

P 443 Part No.

GENERAL BOARD OF HEALTH.

LETTER

OF THE

PRESIDENT OF THE GENERAL BOARD OF HEALTH,

TO

**THE RIGHT HONOURABLE THE VISCOUNT PALMERSTON,
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE HOME DEPARTMENT, &c., &c.,**

ACCOMPANYING A

REPORT FROM DR. SUTHERLAND;

ON

EPIDEMIC CHOLERA

IN THE METROPOLIS IN 1854.

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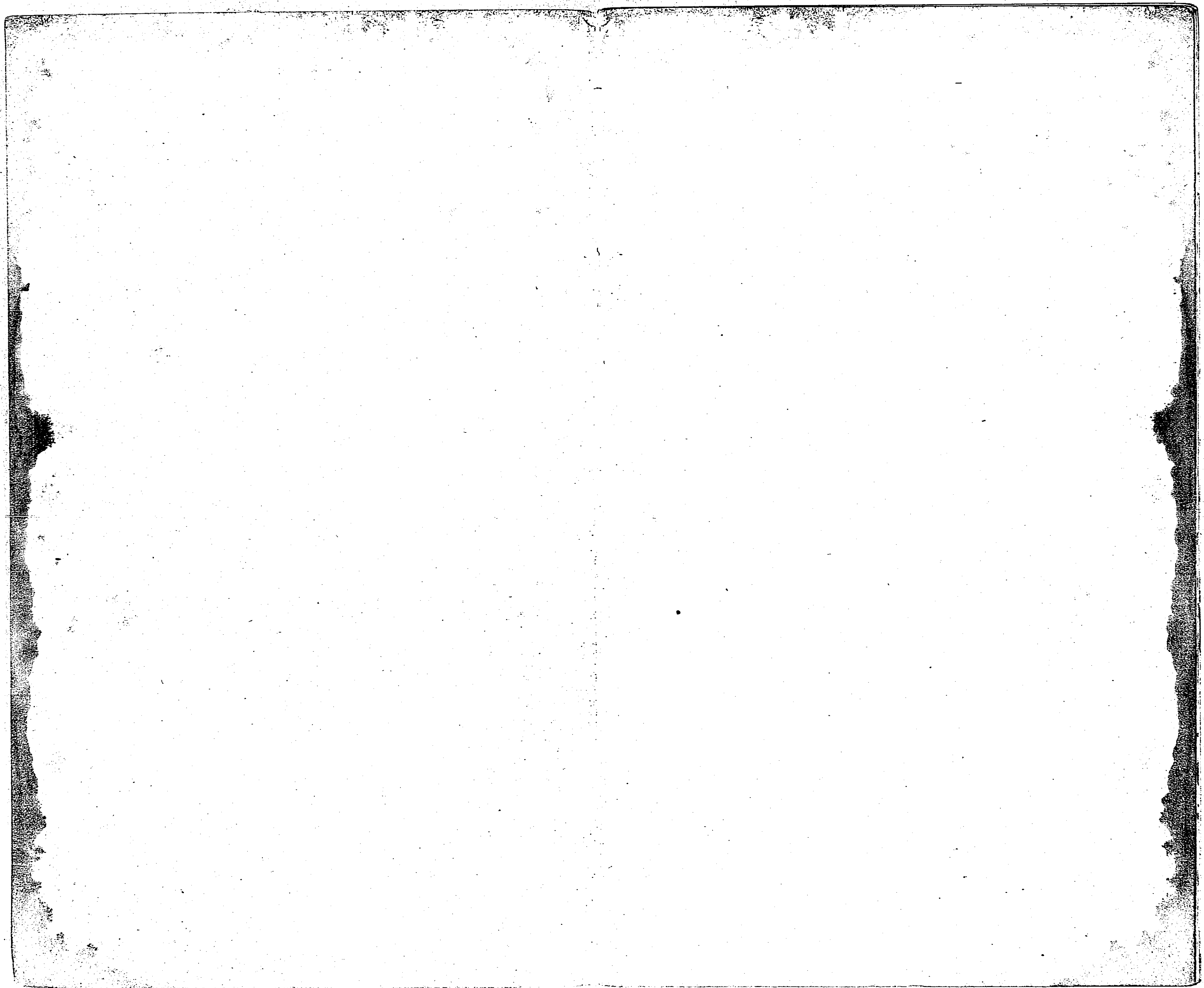
Presented to both Houses of Parliament by Command of Her Majesty.



LONDON:

PRINTED BY GEORGE F. EYRE AND WILLIAM SPOTTISWOODE,
PRINTERS TO THE QUEEN'S MOST EXCELLENT MAJESTY,
FOR HER MAJESTY'S STATIONERY OFFICE.

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General Board of Health,
January 29, 1855.

MY LORD,

As cholera has now happily disappeared from the United Kingdom, and the active duties of the General Board of Health in relation to that epidemic have come to a close, I am anxious to lay before your Lordship the steps which have been taken under my direction, in this office, in execution of the duties imposed on the General Board of Health by the Nuisances Removal and Diseases Prevention Acts, 1848 and 1849 (11 & 12 Vict. c. 123., 12 & 13 Vict. c. 111.)

The general relations of epidemic cholera to the various conditions of the population have already been examined in detail, in the report of the late General Board of Health on the visitation of 1849. In this communication I shall confine myself to a statement of the proceedings actually taken under my directions, as introductory to the several reports upon the outbreak of 1854, viz. those about to be made by the Medical Council through its committees, those by the scientific inquirers acting under the Board on the special subjects of their several investigations, that by Dr. Sutherland on the epidemic as it prevailed in the metropolis, and that by Dr. Milroy on the epidemic as it prevailed in the other parts of England, included in the returns of the Registrar-General. All these reports I hope soon to lay before Parliament.

I entered on my duties as President of the General Board of Health on the 12th of August 1854. At this date cholera was rapidly on the increase; the deaths from that disease in the six weeks ending with that day having been successively 1, 5, 26, 133, 399, 644.

On the same day I directed an application to the Treasury for leave to employ two Medical Inspectors. The sanction of the Treasury having been forthwith received, Dr. Sutherland and Dr. Milroy were the same day appointed.

The duty assigned to these gentlemen was, to advise and assist local authorities in the exercise of their powers under the Nuisances Removal and Diseases Prevention Acts, and to

aid me in the performance of my functions under the same Acts which empower the General Board to issue regulations and directions for the prevention and mitigation of epidemic disease.

Finding that those Acts gave me no effectual power to enforce upon Boards of Guardians the execution of these regulations and directions, I determined to do my best by way of urging and aiding the local authorities in their execution. With this view the following circular was the same day issued to all the Metropolitan Boards of Guardians:

“ The General Board of Health,
“ Whitehall, August 12, 1854.”

“ SIR,

“ I AM directed by the General Board of Health to inform you, that it is the anxious desire of the Board to co-operate with the Metropolitan Boards of Guardians in preventing and mitigating, as far as possible, the visitation of epidemic cholera, which has already made its appearance in many districts of the metropolis.

“ While the Board would deprecate any diminution of local responsibility or interference with local efforts, it is possible that their assistance and advice may be acceptable to Boards of Guardians, and they are prepared therefore to direct one of the Board's medical officers to attend and confer with the Guardians in company with an Inspector from the Poor Law Board*, as to the preventive measures already taken or to be taken, and the arrangements for dispensary accommodation and treatment of the sick in accordance with the recommendations in the minute on preventive measures already sent. I am, therefore, to request that you will convene a special meeting of the Guardians for the purpose of ascertaining whether they are desirous of receiving the assistance and advice of this Board in the manner above indicated, and that you will communicate to me the wishes of the Guardians in this respect.

I am, &c.

“ To the Clerk of the Guardians. “ T. TAYLOR, Secretary.”

A detailed account of the manner in which this circular was received will be found in the 1st section of the annexed report by Dr. Sutherland (p. 19 *et seq.*)

As the disease increased in intensity, feeling the want of fuller information as to what local authorities were doing, I appointed six additional Medical Inspectors on the 2d of

* The Poor Law Board had at once offered the aid of their inspectors in any conferences that might arise from this letter.

September, and on the 6th of September I increased that number to ten.

The supervision of the metropolitan parishes and unions affected by the epidemic was entrusted to these gentlemen, and the following instructions were placed in their hands:—

INQUIRIES to be made by MEDICAL INSPECTORS.

1st. The extent of medical relief now existing:—

- a. Number of medical officers.
- b. Number of day and night dispensaries.
- c. Number of house-to-house visitors.
- d. Measures for arresting diarrhoea in workhouses.
- e. Copies of notices issued by Guardians.
- f. Hospital accommodation and houses of refuge.

2d. Extent of the disease:—

- a. Number of cholera cases.
- b. „ „ diarrhoea cases.
- c. Deaths from either, under union medical officer.

This information to be obtained for a few days back, and tabulated in one of the returns under the heads of—

1. District medical officers' cases.
2. Dispensary cases.
3. Medical visitors' cases.

3d. Localities affected:—

- a. A list of those where cholera or diarrhoea chiefly prevails, and has hitherto or recently prevailed.
- b. Visit some of the worst localities; inspect them and the houses; converse with the people, ascertain to what extent diarrhoea prevails, and what cleansing measures, lime-whiting, &c. may be required, and whether there be any Inspector of Nuisances to carry out these measures.
- c. Examine the water supply, and ascertain whether it is taken from the river above or below Chelsea reach.
- d. Inquire as to nuisances or noxious trades, and inspect them.

4th. Report to the General Board of Health,—

- a. On the particulars mentioned above.
- b. On the number of additional dispensaries required.

- c. On the additional medical officers required.
- d. On the additional medical officers required, stating their number.
- e. Additional Inspectors of Nuisances, or cleansing staff required.
- f. Additional hospital accommodation, or houses of refuge required.

In a few days all the infected districts were under the supervision of the Medical Inspectors, who were in constant communication with the local authorities. They made daily reports to me of the progress of the epidemic, and the measures taken by the Boards of Guardians. These reports I immediately minuted with instructions, and the Inspectors were directed to bring the substance of my minutes under the notice of the local authorities.

The distribution of the metropolitan districts among the Inspectors will be found at the conclusion of the first portion of the annexed report. (p. 25.)

Dr. Sutherland's report itself is an abstract of their separate reports.

Before the Inspectors began their labours, circulars had been prepared and issued from this office in large numbers, informing the public of the proper way of proceeding for the removal of nuisances, pointing out to Boards of Guardians their statutory duties in relation to the epidemic, and setting forth plain and brief precautions to be observed during the prevalence of cholera.

Copies of these are printed in the Appendix (p. 75 *et seq.*).

The late Board of Health, in their last year of office, had compiled and circulated a summary of instructions to local authorities on the organization of preventive measures against cholera.

Fresh copies of these were now distributed, and are printed in the Appendix (page 75 *et seq.*) as revised at a later date by the Medical Council.

The regulations and directions issued by the late Board under the authority of the Nuisances Removal Act, 1848, having expired on the 10th of September, on the 8th and 14th of September new sets of regulations and directions were issued for England,* while those for Scotland, having

* For which see Appendix, p. 112.

been settled in concert with the public and legal authorities in that part of the kingdom, were renewed unaltered on the 8th of September.

These regulations and directions will remain in force for six months from their respective dates.

Meanwhile, though the services of the Medical Inspector enabled me to carry out the administrative medical arrangements which the law directed, I became every day more and more impressed by the necessity of some means by which this department might be enabled to avail itself of the best medical assistance in matters coming within the domain of scientific medical inquiry. With this view it seemed to me desirable that scientific inquiries (chemical, meteorological, and microscopical) should be instituted into the circumstances attending the epidemic, and that a Medical Council should be appointed to act during the prevalence of the epidemic.

The requisite sanction having been procured, a Medical Council (*a*) was appointed, consisting of—

1. †John Ayrton Paris, M.D., F.R.S., President of the Royal College of Physicians.
2. *Sir James Clark, Bart., M.D., F.R.S., Physician in Ordinary to the Queen and to his Royal Highness Prince Albert.
3. *James Alderson, M.D., F.R.S., Fellow and Treasurer of the Royal College of Physicians, Physician to St. Mary's Hospital.
4. *Neil Arnott, M.R.C.P., Physician Extraordinary to the Queen.
5. †Benjamin Guy Babington, M.D., F.R.S., Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians, late Physician to Guy's Hospital.
6. †Alexander Tweedie, M.D., F.R.S., Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians, Physician to the Fever Hospital, Examiner in Medicine in the University of London.

(*a*) Of these, those marked † were nominated by the Royal College of Physicians. Those marked § were selected from a list furnished to the President by the Royal College of Surgeons. Those marked ¶ were nominated by the Society of Apothecaries. Those marked * were nominated by myself.

7. *William Baly, M.D., F.R.S., Assistant Physician to Saint Bartholomew's Hospital, Physician to the Millbank Penitentiary.

8. §William Lawrence, F.R.S., Vice President of the Royal College of Surgeons, Surgeon to St. Bartholomew's Hospital, Surgeon Extraordinary to the Queen.

9. *John Simon, F.R.S., Surgeon to St. Thomas' Hospital, Officer of Health in the City of London.

10. *Richard Owen, F.R.S., Professor of Zoology in the Royal College of Surgeons.

11. ¶Nathaniel B. Ward, Master of the Society of Apothecaries.

12. ¶John Bacot, Inspector of Anatomy, Member of the Senate of the University of London.

13. *William Farr, M.D., Registrar General's Office.

Dr. R. D. Thompson, Dr. Hassall, and Mr. Glaisher were at the same time appointed to conduct, respectively, chemical, microscopical, and meteorological inquiries in connexion with the prevailing disease.

The Medical Council met on the 6th of September, and the following letter, then read, will explain my view of the objects of their appointment :

General Board of Health,
September 6, 1854.

GENTLEMEN,

In opening the first sitting of the first Medical Council that has allowed itself to be associated with this department, it becomes my duty, after thanking you for the public spirit and benevolence you have shown in undertaking this service to the community, to point out briefly both what appear to me to be the general objects in respect of which your assistance and advice will be useful, and the more special and immediate matters to which your attention is invited at present.

I am charged with the responsible duty of directing the sanitary administration of the country, so far as we have as yet anything deserving the name.

But upon scientific matters connected therewith, where the medical profession are to be consulted, advised with, laid under contribution for service or information, or called upon to act, I wish to have the aid of a Medical Council, to whom I may submit questions for consideration, and whom I may ask to suggest or undertake such inquiries as may from time to time be necessary.

The special work of this department is the application of the Public Health Act to such towns as petition for it.

Besides this, in times of epidemic, the Board is charged with the duty of issuing regulations and directions for the prevention, as far as possible, or mitigation of disease.

It will be apparent that it is in connexion with the latter branch of my duties I shall have occasion for your valuable services.

But should public confidence be acquired to this department, should the science of public health take its place among the matters with which statesmanship may properly concern itself, as I believe must sooner or later be the case, a wider field will be opened to this department and to the professional advisers whom it may be able to associate with it.

The circumstances of this country, its wealth and poverty, its great cities with their social extremes of luxury and privation, its aggregation of individuals on the same spots, its multifarious industrial occupations, all point to the duty of studying the effects on life and health of trades, callings and processes, habitations, sites, water supply, sewerage, the adulteration of substances used for food, drink, and medicine, as matters vitally affecting the well-being of the nation.

On many of these subjects I hope it may be in my power at future periods to avail myself of scientific aid, but at present, the matter which most presses is the epidemic now unhappily prevalent in this metropolis, as well as in other parts of the United Kingdom. With this my duty brings me into active and hourly contact, and I should deeply regret if (besides the work this office may be enabled to do at present in aid of local authorities, or when necessary in compelling the observance of the law) I am not able, by your assistance, to deduce from this terrible visitation both facts and lessons which may hereafter be made available. For this end I have the cordial co-operation of the Poor Law Board, the Registrar General, and the Commissioners of Sewers for the metropolis, while, all through the country, the Registration Staff and the Local Boards of Health may render me most useful service. But the most valuable result within my reach at present will be wanting, unless I have your aid in procuring such information upon the concomitants and course of the epidemic as only medical and scientific observation can detect.

Cholera is now very widely prevalent in London; up to the 2d of September 4,070 persons have died of the disease in the metropolis alone. I purpose to direct inquiries into the conditions which attend the presence of the epidemic so far as they can be gathered from meteorological, microscopical, and chemical observation.

The gentlemen who have undertaken to conduct these inquiries are here, and will detail for your approbation what is proposed or has been done.

But besides this I have caused a form to be drawn up, which I propose, with your approval and after it has been settled by you, to

have circulated among all the qualified medical practitioners in London, with a view to determine the number of cases of choleraic disease, the proportion of deaths and recoveries, and the treatment pursued in each case.

The settlement of this return is the immediate object of this meeting of the Council.

I wish also that Dr. Sutherland should state to you what has been done in the way of providing for superintendence of the execution by local authorities of the directions and regulations of the Board, and I shall be much obliged if you would aid me by any suggestion as to other means for this purpose that you may think desirable to be taken.

I have also directed to be laid before you copies of the hand-bills issued by the Board, giving plain advice adapted to the emergency. Any suggestions as to these I shall be thankful for, as indeed for everything that may briefly and clearly inform the public mind, and, while promoting calmness and confidence in the means of prevention, indicate these means in the way best adapted to popular apprehension.

I have, &c.

B. HALL.

I feel deeply grateful to the distinguished members of the Medical Council for the self-devotion with which they have given their powers and their time to the service of the public, in connexion with this Board.

A similar acknowledgment is due to the eminent men who undertook the different branches of the scientific inquiry.

The Medical Council held numerous meetings, and besides revising all the instructions issued by the General Board, in so far as relates to medical matters, they lost no time in preparing forms for circulation among medical practitioners where cholera prevailed, intended to elicit the medical results of their experience as to the epidemic.

The issue of these forms and inquiries has produced a great number of returns, from which the committees of the Council have undertaken to prepare reports, which will be laid before your Lordship, when they are placed in my hands, with the reports of the scientific inquirers, and of the committee of the Council to whom these reports have been submitted.

For the purposes of these reports, and of that in preparation by Dr. Milroy, on the epidemic beyond the limits of the metropolis, it has been necessary to compile voluminous returns from the materials collected in the Registrar General's office, and these are being diligently proceeded with.

In order that the epidemic might be brought under observation in Scotland, on the day after the first meeting of the Medical Council I communicated with the Royal Colleges of Physicians and Surgeons, Edinburgh, and the United Faculty of Physicians and Surgeons, Glasgow. I have to thank these bodies for their ready co-operation. They prepared forms of return for circulation in parts of Scotland visited by the epidemic; and have undertaken the duty of classifying and arranging the information which it is hoped these returns may elicit.

The report by Mr. George Glover on the epidemic in the common and model lodging-houses in the metropolis has already been presented to Parliament.

It appears to me to afford the clearest proof, both of the effect of good sanitary conditions in warding off the pestilence, and of the possibility of attaining these conditions in even bad classes of existing houses.

I have directed the preparation of a separate report upon the district about Golden-square, which was so fearfully visited by the epidemic. This report I hope soon to be able to lay before Parliament.

I believe there are very few examples of so close and careful a house-to-house inquiry into the condition of a district, as that on which this report is founded. The inquiry was conducted by Dr. Fraser, aided by the voluntary and gratuitous services of Mr. J. M. Ludlow and Mr. T. Hughes. I am glad to have this opportunity of acknowledging the zealous discharge by these gentlemen of a most laborious, painful, and even dangerous duty, undertaken solely from motives of humanity and public spirit.

The ravages of the epidemic, however, were not confined to London. It appeared during the autumn in many parts of the United Kingdom, and in some cases with great severity.

When notice of its appearance in a locality was received at this office, full instructions were at once sent down to the local authorities, both as to their legal duties and the organization by which those duties might most effectually be performed. A list was prepared and kept at this office of gentlemen qualified and willing to act (at the expense of Boards of Guardians) as medical superintendents of districts,* as

* For the duties assigned to these officers, see the Board's instructions (page 83, Appendix).

assistants to or substitutes for parochial medical officers, and as house-to-house visitors.

Many applications for the services of gentlemen in these different capacities were made, and at once attended to. I am glad to be able to state that their services have been found most useful, and have in many instances been specially and gratefully acknowledged by the Boards of Guardians at whose request they have been given.

Several reports have been received from the gentlemen thus sent down by recommendation of this Board, and these have been placed in Dr. Milroy's hands for his use in preparing his report on the epidemic beyond the metropolis. The materials for this report are, I am sorry to say, very much less ample than those which have been at the command of Dr. Sutherland.

In conclusion, I am anxious to point out to your Lordship the principal results which appear to me to follow from the experience summed up in the report of Dr. Sutherland. These conclusions, though deduced from the metropolis alone, are in most respects identical with those at which I have arrived from all the information I have received from other parts of the country upon the sanitary condition of the population, and accord with all previous experience on the subject. The evils enumerated may be regarded in a great measure as general, and as admitting general remedies.

The evidence on the localizing conditions of cholera given in the report of Dr. Sutherland (which is, as I have stated, an abstract of the reports of the Medical Inspectors) points to the following as among the more prominent of the removable causes of zymotic disease:—

1. Open ditches used as sewers.
2. Want of sewers.
3. Badly constructed sewers, accumulating deposits and generating sewer gases.
4. The pollution of the atmosphere in streets and within houses from untrapped gulleys and drains, and from sewer-ventilating openings in streets.
5. Cesspools accumulating and retaining excrementitious matters close to and under dwelling-houses, whereby the air is contaminated and the subsoil saturated with filth.
6. Want of house drainage.

7. Improperly constructed house drainage.
8. Defective paving in alleys, courts, and back yards.
9. The absence of any organized daily system of cleansing, and the consequent retention of house refuse in and near dwellings.
10. Bad water, badly distributed.
11. Recurring nuisances.
12. Unwholesome trades, such as private slaughter-houses in crowded localities, bone boiling and crushing, manure making, and other trades evolving vapours containing organic and other noxious matters.
13. Unwholesome vapours exhaled from the Thames, in consequence of the water being polluted by the sewage of the metropolis.
14. Structural defects of dwelling houses, such as houses built in rows, back to back. Cellar habitations. Neighbourhoods the houses of which are closely packed together, with narrow overcrowded streets, alleys, and courts so constructed as to prevent ventilation. Houses absolutely unfit for human habitation. Filthy, unventilated, and overcrowded houses, let to tenants by the week or for other periods less than a year.

Lastly, and applying to all these,

15. Multiplicity of local authorities, and the want of sufficient powers in such authorities to deal with these evils.

Great as these evils are in London, they are not greater, in comparison to the extent of the metropolis, than in other large cities and towns, and there is not one among them that cannot be remedied if proper steps be taken.

The first and most obvious necessity in the metropolis is to sweep away the existing chaos of local jurisdictions, and to constitute Local Boards of Health for the metropolitan districts, with the most ample powers to deal with the evils described. All the details of local works might be left in their hands, as in towns under the Public Health Act; but as there are questions with which Local Boards could not so well deal, such as the purification of the river, opening main lines of streets, laying down main lines of sewers, water supply, &c., these might be placed under the jurisdiction of a metropolitan Board of Works, as suggested in the report of the Commissioners on the Corporation of London last year.

Of all questions that can come under the consideration of the metropolitan authorities, none exceeds in importance that of water-supply.

That the present supply of the metropolis is defective, both in quality and mode of distribution, is hardly contested. The Water Supply (Metropolis) Act of 1852 will, no doubt, lead to great improvements.

I would submit, on this point, that when the period arrives at which the Act requires that the works for the improved supply are to be completed, an inquiry should be instituted, embracing two points,—

1st. How far the companies have complied with the Act; and

2dly, How far the improvements rendered compulsory by the Act have given to London a supply satisfactory both as to quantity, quality, cost, and distribution.

I have prepared a Bill, framed with a view to supersede the existing Acts for the removal of nuisances.

That Bill is before the House of Commons, and I need not set out its provisions here. They are based on necessities widely and deeply felt, and provide remedies much wanted for most serious evils. That measure is intended to be of general application, and to be in force where the Public Health Act is in operation, as well as where that Act has not been applied. I have also introduced a Bill for amendment of the Public Health Act. It has been framed with a view to supply those defects of the present measure which the experience of six years has brought to light, and to give to communities a means of providing a machinery for their own improvement without the cost, difficulties, and delays which attend the procuring of a Local Improvement Act.

I have the honour to be

Your Lordship's obedient Servant,

B. HALL,

President of the General Board of Health.

*The Right Honourable
Viscount Palmerston.*

Whitehall, December 30, 1854.

SIR,

IN compliance with the request of the President of the General Board of Health conveyed in your letter addressed to me on the 26th October, I beg to transmit the accompanying report on the Epidemic Cholera, as it prevailed in the Metropolis in 1854, embodying an abstract of the reports sent in by the Medical Inspectors who had charge of the different Parishes and Unions.

I am, Sir,

Your obedient Servant,

JOHN SUTHERLAND.

T. Taylor, Esq.,

Secretary,

General Board of Health.