

"Sensus Communis"

THE CHOLERA, NO JUDGMENT!

THE
EFFICACY, PHILOSOPHY, AND PRACTICAL TENDENCY
OF THE

Prayer by the Archbishop of Canterbury,

ORDERED TO BE USED DURING

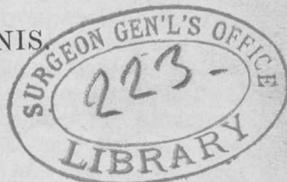
THE PREVALENCE OF CHOLERA,

EXAMINED IN A LETTER,

ADDRESSED TO

THE RIGHT HON. THE EARL OF CARLISLE,
CHIEF COMMISSIONER OF WOODS AND FORESTS,
PRESIDENT OF THE BOARD OF PUBLIC HEALTH, ETC., ETC.

✓
BY SENSUS COMMUNIS

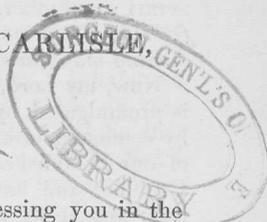


LONDON:
AYLOTT AND JONES, 8, PATERNOSTER-ROW.

PRICE SIXPENCE.

TO THE
RIGHT HONORABLE THE EARL OF CARLISLE,

ETC., ETC., ETC.



MY LORD,—I trust that I may be excused for addressing you in the manner I am about to do, upon a subject to which the attention of the community has, of late, been particularly directed.

The public, for some time past, have earnestly solicited from the Government, of which your Lordship is so distinguished a member, the appointment of a day of public “fast and humiliation,” in consequence of the terrible ravages that have recently been made by cholera. To the manifest surprise, however, of a large and influential class, the Government has decided upon not making this appointment, but the reasons which have induced this decision, of course remain to the public a mystery. It is a very remarkable fact, however, that this refusal has been made; because no one can doubt that, had Ministers believed that their acquiescence could benefit society, they would without any hesitation, have consented. In thinking over this, I have been led into a train of thought which I now venture to lay before your Lordship for perusal.

Although our rulers have not felt it incumbent upon them to appoint the day required, yet it does not appear that they considered it right altogether to disregard the idea upon which it was asked. They have, therefore, decided upon adopting a middle course; and doubtless upon good grounds.

In obedience to instructions, his Grace the Archbishop of Canterbury has drawn up a special form of prayer, which is ordered to be used, during the prevalence of the cholera, in the ordinary services of our Church. As there appears to me something remarkable in this composition, I shall take the liberty of commenting upon it; and I have addressed my remarks to your Lordship, (for reasons that will by and by suggest themselves,) in consequence of your connexion with the Government, and also with that excellent Board of Health, to whose exertions, at this critical time, the public ought to hold themselves so greatly indebted.

The Prayer that has been thus ordered, is styled “*A prayer for obtaining PARDON OF OUR SINS; and particularly for beseeching God to REMOVE FROM US THAT GRIEVOUS DISEASE with which many places in this kingdom are now visited;*” and it is founded on the assumption that this “grievous disease” comes directly from the hand of the Almighty as a *special judgment* on the nation for its guilt; and thus we are desired to intercede with His offended majesty, and by prayer and humiliation before His throne, to seek to stay His avenging hand, and withdraw from us the pestilence He has sent down upon us.

I will quote the pithiest portion of the Prayer, in which both the object and the reason of the whole appears. It says, “*When the men of Nineveh repented of their iniquity, Thou didst lay aside the fierceness*

of Thine anger, and sparedst the guilty city, WHEN THOU SAWEST THAT THEY TURNED FROM THEIR EVIL WAY. And now, Lord, we entreat Thee after Thy rich mercy to grant unto us, Thine afflicted servants, the LIKE SPIRIT OF REPENTANCE that Thou mayest WITHDRAW THY CHASTISEMENTS from our land, and stay the plague and grievous sickness which is abroad, making many desolate."

Now, my Lord, this appears to me a very extraordinary document. It is promulgated by the highest authorities in this kingdom; it has been, by command, drawn up by, or under the sanction of, the first dignitary of our Established Church; it has been submitted to the Ministers in Council; and having been approved of by them, is ordered for public use: and it is, of course, expected that the religious throughout the country will adopt its language as their own.

Although, my Lord, it is my desire and intention to examine this Prayer somewhat closely, I wish it to be understood at starting that I do so with every respect. The motives of its authors, I have no reason to suppose were otherwise than both pious and pure. I shall abstain, therefore, from anything like flippancy in my remarks, for the subject is one which I feel to be solemn and important.

In the public employment of this Prayer, millions of devout men have been led to imply their positive belief in two very remarkable propositions. One is, that the cholera has been sent down upon us by God, directly as a "*chastisement*" on the land for its crimes; the other is, that by the "*humiliation and repentance*" of the nation, the Divine vengeance may be propitiated, and this heavy judgment of the angered Lord averted. There is much to think of in this. It reveals, I think, a good deal concerning the state of men's minds in this enlightened nineteenth century. Truly there is nothing like affliction for making men remember their Creator.

The remarks I have to make upon this subject I shall, for the purpose of clearness, divide into three general heads.

I. *As to the probable efficacy of this Prayer in securing the object sought.*

II. *As to whether, or not, it is founded on a true philosophy.*

III. *As to whether it is better calculated to promote good or evil.*

I know well, my Lord, that the bare mention of these propositions will be received by minds of a certain class with a solemn shrug of disapprobation. Many good men will either pity the ignorance, or condemn the faithlessness of these "*wicked doubts*," as they will term them. I will ask them, however, only to hear me to the end, and then I will give them leave to refute my objections, if they can do so on reasonable grounds.

I. As to the probable efficacy of this Prayer. If I mistake not, prayer, to be acceptable, should be accompanied with faith. Now, I should like to know whether his Grace the Primate, who is the author of this form, whether the body of the Lords in Council who sanctioned it, whether our Bishops and clergy, or, in short, whether one hundred enlightened practical men throughout the realm could utter those words, really and truly believing that the pestilence would decline immediately in consequence of this national act of "*humiliation*?" I would ask you, my Lord, if you believe it? For my own part, I do not hesitate to confess my conviction that *it will not produce the least effect upon the daily returns of the Registrar-General.*

And yet, my Lord, I am persuaded that prayer is the most important privilege of our fallen condition. I believe that without prayer the state of man is hopeless. It is the only link that remains unsevered between us and the Almighty. Without it, salvation is beyond our hopes, for it alone is the key that can open for us the gate of heaven. I believe, too, that prayer, offered up in accordance with the spirit of the Bible, was never, in a single case, poured out in vain. I believe the beautiful words of the Saviour to be literally true *if taken as they were designed to be*. "Every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened." But I believe also, that we may ask many things which God has not covenanted to give us merely for the asking; and the present I consider to be a case in point. Suppose a man, led away by some darling pursuit, continues to live, a long time, in open defiance of the laws of his being. He takes little nourishment, little exercise, and little rest. By and by, as a natural result, disease falls upon that man—his strength decays—his frame becomes shattered—his health and vigour are lost—and he is thrown upon a bed of sickness and agony. What, then, should he do in this extremity? Is it enough that he acknowledge his sins against God, and supplicate Him to remove "the heavy hand of his wrath?" Would such a prayer be reasonable; and would any one give him hopes that he would get well by it? No; his case is one of earth, and before he can recover he must take earthly means. He has transgressed the laws of his physical nature; through those laws alone can he hope for relief. Facts tell us that prayer in such cases, without the use of means, avails not. Facts tell us, too, that the use of proper means, without prayer, succeed every day. These are not cases, then, in which "every one that asketh receiveth." Are, then, those words not true? Yes; but is it not a fair inference, when we have these facts before us, that this recovery from sickness, at all events without other means, is not a legitimate object of prayer?

But it will be said, there are passages in the Bible distinctly telling us to pray in such cases. I deny that anywhere in the New Testament we are told that prayer alone shall cure men of bodily disease. I know there are such passages as that in the Epistle of St. James, where it is said, "the prayer of faith shall save the sick." But I have yet to be shewn that the sick in *body* are here spoken of; or, if they are so, that to "save" them, means to cure them of their natural infirmities. I believe that the *spiritually* sick are here, and in all other such passages, alluded to; and that it is the saving of their souls to which the "prayer of a righteous man availeth."

II. Is this Prayer founded on a true or a false philosophy?

It is not my intention to enter into a long theological discussion upon this subject. Theology, of all sciences, is not one to be discussed in the narrow limits of a letter. But there are a few observations I should like to make, which I know are based on truth, as it is revealed by experience; and, as I am sure that truth cannot be inconsistent with itself, I must be allowed to hold the belief that the doctrine of any science, even though it be that of theology, which is opposed to facts, must contain some erroneous conclusion.

It is stated that we must consider this fearful visitation of cholera as "*a judgment of God upon our sins*"—this is the burden of the prayer.

Now is there any reason in this? Will such a theory bear the test of investigation?

Undoubtedly, on referring to the Old Testament, many instances may be adduced of special judgments. The Israelites were many times thus visited for their transgressions of God's ordinances: and, as the Prayer mentions, the men of Nineveh were spared "on repentance of their iniquity." But still the analogy between those cases and ours remains to be established. Is there then no difference between the method of God's dealing with the kingdoms of the earth then, and now? Were not the Jews a "*peculiar people*"—distinguished, from all others, by special laws, and a particular mark? Are they not, over and over again, in the Bible, called a "*peculiar treasure*;" and were they not set apart, from all the Gentile nations, in a peculiar manner, and for a peculiar purpose? And is there no difference between the old dispensation under the law, and the new dispensation under grace? All Christians admit this readily in the case of individuals, but it is attempted to be denied in the case of nations. We have it, on undoubted authority, that we are "*not under the law, but under grace*;" we cannot, therefore, be said to be in the "peculiar" position of the Jews of old. What right, then, have we to take their case as an example, and to found on it a dogma, which, I believe, there is abundant testimony to prove, is contrary to facts?

God never punished the Israelites unless they had specially sinned. It was only at times of unusual forgetfulness of Him,—of open idolatry, or glaring impiety,—that His offended justice brought down on them the visitations of His wrath. There was no uncertainty about this. It is always clearly shewn how that their wickedness, and His judgments, stood relatively to each other, as cause and effect. *It was only when they greatly sinned that they were punished.* If, then, ours is a precisely similar case, as is implied,—if it is by the same retributive law that brought judgment on the Jews of old that we are now suffering,—then is it clear that WE MUST BE GREATER SINNERS NOW THAN WE HAVE BEEN FOR MANY YEARS.

We are told that the cholera has already carried off more victims than any epidemic since the plague of 1665. What, then, can we deduce from this, except that we must have lately sinned more grievously than at any period since that time? Now, does history, as far as it will serve, bear out this hypothesis? I know it is impossible to ascertain the secret sins of men's hearts. I know that often a fair church-going exterior hides, from the sight of men, a guilty and corrupt heart. But yet, with all due allowance for this, who is the man who would breathe a scandal on this century of noble efforts, by comparing it for a moment with any that has passed? Would Mr. Macaulay do so? Would his Grace, our author, do so? Would any but a madman or a fool do so? Is the boasted spread of education, and the consequent decrease of criminals, all a lie? Is there no evidence of improvement—of higher morals—of purer virtues—of greater philanthropy? Is a speculative dogma to cast to the winds all these obvious matters of fact? If, then, it be a *punishment* we are suffering under, it seems strange that it should only arrive when our national virtues are more prominent than in preceding, but unchastised eras of our history.

But there is another thing very remarkable in the case of the Jews. When that people sinned they were punished with a "judg-

ment." The judgment, however, in no case, I believe, came without previous warning. God sent special messengers to tell men when the cup of their iniquity was filling, for the merciful object of affording them an opportunity of avoiding his indignation. The men of Nineveh, it is seen, took advantage of this; so that, by a timely repentance, their city was spared. The "judgment" was, in every case, preceded by solemn threats and heavy denunciations. If, after these, the sins were persevered in, then came the vengeance and the fiery indignation.

The reasonableness of this is manifest; that law is not a just one that condemns those who are ignorant of its precepts. Let a man be told, that if he steals, the law will transport him: he may then avoid transportation, by not committing the theft; and when *I feel myself justified in asking, WHEN was the special solemn message given to us of coming judgment on our offences?* What voice has declared to us, that the fury of the Lord was kindling; and called us to repentance before the fearful wrath came down? I know, alas! too well, that there has been fearful sin amongst us; but I do not know that this generation is *more guilty than the last*. Punishment, then, in our case, would appear to have been inflicted without any previous warning! The execution has gone before the trial! *Can the Almighty, then, be less merciful now than of old?* As I have never heard of any sins peculiar to this age having been denounced, I deny the fact that the cholera is now come as a "judgment" upon them: forasmuch that, in the absence of direct information from heaven, history tells me that there have been periods, more sinful than the present, on which there has come no judgment such as this.

I am not disposed to give up our present enlightened system of jurisprudence, and go back to the ancient mode of trial by ordeal. That mode of trial was founded upon the principle that God would in all cases protect the innocent and punish the guilty: yet, if that idea were true, what better administration could we have, for the Omniscient would then be the Judge? But society has banished the "ordeal," as being founded on a senseless superstition of a barbarous age. Yet is it not precisely upon the same exploded idea that this Prayer has recently been framed? I know that punishment will overtake the wicked with "swift destruction;" but I *do not know that such punishment will be at all in this world*. On the contrary, I know, that "*the eighteen on whom the Tower of Saloam fell were NOT SINNERS ABOVE ALL THE REST.*" I know, too, that God "*maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good; and maketh his rain to fall on the just and on the unjust.*" Moreover, I know that no less a person than Christ himself, when asked whether his servants should go at once, and gather up the tares which an enemy had sown among his wheat, replied, "*Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares ye root out also the wheat with them. Let both grow together till the harvest.*" Then will the separation be made.

My Lord, for the same reason that I think it uncharitable to judge of a man's innocency before God by the amount of his worldly prosperity, I think it absurd to estimate a nation's guilt by a nation's health or greatness. I know that Britain's wealth is often adduced as an evidence of Britain's worth in the sight of God. It is pleasing to Englishmen thus to believe their country the favoured of heaven; for so, by implication, they pay homage to their own self-esteem. I deny

that with nations, any more than with individuals, there is any necessary connexion between their worldly prosperity and their spiritual purity and acceptance before God. Rome did not become the mistress of the world for no other reason than because her religion was pure, and her citizens more faithful to the Lord than all the other nations; nor was Poland swept away from her place among kingdoms only because she was more wicked than those states which became the greater by her fall. The poor man, who is dying of penury and want in a neighbouring street, is not, for that reason alone, to be taken as a sinner above others; nor is the Noble Duke hard by, simply because he is one of our richest peers, to be regarded as a saint.

"Oh! but," it may be urged, "these, possibly, are exceptions to the rule!" It is an axiom, that the laws of nature admit of no exceptions; a single fact is enough to upset a theory. It does not require much evidence, then, on this head, to show that the laws of God must be equally perfect.

But, it will be said, what then becomes of the fact of there being an "overruling Providence" in all things? Does not the Almighty watch over the interests of the creatures He has made, and does He not bring all things to pass as seemeth to Him good? I answer, at once, that I admit it. I believe that God is the controller, as well as the Creator, of the universe. I believe that the hearts and minds of men,—their social as well as their moral affairs,—are as much under the influence of His care, as the stars in their courses through the heavens; or the wonderful instincts of the teeming myriads of living things, inhabiting the face of this earth. We can easily see, that if God were for an instant to suspend his laws of Nature, matter, in that instant, would be precipitated into wild and utter chaos. I believe, too, that if He were to cease from exercising a general, and merciful supervision over the affairs of men and nations, the present comparative and rapidly advancing harmony in them would give place to general anarchy and confusion. I know that the hand of God is in everything. It is by Him that the sun keeps its place above us; yet, of "the two sparrows sold for one farthing, one of them shall not fall to the ground without our Father" [ordereth it]. He is in, and around us, everywhere,—in our actions, in our thoughts, and in our feelings. I am not, however, wise enough to explain or to comprehend the mysterious course and working of his providence. It will thus be seen, that in admitting a general and absolute "overruling Providence," I at once get rid of what are often so invidiously called "special acts." If the will of the Almighty is absolute in everything, it is difficult to understand how He can be in one thing more than in another. This is a very important distinction.

Well, then, we hear a good deal about "trusting" in this Providence. It is strange of what odd things Providence, in some men's minds, is held to be the author. The philanthropist thanks Providence for his opportunities to do good,—the man of vice blesses Providence for the means of doing evil. In our Liturgy, we pray that Providence may enable Her Britannic Majesty to "vanquish and overcome all her enemies;" forgetting, that, as she is not infallible, it may sometimes be desirable that she should lose a battle, that the balance of kingdoms may be preserved. Generally speaking, we call it a "kind Providence" when we have received or expect a favour;—it becomes a "judgment" if what we obtain happens not quite to square with our desires. By "*Pro-*

vidence," it is said, this country became great;—by a "*grievous chastisement*" is she now afflicted. My Lord, I do not believe this philosophy! If we believe, as I think we are bound to do, that there is such a thing as God's providence at all, we ought also practically to believe, that whatever it decrees must be in accordance with the known merciful attribute of the Creator; *and, therefore, I feel myself bound to trust to it when it frowns, as well as when it smiles.* It may not give me all I wish, but it will afford me the means of obtaining what I want. If I obtain not what I seek, I am bound, I think, to consider, either that the thing I sought was not good for me, or else, that I got it not because I did not seek it as I should and might have done. If an intemperate man becomes diseased through his fatal habit, shall he charge his want of health against the kind providence of God? Providence gave him health, but he sacrificed it at the shrine of pleasure. It was not a "*judgment on his sins,*"—IT WAS THE RESULT OF A BROKEN LAW OF HIS CONSTITUTION. To expect that the Almighty will restore him, before the breach of that law has been repaired, would be to expect man to go out of His natural course, and perform a miracle. The kindness of Providence does not deserve to be arraigned by that man; it was his own folly alone that led him beyond the reach of its care.

The Providence that I trust to, my Lord, is a power that rules all things; but rules them consistently with the fact that God is an *EVER-merciful, and EVER-loving Father.* I feel assured, that in all my future life, Providence will watch over and protect me. But I have no notion that it will give me all I wish without any effort of my own. Providence will, I feel convinced, afford me *opportunities* whereby, through the right employment of the talents committed to me, I shall be enabled to obtain all I need in order to procure my comfort in this life, and my eternal happiness in the next. I am not, however, to expect from it *anything more than these opportunities.* Providence will not leave me with nothing to do. My condition in this life demands of me exertion and activity. I am not to sit down in slothfulness and expect to be saved from its ordinary consequences by offering up a prayer,—"*Aide-toi, et Dieu t'aidera.*" I believe that "*nothing can separate us from the love of God;*" and the *love* and the *Providence* of God must always go together. I would trust in it, therefore, as much in affliction as in prosperity.

In a prayer of our Church Service preceding this new form, there is this remarkable petition:—"Grant that *in all our troubles* we may put our *whole trust and confidence in thy mercy.*" Nor do we exhibit much "trust" in His mercy, when we ask him, immediately after, to take from us the *terrible evil* He has brought down on us?

Men may mystify themselves in talking about offended justice; but if it be the *justice* of the Divine Majesty which is now showing itself, can we think that a sufficient sacrifice has been offered to appease it? The justice of God! God, the immaculate and the infinite, "whose eyes are too pure to look upon iniquity!"—and man, the sinful and vile, in whose corrupt heart "there dwelleth no good thing!" *The sentence of God's JUSTICE!* bearing at least some proportion to the magnitude of the *transgression!* If this be the character of our visitation, then, indeed, may the children of earth tremble.

But we pray to have confidence in God's "*mercy,*" as though it were a duty which we owe Him. If we admit that the Almighty

has sent upon us this plague, is our petition for its removal quite consistent with having our "*whole trust and confidence*" in Him? We believe that "*He doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men.*" Could a merciful God, then, whom we should trust, bring sorrow around us, unless he, by that means, intended to do us good? We are told that "whom He loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth." Does it, then, say much for our faith as "sons," in that love, when it vanishes immediately at the sight of the Father's rod? Suppose a man, in a fit of illness, calls in a physician to cure him, and the physician prescribes the remedy; does the man show much "trust" or "confidence" in that physician's skill, if he prays that the remedy may be altered to something less nauseous to his taste? But imagine the case to be a surgical one, and amputation prescribed, would not an entreaty for a milder mode of treatment imply manifest gross *distrust* of the adviser? If the man had confidence in his surgeon's skill, he would believe that amputation would not be ordered, if anything less than amputation would suffice: and feeling this, he would submit patiently to the operation, and not call that a curse which was the means of saving his life. If God then is speaking to us in this pestilence, my confidence in His mercy tells me that *no milder communication could convey the lesson His would teach us.* It is not mercy that employs means unnecessarily harsh. Surely, therefore, there must be some reason for this severe affliction. It may be that God finds it now necessary to speak to us thus, because, in times past, He has used milder language, and we have treated it with disregard. He may have told us in raging fevers and other diseases, that cleanliness, pure air, and a more natural mode of life, are essential to healthy existence; but we have rejected his warnings with scorn, and continued, with little alteration, the course of our evil ways. His "*mercy,*" then, being anxious to save future generations from lives of unclean wretchedness, He now addresses us in more earnest tones. Oh that these at least may be rightly understood, and the *loving-kindness* of the message not be thrown away! I will not pray to have it removed, till His omniscience and "*mercy,*" which I am willing to "trust" to, discover that His purpose has been answered, and that the terrible thunder of his warning voice has aroused the sleeping to their duties, and the ignorant to their danger. From His known benevolence, it cannot be His "*will*" to treat us vindictively; I will not, then, be afraid to say, "*Thy will be done,*" because not wise enough to see into all His ways.

III. And now, my Lord, to examine my third and last proposition.—Is the promulgation of this Prayer more calculated to do good or evil? In the first place, will it do any good? I have no doubt that, in one respect, it will. From the nature of the case, it will be likely to bring some men to the footstool of their Maker, who were never there before. It has attracted considerable public attention at this eventful time; and, being a special thing, some of the thoughtless and careless may, through it, be brought to think a little about their souls. But beyond this, will it have any practical effect towards removing the disease? I have already said, I believe not; for I believe that the cholera comes upon us not merely as an ebullition of Divine displeasure, but in ordinary obedience to some earthly law. As prayer in that case will certainly not remove it, without the employment of means, if these means were adopted, the necessity for such prayer would be avoided.

Let us now see whether any, and what, evil effects may arise from it? I believe that there are many.

Every one will now confess, that the great want of the present century is the advancement of the social, as well as of the moral and intellectual, condition of the people. It is our glorious boast, that already we have done much; yet what we have done, appears lost in insignificance, when compared with the amount of work there yet remains to do. The popular mind is sighing loudly for development. Whatsoever then tends, though humbly, to promote this holy cause, is a blessing, and deserves the thanks of the world; and anything, whatever its form, which serves or tends to check its progress, is a curse, which all men should abhor.

But we are too much accustomed to confine our ideas on this subject to the very poor, as though there were no other class to which this subject will apply. By education, we too often mean the mere teaching of those things which the station in society we shall occupy will absolutely require. We say that every one ought to be able to read and write, and know the four first rules of arithmetic—so far, all are upon common grounds. But we go on to say that it is the *status* that a man will occupy, upon which depends whether he need do these ill or well, and whether he need go one step further in advance. For a common labourer, or servant, a very moderate proficiency in these is ample. To be a clerk, a man must write and cipher well, but reading matters less. To be a gentleman, reading is of most consequence, and the four first rules of figures and the mere capability to write will do. And so, through every grade of life, the requirements of society regulate the acquirements of the man. But I conceive, my Lord, that there is a false idea at the bottom of this. The object of education is not merely to make good servants, good clerks, or good scholars, but its grand and glorious purpose is to make good *men*. It is not only to fit human beings, like inanimate stones, into the place designed for them in the fabric that is planned—the *men* should be thought of first, and the fabric moulded as their case may require. The right idea of education is, that all men should be led by it to *comprehend thoroughly the nature of the condition implied by their existence*. It is not that they should only know how to read and write; nor yet, any more than this, that they should know a vast deal of Latin and Greek. All knowledge is, doubtless, excellent in its way; but in a manner very different, and to an extent much greater than ever yet has been the case, all men should be regarded as on a common level.

The Creator, when he brings Man into the world, gives him a certain natural constitution, and this may be said to consist of three important elements: the mental, or intellectual; the moral, or religious; and the physical: he has a mind—he has a soul—and he has a body. But the Almighty has so mysteriously and perfectly linked these three together in one, that it is impossible to separate them, or judge of them singly, except by their effects. It is, however, quite possible so to act upon any one of these that it shall become developed, while the others remain quiescent. It is a fixed law, however, that we cannot do so without disturbing that just balance which our Creator designed to subsist between the three, and which man, to be what he ought, should possess. We may expand the intellect, and behold a Byron or Voltaire. We may enlarge the soul, and we have an Irving or a Loyola; we may bring out the animal

powers of the body, only to produce an invincible pugilist. But we see at once there is something wanting in each of these characters, because only a part of their natural constitution has been cultivated. Think, however, what an august example of humanity he would be, in whom these three principles were each brought out to the fullest possible extent ! Suppose there could be combined, and concentrated, into one man,—the mental capacity of a Newton, the moral and religious excellence of a Wesley, and the bodily strength and energy of a Samson ! Why, he would be that “coming man” who is to regenerate the world, for before the mighty power of such a being society would bend like a reed. Here we have a standard to which we should seek to raise mankind—unattainable, perhaps, but yet not on that account to be despised. We should not improve men’s *minds* only, for we want no Atheists or Deists. Nor should we seek to bring out the *emotions* only, for we want no Bigots or Enthusiasts. Neither should we develop the physical part alone, for we want something more than prize-fighters. But let education be directed to *each of these elements of man* rightly, and then we should improve our kind. Now, my Lord, the great fault in our present system is, that, while we address ourselves to the intellect and soul, we, in a blind and fatal folly, neglect to teach men *their responsibility in respect to their bodies*. We tell them how they may become religious ; and we tell them how they may become learned ; but do we show them the laws of their bodies, and teach them **HOW TO BECOME HEALTHY** ? Yet it needs no argument to demonstrate that if a man’s brain be diseased, his religion or his wisdom cannot be great.

But what, it will be asked, has all this to do with the prayer about the cholera ? I think, as I proceed, I can show a connexion.

The Prayer implies, as a fact to be believed, that this visitation of disease is nothing more nor less than a judgment on our sins. We have excited the just wrath of God by our iniquity ; and behold how sorely, but deservedly, are we punished ! Our iniquity being the *cause* of this visitation, our *repentance* and *humiliation* (as in the case mentioned of the men of Nineveh) can alone remove it. When, by prayer and fasting, we shall have conciliated the Almighty, then, and then only, may we expect his anger to be taken away. Now, if this involved but a harmless fallacy, I would not have troubled your Lordship with this long letter. But it is not harmless. I believe that it is based on a gross fundamental error, and that we cannot expose it too plainly, in order that it may be seen and avoided by all men. Is it not in effect saying to those honoured members of the medical profession, whose late extraordinary exertions in mitigating human suffering, and saving men’s lives, have brought down upon them the merited praise of all ranks of society,—and not only to them, but to the noble and honourable members of the Board of Health, the Sanitary Commission, and all other bodies of a kindred character,—“Your efforts are all useless, your exertions are all vain, you are dealing only with a symptom, and leave the cause untouched ! It is God’s indignation that is ravaging the land, and think ye that its effects can be prevented by the measures of your ‘vain philosophy ?’” And what does it say to the poor, who live in the crowded alleys and courts to which this pestilence seems almost to confine its virulence ? Does it not in effect say that what the doctors tell them, in their house to house visitation, about the danger of want of cleanliness, and the deadly effects of intemperance and vice, is sheer nonsense ? That it is

not these which have produced or increased the raging plague ! That *it is the hand of God, and not their filthy condition* ; and, therefore, they need not desire more cleanly abodes, or be otherwise than content to breathe, instead of air, the effluvia of dunghoops and churchyards ! They will naturally turn to this prayer, and show that the highest authorities in the land (and therefore, of course, the wisest men), have declared the cholera to be a *national judgment*. Of course, they must respect this authority. What then can they do but *submit patiently to the will of heaven* ? But there is a class of men, and I think but one, who will find in the language of this Prayer, the balm of consolation ; I mean those wholesale destroyers of human life, at the shrine of whose selfishness thousands of fellow-creatures annually fall victims. The bone-boilers, the slaughter-house keepers, the tallow-melters, and soap manufacturers—all these sort of persons, who by a strange perversity always seem to fix their abodes in the most crowded localities—with what complacency will they regard this Prayer ? They have been called, by scientific men, the murderers of mankind,—behold, in this Prayer, their verdict of acquittal ! They have slept soundly this week—their consciences are now at peace ! Last week they were disturbed with strangely troubled thoughts, for men said that they were guilty, inasmuch as they grew fat by means which made others die. They had almost made up their minds to remove their premises to more secluded spots, away from those busy thoroughfares where thousands sickened around them. But now, these silly dreams have fled. It is *God* who slays, and not *they* ! And in their present abodes they will remain, while men are near to be poisoned, unless, my Lord, the voice of a wiser authority shall decree their removal.

I cannot reflect upon this public declaration, that the cholera is a "*judgment on our sins*," without at the same time being convinced, that, however the subtle logic of theologians may explain the thing away, *the ignorant and the interested will find in it an argument for not employing the only means that can effectually help us in our extremity*. For this reason, I consider the Prayer is likely to do great evil.

The history of cholera shows beyond a doubt that it, like all other epidemics, is not beyond the reach of human skill. Undoubtedly its nature is not yet so thoroughly understood, as that in most cases it can be made to give way before a remedy. Enough, however, has been shown to prove that if taken in time it may be dealt with, and "carried through," successfully. But even could it be demonstrated that it is actually an *incurable* disease ; that no means are available for its modification or cure, so that to be seized by it would be certain destruction ; should we, on these grounds, found our belief that the cholera is the unerring death-dart of the destroying angel, dealing around the unsparing vengeance of God ? The plague is, to a great extent, an incurable disease ; and the small-pox, in its worst type, is at least very difficult to heal ; but yet, history shows, that, if the former cannot be *cured*, it has now for nearly two centuries been *prevented* ; and the latter can be so modified in character, as to be *comparatively harmless*.

The cholera, like all other complaints, arises only from natural causes. Let us then set to work vigorously to understand them as far as possible ! What if there be a mystery around it now ? shall we abandon all hope of solving it, and fly in cowardly terror ? Has the mighty scourge, in its onward march of death, left behind it in its track no clue to its fearful nature ? Is there nothing to be learnt in the indisputable fact,

of its preying peculiarly on the poor in their half-fed misery, and on the intemperate amidst their excesses? Is it nothing that it is known to steal along the course of such receptacles of filth as the river Thames, and its fragrant metropolitan tributaries? Is it nothing that it seems to take especial delight in hovering over our church-yards? Is the Registrar-General's daily Report an altogether useless document, while it shows that in the squalid abodes of filth, and sinks of beastly immorality, which abound in the eastern districts of the metropolis, the mortality from cholera, in proportion to the population, nearly trebles that of the north of London? * This is a fact beyond the reach of controversy; is there, then, I repeat, nothing to be gathered from it, but that we must sit down in despair, and say, "*It is God who smites, therefore who shall resist His will?*"

My Lord, this would be a deadly sin! I am certain there is a lesson we may know, if we choose to learn; and the unborn millions of future ages will witness whether, or not, we shall have heeded it as we ought. This eventful year of 1849, if we respect the warning that is now offered to us, will for centuries be looked back to with something of the same feeling that we now regard that of 1666. The fearful calamity of fire which then destroyed half London turned out in the sequel to be an inestimable blessing. It destroyed those wooden breeding-places of disease that man in his folly would have retained. Doubtless, at that time men called it a terrible infliction of the wrath of God; now we thank Him for that merciful act of His kind and loving care.

What, then, let us inquire, is the lurking secret beneath the stern exterior of this grievous disease?

To my mind this pestilence illustrates one important fact, which we shall do well to give good heed to. It seems to warn us that, wondrously accommodating as our physical constitution may be, there is yet one point beyond which its elasticity cannot go. Let us think well over this. Is our present mode of living exactly as Nature intended that it should be?—or have we perverted the laws of our nature, and thereby habitually run counter to our best interests? *Are the habits and customs of society in accordance with the known dictates of our physical necessities?*

Man, though an animal of hardy growth, cannot afford to bid defiance to the laws of his constitution, for facts are now telling us, that he does so at his peril. Like the stately palm-tree, he will thrive in majestic beauty in those fair regions where his Creator placed him; but like that

* According to the Report of the Registrar-General as given in the "Times," the number of deaths from cholera and diarrhoea in the east and west and north districts of London were respectively as follows:—

During the four days, from the 10th to the 13th September inclusive:—

East districts, population in 1841, 392,000, deaths 272, average 1 in 1,441.

West do. " " 301,000, " 149, " 1 in 2,020.

North do. " " 376,000, " 106, " 1 in 3,547.

During the twelve days, from the 10th to 21st inst. inclusive:—

East districts, population as above, deaths 584, average 1 in 671.

West do. " " " 298, " 1 in 1,010.

North do. " " " 244, " 1 in 1,541.

Assuming the increase of population up to this time (1849) to be the same as in the ten years from 1831 to 1841, at this rate *the whole of the present numbers* would, in the east districts, be destroyed by this disease alone in less than twenty-six years; while the same calculation shows that, in the northern districts, the time required would be upwards of sixty years.

tree, if transplanted to a less generous clime, he will languish and sicken for the genial radiancy of his native skies ; and, though for a short time he may drag on a miserable existence, he must perish at last, that the outraged laws of Nature may be vindicated.

It is said, by the poet, that "God made the country, and man made the town." There is a deep meaning in these words, often overlooked.

In the country, God gives pure air to breathe—in the town, man breathes the noxious gases from decaying bodies in the grave, and the poisonous exhalations of unburied corruption. In the country, God gives us pure water to drink—in the town, man gives us a saturated solution of the contents of London's cesspools. In the country, God intended us to live simply, according to our necessities—in the town, man tells us to set few bounds to our desires, to think little about what is wholesome, or unwholesome, to set no limits to our luxuries, and pay little regard to our real wants ; and if in consequence we suffer, we must "humble" ourselves, and pray to God not to *punish us for our sins*.

My Lord, it has not been my intention to say anything which shall appear to imply any *disbelief* on my part, that the hand of God is in this awful visitation of disease. I believe, my Lord, without a doubt that it comes from Him simply because, as I have before said, He is the author and regulator of all things. The Almighty *is* speaking to us now, and we are bound to listen to his terrible voice. He is telling us that He rules this material world by certain laws which He has fixed. He is telling us that these laws, being fixed, must therefore be impartial. That we have no right, because we live upon a somewhat remote corner of the globe, to expect immunities that others do not enjoy. He is showing us the contrary of this. He is now revealing himself to us in the operation of these laws, by claiming the heavy forfeitures due on old and fearful arrears of disregard. By the solemn messages of agony and death, He warns us to learn His proffered lesson now, that we may be wiser and better for the future. Let us then not cause these fearful warnings to be lost, by attributing, in our terror, a *natural result* to an altogether *supernatural cause* ! If a man desires to avoid punishment, what better can he do, than study the laws which regulate offences ? We are continually acting on this principle in respect to the moral and criminal code, but our great fault is, that, while we know beyond a doubt that there is such a thing as a physical law, we forget the importance of learning it in order to avoid its penalties. LET MEN OF ALL CLASSES BE MADE RIGHTLY TO UNDERSTAND THEIR DUTIES TO THEMSELVES IN REGARD TO THE LAW OF HEALTH ! Let the works and laws of Nature be more studied by us ! Let the elements, at least, of physiology be taught in all our schools almost simultaneously with the alphabet. Now, the education of young persons is said to be complete, when they have learnt just enough to enable them to fall easily into the destructive artificialities of our absurdly unreasonable and unnatural systems of society. Let the mighty havoc of this raging pestilence awake us to the absurdity of this ! Let children everywhere be taught the laws of their bodily constitution, as much as those of their moral and social nature. Let the greatest scholar be called an egregious dunce, if he have not a thorough knowledge of the various processes within him by which health and strength are sustained ! Let each one know that disease can only come through an infraction of the law of his being ; and that he never can be guilty of that infraction without incurring its

penalty. Of course, I do not mean to say that men may expect to live for ever in this world. But is it sufficiently proved that the average period of life might not be greatly increased? When the world was young, men lived a thousand years; now that it is getting old we are glad of half a century. Let the poor learn that to have health, they must have cleanliness, pure air, and wholesome food. Teach them the force of that unalterable law, which says, that while they live in sties, they must be like brutes, and continue subject to the raging pestilence. This is the most effectual way to elevate their social, and, as a consequence, their moral and intellectual condition! Let the rich, too, learn more of the laws respecting life and death; for, practically, they show their want of a "Ragged School" to instruct them concerning these, quite as much as the lower orders one for the A, B, C! Let them be shown how that it is as destructive to them to live upon too many luxuries, as it is for the poor to possess altogether as few. Let all men of every class be made to appreciate that law which decrees that a guilty excess in their appetites and pleasures in no case can escape its merited punishment!

My Lord, I believe that if this were generally done, we should not need so many fast days and special prayers for removing grievous diseases. But society would become renovated, we should become holier and happier—because wiser and better men. We should have more comfortable homes, more healthy children; man would grow up more as nature designed him; he would be a better parent—a kinder neighbour, a loftier being—for in learning to act up to the dictates of our nature, we are only studying to do His will who made us as He has.

It is not my wish to imply, my Lord, by anything I have said, that a special religious service should not be appointed at this solemn season. On the contrary, I believe it might be contrived so as to produce a good effect upon the health of the bodies, as well as the souls of men. Anything which leads men to their Maker in the attitude of humility must have good in it as a necessary result.

There is something thrillingly impressive in a special public act of religion. No one could have passed through the southern part of the metropolis on Wednesday, the 19th of September, without being deeply struck with the manner in which that day was there observed. The recommendation of the good Bishop of that diocese (Winchester), that that day should be observed as one of humiliation and prayer, seemed to meet respect from all. Shops were universally closed—business was generally suspended—placards were everywhere to be seen announcing the postponement of sales and amusements. Notwithstanding that the ministers of Dissenting chapels did not have their places of worship generally open, their congregations could feel the spirit of such a day, set apart as it was by the "*Established*" chief officer of religion. The Roman Catholic poor, also, could feel this in common with the rest of the various branches of the family of God. As I passed St. George's Church, in the Borough-road, on that day, I saw hundreds of the poor flocking there to the house of their worship. In surprise at this, I made inquiry of the begging attendant at the door whether the authorities of the Romish Church had for once agreed to co-operate with their brother of England for a common good. I was told that it was only an

ordinary "Ember" fast ; but that, instead of fifty or sixty worshippers, as usual, they then had almost as many hundreds.

Such a day, my Lord, I think must have produced its benefits. There was a sacred stillness observable in the streets, in no way resembling that of an ordinary Sabbath. It was a special day of prayer *voluntarily* dedicated to God. Men might attend to their worldly callings without incurring any penalty, for it would have been simply enough to profess Dissent in order to avoid the responsibility of observing the Bishop's Charge. But men did not then think of their differences of opinion, because there was something going on around them that made them earnest in their hearts. At the time of a real sense of danger we cease to think of trifles. For once, then, the public became pious. Tradesmen willingly left their shops, and retired to their closets to think of their Creator. There was a solemn voice in the thoroughfares calling men to pray. "Hush!" it seemed to say, "the people would sink to their knees to hold communion with their Lord." And the din of trade *did* cease, and the people *went* to prayer.

There was a vast deal of good in this, and I rejoiced in it ; but at the same time I feel convinced the strong feeling of the public might have been turned to a far better account. Was there not, in all this, an immense deal of vain and senseless superstition? Were those multitudes of prayers based, as they should have been, to be effectual, on the thorough conviction of sin and true feeling of repentance? Were they, in the majority of instances, like the free gushings of the heart of a contrite son to a loving father whom he has offended ; affectionately confessing his fault, and relying upon, while addressing himself to, the kindness, the wisdom, the love of the parent? I fear, my Lord, that in most cases those fervent supplicators were in a different position to this. I fear that their case bore a closer resemblance to that of a traitor who, all his life long, has been in daring rebellion against his King, but who, when an army is sent against him, whose force he cannot resist, and he is summoned to surrender or perish in the field, forgets then to be haughty, but cowers down in fear, and, in the forced repentance of terror, seeks pardon of his injured prince.

My Lord, I see no evidence of contrition, no proof of returned allegiance in these cold, general terms of humiliation. To me this form of supplication appears less the language of love, than of fear. It is not the utterance of a calm and patient spirit of resignation ; but rather the petition of a trembling, yet unreconciled offender. It will be used by the wealthy *shirt-dealer*, who starves poor women upon ninepence a week, and with the profit upon their wretchedness lives comfortably secure from this "judgment ;" and it will be used also by the miserable *shirt-maker* who, in consequence of ill-fed misery, now mourns the loss of her children, whom "this wrath of heaven" has cut down.

My Lord, I would say, let there be a solemn Fast-day. Let it, however, not be done meanly, as now—not only in particular places, and at various times ; let it not be appointed on a Sunday, that it shall make as little difference, and be observed as slightly, as possible, differently from other days ; but let there be a day taken from the world for such a purpose ; and let the whole of that service, not a single, short prayer alone, be special. And let the solemnities on such an occasion be so ordered that they shall be calculated to do the greatest amount

of good that such a service is capable of affording ; without any admixture of a doubtful theology, building up men's hopes on groundless, idle theories : let them be such as reasonable and practical men could join in with faith and earnestness. Let not the " spiritual " and " natural " appointments of the Creator be so mixed and confounded that they shall serve as a hinderance to each other. I would rejoice in such a service as this, because it would be founded, as alone an acceptable service can be, on the sure promises of God's Word.

Let a day then be appointed for all the churches and chapels throughout the land to be opened for an unusually solemn service ; and let them be hung with black, in token of the cause that will then have brought men to His house. Let the service begin with a psalm of thanksgiving to the Almighty, for the wonderful and beautiful manner in which He has made us, and for having established those merciful laws, by which our health, and strength, and happiness may be secured. Let a solemn exhortation and admonition be given to the people, to look well into the secrets of their hearts, and call to mind how utterly and wickedly they have disregarded those merciful appointments. Let them be reminded that it is sin, not only to stifle the soul with impurities, but also, and not less so, to defile that body which is the "*temple of the Lord.*" Many recollections will then come crowding to remembrance, of abominable acts of intemperance, uncleanness, and enervating, health-destroying indulgence.

It should also be the object of this service to set before us the second great law of the Saviour's code,—our duties to others should be dwelt upon. Men should be made to see how often their selfishness has brought a wretched and unnatural existence on their servants and others, over whom they might employ a good, instead of a baneful influence.

Let these reflections be suffered to work awhile upon the heart in a few moments of thought-compelling silence. Let our rulers call to mind, in that solemn moment, if *they have done their utmost* to alleviate the condition of those over whom they are the guardians ! Let our merchant kings and trading princes think of their clerks, their shopmen, their servants ! Let the landlords of the courts and alleys think of their tenants, and keep their tenements in repair, with proper drains and conveniences ! Let men of all trades and occupations—the slaughter-house-keeper, the bone-boiler, and the rest—but especially those parochial officers who superintend the affairs of the churches and graveyards—let them all remember their responsibility to their fellow-creatures, and try to stand justified by God.

And when all this shall have been done, and men have thus had their offences and duties brought to mind ; then, with hearts of deep humility, and souls of true contrition, let them breathe the anthem of praise, and pour out the accents of prayer. Let God be praised for his numberless blessings, seeing, that notwithstanding all our transgressions, He has not utterly cut us off from his mercy. Let us, as the apostle tells us, " pray with the understanding " also. Let us beseech Him to pour out upon us the blessed " spirit of a sound mind." Let us, in addition to the ordinary petitions for grace, supplicate Him to bless unto us *these awful effects of our guilty ignorance of his will concerning our requirements*, which are now shewing themselves in this raging pestilence. Let us implore Him that " now, when there is upon the earth distress of nations with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring, men's hearts failing them for

fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth ;” now, when the thoughtless have their minds open to impression, when the careless, and frivolous, and ignorant are arrested in their folly ; that now the voice of wisdom may be listened to, and the terrible warning of the present become a guide to us concerning the future.

This, my Lord, is the religious service which, in my opinion, would be calculated to do good at this time. It would serve to remind men of what they are too much in the habit, practically, of forgetting, that “faith without good works is dead ;” that “God will render unto every man according to his deeds ;” that *it is worse than useless to pray for health if we neglect the means which God has given us for its preservation.*

Such a service, while it would carry to the throne of grace a petition for those “spiritual gifts” and guiding counsels He has promised to give us in answer to our prayers, would at the same time carry to men’s hearts a sermon on their duties, reminding them that the only way to be acceptable in His sight is to act in the true spirit of the Christian faith, *which involves obedience to His universal laws.*

Trusting that the liberty I have taken, in thus publicly addressing you, will be excused by your Lordship, my only motive being “to do good and to communicate,”

I have the honour to be,

MY LORD,

Your Lordship’s very obedient, humble servant,

SENSUS COMMUNIS.

CAMBERWELL, September 20, 1849.

