

*Observations on the Plague in England, by the Rev.
Mr. Pegge. In a Letter to Mr. Gough.*

Read January 13, 1780.

DEAR SIR,

THOUGH I esteem it to be criminal in some degree to be dropping false hints and suggestions about any matters that may materially affect the public, or raising groundless fears and apprehensions concerning the plague, or war, or any other the like alarming subjects; yet I doubt I shall be but too well justified in declaring, that at this juncture we appear to be in imminent danger of having the pestilence imported into this island. It now rages violently at *Constantinople*, in the *Levant*, and in *Africa*; insomuch that all the neighbouring nations, as we learn from the public prints, are taking all necessary precautions against it; and administration here at home have thought proper to double the quarantine.

THE great port of *London*, and the out-ports, have doubtless the most reason to be upon their guard on these terrifying occasions; but give me leave, Sir, nevertheless, to observe to you, that even we, who live at so great a distance from the metropolis,



polis, or any other sea-port, are not totally exempt from danger, whenever the plague happens to invade this kingdom, as will appear from the relation which I am now going to give you of what formerly passed, in reference to the plague, in this inland county of *Derby*.

AT *Chesterfield* the plague began 2 October, 1586, as is expressly remarked in the parish register, where in the margin it is called the great plague to distinguish it from a less fatal infection that broke out A. 1608-9. In November there were fifteen burials; after which it seems to have ceased for the winter, but appeared again in May 1587, where there were fifteen burials, and in June fifty-four. It continued to rage till November, for as in the month of December there are only five deaths, which is scarce more than common in this large parish, it may be said to have stopt in November. The latter or lesser plague at *Chesterfield* began 18 March 1608-9; so it is noted in the margin of the register again. This seems to have lasted only April and May, and not to have been very fatal.

THE plague, Sir, raged at *Brimington*, a hamlet in the parish of *Chesterfield*, at the beginning of the last century. But the best account of it that can now be procured, is deficient in one material respect, since it never could be known with certainty, not even after the strictest enquiries, in what manner the distemper was brought thither. But though the mode of conveyance be not precisely known, yet, in all probability, it came from *London*, where, according to Mr. *Stowe*, it raged furiously the same year [a], and from whence many people then fled into the country [b]. However, *the sickness*, as it was commonly then called, appeared at *Brimington* at the end of October 1603, between which time and January 2 following there died, at

[a] *Stowe*, p. 857. Dr. R. Brooke's *Hist. of Pestil. Distempers*, p. 33.

[b] *Stowe*, *ibid.*

this

this small place, and were there buried, five men and four women, as appears from the parish-register of *Chesterfield*. The distemper never spread thence to *Chesterfield*, nor into any other neighbouring places, so far as can now be discovered: indeed, as to the adjoining parish of *Whittington*, whence I write this, proper precaution was taken to prevent its getting thither; the bridge, called *Goose-Acre-Bridge* (so named from a field at the foot of it,) and then the principal communication with *Whittington*, being pulled down at this time [c], that so all intercourse might be broken of with the infected at *Brimington*.

THE measures pursued by the inhabitants of *Brimington* among themselves are only known by tradition, which informs that some cabins were erected in a field there now called from thence *Cabin-field*.

THE plague appeared at *Belpar*, in the parish of *Duffield*, A. 1609. I don't find the infection at London in that year, but Stowe observes, that A. 1604 it pleased the Almighty to visit the *whole land* with pestilence, London only excepted; whence it should seem to have continued dispersing itself, for some years, in country places, or rather the seeds of the disorder lay hidden in cloaths, or other receptacles favourable to them [d]; however, the malady broke out at *Belpar* A. 1609, and fifty-

[c] This bridge, of which some remains are now to be seen in the river Rother at low water, was never after re-edified; for though one Martin Wostenholme, of *Eckington*, wanted to have it rebuilt, and for that purpose indicted it, the people of *Brimington* stood trial with him, and cast him at the quarter-sessions, about A. D. 1692. A lane goes down from *Brimington* northward to the place where the bridge stood, and another from *Whittington* southward, and these lanes plainly point out the *quondam* site of the bridge. This was then a great road for packhorses from the vicinal parts of *Derbyshire* and *Yorkshire*, which, after they had crossed the water, proceeded through *Brimington*, and over the moor there, for *London*. The only road from *Whittington* to *Brimington* now is by the *New Bridge*, so called in respect of that *old* one pulled down as above.

[d] See Dr. Mead's works, p. 290.

one persons died of it there, between May 1 and September 30, as the register of Duffield shews. This again appears to have been a confined and very local disaster, since one does not hear of its spreading into any other places in that neighbourhood.

THE plague again just made its appearance (for it did not spread even in the place) at Holmesfield in the parish of Dronfield, about the same time, as we learn from this single entry in the register of Dronfield, "William Townesend, curate of Holmesfield, who died of the plague, was buried in Holmesfield chappell year 12 Mar. 1609."

IN the close of the year 1664 began that ever memorable plague at London, which, in a little above a year, killed, as Dr. Hodges [e], Dr. C. Brookes and Monf. Rapin tell us, 100,000 persons [f], and was carried to *Eyam* in the *Peak of Derbyshire* by means of a box sent from London to a Taylor in that village, containing some materials relating to his trade [g]. Dr. Mead's narrative concerning its ravages there is as follows:

‘ A SERVANT, who first opened the foresaid box, complaining that the goods were damp, was ordered to dry them at the fire; but in doing it was seized with the plague, and died: the same misfortune extended to all the rest of the family, except the taylor's wife, who alone survived. From hence the distemper spread about, and destroyed in that village, and the rest of the parish, though a small one, between two and three hundred persons. But notwithstanding this so great violence of the disease, it was restrained from reaching beyond that parish by the care of the rector; from whose

[c] *Leimologia*, p. 28.

[f] Others say, 68,596. Dr. Hodges in the Table; Annot. on Rapin II. p. 641. Maitland I. p. 430. Here they speak of the Bills of mortality merely.

[g] Dr. Mead, p. 250.

son, and another worthy gentleman, I have the relation. This clergyman advised, that the sick should be removed into huts and barracks built upon the common; and procuring the interest of the then earl of Devonshire, that the people should be well furnished with provisions, he took effectual care, that no one should go out of the parish; and by this means he protected his neighbours from infection with compleat success [b].*

THE rector here commended, both for his care and tenderness towards his parishioners, and his prudence in conducting this dangerous business so happily, was the Rev. Mr. William Mompesson; and his wife [j], who was before consumptive and insisted upon staying with him, when he sent his children away from the place, died of the distemper. Mr. Mompesson, in a letter I have seen, says, seventy-six families were visited with the calamity, and two hundred fifty-nine persons died. His man-servant had the distemper, and upon the appearance of the tumour he gave him several chymical antidotes [k], which had a very kind operation, and with the blessing of God kept the venom from his heart, as he expresses it [l], and after the tumour broke he was well; his maid, a circumstance very fortunate for him, continued in health all the time. The defunct were interred on the common abovementioned, where the grave-stones of several are still remaining. I would add, that Mr. Robert Standley, who had been minister and register here, but displaced A. 1662, continued at Eyam all the time of the pestilence. * And, as my author writes, though not then a mi-

[b] Dr. Mead, p. 291.

[j] Catharine, daughter of Ralph Carr of Cocken in bishoprick of Durham; Esq. She died Aug. 25, 1666.

[k] See the Directions for the Plague by Coll. of Physicians 1665, in Dod. and p. 33.

[l] See Dr. Hodges, p. 74.

* nister

‘ nifter of that place, yet he fhewed himfelf both a minifter,
 ‘ and did many good offices to that place, during that fore and
 ‘ very mortal vifitation [f].’

‘Tis obfervable, that the poor patients, Mr. Mompeffon’s pri-
 foners, as one may term them, at Eyam, principally depended
 on the liberality, countenance and intereft of William, the third
 earl of Devonfhire (who came to the title A. 1628 and died A.
 1684) for their maintenance and fupport, during this horrible
 calamity. But this, I imagine, might be partly in confequence
 of the orders, or directions, iffued by his majefty and the privy-
 council, empowering the juftices to levy money for the fervice
 of infected places, as was ufual on fuch occafions. I fay *as*
ufual; for though the regulations given out at this time, when
 the malady was fo grievous and extenfive, have not at prefent
 occurred to me, yet one has reafon to infer the exiftence of
 them, from former precedents and praftices [m]. I find in cer-
 tain memorandums taken by me from Sir Edward Dering’s
 library at Surenden, that when the town of Affford, and Ken-
 nington, a village in that neighbourhood, were vifited with the
 plague A. 1625 [n], the juftices, 4 July, directed the lower
 half-hundred of Calehill to contribute 1*l.* 19*s.* 6*d.* towards their
 affiftance, the inhabitants of Affford and Kennington not being
 able to defray the neceffary expences; and this was *in perfuance*
of the ftatute and orders from his majefty and lords of the coun-
 cil. The plague increafed at Affford, and in a fecond letter,
 1 Auguft, 1625, the juftices fet forth, that the inhabitants are
 not able ‘ to relieve and orderly to attend the fick, and to beare
 ‘ about the charges of their other poore artificers, who for

[f] Forfter’s Life of Mr. John Hieron, p. 51.

[m] Strype on Stowe’s Survey of London, II. p. 544. 565.

[n] This was a very deftructive plague, Stowe, p. 1041. Maitland, I. p. 299.
 430. Rapin, II. p. 244.

* want of trade must of necessity be provided for, or els they
* will be forced for the succor of theyr lives to *break forbe of*
* *that towne*, to the great danger of the country; and for that
* *by the law, and by vertue of a late order commendaed from his*
* *majesty's privy-council* to be executed during this tyme of in-
* fection, we are to take order for theyr reliefe, taxing and af-
* fessing the inhabitants within five miles of the places infect-
* ed, or to extend the said taxing to other parts, or in any
* other limits, as to us shall be thought requisite, and there-
* fore they order the said half-hundred to collect 3*l.* intended
for a month's provision for the poor people of the town of
Ashford.

Thus it should seem, that if the earl of Devonshire and the
rector of Eyam had no express directions given them by autho-
rity at this time, they followed those which had been issued on
the like occasions in former years, particularly those of A. D.
1625, which regulated the proceedings of the Kentish magis-
trates. However this may be, the measures pursued at Eyam
were certainly the wisest that could be devised, as is clearly
demonstrated by the event, since the distemper never extended
itself beyond the bounds of the parish.

I am, Sir,

Your most obedient Servant,

Whittington, Oct. 28, 1778.

SAMUEL PEGGE.

P. S. As it was common for people, especially the opulent,
to leave the city, and fly into the country, in times of such ge-
neral mortality, as has been noted above [e], so it is said a
lady of fortune, whose name cannot now be recovered, came to
Chesterfield A. 1603 or 1625, along with Paul Fletcher, Lon-

[e] See also Dr. Hodges, p. 12. 15, 25.

don.

don carrier, bringing all her money, jewels, and other valuables with her; that she died there, and Fletcher succeeded to all her wealth. 'Tis certain, that this Walton about that time, bought the whole estate at Walton of Sir Arthur Ingram, and afterwards sold off a good part of it. He was buried at Chesterfield, 4 March, 1663-4, under the description of Paul Fletcher of Walton, and left his estate to Paul Jenkinson, who, I think, was his great nephew, was afterwards created a baronet 1685, and became patriarch of the now-extinct family of Jenkinson of Walton.

* * The register of *Enfield* parish, which, including the Chace, then less populous than at present, is twenty miles round, says that in the plague of 1603 here died one hundred and eighty persons, of whom seventy-one were women. In that of 1625 sixty-seven, including twenty-six women; in 1665 fifty-five; so that the first of these three was far more fatal than the last, though distinguished in our Chronicles by the name of the *great plague*. Notwithstanding it is much easier to account for the number of persons dying of it at the distance of only ten miles from the capital, the disproportion of deaths in the several plagues in the same parish, can only be accounted for by supposing that of 1603 to be the attack of a new disorder which the faculty had not experience to oppose. But against that conjecture the same registers hold out an objection; for the plague carried off here in 1593 fifty-seven, in 1594 two, in 1609 thirteen, in 1631 five; but the number of burials in a day imply that it continued some months this year; in 1636 three, in 1637 ten, in 1642 one, in 1645 five, in 1647 seven, and of these the very first year the plague was felt here was less fatal by two thirds than 1603. R. G.