

EDWIN CHADWICK.

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EDWIN CHADWICK has not yet been done ordinary justice to by his contemporaries. He has been one of the most indefatigable and successful workers of this age, and yet the world knows comparatively little of him. Though he has, more than any other single man, influenced the legislation of his time, and given a powerful impetus to beneficial legislation for all time to come, we hear less of him than we do of many a fifth-rate parliamentary babbler. Mr. Horne has written a *Spirit of the Age*, but Edwin Chadwick has no place among the representative men there delineated; and another book, called *Men of the Time*, has been published, in which not a word is said of Edwin Chadwick, although Chaplin the carrier, and Soulouque the black Emperor of Hayti, are not omitted.

Whether Edwin Chadwick be entitled, or not, to a place among the men of the time, whether he is, or is not, a man who has largely influenced the spirit of the age, let the following brief sketch of his works and career bear witness.

We do not know much about Edwin Chadwick's birth or ancestry: that is a matter of no consequence. We know, however, that he was born near Manchester, and belongs to a Lancashire family. He received his education chiefly in London, and having chosen the law for his profession, he was enrolled a student of the Inner Temple in his twenty-sixth year. There he "ate his way," as the saying goes, to the Bar maintaining himself, as Lord Campbell at one time in his life did, by reporting and writing for the daily press. He was not a man of brilliant powers, or of any extraordinary amount of learning. But he was a most sagacious and persevering man, and was ready to confront any amount of labour in prosecuting an attainable object, no matter how remote its attainment might at first sight appear.

At an early period in his career, Edwin Chadwick became possessed of an idea. And it is a great thing to be thoroughly possessed by an idea, provided its aim and end be beneficent. It gives a colour and a bias to the whole of a man's life. The idea was not a new one; but being now taken up by an earnest, energetic, and hardworking man, there was hope for the practical working out of this idea in the actual life of humanity. The idea was neither more nor less than the Sanitary Idea the germ of the sanitary movement.

We must now briefly state how he worked his way to the practical realization of his idea, in the sanitary movement. It appears that Mr. Morgan, the Government actuary, having been examined before a Parliamentary committee as to the soundness of the Government annuity tables, stated that, though the circumstances of the middle classes had improved, their "expectation of life" had not lengthened. This being diametrically opposed to our student's idea, he forthwith set to work to demonstrate the fallacy of the Government actuary's opinion. He laid aside, for a time, the dreary law papers on which he had been engaged, and entered upon an equally dreary course, of reading and sifting of statistical documents, blue books, life-tables, and population-tables. His practice of sifting evidence for the attorneys in private cases doubtless helped him in this investigation. He bored his way through the cumbrous pile, working his way to the light, and bringing an accumulation of facts from the most unlooked-for quarters, to illustrate his idea and elucidate his master-thought. **The result was published in an able article which appeared in the *Westminster Review* for April 1828.** He there demonstrated, by an extraordinary array of facts and arguments, that the circumstances which surround human beings must have an influence upon their health; that health must improve

with an improvement of these circumstances; that many of these circumstances which were unfavourable to the healthy lives of men were under man's control, and capable of being removed; that the practice of vaccination, the diminution of the ancestral vice of hard drinking, the increase of habits of cleanliness, the improvements in medical science, and the better construction of streets and houses, must, according to all medical and popular experience, have contributed, a priori, to lengthen life; and these he proved by a citation of facts from numerous authentic sources. In short, Mr. Morgan was wrong. **The "expectancy of life," as is now universally admitted, has improved and is rapidly improving;** but it was never so thoroughly demonstrated until Edwin Chadwick undertook the discussion and proof of the entire question.

The article in the Westminster attracted the notice of Lord Melbourne, who had a remarkable tact for discovering the qualities of men; and he determined to enlist Mr. Chadwick in the public service. Though no "eloquent" writer, Mr. Chadwick's pen thus carved out for himself a highly useful, if not a brilliant career in life. Let no one say that the Pen has lost its power in these days!

In like manner, **another article, which Mr. Chadwick published in the *London Review*, in 1829, on Preventive Police, was read by Jeremy Bentham**, then in his 82nd year, who so much admired it, that he craved an introduction to the writer. The consequence was, the formation of a friendship that lasted without interruption till the peripatetic philosopher's death, in 1832. Mr. Bentham wished to engage his young friend entirely in aiding him in the preparation of his Administrative Code, and offered to place him in independent circumstances if he would devote himself exclusively to the advancement of his works. The offer was, however, declined, Mr. Chadwick probably foreseeing that the inheritance of the old Jurist's principles might hinder his freedom in life; and, with a manly independence, he doubtless felt desirous of carving out for himself his own true career.

Mr. Chadwick completed his law studies, and was called to the Bar in November 1830, and he was preparing for practice in Common Law, occasionally contributing articles to the Westminster, when he was (in 1832) appointed a commissioner, in conjunction with Dr. Southwood Smith and Mr. Tooke, to investigate the question of **Factory Labour**, which Lord Ashley and Mr. Sadler were at that time strongly pressing on public attention. The sanitary idea again found opportunity for expression in the report of the commission, which referred to "defective drainage, ventilation, water supply," and the like, as causes of disease, acting, concurrently with excessive toil, to depress the health and shorten the lives of the factory population.

In the same year (1832), an important Commission of Inquiry was appointed by Lord Grey's Government, in reference to the operation of the **Poor Laws** in England and Wales. Mr. Chadwick was appointed one of the assistant commissioners, for the purpose of taking evidence on the subject; and the districts of London and Berkshire were allotted to him. His report, which was published in the following year, is a model of what a report should be. It is full of information, admirably classified and arranged, and so racy, by virtue of the facts brought to light, and the care taken to preserve the very words of the witnesses as they were spoken, that the report may be read with interest by even the most inveterate enemy of blue-books.

Mr. Chadwick showed himself so thoroughly master of the entire subject his suggestions were so full of practical value, that he was, shortly after the publication of the report, advanced from the post of assistant commissioner to that of a chief commissioner: and he largely shared, with Mr. Senior, in the labours and honours of the commissioners' report submitted to the House of

Commons in 1834, and also in the famous Poor Law Amendment Act passed in August of the same year, in which the recommendations of the commissioners were substantially adopted and formalized.

One may venture to say now, without fear of being contradicted, that that law is one of the most valuable that has been placed on the statute-book in modern times. And yet no law was more unpopular than this was, for years after it was enacted. But Mr. Chadwick never ceased to have perfect faith in the soundness of the principles on which it was based, and he was indefatigable in defending and establishing it. He is a man who has never failed in the courage needful to enable him to do the right thing, even though it be the unpopular thing. It has been well said, that “to become popular is an easy thing; but to do unpopular justice, that requires a MAN.” And Edwin Chadwick was that man.

While burrowing amidst the voluminous evidence on the Poor Laws, he never lost sight of his sanitary idea. The reports were strongly impressed with it; and not less than one-fourth of the then existing pauperism was traced to preventible causes of disease. Mr. Chadwick’s minute investigations into the condition of the labouring population, and of the poor generally, gave him a thorough acquaintance with the physical evils that were preying on the community, carrying them prematurely out of existence by fevers, consumption, and cholera; and the sanitary idea took firmer possession of his mind than ever.

One day, in 1838, when engaged in his then official vocation of Secretary to the Poor Law Commission, “an officer of the Whitechapel Union entered hastily the boardroom of the Poor Law Commission, and, with a troubled countenance, informed the secretary that a terrible fever had broken out around a stagnant pool in Whitechapel; that the people were dying by scores; and that the extreme malignity of the cases gave reason to apprehend that they were allied to Asiatic cholera. On hearing this the Board, at our sanitary reformer’s instance, immediately appointed Drs. Arnott, Kay, and Southwood Smith, to investigate the causes of this alarming mortality, and generally to report on the sanitary condition of London. Drs. Arnott and Kay sent in a joint report, and Dr. Smith a separate supplemental one; in which, amongst other things, the pernicious effects of the foul water sold in London were ably set forth. These reports were circulated to the extent of 4,000 or 5,000 copies.”¹

This inquiry ripened at length into the sanitary inquiry, into which Mr. Chadwick threw his prodigious industry and energy. In the mean time he had been engaged as a member of the Commission of Inquiry, “as to the best means of establishing an efficient constabulary force in England and Wales;” the evidence taken in which inquiry Mr. Chadwick embodied in a report as interesting as a novel of Dickens, and affording the most curious insight into the mode of living, the customs, and habits of the lowest classes of the population. When this question had been dismissed, Mr. Chadwick proceeded to devote himself almost exclusively to the great work of his life the sanitary movement. The Bishop of London, in 1889, moved in the Lords, that the inquiry which had been made at Mr. Chadwick’s instance by Drs. Southwood Smith, Amott, and Kay, into the sanitary state of the metropolis, should be extended to the whole population, city, rural, and manufacturing, of England and Wales. Some residents in Edinburgh also petitioned that Scotland might be included; and accordingly, in August 1839, Lord John Russell addressed a letter to the Poor Law Board, authorizing them by Royal Command to extend to the whole of Great Britain the inquiry into preventible disease which had already been gone through with regard to the metropolis. On Mr. Chadwick devolved the onerous task of setting on foot and

¹ *Times*, December 28, 1851.

superintending the inquiry throughout, of sifting evidence, and of afterwards classifying and condensing the information for the purposes of publication.

The first **Report on the Health of Towns** was ready for publication in 1842; and its preparation was altogether the work of Mr. Chadwick. It ought to have appeared as the Official Report of the Poor Law Board; but as the commissioners (some of whom were at variance with Mr. Chadwick with respect to the administration of the New Poor Law) refused to assume the responsibility of a document which contained much that must necessarily offend many influential public bodies, Mr. Chadwick took the responsibility on himself, and it was published as his report which, indeed, it was, and accepted from him as such by the commissioners.

The amount of dry, hard work encountered by Mr. Chadwick in the preparation of this and his other reports, can scarcely be estimated, except by those who know something of the labour involved in extracting from masses of evidence, written and printed, sent in from all parts of the empire, only the most striking results bearing on the question in hand which are worthy of being embodied in the summary report of the inquiry. The mountains of paper which Mr. Chadwick has thus bored through in his lifetime are immense; and could they now be presented before him in one pile, they would appal even his stout heart!

The sensation excited throughout the country by the publication of Mr. Chadwick's Sanitary Report, was immense. Such a revelation of the horrors lying concealed beneath the fair surface of our modern Christian civilization had never been made before. But Mr. Chadwick had no idea of exciting a sensation merely; he had an object in view, which he persistently pursued. The report was nothing, unless followed by legislative enactments, which, indeed, shortly followed. A sanitary party was indeed formed; and the ministers for the time being, of both sides in politics, were its influential leaders, giving practical effect to the sanitary idea.

Mr. Chadwick followed up this report in the following year by another elaborate report on the practice of interment of towns, a work which extended and enforced the views of Mr. Walker on this subject.

A Sanitary Commission was appointed in 1844, to entertain the whole question in its practical bearings. The Commission published two reports, with a view to legislation; but the Free Trade struggle interfered, and little was done for several years. Meanwhile our sanitary reformer was occupied as a commissioner in inquiring into the condition of the metropolis. This Commission published three reports, in which the defective drainage sewerage and water-supply of London were discussed in detail; but as yet, these recommendations have had little effect. Municipal abuses of all kinds, remedied everywhere else, generally find the last strongholds in the metropolis. While all other Corporations are reformed, that of London prides itself on exemption from the law of progress!

We will not venture to describe the character of Mr. Chadwick's numerous valuable reports; but we cannot omit merely to mention his report (published in 1845) on the **Drainage, Paving, Cleansing, and Water-supply of Towns**, one of the ablest state papers ever issued from a Government office.

The sanitary idea had its triumph at length in the enactment of the **Public Health Act of 1848**, and in the appointment of a **General Board of Health** (of which Mr. Chadwick is a member) to superintend its administration. Numerous supplemental measures have since been enacted, with a view to carrying into practical effect the sanitary principles enunciated by Mr. Chadwick and adopted by the Board. They are also engaged in publishing reports, from time to time, full of

valuable information: for instance, in reference to the application of sewerage water to agricultural purposes; on Epidemic Cholera; on **Quarantine**; on Drainage; on Public Lodging Houses; and such like. The sanitary movement, in short, is a “great fact;” and that it is so, we have mainly to thank Edwin Chadwick, the missionary of the Sanitary Idea.

Indeed, we do not know a more striking instance than that presented by this gentleman’s career, of the large amount of good which a man strongly possessed by a beneficent idea can accomplish, provided he have only the force of purpose and perseverance to follow it up. Mr. Chadwick also furnishes an illustration of this truth that a true man, of high and original powers, works for the service of humanity, and not for the honours which it has to bestow. He is not an actual legislator, and yet he has been the mover of more wise measures than any legislator that can be named. He has possessed the legislature with his leading Idea; and he has created a public opinion out of doors in favour of sanitary reform which will not let them lag, even if they would. Take him in all, Edwin Chadwick is one of the most useful practical men living; a leading man of the time, and a veritable embodiment of the spirit of the age. If he be not esteemed in future times as a Clarkson or a Howard, it will not be because he has not deserved this. He will, at all events, be regarded for many generations to come as one of the best practical benefactors of his kind.