and hard either side or round about, hindering swallowing or breathing.
18. Staggering in going about a room.
19. Sick faint fits, swooning and panting, and trembling of the heart.
20. Distraction or idle talk, raving frenzy.
21. Miscarriage in a teeming woman.
22. A settled pain in the back about the hips which will not remove, also a pulling pain betwixt the shoulders, in the sides and belly.
23. Cold sweats about the chin, forehead, breast, hands.
24. Extreme sweating too freely and continually.
25. The belly swollen or fallen inward towards the back on a sudden.
26. Being taken almost blind at first with a strong headache.
27. Much belching and windiness.
28. The sores decreasing, drying up, turning black on a sudden.
29. Urine shadowing black after 2 or 3 days being sick, also bloody coloured unless caused by applying cantharides.
30. Melancholy, sad and frightful dreams.
31. Restlessness, tossing up and down the legs and whole body from one side of the bed to another.
32. Much and deep sighing, and hasty long expiration.
33. Contraction of the jaws.
34. A laughing Countenance with a faint forced smile.
35. A livid Countenance composed of bluish black, also a sharp Countenance.
36. Being dumb and unwilling to speak, and stupidity of spirits.
37. Hoarseness, that they could not speak out.
38. Turning, playing, and fumbling with the bedclothes.
39. Their vomit running out of the side of their mouth.
40. Cramp in the legs and several parts of the body.
41. A stiffness and soreness of one side of the neck.
42. A white, soft, sudden puffed up tumour on the neck, behind the ears, in the armpit or in the flank.
43. Being overladen with the disease, as having risings, carbuncles, and many blains [sores or swellings] on the body all at once.
44. A large extended hard tumor under the chin, and swelling downwards upon their throats, fetching a great compass.
45. Continuing cold, shivering, aguish [i.e. suffering from ague, which means malaria or general fever]; and proving difficult to sweat or raise blisters.
46. Bleeding at the nose, 3, 4, 5 or 6 days together, after the beginning of the disease.
47. Almost all that caught this disease with fear died with tokens in two or three days...

[Boghurst continues the list, with more observations and theories, such as that dark men are more prone to the disease, as are pregnant women and good people rather than bad.]

64. Strength of constitution of body was no protection against disease or death, for it made the hottest assault upon strong bodies and determined soonest, for they died sooner than people of weak constitution, and men died sooner than women, and if they had tokens they killed them sooner than they did weak persons and women.

[Boghurst is of the opinion that cordial waters can do no good against this disease, which typically kills within 5 or 6 days, although death can occur as long as 20 days after onset. In his experience, those that died generally had a sudden, quick and easy death. Some survivors were left with symptoms, such as headache, which ‘tormented many worse than the disease itself.’ He feels that those who tried to avoid the disease by shunning contact tended to suffer from it the worst. Old people with many sores nearly always died.

Of the infallible sign of death, none, he writes, were so common as the ‘tokens’ – a term he seems to use for various types of rash or sores on the patient’s skin, but clearly distinct from buboes:]

... for they appeared sometimes two or three days, yea sometimes a week before the patient died, though most lived but 2, 4, 8, 16 or 20 hours with them before they died, but the other signs commonly appeared (most of them) but an hour or two, if so much, before they died.

...The black tokens killed them the speediest of all, commonly in half an hour, always in three or four hours; the small, purple, thick, and red ones they live a whole day with, sometimes many days...

Continual vomiting; this was very common in most that died, if they could not stop it in two days ’twas a bad presage, for it many times held them till they died either vomiting or straining to vomit. The lungs and stomach were affected, and I believe laden with the disease...

Buboes falling of a sudden. These were the white buboes which came more suddenly up and soft. Those which were red, and hard, and long like a wedge, and came forth more by degrees, could not fall on a sudden, but the others in the groin, armpit or neck being white and soft, were filled only with wind or humour or both, and fell flat commonly just before they died...

[He also dwells on other, more unusual symptoms of fatal disease:]

Trembling hands, lips, shaking of the head... were all Ambassadors of the King of Terrors. Trembling of the hands and lips is common in all other diseases, and affects people a little before they die, and is always a sign of life’s catastrophe. So it fell out in the Plague. But the other, viz., a shaking of the head, which was after an extraordinary hideous manner, so that it almost affrighted the standers by; it happened to people that had relapses, and several days before they died...

Swelling of the neck: this troubled people that were thick, short, and fat, and had big thick necks; sometimes the whole neck swelled round about, sometimes but one side, but always very hard and much distended, so that it quickly troubled them in swallowing, and at last in breathing; they breathe with much difficulty as if their breath were strained through some thick cloth or narrow hole. Such seldom have any token when they die...

Blindness and headache. Some are thus surprised on a sudden at first falling sick; perhaps the violent pain in the head causeth the dimness over the eyes. Such seldom live three days, the disease is so acute with them; they are taken with a pulling strong pain between the shoulders, and presently after with a shivering cold, shaking like an ague and vomiting. Cold windy weather usually brings this kind, and they die speedily, viz., in 20 or 24 hours with tokens. Strong people are oft thus taken.

[Boghurst details many of the other symptoms he ascribes to the plague, both mental and physical: for frightful dreams, constant sighing and dejection of spirits are all seen by him to be just as significant as physical manifestations of illness.

Good signs, on the other hand, including vomiting for less than eight hours; being able to lie still in bed instead of tossing restlessly; and particular types of sores:]

Blackish and brown blains that had a pretty full bladder strouting [projecting] like a cherry almost ripe, though they had more fever with these, yet commonly they fared better with them than with the whitish yellow, flat, paltry blains like the smallpox, though authors say the contrary. I saw one man at our pest-house with a blain upon his leg almost as big as a stool ball [cricket ball], as blue as a razor, [razor-shell?] and as full of matter as the skin would hold, and a great fever with it; I bid the nurse open it with a penknife, and gave her a plaster [i.e. thick ointment] to lay to it afterwards.

Some authors write of green tokens, which I never saw, nor I believe themselves neither. Some are of a blackish blue, a sort of little thick ones of a brownish colour and there is another sort which are commonly but little, but red – like drops of fresh blood fixed in the skin, they be of a bright scarlet red....

Many people die within 2, 3, 4 or 5 days of the plague and yet have no tokens, nor yet have no risings or sores, yet die of the plague. They seldom die of the tokens if they live above 8 or 10 days after they are sick.... They come out first upon the inside of the arm, I seldom saw any on the back... Commonly the neck and breast is full of them, the belly hath but few, but the legs and thighs have some, but not so many as the arms. People that were old seldom had any; all other ages were subject to them.

[Boghurst distinguishes these tokens from carbuncles and buboes:]

Of white buboes and their qualities I spoke before, these I mean to speak of here are the red hard risings, which for the most part arise upon the neck, in the groin, under the armpit, and behind the ear.... Those in the groin... are commonly long like a wedge and high like a ridge, of a red colour inclining to blue; sometimes they begin to come forth as soon as the patient falls sick, sometimes not until two or three days after... I have known some a quarter of a year before they would break, some because of their hardness, and some because of their lying so deep in the flesh, and when they are broke they are a long time a running – sometimes 2 months, 10 weeks, or a quarter of a year. But most of them break in a fortnight and have done running in a fortnight more.

[Boghurst moves on to a discussion of remedies, listing some of the preventatives that were tried at the time. He names ‘a few of the maddest’: those that he dismisses as ineffectual include amulets, tobacco, brandy, fumigating of houses, sprinkling herbs, sweet powders and pomanders, crosses, washing the mouth with vinegar, making fires in the streets, killing dogs and cats, shutting up houses, and prohibiting goods and people from infected areas. In fact, he is dismissive of nearly all the preventative measures taken at the time.

Instead, he recommends the avoidance of sin; moderation in drinking; the avoidance of bathing, purging, swimming, and ‘all sudden changes in the actions or passions.’

Especially to be avoided is ‘the wearing and use of all linen that hath been used about the body or bed of sick patients’, all impure air and rotten food, eating too much flesh and ripe fruit. Sleeping in the sun and sudden fear or joy are also seen by him as likely to make people vulnerable to the disease.

If citizens decide to leave the city, he thinks they should go northward. For those who stay in town, he recommends a few rules. People should keep good fires of juniper, ash, oak or other woods, rather than sea coal. The house should be kept clean, and washed with a solution of boiled herbs. Windows should be closed at night and opened by day only when the weather was fair and dry. Various materials, like frankincense and rosin, could be burnt ‘for correcting the air.’

As might be expected of an apothecary, Boghurst then lists and discusses at length the various medicines, herbs and mixtures which he feels can be useful both to prevent and to cure the plague, and gives his recipes for his own plague water, lozenges, plasters and so on. He is scathing about those who sell ‘idle medicines at an extraordinary dear rate’ and who poison their buyers with opium and hellebore.

On suitable food for patients, he recommends light food at first; he suggests a recipe for chicken (or partridge and lark) soup which contains herbs and root vegetables. Oranges and lemons, he says, are good for fever and thirstiness, and possets made with white wine are to be commended. Bleeding and purging of the patient are to be avoided. He advocates making the patient sweat, a standard remedy at the time, and again list ingredients of remedies for particular symptoms such as headache and bleeding.

While the majority of Boghurst’s recommendations seem likely to have been harmless (if not actually efficacious) there is the occasional mention of more brutal remedies: ‘Other medicines you may make according as occasion and circumstances require, also you may cut up a puppy dog alive and apply him warm to the breast.’

He goes on to say which swellings and buboes may be treated or encouraged to break open, for instance with the application of plasters (salves or ointments) made with oil of lilies or linseed oil:]

The most common plaster or mixture which the poor people used all over the town was an egg and wheat flower and turpentine and honey and oil of lilies, which is not to be contemned, but may do well enough, though I never used it, but found something else better and cheaper for the poor people, but shall not say what, though it is no secret. After they [the buboes] are broke, you may dress them twice a day with Melilote plaster, and if they dry up too fast with that, or do not run well enough, you may add some turpentine, and Burgundy pitch, and melt them together and spread it.

[Boghurst then ends his book with some miscellaneous observations about the plague, including these:]

Towards the latter end of the plague, many people that stay, and others that return have little angry pustules and blains rising upon them, especially upon the hands, without being sick at all, but such never dye, nor infect others.

Old people that had the disease, many of them were not sick at all, but they that were sick almost all died. I have one patient four score and six years old.

None died without being sick, though many said that an hour and a half before they died they were not sick, and hardly any died under 20 or 24 hours being ill... The good and bad fared all alike, and if any fared worse I think it was the good.... Strong and young people die sooner in the plague than old and weak. As soon as any house is infected all the sound people should be had out of it, and not shut up therein to be murdered.

When the plague is got into the country sometimes it continues 8 or 10 years stragglng up and down from city to city and town to town.

*

Source:

Boghurst, William. *Loimographia: an account of the Great Plague of London in the year 1665. Now first printed from the British Museum Sloan MS. 349* (The Epidemiological Society of London, 1894)

Images of the full book are available online at the Wellcome Collection:
<https://wellcomecollection.org/works/e4vdp24g>

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George Thomson
Loimotomia; or, the Pest anatomized
London, 1666

Summary and extracts

Some spellings have been modernised. Notes in square brackets [] are the editor's.

George Thomson (1619 – 1677) took medical qualifications after several years spent as a soldier. He became a successful physician in London, where he practised during the plague year, but fiercely attacked the College of Physicians, both for their theories and for the actions of some of them in leaving London during the plague. While he gave his patients chemical remedies, he also believed that the functions of the human body were directed by a spiritual entity, known as the Archeus. He is notable for having recorded details of his dissection of a plague victim, included in the extracts below.

*

I have been above this twenty years solicitous and sedulous to find out the genuine causes and cures of all diseases malignant, but especially the Pest; [i.e. plague] for which end I visited all sorts of people, the poor as well as the rich, administering to them medicines of my own preparation; observing from one, what might be useful to another; yea, I was so eager in the pursuit of therapeutical truth, that I was restless till I had the full view of the inward parts of a pestilential body...

[Thomson first considers the cause of the Pest or plague, which he considers to be 'a venomous gas or wild spirit, produced either inwardly from some degenerate matter conceived within the body, or outwardly received from some fracedinous noisome exhalations contained in the pores of the air...' This section of his book is speculation rather than observation.

When he moves on to discuss the effect of the plague upon the body, it is in somewhat flowery but rather imprecise terms:]

In the bed-chamber of this noble membrane, the stomach, doth this usurping disease take its lodging, darting Basilisk-like, his virulent beams into all parts circumjacent in a heteroclit [i.e. abnormal] and anomolous manner, sometimes causing a stupor, and lethargical drowsiness, like opium, sometimes a frenzy or fury, like hemlock, or *nuces infanae*; at one time a numbness, or paralytical disposition, like the fish torpedo. At another time inquietude or incessant motion, like the poison of a tarantula...

[On the early signs of the plague, he is more specific, citing as symptoms:]

...a loathing, vomiting, a vertigo, a great pain of the head, a notable redness in the veins of the conjunctive tunicle [i.e. membrane covering the eye], difficult or irregular respiration, a great asperity of the tongue, extreme thirst.... a delirium or

raving, a faintness, palpitation of the heart... eruption of blains, vesicles, spots, botches, carbuncles, an obscure or manifest fever, sometimes violent, sometimes gentle...

[He then moves on to the central part of his book, which describes ‘The Dissection of a Pestilential Body’:]

In the year 1665, a most rueful lamentable time as ever London suffered in this kind, when the sickness swept away many thousands in a week in the month of August, I visited a lusty proper man, by name Mr. Wil: Pick, living in Petticoat Lane, grievously wounded with one of those poisonous arrows that flew thick about poor mortals: so that his condition seemed to be almost desperate, and finding no relief at all from those frivolous and vain preparations a Galenist [i.e. a doctor following the principles set down by the ancient Roman physician Galen] had exhibited to him *usque ad nauseam*: was in some short space preserved by chemical remedies: the poison being therewith excluded, and the Archeus of the stomach redeemed from captivity.

At the same time there lay a servant of Mr. Picks, a youth about 15 years of age, labouring under most horrid symptoms, raving as it were extimulated by some fury; which tragical interlude was quickly terminated by a mortal catastrophe.

Upon this, I took occasion to request my then recovering patient his master, to grant me liberty to open this defunct body, for my own instruction, and the satisfaction of all inquisitive persons...

[On viewing the body, Thomson writes –]

I could not but admire, to behold a skin so beset with spots black and blue, more remarkable for multitude and magnitude than any that I have yet seen; some of which being opened, contained a congealed matter, in one more shallow, and in another more deep... perforating the membrane that involved all the rest, I made entrance into the lowest venter or regions, where appeared a virulent ichor, or thin liquor variously coloured, as yellow, greenish, etc., the small guts being much distended with a venomous flatus, did contain a great quantity of a foul scoria or dross...

... the parenchyma of the liver being separated was very pallid, and did straight weep and send out a thin yellowish excrement. The spleen dissected, appeared more than ordinary obscure, a livid ichorous matter following the incision; the kidneys laid open abounded with a citrine water, but altogether exsanguine, as likewise the other viscera; at length I came to that most excellent useful part, the stomach, whose tender membranes when I had divided, a black matter like ink did show itself, to the quantity (as nigh as I could guess) of a wine pint...

[The lungs he found to be ‘stigmatized with several large ill favoured marks much tumified and distended’. He found no blood there but ‘a dirty coagulation’. On cutting into the aorta he expected to find blood, but ‘no such thing succeeded, for only some very few spoonfuls of a thin liquor of a pale hue came forth, which might easily be licked up by a small handkerchief.’

In the right cavity of the heart he found ‘a white congealed matter’; he comments that this ‘may perhaps puzzle a good physiologist.’ He continues:]

For in all those cadavers I ever saw dissected, this hollow receptacle did still contain a blackish blood condensed... now the most probable cause (as I conceive, with submission) of this unwonted white substance, may come from a sumption of near crude milk, which an indiscreet nurse had given this youth not long before he died, part of which passing out of the stomach little altered, might be conveyed... into the subclavian vessels, and there entering the right cavity of the heart... I may truly say not one spoonful of that ruddy liquor properly called blood could be obtained in this pestilential body, being partly congealed, and partly colliquated into a Tabum or filthy matter...

... Having finished the dissection of this loathsome body, I presently found some little sensible alteration tending to a stiffness and numbness in my hand, which had been soaking and dabbling in the bowels and entrails then warm, though it was ten or twelve hours after the youth expired; whereupon having cleaned away that foulness it was besmeared with, I held it for some time over a dish of burning brimstone, and so received the gas thereof, but in vain...

... for those sly, insinuating, venomous atoms, excited by the heat of my body, opening the pores of my skin, had quickly free ingress... and now do I carry about me the very Pest, closely spreading like a gangrene, diffusing its malignity into all my members...

[Despite his conviction that he is now himself infected with the plague, the doctor continues to visit his patients:]

I walked up and down from patient to patient... I ate, I drank, and slept well till about two of the clock the next morning being Saturday, at which hour I waked to sleep for ever, had not Divine goodness given me an antidote to rouse and raise me up.

[Thomson took a triple dose of a trusted remedy, whose contents are not divulged. He then suffered from a headache, and developed small spots on his chest and arms; and on his right arm found...]

...a very large spot of an obscure colour, of the bigness of a single half-penny, which I often took a view of. Well, after some hours tedious inquietude, and despondency of spirit, with much reluctancy, and many an agony, a gentle mador [i.e. moisture, sweat] at last bedewed my skin, with which I was somewhat relieved...

[After taking other medicines and sweating liberally, he asked a Doctor Starkey, a friend, to visit him. The doctor 'solaced my drooping spirits'; but the following night Dr. Starkey himself 'was forced to yield himself prisoner to that insolent conqueror, which did then make spoil of many thousands; and so I was left destitute of two of my dearest friends' – the other being a Dr Dey, who was also at that time suffering from the plague.

Thomson then resorts to taking a quintuple dose of his own remedy, along with 'the best wine, and strong beer sweetened with a little sugar'...]

...I likewise hung about my neck a large toad dried, prepared not long before in as exquisite a manner as possibly I could, with my own fingers. This toad sewed up in

a linen cloth was placed about the region of my stomach, where after it had remained some hours, became so tumefied, distended, (as it were blown up) to that bigness, that it was an object of wonder to those that beheld it. Had I not felt and seen the swollen dead body of the toad, I should very much have doubted by relation the truth thereof...

[He quotes from Paracelsus]... who tells us that a dried toad macerated and softened in rose water for six hours together, doth draw the pestilential poison so into its body, that five or six Bufos [toads] laid on one after another upon a botch, will all be wonderfully tumefied.... [though Van Helmost argues that] where the vital Archeus is wanting, there can be no swelling from any poison...

... When I contemplate the foresaid words of this great philosopher, a man of that transcendent reason, and that clear bright understanding, I am not a little puzzled to find out the efficient and material cause of the vast tumefaction of the Bufo incumbent on my breast. That simple water of itself will not puff up a dried Bufo to that bulk ready to burst, is plain....

[After a long and complex discussion of the cause of the efficacy of dead toads, Thomson reflects:]

Well, be the cause never so abstruse, I am sufficiently persuaded, that the adjunction of this Bufo nigh my stomach, was of wonderful force to master and tame this venom then domineering in me, and thereby subjugate it to the dictates of the vital spirit.

[Discovering a bubo on his backside, Thomson asked a young man to apply leeches to the swelling to remove the 'virulent moisture'. Relieved by their action, and fortified by 'good spirituous liquors', he lay in bed sweating for a further six days, and then got up and walked about. However, he then suffered a relapse from 'going abroad too soon, out of a zeal to visit my patients.' He took more remedies, and spent a further four days in bed, before feeling himself to be fully well again.

However, he deeply regretted the death of his two colleagues:]

At the very time, whilst I did undergo a sad brunt, many a trepidation of the heart, and conflict of spirit, two of my most esteemed comforts, Dr. Joseph Dey, and Dr. George Starkey, two pillars of chemical physic, were both reposed in their graves, before I knew of their deaths, concealed on purpose from me, lest upon the apprehension of so great a loss, my calamity should be aggravated, and I swallowed up in the gulf of despair.

[He writes of Dr. Starkey that he:]

...was then infected when he came to me, having his imagination dislocated; yielded himself prisoner to this cruel enemy that very night, being wounded in his groin, a bubo appearing there, which I conceive, if rightly ordered, might have been a means to have saved him, had he not poured in an unreasonable quantity of small beer. At which understanding what he had done, he told those then present, that all the medicines that he had in possession were of no force to do him any good...

[Thomson eulogises both doctors, and is at pains to point out that, contrary to rumour, they were not present when he dissected the youth's body, but that he did it alone:]

Wherefore I thought good to lay hold alone, of that seasonable sudden occasion then presented of prying into this dead body, which I often fought for, but was still frustrated in obtaining so useful a discovery, through the peevishness and crossness of some, and fond foolish fears of others...

[He then makes more detailed remarks about the conclusions he has drawn from the dissection and from his wider experiences:]

Observation 1.

In the first place I observe that the punctilio's, pulicar [i.e. flea-bite] like spots, do always signify a stop more or less put to the circulation of the blood, some coagulation or grumosity [i.e. state of being full of clots or lumps] therein caused, through a malignity, and Gorgonian venom, that depredates, sacks and confounds the vital spirits...

Observation 2.

Whensoever these cutaneous spots appear, they always signify an endeavour in the Archeus to extrude that which is noxious...

Observation 3.

When the natural ferment of the stomach in the pest is so far lost, that instead of white, a black juice is engendered, it is a certain sign of the abolition of the vital spirit, and consequently of approaching death. For I never knew any afflicted in this kind, whole strength failed, that vomited an excrement tinged black, did escape...

Observation 4.

That which did first occur most remarkable to my eye in this dissection, was the great alteration that I found made principally in the stomach, in respect of the part continent and that which was contained therein; in the continent, certain vibices [i.e. weals], stigms, strokes, of an obscure colour imprinted, (the inward coat being stained with colours different from the natural) and a fluid matter contained fuliginous [i.e. sooty], pitch like, did sufficiently indicate to me, that there the pestilential poison did take up its chief residence.

Observation 5.

When I contemplate what a pure white substance was taken into this youth's stomach not long before he died, how strangely it was transmuted into another hue, as black almost as ink, I cannot but smile to think on the vain conceits of the Galenists, that tell us of *atra bilis*...

Observation 6.

What a sovereignty and influence the stomach hath over the whole body may be proved by multitude of instances and examples that I could produce, but this was eminently conspicuous, that when anything was taken in that disturbed the innate

Archeus, and required some difficulty to digest, many horrid symptoms did straight break forth, as vertigo, cephalalgie [headache], delirium, frenzy, inquietude, dyspnoea [laboured breathing], sopor [sleepiness, stupor], defection of the spirits, a cohibition of sweat, and other cutaneous excretions, etc. This was plainly apparent in this stripling [because an indiscreet nurse gave him a dose of milk. Instead of milk, Thomson recommends:]

...good wine, and strong beer or ale well brewed; as for flesh, broths, jellies, water-gruel, ptisans [tisanes or teas], barley-water, and such like dull vapid things, etc, they are all to be abandoned and excluded from entering [the body].

Observation 7.

In all parts I took notice of ... a great coagulation, and some small colliquation of juices, except in the stomach, where this negro liquid did float without any concretion or coaction...

Observation 8.

That whereas there is a power inherent in the veins and arteries to preserve the blood from congelation even when the body is dead, so great is the concretive force of the pestilential poison, that the blood is suddenly put to a stop, and becomes grumified, turning into glots [clots] in a living body...

Observation 9.

That a kind of glandulous substance like a lambs stone should be found in the right ventricle of the heart, instead of an obscure clot of blood, doth shew how solicitous Nature (though violently hurried away by a contrary Idea) is to save itself from destruction...

Observation 10.

It being granted, that blood doth make blood, as I can demonstrate, that it is in being before the conformation of the liver... How cautious should we be to exhaust and spend prodigally this treasure of life, as the Galenists [i.e. bleeding patients is detrimental].

Observation 11.

Any artificial evacuation of blood (except that which is performed by immediate derivation, being degenerate) in the Pest, spotted fever, Small Pox, Measles, or any malignant disease whatsoever... is absolutely pernicious, and brings certain perdition, or at least great calamity...

[And so on. Thomson continues to argue his medical views on blood-letting and other subjects at great length. Amongst his further observations, he notes that the body he dissected remained extraordinarily warm twelve hours after death; and he asserts that:]

...For any one to assert that the Pest is not contagious or catching, argues either sottish, stupid ignorance, or a perverse obstinate contradiction of truth...

[Nevertheless, he asserts that a man's frame of mind makes his body more or less liable to contagion:]

If the phantasie [imagination] of man and the Archeus be magnanimous, stout, free from any Idea, vain conceit of fear and terror, having a strong and valiant persuasion that neither can suffer injury in this kind: then the contagious effluvioms cannot take place in such a body...

I am confident many thousands in this City have had a light Infection, which passed away *per Diapaeam*, a transpiration of the whole body, without the least cognizance of it. For my own part, I can avouch by several signs, being very curious and exact in the consideration of my own state, that I often received the scent or tincture of the Pest, but quickly washed it off by some balsamical odour, causing a profluence of a kindly sweat....

[Next Thomson gives advice on how to preserve oneself against the Pest or plague:]

Of all Diseases, there is none that finishes its course with more expedition than the Pest, nor any insinuates more slyly, treads more softly, flatters more subtly, and kills more treacherously; the more cautious therefore ought we to be how we give any harbour to it...

...He that desires to live comfortably, prolong his days, and defend himself from the Pest, and other grievous infirmities incident to mankind, next to powerful medicines, let him embrace temperance in his diet, yet let him rather drink more, so it be spiritous, than eat; let him rather exceed in sleeping than watching, in motion rather than a sedentary course of life... but above all, let him endeavour after ... magnanimity, brave resolution, and an undaunted firmness of mind to resist any vain conceits of infection. Let the Air... be purified, and ventilated from those diversity of effluvioms, and noxious exhalations that conspurcate its *Magnale*, and fill up the pores thereof with foul corrupt hoary Atoms that annoy the Archeus...

[Thomson then recommends the burning of sulphur, brimstone, and other materials, whilst castigating the uselessness of Galenist doctors – ‘a company of Drones that can do little but make a humming noise to please the ear.’ Opium, oil of amber and mercury are other remedies that he recommends, as well as ‘the Viper rightly prepared, discreetly managed and applied’. He continues:]

Some things outwardly applied and worn are much commended, as the emerald and sapphire and other precious stones, which often drawn in a circle about a bubo or carbuncle placed directly against the sun-beams or light, as (Helmont advises) do magnetically extract the virulence and malignity in the body...

[The use of amulets, and spices, however, is to be deplored. ‘As if Spices were not liable to be infected!’ Thomson also discusses in detail the various methods in which dried toads have been prepared and used. He is convinced of their efficacy, attributing it to the fact that the toad is a timorous creature:]

...when it dies, the whole body is seasoned and distained with such an idea of fear, that even the cadaver retains the impression thereof after death... that venomous idea of hatred and terror in the Bufo [toad], annihilates the image of the pestilent poison in the Archeus...

[Thomson ends his book with a tirade against his detractors:]

Certain scurrilous, lying Pamphlets have been vented abroad against me, under disguised Names, which some subtle sly wits made use of to shelter themselves, being conscious, that if they should come to a chemical trial, they would be found most dross... They whisper behind my back, that I am no Scholar... Let me tell these men, that are little else but smooth orators, *Polyglossi*, multiloquous doctors, that if they were but truly *Chirurgi*, [surgeons], operators with their own hands, they would have attained ere this a far greater excellency in that art, in which I am sure they are extremely deficient...

[The considerable length of his concluding tirade illustrates the disagreements, distrust and conflicts that existed between the different branches of medical men at this time.]

Source

George Thomson. *Λοιμοτομία; or, the Pest anatomized ... Together with the authors apology against the calumnies of the Galenists...* London, 1666.

The whole of Thomson's book can be viewed at the British Library website at <https://www.bl.uk/>

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Nathaniel Hodges
Loimologia; or, an historical account of the plague in London in 1665 ...
(London, 1720: translated into English for the first time, and edited by John Quincy)

Extracts

Spelling has been modernised. Notes in square brackets [] are the editor's.

Nathaniel Hodges (1629–1688) was a physician who remained in London during the plague. A strong believer in chemical remedies, he also advocated the isolation of the sick. He wrote his account of the plague in 1672, in Latin: it was not translated into English until 1720.

*

Of the Rise and Progress of the late Plague.

The Plague which we are now to give an Account of, discovered the beginnings of its future cruelties, about the close of the Year 1664; for at that season two or three persons died suddenly in one Family at Westminster, attended with like symptoms, that manifestly declared their origin: Hereupon some timorous neighbours, under apprehensions of a contagion, removed into the City of London, who unfortunately carried along with them the pestilential tint; whereby that disease, which was before in its infancy, in a family or two, suddenly got strength, and spread abroad its fatal poisons...

...Every one predicted its future devastations, and they terrified each other with Remembrances of a former Pestilence; for it was a received notion amongst the common people, that the Plague visited England once in twenty years; as if after a certain interval, by some inevitable necessity, it must return again... And these frightful apprehensions were not a little increased by the predictions of astrologers, from the conjunctions of Stars, and the appearances of Comets...

But to pass by things of less moment, it is to be taken notice, that a very hard frost set in on December, which continued three months, and seemed greatly to deaden the contagion, and very few died during that season; although even then it was not extinguished, for in the middle of Christmas Holy-days, I was called to a young man in a fever, who after two days course of alexiterial medicines, had two risings about the bigness of a nutmeg broke out, one on each thigh; upon examination of which, I soon discovered the malignity, both from their black hue, and the circle round them, and pronounced it to be the Plague...

[Hodges describes how the authorities ordered the shutting up of infected houses for forty days, and the marking of doors with a red cross; but he notes that these measures had little effect, for the plague increased.]

And this seclusion was on this account much the more intolerable, that if a fresh person was seized in the same house but a day before another had finished the quarantine, it was to be performed over again; which occasion'd such tedious confinements of sick and well together, that sometimes caused the loss of the whole.

But what greatly contributed to the loss of people thus shut up, was the wicked practices of Nurses (for they are not to be mention'd but in the most bitter terms): These wretches, out of greediness to plunder the dead, would strangle their patients, and charge it to the distemper in their throats; others would secretly convey the pestilential taint from sores of the infected to those who were well; and nothing indeed deterred these abandoned miscreants from prosecuting their avaricious purposes by all the methods their wickedness could invent...

Moreover, this shutting up infected houses, made the neighbours fly from theirs, who otherwise might have been a help to them on many accounts; and I verily believe that many who were lost might have now been alive, had not the tragical mark upon their door drove proper assistances from them...

I am not ignorant of what moment it is, to shut up the houses of all those who are infected, according to custom; for by this means a contagion may at first be stifled, which otherwise would go beyond any remedy; and with equal advantage might gun-powder be fired, if too much time is not wasted in deliberation, before these things are put into practice...

But to return: The infection had long doubtfully reign'd, and continued through May and June, with more or less severity; sometimes raging in one part, and then in another, as in a running sort of fight; as often as the number of funerals decreased, great hopes were conceived of its disappearance; then on a sudden again their increase threw all into dejection...

[Hodges describes how people fled, yet the contagion continued to rage, until the magistrates took action:]

...First then therefore were appointed a monthly fast for public prayers, to deprecate the anger of Heaven; nor proved it in vain, or were their supplications altogether fruitless; for... the whole Summer was refreshed with moderate breezes, sufficient to prevent the air's stagnation and corruption, and to carry off the pestilential steams...

His Majesty... by his Royal Authority commanded the College of Physicians of London, jointly to write somewhat in English that might be a general Directory in this calamitous Exigence.. this province was cheerfully undertaken, and all possible caution was used ... but all our care and pains were eluded, for the disease, like the Hydra's heads, was no sooner extinguished in one family, but it broke out in many more with aggravations...

After then all endeavours to restrain the contagion proved of no effect, we applied our selves altogether to the care of the diseased; and in the prosecution of which, it may be affirmed without boasting, no hazards to our selves were avoided:

But it is incredible to think how the Plague raged amongst the common people, insomuch that it came by some to be called the Poor's Plague...

In the months of August and September, the contagion chang'd its former slow and languid pace, and having as it were got master of all, made a most terrible slaughter, so that three, four, or five thousand died in a week, and once eight thousand; who can express the calamities of such times? The whole British Nation wept for the miseries of her Metropolis. In some houses carcasses lay waiting for burial, and in others, persons in their last agonies; in one room might be heard dying groans, in another the ravings of a delirium, and not far off relations and friends bewailing both their loss, and the dismal prospect of their own sudden departure: Death was the sure midwife to all children, and infants passed immediately from the womb to the grave...

...Some of the infected run about staggering like drunken men, and fall and expire in the streets; while others lie half-dead and comatose, but never to be waked but by the last trumpet, some lie vomiting as if they had drunk poison; and others fall dead in the Market, while they are buying necessaries for the support of life.

...Many in their old age, others in their prime, sunk under [the plague's] cruelties; of the female sex most died; and hardly any children escaped; and it was not uncommon to see an inheritance pass successively to three or four heirs in as many days; the number of sextons were not sufficient to bury the dead; the bells seemed hoarse with continual tolling, until at last they quite ceased; the burying places would not hold the dead, but they were thrown into large pits dug in waste grounds, in heaps, thirty or forty together; and it often happened that those who attended the funerals of their friends one evening, were carried the next to their own long home....

About the beginning of September, the disease was at the height... more than twelve thousand died in a week: But at length, that nothing might go untried to divert the contagion, it was ordered by the governors who were left to superintend those calamitous affairs, (for the Court was then removed to Oxford) to burn fires in the streets for three days together; yet while this was in debate, the physicians concerned were diffident of the success, as the air in it self was un-infected... notwithstanding which, the fires were kindled in all the Streets. But alas! the controversy was soon decided; for before the three days were quite expired, the heavens both mourned so many funerals, and wept for the fatal mistake, so as to extinguish even the fires with their showers... whether it was from the suffocating qualities of the fuel, or the wet constitution of air that immediately followed, the most fatal night ensued, wherein more than four thousand expired. May Posterity by this mistake be warned, and not, like Empyricks, [charlatans] apply a remedy where they are ignorant of the cause.

The reader is by the way to be advertised, that this year was luxuriant in most fruits, especially cherries and grapes, which were at so low a price, that the common people surfeited with them; for this might very much contribute to that disposition of body as made the pestilential taint more easily take place.

[Hodges then mentions the charity of the rich and the care of the magistrates in assisting the poor. But he castigates the injuries done by ‘chemists and quacks’:]

...of whose audacity and ignorance it is impossible to be altogether silent; they were indefatigable in spreading their antidotes; and although equal strangers to all learning as well as physic, they thrust into every hand some trash or other under the disguise of a pompous title. No country sure ever abounded with such wicked Impostors; for all events contradicted their pretensions, and hardly a person escaped that trusted to their delusions: Their medicines were more fatal than the plague, and added to the numbers of the dead....

[He mentions an antidote brought over from France by order of the government; which, however, ‘threw the patients into their last sleep.’]

To this may be added, that many common medicines were publicly sold, which by their extraordinary heat and disposition to inflame the blood, could never be fit for every age, sex, and constitution indifferently, and therefore in many cases must undoubtedly do harm. ...

... the fine texture of a human body is not to be managed by as clumsy hands as the materials of a house; in the former, if a person makes a mistake, it is with great difficulty repaired; and therefore upon a serious consideration of the whole affair, I cannot make any doubt, but that it is much better even to want [i.e. lack] physicians in such calamities, than to have the sick under the care and management of the unlearned...

Nor in this account are we to neglect, that the contagion spread its cruelties into the neighbouring countries [i.e. countryside or counties]; for the citizens, which crowded in multitudes into the adjacent towns, carried the infection along with them, where it raged with equal fury; so that the Plague, which at first crept from one street to another, now reigned over whole counties, leaving hardly any place free from its insults; and the towns upon the Thames were more severely handled, not perhaps from a great moisture in the air from thence, but from the tainted goods rather that were carried upon it: Moreover, some cities and towns, of the most advantageous situation for a wholesome air, did notwithstanding feel the common ruin. Such was the rise, and such the progress, of this cruel Destroyer, which first began at London.

But the worst part of the year being now over, and the height of the disease, the Plague by leisurely degrees declined.... that dread which had been upon the minds of the people wore off...

The Pestilence did not however stop for want of subjects to act upon, (as then commonly rumoured) but from the nature of the distemper, its decrease was like its beginning, moderate; nor is it less to be wondered at, that as at the rise of the contagion all other distempers went into that, so now at its declension that degenerated into others, as Inflammations, Head-aches, Quinsies, Dysenteries, Small-Pox, Measles, Fevers, and Hectics...

...on the beginning of November, people grew more healthful, and such a different face was put upon the public, that although the funerals were yet frequent, yet many who had made most haste in retiring, made the most to return, and came into the City without fear; insomuch that in December they crowded back as thick as they fled: The houses which before were full of the dead, were now again inhabited by the living; and the shops which had been most part of the year shut up, were again opened, and the people again cheerfully went about their wonted affairs of trade and employ; and even what is almost beyond belief, those citizens, who before were afraid even of their friends and relations, would without fear venture into the houses and rooms where infected persons had but a little before breathed their last... many went into the beds where persons had died before they were even cold, or cleansed from the stench of the diseased...

But the next Spring indeed appeared some remains of the contagion, which was easily conquered by the Physicians.... the City returned to a perfect Health; not unlike what happened also after the last conflagration, when a new City suddenly arose out of the ashes of the old, much better able to stand the like flames another time.

Source

Nathaniel Hodges *Loimologia: or an historical account of the Plague in London in 1665: with precautionary directions against the like contagion ...* Edited by John Quincy. Published by E. Bell and J. Osborn, London 1720.

Images of the whole book can be viewed online at the Wellcome Library:
<https://wellcomelibrary.org/item/b30513716>

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William Simpson
Zenexton ante-pestilentialia: or, a short discourse of the Plague: its antidotes and
cure, according to the Placets of ... Hippocrates, Paracelsus, and Helmont.
1665

Extracts

Spelling has been modernised and the language slightly simplified.

William Simpson was a chemical physician known to have been active in London between 1665 (when he wrote this book) and 1677.

*

The Plague is a certain virulous and contagious ferment conceived from within or without the body, seizing upon the vital spirit of life, with a kind of fear and terror, and boils in the blood; and in its fermenting, impresses its malignity upon all the principal parts and humours of the body, and sends forth buboes, sores, etc...

... though the pest has a real existence in itself, for instance, lying dormant in rags, clothes, flax, walls, etc, it lies dormant in its ashes unless mixed with our human body, and then it becomes an actual pestiferous entity... it outlives the life and skips into another body to act the same scene over again, in as tyrannical a manner as ever.

... I say, those who are most afraid are soonest infected. Fear and terror may work upon the digestion and cause putridness, which then works upon the blood and spirits, spreading Miasma, whereby the vital flame burns dimly and at length becomes quite extinct.

... The pestilent odour may lurk in old rags, garments, paper, sweepings of houses, stone-walls, or any other body whose texture renders it capable of retaining those contagious effluvias which rebound from infected persons. Those bodies which will not admit the pestilent odour include gold, silver, sulphur, pearls and amber. A Spanish surgeon used as his only Zenexton or preservative, for three years as master of the pest-house, a piece of red amber which he used to rub upon both temples, wrists, ankles and left breast, by which he was preserved.

Now the Plague surprises the Archeus or spirit with an idea of fear in two ways: both external fear, from hearing of such a tyrannous disease stirring abroad, and those who are most startled by the news, are the soonest apprehended thereby; for ideas of fear and terror are not mere empty nothings, nor are idle, but cause putrid excrements of the body more in some persons than others. The spirit may also be surprised by an internal fear, a venomous and pestilential entity, which may result in a common disease or a virulent ferment, which hastens the terror of terrors, death.

Not only in the Plague but in all the fatal fevers, the letting of blood is most dangerous; for it takes away not only the only weapon Nature has to contend with, but also the spirit.

... If this pestilent ferment is putrifying the blood, then the spread of gangrene may be stopped by use of a magnet, which may attract the poison from it.

In the Plague, the boiling of venomous leaven in the blood causes the direful symptoms of the disease.

The remedy or Zenextron for the plague is, firstly, to do that which pleases the Lord. Secondly, be of a cheerful, serene and free spirit, for this keeps out foreign ideas which hasten the infection. Thirdly, drink wine moderately, to make the heart merry and enliven the spirits. The fourth things ought to be of a balsamic and preservative nature: I prepare a purified mineral salt, which is mixed with an animal salt, which has been shown to be most efficacious in various illnesses. Fifthly, an amulet hung around the breast will keep off the infectious odours. Precious stones may attract forth the virulency from an infected body: for instance, a sapphire held for a quarter of an hour upon the painful part will within one hour turn black if the plague is present, but if it does not turn black, the person is free from the disease.

In a Pest [i.e. Plague] the shooting off of guns often is useful against the infectious miasma in the hours; also the burning of sulphur in houses, and the fuming of wine by burning sulphur within the bottle.

*

Source

William Simpson, M.D. *Zenextron ante-pestilentiale: or, a short discourse of the Plague: its antidotes and cure, according to the Placets of ... Hippocrates, Paracelsus, and Helmont.* G. Sawbridge, London, 1665.

The whole book can be viewed online at the British Library website:

<https://www.bl.uk/>

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T. Garencières
A mite cast into the treasury of the famous City of London;
being a brief and methodical discourse of the natures, causes, symptoms and
remedies and preservation from the plague in the calamitous year, 1665
Digested into aphorismes by Theophilus Garencières, Doctor in Physic
London, 1666.

Extracts

Spelling has been modernised. Notes in square brackets [] are the editor's.

Theophilus Garencières (1610–c. 1680) was a physician born in Paris who came to England as a young man. It is not clear whether he was a practising physician in London during the plague.

*

Aphorism I.

The Plague is an acute, contagious, epidemical and poisonous fever, accompanied with either a botch [swelling], a carbuncle, or red-spots, like flea bites, vulgarly called the Tokens.

VIII

The Plague is one of the easiest diseases in the world to be cured, if it be taken within four hours, or six at the most, after the first invasion; otherwise, and for the most part, mortal. This is the chief, and principal cause of so many men's loss. If people would observe this rule, I would undertake by the grace of the Almighty, and without bragging (I believe most men that know me, will believe me) to cure nineteen of twenty; and therefore I say, that people perish not so much by the difficulty of the cure, as because God Almighty hath taken away their judgement, that they should not see, nor believe the means he hath appointed for them...

IX.

The causes why so few escape are these. The scarcity of able physicians willing to attend the disease, the inefficacy of common remedies, the want of accommodation, as clothes, fire, room. diet, attendants, the wilfulness of the patient, his poverty, his neglecting the first invasion, and his trifling away the time until it be too late; a vapouring chemist with his drops, , an ignorant apothecary with his blistering plasters, a wilful surgeon with his untimely lancing, an impudent mountebank, an intruding gossip, and a careless nurse.

XII

Let nobody think that the causes of the plague proceed from any intempery in the elementary qualities of human bodies, or from any ordinary putrefaction: it is either the immediate will of God, who sendeth us that scourge for the punishment of our sins, as appeareth in the Holy Scripture, by the Egyptians and the Jews; or from a peculiar and mediate disposition, and configuration of the stars and planets.

[As well as the position of the stars and planets, the author goes on to blame the weather and the condition of the air for the onset of plague. He believes it is drawn into the lungs, where it ferments, and comes out in the form of spots and botches, or swellings.]

XXI

As it cannot be denied that there is such a thing as contagion... so must we be very cautious in not attributing all the causes of the plague to it...

XXIII

If the plague were only imparted by contagion, how should he have it who is the first person invaded? Why should so many people, that have spared neither pains nor cost to avoid it, nevertheless meet with that enemy, when they think him the furthest off? and why should three be visited in a house [i.e. visited with the plague], though (praise be to God) they escaped death, and four spared, as did happen to me?

[The author then points to the previous cold winter as a cause of the epidemic, and also considers the significance of a comet as a possible cause, before disparaging the 'vanity of chemists' and their 'bragging of their fixed medicines, as Mercury, Antimony, etc.' He advises those who develop symptoms to light fires and put themselves in a warm bed to sweat for three or four hours, before drinking beer or claret-wine. He must sweat twice a day for four or five days.

He next warns against placing any faith in the wearing of amulets, 'which are little bags full either of mercury, or arsenic, antimony, or toad's powder, and such other things, which are to be worn about the heart'. He considers that the young are more likely to fall victim than the old; and then reiterates that the cure is easy, cheap and quick:]

LII

But because in reprehending others we ourselves should not be found faulty, and thought in this public calamity to seek our own interest, by concealing what our Antidote is, we do ingenuously and publicly declare, that it is nothing else but the Treacle of Andromachus, vulgarly called Venice-Treacle, [see note below] so much celebrated by Galen, to which we have added a little of the tincture of saffron, for their sakes chiefly that have contracted the Plague by a fright, and whom we have always found the hardest to be cured, because of the sudden and deep impression it maketh upon the vitals.

LIII

This noble remedy called Venice-Treacle, if taken in time, is the only Antidote against all plagues, poisons, bitings and stingings of venomous beasts, a present help to the falling-sickness, and apoplethical fits, to the palsy, tissick [i.e. dry cough], spitting of blood, jaundice, dropsy, colic, all kinds of melancholy, gout, madness, etc...

LIV

Our Cordial or miraculous water is thus made. Take of Venice-Treacle one pound, of the roots of cypress, tormentil, enula campana, Dictamnium one ounce, of Angelica and Carduus benedictus, leaves of each one handful, of the four cordial-flowers, of each a quarter of an ounce, of saffron a quarter of an ounce. Cut the roots

and leaves small and dissolve your treacle in a pint of rose-water, then add to all that four quarts and a pint of the best and strongest claret wine you can get; steep all in a vessel close stopped the whole night...

[The author goes on to discuss buboes and carbuncles, recommending for buboes poultices made with the roots of comfrey, lilies and onions; and for carbuncles, fomentations containing various plants, figs, eggs and butter.

Finally he gives a recipe for a preservative against catching the plague: this contains sage, rue, angelica and *carduus benedictus* [a type of thistle] boiled in claret, with ginger, nutmeg, Venice-treacle and saffron.]

Note:

Venice-treacle was widely used in treatment of the plague. ‘Treacle’ at the time meant simply a medicinal compound, and Venice-Treacle was a well-known panacea dating from classical times. The Roman physician Galen described a formula for it which began with a gallon of ammonia salts to which were added four vipers cut in small pieces. Nine herbs, five fresh squills (a type of small lily) and wine were mixed in and the pot was heated. After cooling, the roasted contents were pounded into powder, which was then mixed with 55 herbs, pepper and poppy juice, copper, bitumen, honey and a few other ingredients. The treacle was supposed to mature for twelve years before use.

There is a full description of the history of this remedy, and its use during the plague, at the British Journal of Clinical Pharmacology website:

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1884566/>

Source

Theophilus Garencières *A mite cast into the treasury of the famous City of London; being a brief and methodical discourse of the natures, causes, symptoms and remedies and preservation from the plague in the calamitous year, 1665, Digested into aphorismes by Theophilus Garencières, Doctor in Physic.*

T. Ratcliffe, London, 1666.

The whole book can be viewed online via the British Library website:

<https://www.bl.uk/>

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The Plague's approved Physitian. Shewing the naturall causes of the infection of the ayre, and of the Plague. Also many medicines for the cure thereof, etc.

London, 1665

Summary and Extracts

Spelling has been modernised. Notes in square brackets [] are the editor's.

This manual by an anonymous author was one of many such publications offering advice, which were sold in large numbers during the plague.

*

Of all the diseases where unto the body of a man is subject, the Plague or Pestilence is the most terrible and fearful, and most contagious; therefore we must seek all means, both natural and artificial, to preserve our selves and families from it.

Therefore first will we speak of the natural causes of the Pestilence.

The first is, an infected, corrupted and putrified air.

The second is, evil and corrupt humours engendered in the body.

The air is corrupted and infected diverse ways as astronomers say, by the influences, aspects, conjunctions and oppositions of ill planets, the eclipse of the sun and the moon, through the immoderate heat of the air ... and moisture, which is the worst temperament of the air... Also the air is often corrupted by the evaporation of dead creatures lying unburied, as often chanceth in the wars, also by the evaporation of pools, fens, marshes, stinking and noisome sinks and kennels.

A man falleth into the pestilence by disordering of himself, either in diet, or with other exercises.

Therefore, during the time of this contagious sickness, he must have a special regard, to keep himself from all outrages, and surfeits (to wit) from all excess of meat [i.e. food], drink, sweating, baths, lechery, and all other things that open the pores of the body, and cause the bad airs to enter...

There cannot be a more safe and present remedy to preserve one, than by flying from the corrupt air... We must draw in such air, unless we get us away into some other place where the air is not corrupted nor infected, but pure and good, neither must you return home again from that place oversoon.

But if upon urgent occasion of business you may not fly; then have a special care that the house in which you must tarry, be kept clean and sweet, without all kind of stink, filthiness, or sluttishness, let the windows be kept close, and shut especially in cloudy and rainy weather, that the pestilent air enter not in, but if you will open them, do it about mid-day.

You must come abroad [i.e. go out of the house] as seldom as you can, and not (if you may) except the element be clear and bright, but before you come abroad you must take some medicine, which is able to preserve you from infection, as the root of Angelica, Pimpernell, etc, chewed in the mouth.

Also you must make fires daily in your houses, that thereby the corrupt air that is in the house, may be the better purged and emended; for there is a marvellous great virtue and strength in fire to purge, correct and amend the rottenness and corruption of the air. Also if you burn Juniper, Tamariscus, Bay-leaves, Rosemary, and such like are very good to purge the house of all ill airs....

[The author suggests various powdered herbs and spices to throw upon the coals, and suggests that the floor should be sprinkled with water mixed with vinegar, roses or sorrel.]

It is very good when one goeth abroad, to have something in their hands to smell too... therefore it is very good to carry in the hand a branch of Rue, Rosemary, Roses, or Camphire. [i.e. camphor, from the henna plant. The author goes on to suggest ingredients for making a pomander.]

...Gluttony, excess, and drunkenness is at all times to be shunned... they that love their health, let them use temperance in their diet and choose such meats [i.e. foods] as engender good blood, and be not ready to putrify and rot, but be of easy digestion, and eat with them sharp sauces, as vinegar, or the juices of sharp things, as verjuice, juice of citrons, lemons, oranges, etc. ... eat little garlic, onions, or leeks, for these cause unkind heat.

[For drinks, the author suggests barley water or clarified whey with herbs.]

... Eschew all violent exercises, as dancing, running, leaping: and... refrain in the extreme heat of the day, and in places where there is much concourse of people.

[The author recommends that one should sleep with closed windows and clean sheets. He suggests laxatives if necessary.]

... Blood-letting is also very wholesome for young folk, and such as have great store of blood...[for it] letteth out the corrupt humours...

Also it is very ill to be too passionate or melancholy; for the passions of sadness, anger, hatred, fear, great cares, and heavy thoughts and sighing, do much distemper the body and make it more unfit to withstand the infection; but on the contrary it is very good to use joy and mirth with temperance.

[The author then lists signs by which to recognise that a person is infected:]

First when the outward members are cold, and the inward parts burning hot, when there is a pain and heaviness of the head, and a great inclination to sleep. A weariness, heaviness and difficulty in breathing. A sadness and carefulness of the mind; a change of countenance, with a frowning look of the eyes: loss of stomach and appetite: immoderate thirst and often vomiting: a bitterness and dryness of the mouth:

the pulse frequent, small and deep, the urine troublous, thick and stinking like beast's urine.

The surest token of all to know the infected of the plague, is if there do arise botches [i.e. swellings] behind the ears, or under the armholes, or round about the share [i.e. groin]: or also if carbuncles do arise in any member suddenly... but if botches do not appear, it is more perilous; for it betokeneth that nature is weak and feeble, and not able to expel and drive out the venomous humours...

[As for the best way to cure the plague, the author recommends bleeding the patient within 12 hours of onset, from the same side or part of the body where the botches or swellings are; the theory being that the 'venom' that causes the plague must be greatest in that area.

If the patient has a full stomach on first finding symptoms, he should vomit straightaway, then take medicine and lie in a warm bed, well covered, in order to sweat well. After sweating, the patient and his bed must be cleaned. He should eat in moderation:]

It is good to eat no flesh... but it is best to give him the broth of a chicken two or three hours after he hath sweat, and often, according to his strength, for the sick and weak must be nourished by little and little; if the broth hath in it the juice of lemons, oranges, verjuice or vinegar, it is the better.

[The author then lists preservatives against the plague, recommending angelica or cloves held in the mouth; a fig or walnut with a little rue; herbs such as bugloss and borage; and adds:]

...it would be very good to wash your hands and to bathe your temples and your pulses with vinegar, and it would be good to perfume your houses with vinegar and rue upon a tile-stone being heated in the fire; it is very good to hold your head over it...

A proved remedy for the plague

Take an onion and cut him overthwart, or asunder then make a little hole in each piece, the which ye shall fill with fine treacle, and set the pieces together again, then and wrap them in a fine linen cloth... and so roast him in the embers, and when it is roasted enough, strain out all the juice thereof, and give the patient a spoonful thereof to drink, and it will heal him by the grace of God.

[Other remedies suggested are sorrel in vinegar, and London Treacle; 'treacle' meant a medicinal compound, and London treacle was a complex mixture of herbs, spices and other ingredients.]

If a botch appears:

Take a pigeon, and pluck the feathers off her tail, very bare, and set her tail to the sore, and she will draw out the venom till she die; then take another and set to likewise, contriving so till all the venom be drawn out, which you shall see by the

pigeons, for they will die with the venom as long as there is any in it; also a chicken or a hen is very good.

[The author concludes his book with a prayer to be said in time of sickness.]

Source

Anon. *The Plague's approved Physitian. Shewing the naturall causes of the infection of the ayre, and of the Plague. Also many medicines for the cure thereof, etc.*

Published by R. Raworth, London, 1665

The whole book can be viewed via the British Library website: <https://www.bl.uk/>

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Thomas Vincent
God's terrible voice in the city:
wherein are set forth the sound of the voice, in a narration of the two dreadful
judgements of plague and fire, inflicted upon the city of London, in the years
1665, and 1666
Published London 1667

Extracts

Notes in square brackets [] are the editor's.

Thomas Vincent (1634 – 1678) was a non-conformist minister who in 1662 had been ejected from his post as a London rector. During the plague, when many ministers fled, Vincent preached in churches throughout London. He also became famous and respected for ministering selflessly to the sick and dying in their homes.

*

INTRODUCTION

God speaks sometimes to a people by terrible things. These few years have given sad instances hereof in England especially the two last in our city of London. The voice of the Lord hath been in the city, hath been loud and full of terror; the Lord hath come forth against us with armed vengeance. Frowns hath been in his brow; death and desolation in his looks: thunder hath been in his voice; flames of fire in his hand. *Hab. 3. 5.* The pestilence hath gone before him, and burning coals at his feet. *Psal. 18. 13, 14....*

[Vincent blames the disasters that have overtaken London on the people, for heeding neither the previous judgements of God nor the preaching of ministers who have prayed so hard and revealed the sin of the city:]

In their confessions of sin, how have they raked into the dunghill of a rotten heart, and laid abroad its inward filthiness? how have they traced the footsteps of its deceitfulness, through the maze and wilderness of its many windings and turnings? how have they pierced into the very bowels of sin, and ript it up as it were to the back bone, bringing forth its very entrails to open view?...

...how have they stood weeping between the porch and the altar, crying, Spare thy people O Lord, and do not destroy London! and many times have they prevailed to appease God's wrath, and turn away his fierce anger which hath been kindled against us...

OF THE PLAGUE

The Plague so great, so lately, should not be forgotten ; yet lest the fire, more lately and proportionably more great, and the amazing fears which since have risen within us should shuffle former thoughts out of our minds, and rase out the impressions which by the Plague we had, and should labor to retain to our dying hour; therefore I shall give a brief narration of this sad judgement, and some observations of mine own; (who was here in the city from the beginning to the end of

it) both to keep alive in myself and others, the memory of the judgement; that we may be the better prepared for compliance with God's design in sending the plague amongst us.

It was in the year of our Lord 1665, that the plague began in our city of London, after we were warned by the great Plague in Holland in the year 1664, and the beginning of it in some parts of our land the same year; not to speak any thing, whether there was any significations and influence in the Blazing Star not long before, that appeared in the view of London, and struck some amazement upon the spirits of many; It was in the month of May that the plague was first taken notice of; our bill of mortality did let us know of but three which died of the disease in the whole year before ; but in the beginning of May the bill tells us of nine, which fell by the plague just in the heart of the city, the other, eight in the suburbs.

This was the first arrow of warning that was shot from heaven amongst us, and Fear quickly begins to creep upon people's hearts; great thoughts and discourse there is in town about the Plague, and they cast in their minds whether they should go if the Plague should increase.

Yet when the next week's bill signifieth to them the disease from nine to three, their minds are something appeased; discourse on that subject cools; fears are husht, and hopes take place, that the black cloud did but threaten, and give a few drops but the wind drive it away. But when in the next bill the number of the dead by the Plague is amounted from three to fourteen, and in the next to seventeen, and in the next to forty-three, and the disease begins so much to increase and disperse – Now secure sinners begin to be startled, and those who would have slept quietly still in their nests, are unwillingly awakened. Now a great consternation seizeth upon most persons, and fearful bodings of a desolating judgement....

The great orbs begin first to move ; the lords and gentry retire into their countries; their remote houses are prepared, goods removed, and London is quickly upon their backs; few ruffling gallants walk the streets; few spotted ladies are to be seen at windows; a great forsaking there was of the adjacent places where the plague did first rage....

Now the citizens of London are put to a stop in the career of their trade; they begin to fear whom they converse withal, lest they should have come out of infected places, now roses & other sweet flowers wither in the gardens, are disregarded in the markets, and people dare not offer them to their noses, lest with their sweet savour, that which is infected should be attracted; rue and wormwood is taken into the hand; myrrh and zedoary into the mouth; and without some antidote few stir about in the morning. Now many houses are shut up where the Plague comes, and the inhabitants are shut in, lest coming abroad they should spread infection. It was very dismal to behold the red crosses, and read in great letters, Lord, have mercy upon us, on the doors, and watchmen standing before them with halberds; and such a solicitude about those places, and people passing by them so gingerly, and with such fearful looks as if they had been lined with enemies in ambush to destroy them....

Now the highways are thronged with passengers and goods, and London doth empty itself into the country; great are the stirs and hurries in London by the removal of so many families; fear puts many thousands on the wing, and those think themselves most safe, that can fly farthest from the city.

In July the Plague increaseth, and prevaieth exceedingly, the number of 470, which died in one week by the disease, ariseth to 725 the next week, to 1089 the next, to 1843 the next, to 2010 the next. Now the plague compasseth the walls of the city like a flood, and poureth in upon it. Now most Parishes are infected, both without and within, yea, there are not so many houses shut up by the Plague, as by the owners forsaking of them for fear of it; and though the inhabitants be so exceedingly decreased by the departure of so many thousands, yet the number of dying persons increase fearfully...

Now the arrows begin to fly very thick about their ears, and they see many fellow sinners fall before their faces, expecting every hour themselves to be smitten; and the very sinking fears they have had of the Plague hath brought the Plague and death upon many. Some by the sight of a coffin in the streets, have fallen into a shivering, and immediately the disease hath assaulted them, and sergeant death hath arrested them...

...lovers and friends, and companions in sin have stood aloof, and not dared to come nigh the door of the house, lest death should issue forth from thence upon them; especially when the diseases hath invaded themselves, and first began with a pain & dizziness in their head, then trembling in their other members; when they have felt boils under their arm, and in their groins, and seen blains to come forth in other parts; when the disease hath wrought in them to that height, as to send forth those spots which (most think) are the certain tokens of near approaching death: and now they have received the sentence of death within themselves, and have certainly concluded, that within a few hours they must go down into the dust, and their naked souls, without the case of their body, must make its passage into eternity, and appear before the highest Majesty, to render their accounts, and receive their sentence: None can utter the horror, which hath been upon the spirits of such, through the lashes and stings of their guilty consciences, when they have called to mind a life of sensuality, and profaneness, their uncleanness, drunkenness, injustice, oaths, curses, derision of saints and holiness, neglect of their own salvation... that the grave is now opening its mouth to receive their bodies, and hell opening its mouth to receive their souls...

...Now death rides triumphantly on his pale horse through our streets, and breaks into every house almost where any inhabitants are to be found. Now people fall as thick as leaves from the trees in autumn, when they are shaken by a mighty wind. Now there is a dismal solitude in London streets, every day looks with the face of a sabbath-day, observed with greater solemnity than it used to be in the city. Now shops are shut in, people rare, and very few that walk about insomuch that the grass begins to spring up in some places, and a deep silence in almost every place, especially within the walls: no rattling coaches, no prancing horses, no calling in customers, no offering wares; no London cries sounding in their ears; if any voice be heard, it is the groans of dying persons, breathing forth their last, and the funeral knells of them that are ready to be carried to their graves....

Now we could hardly go forth, but we should meet many coffins, and see many with sores, and limping in the streets; amongst other sad spectacles, methought two were very affecting. One of a woman coming alone, and weeping by the door where I lived (which was in the midst of the infection) with a little coffin under her arm, carrying it to the new church-yard; I did judge that it was the mother of the child, and

that all the family besides was dead, and she was forced to coffin up, and bury with her own hands, this her last dead child.

Another, was of a man at the corner of Artillery-wall, that as I judge, through the dizziness of his head with the disease, which seized upon him there, had dashed his face against the wall; and when I came by, he lay hanging with his bloody face over the rails, and bleeding upon the ground; and as I came back he was removed under a tree in More-field, and lay upon his back; I went and spoke to him; he could make me no answer, but rattled in the throat, and as I was informed, within half an hour died in the place.

It would be endless to speak what we have seen and heard, of some in their frenzy, rising out of their beds, and leaping about their rooms; others crying and roaring at their windows; some coming forth almost naked, and running into the streets; strange things have others spoken and done when the disease was upon them; but it was very sad to hear of one, who being sick alone, and, it is like frantic, burnt himself in his bed.

[He describes how deaths increased through August into September.]

Now the grave doth open its mouth without measure. Multitudes ! Multitudes! in the valley of the shadow of death, thronging daily into eternity; the church yards now are stuffed so full with dead corpses, that they are in many places swelled two or three feet higher than they were before; and new ground is broken up to bury the dead.

Now hell from beneath is moved at the number of the guests that are received into its chambers; the number of the wicked which have died by the plague no doubt, hath been the greatest, as we may reasonably conclude without breach of charity; and it is certain, that all the wicked, which then died in sin, were turned into hell: how then are the damned spirits increased!

[After much discussion of the differing fates of the souls of the wicked and the righteous, Vincent returns to his account of the plague and how it affected his own household:]

We were eight in family, three men, three youths, an old woman, and a maid; all which came to me, hearing of my stay in town, some to accompany me, others to help me. It was the latter end of September, before any of us were touched; the young ones were not idle, but improved their time in praying and hearing, and were ready to receive instruction: and were strangely borne up against the fears of the disease and death, every day so familiar to the view.

But at last we were visited; and the plague came in dreadfully upon us, the cup was put into our hand to drink, after a neighbour family had tasted it, with whom we had much sweet society in this time of sorrow. And first our maid was smitten, it began with a shivering and trembling in her flesh, &c quickly seized on her spirits; it was a sad day, which I believe I shall never forget; I had been abroad to see a friend in the city, whose husband had lately died of the plague, and she herself visited with it; I came back to see another, whose wife was dead of the plague, and he himself under apprehensions that he should die within a few hours; I came home and the maid was on her death bed and another crying out for help, being left alone in a sweating fainting fit. What was an interest in Christ worth then? what a privilege to have a title to the kingdom of heaven.

But I proceed. It was the Monday when the maid was smitten, on Thursday she died full of tokens; on Friday one of the youths had a swelling in his groin, and on the Lord's day died with the marks of the distemper upon him; on the same day another youth did sicken, and on the Wednesday following he died; on the Thursday night his master fell sick of the disease, and within a day or two was full of spots; but strangely, beyond his own, and others' expectations, recovered. Thus did the plague follow us, and came upon us one by one...

[He speaks of one of the young men who died:]

... a very sweet hopeful youth, so loving and towardly, that it could not but attract love from those that were acquainted with him. But the grace he had gotten in those years, being, I suppose, under seventeen, did above all beautify him, and stand in the greatest stead: In his sickness he had much quiet and serenity upon his spirit; and lay so unconcerned at the thoughts of approaching death, that I confess I marvelled to see it...

[As the year wore on, the deaths lessened:]

Now the citizens, who had dispersed themselves abroad into the countries, because of the contagion, think of their old houses and trades, and begin to return, though with fearfulness and trembling, lest some of the after-drops of the storm should fall upon them; and O that many of them had not brought back their old hearts and sins, which they carried away with them! O that there had been a general repentance and reformation, and returning to the Lord that had smitten the city!...

[Vincent moves on to talk of the Great Fire, and God's further judgement on the city at that time, concluding:]

The glory of London is now fled away like a bird, the trade of London is shattered and broken to pieces, her delights also are vanished, and pleasant things laid waste... now nettles are growing; owls are screeching; thieves and cut-throats are lurking; a sad face there is now in the ruinous part of London; and terrible hath the Voice of the Lord been, which hath been crying, yea, roaring in the city by these dreadful judgments of the plague and fire, which he hath brought upon us.

Thus you have the narration of the judgments of the Plague and Fire.

Source

Thomas Vincent *God's terrible voice in the city: wherein are set forth the sound of the voice, in a narration of the two dreadful judgements of plague and fire, inflicted upon the city of London, in the years 1665, and 1666*

London, 1667

Extracts are taken from a 1811 reprint, which can be viewed at the Wellcome Library website: <https://wellcomelibrary.org/item/b21161628#>

Appendix

Orders Conceived and Published by the Lord Major and Aldermen of the City of London, Concerning the Infection of the Plague

London 1665

Whereas in the first Year of the Reign of our late Sovereign King James of happy memory, an Act was made for the charitable relief and ordering of Persons infected with the Plague: whereby Authority was given to Justices of Peace, Majors, Bayliffs, and other Head-Officers to appoint within their several Limits Examiners, Searchers, Watchmen, Keepers, and Buriers for the Persons and Places infected, and to minister unto them Oaths for the performance of their Offices. And the same Statute did also authorize the giving of other Directions, as unto them for the present necessity should seem good in their discretions. It is now upon special consideration thought very expedient for preventing and avoiding of infection of Sickness (if it shall so please Almighty God) that these Officers following be appointed, and these Orders hereafter duly observed.

Examiners to be appointed in every Parish.

First, It is thought requisite and so ordered, that in every Parish there be one, two, or more persons of good sort and credit, chosen and appointed by the Alderman, his Deputy, and Common-Council of every Ward, by the name of Examiners, to continue in that Office the space of two Moneths at least: And if any fit Person so appointed, shall refuse to undertake the same, the said parties so refusing, to be committed to Prison until they shall conform themselves accordingly.

The Examiners Office.

That these Examiners be sworn by the Alderman, to enquire 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 finde any person sick of the Infection, to give order to the Constable that the House be shut up; and if the Constable shall be found remiss or negligent, to give present notice thereof to the Alderman of the Ward.

Watchmen.

That to every Infected House there be appointed two Watchmen, one for the Day, and the other for the Night: And that these Watchmen have a special care that no person goe in or out of such infected Houses, whereof they have the Charge, upon pain of severe punishment. And the said Watchmen to doe 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 of the clock at night: and the Watchman by night until six in the morning.

Searchers.

That there be a special care, to appoint 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. And that the Physicians who shall be appointed for cure and prevention of the Infection, do call before them the said Searchers who are or shall be appointed for the several Parishes under their respective Cares, to the end they may consider whether they are fitly qualified for that employment; and charge them from time to time as they shall see cause, if they appear defective in their duties.

That no Searcher during this time of Visitation, be permitted to use any publick work or employment, or keep any Shop or Stall, or be employed as a Landress, or in any other common employment whatsoever.

Chirurgions.

For better assistance of the Searchers, for as much as there hath been heretofore great abuse in misreporting the Disease, to the further spreading of the Infection: It is therefore ordered, that there be chosen and appointed able and discreet Chirurgions, besides those that doe already belong to the Pest-house: amongst whom, the City and Liberties to be quartered as the places lie most apt and convenient: and every of these to have one quarter for his Limit: and the said Chirurgions in every of their Limits to joyn with the Searchers for the view of the body, to the end there may be a true report made of the Disease.

And further, that the said Chirurgions shall visit and search such like persons as shall either send for them, or be named and directed unto them, by the examiners of every Parish, and inform themselves of the Disease of the said parties.

And for as much as the said Chirurgions are to be sequestred from all other Cures, and kept onely to this Disease of the Infection; It is ordered, that every of the said Chirurgions shall have twelve-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.

Nurse-keepers.

If any Nurse-keeper shall remove herself out of any infected House before 28 daies after the decease of any person dying of the Infection, the House to which the said Nurse-keeper doth so remove herself shall be shut up until the said 28 daies be expired.

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 Botch, or Purple, or Swelling in any part of his body, or falleth otherwise dangerously sick, without apparent cause of some other Disease, shall give knowledge 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, Chirurgion or Searcher to be sick of the Plague, he shall the same night be sequestred in the same house.

And in case he be so sequestred, then though he afterwards die not, the House wherein he sickned shall be shut up for a Moneth, after the use of due Preservatives taken by the rest.

Airing the Stuff.

For sequestration of the goods and stuff of the infected, 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 have visited any man, known to be Infected of the Plague, or entred willingly into any known Infected House, being not allowed: the House wherein he inhabiteth, shall be shut up for certain daies by the Examiners direction.

None to be removed out of Infected Houses, but, &c.

Item, 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 unto some such House, which the owner of the said visited House holdeth in his own hands, and occupieth by his own servants) and so as security be given to the 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 found, he may 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 the first not appearing.

Burial of the dead.

That the Burial of the dead by this Visitation be at most convenient hours, alwaies either before Sunrising, or after Sun-setting, with the privity of the Churchwardens or Constables, and not otherwise; and that no Neighbours nor Friends be suffered to accompany the Coarse to Church, or to enter the house visited, upon pain of having his house shut up, or be imprisoned.

And that no Corps dying of Infection shall be buried or remain in any Church in time of Common-Prayer, Sermon, or Lecture. And that no children be suffered at time of burial of any Corps in any Church, Churchyard, or Burying-place to come near the Corps, Coffin, or Grave. And that all the Graves shall be at least six foot deep.

And further, all publick Assemblies at other Burials are to be forboren 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 outward Shew, or hang forth on their Stalls, Shopboards or Windows toward 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 Moneths after the Infection hath

been there, his house shall be shut up as Infected, and so shall continue shut up twenty daies at the least.

No person to be conveyed out of any infected House.

If any person visited do fortune, by negligent looking unto, or by any other means, to come, or be conveyed from a place infected, to any other place, the Parish from whence such Party hath come or been conveyed, upon notice thereof given, shall at their charge cause the said party so visited and escaped, to be carried and brought back again by night, and the parties in this case offending, to be punished at the direction of the Alderman of the Ward; and the house of the receiver of such visited person to be shut up for twenty daies.

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 them in, and minister necessaries unto 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, Chirurgions, Keepers and Buriers are not to pass the streets without holding a red Rod or Wand of three foot in length in their hands, open and evident to be seen, and are not to goe into any other house then 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 happen 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 Health of that Parish; or in default thereof, the house whither he or they so remove, shall be shut up as 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 doe) after carrying of infected persons to the Pesthouse, and other places, be admitted to common use, till their Coaches be well aired, and have stood unmployed by the space of five or six daies after such service.

Orders for cleansing and keeping of the Streets sweet.

The Streets to be kept clean.

First, it is thought very necessary, and so ordered, that every Housholder do cause the street to be daily pared before his door, and so to keep it clean swept all the Week long.

That Rakers take it from out the Houses.

That the sweeping and filth of houses be daily carried away by the Rakers, and that the Raker shall give notice of his coming by the blowing of a Horn as heretofore hath been done.

Laystalls to be made farre off from the City.

That the Laystalls be removed as farre as may be out of the City, and common passages, and that no Nightman or other be suffered to empty a Vault into any Garden near about the City.

Care to be had of unwholesome Fish or Flesh, and of musty Corn.

That special care be taken, that no stinking Fish, or unwholsome Flesh, or musty Corn, or other corrupt fruits of what sort soever, be suffered to be sold about the City or any part of the same.

That the Brewers and Tipling-houses be looked unto, for musty and unwholsome Cask.

That no Hogs, Dogs, or Cats, or tame Pigeons, or Conies be suffered to be kept within any part of the City, or any Swine to be, or stray in the Streets or Lanes, but that such Swine be impounded by the Beadle or any other Officer, and the Owner punished according to Act of Common-Council, and that the Dogs be killed by the Dog-killers appointed for that purpose.

Orders concerning loose Persons and idle Assemblies.

Beggers.

Forasmuch as nothing is more complained of, then the multitude of Rogues and wandering Beggers that swarm in every place about the City, being a great cause of the spreading of the Infection, and will not be avoided, notwithstanding any Order that hath been given to the contrary: It is therefore now ordered, that such Constables, and others whom this matter may any way concern, do take special care that no wandering Begger be suffered in the Streets of this City, in any fashion or manner whatsoever upon the penalty provided by the Law to be duly and severely executed upon them.

Playes.

That all Playes, Bear-baitings, Games, Singing of Ballads, Buckler-play, or such like causes of Assemblies of people, be utterly prohibited, and the parties offending, severely punished by every Alderman in his Ward.

Feasting Prohibited.

That all publick Feasting, and particularly by the Companies of this City; and Dinners at Taverns, Alehouses, and other places of common entertainment be forborn till further order and allowance; and that the money thereby spared, be preserved and employed for the benefit and relief of the poor visited with the infection.

Tipling-houses.

That disorderly Tipling in Taverns, Alehouses, Coffee-houses and Cellars be severely looked unto, as the common Sin of this time, and greatest occasion of dispersing the Plague. And that no Company or person be suffered to remain or come

into any Tavern, Alehouse or Coffee-house to drink after nine of the Clock in the Evening, according to the ancient Law and custome of this City, upon the penalties ordained in that behalf.

And for the better execution of these Orders, and such other Rules and Directions as upon further consideration shall be found needful; It is ordered and enjoyned that the Aldermen, Deputies, and Common-Councelmen shall meet together Weekly, once, twice, thrice or oftner (as cause shall 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 duly put in execution; not intending that any dwelling in or near places infected, shall come to the said meetings whiles their coming may be doubtful: And the said Aldermen and Deputies and Common Council men in their several Wards may put in execution any other good Orders that by them at their said Meetings shall be conceived and devised, for preservation of his Majesties Subjects from the Infection.

FINIS.

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Source

Orders Conceived and Published by the Lord Major and Aldermen of the City of London, Concerning the Infection of the Plague Publ. by James Flesher, London 1665 [Reproduced here in full and unedited.]

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