

## CHAPTER V

1881-1890

THE census of 1881 showed that the population of London was 3,816,483 persons—an increase this time of well over half a million of persons in the decade.

In the central parts of London, with the single exception of Clerkenwell, the resident population continued to decrease. In the City, the decrease was nearly one-third; in the Strand nearly a fifth, and the parish of St. George, Hanover Square, was now added to the list of those on the decline.

In the East, in Whitechapel, Shoreditch, and St. George-in-the-East, the population had declined, whilst in Bethnal Green the increase had been at a much slower rate. But Mile-End-Old-Town, where there had been a good extent of unbuilt-on ground, had added over 12,000 to its population; and Poplar over 40,000.

In the North, with the single exception of St. Marylebone, all the parishes showed increases; Hackney, the great increase of over 60,000, and Islington the still larger one of nearly 70,000.

In the West, there were large increases in Paddington and Chelsea, in Kensington an increase of over 42,000, and in Fulham over 48,000. In the parishes nearer the centre—St. George, Hanover Square, St. James' (Westminster), and Westminster, the population had decreased.

On the south side of the river, with the exception of the parishes of St. Olave, and St. Saviour—both in Southwark, and near the City—every parish or district showed an increase. Notably was this the case in Camberwell, where

the increase was 75,000, and most remarkable of all, Wandsworth, where the huge increase of over 85,000 persons was recorded.

Thus the movements of population were shown by this census of 1881 to be very much on the same lines as those in 1871—a diminution in the central parts, and increases of various magnitudes in the outer parts.

Interesting information was once more given as regarded the constituent parts of the population.

It was shown that of the residents in London in 1881, the proportion of persons born in London was practically the same as in 1871. Of every 1,000 inhabitants in London, 628 were born in London, 308 in the rest of England and Wales, 13 in Scotland, and 21 in Ireland—the rest elsewhere.

The flow of people from the country to London was thus continuing at much the same rate, and the metropolis was still being fed with labour at the expense of the agricultural districts.\*

“A contingent untrained in the pursuits of town life” was thus annually thrown upon the labour market of London. But they imported a fresh strain of healthy country people into the constituent elements of the town population, and helped to stay part of the deterioration which necessarily ensued from the insanitary conditions of life in London.

As to the causes of the shifting of the population in London, the same story continued to be told by the Medical Officers of Health.

Thus the Medical Officer of Health for the Strand wrote (1882-3):—

“The material decrease in population is largely connected with the gradual transition of houses from residences into business premises, the construction of new and wider

\* To the then existing population of London.

The South Eastern Counties	contributed	close on	290,000
„ South Midland	„	„	„ 249,000
„ Eastern	„	„	„ 196,000
„ South Western	„	„	„ 168,000
„ West Midland	„	„	„ 95,000

thoroughfares, and the erection of public buildings, combined with the resulting consequence inevitably associated with such changes, a considerable augmentation in the rental or annual value of house property."

In St. James' (1882)—

"The large decrease of population (3,754 in last decade), coupled with the fact that the rateable value still has an upward tendency, clearly shows that the character of the parish is undergoing rapid change—offices, warehouses, and clubs taking the place of residences as the centre of trade continues to increase and move westward, and greater facilities are afforded for business men to live in the suburbs."

Some of the Medical Officers of Health were perturbed by the class of persons coming into their district. Thus the Medical Officer of Health for Whitechapel drew attention to the fact that of the 70,435 people in his parish no fewer than 9,660 were foreigners, mostly Russian and Polish Jews. Others of them were feeling anxious under the ever increasing numbers.

The Medical Officer of Health for Paddington wrote (1881):—

"Occupying, as the population of Paddington does, a limited area with definite boundaries which do not admit of extension, a continually increasing population can only mean a continually increasing complexity of the problems of sanitation."

Upon one most interesting point as regarded the influx of population into London the Medical Officer of Health for Lambeth threw some valuable light.\*

"The evil of overcrowding is aggravated by causes which derive their origin from the effects of that condition itself. A lowered standard of health, always the accompaniment of close building, is a factor in the further increase of pressure in an already congested district. An unsatisfied demand in the labour market for physical strength is a necessary outcome of that quality in the district affected. Muscle and

\* The report was made in 1887, but was as true in 1881 as it was in 1887.

bone in such a locality is at a premium, and that which cannot be supplied in its full development from within must be sought and obtained from without."

"Here, then, is a vicious circle of concurrent cause and effect. Overcrowding is the cause of physical weakness: physical weakness results in an unsatisfied demand in the labour market: the unsatisfied demand is the cause of an influx from without: again that influx results in overcrowding."

Once, then, that the influx of the physically strong began to diminish—the element which had contributed most to the maintenance of the physical vigour and health of the population of London—it was evident that deterioration would ensue, and the only means of counteracting that result was to improve to the utmost possible the sanitary conditions in which the people lived.

The census of 1881 is remarkable as being the last to show an increase of country-born immigrants into London. That tide was soon to begin to ebb.

The immigrants, however, were far from being all of a desirable character.

The Medical Officer of Health for Camberwell pointed this out:—

"A considerable percentage of our population is composed of persons whose natural tendency is to grovel—beggars, thieves, prostitutes, drunkards, persons of feeble intelligence, persons of lazy and improvident habits, and persons who (like too many of the poor) marry or cohabit prematurely and procreate large families for which they are totally unable to provide; and such persons gravitate from all quarters to large towns and there accumulate. . . . A large town like London will always attract undesirable residents."

With the increasing population the number of houses in the metropolis increased also.

From 418,802 inhabited houses in 1871 the number had gone up to 488,116 in 1881, and the same tale was told as to the crowding of houses on the land as in previous years.

The Medical Officer of Health for Bethnal Green (1880) stated that in his parish most of the available ground was already fully built over. The Great Eastern Railway Com-

pany, the School Board for London, and the Metropolitan Board of Works, were largely demolishing small house property. "If this sort of thing goes on much longer," he wrote, "it looks very much as if London in a few years would become a huge agglomeration of Board Schools, intersected by railways and new streets."

The correct record of the population enabled once more an accurate death-rate to be calculated. The death-rate, which had been 24.6 per 1,000 in 1871, had fallen to 21.3 in 1881.

That was most gratifying testimony to the good results following the sanitary work carried out, under many difficulties, in London, and an encouragement to perseverance.

The vital subject of the housing of the huge masses of the people of London was, during all the earlier years of this decade of 1881-90, uppermost in the minds of those who were solicitous for their welfare.

The Act of 1879 had done but little to help to a solution of the tremendous problem.

A short experience of it, and of "Cross's" Housing Act, had shown that instead of "owners" being visited with heavy penalties for their iniquities, they were being actually rewarded. In fact, they secured under these Acts not only a full, but an inordinately high compensation for their property—regardless of its infamous condition—and the ratepayers of London were mulcted in large sums to pay them for it.

"I desire," said the Medical Officer of Health for Hackney in 1883, "to express a very strong opinion that it is most unfair to the ratepayers that they should be compelled to pay for uninhabitable property which has been allowed by the owners to get into a dilapidated state for want of substantial repairs such as cannot be required under the Nuisances Removal Acts. . . ."

The first scheme which was initiated by the Metropolitan Board in 1875 was only completed at a net cost of £151,763, which sum had to be borne by the ratepayers of London; though why they should have been made to pay for the "owners" neglect which had led to the evil conditions of

his property is not very clear, except that Parliament willed it so.

By 1882 the total number of insanitary areas dealt with by the Metropolitan Board, or in process of being dealt with, was fourteen. The houses in these areas had been inhabited by 20,335 persons in 5,555 separate holdings, 3,349 of which consisted of one room only.\*

They were acquired by the Board at a cost of £1,661,000. Parliament had imposed upon the Board the obligation to provide accommodation for at least as many persons of the working classes as were displaced by the destruction of the houses on these areas. As the Board were not empowered to undertake the building of the houses in which to re-accommodate the displaced persons, the sites, after having been cleared, had to be sold to persons or companies, who were put under the obligation to erect workmen's dwellings thereon; but inasmuch as the land had been bought at its value for commercial purpose, which was far higher than its value for residential houses, this Parliamentary obligation entailed upon the Metropolitan Board, and through them upon the ratepayers of London, an enormous loss.

The Goulston Street scheme in Whitechapel, for instance, was acquired at a cost of £371,600. When sold, under the conditions imposed by Parliament, it realised only £87,600; and the Whitecross Street scheme (in St. Luke's), which cost £391,000, when sold realised £76,350.

The whole of the transactions, so far, resulted in a net loss to the Metropolitan Board, or in other words, a net charge upon the ratepayers of London of over £1,100,000.

As Mr. Chamberlain described the result, in an article he contributed to the *Fortnightly Review* of December, 1883:—

"Torrens' and Cross' Housing Acts are tainted and paralysed by the incurable timidity with which Parliament . . . is accustomed to deal with the sacred rights of property. . . ."

"The individual wrong-doer is to remain unpunished—retribution for his sins is to be exacted from the whole community."

\* See Report of Select Committee, 1882, p. v.

The enormous cost of carrying the Acts into effect stayed the hand of the Metropolitan Board, while the length of time, stretching out into years, required for the various proceedings, militated against the success of the schemes so far as providing residences for the displaced people.

An example of the working of the Act was described in 1883 by the Rev. S. A. Barnett.\*

"In 1876 the dwellings of 4,000 persons in this parish (Whitechapel) were condemned as uninhabitable, and the official scheme for their demolition and reconstruction was prepared. During the next four years the 'scheme' ploughed its course through arbitration and compensation with a puzzling slowness.

"It was indeed a 'killing slowness,' for, during all those years, landlords whose claims had been settled spent nothing on further repairs; tenants, expecting their compensation, put up with any wretchedness; while the Vestry, looking to the approaching reconstruction of the houses, let streets and footways fall to pieces. It was not until 1880 that the needful demolition was seriously begun. Since that date the houses of some thousands of the poor have been destroyed."

And then he described the slowness of the reconstruction, and added:—

"Such is the seven years' history of the Artizans' Dwellings Act in a parish under the rule of the Metropolitan Board of Works."

He expressed his opinion that the prime source of the evil was not in the law, but in the local administration; but the complications of ownership, the endless legal difficulties and formalities, the numerous arbitrations, necessarily consumed years of time before the land could be cleared for building, and then the actual building of the new houses was by no means rapid.

The mode of procedure was attended with such difficulties and disadvantages, and the administration of the Acts so clogged, that a Select Committee of the House of Commons was appointed and sat in 1881, and again in 1882, to inquire into the causes of the want of success, and to consider in

\* *Times*, 20th November, 1883.

what way the law might be further amended so as to make it really workable.

The condition imposed as to re-housing, and which was so rigorously insisted on, did not by any means achieve the desired result.

According to Mr. Lyulph Stanley\* in 1884: "Not one single person of all the poor displaced in the carrying out of the Gray's Inn Road improvement, powers for which were obtained in 1877, had been re-housed by the Board."

The Medical Officer of Health for Whitechapel, in his evidence in 1881, also showed that many of those in the houses which were to be pulled down were not working men at all.

"Many of the people do not come into the Whitechapel District for the purpose of getting employment. They have other motives; they come from all parts of the country; a great many are tramps, and come up for the purpose of begging, some for stealing, and some to obtain the advantage of the charities which exist in London, and many of them to get out of the way and hide themselves."

By this time, moreover, the possibilities of getting accommodation further afield was beginning to come into view.

"With the facilities for coming by the early trains and the various tramways that we have now at a cheap rate, the rents of many of the inhabitants of Whitechapel would not be increased by moving from it."

That the obligation to re-house was imposed alone upon the public authorities and upon railway companies was rather inequitable. In many districts the destruction of houses, and the unhousing of the inhabitants, was carried out on a far larger scale by private owners, and no such obligation was imposed upon them. The policy, therefore, was decidedly onesided, and was very costly to the ratepayer who was in no way responsible for the proceedings of the private house-owner who had caused all the trouble.

The Committee reported in June, 1882. They expressed their opinion that—

\* See his speech in Parliament, Hansard, 1884, vol. ccxc., p. 529.

"Nothing would contribute more to the social, moral, and physical improvement of a certain portion of the working classes than the improvement of the houses and places in which they live."

They stated that "very great hardship would often follow if the provision for the replacement in or near the area of displacement were wholly done away with."

"The special calling of many of the work people, the hours of their work, the employment of their children, the maintenance of their home life, the economy of living together in a family, the cheapness of food owing to the nearness of the great evening markets, &c., render it very desirable that a large portion should be enabled to re-house themselves in or near their old houses of living, and if no fresh dwellings be provided the evils of overcrowding will at once increase.

"Still, it is equally true that these observations do not apply to the whole population. Many without any special calling may live in one place as well as another. The facilities of transit recently offered by cheap trains, by boats, by tramways, &c., have enabled many to live in the suburbs who can do so consistently with their calling."

"Your Committee are of opinion that the existing law, which requires that the improvement scheme shall provide for the accommodation of, *at the least, as many persons* of the working class as may be displaced, may be relaxed, and that the accommodation to be required should vary from half to two-thirds."

As a matter of fact very few, if any, of the families thus dispossessed returned for the purpose of occupying the new buildings.

Indeed one witness\* said that—

"Neither the Peabody Trustees, nor—more or less—the other Artizans' Dwellings Companies would take in the class of people who had been displaced."

The Committee called attention to the importance of favouring in every way facilities of transit between the

\* Robert Reid (a Surveyor), p. 805.

metropolis and its suburbs by an extension of cheap workmen's trains.

And they also recommended that—

"All existing sanitary legislation should be more fully enforced, especially in those parts of the suburbs where buildings are so rapidly springing up."

A Bill was at once introduced into Parliament, the object of which was to lay down such rules for estimating the value of the premises to be purchased as would prevent the owners of insanitary property obtaining an undue price for it—"the intention of Parliament being that the owner should not gain by having allowed his property to fall into an insanitary state."

It was passed, and as an Act it further empowered the Secretary of State, under certain circumstances, to dispense with the obligation of re-housing the people to a greater extent than one-half of those displaced.

Into the detailed intricacies of many of these Housing Acts it is really useless to enter; and the enumeration of the details tends to obscure the broad and essential features of the whole subject.

In the effort of the "owners" to repudiate the responsibility for their or their predecessors' infamous neglect, and to shift the blame for the appalling state of affairs on the middlemen and the occupiers; in the effort of the middlemen to evade their responsibilities by availing themselves of every obstructive device the law so lavishly placed at their disposal, and of both of them to extort the utmost amount of money they could for their disease-begetting, death-distributing property; the unfortunate occupiers were the immediate sufferers and victims, and a huge wrong and injury was inflicted upon the community.

It was mere tinkering with the subject to pass an Act removing some petty technical difficulties for putting some previous and very limited Act in force, and to diminish the expense and delay in carrying out the Act.

It was farcical to amend the Standing Orders of Parliament, fixing twenty instead of fifteen as the minimum number of houses in any one parish which could be acquired by the

Metropolitan Board without preparing a re-housing scheme, as if that would revolutionise the condition of the housing of the people of London, and yet something not far short of revolution was required if the housing of the people was to be reformed, and put on a proper sanitary basis.

It is manifest that what was being dealt with by these Acts was only a fragment of the great housing question, and that such destruction of insanitary buildings as could possibly be effected by these means would amount to but a fraction of those unfit for human habitation in London, and would not touch the thousands of inhabited houses in every parish of London which were insanitary in varying degree, and dangerous to the individual and public health. It is clear, too, that if the insanitary conditions of the housing of the people were to be dealt with on a large scale, and with success, measures must be taken to secure the sanitary condition of the houses which such legislation did not touch. Otherwise general improvement was impossible, and existing conditions must continue indefinitely to flourish, and to produce their inevitable and enormous crop of deadly evil.

How urgent was the need for reform in some parts of London may be gauged from the description of the condition of things in Bethnal Green in 1883, given by the Medical Officer of Health of the Parish:—

“The portions of the district I have examined include nearly 2,000 houses.

“I have visited and carefully examined almost every one of these houses, and I must confess that a condition of things has been thereby revealed to me of which I had no previous conception, for I do not think I visited a single house without finding some grave sanitary defect; in a very large number the walls of the staircases, passages, and rooms are black with filth, the ceilings are rotten and bulging, the walls damp and decayed, the roofs defective, and the ventilation and lighting most imperfect.

“The dampness of the walls is in some instances due to defects in the roof, but in many the moisture rises from the earth owing to the walls being constructed without any damp-proof course. . . .

“In almost every house I visited I found the yard, paving, and surface drainage, in a more or less defective condition, a quantity of black foetid mud having accumulated in places.”

And all this was nearly thirty years after Bethnal Green had been endowed with a local sanitary authority.

Returns given occasionally by the Medical Officers of Health revealed the appalling state of insanitation in which people still lived; streets where in nearly every house nuisances dangerous to health were found to exist; a “Place” in St. Pancras where the death-rate in 1881 had been 57 per 1,000, or  $2\frac{1}{2}$  times as much as that for London; a “Place” in St. Marylebone with 22 six-roomed houses, where the births were less in number than the deaths, and the existing population were extinguishing themselves. And overcrowding had increased in many parts of the metropolis, and some of the Medical Officers of Health had come to regard it as inevitable and impossible to prevent.

The reports of the Select Committees of 1881 and 1882, and the outbreak of cholera in Egypt in 1883 which awakened apprehensions of its spread to England, quickened public interest in the sanitary condition of the metropolis, evoked a stronger expression of public opinion upon the existing evils, stirred up lethargic Vestries and District Boards to some special show of activity, and awakened the Local Government Board, and brought it into the field as an active inciter of the local sanitary authorities to adequate efforts to improve the sanitary condition of the people, and to grapple with the terrible problems of insanitary dwellings, of overcrowding, and the consequent physical misery and degradation of hundreds of thousands of the people.

The position of affairs had become clearer than it had ever been before, and its magnitude and importance was beginning to be appreciated, and the iniquities which were being allowed, and the evils which were tolerated, were coming more into the light of day and were being better understood and realised. Though in many ways there had been progress and improvement, yet in many others, of the

most vital consequence, it was evident things were scarcely moving at all.

It was now manifest that at the rate the demolition of slums and the re-housing of the people could be carried out, a very great length of time must elapse; so great that the remedy must be of the slowest, whilst, by itself, it would be wholly inadequate; and it was beginning to be realised that many of the local authorities, instead of administering the laws they were charged by Parliament to administer, were even obstructing and opposing sanitary reforms.

Once again the alarm of cholera woke up the Vestries, and some of the recorded results of such wakening are an illuminating exposure of the normal state of inaction on their part, and of the chronic insanitary condition of their parishes not revealed at other times.

In Westminster:—

“In anticipation of cholera a thorough inspection by a house-to-house visitation through the whole of the united parishes has been undertaken. Naturally many defects were found, and directions given as to what was required. The work has been completed and I consider that the parishes are now in a very satisfactory condition.”

In Poplar, 2,114 houses were inspected, of which only 334 were found to be in good order.

In Lambeth, six men were engaged temporarily for the purpose of a special inspection.

“11,493 houses were visited; 5,594 required sanitary improvements. . . . In many houses several defects were reported, bringing up the total of sanitary improvements to 12,014.”

In Bermondsey, no fewer than 5,992 notices were issued for the execution of sanitary works which were required.

The Sanitary Act of 1866 had enacted that—

“It shall be the duty of the Nuisance Authority to make, from time to time, either by itself or its officers, inspection of the district with a view to ascertain what nuisances exist calling for abatement under the powers of the Nuisances Removal Acts, and to enforce the provisions of the said Acts in order to cause the abatement thereof.”

But by many Vestries the duty had been either entirely neglected or very imperfectly performed.

The Medical Officers of Health were unceasing in pressing upon their employers the necessity of inspection.

“It is only by the constant inspection and re-inspection of property inhabited by tenants of this class (tenement-houses) that the houses can be kept in decent sanitary condition,” wrote the Medical Officer of Health for Bethnal Green.

“My opinion of the value of regular house-to-house inspection throughout the year,” wrote the Medical Officer of Health for Poplar, “is more confirmed than ever, and that such is needed for the proper sanitary supervision of the district.”

“It is by constant inspection,” wrote another Medical Officer of Health, “that the Vestry can best do its duty in preserving the lives and health of its parishioners.”

“Facts are stubborn things,” wrote the Medical Officer of Health for St. Mary, Newington, after 28 years’ sanitary work himself, “and they clearly demonstrate the necessity for a continual supervision of the dwellings of the poor (more especially) and for as constant an attack on all removable insanitary conditions. This after all is the real work to be done.”

But the Vestries and District Boards paid little heed to this advice.

Naturally, inspection was not welcome to sanitary defaulters or misdoers; naturally, the light of the sanitary policeman’s lantern into the dark places of slum-owners and ‘house-knackers’ was resented. It was an invasion of the rights of property, of the privacy of an Englishman’s home, even if he did not live in that home himself, but let it to somebody else to live in. “Why should not a man do as he liked with his own?”

And so, as inspection was, from the house “owners’” point of view, an unpopular thing, too much money was not spent by Vestries upon Sanitary Inspectors’ salaries, and even in the best inspected parishes or districts the portion inspected was small indeed compared with the whole of the

parish or district. How much was left undone, and left undone for years, was proved over and over again by whole areas being represented by their Medical Officers of Health as insanitary, or by their having to shut up houses as unfit for human habitation.

The attempt made by Parliament in 1866—in the scheme embodied in the 35th Section of the Sanitary Act—to provide a remedy for overcrowding, and to secure the maintenance of a moderate standard of cleanliness and sanitation in the tenement-houses, had been an excellent one; and Parliament improved the scheme in 1874 by extending its scope. Almost the whole of the existing evils lay in these tenement-houses, for it was there where the great mass of the disease, filth, and misery of London was to be found, and there where the greatest overcrowding, and the deepest moral and physical degradation existed.

But with the few exceptions already described practically no use had been made of the powers.

“Vested rights in filth and dirt” had still too large a representation upon, and too powerful a grip of the local sanitary authorities for any action to be adopted which would entail trouble upon the possessors of those rights.

Some Vestries, for form's sake, had made regulations but never put them in force. A few had tentatively put them in force, and promptly dropped them. A large proportion of them did not take even that much trouble, but simply ignored them altogether; and so, some seventeen years after the Act was passed, the whole scheme had ceased to be operative, and was in complete abeyance.

In December, 1883, the Local Government Board, having realised the gravity of the situation, endeavoured to get the Vestries and District Boards to take action, but the Local Government Board could not compel them to make such regulations, as there was no power of compulsion, and there was no penalty for refusal to enforce or even to make them.\*

The Vestries and District Boards were, in fact, masters of

\* The regulations suggested by the Local Government Board laid down that the landlord or owner should not allow a greater number of persons to occupy a room than would admit of free air space for each of

the situation, and could act or not act, just as they pleased—and most of them did not act.

Various were the excuses made by the Vestries for doing nothing.

The feeling which prevailed in the Vestry of Clerkenwell was that—

“The regulations generally were of such an inquisitorial and troublesome character that they were unsuited to an Englishman's home. For instance, it was shown that in some cases even clergymen occupied lodgings which would be reached by these regulations.”

And yet there were 4,700 houses in the parish to which such regulations would have been applicable, and where their application would have been of the utmost benefit to thousands of families. And from 1866 up to 1884 this power might have been, but was not used.

The Vestry of Bethnal Green was—

“Unanimously of opinion that it was unnecessary to make the regulations, and considered the existing powers sufficient.”

The Vestry of St. George-in-the-East resolved—

“That whilst fully recognising the necessity of continuing to carry out with vigour the general sanitary laws, the Vestry did not consider it advisable in the present depressed condition of trade in the parish to incur the additional expense of enforcing special sanitary regulations for houses let in lodgings” (estimated to number above 4,000).

In Westminster, the District Board resolved that no further steps should be taken as regarded making or enforcing regulations, as the Board—

300 cubic feet—if used exclusively as a sleeping room—or 400 feet if used day and night.

He was to—

- (1) Keep the drainage in good working order, to properly pave the yard, and provide sufficient sanitary accommodation.
- (2) Keep the cisterns clean and in proper order, and keep the structure of ashpit in proper order.
- (3) Cause the ceilings and walls of every room to be whitewashed and papered every April.
- (4) Provide all requisite means for the ventilation of every room, and of the common passages and staircases thereof.
- (5) To notify cases of infectious disease.



"Already possessed ample powers under existing statutes to enable it to deal promptly and effectively with such sanitary defects as the proposed regulations are intended to remedy"—a contention which, if true, threw discredit upon themselves, as there were thousands of filthy and insanitary abodes in that district which were not dealt with at all.

St. Pancras Vestry refused (1883) to make regulations, though its Medical Officer of Health had made more than one appeal to them to do so.

"I would beg to remind the Vestry that until proper regulations are made and enforced in St. Pancras for this class of houses, the Vestry have not exercised to their full extent the powers they possess for improving the condition of their poorer parishioners, and that the moral and physical welfare of those who are least able to help themselves is a question which concerns the Vestry as much, if not more, than any other it is their duty to consider."

And in the following year he wrote:—

"Upon the Metropolitan Sanitary Authorities rests a great responsibility, for it is absolutely within their power to insist upon all dwelling-houses being maintained in condition fit for human habitation, and they may, within limits, prevent overcrowding, which is no less disastrous to health than to morality.

"I have repeatedly recommended the Vestry to adopt regulations for houses let in lodgings, and have pointed out the power they would then possess for ensuring tenemented houses being maintained in proper sanitary condition. I would desire, in my last report, to urge upon them the further consideration of this subject."

There were doubtless difficulties in putting regulations such as these in operation—as, indeed, there are in putting all laws in operation—but two Vestries had put them most successfully in operation, and therefore the difficulties were not so great as those who were opposed to them insisted.

Some of the Vestries stated that they could equally well attain the same results under the powers of the Nuisances Removal Acts; but that was not the fact, for there many and considerable advantages in this form of procedure over

the procedure prescribed in other Acts relating to health and sanitation. Indeed, the Medical Officer of Health for Fulham declared (in 1884) that—

"This section gave almost all the legal power that could be wished for to place the dwellings of the poor in a proper sanitary condition."

And in the following year he wrote:—

"It will therefore in future be the fault of the Sanitary Authority if the dwellings of the poor are not kept as they should be."

The Medical Officer of Health for Camberwell, discussing the general aspect of the matter, wrote (1884):—

"I cannot help remarking on the feebleness which constantly spoils the best intentioned sanitary legislation, and which is conspicuous in the enactments relating to houses let in lodgings.

"The Local Government Board have declared that certain enactments are in force, but they cannot compel the Vestries to frame any regulations of their own, nor even can they compel Vestries to carry out and enforce regulations which the Vestries have framed and the Board have sanctioned.

"Now I am one of those who think that by the judicious regulation of lodging-houses of certain kinds, and in certain localities, very much good might be effected, and much advantage would accrue both to the lodgers and to the public. But it is clear that it ought never to have been left to individual Vestries in a place like London, to adopt or not to adopt, the enactments referred to, simply according to their pleasure, still more that they should never have been allowed to frame inconsistent orders or regulations. . . .

"The opportunity (of the Act of 1874) might have been seized, not for giving an empty power to the Local Government Board, but for requiring the Metropolitan Board of Works to frame suitable regulations for the whole of the metropolis, which the Vestries might have been required to enforce as they are required to enforce other provisions of the Sanitary Acts."

A similar opinion was expressed by the District Board of St. Olave, Southwark, which, after stating that it had been

one of the first to make regulations, it had been found unnecessary or impracticable to enforce them, went on to say:—

“The fact of the enactment having been practically inoperative throughout the metropolis, . . . it was considered that it would be unjust to enforce stringent regulations in the district, while in other parts of the metropolis regulations might differ in principle, and be neglected in practice: and what the Board wanted to see was a system of sanitary regulations which should be strictly uniform throughout the metropolis, and in which there should be no option on the part of local authorities of enforcing or neglecting.”

The explanation of this general inaction was the simple and obvious one that on those bodies there were many whose interests ran counter to the adoption of the Act, and what its adoption entailed; the sanitary obligations, the annual lime-washings, &c., would entail expense; they were not going to inflict the cost upon themselves or upon their friends if they could avoid doing so. And as they could avoid it, the great bulk of the local authorities deliberately ignored the remedy devised by Parliament, and with most reprehensible callousness let the evils go on and increase. But while they remained inactive, death and disease did not.

Progress in sanitation was retarded also somewhat by other circumstances.

The Medical Officers of Health were under no obligation to reside in their district, and were at liberty to take private practice, and so the whole of their time was not given to their public duty.\*

But furthermore, they were in a state of dependence on their employers, which naturally would often prevent their reporting fully upon sanitary matters, though, happily, there appear to have been few who were influenced by this consideration. And some of the Vestries and District Boards did not hesitate to put pressure upon their Medical Officers to prevent energy on their part. It was stated in evidence before the Select Committee in 1882 that a

\* Royal Commission, 1884.

Medical Officer would very soon “bring a hornet’s nest round his ears if he attempted to do his duty strictly and independently.”

Lord Shaftesbury declared, in 1884,\* that he was quite certain that—

“They would never have the laws of health properly given effect to, until they asserted the independence of the Health Officers.”

Nor were the Sanitary Inspectors as efficient as they might have been, though there had been a great improvement in the class of man appointed.

The Chief Sanitary Inspector for Clerkenwell † reported:—

“The two men (in Clerkenwell) are not very active. It is the greatest trouble I have to get the men to do their duty.”

“The Sanitary Inspectors have not always shown as much zeal and interest as they might have done, but lately they have improved. . . . It is openly talked about in a good many districts in London that a system of bribing goes on.” †

But those who were energetic were also discouraged by the same pressure which damped some of the energies of the Medical Officers of Health.

The Medical Officer of Health for Fulham wrote, in 1884:—

“So many are the vested interests that Sanitary Officers are obliged in the performance of their duty to interfere with, that they must be prepared to meet with injustice and opposition in almost all directions. It is not at all surprising that the dwellings of the poor in London should be in an insanitary condition seeing the great obstacles public sanitary officers have in the performance of their duties.”

And yet there were many who did their work well, and who did much to improve the conditions of living of those who were under their care or charge; and did it in the face of many obstacles and much discouragement, and of all the

\* Hansard, 1884.

† 1884 Royal Commission, vol. ii. p. 2938.

‡ Ibid. p. 724.

opposition that vested interests could bring to bear against them.

Many of the Vestries and District Boards were not only not above reproach, but were strongly to be condemned.

Sir Charles Dilke, then President of the Local Government Board, speaking in 1883, said:—

“There were some parishes in London which had very zealously tried to work the existing law, but, on the other hand, there were more parishes the government of which was a flagrant scandal.”

And Mr. Chamberlain, in an article in the *Fortnightly Review* of December, 1883, wrote:—

“In the metropolis, where the evil is greatest, the want of an efficient and thoroughly representative municipal government stands in the way of reform.

“The Vestries, often in the hands of cliques and chosen at elections which excite no public interest, are largely composed of small house-property owners, who cannot be expected to be enthusiastic in putting the law in force against themselves.”

And in the House of Commons, on the 4th of March, 1884, Sir Charles Dilke stated that—

“In Clerkenwell, the two joint dictators of the parish, who had control of the Vestry and its leading Committee, one of them being Chairman of the principal Committee, were the largest owners in the whole district of Clerkenwell of bad or doubtful property. . . . In Clerkenwell there were fourteen house-farmers on the Vestry and twelve publicans who seemed to work very much with them.”

Nothing more decisively demonstrates the hostility of the Vestries to the Act of 1866, indeed to all this branch of sanitary reform, than the fact that they would not make adequate provision for the performance of the sanitary duties imposed on them by divers Acts of Parliament.

A return compiled by the Medical Officer of Health for Bethnal Green in 1885, from information supplied him by the Medical Officers of Health of thirty-eight Vestries, shows how the local sanitary authorities crippled sanitary work by a wholly inadequate staff of Inspectors.

Parish or District.	Number of Inspectors.	Number of Inhabitants to each Inspector.
Greenwich ... ..	1	148,545
Newington ... ..	1	117,870
Mile-End-Old-Town ... ..	1	111,607
Lambeth ... ..	4	69,683
Poplar ... ..	2	86,671
Bermondsey ... ..	1	88,770
Shoreditch ... ..	2	62,754
St. Pancras ... ..	4	60,389
Paddington ... ..	2	55,567
Marylebone ... ..	3	50,294
Hackney ... ..	4	56,431
Bethnal Green ... ..	2½	51,958
Camberwell ... ..	4	59,500

In the whole of the metropolis there were 103 Inspectors of Nuisances—a rough average of one Inspector to about 40,000 of the population.

How could it be expected that one Inspector could look after a town of 40,000 people?

Consistently, and, year after year, insistently, did the bulk of the Medical Officers of Health complain of the lack of sufficient Sanitary Inspectors, and point out the necessity for more Sanitary Inspectors; some begged for them—but to nearly all these appeals the Vestries turned a deaf ear.

Every now and then some incident occurred or some exposure was made of some abominations of insanitation which were a revelation of the extraordinary methods adopted by some men in utilising land for building houses regardless of all sanitary consequences whatever to others.

In the *Times* of December 18, 1883, an article was published entitled “A Curious Site for Industrial Dwellings.”

“The things which are done in London under the shadow of legal right are sometimes startling.”

In Bethnal Green were two disused burial-grounds—“Globe Fields” and “Peel Grove.” Parliament authorised a railway line to be constructed through “Globe Fields.”

Foundations had to be made for the arches, and trenches had to be dug in the burial-ground.

The Medical Officer of Health, on inspecting the place, found a horrible condition of things. But with many precautions against loosing some virulent epidemic in the

locality, the human remains were removed and re-interred elsewhere, and, it is stated, part of the ground was built over.

Fuller particulars were given as to the Peel Grove Cemetery. The ground, several acres in extent, had been leased by a pawnbroker and started as a cemetery as a speculation. The statements made by the writer in the *Times* are specially illuminating. The cemetery was opened about 1840 without consecration. The Bishop refused to consecrate the ground as burials had taken place in it already, and as some difficulties were consequently experienced, the speculating pawnbroker acted, it is said, for some years as chaplain.

Ultimately, somehow or other, a chaplain was appointed.

About 20,000 persons had been buried in it, six deep, and packed as closely as it was possible to pack them—not even earth between the coffins, so anxious was the owner to economise space; large numbers who died of cholera in 1849 having been buried there.

The last interment took place in September, 1855.

In 1883, the ground having served one financial purpose, it became desirable to utilise it for another financial purpose, and the proposal was made to erect houses upon it, and an agreement was entered into with a builder for the erection of blocks of dwellings thereon. This builder commenced excavations for the purpose of laying foundations, and he had sent in drainage plans for a block of industrial dwellings to the Vestry of Bethnal Green.

“Is such an obvious violation of the laws of health and decency to be permitted?” said the writer.

“The Vestry are alive to the situation, and appear to be willing to do all in their power to avert the catastrophe. But the law on the subject is by no means clear. . . . It is little short of scandalous that such doubts should exist. It is repugnant to every feeling of decency and propriety to invite human beings to live in densely packed crowds over a charnel-house.”

The sanitary condition of any city or district must, as has already been pointed out, depend very largely upon

the system of local government in existence at the time, and its efficiency or inefficiency.

This was specially true of this great metropolis with its millions of people, its vast extent, its great diversities.

To all intents and purposes the main features of the local government of London had undergone little change since 1855. There was still the “City” with its special law, special area, and special government, to which had been added the Port Sanitary Authority.

And there was the Central Authority, the Metropolitan Board of Works; and there were the local sanitary authorities, the Vestries and District Boards—and to them had been added the Metropolitan Asylums Board, another indirectly elected central body. But there were very manifest and prominent defects of the very gravest nature in this system of London government, and in 1884 the Government of the day made an effort to construct a better system.

Sir William Harcourt introduced the London Government Bill into the House of Commons.

“While London grew,” he said,\* “the Corporation remained stationary.”

“The central body must deal with the large affairs, . . . a central body doing all the great things.”

“The central principle of the Bill is this, that there should be some common control over the Vestries which shall give them a uniform action for the benefit of the whole community instead of leaving them as they now are, independent of any such control.”

“What is the great evil? It is that the metropolis is broken up into fragments acting on a different principle, some doing ill, and those who do well suffering in consequence of the ill-doings of their neighbours.”

“When the danger (of invasion of cholera) threatens a great metropolis like London, all must desire and want a central authority which should advise, which should assist, which should compel every part of the community to take those measures of precaution which are necessary for the safety of the whole. No such authority exists at this time.

\* Hansard, 1884, vol. cclxxxix, p. 41.

"If a Vestry refuses to make sanitary bye-laws, or to carry out a proper system of sanitary inspection, you are absolutely powerless to compel them to do so. A single parish may become a plague-spot in London from which disease may be spread all around, and the Metropolitan Authority have no authority to make the parish do as it ought to do."

Mr. Gladstone said \* :—

"The local government of London is, or, if it is not, it certainly ought to be, the crown of all our local and municipal institutions.

"The principle of unity (of London) has already been established under the pressure of necessity as a matter which could not be resisted. It has been established in the Metropolitan Board of Works. . . . There can be no doubt we have established a principle of unity, and that we have found it satisfactory.

"The supply of water and the supply of gas . . . two of the most elementary among the purposes of municipal government, have been handed over to private Corporations for the purpose of private profit because you have not chosen to create a complete municipality for the metropolis.

"And that is not all.

"The defects of the present system are admitted. . . . Surely if there are these great and intolerable defects they ought to be remedied by the action of some genuine popular local authority. But we have got no genuine popular local authority. . . .

"London, large as it is, is a natural unit—united by common features, united by common approximation, by common neighbourhood, by common dangers—depending upon common supplies, having common wants and common conveniences.

". . . Unity of Government in the metropolis is the only method on which we can proceed for producing municipal reform."

The Bill was strongly opposed in Parliament, and was withdrawn at a late period of the Session, "but its introduction and discussion had done much to awaken interest

\* Hansard, 1884, vol. ccxc. p. 541.

and mature opinion on the question of the practicability of the government of London by a single municipality." \*

Up to this time, though overcrowding had occupied so prominent a position in the great health problem of London, no returns of the amount of overcrowding actually existing had been obtained, nor had any estimate even been attempted. The reports of the Medical Officers of Health showed in many graphic descriptions that overcrowding was prevalent in every part of London—more acutely so in some districts than in others—but as to the amount no information was available.

The first reliable figures over a large area—a large central district of London—were collected by Mr. T. Marchant Williams, Inspector of Schools for the London School Board, and published in the *Times* of February 22, 1884.

He wrote giving some of the results of his recent investigations into the social conditions of the people residing in his district.

"My sole desire," he wrote, "is to record facts. It will be my endeavour to show that these facts are sufficiently typical or representative of the social condition of the elementary school population of London to serve as a trustworthy basis for a fairly accurate estimate of the stupendous difficulties the School Board for London has to contend with."

"The Division of Finsbury includes the following parishes :—

- |                              |   |   |
|------------------------------|---|---|
| (1) St. Giles'-in-the-Fields | } | The whole population in 1881 = 503,851; number of children of school age, 3-13 = 91,128, 95 per cent. of whom have been scheduled by the Officers of the School Board." |
| St. George-the-Martyr        |   |   |
| (2) St. Andrew, Holborn      | } |   |
| Clerkenwell                  |   |   |
| St. Luke                     |   |   |
| Stoke Newington              |   |   |
| Islington                    |   |   |

(1) In St. Giles'-in-the-Fields there were 9 efficient elementary schools, 4 churches, 6 chapels, 102 public-houses, 27 milk shops.

\* See Report of Royal Commission on the Amalgamation of the City and County of London, 1894.

He gave the number of families scheduled for elementary school purposes residing *in more than two rooms* was 382, which represents about 14 per cent. of the whole number of scheduled families.

28 per cent of the families lived each in 2 rooms only,  
and 58 " " " " " 1 room only.

(2) In the parishes of Bloomsbury, St. George-the-Martyr, St. Andrew, Holborn, and part of St. Giles'.

The number of families scheduled for elementary school purposes residing *in more than two rooms* was 395, which is about 10 per cent. of the whole number of scheduled families.

About 45 per cent lived in 2 rooms only.  
" " " " " 1 room only.

(3) Lower Division of Clerkenwell and St. Luke's.

The number of families scheduled for elementary school purposes residing *in more than two rooms* was 3,886, which is about 37 per cent. of the whole number of scheduled families.

33 per cent live in 2 rooms only.  
30 " " " 1 room only.

He gave similar information as regarded three other sub-districts, and then went on:—

"The foregoing statistics show that there were at the beginning of the present year, in the Finsbury division—

"10,490 families consisting of 41,044 persons, living, each, in *one room only*, and 17,210 families consisting of 82,215 persons, living, each, in *two rooms only*, a total of 123,259 persons living in one or two rooms.

"For every efficient elementary school in the division there are more than 8 public-houses, for there are in the division 111 efficient schools, while the public-houses number 912; the grocers' shops, 682; bakers' shops, 409; dairies, 350; coffee shops, 427; churches, 74; chapels, 32; mission rooms, 47; registered lodging-houses, 101."

And then he summarised his figures for the City Division:

Number of children of school age	=	6,986
" " churches and chapels	=	71
" " public-houses	=	408

Number of families living, each, *in more than two rooms* was 1,972, which is about 33 per cent. of the scheduled families.

About 43 per cent. live, each, in 2 rooms only, and  
nearly 24 " " " 1 room only.

The *Times* commented, in a leading article, on this information.

"Everywhere, and by all sections not immediately affected, the scandal and almost the absurdity of the brutish degradation of an enormous number of habitations in the greatest and most opulent city in the world are thoroughly recognised. . . . Habits of life such as lodgings of the kind now common among London workmen foster and encourage are a positive danger to the whole of society. Only by one rank is the question treated as of no pressing importance. That happens to be the body of persons directly interested.

". . . No more instructive contribution has been offered towards a clear perception of the dimensions of the problem than those given by Mr. Marchant Williams. . . .

"Incidentally the census, by the School Board, of the classes it was founded to teach, contains the precise materials for informing the public of the extent of the overcrowding which has been shocking the moral sense of the nation. Formerly, when instances of overcrowding were cited, it might have been fancied they were exceptions or exaggerations. Mr. Williams' report allows of no possibility of a doubt.

"The Finsbury educational division contained, in 1881, a population of 503,851. Of these, 41,044 live in single rooms, at an average rate of four a room; 82,215 occupy suites of two rooms, at a rate exceeding four persons and

three-quarters for each. For a family of two to monopolise a whole room is a luxury, and to possess two rooms is a marvel. Some rooms are made to hold ten, and many to hold six or seven. . . .

"A home partakes of the life of the dwellers in it. They mould and incorporate it with their being, and it helps to mould and fashion them. The 123,000 owners of an undivided and indivisible quarter of a hovel in Finsbury, and the other hundreds of thousands in like case elsewhere in the town, are curtailed of the essential parts of the rights of humanity by the miserable accident that their locality refuses them reasonable standing room. Family life is an impossibility for a whole family collected in the single room 12 to 15 feet by 6 to 10. In a multitude of instances those tenanted a single room are several families, not one. They have to distribute the floor by square inches, and grow up with less regard to decency than a cat or a dog."

And in another letter written a few days later, Mr. Marchant Williams added:—

"It was only the other day that I discovered in one of these streets (near Fitzroy Square) a house containing nine rooms, each of which accommodates on an average eight persons!

". . . The rents in the most crowded parts of my district amount as a rule to about a third or fourth of the maximum wages earned by the tenants."

He mentions a case, a riveter:—

"He had recently abandoned the room in which he, his wife, and six children had lived for two years."

"I have more than once when going my rounds been accosted by a landlord in a state of abject terror, lest I might be arranging to rob him of some of his victims. The landlord's defence invariably is that he is obliged to levy high rents because the tenants frequently run away by night and leave no trace behind them of their whereabouts."

More and more did the feeling grow that something must be done to ameliorate the conditions under which the working classes and poorer people were living, and on

the 22nd of February, the Marquess of Salisbury, in the House of Lords, moved in an Address to Her Majesty for the appointment of a Royal Commission to inquire into the housing of the working classes.\*

"The attention of persons of every class, of every creed, and school of politics, has been turned to this question," he said.

H.R.H. the Prince of Wales said:—

"I feel convinced that your lordships, in common with all classes of Her Majesty's subjects, will be gratified to learn that the noble Marquess has asked for a searching inquiry into this great and momentous question with regard to the housing and the amelioration of the dwellings of the poor and of the working classes, and that Her Majesty's Government have decided to issue a Royal Commission for that purpose.

"As your Lordships know I take the keenest and liveliest interest in this question.

"I can assure you, my Lords, that I am deeply flattered at having been appointed a member of this Royal Commission."

The Government accepted the motion, and a Royal Commission was forthwith appointed and immediately began its work.

While the great question of housing and overcrowding was under discussion and was being investigated, and efforts being made to deal with it, various other matters forming part of the general sanitary evolution of London were attracting attention, or gradually developing.

In October, 1882, the limits of the Port of London were extended seawards, and in the following year the powers of the Port Sanitary Authority were extended.† Most of the powers of an Urban Sanitary Authority under the Public Health Act of 1875 were conferred upon it, and the Medical Officer of Health reported that he believed

\* Hansard, 1884, vol. cclxxxiv.

† By the Diseases Prevention (Metropolis) Act, 1883, 46 and 47 Vic. cap. 35.

the legal powers of the Authority would be found "amply sufficient for the sanitary control and supervision of the Port."

The Authority extended its attention now to the inspection of imported meat. It was a matter of the first importance to watch carefully the food supply of the people. The trade of frozen meat had been rapidly growing, and from time to time large quantities arrived in unsound condition, which it was most necessary should be prevented going on to the market.

In connection with another very important article of food—namely, milk—action was also taken.

The effect of the order made in 1879 by the Privy Council, as to dairies, cowsheds, and milkshops, had been very beneficial, and a marked change for the better in the conditions under which the milk trade was conducted was the result. That Order was revoked in 1885 by the Privy Council, and a new one passed extending the powers of local authorities in the matter, and prescribing further precautions to secure the sanitary condition of all dairies and cowsheds, and for the protection of milk against infection or contamination.

Another beneficial sanitary improvement was effected in 1883, by the extension of the benefits of the infectious hospitals of the Metropolitan Asylums Board.

The Royal Commission on Fever and Smallpox Hospitals, in 1882, stated that in their opinion it was of paramount importance that the hospitals of the Metropolitan Asylums Board, to which so many classes of persons might become liable to be removed, should be made as little unattractive as the nature of the case admitted, and they considered that the pauper character which attached to the hospitals of the Board, and which rendered them repulsive to all but the indigent, would disappear if the distinction between paupers and non-paupers were abolished.

This suggestion was partially given effect to by the Diseases Prevention (Metropolis) Act of 1883, which enacted that, subject to certain arrangements, the admission of any person suffering from infectious disease into any

hospital provided by the Metropolitan Asylums Board, or the maintenance of any such person therein, should not be considered to be parochial relief.

The plan was only partly successful, but as years went on the hospitals were increasingly used by persons other than those of the legally recognised pauper class.

In the years 1884 and 1885 the hospitals demonstrated their great utility. There was a severe epidemic of smallpox. From its outbreak in 1884, to its subsidence in the autumn of 1885, no less a number than 12,425 patients passed through the hospitals, hospital ships, and camps of the Metropolitan Asylums Board, and the arrangements for the removal to hospital of cases of infectious disease, from the whole of the metropolis, worked smoothly and satisfactorily.

The gain to the community in thus removing infectious cases from its midst was immeasurable.\*

In 1885 the Report of the Royal Commission which had been inquiring into the Housing of the Working Classes was published. It presented to the general public a mass of facts of which previously they had taken but little heed, and the vast importance of which they had utterly failed to realise; and it brought into the forefront of social questions the vital question of the public health, and the imperative necessity of remedying evils which were eating into the very vitals of the community.

The Royal Commissioners depicted the widely prevalent and dreadful overcrowding which existed, and which in certain localities was becoming more serious than ever, and they gave numerous instances of it. They described the fearsome condition of tenement-houses, and of the people living therein—the inadequacy of the water supply—the defective sanitary accommodation in houses—the lack of air space—the absence of ventilation—the use of cellars and underground rooms as dwelling-places—the limitless filth.

And they pointed out the dreadful results of this condition of things—physical, moral, and material—the preva-

\* The total net expenditure was £401,000 in 1885.



lence of disease, the heavy death-rate, the destruction of bodily health, the dreadful immorality resulting from overcrowding, the degradation to which masses were doomed, the incitement to drink, and depravity, and crime. They declared that:—

“Even statistics of actual disease consequent on overcrowding would not convey the whole truth as to the loss of health caused by it to the labouring classes. . . .

“Nothing stronger could be said in describing the effect of overcrowding than that it is even more destructive to general health than conducive to the spread of epidemic and contagious diseases.”

And they pointed out that there was much legislation designed to meet these evils, yet that the existing laws were not put in force, some of them having remained a dead letter from the date when they first found place in the statute book.

And they investigated the causes of many of these things—and they assigned the blame for some of them—and they passed in review the conduct of the local governing authorities—and they recapitulated the existing laws upon these various matters, and suggested certain alterations, and made various valuable recommendations.

There was, in fact, placed on record a calm, unimpassioned, and unexaggerated statement of the evils which masses of the population of the great capital were enduring in the last quarter of the highly civilised and enlightened nineteenth century.

It was a thorough confirmation of all the reports of the Medical Officers of Health, and of the facts set out, and pressed by them, year after year, upon the attention of the Vestries and District Boards, and which had so persistently been ignored by so many of those authorities.

The Commissioners classified the—

“Unquestioned causes which produced the overcrowding and the generally lamentable condition of the homes of the labouring classes.”

The first was—

“The poverty of the inhabitants of the poorest quarters,

or in other words the relation borne by the wages they received to the rent they had to pay.”

The next was the demolition, for various reasons, of houses inhabited by the working classes and poorer people, and the consequent displacement of the people.

The third was the relation between the owners of property upon which the dwellings of the poor stood, and the tenants of those dwellings.

“The other great remaining cause of the evil was the remissness of local authorities.”

From their very origin, these “authorities” were unsatisfactory instruments for the performance of the public duties.

“But little interest was, as a rule, taken in the election of vestrymen by the inhabitants,” instances having been known of vestrymen in populous parishes being returned by two votes, on a show of hands.

Elsewhere it is reported they elected each other.

The Commissioners referred to the “supineness” of many of these metropolitan local authorities in sanitary matters, and to the “laxity of administration of some of them.” And still worse, to the self-interested action of vestrymen.

Thus on the Vestry of Clerkenwell, they said, were—

“Thirteen or fourteen persons who are interested in bad or doubtful property, including several ‘middlemen’; and ten publicans who, with the exception of one or two, had the reputation of working with the party who trade in insanitary property; and accordingly this party commands a working majority on the Vestry.”

“It is not surprising to find that the Sanitary Inspectors whose tenure of office and salary is subject to such a body should show indisposition to activity.”

“The state of the homes of the working classes in Clerkenwell, the overcrowding, and other evils, which act and re-act on one another, must be attributed in a large measure to the default of the responsible local authority.”

“Clerkenwell does not stand alone: from various parts

of London the same complaints are heard of insanitary property being owned by members of the Vestries and District Boards, and of sanitary inspection being inefficiently done, because many of the persons whose duty it is to see that a better state of things should exist, are those who are interested in keeping things as they are."

And in another part of their report they wrote:—

"It is evident that the remedies which legislation has provided for sanitary evils have been imperfectly applied in the metropolis, and that this failure has been due to negligence in many cases of the existing local authorities."

The part of the evidence which was of greatest value and interest was that which laid bare the responsibility for the dreadful conditions under which such masses of the people lived.

Apart from the measure of responsibility which fell on Parliament itself, and it was no light one, it is clear that those conditions were due (1) in part to the various classes of "owners," (2) in part to the people themselves, and (3) in part to the local authorities.

As regarded *owners*, there were first the ground landlords, who themselves, or whose predecessors had leased their land for building purposes, or with houses thereon to a tenant.

It would appear clear that these ground landlords or freeholders, or lessors, had power to enforce against the person who held directly from them the repairing clauses of leases. But the existing condition of things showed that they did not do so.

One of the witnesses, giving evidence about a particular property, said:—

"By the terms of even the old leases the tenant was supposed to keep the place in proper repair. . . . The property has gradually deteriorated in consequence of neglect."

And Lord Salisbury, who asked:—

"I suppose it is practically impossible for the ground landlord to see that the conditions are kept?"

Was told in reply:—

"The only way in which it is possible for him to do that is to keep a very active supervision over his property.

"If that was done by ground landlords, and had always been done by them, you would have personal supervision carried out by a sufficient number of people to ensure the conditions being kept."

Any idea of property having its duties as well as its rights appears to have been non-existent.

Next to the landowner was the numerous and varied class of house "owners," from the man who leased the land from the landlord and built the house, or who had leased the house and had sub-leased it to some one else. And often there were sub-lessees, until in some cases there was a chain of persons holding different interests in the same house.

And there was the class of persons who take a house and break it up into tenement-rooms, and who were known as "house-knackers," or house jobbers, or house farmers, or as "middlemen," these last being defined as any one who stands between the freeholder and the one who occupies.

Some interesting descriptions of some of these "middlemen" were given.

One of the largest in Clerkenwell was a Mr. Decimus Ball, and there was also a Mr. Ross—both of whom were on the Vestry.

The witness stated that these men had neglected the houses, and in many cases were very extortionate in their demands against the occupants.

Mr. Ball had many houses which were inhabited by families in single rooms, but which up to a short time previously were inhabited by whole families to a house.

Mr. Ball's profit is "perfectly enormous if he does not do any repairs." And he made very few; and if the rent were not paid on the Monday morning, he threatened to raise it.

Probably the most notorious "middleman" was a certain Mr. Flight.

"He must have been the owner of thousands and

thousands of houses in the metropolis." (18,000, it was said.)

"He owned property in every part of London, and the squalid nature of that property, the wretched condition in which it has been kept, the avoidance of all decent rules by which habitations are governed, was something very fearful."

"Middlemen," it was stated, sometimes appeared to be making 150 per cent. per annum, but they assert that repairs have to come out of that. Repairs, however, were only executed once in three or four years, and in the others they get their 150 per cent.

"If the house-farmers do no repairs for years the profits are large. . . . They collect their rents very sharply.

"The middleman makes the tenant pay an excessive rent because he insists upon making an excessive profit."

The great work which the Commission did was in the enlightenment of the public, and the material they afforded for the formation of public opinion in the right direction. Subsequent experience showed that the recommendations made—excellent and helpful as so many of them were—did not by a long way cut deep enough to extirpate the more serious evils.

"It is evident," wrote the Commissioners, "that the 35th Section of the Sanitary Act of 1866 (dealing with tenement-houses) which contains a remedy for some of the evils which have been described is likely to remain a dead letter in many districts of the metropolis until some improved means be devised for putting it into action." They recommended that the local authorities who had not already made and enforced bye-laws under the section "should proceed to do so."

But no compulsion was suggested to make them do so, or for the only effective alternative, the provision of other machinery to act in their default, and so the local authorities were in this matter allowed to remain in their position of complete independence and to continue their policy of inactivity—if not obstruction.

As to inspection, and the inadequacy of a sanitary staff, much evidence had been given, but, they remarked:—

"It is evident that where work is performed according to the custom of certain districts of the metropolis it really does not matter whether the staff of inspectors be large or small."

They summed up their general view in the following passage:—

"Without entering upon questions of policy of far wider application than the more immediate subject-matter of the present inquiry,\* Your Majesty's Commissioners are clearly of opinion that there has been failure in administration rather than in legislation, although the latter is no doubt capable of improvement. What at the present time is specially required is some motive power, and probably there can be no stronger motive power than public opinion."

And with that view they recommended that inquiries should be held as to the immediate sanitary requirements of different districts, and the reports be presented to Parliament.

Public opinion, however, is hard to move, and usually slow in moving; and when it has at last decided on definite action Parliament is slow in giving effect to the decision, and, when Parliament at last acts, the legislation itself is frequently defective. And so the outlook was rather hopeless.

Various other more concrete amendments were, however, suggested in the various Housing Acts to render them more effective for their purpose.

And, as a result, in the session of Parliament of 1885 a Bill was introduced dealing with the "Housing of the Working Classes."

Lord Salisbury, in moving the second reading, said\* :—

The Bill he introduced was to a certain extent "a compromise." "No one need expect to find that it contains any magic formula which will cure all the evils of which this House and the public have heard a great deal, and there is nothing startling, sensational or extreme in its provisions. We are hoping to cure these evils by slow and gradual steps, by the application of remedies

\* Hansard, vol. ccxxix. p. 889.

apparently not far-reaching in their character, but still judiciously directed to the precise difficulties which arose in each department of our inquiry."

The Bill duly passed (48 & 49 Vic. cap. 72).

Most of the reforms embodied in it were of a trifling character and such as could have only the most limited and gradual effect.

This Act extended generally the operation of the Labouring Classes Lodging Houses Acts of 1851 and 1867, and substituted the Metropolitan Board of Works for the Vestries and District Boards as the authority under the Act.

A really useful plan was authorised by it, namely, the sale, at a fair market price, to the Metropolitan Board of certain prison sites in London for housing purposes. And one other good thing done was depriving the owner of insanitary premises, which had been pulled down by order of the local authority, of the power to require the local authority to purchase such premises.

But merely again to declare—

"That it shall be the duty of every local authority entrusted with the laws relating to public health and local government to put in force the powers with which they are invested so as to secure the proper sanitary condition of all premises within the area under their control"—was futile, considering that the authorities in question had steadily ignored the same direction, made nineteen years previously, in the Act of 1866.

Lord Salisbury wound up his speech with the following abnegation of Parliamentary power:—

"We must not imagine that it is anything we can do in this House, or in the House of Commons, that will remove all these evils. It must be done by that stirring up of public opinion which these investigations cause; it is to this that we must look for any real reform, it must be from the people themselves, from the owners, builders, and occupiers, when their attention is drawn to the enormous evils which past negligence has caused, it is from them that the cure of the sanitary evils which have so largely increased the death-rate must come."

Considering, however, the accumulated mass of evidence which had shown beyond all question that it was the owners and builders who were mainly responsible for those "enormous evils," and who were still hard at work adding to them and perpetuating them, it was rather hopeless to expect "the cure of the sanitary evils" to come from that quarter.

Unfortunately two general elections, and the heated discussion of great political questions, threw even these great health questions into the background, and not so much immediate benefit as was to be hoped followed the inquiry of the Royal Commissioners.

It is an awful handicap to the welfare of a community, and of a nation, when those who should take a principal share in the duty of raising the physical, social, and moral condition of the people over whom they can exercise influence, and who are more or less under their control, not alone stand idly aside, but absolutely exploit the misery and helplessness and ignorance of masses of the people.

The Imperial Government may make most excellent laws, but the physical and sanitary welfare of the people cannot be secured by a local governing authority alone, nor their moral and religious welfare by the Churches alone.

There is a great sphere of life where those who stand in the relation of land-owners or house-owners to tenants could exercise an enormous influence for good, and where nobody else could exercise it so effectually or so easily.

But the disaster has been that in the great metropolis—the greatest of all cities—a vast proportion of those who ought to have been active in using this influence, have never made the slightest effort to use it, whilst others have used their position, and the dependence of the people upon them, solely to wring from them the last farthing that could be extracted.

And these were the men who made the loudest protests and outcry against legislation and against administration which was to make them do that which the vital interests of the community and of the State required to be done.

The root of the evil connected with the housing of the people in London lay with the disregard of "owners" for the condition of their tenants.

Many "owners" appeared to be under the impression that their investment in house property was to be as free from trouble or labour as money invested in the national funds is; and so long as they got the rent they expected, they did not trouble themselves about the state of the houses or of the people living therein. They were loth to spend money on them, as that curtailed their income, and the argument was constantly used that it was useless spending money to put the property in order, when anything they did to it would be promptly destroyed. And they cared not who were their tenants so long as a high rent was obtainable from them.

Some declared that the people were so sunken, so degraded, so filthy, and depraved, and destructive, that nothing they could do could secure their property being kept in a sanitary or decent condition.

Doubtless in many districts and many cases the conduct of the tenants was as bad as bad could be. As one of the Medical Officers of Health wrote in 1883:—

"It must be borne in mind that many of the occupants of tenement property are careless and filthy in their habits; and in addition are very destructive; fittings put up one day are pulled down and destroyed the next; ash-bin covers, closet doors, and even flooring boards, share the same fate."

And many were the "owners" of various degree who endeavoured to justify their neglect on this ground.

Were such an argument admitted, the owner could claim to be exonerated from the duty of keeping his property in proper order, and the evil conditions and consequences resulting from his neglect would go on increasing indefinitely, until a state of things destructive to the community was ultimately reached.

Viewed broadly, and impartially, there was much truth as regarded the misconduct and uncleanness of great numbers of tenants, but the central fact was that the "owner" was the person mainly interested in, and bene-

fited by possession of the property, and therefore primarily responsible for maintaining it in a condition which should not endanger the health of the community.

If, through the neglect and indifference of his predecessors, the property had fallen into a bad state, the consequences equitably fell upon him, just as the consequences of any other bad investment by his predecessor would have done. He had inherited something which was not worth as much as he anticipated—that was all; but the consequences must not be shifted on to the community, nor must his tenants be made the victims.

And if he allowed his property to become a danger to his tenants, and through them to the community at large, the community had an absolute right to protect itself by insisting that he should be prevented from so doing.

The only way in which, in the interests of the public, abuses can be prevented is by holding the person responsible for them who has the power of preventing them. And that was just what in this case the "owners" did not like.

Building constituted an important part of the housing problem. The Medical Officer of Health for Lambeth, in his report for 1887, gave an interesting account of the process of building in London which shows how even the amended Building Acts had failed to secure those conditions of air and space which are essential for health.

"In proximity to the centres of business every available plot of garden or recreation ground has been converted into building sites. Houses constructed from materials of the poorest quality and by workmen employed only for the cheapness of their labour, have been hurried into occupation.

"The system of close building, at first confined in its application to the consolidation of the inner zone, has been adopted in the outer, and with the demand for shelter, which increases in a progressive ratio with the growth of the population, the once open suburbs must ere long become indistinguishable in the monotony of house row and pavement.

"The art of close building appears a progressive one. In its infancy, twenty years ago, the art has now arrived at a stage nearly approaching perfection. In the earlier examples the space allotted to garden land was larger than that built on. Then the size of the two quantities reached an equality—then the covered ground becomes a larger quantity than the uncovered land, until the final stage of development is attained when the extreme limit of encroachment permitted by the Building Act is reached, and garden land is represented by a yard 100 superficial feet in area."

Extraordinary loopholes in the sanitary laws, moreover, were constantly being discovered which almost neutralised the original enactment.

Thus the Medical Officer of Health for Camberwell remarked in his report for 1888:—

"It has been long known to the Sanitary Committee that there has never been any efficient supervision of the drainage and other sanitary arrangements of houses in course of construction. . . . It is true that every builder has been required before constructing his private drains and connecting them with the public sewers, to send in a plan of his proposed drainage for the sanction of the Surveyor. But there has been no machinery by which builders could be compelled to carry out their private works in accordance with the plans submitted, and to ensure that the details of their works had been carried out in a workmanlike or efficient manner. The inspections of houses even recently built have shown that sanitary nuisances complained of have been largely due to scandalous neglect of duty on the part of those concerned in carrying out the drainage works, and that in most cases the plans sent in have not accorded with the arrangements finally adopted."

Various, indeed, were matters connected with the public health which unexpectedly came cropping up; sometimes matters thought to have been disposed of but only partly so, sometimes, wholly new origins and ramifications of insanitation.

Thus in 1886 the Medical Officer of Health for the south part of Poplar District drew special attention to a grievance long previously complained of and for many years endured.

"A greater scandal cannot well be shown in matters vital to health than that in spite of abundant evidence of the magnitude of the evil, thousands and tens of thousands of families living in houses, the rates of which are payable by the landlords, may at any moment, without a particle of fault of their own, be suddenly denied one of the first necessities of life—water—through the neglect and wilfulness of others."

The main remedy open to the water companies to recover rates from defaulting non-resident owners of tenement-houses was the simple expedient of discontinuing the supply of water. This course was open to a double objection—first, tenants who had paid their rent were deprived of that for which they had constructively paid; and secondly, a tenement-house deprived of water might speedily become a focus of disease.

"That disease and death are directly traceable to this want," wrote the Medical Officer of Health, "no one acquainted with sanitary work in London can doubt. Take this instance. Water cut off, drains stopped, opening up of ground and drains, removal of filth accumulations, horrid stench, diphtheria, death.

"In Hanbury Place—having six houses—there was no water supply for twenty-six days, and families numbering each seven, nine, two of six, and others had to exist in May, 1885, with choked drains, yard flooded with sewage, and no water—and all because of non-payment of rates by the landlord."

In 1887 Parliament happily dealt with this evil, and by an Act passed in that year—

"Water companies were prohibited from cutting off the water supply from any dwelling-house for non-payment of water rate, if such rate were payable by the owner and not the occupier of the premises. . . ."

In the middle of this decade, too, anxiety revived, owing to the state of the Thames, a matter which it was hoped

had been finally disposed of. The discharge of sewage at the new outfalls make the river in those parts much what it had previously been in London.

A Royal Commission was appointed to inquire into the subject. They reported that they found a condition of things which they "must denounce as a disgrace to the metropolis and to civilisation." They said that in 1884 "the sewage water from the outfalls manifestly reached London Bridge."

"At Greenwich Pier the water was very black, and the smell exceedingly strong."

"At Woolwich the river for its whole width was black, putrid, sewage—looking as if unmixed and unalloyed. The stench was intolerable."

"We are of opinion that it is neither necessary nor justifiable to discharge the sewage of the metropolis in its crude state into any part of the Thames."

This evil was surmounted by the adoption by the Metropolitan Board of Works of a system of treatment of the crude sewage. Chemical precipitation was effected by adding to the sewage certain proportions of lime and protosulphate of iron, and allowing it to remain for an hour or two in settling tanks. The effluent water was let flow into the river, and the sludge was carried down the river in barges and cast into the sea.

The public interest evoked by the inquiries made by the Royal Commissioners on Housing, and the publication of their Report, certainly quickened the activity of many of the local authorities.

In several of the parishes and districts the Regulations under the Sanitary Acts of 1866 and 1874 were being more readily adopted, and being put into force on a slightly more extended scale; and in every case it was reported that the results had been satisfactory, a great improvement taking place in the houses which were registered.

A report of the Inspector of such houses, for Bermondsey, describes this well:—

"108 were placed on Register by Vestry. The majority of these houses are situated in the lowest and most densely

populated parts of the parish. They are occupied by the very poor, costermongers, dock and waterside labourers, &c. They contain 509 rooms, occupied by 386 families, numbering 1,434 persons. 285 rooms were overcrowded. With three exceptions the overcrowding has been abated. Previous to registration the number in each house was 13, present average 9."

"The sanitary condition of the said houses has been greatly improved. Staircases, &c., are now regularly swept and washed. In 85 houses the walls have been stripped and whitewashed. Many of the walls had 15 layers of paper, thus hiding filth and harbouring vermin. Ventilation in them is also improved. Many owners rendered much assistance."

Several inquiries of the sort suggested by the Royal Commissioners were held in the course of the ensuing years and reports presented to Parliament, but it is much to be doubted whether they had any effect in so inciting public opinion as to make it insist on the recalcitrant local authorities carrying the laws into effect.

Clerkenwell, Mile-End-Old-Town, Bethnal Green, and Rotherhithe, were inquired into, and reported on. The tale was much the same as that set forth time after time, and year after year, by various Medical Officers of Health—want of adequate sanitary supervision, numerous neglects by the Vestries, especially the neglect to make, or, if made, to enforce Regulations under the Sanitary Acts of 1866 and 1874.

The initiative of dealing with the existing condition of things rested with the Vestries. It was forcibly pointed out that complaints could hardly be expected either from the owners of insanitary houses, on whom the cost of the improvements would fall, or from tenants who are too often indifferent to considerations of health and cleanliness, and who in any case would fear to offend their landlords by complaining.

Rotherhithe came in for the strongest condemnation. Of it the Commissioners reported:—

"It is, in fact, no exaggeration to say that the results of

lax administration abound in Rotherhithe, and especially in houses occupied by poor persons."

The increase of the sanitary staff was recommended, but the obdurate Vestry resolved not to increase it.

The absolute necessity of inspection was demonstrated every day of the year to every Vestry and District Board in the metropolis by the results of such exceedingly limited inspection as was carried out.

In St. Luke, in 1890, of 1,348 houses inspected 296 were found "in fair sanitary condition."

In Hackney, in 1887, 5,213 were inspected; 3,620 of them were found to be wanting in some sanitary requirement, or were so dirty as to necessitate orders being served for whitewashing and cleaning. In one street 111 houses were inspected, and in 97 nuisances were found.

In St. Marylebone, in 1884, 2,136 orders were sent out for repairs and various sanitary improvements. In Hammersmith, 3,377 notices to abate nuisances were served in 1886. In Westminster, 1,609 notices served for sanitary defects.

The Medical Officer of Health for St. Saviour, Southwark, reported (1890-1):—

"The importance of house-to-house inspection may be estimated by the fact that of 491 houses inspected, it was found necessary in nearly every instance to serve notice for the carrying out of urgent sanitary requirements."

In Camberwell there were, in 1889, between 30,000 and 40,000 houses in the parish, "of which probably one-half should be inspected periodically."

The Medical Officer of Health of Bethnal Green stated:—

"In my district we have a population of about 130,000, and about 18,000 houses, and we have two Inspectors. Of course there should be periodical inspection, that is to say, every house in the parish should be visited at least once a year by a Sanitary Inspector, but that with the present staff would be utterly impossible. In my district there is no house-to-house visitation; we simply attend to complaints as we receive them, and this completely fills up the time of the two Inspectors."

And he further stated\* :—

"In my district the Sanitary Inspectors are not under the control of the Medical Officer of Health."

It is of course manifest that if houses had not been inspected, and the necessary sanitary improvements enforced, things would have gone on rapidly deteriorating, and with that deterioration would have come all those causes of disease which would endanger the lives of the occupants and create fresh centres for spreading disease broadcast.

It might have been thought that the numerous inquiries into the condition of the working classes in factories and workshops would have laid bare nearly all there was to lay bare.

A report to the Board of Trade on the Sweating System in the East End of London, by J. Burnett in 1887, rudely dispelled such an idea, and opened out to public view a new vista of causes, deleteriously affecting the public health, a new area of insanitation. Though the evils depicted had become acuter, they evidently had been going on for years.

"The system may be defined as one under which sub-contractors undertake to do work in their own houses or small workshops, and employ others to do it, making a profit for themselves by the difference between the contract prices and the wages they pay their assistants.

"The mass of those employed under the sweating system labour in workshops where much fewer than 20 are engaged, or in the houses which may be single rooms of the 'small sweaters.'"

After referring to the numerous branches of the tailoring trade, he said :—

"Immense numbers of people of both sexes and all ages have rushed into the cheap tailoring trade as the readiest means of finding employment. The result has been an enormously overcrowded labour market, and a consequently fierce competition among the workers themselves, with all the attendant evils of such a state of things. . . . Matters have been rendered infinitely worse by an enormous influx

\* Lords' Committee on Sweating, P.P. 1890, vol. 17.



of pauper foreigners from other European nations. The result has been to flood the labour market of the East End of London with cheap labour to such an extent as to reduce thousands of native workers to the verge of destitution. . . ."

"There are, of course, in addition many English workers employed in the same trade and in the same shops, but their number is gradually being reduced, owing to the severity of a competition in which those who can subsist on least are sure to be victorious.

"The object of the sweater being his own gain, the inevitable tendency of such a system is to grind the workers down to the lowest possible level. . . ."

"The character of the workshops, or places used as workshops, varies considerably. The smaller sweaters use part of their dwelling accommodation, and in the vast majority of cases work is carried on under conditions in the highest degree filthy and unsanitary."

"In small rooms, not more than nine or ten feet square, heated by a coke fire for the pressers' irons, and at night lighted by flaring gas jets, six, eight, ten, or even a dozen workers may be crowded.

"The conditions of the Public Health Acts, and of the Factory and Workshop Regulation Acts, are utterly disregarded, and existing systems of inspection are entirely inadequate to enforce their provisions even if no divided authority tended to weaken the hands of the Inspectors.

"Some of the shops are hidden in garrets and back rooms of the worst kinds of East End tenements, and a third of them cannot be known to the Factory Inspectors.

"It is in regulating the hours of the women that factory inspection should be of most service, but how can two or three Inspectors keep in check the multitude of sweating dens of East London? Basements, garrets, backyards, wash-houses, and all sorts of unlooked for and unsuspected places are the abodes of the sweater."

Early in the following year Lord Dunraven, in the House of Lords, moved for the appointment of a Select Committee to inquire into the sweating system.

"The evils which existed there were caused by natural laws which were not by any means of necessity unwholesome in any degree. . . . But his belief was that though the causes were perfectly natural in themselves they had been allowed to run riot, and had not been put under proper control, and had thus produced the present terrible state of things. . . ."

"Large workshops were the exception. In the 'dens' of the sweaters there was not the slightest attempt at decency; men and women worked together for many consecutive hours, penned up in small rooms and basements, garrets, backyards, wash-houses, and all sorts of unlikely places, were the abodes of the sweaters."

And he quoted the Chief Inspector of Factories and Workshops:—

"To add to the evils of overwork pursued by these people, we must note the overcrowded, ill-ventilated, and excessively hot state of the workrooms; . . . it is surprising how such people can live under such conditions.

". . . It was," he said, "a ridiculous and scandalous thing that Parliament should pass Factory and Sanitary Acts regulating the hours of labour of women and children, and that those Acts should be grossly violated."

Lord Sandhurst said:—

"It might appear to their Lordships almost incredible that within three or four miles of that House a state of things, involving so much human misery, could possibly exist as was to be found at the East End of London."

The Select Committee was appointed. The results of its inquiries are stated in the next chapter.

In 1888 the local government of London underwent a most notable change.

In the early part of 1887 various rumours gained currency as to questionable dealings in connection with the lettings of land owned by the Metropolitan Board. Certain officials of the Board were mentioned. The details do not fall within the history of the sanitary evolution of London, except so far as they affected the central governing authority of London. The allegations made received in-

creasing confirmation, and early in 1888 a Royal Commission was appointed to inquire into and thoroughly sift them, and early in May the Commission held its first sitting, the Metropolitan Board affording every facility for the thorough investigation of the matter.

Before that time, however—namely, in March—the Government had introduced into the House of Commons its proposals as regarded the local government of England and Wales generally; and the opportunity was taken to deal with the great problem of London government which had so long vexed and perplexed successive governments, and which was becoming more and more insistent as years went on, and London was accordingly included in the general scheme.

By the measure now introduced London was to be created—not a Corporation, nor a Municipality, but a County—with a Council as the governing authority of the County.

Mr. Ritchie, introducing the Bill into the House of Commons, said\* :—

“We cannot shut our eyes to the fact that whereas every other borough in the country possesses a body directly representing the ratepayers, no such body exists in London.

“There is no one elected by, or responsible to the ratepayers.

“We propose to take London, as defined under the Metropolitan Management Act, out of the counties of Middlesex, Surrey, and Kent, and we propose to create it a County of London by itself, with a Lord Lieutenant, a Bench of Magistrates, and a County Council of its own.

“We propose that the Council shall be directly elected by the ratepayers, as in all other counties and boroughs—that the franchise shall be the same—and that it shall consist, as in all other cases, of elected and selected members; the elected members sitting for three years, the selected for six years (one-half of their number retiring every three years).

“It will take over the licensing powers and all the duties

\* Hansard, p. 1663, March 19, 1888.

of the Metropolitan Board of Works, which will cease to exist.”

The “City” of London was to be allowed to retain its separate existence within the new County, together with its ancient privileges and immunities for the most part unaltered and untouched.

The Bill developed into an Act, which created a new central authority for London, under the title of the London County Council.

The area of the new “Administrative County” of London was made co-extensive with that of the former district of the Metropolitan Board of Works.

And to the new Authority was transferred the powers, duties, and liabilities of the Metropolitan Board of Works; and to those were added functions much wider and more extensive than those of that Board.

The Act also conferred upon the Council the power of appointing a Medical Officer of Health for the County, and additional powers of making bye-laws.

It did not, however, materially interfere with the Vestries and District Boards, nor did it alter their relation to the Central Authority. Practically it left them untouched.

The Council was to consist of 137 members, of whom 118 were to be elected triennially by direct election in the various metropolitan constituencies, and 19 to be elected by the Council itself as Aldermen.

Finally, the Act set a limit to the existence of the Metropolitan Board of Works.

While the Bill was going through Parliament the Royal Commission had been pursuing its inquiry into the allegations made against that Board, and had ascertained that several of the officials had been carrying on—

“... A nefarious course of proceeding by which they had been able to obtain for themselves large sums of money out of dealings with the Board’s land.”

And that—

“... Two of the members of the Board in the architectural profession had availed themselves of their repre-

sentative position to make personal profit out of some of the business which came before them."

Under the growing disfavour with which public authorities were regarded who were only indirectly elected, and so not amenable to the influence or control of the electorate, it is improbable that the existence of the Metropolitan Board of Works would have been much prolonged. But it was an unfortunate ending to a great public body which had done really great service to London.

Its own final words \* may be quoted in its defence:—

"It has been a source of pain and sorrow to the Board that, at the close of thirty-three years' administration of the local affairs of London, which has been attended with at least some measure of success, and in the course of which the Board has carried out some of the greatest works of public utility of which any city can boast, its good name has during the last year of its existence been sullied by iniquitous proceedings of which, though carried on in its midst, its members as a body were entirely without knowledge. It is some satisfaction to remember, however, that a body of Commissioners, who in a judicial spirit made the most searching inquiry into the Board's proceedings, were able, while exposing the wrong-doings which were revealed to them, and justly distributing the blame, to speak of the Board, as they do in their report, in the following terms:—

"It has had a multitude of duties to perform, and very great works have been constructed by it, which have transformed the face of some of the most important thoroughfares of the metropolis. And there has hitherto been no evidence that corruption or malpractice has affected or marred the greater part of the work which it has accomplished. The same may be said, too, in relation to the conduct of the vast majority of the members of the Board. We have received very numerous communications, some anonymous, some bearing the signature of the writers, impugning the action of the Board and certain of its members, but against the vast majority of them not even a suspicion of corruption or misconduct has been breathed. We believe that many

\* See the last Report of the Board.

members of the Board have cheerfully given for the public good much valuable time, and have rendered most important public services.'"

The change in the constitution, nature, and character of the central authority of London effected by the Act was momentous and far-reaching.

Instead of an indirectly elected body such as the Metropolitan Board of Works, over which the inhabitants of London had practically no control, there was brought into being a body directly chosen by an electorate of nearly half a million of the ratepayers of the metropolis, responsive to the views and desires of the electorate, endowed with the great authority derived from its representative character, and entrusted with the carrying out of the views and policy of London as one great city.

London had been unified and welded together into one whole by the constitution of its new central authority; for the first time in his history it had been given a voice—the voice of one great city—and though much remained to be done before its entrance into its full rights as one city—and that the greatest which has ever existed in the world—the idea had been born, and had been embodied in the statutes of the realm that London was one great city, and not a mere conglomeration of petty jarring authorities.

The first election of councillors took place on January 17, 1889.

The first meeting of the Council took place on the 21st of March, when the Earl of Rosebery was elected Chairman, and the Council entered energetically on the work lying before it.

The sanitary evolution of London was vitally involved in the change, but it was at once discovered that the powers of the Council relating to the public health of London were of a very limited and unsatisfactory nature.

Matters concerning it were regulated by the Metropolitan London Management Act and a large number of other Acts, the execution of which was in the hands of the Vestries and District Boards.

These bodies were practically uncontrolled, and no

machinery existed for securing any uniformity of administration in the different parts of the county.

And even the Metropolitan Board had not used certain powers it possessed of making bye-laws for certain sanitary purposes.

"We cannot," reported the Sanitary Committee of the Council, "too strongly emphasise our opinion that the London County Council should be empowered to frame bye-laws for the proper sanitary government of London, that the new or existing local bodies should put them in force, and that the County Council should be the supervising body to see that they are properly carried out."

A somewhat similar report was made by the Housing of the Working Classes Committee.

"The Committee," they said, "feels that until the law is strengthened, and fuller powers to enforce the law are placed in the hands of the Council, its action in dealing with insanitary areas will be of an imperfect character."

The question of the housing of the poor in London was at once energetically taken up by the new body.

Representations were made to the Government as to the necessity of the Acts relating to the housing of the working classes being consolidated and amended.

Consequent upon this, the Government introduced a Bill which was passed—"The Housing of the Working Classes Act, 1890,"\* which repealed and codified fourteen enactments, all having for their object the improvement of the dwellings of the artizan and labouring classes, and the clearing away of unhealthy areas. Very large powers were placed in the hands of the Council and of the district authorities to secure the better housing of the working classes. And the Act may be said to mark a new era in the history of reform in the matter of insanitary areas, giving full power to the Council as a central authority to enforce its provisions.

Before the end of this decade Parliament passed two other Acts of great advantage to the health of London. One was, "The Infectious Diseases Notification Act, 1889," making the notification of certain specified diseases compulsory in

\* 53 & 54 Vic., cap. 70.

London—smallpox, cholera, diphtheria, membranous croup, erysipelas, scarlet fever, typhus, and other fevers.

In accordance with well-worn usage London had been left behind in this matter. Other cities and even towns had, by means of local Acts, secured the advantages of such legislation long before. So far back as 1874, indeed, machinery had been in existence in London for the notification of infectious disease in houses let in lodgings. But owing to the neglect of the majority of the Vestries and District Boards to make or enforce regulations under the Sanitary Act of 1866, that machinery was left unused to the great detriment of the people of London. Thousands of lives must have been sacrificed by this neglect, and innumerable cases of preventable disease not prevented. It was not until a general Act was passed that London became possessed of the advantages resulting from such notification.

In London, indeed, the health of cattle was better looked after in this respect than that of the people, for cases of infectious disease in cattle had to be notified to the Sanitary Authorities.

By this Act it was made compulsory on medical attendants to certify, and on householders to notify, the existence of any of these diseases.

Hitherto information as to infectious illness only reached the Medical Officer of Health after a sufficient time had elapsed to allow of the spread of the infection.

The results of the Act of 1889 were soon found to be very beneficial in checking the spread of disease.

The receipt of the notices of infectious diseases led to the more prompt and general disinfection of premises where infectious diseases prevailed, and led also to the discovery of sanitary defects which might not otherwise have been discovered.

The information, moreover, kept the Medical Officers of Health informed of the progress of disease not only in their own districts, but also in contiguous ones, and so assisted them to take prompt measures for the eradication of disease in their respective districts.

The other measure which passed the legislature in this

same year contained provisions of the highest importance as affecting the metropolis. This was "the Poor Law Act, 1889."

Until 1889 patients could be admitted only to the infectious hospitals of the Metropolitan Asylums Board on the order of the Relieving Officer and District Medical Officer, so, except in certain cases, the hospitals were only open to Poor Law cases.

This measure made practical concession of two principles. Free admission to the hospitals of the Metropolitan Asylums Board of sick persons in need of isolation, and devolution upon the Metropolitan Poor Fund of all charges incurred in the maintenance of the sick in those hospitals.

The Managers were, therefore, enabled to admit other than pauper patients reasonably believed to be suffering from fever, smallpox, or diphtheria.

The system was attended with the happiest results in reducing the amount of infectious disease in the metropolis, and proved a great boon to all classes of the community.

The Board in its annual report wrote:—

"The Managers are now, for the first time since the establishment of the Board in 1867, virtually recognised as the Metropolitan Authority for the provision of accommodation for the isolation and treatment of infectious disease—both pauper and non-pauper—and are now empowered to legally perform duties which the Legislature had imposed on the District Sanitary Authorities, but which the Managers had hitherto been called upon to perform in consequence of the failure of most of such Authorities to provide accommodation for non-pauper patients."

The Managers by this date had increased the accommodation for patients afflicted with any of these infectious diseases. There were six fever hospitals, 2,463 beds; 350 beds in smallpox hospital ships; and 800 beds in the hospital for convalescing smallpox patients.

One other Act\* deserves mention before the close of this decade as it contained an unique section which required the Medical Officer of Health, on notice from the owner of

\* The Customs and Inland Revenue Act, 1890, 53 & 54 Vic. cap. 8.

property in which there are separate dwellings let for 7s. 6d. or less a week, to visit them and examine all their sanitary arrangements, &c., so as to be able to certify or not—

"That the house is so constructed as to afford suitable accommodation for each of the families or persons inhabiting it, and that due provision is made for their sanitary requirements."

The certificate, if granted, was to be handed to the owner, who was then able to obtain the remission of the inhabited house duty.

The owner, therefore, obtained a remission of taxes to which he was justly liable, because the dwelling which he lets was in a sanitary condition!

In many ways, then, the sanitary evolution of the great city was developing satisfactorily, though by no means so rapidly as was to be desired, or as it might have developed if local governing authorities had done their duty.

"The war of the community against individuals for the public good," which had now lasted for over thirty years, and the war against disease in its most dangerous forms, was being waged with good effect; and though an immensity remained to be done, a great deal had been accomplished. Larger numbers of all classes were beginning to grasp the idea and to realise that the necessity of securing and guarding the public health was not a craze or form of mental aberration, but was of absolutely vital consequence, not merely to certain classes but to the great community of the metropolis and to the nation itself, and that the future welfare and power, even the very existence, of the nation are dependent upon it.

Larger numbers, too, were beginning to see who really were responsible for the widely prevalent evils, and who really were obstructing progress towards a higher standard of public health, and how little claim they had to consideration, either from the hands of the Legislature or of local administrators.

The reports of the Medical Officers of Health of the latter part of this decade were distinctly more hopeful in tone, and recorded more progress than ever before.

The catalogue of things in which improvement had taken place had lengthened—sewerage, water supply, the removal of refuse, paving, the regulation of offensive businesses, of cowhouses, dairies, and bakehouses, the provision of open spaces, the better disinfection of houses and of infected articles, the erection of hospitals for the isolation of cases of infectious diseases—all of which things were elemental necessities if the public health was to be assured.

In some parishes, in place of the smaller class of houses, great blocks of artisans' dwellings had been erected. In others great blocks of flats.

With the increased wealth of the population finer buildings had been erected in many districts. London had grown enormously in wealth, and the wealth showed itself in finer public buildings and private houses. The District Board of Westminster, for instance, said in their report for 1885-6:—

“Whether viewed as to its character, its statistics, its topography, or its sanitary condition, the change which Westminster has undergone in thirty years can only be described as a complete transformation.”

“In the St. Margaret's portion, whole streets of fine houses which were occupied by the nobility and the wealthy for residential purposes are now let out in offices for the transaction of legal, scientific, or mechanical business, while narrow streets, wretched courts, and melancholy homes of squalid poverty and misery have been replaced by ‘mansions,’ ‘flats,’ &c.; and on the other hand by huge blocks of artisans' dwellings, comprising upwards of 1,200 homes.”

The Education Act was indirectly producing some good results as regarded the health of the rising generation.

A most marked improvement had come over the mortality of children at school ages. Mortality has lessened—

5-10 years	30	per cent.
10-15	32	”
15-20	30	”*

\* See speech by Sir L. Playfair in House of Commons, March 4, 1884.—Hansard, p. 529.

due to the fact that children had been gathered into the schools from their crowded and insanitary homes, and had thus escaped some of the perils of disease.

And the Medical Officer of Health for Lambeth referred to this same subject in his report for 1886:—

“The children of the pauper and mendicant are withdrawn from the atmosphere of vice and intemperance to which their fathers had become acclimatised, and are placed under supervision in the schoolroom. . . .”

Some slight improvement there was also as regarded the mortality of children under five years, though in many parishes it was still fearfully high.

In Mile-End-Old-Town, for instance, in 1890 the deaths under five years amounted to 51 per cent. of all deaths. In Deptford district in 1890-1 they amounted to 50 per cent. In Bermondsey in 1889 they amounted to 52 per cent. In St. Olave, Southwark, in 1888-9 to 49½ per cent. In St. Mary, Newington, in 1890, very slightly under 50 per cent.

Infantile mortality was becoming of greater concern than ever as the birth-rate was showing a decided diminution—that for 1889 being the lowest on record since 1849.

Though the tables as to death-rate in many of the parishes were still more or less vitiated by various local circumstances, there was considerable unanimity that the death-rate was falling and the public health better. Some diseases which had previously claimed their victims by thousands, now only claimed them by hundreds. Death from tubercular disease had steadily fallen, and the mean death-rate from phthisis in London showed a very satisfactory decrease between 1861-70 and 1881-90.\*

The *Lancet* of January, 1887, stated that, measured by its recorded death-rate, London was healthier in 1887 than in any year on record.

In the Strand in 1886:—

“The efforts that have been made by the Board and its officers have resulted in a marked and continuous improvement in the sanitary state of the district.”

\* See Report from Royal Commission on Tuberculosis, 1898.

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In St. Pancras in 1888 the death-rate was "by far the lowest yet recorded."

In Bermondsey, in the same year, "so few deaths have not occurred since 1865."

These and similar reports from other districts showed that sanitary progress was being made. But, unfortunately, in the autumn of 1888 there was an epidemic of measles of exceptional severity, which raised the death-rate. And in 1890 there was a sudden increase from 18.4 per 1,000 to 21.4, a mortality which was higher than any since 1882.

The increase served to show the great necessity there was for unceasing watchfulness and for steady perseverance in sanitary work. The forces of disease are ever on the watch for the opportunity to work their evil will, and there were still many weak places in the defences against them. The central government of London had been improved enormously, but the corrective was not extended to where it was most wanted, namely, the local Sanitary Authorities, the Vestries and District Boards.

## CHAPTER VI

1891-1901

IN 1891 the census once more gave authoritative figures as to the population of the metropolis of London. The population had increased from 3,830,297 to 4,228,317.

The increase had been in a somewhat lower ratio than the population of England and Wales as a whole, and the fact was notable inasmuch as it was the first time that such a phenomenon had presented itself, London having been found in every preceding intercensal period to have gained more or less in its proportions as compared with the country at large.

The movements of population had followed very much the same lines as in the previous decade. In the central parts—under the pressure of the great economic forces—the population had increased. In the outer parts it had increased, but "the wide belt of suburbs was beginning to show some signs of repletion."

Immigration into London had greatly diminished in the decade. Fewer immigrants had come from the various counties of England and Wales, and the proportion of the inhabitants of London who had been born elsewhere had fallen from 308 persons per 1,000 in 1881 to 283 in 1891.

Thus the influx of country people, mostly in the prime of life, and the admixture of fresh country blood into the urban population of London was undergoing diminution—a circumstance which, in the long run, would materially influence the physique of the people.

Three important facts came into view with the figures set