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# Narratives of Public Health in Dickens's Journalism: The Trouble with Sanitary Reform

Ralph F. Smith

A good custom they have about here [in French-Flemish country], likewise, of prolonging the sloping tiled roof of farm or cottage, so that it overhangs three or four feet, carrying off the wet, and making a good drying-place . . . . A better custom than the popular one of keeping the refuse-heap and puddle close before the house door: which, although I paint my dwelling never so brightly blue (and it cannot be too blue for me, hereabouts), will bring fever inside my door.

—Dickens, *The Uncommercial Traveller* (61)

The first system of public health in England and Wales was created in 1848 as a result of widespread public fear over epidemical fever.<sup>1</sup> Fever was considered the generic disease from which species such as cholera and typhus evolved. The cholera epidemic of 1831 initiated the panic; over the next seventeen years, as fever struck again and again, politicians, some doctors, and lobby groups such as the Health of Towns Association cried out for government action.

The course of a disease, as in a piece of fiction, is revealed through narrative. From the 1840s until at least the mid-1850s, a professional and political faction known as “sanitarian” commandeered media and political attention with their fever narrative, including how to eliminate, or to reduce dramatically, epidemic outbreaks. Their concepts became the foundation of the 1848 *Public Health Act*.

The sanitarian narrative began with causation: most if not all fevers were caused by inhalation of the stink of decaying animal and vegetable waste in the working-class areas of towns.<sup>2</sup> In this narrative, fever presented itself primarily in working men—there was limited interest in pathology, treatment of individual victims, and the plight of

the unemployed poor. Prevention was the main focus: the sanitarians lobbied for sewer and water projects in towns as well as centralized parliamentary enforcement that would ensure individuals, particularly the working poor, observed specific sanitary practices in their dwellings. This plan of action would suffice. It would bring an end to epidemics and save money at the same time by reducing medical costs and increasing the productivity of the labor force. Dozens of books and pamphlets proselytized the sanitarian narrative. The earliest book that articulated its cause was *A Treatise on Fever*, written in 1830 by Dr. Southwood Smith, a key player in the subsequent public health reform. By the late 1840s, journals such as *The Journal of Public Health and Monthly Record of Sanitary Improvement* and *The Health of Towns Magazine and Journal of Medical Jurisprudence* perpetuated the sanitarian narrative on fever and public health. However, the foremost sanitarian was Edwin Chadwick, a lawyer who co-authored the 1834 *Poor Law*, became secretary of the Poor Law Commission, took up the issue of sanitation, published at his own expense *The Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population* (1842), and became a commissioner of the central Board of Health from its inception in 1848 until 1854.

While the sanitarian narrative shaped the politics, laws, and administration of public health in the mid-nineteenth century, there were contending narratives. The majority of the medical profession knew from experience that many if not most diseases spread by contagion, a concept that was anathema to the sanitarians. Nevertheless, they tended to support sanitary reform as a necessary, if not sufficient, action. Given the importance of cholera to the sanitarian platform, John Snow's theory on the transmission of cholera by water in 1854 was a direct challenge to the insistence of sanitarians that fevers were generated in filth and spread locally by effluvia. Snow's fame arising from his role in the removal of the Broad Street pump handle in 1854 and his published work were not recognized by circles of power until the 1860s.<sup>3</sup> Another doctor with a different narrative, Scottish physician and reformer William Pulteney Alison, published works going back to the 1830s that might have been the most dangerous blow to the sanitarian narrative.<sup>4</sup> Alison had taken extensive observations of the working poor and destitute population in Scotland; his works lack utterly the kind of moral repugnance towards a feckless underclass that characterized the sanitarian reports in England. His argument was that poverty was being overlooked as a predisposing cause for fever epidemics. The English establishment of the mid-nineteenth century had ignored Alison, and they ignored Snow.

While he was on his first American reading tour in 1842, Charles Dickens was seized by the ideas in Chadwick's book, a fresh copy of which had been sent to him by his brother-in-law Henry Austin, who worked with Chadwick. Upon his return to England, Dickens joined sanitarian organizations, spoke on their behalf, and wrote letters of support.<sup>5</sup> Dickens recommended Chadwick's volume to the United States public at the conclusion of *American Notes* (1842). In the 1849 preface to the Cheap Edition of *Martin Chuzzlewit*, he claimed that all his works of fiction had sections supportive of the need for sanitary improvement of the dwellings of the poor. As late as 1854, he wrote that sanitary reform should have precedence over every other social cause, including one of his greatest objectives, the reform of education.

Although Dickens continued his public support of sanitary reform in the mid-nineteenth century, articles dealing with sanitary topics contributed by other authors to *Household Words* (scrupulously "conducted" by Dickens) sometimes commenced with a sanitarian flavor but, in the end, did not align with one or more of the fundamental tenets of the sanitarian narrative on fever that had so influenced Dickens a decade earlier.<sup>6</sup> Dickens's own journalism during this period shows an even greater degree of discomfort with this narrative. Dickens found it laughable that the sanitarians could actually think that Parliament was capable of controlling sanitary reform. Also, Dickens began increasingly to believe that epidemics were spread by contagion rather than merely by inhalation of the effluvia from decomposing vegetable and animal waste. Most of all, he had a much different outlook from the sanitarians on disease and poor people. Yes, poor people were victimized by epidemics, but they were not responsible for the origin of epidemics—the poor, especially the children, were not irresponsible objects, as the sanitarians insisted, but were subjects in their own right. Their needs could not be met merely through engineering works and discipline; the country required radical economic and social change.

While some publications have drawn attention to Dickens's interest in public health and sanitary reform, there has been no discussion on how Dickens's own nonfiction articles increasingly tend to undermine the sanitarian version of public health and how he, as editor, influenced those of other writers.<sup>7</sup> In the remainder of this article, I will analyze how fever narratives in Dickens's journalism, principally those published in *Household Words* from 1850 to 1855, compare with the sanitarian version. I discuss these articles in three groups—the visitor's tale, the history, and the fanciful story.<sup>8</sup> While there are no doubt other ways of organizing this analysis, the groups designated here could prove

useful in later consideration, beyond the scope of this article, of more complex fever narratives in Dickens's novels (such as the visitor's tale in *Martin Chuzzlewit* or the history in *A Tale of Two Cities*).

### The Visitor's Tale

Such strange churchyards hide in the City of London; churchyards sometimes so entirely detached from churches, always so pressed upon by houses; so small, so rank, so silent, so forgotten, except by the few people who ever look down into them from their smoky windows. . . . Contagion of slow ruin overhangs the place. The discoloured tiled roofs of the enviroing buildings stand so awry, that they can hardly be proof against any stress of weather. Old crazy stacks of chimneys seem to look down as they overhang, dubiously calculating how far they will have to fall. In an angle of the walls, what was once the tool-house of the grave-digger rots away, encrusted with toadstools. Pipes and spouts for carrying off the rain from the encompassing gables, broken or feloniously cut for old lead long ago, now let the rain drip and splash as it lists upon the weedy earth. Sometimes there is a rusty pump somewhere near, and, as I look in at the rails and meditate, I hear it working under an unknown hand with a creaking protest: as though the departed in the churchyard urged, "Let us lie here in peace; don't suck us up and drink us!"

—Dickens, *The Uncommercial Traveller* (493)

The visitor is usually a quiet but observant person who is rarely himself the subject of the tale. These narrators are part of the flâneur tradition—tales by observers during the mid-nineteenth-century explosion of industrialization and urbanization. This quiet observer is far from passive, however, because he reveals, in the telling or writing of a tale, the seamy underbelly of economic, social, and political development.<sup>9</sup> The Dickensian narrator cogitates while ambling down unfrequented streets and he visits, intentionally or merely by chance, insalubrious places. The visitor sometimes uses sanitarian rhetoric but his reflections may cause a re-orientation towards other assumptions and values than those of the sanitarians. The visitor's tales in *Household Words* written by authors other than Dickens are discussed immediately below.

Like Dickens, William Moy Thomas turned from an early start in the legal profession to a life-long career of writing. His "A Suburban

Connemara," published in *Household Words* on March 8, 1851, shows that, also like Dickens, he was a close observer of urban neighborhoods. The article concerns the encounter of a middle-class man from Manchester with a London dustman. The piece is pro-sanitarian in its implication that even the industrial pollution of Manchester is preferable to the feverish miasmas of London. However, it points out that the surveillance measures favored by the sanitarians are not going to be supported by poor people. The narrator seeks Agar Town, a London low-cost housing area started in 1841 that quickly became a slum. It was mostly demolished before 1864 to make way for St. Pancras railway station. From its start, Agar Town was a place where the poor were "dumped," as were the Irish in Connemara. The narrator notes that there is a stench about and questions a dustman about the sewers. The dustman's answer demonstrates the inefficiency of both the Metropolitan Sewer Commission and the sanitary inspectors: "There used to be an inspector of noosances, when the cholera was about; but, as soon as the cholera went away, people said they didn't want no more of that suit till such times as the cholera should break out agen" (563).

A somewhat similar piece, again with a conditional sanitarian bias, is George A. Sala's August 14, 1852 "Up a Court." From 1851, Dickens had encouraged the young Sala to contribute to *Household Words* and he had closely edited Sala's work, sometimes compressing and other times adding.<sup>10</sup> "Up a Court" is one of the rare visitor's tales in which the narrator is also the principal actor, while others observe him and his environment. The slum-dweller narrator invites "gentlemen" to come with him to where he lives in Slaughterhouse Court (a fictional name but probably located in the slum area around Smithfield Market). Just as the title is possibly a poor pun, the style of the article is awkward and the piece overtly didactic. Sala chooses not to use colloquial language for the narrator's voice, as would be normal in sketches about a slum-dweller, possibly because he wants to meld an insider view of the slum with the interior voice of a middle-class visitor witnessing the shameful sights. Upon entering the court, the narrator exclaims in a commanding tone: "Observe the dirt; also the smells. Walk inside. Observe a repetition of the dirt and the smells. Look at the people. Examine the children. Look at (but don't drink) the water, where there is any" (508). The narrator complains of the middlemen of the subletting system who must also take their cut of the profits for the slum housing. The authoritative voice of the impoverished narrator controverts the perspective on the poor found in sanitarian journals and books.

Another story, "Hobson's Choice" by William Blanchard Jerrold, published in *Household Words* on January 22, 1853, would be fully sanitarian were there not such empathy shown for poor children. While the sanitarian focus is almost always on the wellbeing of the working man, in this instance the narrator is a middle-class man walking in Birmingham. When he encounters a street child, it is hard to determine whether the negative stream of thoughts he develops about the hopeless situation of the poor is objective or a reflection of his own class disaffection. From the child's swollen face and coarse jaws, and because "ill health had burst hideously about the lips," the narrator determines that the child has no choices in life, except a "Hobson's choice" between one evil and another (451). He suggests that this child and others like him were raised in a miasma from birth: "There was poison in the atmosphere that surrounded its cradle, contamination in its play-ground; and how then shall the child fare, as I notice the sickly bud burst into the graceless flower?" (452). The narrator's thoughts stray to how Hobson's choice will cause "revenge," as the cost of children raised in such settings will be thrown upon the state through their incarceration in prisons or hospitals and their constant need for medicines.

Henry Morley, as the medical and science specialist on the staff of *Household Words*, unsurprisingly wrote of visits to fever scenes. His June 10, 1854 tale "Death's Doors" is like Jerrold's in the sense that it foretells dire consequences for all of London unless those with power and money recognize the danger and take action: "war, pestilence, and famine will make grievous work among those neighbours upon whom so many of us look down daily from back windows, and do nothing but look down" (398). The story is oriented towards the sanitarian narrative in equating smell with disease, but it differs in presenting disease as being on the move, carried by water, rather than arising as effluvia from a local miasma. The narrator sets out with the intention of visiting some lodging-houses featured in a newspaper article, houses which the owner claims "with a few cheap alterations" to have converted into "Christian dwellings." The dwellings are in the vicinity of the Queen's Kensington Palace, but when he enters the narrow street of the slum he is overcome with horror: "Houses and lanes so mean and desolate, and rotten, that one might reasonably suppose them to be bred, as men once said of crocodiles, in all their loathsomeness from the surrounding filth" (398). He is revolted by the smell of the filth and by the destitute, diseased residents who mill about on the street. He finally comes to two houses that stand apart and have a

new paved court in front of them. However, as he approaches he smells a horrible stink, looks down, and sees open sewers emerging from them: he can go no further. No cursory, cheap alterations will solve the problem of housing the poor. The sewers from that area are interconnected and run into the Serpentine. He reflects on how newspaper articles about the drowning of rich boaters in the Serpentine miss the point—it is polluted and hence a symbol of the revenge that the poor will unknowingly take on the rich. Thus, the narrative represents fever on the move, transmitted by the water rather than by effluvia in the air. Its assumptions are reminiscent of the science of John Snow's work and of Dickens's emphasis on physical and moral contagion in the death of Jo in *Bleak House*.

I now turn to Dickens's own visitor's tales. These were, in fact, a type he used earlier, as far back as *Sketches by Boz*, and frequently derived from observations and speculations during his habitual night walking. Examples, in addition to the socio-medical narratives discussed here, include the elderly gentleman's narrative at the commencement of *The Old Curiosity Shop* and *The Uncommercial Traveller* sketch of 1860, "Night Walks."

In mid-century, Dickens's visitor's tales relating to the fevered and debilitated were mostly accounts of visits to workhouses, places he had savagely pilloried in *Oliver Twist*. With his empathy for the poor, it is no wonder that the caring interest of his narrator resembles that of a doctor for a patient, although Dickens makes it generally his practice to observe rather than to intervene. Nevertheless, there are echoes of the sanitarian narrative because the visitor notes carefully either the present or the past sanitary circumstances of places along his route.

In Dickens's "A Walk in a Workhouse," which appeared in *Household Words* on May 25, 1850, there is a lingering shadow of fever but the narrative present is a calm aftermath.<sup>11</sup> The narrator begins by attending a religious service with the inmates and reflects sympathetically on their helpless condition. He also thinks about those, like many of the sanitarians, who see the inmates as enemies to the stability of the country: "Upon the whole, it was the dragon, Pauperism, in a very weak and impotent condition; toothless, fangless, drawing his breath heavily enough, and hardly worth chaining up" (236). One of the stops in his tour is the "Itch Ward," where patients are isolated due to contagious scabies, and he finds there a nurse, herself a pauper, who is in deep mourning because "the dropped child," an infant brought to her from the street whom she has nourished, has died. The narrator describes her as a woman such "as HOGARTH



has often drawn" and he imagines hearing a voice from heaven telling him that all shall be well for her when "some less gentle pauper does those offices to thy [the nurse's] cold form" (237): she then will discover the dropped child to be an angel. Despite this sorrow, the narrator finds the workhouse to be relatively clean and well-ventilated and its food to be fairly adequate.

Another Dickens workhouse piece, "Wapping Workhouse," is an installment of *The Uncommercial Traveller* published on February 18, 1860. The traveler (unnamed but I will call him "Uncommercial") is coy about his destination because he is in no hurry, going where his whims take him into East London, describing familiar sites upon the way. However, he does have Wapping Workhouse in the back of his mind because he has read the morning papers in which an "Eastern police magistrate" berated the workhouse, claiming it is a "disgrace and a shame," and that it has no classification system for women.<sup>12</sup> As Uncommercial approaches Wapping, he notes the slimy and disgusting condition of the east side of the river and encounters "a figure all dirty and shiny and slimy, who may have been the youngest son of his filthy old father, Thames" and who directs him to the workhouse (392). Uncommercial rings the bell on the workhouse gate and is greeted by a "very bright and nimble little matron" who gives him a full tour of the establishment, even though he was unexpected and is a stranger. As in Dickens's workhouse visit ten years previously, Uncommercial finds the staff to be attentive to the inmates and the rooms to be as tidy and as well-ventilated as possible. Women patients in the infirmary are grouped according to age and physical and mental health. The most heart-wrenching visit is to the "Foul wards," where those stricken by fever and other diseases are isolated. The sanitary observer side of Uncommercial emerges briefly when he notes that the wards are crowded into a tiny old building in the corner of the yard, but that reasonable sanitation has been observed because the rooms are "as clean and sweet as it is possible for such rooms to be; they would become a pest-house in a single week, if they were ill-kept" (393). Nevertheless, Uncommercial's (and we may say Dickens's) main interest is not in sanitation but in the remaining signs of vitality and individuality in the women: "None but those who have attentively observed such scenes [of distress and disease] can conceive the extraordinary variety of expression still latent under the general monotony and uniformity of colour, attitude, and condition" (393). When Uncommercial stops to say a word to one of the women, "the ghost of the old character came into the face, and made the Foul ward as various as the fair world" (393).<sup>13</sup>

Dickens's two narratives share some features of those of the other writers but are in fact quite distinct. All of the tales discussed above share a sanitarian trait: there is a local site where fever is concentrated. The narrator of Morley's "Death's Doors" is the only one who demonstrates scientific knowledge and who is aware of the transmittal of disease by water, quite contrary to the etiology of the sanitarians. The narrators of the pieces by Thomas, Sala, Jerrold, and Morley give the sense that they have just made interesting discoveries and, with varying degrees of explicitness, give voice to the urgent need for sanitary and social reform. They also suggest that dire social consequences will follow if action is not taken to remedy the health and welfare of the poor. Scenes of "vengeance" for the same reasons are depicted at length and imaginatively in Dickens's novels during the 1840s and 1850s. However, the mood of Dickens's own visitor's tales is different from those of the other authors. Dickens's narrators have better-trained eyes and ears because they have trod these urban paths many times and over many seasons, and Dickens himself represented such scenes at length in his novels. The Dickens narrators, with no hope remaining for massive socio-medical reform led from the top by politicians, redirect their energies to settings where the poor as both individuals and communities provide examples of survival in challenging circumstances, and are also examples to others who are materially better off. These narrators' interest is to understand and to comfort those they visit, and they usually find that the care providers in the institutions share their compassion.

### The History

. . . [I]n the month of May, one thousand six hundred and sixty-five, it began to be said all over the town that the disease had burst out with great violence in St. Giles's, and that the people were dying in great numbers . . . The roads out of London were choked up by people endeavouring to escape from the infected city, and large sums were paid for any kind of conveyance. The disease soon spread so fast, that it was necessary to shut up the houses in which sick people were, and to cut them off from communication with the living.

—Dickens, *A Child's History of England* (215)

The following journal articles, all but one of which appeared in *Household Words*, relate to fever narratives of the past that initiate a

discourse on comparable circumstances at the time the article was being written. Scenes of miasma and effluvia are represented, but they are rarely used simply as propaganda for the political program of the sanitarians. Rather, the reference point tends to be the provision of support and hope for those most afflicted: the poor (and not just the working poor). The writers are in general less detached from their stories than they were in the visitor's tale, in part because their main interest in delving into the past is to draw a "lesson" that is relevant to their own times. The accounts sometimes contain disturbing elements arising from their narrator's imagination as he is drawn to the frenzy of fever in a way approaching that of an arsonist's attraction to fire. Also, the narrator at times discusses the old superstition that fever has been sent by an angered deity who punishes humans for their lack of fidelity and that, after the scourge, there will be a reawakening period and an opportunity for civilization to rebuild itself upon stronger foundations. This, in itself, implies that reforms of limited scope, such as those envisaged by the sanitarians, are insufficient.

Morley uses personification to describe malaria at the beginning of his January 15, 1853 "Information Against a Poisoner." He feminizes it: "like the most famous poisoners of Italy and France, the thing is feminine" (427). Morley's history of malaria goes back to the seventh century. He describes the disease of soldiers and sailors who are travelling in countries where the climate is warm and moist. The history leads him to speculate on the cause of the disease. He believes that malaria is an "emanation" that comes from the earth when it has been moist and then dries as the temperature rises, and then is breathed in, especially if one is sleeping outside and in the proximity of a marsh. Thus, the etiology of malaria, according to Morley, has similarities to the sanitarian theory on the cause of fever in general—it cannot be spread from one person to another and it travels through the air. However, in this article, his exposition on how malaria differs from other fevers demonstrates how far he appears to have moved in this article away from the sanitarian narrative on the issue of miasma: "Foul city air is not Malaria. Foul city air saps the foundation of our fleshly castles, and makes wide the breach by which Typhus enters, but foul city air generates no fever by itself, and the fevers for which it makes working ground and elbow-room are all contagious fevers, passed from hand to hand" (427).

Morley's September 30, 1854 "Sick Body, Sick Brain" concerns the Black Death in the fourteenth century and is prefaced by a lesson on the contemporary situation, suggesting that fever is contagious, contrary

to the most deeply held sanitarian principle: "We are not free from such afflictions [of body and mind resulting from plague] yet. We are at this hour shrinking from the breath of cholera. It comes home to the poor. It comes home to the minister of state. He may sacrifice sanitary legislation to the first comer who attempts to sneer it down, and journey home to find the grateful plague sitting in his own hall ready with the only thanks that it can offer" (148). Morley is fascinated with the psychological effects of the plague. His particular interest is in how fever in the fourteenth century turned from physical malady to insanity: "I particularly wish to show how in the good old times men's bodies were wasted, and how there was produced out of such wasting a weakening and wasting of their minds" (148). The effect of fever during an epidemic created a bizarre social environment. Morley discusses how the persecution of the Jews had a relationship to social anxiety during the years of the plague. He relishes the fevered circular dancers of the time—especially those who worshipped St. John and St. Vitus, as well as the tarantella dancers, who fancied themselves poisoned by a tarantula. Morley explains that there is "not necessarily deceit or hypocrisy in outbreaks" as they have recurred naturally and frequently since the fourteenth century (151).

The tendency of the fever history to link physical disease with its metaphoric manifestations, such as individual and institutional madness, is evident also in the May 5, 1855 narrative by Brown, "Plagues of London."<sup>14</sup> While Brown gives a nod towards sanitarian etiology, he shares none of the sanitarian trust that central government laws and administrative regimes will resolve the problem. At the beginning of the article Brown states that his purpose is to provide analogies between the plague of 1665 and the cholera outbreaks of the 1850s, through discussion of unpublished letters written by Patrick Symon, Rector of St. Paul's. In the 1665 plague, the Rector is aware of the likelihood that, by staying in London, he will himself become infected, but he stays to preach to those who are well and to write to those who are ill. When the Rector expresses fear that bread, stockings, and vessels containing wine and beer carry contagion, Brown intervenes with a sanitarian dictum: "The main exciting cause of the old plagues as of the modern cholera was, beyond doubt, confinement in foul air, living among the filth of towns or villages in ill-constructed houses" (316). The Rector speaks of the superstitions of those who look for signs that the plague is ending, such as the falling out of the clapper of the great bell of Westminster and the return of daws to the palace and the abbey. Brown then turns awkwardly away from the Rector's letters

and speaks of another pestilent outbreak in London, "the plague of street rogues and sharpers," which he believes has abated in contemporary times (317). No doubt borrowing from Dickens's February 15, 1851 "Red Tape," he concludes by alluding to the current ministers of government, who act no more knowledgeably than did their forebears in the seventeenth century, and by asking: "Who does not know how dreadfully infectious this new sickness is? How it is communicated by papers and documents, lurks in the horsehair of stools, and how it clings to tape (especially to tape of a red colour) with so much energy that no known disinfectant . . . is able to remove it" (318–19)?

Dickens's histories also demonstrate the double use of "fever" as the denotation of a disease and as an extended metaphor for individual or social behavior. There are sanitarian reflections in Dickens's August 19, 1848 review in *The Examiner* of a book on the expedition of ships bound for Africa in 1841 at the request of Exeter Hall.<sup>15</sup> The *Albert*, the *Wilberforce*, and the *Soudan* entered Africa by the Niger River.<sup>16</sup> The mission was to negotiate the end of the slave trade in the region, as well as to establish a profitable commercial trade and a model farm. Dickens was fascinated by the tale's heroic dimensions—a daring trip into largely unexplored Africa, the dangerous luminescence of the scenery, the uncanny meetings with native leaders, and the outbreak of fever on all three ships, then the deaths and the retreat to open water and to England. However, Dickens's account of the expedition was not a book review in any normal sense but his own imagined narrative on the grand initiative that the English intended to be "the great awakening of the African people" (121).

In Dickens's re-created narrative, the voyage up the Niger symbolizes a journey into the heart of a miasma existing within the close and sultry air of the African river, and hence towards death: "The sea-breeze blew too late on many wasted forms, to shed its freshness on them for their restoration, and Death, Death, Death was aboard the *Albert* day and night" (123). The devastation of the English by fever while the Africans remain immune—"The air that brings life to the latter brings death to the former" (125)—is a scenario similar to Edwin Chadwick's, suggesting that, in England, fever would strike healthy working men first while the destitute were, for the most part, immune.

Despite its sanitarian overtones, Dickens gives the piece a much broader meaning than a sanitarian tract would have. The African leaders, in their apparent simplicity and willingness to placate the English by coming to terms with them and being rewarded (at least in the short term), have no intention of abiding by the terms of a

negotiated agreement. The outwitting of the European negotiators is a scene of dark humor. Despite the slave trading and despotism of the African leaders, the narrator respects their “difference” and implies that Africans must be left to create their own space for their own humanity. The narratorial leap taken to understand Africans as subjects rather than as objects is similar to the sympathetic approach of doctors towards poor patients. Rather than aggrandizing *nation*, as in the sanitarian narrative, Dickens strikes a blow against England’s identity as empire: “In the mighty revolutions of the wheel of time, some change in this regard may come about; but in this age of the world, all the white armies and white missionaries of the world would fall, as withered reeds, before the rolling of one African river” (125). Rather than relying upon charitable institutions, such as “Exeter Hall” whose plans are “the thing by no means to be done” (110), Dickens’s narrator suggests that power to bring about change needs to arise gradually and to reside within individuals. Most significantly, he asserts that the interests of the destitute living in England must never be sacrificed again while wealthy people deem it fashionable to direct charity towards the religious conversion of Africans and the colonization of their land; unlike the sanitarians, Dickens’s focus is not the working poor but the destitute population at large.

Dickens also recasts the past in his October 29, 1853 installment in *Household Words* of *A Child’s History of England*. The narrative voice is that of Dickens talking to his children and giving lessons on the deficiencies of “Merry Old England,” interspersed with comparisons to contemporary problems. In the section on the Great Plague of 1665, Dickens suggests, in a sanitarian manner, that London was struck the worst of any town of England because it was “close and unwholesome” (216). Nevertheless, the fever is portrayed as being contagious, quite unlike sanitarian narratives.

Yet there is an opportunity in the wake of the fire to demonstrate a sanitarian “moral” that children—the principal audience for *A Child’s History*—can take away from the past and apply to their own day:

But the Fire was a great blessing to the City afterwards, for it arose from its ruins very much improved—built more regularly, more widely, more cleanly and carefully, and therefore much more healthily. It might be far more healthy than it is, but there are some people in it still—even now, at this time, nearly two hundred years later—so selfish, so pig-headed, and so ignorant, that I doubt if even another Great Fire would warm them up to do their duty. (216)

Far from narrator as background observer as in the visitor's tale, Dickens's narratorial invective in the histories discussed above far exceeds the expression of passion and denunciation in the articles by Morley and Brown. What is remarkable is that Dickens does this effectively in works intended for audiences (adventure lovers and children) who would not normally pay much attention to such strident political rhetoric. Brown's narrative, despite its reference to "red tape" at the conclusion, suggests that threats to population health in the 1850s need to be put into context by recollecting the much higher mortality rates of the plague of 1665 and other hazards to wellbeing in the history of England. Morley's articles are injected with criticisms of the lack of progress on public health reform, but his attention is drawn mostly to scientific medicine and the history and perceived causes of fever itself rather than to disease of the social body. But in his journal pieces discussed here, Dickens is interested in the social implications of fever. He writes of historical events and then applies them to the present. He arrives at the conclusion that England has a way of failing even when opportunity knocks loudly—thus the tragic lesson that historical errors recur time and again.

#### The Fanciful Tale

When I came to myself, I directed a favourite slave to make enquiries among the neighbours, and, on pain of death, to bring me an exact account of the young lady's family and condition. The slave acquitted himself so well, that he informed me within an hour that the young lady's name was FAIR GUVAWNMENT, and that she was the daughter of the chief Cadi. The violence of my passion became so great that I took to my bed that evening, fell into a fever, and was reduced to the brink of death, when an old lady of my acquaintance came to see me. Son, said she, after observing me attentively, I perceive that your disease is love. Inform me who is the object of your affections, and rely upon me to bring you together. This address of the good old lady's had such an effect upon me, that I immediately arose quite restored in health, and began to dress myself.

—Dickens, "The Thousand and One Humbugs" (313)

The fanciful fever tale is more inventive than the visitor's story and the history discussed above. It takes on the form of fable, al-

legory, fairy tale, satire, or dystopian story and makes extensive use of such devices as mimicry, metaphor, irony, and apostrophe. All the following narratives concern politics or, more specifically, the ridiculous and yet tragic failure of Parliament, municipal authorities, and other institutions to implement an effective program of public health. Until at least 1855, these narratives promoted sanitarianism, most often by general admonitions to support the recommendations of the Board of Health. However, they frequently controverted aspects of sanitarianism by treating poor people as subjects, interesting in their own right, and not merely as bodies that needed alignment to increase the overall wealth of the country and fitness to defend the far-flung empire. Thus, despite their susceptibility to interpretation as sanitarian propaganda, such narratives tend increasingly to be suspicious of government as custodian of public health and of other key elements of the sanitarian narrative of fever.

W. H. Wills's August 10, 1850 "Health by Act of Parliament" is a fable that both supports the sanitarian platform and casts doubts on its administrative feasibility. It concerns a prince and his household from the time of the *Arabian Nights*. Fever attacks the prince and, unfortunately, the royal doctor also has fallen sick of the plague and so is unable to attend him. Disease within the palace has already exhausted the stock of medicine and so another famous doctor is summoned to prepare medicine for the prince. However, this doctor points out that he is unable to treat the prince because a royal decree forbids anyone other than the prince's doctor to provide his care. Thus, there is no help for his situation and the prince dies. Wills claims that this story parallels what has been happening to London. Lying "in extremis" due to unsanitary conditions, the metropolis called in the sanitary doctors who provided a "prescription," the *Public Health Act*, but it was made available to "every other member of the great retinue of towns, except to the Imperial City" (460). Wills closes the article by calling upon citizens to support the efforts of the Metropolitan Sanitary Association.

Wills wrote other narratives in *Household Words* relating to public health but the most notable is the June 15, 1850 satire he co-authored with William Taylor Haly, "The Royal Rotten Row Commission." This piece attacks the bureaucracy as being all form and no substance in its attitudes towards sanitary reform. The Commissioners are proud that they are not paid for their volunteer efforts whereas, by contrast, the Secretary and the Clerk of the Commission receive high salaries and spend their time demanding alterations to the room in which the Commission is to meet. The "Ventilator General" is prevailed upon to



examine the facility and his report is that "the door ought to have been precisely where the chimney was, and that the chimney should have stood exactly where the window was" and that the Board should postpone its meeting until next year (275). The clerk takes the initiative to have the hearth swept and the window thrown open but other formalities keep the Commission from even examining its first witness. The narrator is doubtful that the report will be ready prior to the opening of the Great Exposition in May of the next year.

*Household Words* published "Father Thames" on February 1, 1851 and, on May 24, 1851, "The Pen and the Pick-Axe," fables by Richard Horne criticizing the Metropolitan Commission of Sewers. While in both of these works Horne joins the sanitarians in expressing impatience over the Commission's passivity and inefficiency, the fables differ from the sanitarian narrative in the way they represent fever as being on the move and transmissible by water. The first fable is a dialogue between Mr. Beveridge and Father Thames, beside whose waters Mr. Beveridge is walking. The humor of the piece comes from the sardonic way in which Father Thames describes his features, his "fine, generous open" sewers, industries that dump their waste directly into his water, and graveyards that drain into him. The water corporations have no fear of drawing off his water. Father Thames recognizes, once pressed by Mr. Beveridge, that he has, indeed, been injured by all that has been done to make him filthy, but he has grown tired of being examined and by the useless deliberations of Boards and Commissions. He is happy enough in getting vengeance: "For every dead dog and cat that is flung into my bosom, there's a typhus patient perhaps a dozen; for every slaughter-house, fish-market, or graveyard near my banks, there's a dozen scarlet fever patients perhaps a hundred; for every main sewer draining into me, there is a legion of cholera patients" (448).

Horne's second fable is less vitriolic. It begins, "I am a dirty town, on the banks of the Thames" (193), the town being Fulham, here speaking on behalf of his "sister" Putney and his "cousin" Hammersmith. There is a gloomy, wounded, virtually hopeless tone to the narrative voice of the town. These outlying towns have seen deliberations, studies, meetings and many plans but are not yet connected to the Metropolitan sewer system and are in a shocking, unsanitary state. Unlike Father Thames, who is happy to wreak revenge on his abusers, this and many other towns are saddened by the obligation to dump their waste into the river, which carries disease into the metropolis. Naïve at first about the Board of Health, the towns have become wiser, recognizing that virtuous political speeches are rarely followed

by the actual commitment of resources to honor the promises made. The dirty town says that those who “know how to use the ‘blunt’ [money], are not disposed to mistake a pen for a pickaxe. They cannot see their way through so much paper and red-tapery. Insurance Companies have declined to lend the indefinitely large sums required, and even the Exchequer Loan Commissioners have politely excused themselves” (196).

Morley’s fanciful tales of the mid-1850s are both clarion calls for sanitary reform and lampoons of the government that the sanitarians desire to take the helm.<sup>17</sup> “Lord W. Tyler,” published October 3, 1857 in *Household Words*, begins as a fairy story: “ONCE upon a time on a day in the remote past, when there were inhabitants in London, and a parliament was sitting, and the shrimps had Margate to themselves” (333). This satirical piece was inspired by a retort made by William Cox, M. P., concerning a bill to extend the application of the *Common Lodging House Act*. Palmerston, as Prime Minister, tried to force the bill through the House, causing Cox to say to the Speaker, “If he meant to play Wat Tyler with the people of England they would be able to play the tyrant against him” (334). Reflecting Morley’s long-standing support of sanitary reform and the deplorable conditions of the many exempt lodging houses, his narrator demands that the people rise up in a new rebellion in support of Lord W. Tyler (Morley’s name for the Prime Minister). Morley intersperses documentary evidence in support of the bill with comic rhetoric that incites the people to rebel: “Rise, then, poor tenants, comrades rise, and bestir yourselves! Take up your lime-pails and your whiting-brushes! Shout, help, ho! Soap for England! To the rescue, water and fresh air!” (336).

Morley’s June 9, 1858 “A Lesson Lost Upon Us” begins with an allegory. In the “Days of the Faery Queen” (73), an official named Morpheus in a subterranean dwelling on Downing Street is visited by a messenger bearing news that there is urgent work to be done. However, Morpheus is so sound asleep that it is impossible to awaken him and the message is ignored. Morpheus represents the government of England, which fell asleep when there were calls for help from the Crimea, where the British army was losing more men to cholera than to the Russians. When the government did wake up, nearly too late, it sent over sanitary officers who were highly effective (unlike the medical corps of the French, who are depicted as ridiculously bureaucratic). Nevertheless, the English army returned home to barracks that were more unsanitary than their battlefield environment. Thus the sanitary lesson was lost.

Dickens also liked to use fables and allegories in his narratives on the failed politics of public health. These tend to support action on sanitarian reform while controverting its utilitarian spirit. In his fable of December 14, 1850, "A December Vision," the narrator has a vision of the Grim Reaper breeding effluvia: "I saw a poisoned air, in which Life drooped. I saw Disease, arrayed in all its store of hideous aspects and appalling shapes . . . I saw innumerable hosts, fore-doomed to darkness, dirt, pestilence, obscenity, misery, and early death" (266). However, unlike in the sanitarian narrative, it is not only the working class that is attacked but the rich as well: "I saw the rich struck down in their strength, their darling children weakened and withered, their marriageable sons and daughters perish in their prime" (266). The fever is in constant movement and is contagious: "I saw that not one miserable wretch breathed out his poisoned life in the deepest cellar of the most neglected town, but, from the surrounding atmosphere, some particles of his infection were borne away, charged with heavy retribution on the general guilt" (266).<sup>18</sup> Throughout the fable, as the narrator relates the horrors of poverty and disease, there are those who have power and wealth but stand back and say, "But it will last my time." The spirit (Death) reveals to the narrator that if all this "time" were to be added together it would come to "eternity" and that whoever makes such an excuse for passivity will be punished "throughout ALL TIME" (266). Given the association between Dickens and the celebration of Christmas, anything he published at this time of year would have been particularly poignant for his readers.

Dickens continued his prompting for immediate action on sanitary reform in a subsequent allegory of January 4, 1851, "The Last Words of the Old Year." At this time, Dickens's readers would have had the forthcoming Great Exhibition uppermost in their minds but, in this piece, Dickens contrasts their self-satisfaction over this event to their neglect of poverty, health, and sanitation. The scene is New Year's Eve, at the deathbed of the gentleman christened One Thousand Eight Hundred and Fifty, who is testifying to his successes and failures that will be inherited by his successor, the about-to-be-born New Year. Prominent among his failures is the lack of progress on London sewers. He says that "the Honourable Board of Commissioners of Sewers . . . [is] . . . the most feeble and incompetent Body that ever did outrage to the common sense of any community or was ever beheld by any member of my family" (337). The humor of the allegory results from the two attendants who sit by the side of the dying gentleman, the Registrar of Births (a satire on the emerging reliance on statistics) and

the Chief of the Grave Diggers. The latter, there in his professional capacity to bury the old gentleman, is confided in as a friend and asked to carry out some last requests subsequent to the old gentleman's death. The Chief Grave Digger admits that he has a conflict of interest because the despicable Commission of Sewers has thrown a lot of good business his way during the year, endangered only by the recommendations of the Board of Health. But he cannot refuse the last wish of the old gentleman. The Chief of the Grave Diggers commits himself to "shovel the earth over their [the Commissioners'] preposterous heads" and confides that their Commission is an "Abortion of Incapables!" (337).

Dickens's fascination with, and repulsion by, political power is evident in dystopian tales such as "Red Tape," April 15, 1851. The tale introduces both real people and imaginary types, moving from a very pointed sanitary reform object to a conclusion completely skeptical about any action being taken. The satire comes from the narrator's mock admiration for the Red Tapists and the wonderful consistency in the inadequacy of all institutions of government. The Right Honourable Red Tape, M. P., leads the Red Tapist faction and ingeniously undermines all reasonable legislative and administrative action, particularly any that would prevent disease and alleviate the problem of poverty in England: "In either House of Parliament, he [the Red Tapist] will pull more Red Tape out of his mouth, at a moment's notice, than a conjuror at a Fair. In letters, memoranda, and dispatches, he will spin himself into Red Tape, by the thousand yards" (481).

The principal satirical object of the piece is to highlight the delays in parliamentary elimination of the Window Tax, which causes the poor to live in dark, unventilated conditions because landlords are unwilling to go to any extra expense. This law is, according to those who oppose it, against all reason: "Lettuces, and some other vegetables, may be grown in the dark, at no greater disadvantage than a change in their natural colour; but, the nervous system of Animals must be developed by Light" and, moreover, diseases are "engendered and propagated" in darkness (482). A deputation appears before the Office of the Exchequer in 1844 demanding a change to the Window Tax and presenting evidence that scrofula and consumption are more frequent when the poor are obliged to live in rooms that are dark and lack ventilation. They are answered by what the narrator calls "the perfection of Red Tapeosophy" (482) by the Right Honourable Red Tape, M. P., who says that the Window Tax has nothing to do with scrofula because he has seen numerous instances of it among his

"agricultural peasantry" (482) who live in country cottages where the tax does not apply. However, the deputation refuses to be daunted and finally a concession is granted and Deputy Red Tape is delegated to put it into action. An exception to the application of the tax will be made for perforated zinc plates placed against the wall of the houses in lieu of windows. As in *Bleak House*, where he introduces a damning caricature of Leigh Hunt, and in *Our Mutual Friend*, where John Forster is recognizable as the odious Podsnap, Dickens shows no hesitation here in making fun of one of his best friends, Southwood Smith. The relief of the delegation upon achieving the exception is such that noted sanitarian Dr. Southwood Smith is seen to fall upon the neck of another delegate and "shed tears of joy in Parliament Street" (483). But, alas, when the President of the Carpenters' Society writes to the Stamp Office on the design specifications for the plates, he is informed that the perforations to allow ventilation must not admit any light or else each hole will be taxed as a separate window. This design being beyond the capacity of the carpenters, it serves as another example of the brilliance of Red Tape.

At the conclusion of the piece, recollecting a visit to a shop where the narrator has seen bottles of what look like "unhealthy macaroni" but that are in reality preserved tapeworms, and considering that this (1851) is the year of the Great Exhibition, the narrator is struck with a brilliant and enriching idea: an exhibit of Red Tape to which he is certain the public would gladly contribute financial support because it would be a "curious natural spectacle." For example, one of the exhibits might be the Red Tape taken from inside the "Right Honourable Mr. X from the Exchequer, seven thousand yards" (484).

When in 1854 Chadwick was pensioned, it was clear that the Board of Health had not been successful in its objectives of quelling epidemics, guiding local governments in their implementation of sanitary infrastructure, and saving money out of the public purse.<sup>19</sup> Other public issues had pushed sanitary reform aside, notably the Crimean War. Dickens became less interested in promoting specific sanitarian projects in his short narratives. He continued to promote the necessity of engineering works but, unlike the sanitarians, he regarded these as insufficient for addressing the health and social wellbeing of the working class and the destitute. Reform, for Dickens, required fundamental changes to the institutional and class structure of the country and perhaps this grand object was unattainable after all. Dickens's subjects were now much greater and darker—the failure of governments and the law, the desperate condition of the poor, and the degeneration of England as country and empire.

This biting indictment appears in the *Household Words* satire of August 11, 1855 entitled "Our Commission," which reverses the source for propagation of epidemic disease, suggesting that it emanates from those in power rather than from the poor. The *Lancet* had become impatient with official government sanitary commissions and had launched its own series of inquiries, including investigations between 1851 and 1854 into the adulteration of food. The topic and style of the *Lancet* reports appealed to Dickens and he mimics them in *Household Words'* mock investigation, led by Mr. Bull, an "accomplished practical chemist," who analyzes several products of "consumption" in England, such as Parliament, public offices, and British peasantry. The sample taken of Parliament is found to be very expensive but of poor quality, "being deficient in flavour, character, clearness, brightness" but serving as "a ready means of making froth" (319). Moreover, the infusions found in samples of the "common weed" called "Talk" are a "rank Poison." Mr. Bull then takes an "immense" number of samples from public offices, drawing upon "shops" in Downing Street, Whitehall, Palace Yard, and elsewhere. When analyzed, every sample is found to be contagious and composed of seventy-five to ninety-eight per cent "Noodledom," which is a deadly poison: "the germs of self-propagation contained within this baleful poison were incalculable: Noodledom uniformly and constantly engendering Noodledom, until every available inch of space was over-run with it" (320). Mr. Bull assigns national importance to his findings on samples of the British peasant he has taken from every part of the country. He suggests that each sample might have been better fitted for wear and tear if it had been "reared with a little more care, study and attention, as were rightfully bestowed on the vegetable world around it" (321). However, as it is, the samples are so broken down that they are not in shape to handle a gun or a sword in any defense of the country or in acting "as a disciplined body."

While all the fanciful fever tales of *Household Words* demonstrate narrative creativity, enduring humor, and coherent discourse on political folly, there are some differences between those by Dickens and those by the other writers. With the exception of Horne and Dickens, the other writers begin their narratives with such forms as an allegory or fairy tale and then "break the spell" by intervening to explain to the reader that these introductory stories have a contemporary political counterpart, the narrative of which they then relate. Dickens sustains and builds new layers of fancy as his narratives proceed. His earliest pieces borrow from his experience in writing drama—"A December Vision" is a monologue that could be performed on stage and "The Last Words of the Old Year" could be a short three-person play. "Red

Tape" and "Our Commission" expand their levels of absurdity and satirical bite as they proceed. Dickens's narratives also tend to represent a deeper and darker condemnation of politics and institutions than do those of the other writers. The remedies for the evils in the other narratives are specific: effective administration of the *Public Health Act* ("Health by Act of Parliament"), engineering works to improve the quality of water in the Thames ("Father Thames"), inclusion of Fulham within the Metropolis of London ("The Pen and the Pick-Axe"), the speedy passage of a bill to eliminate the Window Tax ("Lord W. Tyler"), and the provision of spacious, clean, ventilated barracks for the British Army in England ("A Lesson Lost Upon Us"). It is difficult to imagine how the evils represented in any of Dickens's fanciful fever narratives could be addressed without a wholesale replacement of the system of government and the bureaucracy, a great change in the profit motivation of private industry, a fundamental modification to the class system, and the provision of good quality food, shelter, and education to the destitute.

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Why were there differences—in the visitor's tale, the history, and the fanciful story—between Dickens's articles and those of other writers? Part of the answer may be that Dickens had the best trained eye for observation, given the length and frequency of his urban walks. Dickens's rapt observation of fever scenes—such as fever dens, workhouse infirmaries, and pauper graveyards—was part of what Forster described, after his death, as a kind of syndrome, "the attraction of repulsion," a phrase Dickens himself used in *The Uncommercial Traveller*.<sup>20</sup>

Moreover, Dickens did not, like some of the others, write to provide a "sanitary lesson" but, instead, to bring to the reader's attention the devastating effects of disease and poverty and the shame of those in power to allow those ills to exist and to multiply. In fact, for Dickens, "fever" was as much a social diagnosis as it was an outbreak of bodily disease. As the 1840s were ending and Dickens's novels were becoming darker, disappointing the worshippers of *The Pickwick Papers*, his moral identification with poor people and his rejection of existing institutions of government and law became all the greater.

Thus, Dickens's values were directly opposed to those of the sanitarians, who associated the cause of fever with the immorality of the poor and who called for parliamentary laws and police to administer

sanitary behavior. Nevertheless, Dickens continued to promote the written works of his sanitarian friends, retained his membership in sanitarian organizations, and encouraged journalism on sanitary reform.<sup>21</sup> By the time he wrote *Our Mutual Friend* (1864–1865) he was optimistic that the Embankment project might help regenerate the polluted Thames and be a step in improving the desecrated metropolis he portrayed in this novel. But, neither the massive Embankment project nor other sanitary works would have been sufficient to satisfy him. English values concerning its poor and destitute population would have to change radically. He died pessimistic that such social re-engineering would come into being.

## NOTES

1. In 1848 Parliament passed the *Public Health Act* and created a central Board of Health to guide the development of local health boards.

2. "Towns" was the word commonly used by Victorians to designate urban areas, including London.

3. When the central Board of Health was dissolved in 1858, its functions were taken over by John Simon of the Privy Council. Originally a believer in sanitarian doctrine, Simon gradually began to accept that fevers were contagious from one person to another. Looking back on his career in 1879, Simon admitted that the theory of John Snow from three decades before was now a "certainty" (Pelling, 236).

4. Alison wrote, "if any one supposes, that he can purify the air of the rooms in which the destitute inhabitants of such a town as this (and in this climate) live and sleep, otherwise than by relieving the state of destitution which brought them there, and crowds them together there, I believe that a very few trials will convince him of his error" (*Observations*, 12–13).

5. See Eysell, 166–74.

6. The appellation "conductor" is a railroad metaphor consistent with the general association of the journal with the railway age. In "A Preliminary Word," on the first page of *Household Words*, Dickens writes, "The traveller whom we accompany on his railroad or his steamboat journey, may gain, we hope, some compensation for incidents which these later generations have outlived, in new associations with the Power that bears him onward; with the habitations and the ways of life of crowds of his fellow creatures among whom he passes like the wind; even with the towering chimneys he may see, spirting out fire and smoke upon the prospect" (1).

7. See particularly Allan and Gilbert.

8. These were not new forms as they had been used in the eighteenth century. A prime example of magazines that created imaginary characters is *The Spectator* (founded by Thomas Addison in 1711 and later co-edited with Richard Steele); the narrator is the fictional Mr. Spectator, who tells of the actions and reflections of members of the Spectator Club.

9. See particularly Walter Benjamin's discussion of the flâneur in Baudelaire.

10. See <http://www.djo.org.uk/indexes/authors/george-augustus-sala.html> (from Lohri).

11. Slater identifies it as the Marylebone Workhouse, with 1,715 inmates. See *Dickens' Journalism*, vol. 2, 235.



12. The 1888 *Encyclopedia Britannica* provides an explanation of workhouse classification:

The general classification of paupers in the workhouse so far as the structure admits is as follows:—Class 1, men infirm through age or any other cause; Class 2, able-bodied men, and youths above the age of fifteen; Class 3, boys above the age of seven and under fifteen; Class 4, women infirm through age or any other cause; Class 5, able-bodied women and girls above fifteen; Class 6, girls above seven and under fifteen; Class 7, children under seven. To each class is assigned that ward or separate building and yard which may be best fitted for the reception of such class, and each class is without communication with those of any other class. Guardians are required to divide the paupers into the seven classes, and to subdivide any one or more of these classes in any manner which may be advisable, and which the internal arrangements of the workhouse admit; and the guardians are required from time to time, after consulting the medical officer, to make necessary arrangements with regard to persons labouring under any disease of body or mind, and, so far as circumstances permit, to subdivide any of the enumerated classes with reference to the moral character or behavior or the previous habits of the inmates, or to such other grounds as may seem expedient. (Vol. 19, 476)

13. I omit, because it does not include scenes of fever and disease, consideration of a third workhouse strolling narrative by Dickens published in 1856 in *Household Words* entitled "A Nightly Scene in London." It recounts an experience that Dickens had while walking with a friend by the Whitechapel workhouse. They see five "bundles of rags" that turn out to be young women waiting all night (often for several nights on end) for admittance to the workhouse. Dickens knocks on the door and is convinced by the Workhouse Master that he has no room because he had to give priority to women with children. The narrative provides another occasion for impeaching utilitarianism: "Without disparaging those indispensable sciences [utilitarian arithmetic and political economy] in their sanity, I utterly renounce and abominate them in their insanity" (27).

14. The identity of "Brown" or "Browne" has never been discovered, but he wrote a series of articles in 1855 and 1856 that, according to *Dickens Journals Online*, are "so similar in content and attitude as to indicate they are the work of one author" (<http://www.djo.org.uk/indexes/authors/browne-or-brown-2.html>).

15. Exeter Hall, on the north side of the Strand in London, opened in 1831 and was used for large meetings of religious and philanthropic organizations. Political meetings of the Anti-Slavery Society were held there: "Exeter Hall" became politically synonymous with the antislavery movement.

16. Slater suggests this article has been primarily cited as a precursor for Dickens's invective in *Bleak House* against the popularity of African charitable projects while poverty and the lack of education of the poor of England were being ignored. See *Dickens' Journalism*, vol. 2, 109.

17. Morley's highly specific focus on sanitation in this article and the next one discussed perhaps reflects his engagement in writing articles for sanitary journals prior to 1850.

18. As pointed out by Slater and others, this part of the "vision" is close to that which appears in *Bleak House* with the death of Jo.

19. See Allen-Emerson, Hamlin, Harrison, Pelling, and Wohl for the history of public health in England.

20. See Dickens, *The Uncommercial Traveller*, 18, 493.

21. Dickens's discomfort with sanitarian ideology was becoming more apparent publicly by 1850. In that year he was a member of high standing in the Metropolitan Sanitary Association and was called upon to second a resolution to have London included within the operations of the 1848 *Public Health Act*. The man

who had made the resolution (the Reverend Doctor John Cummings) claimed in his remarks that unsanitary conditions wrought among the poor “physical degradation and mental depravity that are barriers to inculcation of social obligations and Christian virtues” (*Public Health*, 20). When Dickens seconded the resolution, he begged to differ with the Reverend on the issue of the condition of the poor. He stated, “No one who had any knowledge of the poor could fail to be deeply affected by their patience and their sympathy with one another—by the beautiful alacrity with which they helped each other in toil, in the day of suffering, and in the hour of death” (*Public Health*, 26).

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