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REPORT
OF THE
COMMITTEE OF INTERNAL HEALTH
ON THE
ASIATIC CHOLERA,
TOGETHER WITH A
REPORT OF THE CITY PHYSICIAN
ON THE
CHOLERA HOSPITAL.



BOSTON:
1849.
J. H. EASTBURN, CITY PRINTER.

*In the Board of Mayor and Aldermen, }
December 31, 1849. }*

Accepted and ordered to be printed.

Attest : S. F. McCLEARY, *City Clerk.*

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ASIATIC CHOLERA.

[Dec.

We would now refer to another subject which, in our view, also demands the attention and action of this Board. We allude to the very wretched, dirty and unhealthy condition of a great number of the dwelling houses, occupied by the Irish population, in Battery-march, Broad, Wharf, Wells, Bread, Oliver, Hamilton, Atkinson, Curve, Brighton, Cove, Ann, and other streets. These houses, for the most part, are not occupied by a single family, or even by two or three families; but each room, from garret to cellar, is filled with a family consisting of several persons, and sometimes with two or more families. The consequence is an excessive population, wholly disproportioned to the space or the accommodations.

From the very necessities of the case, these residences soon become polluted with all manner of bad odors.

In such a state of things, there can be no cleanliness, privacy, or proper ventilation, and little comfort; and, with the ignorance, carelessness, and generally loose and dirty habits which prevail among the occupants, the necessary evils are greatly increased both in amount and intensity. In Broad street and all the surrounding neighborhood, including Fort Hill and the adjacent streets, the situation of the Irish, in these respects, is particularly wretched. During their visits the last summer, your Committee were witnesses of scenes too painful to be forgotten, and yet too disgusting to be related here. It is sufficient to say, that this whole district is a perfect hive of human beings, without comforts and mostly without common necessaries; in many cases, huddled together like brutes, without regard to sex, or age, or sense of decency; grown men and women sleeping together in the same apartment, and sometimes wife and husband, brothers and sisters, in the same bed. Under such circumstances, self-respect, forethought, all high and noble virtues soon die out, and sullen indifference and despair, or disorder, intemperance and utter degradation reign supreme.

The houses above alluded to are also insufficiently provided with the necessary in and out of door conveniences, which are required in every dwelling place. The great mass of them, particularly in the region last referred to, have but one sink, opening into a contracted and ill constructed drain, or, as is frequently the case, into a passage way or street, and but one privy, usually a mass of pollution, for all the inhabitants, sometimes amounting to a hundred. Some of them have neither drain nor privy; and the tenants are obliged to supply their necessities as best they can. Many of them were originally designed for warehouses, and have been converted to their present uses as eco-

nomically as possible ; whilst others, which were once well fitted for the accommodation of a single family, have become wholly inadequate to meet the wants of the large numbers that now crowd into them. A great portion of those in Broad street and Fort Hill are lofty buildings from three to six stories high, and contain from forty to one hundred inhabitants. The rent for each room ranges from one dollar to one dollar and a half ; and is generally collected by a man who hires the whole building, or several buildings, and enforces prompt payment under the threat always rigidly executed, of immediate ejection.

Appended to the medical report is a sketch of Half Moon Place, which is probably the worst locality in the City. Here the houses are built around an area from which air is almost totally excluded by the perpendicular wall of Fort Hill on one side, and the lofty buildings of Broad street on the other. A large part of the area is occupied by some twelve or fourteen privies, constantly overflowing, and by ill constructed and worn out sinks and drains, into which are hourly thrown solid substances, of all sorts, which choke them up and cause the liquid parts mixed with them to run over. Into the area there is a narrow entrance from Broad street, whilst a steep and crazy staircase affords a passage to Humphrey place, some fifty feet above. Side by side with the staircase, and fully exposed, a large, square, plank drain makes a precipitous descent, conducting, half hidden, half revealed, not only the waste water of the houses in Humphrey place, but, also, the contents of its privies to the area below ; which, as may be supposed, is redolent of the fact.

Your Committee have already, in a former communication, described to the Board the state of the cel-

lars under the houses, above described; but the importance of the subject, as well as the consideration that the duties of the existing Board will soon be transferred to others, seem to require some notice of them here, even at the risk of repetition. These cellars are generally entirely beneath the surface of the ground, and, to most of them, the only entrance for light or air, is by the passage, or cellar door way, leading down to them by steps from the sidewalk above. They are crowded with families, which lodge there and make them their sole place of abode. Besides a dwelling house, these places very generally serve the purposes of a grocery and vegetable shop; and, not unfrequently, a groggery and dancing hall are added. As might be expected, intemperance, lewdness, riot and all the evil spirits, to which poor humanity is at any time subject, enter in and dwell there. Few of the cellars have either drains or privies. Some of them are divided off into one or more rooms, into which hardly a ray of light, or breath of air passes, and where notwithstanding, families consisting of several persons reside. How the lamp of life, under such circumstances, holds out to burn, even for a day, is, perhaps, as great a wonder as that such a state of things should, in this community, be suffered to exist. That such residences become the permanent abode of fever, in some of its forms, is well known to the medical men who visit them; and, that they tend to shorten life, we may clearly infer from the statistical tables of Mr. Shattuck, who states that the average age of Irish life in Boston, does not exceed fourteen years. The number of cellars, used as dwelling houses, is, according to the return of the City Marshal, five hundred and eighty-six; and the number of persons occupying them varies from five to fifteen.

The Committee would gladly have been excused from

the task of setting before you the above most painful details, but it has been forced upon them by a sense of duty and the hope and belief that, for the large portion of the evils complained of, some adequate remedial measures can and ought to be found by the City. Great public considerations seem to them to demand, that every dwelling house should be provided with sinks, drains, and privies, that are adapted, in size, number, and construction, to the number of individuals who shall occupy it; that the owners should be compelled by law, to construct them, under the direction of the Board of Health; and, in case of neglect or refusal, that the estate itself should be held liable for the payment of all expenses which may be incurred by the City in making such provision. A just regard to the health and comfort of the poorer classes, as well as to the rights of tenants, who are unable to prosecute them, would also make it reasonable, that every landlord should be required to fit his building properly to the purposes for which it is to be used, in respect to light, air, and necessary conveniences; and that some provision of law should be made by which the number of tenants should be apportioned to its size and general arrangements. And, especially is it important, that some legal power, sanctioned by penalties sufficiently stringent, should be obtained, to prevent entirely the occupation of under-ground cellars as dwelling houses.

Your Committee submit the above subjects to the serious consideration of the Board of Health, and they recommend that an early application be made to the Legislature for such additional powers, as may be needed to abate the evils complained of.

In behalf of the Committee,

HENRY B. ROGERS,

Chairman.