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W. M. Frazer
A History of English Public Health

1950

INTRODUCTION

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Public Health matters.¹ Simon says of him that he was much respected as a man of thought and benevolence. His work in connection with the formation of the Health of Towns Association in London is referred to in Part I, Chap. I. Southwood Smith's official life was closely bound up with that of Chadwick, and they retired from the General Board of Health at the same time, thus ending their careers together.

The surveys undertaken by these eminent medical practitioners were confined to London, but in 1839 the Government, on the motion of Dr. Blomfield, Bishop of London, in the House of Lords, instructed the Poor Law Commission to make inquiries in regard to the health of the working population throughout England and Wales. Later, these inquiries were extended to Scotland. During the following three years a vast amount of evidence was accumulated throughout the United Kingdom and this formed the basis of the Commission's Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Great Britain, published in 1842.² The Report which, by Her Majesty's Command, was laid before Parliament, was presented in three volumes—two being local reports covering respectively England and Scotland, while the third, founded mainly on them, treated generally of the sanitary condition of the labouring population of Great Britain, and of the means deemed suitable for improving it. The English local reports from the Assistant Commissioners and others, together with a large number of detailed answers from the Boards of Guardians, totalled twenty-four; and the synoptical volume, entitled General Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Great Britain, was the work of Chadwick and was issued by the Commissioners as distinctively his. Some of the conclusions which Chadwick

¹ Southwood Smith's evidence before the Health of Towns Commission (First Report, Vol. 1) gives a moving picture of poverty and disease in the East End of London. Like Chadwick, he believed that it was beyond the power of the individual amongst the poor to change his environment, and that this could only be done by the community.

² In the New World an equally important event, occurring some years later, was the publication of the famous Report of the Sanitary Commission of Massachusetts, 1850, by Lemuel Shattuck and others. A facsimile edition of this report has been issued by the Harvard University Press. In the correspondence of Duncan of Liverpool there is a letter to Shattuck dated December, 1849, in which the writer congratulated the great American sanitary reformer on the active part which he had taken in the "Sanatory Cause."

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