

No. 26.

THIRD REPORT

ON THE STATE OF THE DWELLINGS OF THE LABOURING CLASSES
IN CUMBERLAND, DURHAM, NORTHUMBERLAND,
AND WESTMORELAND.

BY SIR JOHN WALSHAM, BART.

Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 10th June, 1840.

GENTLEMEN,—Adverting to the Reports which I have already had the honour to submit to you, in reply to your Circular of the 11th November last, there remain two questions to which you have invited my attention, and upon one of which I have not yet had an opportunity of commenting, whilst upon the other I am desirous of bringing under your notice several illustrative communications with which I have been supplied, in addition to those referred to and tabularized in my Report of the 16th April last. Of these questions, one relates to the expediency of a legislative measure in the nature of a Building Act, and the other to the propriety of either exempting small tenements from the payment of rates, or collecting them from the landlord.

I. On the necessity of a Building Act in large towns, the parties to whom I have applied for information, and whose practical experience renders them most able to afford it, are almost unanimous.

Mr. Robert Plummer, one of the magistrates of Newcastle has favoured me with some very valuable observations on this subject, which I do myself the pleasure of presenting to you at length. After premising that as his experience is for the most part limited to town and suburban districts, he shall confine his observations chiefly to the class of tenements that belong to them. Mr. Plummer says,—

“First, then as to the expediency of a Building Act. In many respects such an Act is desirable, say in regard to sewerage, to receptacles for refuse, and other out-door conveniences, to the prevention of the spreading of fires when such occur, to the supply of water for personal and domestic use, to ventilation, to the internal arrangements of each separate tenement, and to the general arrangement of the buildings built for or containing tenements so as to keep each family as distinct as the nature of the case will admit of.

“It is to be observed that in this district (and I believe in towns generally, not excluding, in this particular, even streets for superior buildings), sewerage is for the most part greatly deficient, and in suburban districts there is frequently none, or only open drains; that receptacles for refuse are sparingly supplied and sometimes wholly omitted, and privies for the most part are wanting; that arrangements for saving rain-water or meeting the increase of population by increasing the supply of water by artificial means are little thought of, and the rain-water is commonly allowed to run to waste; that the partition walls are imperfect, and the general style of building is ill calculated to delay the

progress of fire; that the ventilation, especially of inner rooms, where there are any, is not regarded; that the internal arrangements amount to almost nothing, each tenement being confined to one apartment; and that, in order to save expense, one door-way commonly serves four and sometimes more families, and one staircase two or more families, thereby making the comfort of three or more families subservient to the conduct of one, and this is a frequent source of ill-will, discourtesy, quarrelling, and crime.

“I am decidedly of opinion that in so far as a general Building Act could be made to embrace these particulars, and induce an improvement upon the present state of them, it would be highly useful. This Act might very well be made to apply to all tenement houses to be built after a certain day, and after a limited number of years to include all tenement property whatever, so as gradually to bring the property already built under its operation. It is very doubtful whether all these objects should be included at first, as, until the public saw the beneficial working of the measure, they might be disposed to think too tight an Act as being an uncalled-for interference with private property, speculation, and emolument, especially as for a time the inferior and less costly old tenements would, in rent, compete powerfully against the new and more costly. There should also be, I think, a separate provision in the Act for old property when converted into tenements. In the progress of towns, what were once good situations often become inferior ones, and a conversion of the property becomes necessary: it is clear, however, that such a conversion must depend largely upon the nature of the existing buildings, and the arrangements in this case cannot, excepting at great cost, be made so complete as if the ground were unbuilt upon.

“In this town, the practice is for a workman's family to live in one room only; of course there are numerous exceptions to this, but the general practice is so, and the tenements are built with that view.

“In respect to the ability of the working classes in towns to pay an additional amount of rent commensurate with the increase of convenience a Building Act would secure to them, I have no doubt that they are quite able, generally speaking, to do so. The usual rent of a room in and about Newcastle is 3*l.* per annum. Some may reach 4*l.*, and some are a little under 3*l.*, according chiefly to size. I speak now of rooms usually occupied by workmen, artificers, and the ordinary class of labourers. This sum is a fraction under 1*s.* 2*d.* per week; and when it is considered that the wages of these parties run between 15*s.* and 40*s.* per week, the bulk being at about 21*s.*, it must be evident they can afford to pay an additional rent. Not a few workmen earn more than 40*s.* per week, and the lowest class of labourers 12*s.*; and it must always be borne in mind that where there is a family, the receipt in wages is for the most part greatly increased by the earnings of the younger branches.

“I think, then, that a Building Act might be devised that would secure many essential benefits to the working classes. The points I would most insist upon are:—

- “Separate entrances;
- “Receptacles for ashes and refuse;
- “Privies;
- “Each room to have one window to the day;
- “Sufficient party walls;

"The buildings not to be above two stories high when the rooms or floors are let separate; and sewerage and rain gutters or spouts.

"The main sewerage in existing public streets and roads should be made to fall upon the property rateably; where an entirely new plot is laid out the proprietors should be compelled to provide sufficient sewerage in the first instance, and the maintenance should afterwards become a public charge. This would require that inspectors should be appointed, and a provision should be made for appointing these in each locality."

Mr. Plummer's opinions and suggestions are fully borne out by the subjoined statement from Alderman Reed, of Sunderland, which, whilst treating of a Building Act, reverts again to the painful subject of bad drainage and its results:—

"It is my decided opinion that a Building Act would be eminently useful, and would be a great boon to the labouring classes. In the parish of Sunderland (with which you know I am most intimately connected), I am afraid we are past redemption. We have not an inch of ground in the parish but what is built on; and the great mass of the houses in the parish are densely crowded with human beings, for whom there is no convenience in-doors, and in the great majority of the lanes there is not a drain from one end to the other. These two evils, with the antipathy of too many of the labouring classes to habits of cleanliness, render their abodes the nurseries of fever, and, I think, I may safely say, that fever never fairly leaves them. But setting Sunderland aside as incurable (for I cannot see any remedy at all except in a system of drainage on so large a scale as to be beyond the means of the present paving boards to accomplish), I find that the New Town* (as it is called) of Bishopwearmouth is built with little more regard to the health and comfort of the inhabitants. The houses or cottages are certainly not so high, nor are the streets (if they may be so called) so narrow, as in the worst parts of Sunderland; but there is an equally complete disregard of order and irregularity; and drainage is a word that seems blotted out of their vocabularies. It is truly lamentable to see neat little cottages, just built, which ought to be the abodes of comfort and cleanliness, with a dunghill and a morass almost at every door. And what makes the want of sewers more apparent here than in Sunderland is the want of pavement, so that the filth which is continually thrown down soon wears away the soil and makes a deposit hole which even that best of scavengers, a deluge of rain during a thunder-storm (and which we often rejoice to see in Sunderland), cannot purify.

"I know not sufficient of the nature of the Building Act to which your papers refer to go into much detail on the subject; but I am of opinion that the Legislature would confer a great boon on the labouring classes in particular and on the public generally, were they, in such an Act, to make it imperative on a person opening out a new street, that before he laid the foundation of one house he should thoroughly provide it with ample sewerage."

Mr. Cowen, the chairman of the Gateshead union, corroborates the opinion expressed by *Mr. Plummer*, as to the ability of the town labourer to pay an increased rent for increased comfort. He observes:—

"I am of opinion that if a legislative measure in the nature of a

* By the New Town, I mean that part which lies mainly to the north-west of Bishopwearmouth church, and which is composed almost entirely of cottages for the labouring classes.

Building Act, to regulate the building of cottages, could be so framed as to meet the object for which it would be intended, much benefit would result from it. I think the labouring classes in towns, whose wages generally are good, could afford to pay a little additional rent for increased comfort and accommodation; but in the rural districts, where the wages are much less, I fear this would hardly apply: yet even in the rural districts, if such additional comfort was afforded, I think the labouring classes would be much benefited by it, and might pay a little more rent for such increased accommodation."

Mr. Heysham, late mayor of Carlisle, says:—

"I think there can be no question that many of the diseases so very prevalent among the labouring classes may be attributed in some measure to imperfect ventilation, want of cleanliness, &c., in their dwellings, and also to the want of out-door convenience. If, therefore, any legislative measure could effectually remedy these evils, it would be productive of unmixed benefit to all classes of society, and more particularly so in large manufacturing towns." *Mr. Heysham* adds, indeed, "But it must also be recollected that these improvements will be attended with additional cost, and at present I am fully convinced that the great majority of the working classes in this country could not afford to occupy tenements of this description.

Mr. Brisco, however, the chairman of the Whitehaven union, observes:—

"I believe that if the houses were built on a better plan, as to convenience in the house and outside, the inhabitants would be much more frugal, cleanly, healthy, and happy, and much better able to pay a somewhat higher rent under those circumstances, than to pay the present rents under existing circumstances."

Speaking of the Rothbury Union, *Mr. Woodman*, the then clerk, says:—

"I do not think any legislative measure to regulate buildings is required. But," he adds, "in towns, I certainly think such an enactment would be attended with the most salutary consequences; even in such small places as Morpeth and Alnwick it is desirable."

II. In regard to small towns and rural districts, however, the opinions of my correspondents on the necessity of a Building Act are conflicting. *Archdeacon Headlam*, speaking of Barnard Castle, observes:—

"From the inquiries I have made in this neighbourhood, it does not appear that a legislative measure in the nature of a Building Act would tend to introduce any improvement in building dwellings for the labouring poor. Great improvements have taken place in this respect on many estates of this district within the last 20 or 30 years, and I do not think that a compulsory law would increase this tendency to improvement."

Whilst *Mr. Brown*, the clerk of the Teesdale union, seems to imply that a Building Act would be beneficial, he says:—

"I have to observe that, in my opinion (corroborated by that of medical men with whom I have conversed), some of the sanitary requisites in the building of labourers' tenements would be, the previous draining of the ground; and, if a cellar is not made underneath for their coals

and the rooms boarded, that the ground-floor should be a little raised above the level of the street or adjoining ground; the walls not to be under a given thickness; the fire-places to be so constructed as to throw equable warmth over the rooms; and the windows to have moveable ventilators. After all, much depends upon the habits of the inmates, and their disposition to cleanliness and order."

And *Mr. Sinclair*, the auditor of the Berwick union, states:—

"I do certainly think that a Building Act is necessary. Many of the country cottages are in a miserable state; and the circumstances of the landlord do not generally seem to be the reason why better ones are not built. It is true that where new ones are being erected, they are improvements on the old ones in point of finishing; but there is not any uniformity of accommodation, or any attempt to construct them with a view to an economical management of fuel either in cooking or in maintaining a proper temperature in the rooms."*

Moreover *Mr. Hasell*, chairman of the West Ward union, &c., speaking of a rural district, observes:—

"With respect to a Building Act, although it is perhaps difficult to legislate on such matters, the evils resulting from imperfect drainage, want of privies, and above all, want of sufficient separate bed-room accommodation are so manifest, that I should say a remedy ought to be attempted. As such improvements would apply not so much to size of building as to superior arrangement, I do not see why they should burden the labourer with much increase of rent. If any increase took place it would at all events be small, if such improvements became general, and would be far more than counterbalanced by the advantages resulting to the labourer in the way of health, cleanliness, and want of temptation to immorality."

But *Mr. Spedding*, vice-chairman of the Cockermouth union, adds:—

"I doubt if a Building Act would be of any service here, unless the Boards of Guardians could, by any securities against abuse, be made the rent-payers. But I believe very great and general benefit in point of health would arise from giving the Boards of Guardians power to build privies, in number and locality at their discretion, and to keep them in decent order, and also power over the general cleansing and draining of towns and villages, both by enforcing private and parochial liabilities in that respect, and also by incurring expense in case of need, and providing for it out of the rates. The utmost expenditure that could arise under such a power would be moderate, and probably a negative quantity compared with the saving under the head of sick and medical relief almost certain to be effected by it, and soon too."

"A Building Act might possibly be of use in large towns and populous manufacturing districts, where builders are in the habit of making speculations or investments in cottages for the poor, and where employment and wages are such as to afford in rent the interest of the outlay; but here, if it operated at all, it would be to hamper if not to repress improvements. It is clear that, considering the matter generally, you can supply the poor with improved habitations only by making them directly or indirectly pay for them. The object, therefore, is to raise the

* See also Dr. Gilly's "Appeal in Behalf of the Border Peasantry," with reference to the same district of which Mr. Sinclair speaks.

plebeian standard of convenience, and to make a taste for rational daily comfort supersede the present rage for sensual excitement. To this end I think a law might conduce which gave the Guardians power to build or rent a few *model cottages*, and sublet them to the most deserving of the out-relieved paupers, by way at once of example and encouragement. Consider whether such a plan could not be concocted without containing within itself the seeds of financial failure. In the meantime, however, and pending all such questions, the more I reflect upon my former suggestion as to making all Guardians 'ex-officio scavengers,' the more I am confirmed in my conviction that it is, under present circumstances, the most immediate practicable improvement in a sanitary point of view. In this district, which is naturally healthy, wherever fevers prevail and recur, they are traceable to *removeable* causes; but the people themselves are inert; their thoughts are engrossed by the great business of finding daily food; and they will not listen to any lectures upon the theory of infection, or the connexion between dirt and disease. If taught this by a few practical examples, they would soon become co-operative agents in the important business of cleansing."

The *Board of Guardians* of the Cockermouth union, however, thus report their collective opinion:—

"That if some legislative provision should be made by which the builders of cottages should be compelled to pay more attention to the planning and laying them out before built, and to the future keeping of them in repair, with proper cesspools and drainage, and a plentiful supply of good water, it would materially tend to the diminution of disease and lessen the privations which too many of the manufacturing and labouring population suffer, partly from the want of such conveniences, but more especially from the high price of provisions, which at this time exceeds the remuneration which the labourers and certain classes of manufacturers receive for their labour."

On the other hand, the *Rev. Richard Matthews*, chairman of Wigton union, says:—

"I beg leave to state that, in my opinion, so far as regards this part of the country, any legislative measure in the nature of a Building Act would be inexpedient, the dwellings of the labouring classes here being in general equal to their habits of life and means of subsistence. Those that reside in the town of Wigton do not receive higher wages than those of a similar class who live in the country, and are therefore not better able than the latter to pay for increased accommodation in their houses. Cottages in the rural districts have in many instances, when landed property was more divided, been small farm-houses, and are, to say the least, proportionate to the condition of the persons who inhabit them. In short, the poverty of the labouring classes must be diminished, and their intelligence and prudence increased, before better dwellings than those they now occupy would be of any use to them. Not only an ability to procure, but a *taste* also for, the decencies and comforts of life must be imparted, before they can be enjoyed."

And to conclude this portion of my inquiry, *Mr. Crackanthorpe*, chairman of the East Ward union, &c., remarks:—

"The district comprised within this Union is, as you are well aware, almost entirely agricultural, and only contains the two small towns of Appleby and Kirkby Stephen; and from the general observation which

I have been enabled to make of the condition of the cottages in the villages and rural parts, I am decidedly of opinion that no legislative measure in the nature of a Building Act is required. The houses are in general quite sufficient for the accommodation of a labouring family; and although they do not always contain what, if all our wishes were fulfilled, may be by some considered necessary, nevertheless they are upon that scale that I do not think any interference on the part of the Legislature would be justified. I beg, however, to limit my observations strictly to the agricultural districts in this neighbourhood, as I can easily conceive that in large and populous towns some regulations may be required for the health and comfort of the population which are not at all applicable here."

III. On the subject of rating small tenements, of which I have already made brief mention in my first Report, there is no difference of opinion in my district. *Mr. Plummer's* observations thereon are these:—

"The payment of rates by cottages is an important question; but after giving it much consideration, I incline to the opinion that all property in use ought to pay. I arrive at this conclusion chiefly from a consideration of the high rents paid by the lower orders, for they appear to suffer in this matter as in every other—they pay the highest in proportion; this arises in great part from the necessity of the case, from the additional risk and trouble that attach to low property. Generally speaking, 1000*l.* laid out in great houses will not yield nearly the amount of rent that the same sum laid out in tenement property will. It appears to me, therefore, that no good reason can be given why tenement and cottage property should not pay rates. The difficulty is, who should pay them, the landlord or tenant? I think the easiest and simplest, and, considering the rents, the proper plan would be to make the landlord liable to rates for all dwellings with or without appurtenances let at under a certain sum, say 6*l.* or 8*l.* Stables, byres, detached shops, &c. let separately, it would be advisable, perhaps, to rate the tenant for. For all property, to the rates on which the landlord is made liable, it would be desirable that there should be as little opportunity left open for disputes as possible; and therefore a system of fixing the value on which the rates shall be charged should, in my opinion, be devised, which should serve, say for three, five, or seven years, similar in plan to the system of tithe commutation, the party paying of course rate only upon such portion as is occupied from time to time when the rate is laid on. The overseers might be empowered to lay the rate on as at present, subject to an appeal to the rate-payers; or the overseers might have power to call in a local sworn valuer to assist them. Difficulties there would no doubt be in commencing such a system, but it would, I think, soon work well. The valuers to be sworn at the special sessions held annually for passing overseers' accounts; and they might, perhaps, advantageously be made officers elective by the rate-payers, and be subjected to annual re-election.

"I do not think exemption from the rate has the effect of deteriorating the quality of tenement buildings; the question is one of rent.

"At present a different practice prevails in different localities; in some districts tenements are rated—in others not. In this neighbourhood the general practice is not to rate them, unless the tenements are

taken by collieries or manufactories, and this not universally so, some parishes and townships acting differently. At South Shields, I believe, tenements are all rated. Certainly no valid reason can be given why they should be rated in one place and not in another, and it would be very desirable to assimilate the practice."

Alderman Reed, of Sunderland, in addition to his replies to the printed queries which I have tabularized in my first Report, remarks:—

"With regard to the second point of the inquiry, viz., as to rating, I cannot say that it has ever come under my observation that tenements have been built purposely of such quality and appearance as to prevent them being rated. Landlords of such like property know very well that the tenants their houses are intended for cannot, from their circumstances, be called on to pay the rates; but with regard to the statement that the benefit of the exemption goes to the landlord, I can fully bear it out; and I am confident that in the great majority of cases the rates on such property, instead of going into the hands of the parish officer in aid of the parish funds, actually go into the pocket of the landlord, in the shape of an increased rent, which he receives and often *claims on the ground of such exemption.*"

Mr. Tinley, the chairman of the Tynemouth union, says:—

"I am decidedly of opinion that *no kind of property* should be exempt from payment of poor's rate; but I think whenever a house is let to more than two tenants, the landlord ought to be liable. I know scores of cases where a house occupied by four or five tenants produces one-third more rent than a similar one in the occupation of an individual, and the only drawback is the chance of occasionally losing a portion of your rent."

Mr. Cowen, speaking of the Gateshead union, states:—

"I have often thought it desirable that as great a number of the labourers' cottages as possible should be rated to the poor's rate in order to prevent imposition by the parties who receive parochial relief; but I have seen the difficulty of collecting rates from the occupiers of small tenements, and would say the landlords should pay the rates upon such tenements."

Mr. Heysham, of Carlisle, observes:—

"Until very lately I have no hesitation whatever in saying that I always considered it advisable that all occupied property should be rated to the poor's rate, and also that the occupiers themselves should pay the rates. There can be no question, however, that in numberless instances, these as well as other local rates have long been severely felt by the poorer classes; still the difficulty always appeared to me to be where to draw a correct line, and from my own experience I think I may safely say that almost any exemption, except to individuals in the actual receipt of parochial relief, invariably gives great dissatisfaction to other parties, and is upon the whole productive of more harm than good.

"The great reduction, however, that has taken place within the last few years in the price of labour, the very fluctuating state of the trade and commerce of this country, together with many other circumstances, which I need not enumerate, have, I must confess, induced me to view this subject in a somewhat different light: in fact, I now begin

to fear that in a little time it will not be possible to collect any rates from the occupiers of tenements let for less than 5*l.* or 6*l.* per annum; and I think I may also venture to add that property of this description is now, and has long been, anything but profitable to the owners, except to extensive manufacturers, who let it to their own workpeople, which enables them to secure the whole rent without any trouble or expense."

Mr. Hasell's often-quoted letter contains the following instructive passage:—

"In recommending that landlords should be rated rather than occupiers in cases of small tenements, I do so not because I think that such occupiers would gain any pecuniary advantage from the arrangement, for I conclude that in a vast majority of instances the occupier would in fact pay his amount of rate in the shape of increased rent, but because I think it would enable the overseers to collect the poor's rates with more ease, and without irritating and vexing poor labourers, who are often called upon to pay rates when they have made no provision for the payment, and when unable to pay are subjected to what is to them an expensive process (speaking comparatively) for the recovery of such rates. In Penrith, by a sort of understanding between the landlords and parish officers, landlords have been rated for several years, not merely for small houses occupied by tenants, but for large houses and lands so occupied likewise, and I remember no instance of a complaint against a landlord so rated for non-payment of poor's rate, whilst we have frequently had to proceed against occupiers for the recovery of rates, both in the town and in the country parishes. I conclude such landlords have regularly paid the rates, though we could not have compelled them to do so; and as landlords of this description are, generally speaking, persons of ability to pay the rates at once when called for, a considerable benefit would, I think, result from generalizing the system as far as small tenements go, and from shifting the liability in such cases from the occupiers to the landlords. I mention 9*l.* per annum as the limit, because, if 10*l.* were named, it would cause indirectly an alteration in the present law of settlement, unless section 66 of the Poor Law Amendment Act should be repealed; and it seems reasonable that a person who rents a tenement of sufficient value to give him a settlement should contribute as long as he is able to the funds from which he may afterwards, in case of sickness, infirmity, or misfortune, have to draw relief or support."

The *Board of Guardians* of the Cocker mouth union, state,—

"That if the owners of houses below the value of 10*l.* per annum were compelled to pay the rates instead of the occupiers, it would have a tendency to secure with less difficulty a more uniform collection, without bearing heavily upon such owners, and would also in some degree ease the burden of the poor, inasmuch as the owners frequently let their houses under a promise to pay the rates themselves, thereby inducing the tenant to offer a higher rent than he otherwise would; but if from any cause the tenant becomes unable to pay his rent in due time, the landlord then refuses to pay the rates, and the overseers are obliged to compel payment from the tenant, by which proceeding the tenant is damnified to the amount of his rate so paid."

The Rev. Richard Matthews, of Wigton, reports:—

"If small tenements were exempted from the payment of rates, I am of opinion that the owners and not the occupiers would ultimately reap the benefit. The former are commonly rated and pay the rates in this neighbourhood; and as experience proves this usage to be convenient here, I can see no reason why it should not be made the law of the land."

And furthermore, Mr. Crackanthorpe writes to me thus:—

"I confess that I am very much inclined to recommend that the rates of cottages generally should be paid by the landlord, as there is frequently great difficulty in collecting them, and exemptions are claimed which, as regards the proprietor, are unjust. At the same time it must be observed that one argument against giving relief to paupers would be taken away, viz., that poor persons not, or scarcely, in a better condition than the applicants are, would be contributing to their relief: but on the whole, I am inclined to think that in no case should cottages be exempt, but that whenever the rent is under 5*l.* it should be paid by the landlord. On no ground can I conceive that cottages should be entirely exempt, except those belonging to the cottagers themselves who may be too poor to pay the rates; but even in this case I believe they feel a pride in contributing their share to the general fund."

It remains only that, in closing this Report, I should take leave to submit that by an examination of the opinions which it contains, and the measures (founded on such opinions) which it indicates, we are unavoidably led to these conclusions:—

1st. That a Building Act, of the nature so well conceived and lucidly sketched by Mr. Plummer, is of unquestionable (and indeed unquestioned) expediency in reference to towns.

2ndly. That although it is not quite so clear whether a Building Act could, in practice, be advantageously adjusted to the peculiarities and wants of purely rural districts, it would yet appear to be desirable, for the reasons stated by Mr. Hasell, the Rev. Mr. Matthews, and Mr. Crackanthorpe, that such Act should certainly not be limited, in its operation, to urban communities exclusively.

3rdly. That as regards the propriety—not to say necessity—of rating the owners instead of the occupiers of cottage and tenement property of low annual rental, no one (as I have had occasion to remark more than once in these papers) I have ever met with in the four northern counties can now be said to entertain a doubt upon the question.

I have the honour to be, Gentlemen,

Your very obedient servant, J. W.

Alnwick, 1st March, 1841.

GENTLEMEN,—With reference to your circular letter of the 9th of September, 1840, in which (after a direction to me to inquire into and remedy the neglect of certain medical officers in my district to furnish the returns due from them under the Sanitary Inquiry—a direction that I immediately and successfully acted upon),

you proceeded to draw my attention to the provision made in the towns for the supply of water for the use of the labouring classes, as well as to the beneficial effects of drainage on marshy localities,—with reference to that circular, I beg to submit for your information and use some extracts from letters I have received from gentlemen conversant with the condition (*quoad*, the circular's subject-matter) of the four northern counties, and especially of the towns and neighbourhood of—

- | | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| 1. Gateshead, | } In the county of Durham. |
| 2. South Shields, | |
| 3. Barnard Castle, | |
| 4. Sunderland, | |
| 5. Tynemouth, | } In the county of North-
umberland. |
| 6. Hexham and Wooler, | |
| 7. Cockermouth and Keswick, | } In the county of Cum-
berland. |
| 8. Penrith, &c., | |

But I have been disappointed, I regret to say, of some valuable notices that I expected ere this to have received respecting Newcastle-upon-Tyne; I understand, however, and (so far as my own observation goes) believe that great town to be, upon the whole, well supplied with water by companies.

I have the honour to be, Gentlemen,

Your very obedient servant,

J. WALSHAM, *Assistant Commissioner.*

No. 1.—Extract from letter, dated January 7th, 1841, from *W. H. Brockett, Esq.*, one of the magistrates, and late mayor of Gateshead:—

“The supply of water to the poor of this borough is anything but satisfactory: it is true a large portion of the poorer description of persons reside by the river-side, and are thus provided with this necessary of life at their own doors, but, elsewhere, the supply is either uncertain and deficient, or expensive. There are no public fountains as in almost all large towns, but here and there a ‘well’ or spring, occasionally provided with a pump in a state of repair, but more frequently without one; some of them, in fact, being in fields at a considerable distance from the populous parts of the borough. The water-company, which have a reservoir on Gateshead Fell, whence the town—that is, the *paying* portion of its inhabitants—is supplied, have placed fountains in the principal streets, at convenient distances, where the water is *sold* to poor and rich alike, at a small but still, to an indigent family, a prohibitory charge. Of course the wealthier classes have the article introduced by pipes into their houses.

“Public fountains could be erected at a trifling expense, and, I dare say, the necessary quantity of water might be procured from the company at a reasonable charge; and it strikes me that some regulation of that kind would be much more practicable, advisable, and beneficial, even than any statutory requirement of the introduction of water-pipes into new buildings. The residences of the wealthy need no such enactment; and in those of the ‘poor and needy’ the landlords would

experience little difficulty in evading it—they would raise the rent in proportion to the cost of water, and *vice versa*.

“Water-companies would gladly, I am persuaded, come to terms with the public in this matter, especially such of them as from time to time apply to Parliament for incorporation or for additional powers. With such the legislature might make it a *sine quâ non* that public fountains should be supplied, if not gratuitously, at least on very reasonable conditions.

“Another matter is of great importance in connexion with a supply of water. Fire-plugs should be required to be fixed in every town, at convenient distances, and duplicate keys thereof to be placed in the hands of the police. Until very lately, this was not the case in Gateshead; and since the arrangement has been made, much good has ensued from it.”

No. 2.—Extract from letter, dated January 11th, 1841, from *R. Shortridge, Esq.*, chairman of the South Shields union, &c.:—

“With respect to water, this town is mainly supplied from a very copious and excellent spring about a mile and a half distant from it, from whence the water is brought by pipes either into the houses of the more wealthy, who pay so much per year for it, or it is sold to the poorer classes at the public pumps (or pants as they are called here), at so much per pail or bucket. An Act of Parliament was got for these water-works many years ago, and they are held by an individual (Mr. Rippon, of North Shields), who receives the revenue from the sale of the water as above. The quality is excellent, and the supply ample for all who can afford to pay for it; at the same time if it was either to be had gratis or to be laid into the houses, there is little doubt that the saving of expense and labour would cause it to be much more plentifully used, both on the person and the dwellings, and thereby contribute greatly both to health and cleanliness: such a house as mine pays 2s. a-year, and at the pants they pay one farthing per pail.

“With respect to the other part of your inquiry, we have no marshy localities to complain of. The only part that may be considered damp is what is called the Mill Dam, which formerly was a sheet of water into which the tide flowed from the river, but of late years it has been built upon, though from its low situation it perhaps is not so well drained as it might be. It is, however, a very small part of the town, though it is about the centre of it. On the whole, I look upon this place as a very healthy one, for we never almost have any infectious diseases prevailing in it; and for many years I have remarked that when Newcastle and Sunderland have been visited with such disorders as fevers, &c., we have escaped. This, perhaps, may partly be accounted for by the fresh air from the sea, and the continual flow and influx of the tide (though this equally applies to all sea-ports), and partly to the circumstance that we have no confined or unhealthy occupations for the working-classes of people. Should any sanitary regulations be made, perhaps none would be more beneficial to this town than the more frequent cleansing and removal of dung-hills, particularly those of the butchers’ shops, for each one here has its slaughter-house attached to it, where the offal is allowed to accumulate and remain much too long; in fact, it would be a great improvement if the slaughter-houses were compelled to be out of the town altogether, as the scenes of them must tend very much to brutalizing consequences.

"With respect to drainage, I presume it must not only have a very material effect upon the bodily health, but upon the mind also. I remember some years ago, a medical man of considerable practice at York told me that a village in that neighbourhood was remarkable for the number of idiot children it contained. It was suggested that it should be drained, as the peculiarity might arise from its swampy nature. This was done, and along with it idiocy was banished."

No. 3.—Extract from letter, dated January 15th, 1841, from *George Brown, Esq.*, clerk of the guardians of the Teesdale union:—

"In reply to your letter of the 9th instant, touching supply of water and other sanitary matters, I beg to state that to convey water into the houses of cottagers in pipes is expensive; and in some localities, from want of level and other requisites, impracticable without force-pumps on a large and costly scale. The cottagers are, moreover, very generally careless; and the pipes and other apparatus would soon be suffered to become obstructed, or otherwise injured or rendered useless. The old system of public pumps is, after all, the best and most useful plan; and in legislating, it should be provided that there should be at least one common pump for every dozen houses—to be kept in repair at the joint expense of the owners of those houses; or the guardians of every union, or other public functionaries, should in every district be compelled, out of some general parochial fund, to provide pumps or other means for the supply of water, on a scale proportioned to the number of inhabitants.

"I apprehend that there is now no fund out of which our town's pumps and other public reservoirs of water can lawfully be repaired: this is a serious evil, and ought forthwith to be remedied."

No. 4.—Extract from letter, dated February 3rd, 1841, from *Thomas Reed, Esq.*, one of the aldermen of the borough, and late vice-chairman of the Sunderland union:—

"I believe Sunderland South (that is, Sunderland and Bishop Wearmouth) is better supplied with water than most places; there having been, from time immemorial, numerous wells in the parish of Sunderland whence the public has been supplied with excellent water at a very moderate rate; and, in addition to these, a water-company was formed a few years ago in Bishop Wearmouth which supplies the two parishes, both by means of private pipes and by pumps placed in various parts. The water from the water-works is also very good, and is sold to persons buying small quantities at one farthing per skeel—a measure which you may know from your long experience in the North, and which is, I believe, calculated to hold four gallons; but, from the difficulty of carrying it full, has seldom more than three put into it. At the pumps in Sunderland the same price is charged. At Monk Wearmouth, however, the supply is very bad: there were formerly pumps or pipes in the town, whence the public was supplied, but when Messrs. Pemberton's pit was won, the water was drained from the pumps, and the only supply now is from a well about half a mile from Monk Wearmouth, on the Newcastle turnpike, and is supplied at one halfpenny per skeel—the extra charge is no doubt for carriage, as the water on the Monk Wearmouth side is conveyed to the con-

sumers' doors in a cart. There is certainly ample room for improvement here. But as a good supply of pure water is of essential importance to the public health, I should say that even Sunderland and Bishop Wearmouth (with all their advantages) are still miserably deficient; and if any legislative enactment could be obtained to give facilities for an abundant supply, it would be of incalculable benefit as a means of maintaining the health of large towns."

No. 5.—Extract from a letter, dated January 5th, 1841, from *E. H. Greenhow, Esq.*, a medical practitioner of Tynemouth:—

"The town of Shields is very well supplied with water, which in a great proportion of instances is found upon or near to the premises. Besides this, there is a water-company which provides an abundant supply for the lower orders by means of pumps—public fountains—kept by disabled men or widows, who retail it out during six or eight hours daily at the rate of a farthing per skeel—a vessel containing about four or five gallons.

"I can afford no direct information in answer to your second question, as no marsh lands have been drained in this neighbourhood in my remembrance. I have, however, had occasion to remark that fever and other diseases prevail more in one or two small localities where there is standing water. One of these is a row of good houses, standing in an open airy situation and inhabited solely by persons of respectable station, which is built within a dozen yards or so from one of the water-company's reservoirs. This would indicate the importance of providing, in any legislative enactment of the kind you mention, for the removal from the close vicinity of populous districts of all bodies of water—even such as are generally considered innocuous.

"There is one point of considerable importance as respects the public health of towns, which is not alluded to in your letter, but upon which I venture, nevertheless, to trouble you. In towns of second or third-rate size and standing, like North and South Shields, there is generally a very inadequate supply of common sewers. Many of the best parts of North Shields are entirely destitute of these conveniences; and in others where they exist, from being placed too near the surface, and from other defects in their construction, a stranger is very much offended, on entering the houses of even respectable and wealthy persons, by the noxious smell arising from this cause. This state of things must be most injurious to the public health; and any legislative arrangements that would remedy the evil and provide for the formation of such conveniences at the building of each house, would not only be most serviceable in promoting public health but also be conferring a boon as regards public comfort."

No. 6.—Extract from letter, dated January 11th, 1841, from *John Grey, Esq.*, receiver of Greenwich Hospital, &c.:—

"The provincial towns in the Vale of Tyne, *i. e.*, Corbridge, Hexham, Haddon Bridge, &c., in common with all places surrounded by and in the immediate vicinity of high grounds, are plentifully supplied with pure and wholesome water; and the villages and farm offices possess generally the same advantage, as it is an easy matter in most cases to convey a spring or well to the places and diffuse it through the offices, so as to supply at once the dwellings of the people and the

hovels of the cattle. The varying strata of this district, and the seams of gravel which constantly occur, afford a constant supply of pure and wholesome water. The flat country towards the east coast, particularly where it is subject to the continual draining of coal-mines, and where a thick bed of clay prevents the flow of springs to the surface, is often very deficient in this respect; and in many situations the only water to be had is that collected in ponds and tanks, which is of course at some seasons very unwholesome. The northern parts of the country—namely, Glendale and Coquetdale—being a series of hill and dale, resemble the Vale of the Tyne in soil and circumstances conducive to the health of their inhabitants, possessing abundance of streams and springs, but no stagnant water or marshy ground. Ague, the disease of marsh and fen districts, is unknown,—at least I never saw a case of it in this county; and I have been told by a medical gentleman that it scarcely prevails at all now in the island, except in the low parts of London and the vicinity of the 'Thames.'

No. 7.—Extract from a letter, dated January 22nd, 1841, from *T. S. Spedding, Esq.*, vice-chairman of the Cockermouth union:—

"In respect of the supply of water to Keswick, I think we are agreed that there is no deficiency. There are plenty of pumps, and no complaint.

"As for the effect upon local salubrity of the agricultural draining, which is going on now very extensively, and increasing every year, I suppose that no very exact observations have been made, and certainly no sensible effects ascertained. There can be no doubt but good in this respect is done and doing. Braithwaite, a village two miles on the old road to Cockermouth, is the only place hereabouts remarkable for fevers; a rapid transparent mountain-stream flows through it, but by perpetual depositions of gravel has raised its own bed above the level of the village, thereby acting rather as a dam than as a drain. My favourite notion is, that if the Boards of Guardians had power to drain such spots out of the rates, and power also to keep their towns and villages clean, as well by direct operations in that behalf as by enforcing the obligation already lying upon other parties to cleanse particular localities, it would act most beneficially upon the public health of their districts. I would include a power to build privies, and to keep them in order; such a power at Keswick might do very great good."

No. 8.—Extract from a letter, dated February 2nd, 1841, from *H. Addison, Esq.*, vice-chairman of the Penrith union:—

"Penrith is particularly well supplied with pumps and springs, affording water of excellent quality; independent of these it derives great benefit from having a branch of the Pettril running through it. Many of the dwellings of the poor, most particularly those situated in courts and yards, are in a very dirty state, arising chiefly from the want of *certain conveniences*; and although much has been done of late years to remedy this great evil, much still remains to be done. As respects the land, no drainage is required—the whole of the lands in the immediate neighbourhood of the town being perfectly sound and dry."



