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A
SHORT ACCOUNT
OF THE
PROGRESS *and* EFFECTS
OF THE
P L A G U E,
WHICH PREVAILED IN THE
CITY OF LONDON,

IN THE YEAR 1665;

EXTRACTED FROM THE MEMOIRS OF A PERSON
WHO RESIDED THERE, DURING THE
WHOLE TIME OF THE INFECTION.

*O that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would
consider their latter End.*

Deut. xxxii. 29.

W H I T B Y:

PRINTED BY T. WEBSTER. 1793.

SHORT ACCOUNT

OF THE

PROGRESS AND EFFECTS

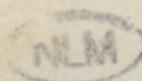
OF THE

PLAGUE

CITY OF LONDON

IN THE YEAR 1665

EXTRACTED FROM THE MEMOIRS OF A PERSON
WHO RESIDED THERE DURING THE
WHOLE TIME OF THE INFECTION.



PRINTED BY T. WEBSTER

AMONGST the many Calamities with which the Almighty is pleased to visit the Children of Men, in order to reduce them to a just Sense of their Weakness, and an entire Dependance upon him, there are scarcely any that are more productive of true penitent Humiliation, and a Sight of what is really Good, and truly Evil, than those contagious Distempers which an offended God, sometimes, suffers to rage amongst the People. In the Year 1665, the City of LONDON was sorely visited by the Plague: an Account of the Progress and Effects of that Visitation, was kept by a Citizen who remained there during the whole Time of the Sickness, and who appears to have been candid and judicious in his Remarks. It is hoped the Reader will, in a short Description of that memorable Judgment, meet with some Lessons of best Wisdom, and derive Instruction from this close and serious Converse with Death and the Grave.

THE Introduction of this Contagion in LONDON, was by some Goods imported from HOLLAND, which had been brought thither from the Levant. It first broke out in the House where those Goods were opened, from whence it spread to other Houses. In the first House that was infected, there died four Persons: a Neighbour who went to visit them, on returning Home, gave the Distemper to her Family, and died with all her Household. The Parish Officers who were employed about the sick Persons being also infected, the Physicians perceived the Danger, and upon narrow Inspection were assured, that it was indeed the Plague, with all its

terrifying Particulars, and that it threatened a general Infection. The People began now to be alarmed all over the Town; the usual Number of Burials within the Bills of Mortality for a Week, were generally about 240 to 300; but from the 24th to the 27th of January, the printed Bill was 474. However this went off again, and the Frost continuing very severe till near the End of February, the Bills decreased again, and People began to look upon the Danger as good as over; but in May the Bills greatly increased, and the Weather becoming hot, the Infection spread again, in a dreadful Manner.

I lived, says the Author, without Aldgate, and as the Distemper had not reached to that Side of the City, our Neighbourhood continued easy; but at the other End of the Town, the Consternation was very great; and the Nobility and Gentry thronged out of the Town, with their Families, in an unusual Manner. Nothing was to be seen but Waggons, Carts, and Coaches, with Goods and People, and Horse-men attending them, hurrying away; then empty Waggons and Carts appeared, which were apparently returning to fetch more People: besides innumerable Numbers of People on Horseback, fitted out for travelling. This was a very melancholy Prospect; indeed there was Nothing else of Moment to be seen; it filled my Mind with very serious Thoughts of the Misery that was coming upon the City, and the unhappy Condition of those who would be left in it. By the End of July, the Contagion had spread and increased to a great Degree: Sorrow and Sadness sat upon every Face; and tho' some Parts were not yet overwhelmed, all looked deeply concerned. LONDON might well be said to be all in Tears; the Mourners did not go about the Streets, for Nobody made a formal Dress of Mourning for their nearest Relations; but
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the Voice of Mourning, was, indeed, heard in the Streets; the Shrieks of Women and Children at the Windows and Doors of their Houses, where their dearest Relations were dying, were so frequent to be heard as we passed the Streets, that it was enough to pierce the stoutest Heart in the World. Tears and Lamentations were perceived in almost every House, especially in the first Part of the Visitation; for, towards the latter End, People did not so much concern themselves for the Loss of their Friends, expecting that themselves should be summoned the next Hour.

It was a Time of very unhappy Breaches amongst us; in Matters of Religion, Divisions, and separate Opinions prevailed; the Church of ENGLAND was lately restored, and the Presbyterians and other Professions had set up their Meetings for Worship apart, in which they were frequently disturbed, the Government endeavouring to suppress their Meetings. But this dreadful Visitation reconciled the different Parties, and took away all Manner of Prejudice and Scruple from the People. But after the Sicknels was over, that Spirit of Charity subsided, and Things returned to their old Channel again.—Here we may observe, that a nearer View of Death would soon reconcile Men of good Principles to one another; and that it is chiefly owing to our easy Situations in Life, and our putting these Things far from us, that our Breaches are fomented, and that there is so much Prejudice and Want of Christian Charity and Union amongst us. A close View and Converse with Death, or with Diseases that threaten Death, would scum off the Gall of our Tempers, remove our Animosities, and bring us to see with different Eyes. On the other Side of the Grave, we shall all be Brethren again.

THE Inns of Court were now all shut up; there were but few

few Lawyers to be seen in the City; indeed there was no Need of them, for Quarrels and Divisions about Interest had ceased; every Body was at Peace.

It was also worthy of Observation, as well as fruitful of Instruction, to remark with what Alacrity the People of all Persuasions, embraced the Opportunities they had of attending upon the public Worship, and other appointed Times of Devotion, as Humiliations, Fastings, and public Confession of Sins, to implore the Mercy of GOD, and avert the Judgment which hung over their Heads. The Churches were so thronged, that there was, often, no coming near; no not to the very Door of the largest Churches. There were also daily Prayers appointed, Morning and Evening, at which the People attended with uncommon Devotion.

ALL Plays and Interludes, which had lately begun to increase amongst us, were forbid to act; the Gaming-Tables, public Dancing-Rooms, and Music-Houses, which multiplied, and began to debauch the Manners of the People, were shut up and suppressed, finding no Trade; for the Minds of the People were generally humbled and agitated with other Things: Death was before their Eyes, and every Body began to think of their Graves.

THE Infection still gradually increased, till the Middle of August, when there died a Thousand a-Day, by the Account of the weekly Bills, though they never gave a full Account, by many Thousands: many of the Parish-Officers were taken sick themselves, and died when their Account was to be given in. The Parish of Stepney alone, had, within the Year, one Hundred and sixteen Sextons, Grave-Diggers, Carriers of the Dead, &c. Indeed the Work was not of a Nature to allow them Leisure to take an exact Tale of the dead

dead Bodies, which were all thrown together in the Dark, in a Pit, to which no Man could come near without the utmost Peril.

I had, says the Author, the Care of my Brother's House, which obliged me sometimes to go abroad. In these Walks, I had dismal Scenes before my Eyes, as, particularly of Persons falling dead in the Streets, terrible Shrieks of Women, who, in their Agonies, would throw open their Chamber-Windows, and cry out in a dismal, surprising Manner. It is impossible to describe the Variety of Postures in which the Passions of the poor People would express themselves.—Passing through Token-House Yard, of a sudden a Casement violently opened just over my Head, and a Woman gave three frightful Screeches, and then cried, "*Oh! Death, Death, Death!*" which struck me with Horror, and caused a Chilness in my very Blood. There was no Body to be seen in the whole Street, neither did any Window open, for People had no Curiosity now in any Case. I went on to pass into *Bell Alley*, where there was a greater Cry than that; I could hear Women and Children run screaming about the Rooms like distracted Persons; when a Garret-Window opened, and some Body from a Window on the other Side, asked, *What is the Matter?* Upon which it was answered, "*O Lord! my old Master has hanged himself!*" The other asked again, *Is he quite dead?* And the first answered, "*Ay, Ay, quite dead and cold.*" This Person was a Deputy Alderman, and very rich. But this is but one Instance; it is scarce credible, what dreadful Cases happened in particular Families every Day; People in the Rage of the Distemper, or in the Torment of the Swelling, which was indeed intolerable, becoming raving and distracted, oftentimes laid violent Hands upon themselves, or threw themselves out of the
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Windows; or breaking out of the Houses, would dance naked about the Streets, not knowing one Extasy from another; others, if not prevented, would run directly down the River, and plunge into the Water. Some died of meer Grief as a Passion, and some of Fright and Suprise, without having received the Infection. It often pierced my very Soul, to hear the Groans and Cries of those who were thus tormented. But this of the Swellings was accounted the most promising particular in the whole Infection; for if these Swellings could be brought to break and run, the Patient generally recovered; whereas, those who were struck with Death at the beginning of the Distemper, and had Spots come upon them, often went about indifferent easy, till a little before they died, and some till the Moment they dropped down; such would be taken suddenly very sick, and would run to some convenient Place, or to their own Houses, if possible, and there sit down, grow faint, and die.

THE Method the Magistrates fell into, of locking up the Doors of People's Houses, where any had taken the Distemper, and setting Watchmen there Night and Day, to prevent any going out to spread the Infection, looked hard and cruel, as, perhaps, those who were found in the Family, might have escaped if they had been removed from the Sick; but the public Good seemed to justify such a Conduct, and there was no obtaining the least Mitigation by any Application to the Magistrates. This put People, who thought themselves well, upon many Stratagems to get out of their Confinements. Going out one Morning, I heard a great Outcry, which prompting my Curiosity, I inquired the Cause of a Person who looked out of a Window. A Watchman had been employed to watch at the Door of a House, which was infected and shut up; both himself and the Day Watchman,

attended

attended there a Day and two Nights. All this while no Noise had been heard, nor Lights seen in the House; neither had they called for any Thing. It seems that two or three Days before, the Dead-Cart had stopped there, and a Servant-Maid had been brought down to the Door dead, wrapped only in a green Rug, which the Buriers had put into the Cart and carried away: the next Day, the Watchman heard great crying and screaming in the House, which he supposed was occasioned by some of the Family dying just at that Time; upon which he knocked at the Door a great while: at last, one looked out, and said with an angry, quick Tone, and a Voice as of one who was crying, "*What d'ye want that ye make such a Knocking?*" He answered, "*I am the Watchman; How do you do? What is the Matter?*" The Person answered, "*What is that to you? Stop the Dead Cart.*" This was about one o'Clock; soon after, he stopt the Dead-Cart, and then knocked again, but no Body answered: He continued knocking, and the Bell-man called several Times, "*Bring out your Dead;*" but no Body answered, till the Man who drove the Cart, being called to other Houses, would stay no longer, and drove away. In the Morning, when the Day Watchman came in, they knocked at the Door a great while; but no Body answering, they got a Ladder, and one of them went up to the Window, and looking into the Room, he saw a Woman lying dead upon the Floor, in a dismal Manner; but though he called aloud, and knocked hard on the Floor with his Staff, no Body stirred or answered. This they made known to the Magistrate, who ordered the House to be broke open, when no Body was found in the House but that young Woman; who having been infected, and past Recovery, the Rest had left her to die by herself, and were every one gone, having found some Way

to delude the Watchman, and go out. As to those Cries and Shrieks which he heard, it was supposed they were the passionate Cries of the Family, at the bitter parting, which, to be sure, it was to them all; this being the Sister to the Mistress of the Family.

MANY more Instances might be given; but these may suffice to shew the deep Distress of that Day. Death did not now hover over every one's Head only, but looked into their Houses and Chambers, and even stared in their very Faces; and though there were some Stupidity and Dulness of Mind, yet there was a great Deal of just Alarm sounded in the inmost Soul: many Consciences were awakened: many hard Hearts melted; many a penitent Confession was made of Crimes long concealed. People might be heard even in the Streets, as we passed along, calling upon God for Mercy, through JESUS CHRIST; and saying, "I have been a Thief,"—"I have been an Adulterer,"—"I have been a Murderer,"—and the like; and none durst stop to make Inquiry into such Things, or to administer Comfort to the poor Creature, who, in the Anguish both of Soul and Body, thus cried out. Many were the Warnings that were then given by dying Penitents to others, not to put off and delay their Repentance to a Day of Distress; that such a Time of Calamity as this, was no Time for Repentance. I wish (says the Author) I could repeat the very Sound of those Groans and Exclamations that I heard from some poor dying Creatures, when in the Height of their Agonies and Distress; and that I could make him who reads this hear as, I imagine, I now hear them; for the Sound seems still to ring in my Ears.

IN the Beginning of September, the Number of Burials increasing, the Church-Wardens of Aldgate Parish ordered

a large Pit to be dug, to hold all the Dead which might die in a Month ; it was about forty Feet long, and sixteen broad. Some blamed the Church-Wardens for suffering such a frightful Gulf to be dug ; nevertheless, in two Weeks, they had thrown more than eleven hundred Bodies into it, when they were obliged to fill it up, as the Bodies were come within six Feet of the Surface. My Curiosity drove me to go and see this Pit, when there had been near four hundred People buried in it. I got Admittance into the Church-Yard by means of the Sexton, who was a sensible, religious Man ; he would have persuaded me not to go, saying, *“That it was, indeed, their Duty to venture, and in it, they might hope to be preserved ; but that, as I had no apparent Call, he thought my Curiosity could not justify my running that Hazard.”* I told him, *“I had been pressed in my Mind to go ; and that, perhaps, it might be an instructing Sight.”* *“Nay,”* says the good Man, *“if you will venture upon that Score, in the Name of GOD go in ; it will be a Sermon to you, it may be the best that ever you heard in your Life.”* His Discourse had shocked my Resolution, and I stood wavering for a good while ; but just then I heard the Bell-Man, and the Cart loaded with dead Bodies, appearing, I went in. There was no body, as I could perceive at first, with the Cart, but the Buriers and the Man who led the Cart ; but when they came to the Pit, they saw a Man muffled in a Cloak, who appeared in great Agony. The Buriers immediately gathered about him, supposing he was one of those poor delirious or desperate Creatures, who would sometimes run to the Pit, wrapt in Blankets, and throw themselves in ; and, as they said, bury themselves. When the Buriers came to him, they soon found he was neither desperate nor distempered in Mind, but one oppressed with a dreadful Weight of Grief, having his Wife and several Children all in the cart, that was just come in with him, and he followed in Agony

and Excess of Sorrow. He calmly desiring the Buriers to let him alone, said he would only see the Bodies thrown in, and go away; so they left importuning him; but no sooner was the Cart turned round, and the Bodies shot into the Pit promiscuously, which was a Surprise to him, for he at least expected they would have been decently laid in, though indeed he was afterwards convinced that was impracticable; I say, no sooner did he see the Sight, but he cried out aloud, unable to contain himself, and fell down in a Swoon. The Buriers ran to him, and took him up, and when he came to himself, led him to a Place where he was taken Care of.— He looked into the Pit again as he went away, but the Buriers had covered the Bodies so immediately, with throwing Earth, that Nothing could be seen. The Cart had in it sixteen or seventeen Bodies. Some were wrapt up in Linen Sheets, some in Rugs, some little other than naked, or so loose, that what Covering they had fell from them, in the shooting out of the Cart, and they fell quite naked among the Rest: but the Matter was not much to them, or the Indecency much to any one else, seeing they were to be huddled together into the common Grave of Mankind; for here was no Difference made, but Poor and Rich went together; there was no other Way of Burials, neither was it possible there should.

John Hayward under-Sexton, Grave-Digger and Bearer of the Dead, never had the Distemper at all, but lived about twenty Years after it. His Wife was employed to nurse the infected People; yet she herself never was infected. The only Preservative he used against the Infection, was holding Garlic and Rue in his Mouth, and smoaking Tobacco; this I had from his own Mouth. His Wife's Remedy was washing her Head in Vinegar, and sprinkling her Head-Cloths so with Vinegar, as to keep them always moist; and if the Smell

of any of those she waited on, was more than ordinary offensive, she snuffed Vinegar up her Nose, sprinkled her Head-Cloths, and held an Handkerchief wetted with Vinegar, to her Mouth.

AND here I must not omit mentioning the Disposition of the People of that Day, with Respect to their Charity to the Poor, which indeed was very large, both in a public and a private Way. Some pious Ladies were so zealous in this good Work, and so confident in the Protection of Providence in the Discharge of this great Duty, that they went about themselves distributing Alms, and visiting the poor Families who were infected, in their very Houses, appointing Nurfses and Apothecaries to supply them with what they wanted. Thus giving their Blessings to the Poor, in substantial Relief, as well as hearty Prayers for them. I will not undertake to say that none of these charitable People were suffered to die of the Plague; but this I may say, that I never knew that any of them miscarried, which I mention for the Encouragement of others in Case of like Distress: and doubtless, if they *“that give to the Poor, lend to the Lord, and he will repay it,”* those who hazard their Lives to give to the Poor, and to comfort and assist them in such a Misery as this, may hope to be protected therein.

FROM the Middle of August to the Middle of September, the Infection still increased, and spread itself with an irresistible Fury; it was reckoned that, during that Time, there died no less than sixteen Hundred a Day, one Day with another. It was then that the Confusion and Terror was inexpressible; the Courage of the People appointed to carry away the Dead, began to fail them: the Vigilance of the Magistrates was now put to the utmost Trial. At last the Violence of the Distemper came to such a Height, that the People sat still, looking at one another, and seemed quite abandoned

doned to Despair. In a Word, People began to give themselves up to a Fear, that there was Nothing to be expected but an universal Desolation. This Despair made People bold and venturous; they were no more shy of one another, as expecting there was now no avoiding the Distemper, but that all must go; this brought them to croud into the Churches; they inquired no more what Condition the People who sat near them were in, but looking upon themselves all as so many dead Corps, they came to the Churches without the least Caution, and crouded together, as if their Lives were of no Consequence, compared to the Work which they were come about. Indeed, their Zeal in coming, and the Earnestness and affectionate Attention they shewed to what they heard, made it manifest what Value People would put upon the Worship of GOD, if they thought every Day they attended at the Church would be their last.

IT was in the Height of this Despair, that it pleased GOD to stay his Hand, and to slacken the Fury of the Contagion, in a Manner as surprizing as that of its Beginning; and which demonstrated it to be his own Particular Hand, above the Agency of Means. Nothing but Omnipotent Power could have done it: the Contagion despised all Medicine; Death raged in every Corner; and had it gone on as it did then, a few Weeks more would have cleared the Town of all its Inhabitants. In that very Moment, when thirty Thousand were dead in three Weeks, nay, when it was reported three Thousand had died in one Night, and an Hundred Thousand more were taken sick; when we might well say, *Vain was the Help of Man*, it pleased GOD to cause the Fury of it to abate, and by his immediate Hand to disarm the Enemy. It was wonderful! The Physicians were surprised, wherever they visited, to find their Patients better, and in a few Days every

every Body was recovering. Nor was this by any Medicine found out, or any new Method of Cure discovered; but it was evidently from the secret invisible Hand of Him, who had at first sent this Disease as a Judgment upon us. Let the Philosophers search for Reasons in Nature to account for it, and labour as much as they will to lessen the Debt they owe to their Maker; those Physicians who had the least Share of Religion in them, were obliged to acknowledge that it was all supernatural. The Streets were now full of poor recovering Creatures, who appeared very sensible and thankful to GOD for their unexpected Deliverance: yet I must own, that as to the Generality of the People, it might too justly be said of them as was said of the Children of *Israel*, after they had been delivered from the Host of *Pharaoh*;—
“That they sung his Praise, but they soon forgot his Works.”

THE Author, who was preserved unhurt with his whole Family, during the Time of the Sickness, gives, in his Memoirs, a particular Account of the many Reasonings and Fears which affected his Mind, before he could come to a fixed Conclusion whether to stay and take his Lot in the Station in which GOD had placed him, or by leaving the City run the Hazard of unsettling himself, and lose his Effects, which lay scattered amongst the Merchants. At the earnest Solicitations of his Brother, he had concluded to go, but being always crossed in this Design, by several Accidents, it came, one Morning, as he expresses it, very warmly in his Mind, whether these repeated Disappointments were not Intimations to him, that it was the Will of Heaven he should not go; which was succeeded by a farther Thought, that if this Suggestion was from GOD, he was able effectually to preserve him in the Midst of all Deaths and Dangers that would surround him, and that if he attempted to secure him-
 self,

self, by fleeing from his Habitation, and acting contrary to these Intimations, which he believed to be divine, it was a Kind of flying from GOD, who could cause his Justice to overtake him, when, and where he thought fit.

BUT what finally fixed him in a Resolution to stay, and cast himself entirely upon the Protection and good Pleasure of the Almighty, was, that at a Time when his Thoughts were more than commonly serious upon this weighty Subject, turning over the Bible which lay before him, he cried out; *Well, I know not what to do, Lord, direct me!* At that Juncture, happening to stop, and casting his Eye on the second Verse of the 91st Psalm, he read to the 10th, as follows; “ *I will say of the Lord, He is my Refuge, and my Fort-
‘refs, my GOD, in him will I trust. Surely he shall deliver thee
‘from the Snare of the Fowler, and from the noisome Pestilence.
‘He shall cover thee with his Feathers, and under his Wings shalt
‘thou trust: his Truth shall be thy Shield and Buckler. Thou
‘shalt not be afraid for the Terror by Night, nor for the Arrow
‘that slieth by Day: nor for the Pestilence that walketh in Dark-
‘ness: Nor for the Destruction that wasteth at Noon-Day. A
‘Thousand shall fall at thy Side, and ten Thousand at thy right
‘Hand; but it shall not come nigh thee. Only with thine Eyes
‘shalt thou behold and see the Reward of the Wicked. Because
‘thou hast made the Lord which is my Refuge, even the Most
‘High thy Habitation: there shall no Evil befall thee, neither shall
‘any Plague come nigh thy Dwelling: &c.”*

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