

## **AI-Generated Graded Readers**

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### **About This Edition**

This book is a simplified English adaptation created for extensive reading practice.

The text was generated using ChatGPT and prepared for intermediate English learners as part of an educational project.

Target reading level: CEFR A2-B1

This edition aims to support fluency development through accessible vocabulary, expanded narration, and improved readability while preserving the original story structure.

### **Content Note**

This adaptation is based on a historical literary work. It may contain expressions, attitudes, or depictions that some readers may consider inappropriate or offensive by today's standards. Such elements have been retained or reflected where necessary in order to preserve the historical and literary character of the original work.

### **Source Text**

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Daniel Defoe, *A Journal of the Plague Year* (Simplified Edition, Adapted and Simplified by ChatGPT)

## Part 1: Rumours from Holland

In the beginning of September 1664, I first heard that the plague had come back to Holland. People spoke of it in normal talk, as neighbours often do when news comes from far away. They said it had been very strong in Amsterdam and Rotterdam the year before. Some people said it had come from Italy, some from the east, and some from other places. To me, the exact place did not matter. The important thing was this: everyone agreed that the disease was in Holland again, and Holland was not far from England.

In those days, we did not have printed newspapers as people have now. News did not fly at once through the whole country. Most news came in letters from merchants and other men who had friends or business abroad. Then it passed from mouth to mouth, from one man to another, and from one street to the next. Because of this, news came slowly, and rumours could die away before people knew the truth. The government, however, seems to have known more than ordinary people. Some meetings were held about how to keep the sickness from coming to England, but all this was kept very quiet.

After a little time, the rumour became weaker. People began to forget it. Many hoped that the story was not true, or that it had nothing to do with London. But near the end of November, or the beginning of December, two men died in Long Acre, near the upper end of Drury Lane. They were said to be Frenchmen. The family in the house tried to hide the matter as much as they could, but neighbours began to talk. The Secretaries of State heard of it and ordered two doctors and a surgeon to visit the house. They looked at the bodies and found clear signs of the plague.

After this, the deaths were reported in the usual weekly bill. The words were very simple, but they frightened many people: "Plague, 2. Parishes infected, 1." At once people grew uneasy all over the town. Their fear became stronger when,

in the last week of December, another man died in the same house of the same disease. Then, for about six weeks, no clear sign of plague appeared, and people began to feel safe again. They said the sickness had gone. But in February another person died in another house in the same parish, and the old fear returned.

From that time, people watched that end of the town closely. The weekly bills showed that more people than usual were being buried in St Giles's parish. Many suspected that the plague was already among the people there, though deaths were being hidden or called by other names. Few people wanted to pass through Drury Lane or the streets near it unless they had important business. Men looked at one another with doubt. A cough, a pale face, or a closed door was enough to make people afraid.

The numbers in the bills began to trouble us. In ordinary times, the parishes of St Giles-in-the-Fields and St Andrew's, Holborn, buried about twelve to nineteen people each week. But after the first deaths, the numbers rose. Some weeks were not greatly different from usual, but other weeks were clearly higher. St Andrew's and St Giles's both showed more burials than people liked to see. Nearby parishes, such as St Bride's and St James, Clerkenwell, also showed increases. These changes were not proof enough for everyone, but they were enough to fill men's minds with dark thoughts.

The whole city also began to show a rise in deaths. Usually, the number buried in one week within the bills of mortality was about two hundred and forty to three hundred. Three hundred was already thought to be a high number. But then the numbers rose: first 291, then 349, then 394, then 415, and then 474. That last number was very frightening. People said that such a high weekly number had not been known since the last great sickness some years before. Still, fear did not yet hold the whole city, because the winter was cold.

The frost continued for many weeks, from December almost to the end of February. The air was sharp, and the wind was cold, though not always violent. Under this cold weather, the numbers began to fall again. London looked healthier, and many people believed the danger was almost past. Only St Giles's continued to worry us, because the burials there stayed high. In April, the fear came back

strongly. One week, thirty people were buried in St Giles's, and two were listed as dying of the plague. Several others were said to have died of spotted fever, which many people believed was really the same disease under another name.

This alarmed us again, especially because the weather was growing warmer and summer was near. Then, for one week, people hoped again. The whole number of deaths was low, no one was listed as dying of the plague, and only a few were listed as dying of spotted fever. But the hope did not last. The next week, the sickness appeared in more parishes. It was found in St Andrew's, Holborn, in St Clement Danes, and, to the great sorrow of the city, within the walls themselves, near Stocks Market. One Frenchman who died there had lived near the infected houses in Long Acre. He had moved away because he feared the plague, but it seems he had already carried it inside him.

This was at the beginning of May. The weather was still not very hot, and many people still tried to hope. The city itself seemed mostly healthy. The deaths inside the ninety-seven city parishes were low, and people said, "Perhaps the sickness will stay in that part of town and go no farther." For a few days, this seemed possible. But it was only a short comfort. Soon people searched more carefully and found that the plague had spread in many directions. Whole families were sick together in St Giles's, and many deaths were still being hidden under other names.

In one weekly bill, only fourteen deaths were written down as plague deaths. But this was not the truth. In St Giles's parish, forty people were buried that week, and many of them had certainly died of the plague. Others were called cases of spotted fever or other illnesses. The real number was probably much higher than the printed number. The next bill gave seventeen plague deaths, but St Giles's buried fifty-three people. When the matter was examined more closely, many more plague deaths were found there. People understood then that the sickness could no longer be hidden.

At the beginning of June, the weather became hot, and the infection spread in a terrible way. The bills rose quickly. Many families still tried to hide the disease, because they feared their neighbours would avoid them. They also feared that the

authorities would shut up their houses, though this had not yet begun in full. In the second week of June, St Giles's buried 120 people. The bill said that sixty-eight had died of the plague, but almost everyone believed the true number was nearer one hundred. Until then, the city within the walls had mostly escaped, except for one Frenchman. But now four people died inside the city too, in Wood Street, Fenchurch Street, and Crooked Lane.

I lived outside Aldgate, about halfway between Aldgate Church and Whitechapel Bars. My house was on the north side of the street. At that time, the disease had not yet reached our part of the city, so our neighbourhood was still calmer than the west. But at the other end of town, fear was very great. Rich people, nobles, and families of good position began to leave London in great numbers. From my street I saw carts, wagons, coaches, servants, women, children, and goods moving away day after day. Some carts were full, and others were empty, returning to bring away more people and more things.

It was a sad and terrible sight. From morning to night, there was almost nothing else to see. Coaches passed with people inside them, and men on horseback rode beside them. Servants led extra horses, and bags and boxes were tied everywhere. It seemed as if the city were slowly emptying itself. When I watched them, I could not help thinking of the misery that was coming upon London. I thought especially of those who would be left behind: the poor, the workers, the sick, and those who had no place to go.

For some weeks, there was such a crowd at the Lord Mayor's door that it was hard to get near it. People wanted passes and certificates of health, because they needed them in order to travel. Without such papers, towns on the road might refuse to let them pass or sleep at an inn. Since few had yet died inside the city, the Lord Mayor gave certificates freely to those who lived within the city parishes and, for a time, to others nearby. This great movement of people continued through May and June. There were also rumours that the government would soon stop travel by setting barriers on the roads. The rumours were not true at first, but fear made people believe almost anything.

## Part 2: Shall I Stay or Go?

At this time, I began to think seriously about my own condition. I had to decide whether I should stay in London or shut up my house and leave, as many of my neighbours had done. I write about this choice carefully because others may one day be in the same kind of danger. They may have to think about the same question: whether to stay in a place of sickness or go away. For that reason, I do not write only to tell what happened to me. I write so that my experience may perhaps help someone else.

Two great matters stood before me. The first was my business and my shop. I had worked for many years, and nearly everything I owned was connected with my trade. The second was my life. I could see that a terrible sickness was coming upon the whole city, and I feared it greatly. Perhaps my fear made the danger look even greater than it really was, but no careful man could look at London then and feel safe.

My trade was that of a saddler. I did not live chiefly by small sales in a shop, but by business with merchants who traded with the English colonies in America. Much of my money was tied up in goods, debts, and accounts with these merchants. I was not married, but I had servants in my house and business. I had a house, a shop, and warehouses full of goods. If I left them without a trustworthy person to care for them, I might lose not only my business but almost everything I had in the world.

I had an elder brother in London at that time. He had not long before returned from Portugal. I spoke with him about my case, and his advice was short and clear. He told me, in effect, "Save yourself." He had already decided to go into the country with his own family, and he strongly advised me to do the same. He said that the best way to prepare for the plague was to run away from it.

I told him that if I went away, I might lose my trade, my goods, and my money. But he answered me with my own argument. I had said that I must trust God with my life if I stayed. My brother replied that I should also be willing to trust God with my goods if I went. "Is it not just as reasonable," he said, "to trust God with

your business as to put your life in such danger and say you trust Him with that?" His words struck me deeply, because they were hard to answer.

I could not say that I had nowhere to go. Our family had come from Northamptonshire, and I had friends and relations there. I also had an only sister in Lincolnshire, and she would gladly receive me. My brother had already sent his wife and two children into Bedfordshire, and he meant to follow them. He pressed me again and again to leave London. For a time I agreed with him and began to prepare.

But when I tried to go, problems came at once. I could not get a horse. Though many people stayed in London, almost all the horses seemed to have gone out of it. For several weeks it was very hard to buy or hire one. Then I thought of going on foot with one servant. We would carry a soldier's tent, avoid inns, and sleep in the fields, because the weather was warm. Many people did this later, especially men who had been soldiers in the late wars.

In truth, if more travellers had done this, the plague might not have been carried into so many country towns and houses. Inns were dangerous places in such a time. A sick traveller might sleep there one night and leave death behind him. Still, my plan did not succeed. The servant whom I meant to take with me became frightened by the growing sickness. He did not know when I would go, and he found another way to save himself. He left me, and so my journey was put off again.

This was not the only delay. Whenever I fixed my mind on leaving, some new accident stopped me. One thing after another crossed my plan. At last, these repeated delays began to seem strange to me. I wondered whether they were not more than common accidents. In such a time, I thought a serious man should watch carefully what happens around him. If several events all point in the same direction, perhaps they are a sign of what he ought to do.

One morning, while I was thinking deeply about this, a thought came strongly into my mind. Nothing happens without the will or permission of God. If so, perhaps these delays were meant to teach me something. Perhaps it was God's will that I should not leave London. And if God wished me to stay, then He was

also able to protect me in the middle of death and danger. If I fled against that sign, I might only be running away from the place where God had put me.

These thoughts turned my mind again. When I next spoke with my brother, I told him that I now felt more willing to stay. I said that God seemed to have placed me in my present station, and perhaps it was my duty to remain there. My brother was a religious man, but he laughed at this idea. He said I was taking common accidents for signs from Heaven. If I were sick, or if I could not walk, then perhaps I might say that God had clearly stopped me. But to stay only because I could not hire a horse, or because one servant had run away, seemed foolish to him.

My brother said I was healthy and had all my limbs. I had other servants. I could walk for a day or two and then hire a horse on the road. I also had a certificate of health, so I could travel more easily than many others. Then he told me about people he had seen in other countries. Some men, he said, believed that every person's death was fixed before birth and could not be changed. Because of this belief, they walked carelessly into infected places and spoke with infected people. Many of them died, while wiser people who kept away from danger often escaped.

His words changed my mind once more. I began again to prepare for leaving. The infection was increasing around London, and the weekly bills had risen to nearly seven hundred deaths. My brother said he would not stay any longer. I asked him to give me one more day to think. I had already made the best arrangements I could for my business, so the chief matter left was only the decision itself.

That evening I went home with a heavy heart. I was alone, because people had already begun to stay indoors after sunset. Later I will explain more about why they did this. I spent the evening thinking about my duty. I placed my brother's reasons on one side and my own reasons on the other. His reasons were strong: life was more important than goods, and wise men should not walk into danger without need.

But my reasons for staying also seemed strong to me. My business was my whole estate, and I had a duty to care for it. I believed that God had given me this

work and this house. I also felt that the delays in my plan to leave were not without meaning. If I had a direction to stay, then perhaps that direction also carried a promise that I would be kept safe. These thoughts gave my mind a secret comfort, though fear was still near me.

There was a Bible lying before me. While my thoughts were very serious, I opened it and prayed for direction. My eyes fell on words from the ninety-first Psalm. They spoke of God as a refuge and a fortress. They spoke of being kept from the deadly sickness and not fearing the terror of the night. They said that many might fall nearby, but the faithful person would be protected. These words came to me with great force, as if they had been written for my own trouble.

From that moment, I resolved to stay in London. I would put myself fully under the care and protection of God. If He wished to preserve me, He could do so in a time of plague as easily as in a time of health. If He did not preserve me, then I was still in His hands. With that thought, I went to bed with a calmer mind than I had felt for many days. The next day, I was confirmed in my decision by another event.

The woman whom I had planned to trust with my house and affairs became ill. Soon after that, I myself became ill too. If I had wanted to leave then, I could not have done so. For three or four days I was unwell, with pain in my head and stomach. It was a bad time to be sick, because any illness made people think at once of the plague. I had no clear signs of that disease, but I could not help fearing that I might be infected.

After about three days, I began to recover. On the third night I slept well, sweated a little, and woke much refreshed. As my illness passed, my fear that it was the plague also passed. I returned to my business as usual. By then my thoughts of going into the country were gone. My brother had left London, first for Dorking in Surrey and then farther away, where he had found a safer place for his family. I was now left to take my own course, and I no longer debated the matter with him or with myself.

Part 3: London Begins to Change

It was now the middle of July. Until this time, the plague had been strongest in the west part of London, especially around St Giles, St Andrew's, Holborn, and the streets toward Westminster. But now it began to move eastward, nearer to the place where I lived. It did not come in a straight line. The city within the walls was still much healthier than the outer parts. Southwark, on the other side of the river, had also suffered much less than the western parishes.

Still, the danger was clearly drawing nearer. In one week, more than twelve hundred people died of all diseases, and perhaps more than six hundred of them died of the plague. Yet only a small number of these deaths were inside the city walls or in Southwark. In St Giles and St Martin-in-the-Fields alone, the deaths were very high. The sickness seemed to feed most strongly on the crowded outer parishes. These places were full of poor people, and the disease found many bodies there.

We could see the plague coming toward us by way of Clerkenwell, Cripplegate, Shoreditch, and Bishopsgate. These places were joined in many ways to Aldgate, Whitechapel, and Stepney. So we knew that, sooner or later, the sickness might reach our side of London. At first, however, the difference between west and east was strange. In one week, when hundreds died in St Giles and St Martin, only a few died in Aldgate, Whitechapel, and Stepney. It was as if the disease stood at a distance and waited before it crossed over to us.

That face of things soon changed. In the next weeks the numbers grew in Cripplegate and Clerkenwell. By the second week of August, Cripplegate alone buried a terrible number of people. Most of them were believed to have died of the plague. Clerkenwell also suffered greatly. The sickness was now no longer something far away at the other end of town. It was moving through the parishes step by step, and every week brought it nearer.

During July, while our part of London still seemed safer than the west, I went about the streets when my business required it. I often went once a day, or once every two days, into the city. My brother had left his house in my care, and I carried the key with me. I went in to see that everything was safe. I walked through

the rooms and looked around carefully. It may seem strange, but even in such a time, some people were still ready to steal from empty houses.

Indeed, many kinds of wrong behaviour continued in London. There were fewer people than before, but bad people did not disappear. Some robbed, some cheated, and some behaved foolishly, even while death was all around them. This was hard to understand. A man might think that such danger would make everyone serious, but it was not so. The plague frightened many people, yet it did not make all people good.

The city within the walls now began to be touched by the sickness too. Still, many people had already left, so there were far fewer bodies for the disease to attack there. All through July, people continued to flee, though not in such great crowds as before. In August they left again in such numbers that I almost thought only magistrates, officers, and servants would remain. The Court had already gone away in June and moved to Oxford. There, as I heard, they were preserved from the sickness.

I cannot say that the Court showed much change of heart afterward. They were saved from danger, but I did not see great signs of thanks or better behaviour. Many people believed that the sins and proud life of the nation had helped bring this judgement upon us. Whether every man agreed with that or not, it was clear that the city was under a heavy hand. London was no longer the same place. The streets, the houses, the shops, and the faces of the people had all changed.

The whole face of London was strangely altered. I do not mean only the old city within the walls, but the city, the liberties, the suburbs, Westminster, Southwark, and all the great mass of buildings together. Sadness seemed to sit on every face. Some parts were not yet fully struck, but all people looked as if danger had already entered their homes. Each man looked at himself and his family and thought, "We may be next." It is hard to show, in words, the horror that stood before our eyes every day.

London might truly be called a city in tears. People did not wear black clothes in the usual way of mourning, for there was too much death for ordinary signs of grief. But the sound of mourning was everywhere. As we passed along the streets,

we often heard women and children crying from windows and doors. Their fathers, husbands, mothers, or children were dying inside, or had just died. Such cries could pierce the hardest heart.

In the first part of the visitation, tears and sorrow were seen in almost every house that was touched. Later, when death stood always before men's eyes, some hearts became harder. People expected that they themselves might be called next, perhaps within the hour. Because of this, they sometimes seemed less moved by the deaths of others. It was not that they had no love. Rather, they were worn down by constant fear, and the mind cannot bear the same terror forever.

My business sometimes took me to the west part of town, where the sickness was strongest. Because the sight was still new to me, as it was to many others, I watched things with great attention. Streets that had once been full of people were now almost empty. In some smaller streets, a stranger might walk from one end to the other and find no one to ask for directions. Only a watchman might be standing at the door of a shut-up house. I will speak later about those houses and the sad rules connected with them.

One day, when I was in that part of town on special business, curiosity led me farther than I needed to go. I walked up Holborn and saw that people kept to the middle of the street. They did not walk close to the houses on either side. I believe they feared that someone might come out of a house and carry infection with him. They also feared bad air or smells from houses where sick people might be hidden. So the street had people in it, but they moved as if every wall and doorway might be dangerous.

The Inns of Court were shut up. Very few lawyers were to be seen in the Temple, Lincoln's Inn, or Gray's Inn. In truth, there was little need for lawyers then. Men had other fears, and business of that kind had almost stopped. Also, it was the vacation time, and many lawyers had gone into the country. In some places, whole rows of houses were closed because the people had fled. Only a watchman or two remained to look after them.

When I say that rows of houses were shut up, I do not always mean that the magistrates had locked them because of infection. Many were simply empty.

Some people had followed the Court because their work depended on it. Others had retired into the country because they were frightened. In this way, some streets looked almost dead before the disease had even fully entered them. Doors were closed, windows were dark, and the usual noise of daily life was gone.

Yet fear was not the same in every part of London. In the city itself, people had been alarmed more than once, and then comforted again when the danger seemed to pause. This happened several times. Because the plague did not at first spread violently into the city, the east, or the south, some people became a little brave, or perhaps a little careless. Many rich families fled, especially from the west and from the heart of the city. But most working people stayed, because their lives depended on their trades.

In the liberties, the suburbs, Southwark, and the eastern places such as Wapping, Ratcliff, Stepney, and Rotherhithe, the general body of the people remained. A few wealthy families left, but most could not. They had shops, tools, rooms, children, debts, and daily work. They could not simply close the door and go to a country house. For the poor, leaving London was not a simple choice between danger and safety. It was often a choice between danger in the city and hunger on the road.

It must also be remembered that London was extremely full of people when the plague began. The wars had ended, the armies had been broken up, and the king had been restored. Many people had come to London to find work, business, favour, or reward. Old soldiers had become tradesmen. Families that had lost money or position had come to the city to begin again. The Court had brought pride, fashion, pleasure, and new spending, and all this had drawn many more workers into London.

Because the Court and rich people wanted fine things, many poor workers found employment making clothes, ribbons, and other goods of fashion. In one report to the Lord Mayor, it was said that there were a very great number of ribbon-weavers in and around the city. Many lived near Shoreditch, Stepney, Whitechapel, Bishopsgate, and Spitalfields. These were crowded places, filled with people who depended on daily labour. When sickness came among them, it

had a wide field to work in.

From all this, one may judge how full the city was. Even after great numbers had fled at the first alarm, a huge multitude still remained. I often wondered at it. The roads had seemed crowded with people leaving, and yet London still held more people than the mind could easily count. This made the visitation more terrible. The disease had entered not an empty city, but a city full of homes, trades, servants, children, and poor workers who could not escape.

#### Part 4: Signs, Dreams, and Fear

I must now go back a little to the beginning of this surprising time. While the people's fear was still new, many strange things made it grow stronger. Some of these things were natural, and some were only the work of frightened minds. Yet when they all came together, they had great power over the city. I have often wondered that the whole body of people did not rise at once and leave London empty, as if the place had been marked for death.

One of the first things that troubled people was a comet. It had appeared in the sky some months before the plague. Another comet appeared the next year, before the great fire. Many people spoke much about these two stars. They said the first was pale, dull, and slow, and therefore it warned of a slow and heavy judgement. They said the second was bright, fiery, and fast, and therefore it warned of sudden fire.

I saw both of these comets myself. I will not deny that I shared some of the common feeling about them. After the plague followed the first comet, and after I saw another one in the sky, I could not help thinking that God had not yet finished correcting the city. Still, I could not go as far as many others did. Learned men said that comets had natural causes and regular movements. I knew enough to understand that such things were not always direct signs of war, fire, or sickness.

But what wise men thought did not matter much to the common people. The comet had a deep effect on them. It filled many minds with dark expectation. People had already heard of deaths in St Giles, and now the sky itself seemed to

them to speak of judgement. Fear made every sign larger. A light in the air became a warning, and a warning became a certainty.

The people were also made afraid by books, almanacs, and printed predictions. At that time, London was full of talk about prophecies, dreams, and the stars. Some men made money by frightening others. They printed books and papers which spoke, openly or secretly, of the ruin of the city. Some had religious titles, calling people to come out before the plagues fell. Others pretended to read the future from the heavens.

There were also people who ran through the streets crying warnings aloud. One man went about like Jonah preaching to Nineveh. He cried that London would soon be destroyed. I cannot be sure whether he said forty days or only a few days, but the meaning was plain enough. Another poor creature ran about almost naked, with only cloth around his waist. Day and night he cried, "Oh, the great and dreadful God!" and said little or nothing else.

I met this poor man several times in the streets. His face and voice were full of horror. He moved quickly and did not seem to stop, rest, eat, or speak with anyone. I once wished to talk to him, but he would not answer me or any other person. He only went on with his terrible cry. Such sights struck the people deeply, especially when the bills again showed one or two deaths from plague in St Giles.

Next came dreams and visions. Many old women told stories about dreams, and many others believed them. Some people said they had heard voices warning them to leave London. Others said they had seen shapes in the air. I hope it is not unkind to say that they heard voices that never spoke and saw things that never appeared. Their minds were so full of fear that clouds, smoke, and light became strange pictures.

One person said there was a burning sword in the sky, held by a hand coming out of a cloud. Another said there were coffins and funeral carts in the air. Another saw heaps of dead bodies lying unburied. The poor people looked up for so long, and with such fear, that their own minds gave shape to the clouds. When fear is strong enough, the eye can almost be taught what to see. Then each person tells another, and the story grows.

I remember one day, before the plague had fully broken out, I saw a crowd in the street. I joined them because I wanted to know what they were watching. A woman told them that she saw an angel in white, with a fiery sword in his hand. She described his clothes, his face, his movement, and the way he held the sword. The people listened so eagerly that soon one said, "Yes, I see the sword." Another said he saw the angel. A third said he could see the shining face.

I looked as hard as the rest, but I could see only a white cloud, bright on one side where the sun touched it. The woman tried to show me the angel, but I could not honestly say I saw it. She thought I was laughing at her, though I was not. I was only thinking sadly about the power of fear over poor people's minds. She turned on me and called me a wicked scoffer. The crowd looked angry too, so I thought it best to leave them.

Another time, I met with a similar thing near Bishopsgate Churchyard. In a narrow passage, a man stood looking through the railings into the burial ground. A small crowd had gathered around him. He pointed from one place to another and said that he saw a ghost walking on a grave. He described its shape, its movement, and the way it turned. He seemed amazed that everyone else did not see it as clearly as he did.

Suddenly he would cry, "There it is! Now it comes this way!" Then he would say, "Now it has turned back!" At last, he persuaded some of the people that they saw it too. This happened day after day until eleven o'clock struck, and then, he said, the ghost disappeared. I looked carefully where he pointed, but I saw nothing at all. Still, many people went away trembling. After a while, few wanted to pass that place, especially at night.

The man said the ghost made signs toward the houses, the ground, and the people. The crowd took this to mean that many would soon be buried in that churchyard. In truth, many were later buried there. But I never believed that the man had really seen what he claimed to see. Such stories show how completely the people were overcome by fear. They expected a great visitation, and therefore every dream, cloud, cry, and shadow seemed to point to it.

Astrologers added still more terror. They spoke of dangerous meetings of

planets and said these would bring drought, famine, and plague. In some things they were wrong, for the weather had not been dry. We had had a hard frost, then moderate weather, with winds and rain. But the astrologers did not lose their power over frightened people. When men are already afraid, they often listen most to those who frighten them more.

Some efforts were made to stop the printing of such fearful books and papers. A few sellers were taken up, as I heard. But little was truly done. The government did not wish to anger the people, who were already almost out of their senses. I must also say that some ministers, though they meant well, did not help as they should have done. Instead of lifting people's hearts toward mercy, they filled them with more terror.

No doubt many preachers wished to move the people to repentance. Yet some spoke so much of judgement and destruction that their hearers left in tears, without enough hope. I thought then, and still think, that they should have spoken more of God's mercy. The Gospel calls men to turn and live. It is a message of peace and grace. In such a time, frightened people needed warning, but they also needed comfort.

Religion in London was then divided in many ways. The Church of England had been restored with the monarchy, but Presbyterians, Independents, and other groups also had their own meetings. Before the plague, these divisions were sharp. The government did not favour the separate meetings and often tried to stop them. But when the sickness came, many of these quarrels became weaker, at least for a time.

Some ministers of the Dissenters were allowed to preach in churches where the regular ministers had fled or died. People crowded to hear them and did not ask much about their party or opinion. They wanted serious words, not arguments. Churches and meeting places were full. Daily prayers were appointed in many churches, morning and evening. Families also held private fasts and prayers in their homes.

The public face of the city also changed. Plays, music houses, dancing rooms, gaming tables, puppet shows, rope dancers, and other entertainments were shut

up. Some were forbidden by authority, and others simply had no customers. People were no longer thinking of pleasure. Death stood before their eyes. Even the common people, who had once loved noise and shows, now carried sadness on their faces and thought more of graves than of games.

#### Part 5: False Doctors and False Hope

Good thoughts might have helped the people if they had been guided well. Fear might have led them to pray, confess their sins, and ask God for mercy. But among many common people, fear went another way. It drove them into foolish and dangerous actions. They ran to fortune-tellers, charm-sellers, false doctors, and old women who promised secret cures. These people kept the poor afraid on purpose, because fear brought money to their doors.

Many men and women bought pills, drinks, powders, and special waters which were said to keep the plague away. They filled their houses and pockets with these things. Some spent money they could not afford to lose. Some took so many strange medicines that they harmed their bodies before the plague ever touched them. They thought they were protecting themselves from poison in the air, but they were often poisoning themselves with the things they swallowed.

The posts of houses and the corners of streets were covered with printed papers. These papers promised wonderful cures and sure protections. One said there were pills that could never fail against the plague. Another promised a drink that no one had ever known before. Another offered the only true plague water. Others spoke of royal medicines, special rules for the body, or strong drinks against infected air. The words were large and proud, but most of the promises were empty.

Some people put up notices asking the frightened public to come to their lodgings for advice. One notice spoke of a foreign doctor newly come from Holland, where, he said, he had cured many people during the plague in Amsterdam. Another spoke of an Italian gentlewoman from Naples, who claimed to know a secret way to prevent infection. Another was from an old gentlewoman who said she had worked with great success during an earlier plague in London.

There were many more like these, and I could fill many pages with them.

These notices show the temper of that time. Thieves and cheats did not only take money from the poor. They also gave them dangerous mixtures and called them medicines. Some used mercury, and some used other harmful things. Such things were far from being true help. If infection came afterward, these preparations were more likely to weaken the body than save it.

I remember one clever trick used by one of these false doctors. On his printed paper, he wrote in large letters that he gave advice to the poor for nothing. Many poor people came to him because of this. He spoke finely to them, asked about their health, and gave them common advice that meant little. Then, at the end, he told them he had a special preparation. If they took some of it every morning, he said, they would not catch the plague, even in an infected house.

The poor people naturally wanted this medicine. But then he named the price, and it was too much for many of them. One poor woman said to him, "Sir, I am kept by the parish, and your paper says you help the poor for nothing." The doctor answered, "Yes, good woman, I give my advice for nothing, but not my medicine." The woman saw the trick at once. She told him that free advice only meant he advised poor people to buy his medicine with money they did not have.

Yet the people continued to crowd around such men. The doors of false doctors were often more crowded than the doors of the best real physicians in London. People ran after loud promises more eagerly than after careful skill. Some of these quacks made great sums each day from the fear of the poor. They grew rich by selling hope in small bottles. It was a cruel trade, because the buyers were often the most helpless people in the city.

There was another kind of madness too. Many people wore charms, written papers, and strange signs around their necks. Some carried words folded in little packets. Some tied papers with knots. Some used signs of the stars, or religious marks, or old magical words. They acted as if the plague were an evil spirit that could be kept away by marks and letters. In truth, these things gave them no more safety than a piece of dry grass.

I do not wish to spend too much time speaking against such folly. I record it

because it was truly part of the time. Later, many people who trusted these charms were carried away in dead-carts. Some still had the useless papers hanging around their necks when they were taken to the common graves. Such sights should have taught the living that fear had deceived them. But fear is a poor teacher when it has already taken control of the mind.

All this began while the plague was still only expected, or while it had appeared in a few places. After it spread more openly, people began to see that the false helpers had cheated them. Then their fear took another form. They no longer knew where to turn or what to do. They ran from one neighbour's house to another and from one door to the next. Again and again they cried, "Lord, have mercy on us! What shall we do?"

The poor people were deeply to be pitied. Death no longer seemed only to hang over the city. It seemed to look into every house and every room. Some people became dull and silent from fear, but others were shaken in their very souls. Many hearts that had long been hard were broken. People confessed old wrongs, secret crimes, robberies, and even murders. Sometimes their cries could be heard from the street as they begged God for mercy.

Yet, as time passed, people became used even to terrible things. At first, many dared not go near a sick person or an infected house. Later, they went almost everywhere, because danger had become part of daily life. This was not true courage in all cases. Sometimes it was only tiredness of fear. When death is seen every day, some people stop feeling the first sharp terror of it.

The magistrates saw how badly the people were being deceived. The Lord Mayor was a serious and religious man, and he took thought for the poor. He appointed physicians and surgeons to help the diseased poor. He also ordered the College of Physicians to publish directions for cheap remedies. These directions were meant especially for people who could not pay large fees. This was one of the wisest and kindest things done at that time.

The advice of the physicians was prepared by the whole College. It was made public, and copies were given freely to those who wanted them. In this way, poor people did not have to depend only on street papers and lying advertisements.

They could receive plain directions from men who truly understood medicine as far as medicine could then go. It did not save everyone, but it helped turn many away from poison and fraud. In a time of confusion, even simple and honest advice was a great mercy.

Still, no one should think that physicians could stop the plague by their skill. When the sickness reached its full strength, it was like a great fire that no bucket could put out. The next year, fire would burn what the plague had not touched, and men would find their tools almost useless before it. So it was with the plague. Medicines were tried, rules were given, and care was taken, yet the disease often passed through all defences.

Many physicians and surgeons were themselves seized by the sickness. Some had their own preservatives with them and still fell ill. Some gave advice to others until the signs of death appeared on their own bodies. Several famous and skilful men died while trying to save others. This should not be counted against them. Rather, it shows their courage, because they risked their lives in the service of mankind.

The true physicians helped many people. By care, skill, and good judgement, they saved some lives and restored some sick persons to health. But they could not save those who were already too deeply infected before help came. They could not cure those who had the deadly signs upon them. No honest person should blame them for that. Human skill has limits, especially when a disease comes with such force.

The false doctors were different. Many of them died too, though they had trusted in their own useless medicines. Perhaps they believed their own lies, or perhaps fear caught them before they could run away. In either case, their end showed the emptiness of their promises. They had told others they could command safety, but they could not save themselves. Their trade weakened as the plague grew stronger, because the disease answered their proud words with death.

After this, the magistrates turned more fully to public order. They had to think not only of medicines, but also of infected houses, sick families, burials, streets, markets, and the movement of people. I shall next describe those orders more

exactly, because they formed a very important part of the history of the plague. The saddest of these measures was the shutting up of houses. It was meant for public safety, but it brought much misery, and the most painful part of the story must still be told.

## Part 6: The Lord Mayor's Orders

I must now describe the public orders that were made for the safety of the city. The magistrates had to think not only about medicine, but also about houses, streets, burials, markets, and poor people. When the plague first broke out, some houses had already been shut up in the western parishes. This was done by the justices of peace, under direction from the government. In several streets, this seemed to help for a time. When infected houses were closely watched and the dead were buried quickly, the sickness sometimes stopped spreading in that street.

This way of shutting up houses was not new. It had been used in an earlier plague, in the time of King James the First. There was also an Act of Parliament about the relief and ordering of people infected with the plague. The Lord Mayor and aldermen used that law as the ground for their own orders. These orders began to take effect on the first day of July 1665. At that time, the number of plague deaths inside the city itself was still small.

Some infected people were also removed to the pest-house beyond Bunhill Fields, on the way to Islington. By these means, the city within the walls stayed healthier than many other places for a long time. This did not mean that the danger was small. It only meant that the city government acted early and carefully. The outer parishes suffered more, partly because the infection reached them in a more violent way. Still, the orders of the Lord Mayor became one of the most important parts of the whole visitation.

The orders first appointed officers for every parish. There were to be examiners, searchers, watchmen, keepers, and buriers. These people had to do hard and dangerous work. They were to learn which houses were infected, which people were sick, and what disease they had. If a person refused to take such an

office after being chosen, he could be sent to prison until he obeyed. The city needed these officers, because fear and secrecy made the truth very hard to discover.

The examiners had one of the most important duties. They had to ask from time to time which houses in their parish were visited by sickness. If they were not sure what disease a person had, they could stop people from going in and out until the truth was known. If they found that a person had the plague, they had to tell the constable to shut up the house. If the constable was careless, the examiner had to report him to the alderman. In this way, the city tried to stop delay, hiding, and neglect.

Watchmen were then placed at infected houses. Each house was to have two watchmen, one for the day and one for the night. Their chief duty was to keep people from going in or out. They also had to help the sick house get what it needed. If a watchman had to leave on business, he was to lock the house and take the key with him. The day watchman stayed until ten at night, and the night watchman stayed until six in the morning.

The searchers were usually women, and they had to look at the bodies of the dead. Their work was to report honestly whether a person had died of the plague or of another disease. The city wanted women of good name and honest life for this office, but it was not always easy to find such people. The physicians were to examine the searchers and see whether they were fit for the duty. Searchers were also forbidden to keep shops, wash clothes for others, or do other public work during the visitation. This rule was meant to keep them from carrying infection to many places.

Surgeons were appointed to help the searchers. This was necessary because, in former times, many deaths had been falsely reported. If a body was wrongly said to have died of another illness, the infection could spread farther. The surgeons were to view bodies with the searchers and give a truer report. They were also to visit sick people when sent by examiners or called by families. Because they had to give themselves to this dangerous work, they were to be paid for each body they searched.

There were also rules for nurse-keepers. A nurse who had been in an infected house could not simply leave and go to another house. If she left before twenty-eight days had passed after the death of an infected person, the new house could be shut up too. This was a hard rule, but it had a clear purpose. Nurses moved from house to house, and many of them handled sick bodies, bedding, and clothes. Without strict rules, they could carry the disease everywhere.

The orders then spoke of what a household must do when sickness appeared. If any person in a house had swellings, purple marks, or dangerous illness without another clear cause, the master of the house had to tell the examiner within two hours. As soon as a person was found to have the plague, he had to be separated in the same house that very night. Even if he later recovered, the house might still be shut up for a month. The bedding, clothes, and hangings had to be aired with fire and proper smoke before they were used again. All this was meant to stop the hidden poison of infection from remaining in the house.

The orders were very strict about movement from infected houses. No sick person could be moved to another house in the city, except to a pest-house, a tent, or another house belonging to the same owner under special control. If a man had two houses, he could choose where to place the sick and where to place the well. But he could not send healthy people first and then later send sick people to the same place. The people moved had to be kept apart from company for at least a week, because infection might be hidden at first. These rules show how much the city feared secret sickness.

The burial rules were also strict. People who died of the plague were to be buried at the most suitable hours, usually before sunrise or after sunset. The churchwardens or constables had to know of the burial. Neighbours and friends were not allowed to follow the body, enter the infected house, or gather around the grave. Children especially were not to come near the body, coffin, or grave. All graves had to be at least six feet deep.

Public gatherings at burials were forbidden during the visitation. Bodies could not be left in churches during common prayer, sermons, or lectures. These rules were painful for families, because they could not mourn in the old way. Yet the

danger was too great for ordinary customs to continue. A funeral could easily become a new centre of infection. So grief had to be private, quick, and often almost silent.

There were also orders about infected goods. Clothes, bedding, and other things could not be carried out of infected houses. Old clothes and bedding were not to be sold, carried about, or shown for sale in stalls and shop windows. Brokers who bought goods from infected houses could have their own houses shut up for at least twenty days. This was important because cloth, bedding, and clothes were thought to hold infection. Poor people often wished to sell such things for money, but the city feared that this would spread death.

If an infected person escaped or was secretly carried from one place to another, he was to be brought back by night. The parish from which he came had to pay the cost. The person who received him could also have his house shut up. Every infected house had to be marked clearly. A red cross, a foot long, was to be painted on the middle of the door. Over it were to be placed the words, "Lord, have mercy upon us."

These red crosses became one of the most dreadful sights in London. A man walking along a street could see, before he reached the door, that death or danger was inside. The house was then watched and kept shut for four weeks after all inside were well. If the people could pay for food and help, they had to pay. If they could not, the parish had to provide what was necessary. The rule was meant to save the public, but for the family inside it often felt like a sentence of death.

The officers who dealt with infected houses had to carry a red rod or wand in their hands. This showed others that they had been near the sick or the dead. They were not to enter houses except their own or the house where they were sent. They were also to keep away from company, especially after doing dangerous work. This was a plain and useful rule. People needed to know who had been in contact with infection.

The orders also spoke about people who lived together in the same house. In London, many houses had more than one family inside them. If one person in such a house became infected, the others were not allowed to move away without a

certificate from the examiner. If they moved without permission, the house that received them could be shut up. Hackney-coachmen were also watched. If a coach carried an infected person to the pest-house or another place, it had to be well aired and kept from ordinary use for several days.

The city also ordered the streets to be kept clean. Every householder had to sweep before his door. Rakers came to carry away dirt and rubbish, and they gave notice of their coming by blowing a horn. Places for filth were to be kept as far from the city and common roads as possible. No bad fish, bad meat, musty corn, or rotten fruit was to be sold. Brewers and drinking houses were also to be watched, so that bad drink and dirty casks did not add sickness to sickness.

Animals were controlled too. Hogs, dogs, cats, tame pigeons, and some other animals were not to be kept within the city. Swine found in streets or lanes were to be taken up, and their owners punished. Dogs were to be killed by officers appointed for that work. These orders may sound harsh, but the magistrates feared that animals might carry infection or spread dirt. In a time of such fear, almost everything that moved freely through the streets was seen as a danger.

Finally, the orders spoke about loose persons and idle gatherings. Wandering beggars were not to be allowed in the streets, because they moved from place to place and might carry infection with them. Plays, bear-baitings, games, ballad singing, and other public entertainments were forbidden. Public feasts, company dinners, and tavern gatherings were also stopped. The money saved from such feasts was to be used for the poor who were visited with the infection. Drinking houses, taverns, ale-houses, coffee-houses, and cellars were to be watched closely, and people were not to stay drinking there after nine at night.

To carry out all these orders, aldermen, deputies, and common councilmen were to meet often in each ward. They were to choose safe places for these meetings and avoid places already infected. They could also make further orders if local conditions required them. The orders were signed by Sir John Lawrence, Lord Mayor, and by the sheriffs, Sir George Waterman and Sir Charles Doe. These rules belonged directly to the Lord Mayor's area, but the out-parishes soon followed similar methods. On the eastern side, where I lived, the plague did not

become very violent until August; yet the numbers were already rising quickly, and everyone could see that our turn was coming.

## Part 7: Locked Houses

The shutting up of houses was thought by many people to be very cruel. Poor families who were locked inside cried bitterly against it. Complaints were brought every day to the Lord Mayor. Some said their houses had been shut without cause, and some said enemies had spoken against them on purpose. When these cases were examined, many of the loudest complaints were found to be weak. But in other cases, if the sickness did not seem to be the plague, or if the sick person agreed to be taken to the pest-house, the house was opened again.

Still, the rule looked very hard. A whole family might be locked in because one person was sick. The healthy people inside might have escaped the sickness if they had been allowed to leave early. Instead, they were kept in the same house with danger. Many people believed that some died only because they were forced to remain near the infected. It is easy to understand why the people cried out against such treatment.

Yet the magistrates believed the public safety required it. They thought that one family's suffering might prevent the death of many others. For that reason, they would not easily change the rule. No request to the Lord Mayor or to the government could get much relief, at least not that I heard of. So the people began to use every trick they could imagine. They tried to deceive the watchmen, hide from them, send them away, or break out by force.

I could tell many stories of these tricks. Some were strange enough almost to be funny, if the time had not been so sad. Others ended in anger, injury, or death. The watchman had a hard and dangerous office. He was set at the door of a house full of fear, sickness, grief, and anger. He had to keep people inside who had done no crime, except that the plague had entered their home.

One morning, about eight o'clock, I was walking along Houndsditch when I heard a great noise. There was not a large crowd, because people were careful not

to gather or stand long together. Still, the outcry was loud enough to make me curious. I called to a man who looked out of a window and asked what had happened. He told me that it concerned a house which had been shut up.

A watchman had kept guard at the door of that house for two nights. The day watchman had also been there during the day. During all that time, they had heard almost nothing from inside. No one had asked for food, medicine, a doctor, or any other errand, which was usually the chief work of the watchman. Only once, on Monday afternoon, the night watchman had heard great crying and screaming in the house. He supposed that someone in the family was dying.

The night before, the dead-cart had stopped at that door. A servant-maid had been brought down dead and put into the cart. She was wrapped only in a green rug. After that, the watchman knocked at the door because of the crying he had heard. For a long time no one answered. At last someone looked out and spoke in an angry, broken voice, as if still crying.

“What do you want, knocking like that?” the person said. The watchman answered, “I am the watchman. How are you all? What is the matter?” The voice from the window only said, “What is that to you? Stop the dead-cart.” So the watchman stopped the cart and knocked again. The bellman called several times, “Bring out your dead,” but no one answered. At last the cart could wait no longer and went on to other houses.

The watchman did not know what to think. He waited until morning, when the day watchman came to take his place. The two men knocked for a long time, but still no one answered. They noticed that the upper window, where someone had spoken before, was still open. To satisfy themselves, they brought a long ladder. One of them climbed up and looked into the room.

Inside, he saw a woman lying dead on the floor in a miserable condition. She had almost no clothes on her. He called loudly and pushed his long staff through the window, striking the floor, but no one moved or answered. He heard no sound anywhere in the house. Then he climbed down and told the other watchman. The second man went up and saw the same thing.

They did not dare to go in through the window. Instead, they reported the

matter to a magistrate. The magistrate ordered the house to be opened, with a constable and other persons present so that nothing would be stolen. When they went inside, they found no one in the house except the dead young woman. She had been infected and past hope. The rest of the family had left her to die alone.

How they escaped was never certainly known. They may have opened a back door, gone over the tops of houses, or found some other secret way out. The cries the watchman had heard were probably the family's cries at parting from her. She was said to be the sister of the mistress of the house. The man of the house, his wife, children, and servants had all fled, whether sick or well. I did not learn where they went, and indeed I did not inquire much further.

Many such escapes were made from infected houses. Sometimes the family sent the watchman on an errand. He had to fetch food, medicine, a doctor, a surgeon, a nurse, or the dead-cart when needed. The rule said that he must lock the outer door and take the key with him. But people found ways around this. They had extra keys made, or they took off locks from the inside, and while the watchman was away they opened the door and went out.

When this trick became known, the officers changed their method. They ordered doors to be padlocked on the outside and fastened with bolts if necessary. But even this did not stop all escapes. A house in the street just inside Aldgate was shut up because a maid-servant was taken sick. The master of the house complained to the alderman and to the Lord Mayor through his friends. He agreed that the maid should be carried to the pest-house, but this was refused.

So the red cross was marked on the door, and a padlock was fixed outside. A watchman was set there, according to the public order. The master then saw that he, his wife, and his children were to be locked in with the sick girl. He called to the watchman and said, "You must fetch a nurse for this poor girl. If we are forced to nurse her ourselves, it will be certain death to us all." He also said plainly that no one in his family would go near her, because she lay in a high garret where she could not call for help.

The watchman agreed and went to find a nurse. While he was away, the master of the house used the time carefully. He broke a large hole from his shop into a

small stall under the shop window, where a cobbler had once worked. The cobbler was dead or gone, and the master had the key. He could not have made such noise if the watchman had been at the door. So he sat hidden in that place until the watchman came back with the nurse.

The next night he sent the watchman away again on some small errand, perhaps to an apothecary for a plaster for the maid. The errand was chosen so that the man would have to wait there for some time. While he was gone, the master took his wife and children out through the way he had prepared. They left the nurse and the watchman to deal with the poor sick maid. If she died, they would have to put her into the dead-cart and look after the empty house.

I could give many more stories of this kind. I heard them during that sad year, and I believe many were true in the main, though no one could know every detail in such a time. There was also violence against watchmen in many places. From the beginning of the visitation to the end, I believe eighteen or twenty watchmen were killed or so badly hurt that they were first taken up for dead. This happened when people in shut houses tried to get out and were opposed.

In truth, it could hardly be otherwise. There were as many prisons in London as there were shut houses. But the people inside had not been put there for crimes. They were imprisoned only because they were miserable and suspected of infection. That made the confinement harder for them to bear. A common prison has bars, bolts, and many officers, but each shut house usually had only one poor watchman at the door.

Many houses had more than one way out. Some had back doors, windows, yards, gardens, roofs, or passages into other streets. One man could not guard every way. While he stood at the front door, the family might be escaping from the back. While someone spoke to him from a window, others might be climbing over a wall. Fear, anger, sickness, and the desire for life made people daring, and the shutting up of houses soon proved much harder to manage than the orders had supposed.

Part 8: Breaking Out

There were many alleys in Coleman Street, and one case there showed how hard it was to keep a house truly shut. A house in White's Alley had a back window that opened into a court. From that court there was a passage into Bell Alley. A watchman was set at the front door by the constable. He stood there, or another man stood in his place, day and night. But the family went out quietly through the back window in the evening and left the poor watchmen guarding an empty house for nearly two weeks.

Not far from the same place, a worse thing happened. Some people used gunpowder against a watchman and burned the poor man terribly. While he cried out in pain, no one dared to come near him to help. At the same time, all the people in the house who were able to move escaped from the windows. Two sick persons were left inside, calling for help. Nurses were later sent to care for them, but those who had fled were not found until after the plague had become weaker.

In some houses, people climbed down from the windows in front of the watchman himself. They carried swords or pistols and threatened to shoot him if he moved or called for help. In other houses there were gardens, yards, walls, wooden fences, or back buildings. With the help of neighbours, or by paying servants, people crossed these places at night and went out through another door. So the shutting up of houses could never be fully trusted. It often made people more desperate and pushed them to escape at any risk.

This made the danger greater. Some who broke out of shut houses already had the plague upon them. They did not always know where to go, and sometimes they hardly knew what they were doing. They ran into the streets or fields in a state of fear and fever. Some died outside from sickness, hunger, or want of care. Others wandered into the country, where villages would not let them enter or sleep in barns, because everyone feared that Londoners carried death with them.

Sometimes these poor wanderers may not even have been infected. But no one would believe them. A man who came from London was enough to frighten a whole village. If he looked tired, pale, or hungry, people thought the plague was on him. He might beg for food or shelter, but doors stayed shut. In this way, the

fear of infection could become almost as cruel as the infection itself.

There was also another problem. When someone in a family first became sick, the family usually knew it before the officers did. The examiners could not come until they heard of the sickness. During that short time, the master of the house could send away his children, servants, or even all the family if he had another place for them. Many did this, and some saved their families by doing it. But others carried the disease with them without knowing it and brought death into houses that had kindly received them.

This helped create a dark report about infected people. Some said that people with the plague did not care if they infected others. Some even said they wished others to become as miserable as themselves. I do not believe this was generally true. There may have been a few cruel or careless cases, but it was not the common temper of the people. Most were confused, frightened, and driven by misery, not by a desire to harm.

People outside London also spoke harshly of the citizens. They said Londoners came into the country by force, brought infection with them, and had no care for others. Londoners, on the other hand, complained that country people were cruel because they refused them food, shelter, and passage in a time of distress. Both sides were partly unjust in their anger. Fear made country people hard, and desperation made Londoners press forward. It was a sad quarrel between people who were all afraid.

I must also say that London was not left without order. Some people did escape, and some did foolish or violent things. Yet the whole city was managed with great care by the Lord Mayor, aldermen, justices, churchwardens, constables, and other officers. Considering the terror of the time, the order kept in London was remarkable. The magistrates cannot fairly be blamed as if they had allowed everyone to run wild. They did more than many cities would have done in such a calamity.

The magistrates also showed concern for poor families that were shut up. They did not only make orders and then forget the people. Aldermen sometimes rode on horseback to infected houses and had the people asked at the windows whether

they had food, medicine, and proper care. If the people said they were well supplied, all was left as it was. But if they complained that an officer was careless, rude, absent, drunk, or asleep when help was needed, the officer was often removed and punished.

This was not always perfectly fair to the watchmen. A family might complain unjustly, and it was hard to hear both sides properly when one side stood in the street and the other cried from an upper window. But the magistrates usually chose to favour the shut-up family. If a watchman was wronged, another place could be found for him. If a family was wronged, the damage might be their lives, and no later apology could repair that.

Still, after all the care that could be used, the shutting up of houses had great evils in it. I do not know whether, on the whole, it truly stopped the infection. When the plague reached its full violence, it ran with terrible force, though houses were shut as strictly as possible. If every infected person could have been perfectly kept inside, then perhaps the healthy could not have been infected by them. But the danger often came from people who did not yet look sick and did not know they carried the disease.

Many cautious families found another way to protect themselves. When they saw the sickness coming near, they stored food, water, medicine, and other things. Then they shut themselves inside their own houses before any officer forced them to do so. Some Dutch merchants were especially careful in this way. They kept their houses like little forts under siege. No one went in, no one came out, and no one came near.

This voluntary shutting up was very different from being locked in with a sick person. Those who prepared early and stayed apart were almost as safe as if they had gone far into the country. I do not remember hearing that such families failed, if they kept their rule strictly. But this was possible only for people with enough money, space, and forethought. The poor could not easily lay up food for many weeks. They had to go out for small things almost every day.

The misery of families shut up by force is hard to express. From such houses came the most terrible cries. People were not only afraid of the sickness. They

were also afraid of being imprisoned with it. They saw husbands, wives, children, or servants fall sick in the same rooms where they had to eat, sleep, and wait. In many houses, fear itself seemed almost strong enough to kill.

I remember one story of a lady and her only daughter. The daughter was about nineteen years old and had a good fortune. They were lodgers in a house, and the house had not yet been shut up. The young woman, her mother, and their maid had gone out on some business. About two hours after they came home, the young woman said she felt unwell. Soon she vomited and had a violent pain in her head.

Her mother was filled with terror. "God help us," she said, "I hope my child has not the plague." She had the bed warmed and meant to put the girl to bed and make her sweat, which was a common remedy at the first fear of infection. While helping her daughter undress, the mother looked at her body by candlelight. Then she saw the fatal marks. She dropped the candle and screamed with such horror that anyone who heard her would have been shaken.

The poor mother did not cry only once. She fainted, recovered, ran up and down the stairs, and cried for hours like a person who had lost her mind. The young woman was already almost dead from the moment the marks were seen. She died in less than two hours. But the mother continued crying long after her child was gone, as if she could not understand what had happened. I was told that she never fully recovered her senses and died not long afterward.

Many people were said in the weekly bills to have died of fright. This may sound strange, but in that year it was easy to believe. Some were frightened out of their senses, some out of their memory, and some out of all clear thought. Even those who did not die at once were often broken by what they saw. The plague killed bodies, but fear wounded minds. No account of that year is true if it leaves out this invisible suffering.

Many people escaped from shut houses by bribing the watchmen. I confess that, at the time, I could hardly think this was the worst kind of bribery. The poor men were paid to let miserable families save themselves if they could. Still, the law had to be obeyed, and three watchmen were publicly whipped through the streets for allowing people to escape. Even after this punishment, money still

tempted some of them. Families who had another place to go often found a way out at night.

Some people, unable to pass safely along the roads, took tents and went into the fields. They carried beds or straw, food, and a few necessary things. There they lived apart, almost like hermits. No one dared to come near them, so they had more liberty than those locked in houses. I heard many stories of such people, some almost amusing and some very sad. I also heard of three poor men who found a way to preserve themselves by leaving the city in a hard but sensible manner, and I shall give their story later, because it may be useful to others.

## Part 9: Death in the Streets

I must return now to the time when houses were being shut up. In those first weeks, people still had enough freedom to watch what happened around them. Later, when the plague grew stronger, there was little talking from house to house and little safe movement in the streets. But in the earlier part, many things were seen and told. They showed how weak the rules could become when fear pressed hard on people.

There were no soldiers to help keep order in the shut-up houses. The king's guards were few, and most were with the Court at Oxford or in other places. A few remained at the Tower or Whitehall, but they were not enough for common street duty. The trained bands could not really be called together, because men feared the infection more than any command. So the watchmen stood almost alone at the doors of infected houses.

This made the watchmen less feared than they might otherwise have been. People broke out by force, by secret ways, or by clever tricks. Some who escaped were already infected, though not always fully aware of it. In their fear, they ran from place to place and thought first of saving themselves. This helped spread the report that infected people wished to infect others, but I do not believe that was generally true.

I knew of many good and serious people who acted in the opposite way. When

they felt the sickness upon them, they warned their own families not to come near. Some died without seeing their nearest relations, because they feared passing the disease to them. Such people did not wish to harm anyone. But those who broke out of shut houses were often in a different condition. They were frightened, hungry, half-sick, and desperate, and they hid their state because no one would receive them if the truth were known.

One story shows the danger clearly. A citizen had broken out of a house near Aldersgate Street and went along the road toward Islington. He first tried to enter the Angel Inn, and then the White Horse, but both refused him. After that, he came to the Pied Bull. He asked only for one night's lodging and said he was on his way into Lincolnshire. He also said that he was healthy and free from infection.

The people at the inn told him they had almost no room. The only bed they could give him was in a garret, high in the house. Some drovers were expected the next day, so he could stay there only for that night. He accepted it, and a servant went up with a candle to show him the room. He was well dressed and looked like a man who was not used to such poor lodging. When he saw the room, he sighed deeply.

"I have seldom slept in such a place as this," he said. The servant told him again that there was no better room. "Well," he answered, "I must manage. This is a dreadful time, and it is only for one night." Then he sat down on the side of the bed and asked the servant to bring him a pint of warm ale. She went down to fetch it, but the house was busy, and she forgot him. No one went up to him again that night.

The next morning, someone asked what had become of the gentleman. The servant suddenly remembered him and said, "Alas, I forgot him. He asked me to bring warm ale, but I never went back." Another person was sent up to see him. When that person entered the room, the gentleman was found dead and almost cold. He lay across the bed, with his clothes partly taken off, his eyes open, and one hand holding the rug tightly.

It was clear that he had died soon after the servant left him. If she had brought the ale, she might have found him dying or already dead. The whole house was

filled with fear. Until then, that place had been free from the sickness. But this one night brought infection into the inn and then into houses around it. I do not remember exactly how many died in the inn itself, but the number of plague deaths in Islington rose sharply the next week.

Many families had another way of escaping the danger of being shut up. When rich or comfortable families fled to the country, they often left their houses in the care of neighbours or relations. Some houses were simply locked, with boards nailed over the windows and doors. But many houses were left under the care of someone who stayed nearby. Because of this, some people had more than one house at their disposal.

If sickness appeared in one house, the master sometimes moved the rest of his family at once to another house before telling the examiner. Then he gave notice that one person was sick and had a nurse appointed. Sometimes another person was paid to remain in the infected house and take charge of it if the sick person died. In this way, a whole family might be saved. If they had all been shut in with the sick person, they might all have perished.

But this practice also caused great harm. Some people ran away with the rest of the family while the disease was already hidden among them. They did not yet look very sick, and perhaps they did not know their own danger. But they carried the infection into another house, another street, or another parish. Because they had to hide where they came from, they moved about freely. By trying to escape one danger, they often carried that danger to others.

From what I saw, I made several observations. First, the infection often entered citizens' houses through servants. Masters had to send servants into the streets for bread, beer, medicine, meat, or other small needs. The servants went to shops, bakehouses, markets, and other crowded places. There they met people who looked well but might already be infected. Then they brought the deadly breath home to the family.

Second, I believed it was a great mistake that London had only one pest-house. This was a house where infected people could be taken and cared for apart from others. The one beyond Bunhill Fields could hold only a small number. If there

had been many such places, each large and clean enough, many lives might have been saved. Sick servants and poor people could have gone there willingly, and whole families would not have needed to be locked together.

I do not say people should have been dragged there by force. But many would have gone if they had seen hope of care. I knew cases where a sick servant was sent away in time, or where the rest of the household withdrew from the infected room, and the family was preserved. I also knew cases where one person fell sick, the house was shut, and the whole family died. At last there was no one left even to bring the bodies to the door. The bearers had to go in and carry them out.

Third, I became fully persuaded that the disease spread by infection from person to person. It came through breath, sweat, sores, clothing, or some other hidden contact which even physicians could not fully explain. Some people said it was only a direct stroke from Heaven, striking one person and not another without any natural means. I could not accept that. God may rule all things, but He often works through means, and in this case the means of infection were plain enough.

I must also blame the people, including myself, for not preparing earlier. We had long warning, yet many made no store of food or necessary things. If more families had laid up provisions and stayed quietly in their houses, many might have been preserved. I was one of the careless ones. My servants still had to go out for small things, almost as before. Only when danger was very near did I see my mistake.

My household was small. I had an old woman who managed the house, one maid-servant, two apprentices, and myself. As the plague increased around us, I began to think with great anxiety about what I should do. Everywhere in the streets I saw things that filled me with horror. Some sick people suffered terrible swellings in the neck or groin. When these grew hard and would not break, the pain was almost more than a human body could bear.

Some people, unable to endure that pain, threw themselves from windows or killed themselves in other ways. Others cried and roared without stopping. Their voices came from houses as we passed, and the sound went straight to the heart.

At such moments, I often felt my courage fail. I repented of my decision to stay in London and wished that I had gone away with my brother and his family.

When I came home after seeing such things, I sometimes resolved not to go out again. For three or four days I would keep that resolution. I spent that time in prayer, fasting, serious thought, and thanks to God for preserving me and my family. I also read books and wrote down daily notes of what I had seen. From those notes I later took much of this account. My private religious thoughts I kept for myself and do not wish to make public.

I had a good friend named Dr Heath. He was both a skilful physician and a serious Christian, and his conversation supported me greatly. I often visited him, and he often came to see me. He gave me advice about things to hold in my mouth when I went into the streets, in the hope of preventing infection. At the beginning of August, when the plague became very violent near my home, he urged me strongly to lock myself and my family inside. He told me to close the windows and shutters, make strong smoke when any door or window had to be opened, and avoid going out as much as possible.

#### Part 10: Markets, Food, and Sudden Death

Dr Heath's advice was wise, and for a time I tried to follow it. We kept the windows fast shut, with the shutters and curtains closed. When a door or window had to be opened, we first made a strong smoke in the room. We used things with a sharp smell, such as pitch, brimstone, or gunpowder. People believed that such smoke might help to drive away infected air. Whether it truly helped or not, it gave the mind some comfort in a time when comfort was rare.

But I had not prepared early enough for a long retreat inside my house. Because of that, it was impossible for us to stay fully indoors. Still, I did what I could, even though it was late. I bought two sacks of meal, because I had an oven and could bake bread at home. For several weeks we made our own bread. I also bought malt and brewed as much beer as my casks could hold, enough, I thought, for five or six weeks.

I also laid in salt butter and Cheshire cheese. But I had no fresh meat. This was a serious lack, yet I thought it better to go without meat than to risk our lives for it. The butchers and slaughterhouses were on the other side of our street, and many butchers lived there. The plague was very violent among them. It did not seem safe even to cross the street and go among their shops.

Here I must observe something important. The need to go out and buy food was one of the great causes of ruin in the city. People caught the disease from one another on these daily errands. I also had strong reason to believe that food itself was sometimes touched by infection. Some people later said with great confidence that market people and country sellers were wonderfully preserved from the plague. I cannot speak so confidently. I am certain that the butchers of Whitechapel were terribly visited, and many of their shops were closed.

Those who still sold meat took new precautions. Some killed their meat farther away, near Mile End, and brought it to market on horses. Buyers and sellers were both afraid of touching one another. If a person bought a piece of meat, he often took it from the hook himself, not from the butcher's hand. The butcher would not take money directly. The buyer put the money into a pot of vinegar, kept there for that purpose.

Buyers also tried to carry the exact money, so that they would not need change. Many carried bottles of strong scents or perfumes in their hands. They held them close to their noses when they came near other people. All the care that could be used was used. But the poor could not always do these things. They had little money, little choice, and often no servant to send in their place.

The poor had to go to market almost every day. They could not buy enough food for many weeks, because they had no money for it and no room to store it. Some sent their children or servants, and some went themselves. This daily need brought many unhealthy people into the markets. Some went there healthy and brought death home with them. In this way, bread, meat, and small household needs became connected with fear.

We heard sad stories about these matters every day. Sometimes a man or woman fell down dead in the market. Such people often did not know they had

the plague until it had already reached the inside of the body. They might walk, talk, and buy food like others, and then suddenly sink down. Some had only time to sit on a bench, a stall, or a doorstep before they died. This made the markets places of terror as well as necessity.

Soon such sights became common in the streets too. When the plague was very strong in one part of London, dead bodies might be found here and there on the ground. At first, people stopped and called to neighbours when they saw such a thing. Later, almost no one stopped. If we saw a corpse in the street, we crossed to the other side. If the lane was too narrow, we turned back and looked for another way.

The body was usually left there until the officers heard of it or until night came. Then the bearers who followed the dead-cart took it away. These men were brave in their way, because they handled bodies that others dared not approach. Yet some of them were not honest. They sometimes searched the pockets of the dead. If the dead person was well dressed, they might even take clothes from the body.

In the markets, the butchers had officers ready for sudden deaths. If anyone died there, the body was put on a hand-barrow and carried quickly to the nearest churchyard. Such deaths were not always entered separately as people found dead in streets or fields. They were often placed under the general numbers of the plague. This is one reason why the printed bills could never show the whole truth of what happened.

As the sickness grew stronger, the markets themselves became thinner. There were fewer goods and fewer buyers than before. To help both the city and the country people, the Lord Mayor made a useful arrangement. Country sellers were stopped at the streets leading into London. They sat down there with their goods, sold them at the edges of the town, and then went away again. This saved them from going deep into infected streets.

This plan encouraged the country people to come. They sold food near the entrances of the city and even in open fields. Such places included the fields beyond Whitechapel, Spitalfields, St George's Fields in Southwark, Bunhill Fields, and a large field near Islington. Officers and servants went there to buy

food for families whose masters stayed indoors. Many careful households used this method. Because of it, country sellers came more willingly and were less often harmed.

As for my own small family, we had our bread, butter, cheese, and beer. So I took Dr Heath's advice and locked us up as much as I could. I resolved that we would live for some months without fresh meat rather than buy it at the risk of our lives. My household accepted this hardship, because the danger outside was plain. A simple meal eaten in safety seemed better than richer food bought from a place of death.

Yet I must confess that I could not fully restrain my curiosity. Though I kept my family indoors, I still went out myself more than I should have done. I often came home frightened by what I had seen, and then promised myself that I would not go again. But after a few days, some need or some strong desire to observe the city drew me out. I did go less often than before, but I did not stop entirely.

I had one real duty that took me out. My brother's house in Coleman Street parish was still in my care. At first I went there every day, but later only once or twice a week. On these walks, terrible scenes passed before my eyes. People fell dead in the streets. Women screamed from windows. Families cried out from rooms where no neighbour could safely enter to help them.

One day, as I passed through Tokenhouse Yard in Lothbury, a window was suddenly opened above my head. A woman gave three terrible screams. Then she cried, "Oh! death, death, death!" in a voice that chilled my blood. There was no one else to be seen in the whole street. No other window opened, because people no longer came out from curiosity. No one could help, and so I went on.

A little farther, in Bell Alley, I heard an even more dreadful cry. It came from inside a house, not directly from a window. Women and children were running about the rooms and screaming like people out of their minds. Then someone opened a garret window, and a person across the alley called, "What is the matter?" A voice answered, "Oh Lord, my old master has hanged himself!" The other person asked, "Is he quite dead?" and the answer came back, "Yes, quite dead, quite dead and cold."

Such cases were not rare. People in the rage of the disease, or in the terrible pain of their swellings, sometimes lost control of themselves. Some threw themselves from windows. Some shot themselves. Some mothers, in madness, harmed their own children. Others died from grief, fear, or sudden surprise, even when the infection itself had not yet taken them. The plague killed in many ways, and terror helped it.

The pain of the swellings was especially violent. Doctors and surgeons tried to draw them out or make them break, because if they broke and ran, the patient often recovered. But the treatment itself could be terrible. If the swelling grew hard, they cut it or burned it with strong medicines. Many poor people screamed under such treatment. Some died during it, and some, having no one to hold or comfort them, ran out into the street or toward the river in their pain.

At the same time, dark stories were told about nurses and watchmen. People said that hired nurses starved the sick, robbed them, or even hastened their deaths. They said watchmen sometimes broke into houses where only one sick person remained and threw the body into the dead-cart before life was fully gone. I cannot say that no such crimes happened. Some robberies certainly happened, and a few people were punished. But I do not believe murder was as common as frightened people later claimed.

Robbery was more certain than murder. Some nurses stole clothes, linen, rings, or money from those they cared for. Some thieves entered houses where all the family were dead and took bedding and clothes, even from the bodies. I heard of a man and his daughter found dead and naked in a house in Houndsditch, their bedclothes stolen. Because of such things, parish officers began to recommend nurses and keep account of who was sent into each house. Fear could make people cruel, but greed could make them worse.

## Part 11: The Apprentice and the Dead Cart

Most of these robberies were small in kind, though not small in guilt. Nurses often took clothes, linen, rings, money, or other things that lay near the sick person.

They did this especially when the person under their care had died. I heard of one nurse who, many years later, confessed on her deathbed that she had stolen much during the plague. Her own memory of it filled her with horror at the end of her life.

As for murder by nurses, I never found sure proof that it was as common as people said. Stories were told everywhere. One nurse was said to have laid a wet cloth on a dying man's face. Another was said to have smothered a young woman in a faint. Others were accused of starving the sick or giving them harmful things. But these tales always seemed to have the same form, and they always seemed to happen far away from the place where the story was told.

If we heard the story in Whitechapel, people said it had happened in St Giles, Westminster, or Holborn. If people heard it in the west, they said it had happened near Whitechapel, the Minories, or Cripplegate. If someone told it in the city, then it had happened in Southwark. If someone told it in Southwark, then it had happened in the city. This made me think that many of these stories were born from fear rather than fact.

Still, the stories had one useful effect. People became more careful about whom they allowed into their houses. When they needed a nurse, they tried to get one recommended by a parish officer or by some person they trusted. But recommended nurses were not always easy to find. The poor suffered most from this. Many infected poor people had no food, no medicine, no doctor, no apothecary, and no nurse to care for them.

Some of these poor people died crying for help from their windows. They called not only for medicine, but even for bread or drink. It must be said, however, that when such cases were made known to the Lord Mayor, help was usually sent. The city officers did not willingly leave the poor to starve. Yet there were too many houses, too many sick people, and too few safe hands to reach everyone in time.

Some people who were not very poor also died alone. Their wives and children had perhaps been sent away. Their servants had been dismissed because of fear or cost. Then, when the master himself fell sick, no one remained in the house to

help him. A man might have money and still lack a human hand to bring him water. In such a time, loneliness could be as deadly as poverty.

A neighbour of mine once sent his apprentice to collect money from a shopkeeper near Whitecross Street. The apprentice was about eighteen years old. He came to the shopkeeper's door and found it shut. He knocked hard and thought he heard someone answer inside, but he was not sure. He waited, knocked again, and then knocked a third time. At last he heard someone coming slowly down the stairs.

The man of the house opened the door. He was only partly dressed, with a yellow flannel waistcoat, a white cap on his head, loose shoes on his feet, and no stockings. The young man told me afterward that death was already in his face. The shopkeeper looked at him and said, "Why do you trouble me like this?" The boy, though frightened, answered that his master had sent him for the money that was owed.

The man said, "Very well, child. As you pass Cripplegate Church, tell them to ring the bell." Then he shut the door and went upstairs again. He died that same day, perhaps even that same hour. The apprentice himself told me this, and I believe it. This was still before the plague had reached its full height. At that time, people were still ringing bells for the dead, but soon even that ceremony had to stop because there were too many deaths.

In spite of all this misery, thieves still looked for chances to steal. One morning, about eleven o'clock, I went to my brother's house in Coleman Street parish to see that all was safe. His house had a small court in front, with a brick wall and a gate. Inside were warehouses where different goods were stored. In one warehouse there were several packs of women's high-crowned hats, which had come from the country and were probably meant to be sent abroad.

As I came near Swan Alley, I saw three or four women wearing high-crowned hats. One of them, and perhaps more, also carried hats in her hands. I did not at first think they had come from my brother's warehouse, because I did not know he had such goods there. As people often did in that time, I crossed the way to avoid meeting them closely. But when I reached the gate, another woman came

out with more hats.

I asked her what business she had there. She answered that other people were there too and that she had done no more than they had. I hurried to the gate, and she escaped before I could stop her. Just then I saw two more women crossing the yard toward the gate, with hats on their heads and under their arms. I pushed the gate shut behind me, and the spring lock fastened it. Then I took the hats from them and asked what they were doing.

One of the women did not look like a thief. She began to cry and said, "We have done wrong, but we were told these goods had no owner. Please take them back. Look over there, and you will see more people doing the same." I pitied her and let her go. Then I looked toward the warehouse and saw six or seven more women calmly trying on hats, as if they were buying them in a shop. I was amazed, not only by the theft, but also because I had to go near so many people at a time when everyone feared contact.

I spoke sharply to them and took the key from the gate. I told them they were now my prisoners and that I would fetch the Lord Mayor's officers. They begged me not to do so. They said the gate and warehouse door had already been open, and that other people had broken in before them. This was probably true, because the lock had been broken and many hats were already gone. At last I decided not to be too severe.

It was not a time for long legal business. To seek justice would require me to go from person to person and meet people whose health I did not know. The plague was then killing thousands each week. So I took the names and addresses of some women who lived nearby and warned them that my brother might call them to account later. Then I spoke to them about the wickedness of stealing during such a judgement. I told them the dead-cart might stop at their own doors before many hours had passed.

While I was speaking, two men from the neighbourhood came to help me. They knew my brother and knew some of the women. One of these men was John Hayward. He was under-sexton of St Stephen, Coleman Street. That meant he helped dig graves and carry the dead. During the plague he went with the dead-

cart and the bell, fetching bodies from houses, rooms, and narrow alleys where carts could not go.

Coleman Street parish had many long alleys and courts, such as White's Alley, Cross Key Court, Swan Alley, Bell Alley, and White Horse Alley. In such places, the dead had to be carried on a hand-barrow before they could be placed in the cart. John Hayward did this work through the whole visitation, yet he never caught the disease. His wife also worked as a nurse to infected people and cared for many who died, but she too escaped. He told me that he used little protection except garlic and rue in his mouth and tobacco. His wife washed her head with vinegar and kept her head-clothes wet with it.

This shows something strange about the poor. The plague was worst among them, yet they were often the most fearless in going near it. I do not call this true courage, because it did not always come from faith or wisdom. Often it came from need. They took the most dangerous work because they had to live. They watched shut houses, carried the sick to the pest-house, nursed dying people, and carried the dead to their graves.

It was under John Hayward's care that the well-known story of the piper happened. Some people later told it as a joke, but John assured me that the main story was true. The piper was not blind, as some said. He was a poor, simple man who walked about at night playing his pipe from door to door. Public houses sometimes gave him food, drink, or small coins, and he played and sang for them.

During the plague, this poor man almost starved. Still, he kept walking about in his usual way. When people asked him how he was, he would answer that the dead-cart had not taken him yet, but had promised to call next week. One night, after eating more than usual at a public house, he lay down on a stall near London Wall and fell fast asleep. Near him, people from a nearby house placed a body that had truly died of the plague. They seem to have thought the sleeping piper was also dead.

When John Hayward came with the bell and the cart, the bearers found two bodies on the stall. They lifted both with their tools and threw them into the dead-cart. The piper slept through it all. The cart went on, taking in more bodies from

other houses. At last it reached the burial place. When the cart stopped before its sad load was thrown into the pit, the piper woke and pushed his head up among the dead.

“Where am I?” he cried. The men were badly frightened at first. Then John Hayward said, “Lord bless us! There is someone in the cart who is not quite dead.” Another man asked, “Who are you?” The fellow answered, “I am the poor piper. Where am I?” Hayward said, “You are in the dead-cart, and we are going to bury you.” The piper answered, “But I am not dead, am I?” Then, though they were still shaken, the men could not help laughing a little. They helped him down, and he went away about his business.

Some people say he took out his pipes in the cart and frightened the bearers so much that they ran away. John Hayward did not tell the story so. He said only that the poor piper was carried away in the dead-cart while he slept and woke before he was buried. I believe John’s version. The dead-carts were not tied to one parish only. One cart often passed through several parishes, and many bodies from the city were carried out to burial grounds beyond the crowded streets, because there was no room left near their homes.

I must now speak more of the condition of the poor. London was not prepared for such a visitation. There were no great public stores of meal or grain for the poor, as some cities in other countries had. When the rich fled and ordinary trade stopped, thousands lost their work at once. Makers of ribbons, lace, clothes, hats, gloves, furniture, and many other goods were dismissed. Their masters could no longer sell such things when everyone was thinking of death, not fashion.

Merchants also stopped much of their business, and many ships no longer came up the river or went out as before. Watermen, carmen, porters, sailors, ship workers, builders, carpenters, masons, painters, and many others lost their daily bread. Families who stayed in London spent less, and families who left dismissed servants. Many footmen, shop workers, bookkeepers, and maid-servants were suddenly without homes, wages, or friends. This was one of the saddest parts of the whole calamity.

If great charity had not been sent from many places, the city could hardly have

remained peaceful. Money came from absent citizens, from towns in other parts of England, and from many generous people. The Lord Mayor and other magistrates used it to relieve the poor as well as they could. They also gave work to many by employing them as watchmen, nurses, bearers, and other necessary officers. It was terrible work, but it kept many from starvation. In this way, even the sad labour of the plague helped prevent a worse disaster of hunger, disorder, and violence.

## Part 12: The Waterman's Story

The work given to poor people helped keep London from greater trouble. Men were hired as watchmen, bearers, cart-drivers, and grave-diggers. Women who had lost their places as servants were often hired as nurses. This was sad employment, but it was still employment. Without it, many thousands would have had no food, no money, and no hope, and fear might have turned into open disorder.

Yet there was another dark truth. The plague itself carried off great numbers of the poorest people during its worst weeks. From the middle of August to the middle of October, the deaths were so many that the mind could hardly hold the number. The weekly bills said that thousands died each week. But those bills could not be exact. The carts often worked in darkness, the dead were thrown together into pits, and many clerks and officers died or were too frightened to keep full accounts.

Some parishes, especially in the east and north, suffered beyond what the printed numbers showed. Aldgate, Whitechapel, Stepney, and Cripplegate were struck with terrible force. Many who lived through those days believed that the true number of deaths was far higher than the bills reported. I also believed this from what I saw and heard. Many poor people died in fields, lanes, and hidden places, and their deaths were never written down.

Some poor creatures, already sick and full of despair, wandered away from the city. They went into fields, woods, hedges, or lonely places and lay down there to die. People from nearby villages sometimes left food for them at a distance. If the

sick were able, they came and took it. If they were not able, the food was later found untouched, and the person lay dead nearby.

The country people buried such bodies as best they could. They dug holes at a distance, then used long poles with hooks to drag the bodies into the pits. They stood where the wind would blow the smell away from them. Then they threw earth over the bodies from as far away as they could. In this way many went out of the world without name, record, or funeral.

I did not often walk far into the fields, except sometimes toward Bethnal Green and Hackney. But when I did go out, I saw poor wanderers at a distance. No one came near anyone else if he could avoid it. If we saw a person coming toward us, we usually turned aside or walked away. This was not always lack of pity. It was the common rule of self-preservation in those fearful days.

The city itself looked almost like a place without life. The broad street where I lived, especially the side where the butchers had lived beyond the bars, looked more like a green field than a street. Grass grew in places where carts, coaches, and people had once passed every hour. Even great streets within the city had grass growing in them. There were hardly any carts or coaches except a few country carts bringing food, hay, straw, roots, or beans.

Coaches had become dangerous things in people's minds. No one knew who had ridden in them last. Sick people were often carried in them to the pest-house or to other places of care. Some died inside them on the way. Because of this, many people would rather walk than sit in a closed coach whose last passenger might have carried the plague.

By this time, many doctors and surgeons were dead or afraid to go out. For about a month, I believe that the daily number of deaths was far higher than the printed bills could show. One of the worst times was at the beginning of September, when the disease came fully into the eastern parishes. Aldgate, where I lived, seemed almost surrounded by death. In the Minories, Houndsditch, Butcher Row, and the alleys near me, hardly one house in twenty seemed free from infection.

During this worst period, I kept myself indoors for about two weeks. From my chamber window I sometimes saw strange and sorrowful sights. There was a man

named Solomon Eagle who went about crying judgement on the city. He was not sick with the plague, but his mind seemed deeply shaken. He sometimes walked almost naked, with a pan of burning charcoal on his head, warning people in a terrible manner.

I also heard of a clergyman who went through the streets of Whitechapel in the evenings. He lifted up his hands and repeated prayers for God to spare His people. I cannot say whether grief had disordered his mind or whether he acted from pure religious zeal. Many ministers had fled, but not all. Some still kept churches open, prayed with the people, and spoke to them of repentance and hope as long as anyone would come to listen.

It was a deeply moving thing to hear dying people call for ministers. They wanted someone to pray with them, comfort them, and guide them when death was near. Many cried aloud for mercy and confessed their sins. Some warned others not to wait until a day of distress before turning to God. Their groans and cries stayed in my memory, and even later I seemed still to hear them.

Though God had preserved my health, I became restless from staying so long indoors. I wanted air and movement. At last I went out to carry a letter for my brother to the post-house. The streets were very silent. At the post-house yard, I saw a small leather purse lying on the ground, with keys and money in it. No one would touch it, because no one knew who had dropped it or whether it carried infection.

A man finally decided to take it up, but with great care. He brought a pail of water and set it near the purse. Then he threw gunpowder on the purse and made a little trail of powder from it. He set fire to the powder, so the purse was smoked and burned. Then he used red-hot tongs to lift it and shook the money into the water. This shows how careful people had become, even about a little money.

Around the same time, I walked out toward Bow, because I wanted to see how things were managed on the river and among the ships. I had some interest in shipping and thought that living on a ship might be one of the safest ways to avoid infection. I went through the fields from Bow toward Bromley and then down to Blackwall. There I came near the stairs where people took boats.

On the bank I saw a poor man walking alone. The houses near him were mostly shut up. I spoke to him from a distance and asked how people were doing there. “Almost desolate, sir,” he said. “All dead or sick. In this village and over there at Poplar, there are few families where half are not dead already and the rest sick.” Then he pointed to one house and told me all inside were dead.

I asked him why he was there alone. He said, “I am a poor, desolate man. God has not yet visited me, though my family is visited, and one of my children is dead.” I asked what he meant, since he said he was not visited. He pointed to a very small wooden house and said that his poor wife and two children were there. His wife and one child had the plague, but he did not go near them. As he said this, tears ran down his face, and I confess that tears came to my eyes too.

I asked, “How can you leave your own wife and children?” He answered at once, “Oh, sir, I do not leave them. I work for them as much as I can. Blessed be God, I keep them from want.” As he said this, he lifted his eyes toward heaven. I saw that he was no false speaker. He was a serious and honest man, thankful even in such misery because he could still feed his family.

He told me that he was a waterman. His boat was his house. He worked in it by day and slept in it by night. What he earned, he laid on a broad stone at some distance from his house. Then he called aloud until his wife or child heard him. They came out and took the money or food after he had moved away. In this way he helped them without touching them or entering the infected house.

I asked how he could earn money as a waterman when so few people travelled by water. He pointed to ships lying at anchor in the river. Some families had shut themselves up on board those ships to escape the infection on land. He served them by bringing food, carrying letters, and doing necessary errands. At night he tied his boat near one of the ship’s boats and slept alone. “Blessed be God,” he said, “I have been preserved until now.”

I asked if those on the ships allowed him to come near after he had been on shore in such an infected place. He said he seldom went up the ship’s side. He brought goods to their boat, or lay beside the ship while they lifted the things on board. He did not go into houses on shore, nor did he touch anyone, not even his

own family. When he bought provisions, he did not buy them in the infected village. He rowed to Greenwich, Woolwich, or to farmhouses on the Kent side, where people knew him.

He had come ashore that day only to learn how his family was and to give them what he had earned. He had four shillings, a bag of bread, salt fish, and some meat. His wife had answered him from the house, but she was too weak to come out at once. He said her swelling had broken, and he hoped she might recover. But he feared the child would die. Then he stopped speaking and wept.

I told him that he had a sure comforter if he had given himself to the will of God. He answered, "It is infinite mercy if any of us are spared. Who am I to complain?" His words struck my heart. I thought how much stronger his faith was than mine. I had stayed in London partly by choice, while he had no safe place to flee. Yet he used every possible care and trusted God with a humble heart.

After a while, his wife opened the door and called, "Robert, Robert." He ran down to his boat, brought up the sack of food, and laid everything on the stone. Then he moved away. His wife came out with a little boy and took the things as well as her weakness allowed. She called out that one captain had sent this and another captain had sent that. Then she added, "God has sent it all. Give thanks to Him."

I asked the man whether he had left her the four shillings too. He called, "Rachel, did you take up the money?" She answered that she had. He asked how much it was, and she said, "Four shillings and a groat." Then he said, "The Lord keep you all," and began to go away. I could not leave him without helping. I called him back and gave him four more shillings to lay on the stone for his wife.

The poor man could hardly speak for thanks. Tears ran down his face. He called Rachel again and told her that God had moved the heart of a stranger to help them. She also showed great thankfulness, both to Heaven and to me, and took up the money joyfully. I spent no money that whole year which seemed to me better given. The sight of that poor family stayed with me long afterward.

Later I asked him about the ships in the river. He told me that many ships, from near Greenwich up toward Limehouse and Redriff, had families on board. They

lay two by two in the middle of the stream, and some had several families each. I asked if the infection had reached them. He said he believed most had been preserved, except a few ships where people had not been careful enough to keep the sailors from going ashore.

When the tide came in, he agreed to carry me to Greenwich, after I assured him honestly that I was in health. I would not have gone if I thought I might harm him or his family. From the hill near Greenwich I saw the river full of ships, lying in long lines. It was a surprising sight. I thought that many thousands of people connected with shipping had found a kind of small refuge there, away from the worst violence of the plague.

I returned home well satisfied with the journey. I was glad that such places of safety had been found for so many families. As the plague grew worse, some ships moved farther down the river, and some even went out to sea or to safer harbours. Yet not all were safe. Some people had gone on board too late, carrying the infection with them, and some died there. Still, compared with the crowded streets, the ships were among the wiser shelters that men found in that dreadful time.

### Part 13: Human Hearts Under Fear

Here I must notice something that caused much destruction in London. People in some parts of the town believed for a long time that the plague would not reach them. This was especially true near the river, in Redriff, Wapping, Ratcliff, Limehouse, and parts of Southwark. They saw the disease begin far away in Long Acre and Drury Lane. They saw it move slowly through the west and then toward the city. Because it did not come to them at once, they began to think they were safe.

Some people had special reasons for this false hope. They thought the smell of pitch, tar, oil, rosin, and other things used in shipping would protect them. These smells were common near the river, among sailors, ship workers, and watermen. Others said the plague was already becoming weaker before it came to their side of town. There was a little truth in this, because the sickness did lessen in some

western parishes while it grew in others. But this was not safety. It was only delay.

Because of this false security, many people near the river did not prepare. They did not leave London while the roads were still open to them. They did not shut themselves up with food and other necessary things. Some even received friends and relations from infected parts of the city, thinking that Wapping, Ratcliff, and Limehouse were places of refuge. By doing this, they may have helped bring the plague more quickly into their own streets.

When the sickness came upon them at last, it came with great violence. Then they were surprised and unready. It was too late to go into the country, because villages would not let Londoners come near. No one wanted strangers on the road, at an inn, or near a town. Some poor people who wandered out on the Surrey side were later found starved in woods and open places. Country people feared to help them, because help might bring death into their own homes.

This was one reason many people near the river went onto ships. If they did this early, and if they carried enough food and water, they were safer than most people on land. But many ran on board too late and in great fear. They had little bread, little drink, and no clear plan. Some ships had no proper crew to move them down the river or to buy supplies safely. Such people often had to send boats to shore, and by that contact the infection came to them.

Richer people could sometimes live in ships, but poorer people used smaller boats. Some went into hoys, smacks, lighters, fishing boats, or watermen's boats. This was a hard life. Many poor watermen stayed in their boats by day and by night, trying to earn food and keep away from infected houses. But because they had to go about for work and provisions, the disease reached them too. Some died alone in their small boats and were not found until no one dared to touch them.

The distress at that seafaring end of London was very great. Yet this was a time when each person's own safety pressed so hard on the mind that pity often became weak. Men had death at their own doors, or even inside their own rooms. They did not know where to flee or how to save their families. When fear becomes so close, it can make the heart smaller. People who might once have helped others now thought first of themselves.

In some cases, children ran away from their parents when the parents were sick. In fewer cases, but still terrible ones, parents left their children. There were even dreadful examples of mothers, driven out of their senses by fear and pain, killing their own children. One such case happened not far from where I lived. The poor woman did not live long enough to understand fully what she had done. Such things should not be judged as ordinary crimes. They show how far terror had broken the minds of some people.

I do not say that all love disappeared. Many people showed strong affection, duty, and pity. Some stayed beside sick relations when they might have saved themselves by leaving. Some parents died nursing their children. Some children refused to leave father or mother, though the danger was clear. But the general state of the city was so full of fear that many natural feelings were weakened. The plague did not only attack the body. It also tested every bond of family and friendship.

Among the most miserable people were women who were with child. When their time came, they often had no proper help. Many midwives were dead, especially those who served the poor. Many others had fled into the country. A poor woman could hardly find a midwife unless she paid far more than usual. If she did find help, it was often from an unskilled person who did not know what to do.

The result was terrible. Many women died in childbed. Many children were born dead or died at once. Sometimes the mother had the plague, and no one dared come near her. Sometimes both mother and child died together. The weekly bills showed a great increase in deaths connected with childbirth, but even those numbers could not show the full misery. It was truly a dark day for women who were with child or nursing infants.

Nursing mothers suffered greatly too. If the mother died, the child might be left without milk or care. In some houses, a dead mother and a living infant were found together, the child still trying to feed. In other cases, the mother herself was infected before she knew it and passed the disease to the child through close care and nursing. Sometimes the child died before the mother. Sometimes both died

within a short time.

I heard one story from the parish where I lived. A mother had a child who was unwell, and she sent for an apothecary to look at it. When he came, she was holding the child at her breast and seemed healthy enough. But when he came nearer, he saw the deadly marks on the very breast with which she was feeding the child. He did not wish to frighten her suddenly. He gently asked to take the child, laid it in the cradle, and saw the marks on the child too.

He went away to send medicine or warning to the father, but there was no time. Both mother and child died before help could return. No one could say with certainty whether the mother infected the child or the child infected the mother, though the first seemed more likely. I also heard of another mother who received back her child from a nurse who had died of the plague. Her love would not let her refuse the child. She took it into her arms and died with it.

There was also the sad case of a tradesman in East Smithfield. His wife was expecting her first child and fell into labour while the plague was upon her. He could not find a midwife or a nurse. His two servants fled from the house. He ran from door to door like a man out of his mind, begging for help, but no one would come. At last a watchman promised to send a nurse in the morning.

The poor husband went back and did what he could by himself. He helped his wife as if he were the midwife, but the child came dead into the world. About an hour later, his wife died in his arms. He sat holding her dead body until morning. When the watchman came with the nurse, they found him still there, broken with grief. He died a few hours later, not from the plague, as far as anyone could see, but from sorrow.

I could tell many such stories, but no full account can be given. Often the whole family died, and no one remained to tell exactly what happened. Sometimes only cries were heard from the street. Sometimes a window was opened, a voice called for help, and then all became silent. In such cases, the city learned the story only when the dead-cart came, or when officers entered the house and found what death had left behind.

At this same time, another public measure must be remembered. The Lord

Mayor and the physicians ordered that dogs and cats should be killed. These animals moved from house to house and street to street, and people feared they might carry infection in their fur. Officers were appointed to carry out this order. The number killed was said to be extremely great. People spoke of tens of thousands of dogs and far more cats.

Efforts were also made to kill mice and rats. Poison was laid for them, and great numbers were destroyed. Whether all this truly helped, I cannot say with certainty. But people believed that any creature moving freely between houses might carry danger. The city had been unprepared in almost every way. When the plague had already come, men tried many harsh measures that might have been less necessary if better preparation had been made earlier.

This thought brings me back to the three poor men whom I mentioned before. Their story began in Wapping, among people who had long believed their part of London would be spared. One was a biscuit-maker, one was a sailmaker, and one was a joiner. Two of them were said to be brothers. Their conduct, though they were poor men, showed more sense than the behaviour of many richer people.

One day John, the biscuit-maker and an old soldier, spoke to his brother Thomas, the sailmaker. "Brother Tom," he said, "what will become of us? The plague is growing hot in the city, and it is coming this way. What shall we do?" Thomas answered that he did not know. He feared that if the plague came into Wapping, he would be turned out of his lodging. The people with whom he lived were kind enough, but they knew he went out every day for work, and they were beginning to think of shutting themselves up and letting no one come near.

#### Part 14: John, Thomas, and Richard Leave London

John listened to his brother and saw that Thomas was truly afraid. Thomas had work for only a short time longer. After that, he would have no wages, no sure lodging, and no safe place to wait. John was in nearly the same state. The people in the house where he lodged had gone into the country, all except a maid, and she was soon to leave too. When she shut the house, John would be turned out into

the world with nowhere to sleep.

“Brother,” John said, “if they turn you out, I do not know who will take you in. People are afraid of one another now. A man can hardly find a room anywhere.” Thomas answered that the people in his lodging were kind enough, but they feared him because he went out each day to work. They spoke of locking themselves inside and letting no one come near them. John could not blame them for that. If they meant to stay in town, they were right to make themselves as safe as they could.

Thomas said he might also be willing to stay indoors. He had almost finished one set of sails for his master, and after that there would be little more work. Trade was stopping everywhere. Workmen and servants were being dismissed in every part of London. “I might be glad to be shut in too,” he said, “if they would let me stay with them. But I do not think they will agree to it.” His voice was low, because he already knew the answer. Fear had made even good people careful and hard.

John then spoke more strongly. “What shall you do, Tom? And what shall I do? I have almost no place left either. I am resolved to go away if I can only know where to go.” Thomas shook his head. He said they had been foolish not to leave earlier, when the roads were still easier. Now, if they tried to travel, people might not let them pass through towns. They might not sell them food, even for money. They might drive them back as if they were enemies.

John answered in the voice of an old soldier. “If they deny me food when I offer money, I will take it before their eyes,” he said. Thomas warned him not to talk as if he were still in war. This was not a camp in the Low Countries. These were frightened English towns, trying to keep the plague away from their own people. “We must not rob them,” Thomas said. “They have reason to be afraid.” John answered that he did not mean robbery. He only said that no town had a right to starve a traveller who was trying to save his life.

The two brothers argued for a long time. Thomas said that if one town refused them, they could go back. John answered that the town behind them might refuse them too. Then they would die between two places, with no road open before them and none behind. Thomas said the laws might treat them as wandering poor men

and send them back to their own settlement. John answered that they were not wandering for idleness, but travelling to preserve their lives. "Is not saving our lives a lawful reason?" he said. "Everyone knows the plague is in London. We do not need to pretend."

At last John spoke the thought that was strongest in him. "If we stay here, we are sure to die," he said. "We have no house of our own and no safe lodging in another man's house. We cannot lie in the street at such a time. We might as well climb into the dead-cart at once. If we go away, we can only die. So I am resolved to go." Thomas wanted to go too, but he did not know where. "Here we were born," he said sadly, "and here we must die."

John did not accept that. "The whole kingdom is my country," he said. "If my house is on fire, must I stay inside because I was born there? London is infected, and I was born in England, not only in one street. I have a right to live in England if I can." Thomas still feared the roads, the constables, the towns, and the hunger that might come. But John's words stayed in his mind. They parted for that time without a full decision, yet both knew that the question would return.

This first talk was near the beginning of July. At that time, the plague was strong in the west and north of London, but Wapping, Ratcliff, Limehouse, Poplar, Deptford, and Greenwich were still almost free. Not one person had yet died of the plague in the whole parish of Stepney, and the south side of Whitechapel Road was still untouched. Yet the weekly bill had already risen to more than a thousand. The danger was moving, and wise men could see that safe places might not remain safe for long.

Two weeks later, the brothers met again. The matter had changed greatly. The weekly bill was now much higher, and the disease was growing fast. Some people had begun to die in Redriff and in Ratcliff Highway. Thomas came to John in great fear, because he had been warned out of his lodging and had only one week to find another place. John was already worse off. He had begged leave from his master, the biscuit-maker, to sleep in an outhouse near the workhouse. His bed was only straw, with old biscuit sacks under him and over him.

Now they resolved to leave. There was no work, no wages, and no safe lodging.

They would go as far as they could from the infection and live on their small money as long as it lasted. If they could find work in the country, they would take any honest work, however rough. While they were planning this, a third man heard of it. He was Richard, a joiner, and he knew Thomas well. He asked to join them, and they agreed.

The three men did not have the same amount of money. Thomas had the most, because he had been careful and had saved a little. But he was lame and less able than the others to earn money on the road. So they made one common purse. Whatever money each man had would go into it, and whatever any man earned later would also go into it. This was a wise and honest agreement. In danger, men who travel together must either trust one another or fail.

They decided to carry as little baggage as possible. At first they meant to travel on foot, and they hoped to go far enough to be truly safe. But they could not agree on the road. They talked much and still had no firm plan, even on the morning when they meant to leave. At last Thomas, who had been a sailor, gave advice. He said the weather was very hot, so they should travel north if they could. Then the sun would not beat full on their faces and chests.

Thomas also said they should think about the wind. If the wind blew from London toward them, it might carry bad air from the infected city. This may not have been a perfect rule, but in that time people thought much about air and wind. John and Richard agreed that it was at least sensible to avoid the wind from the worst parts if they could. John then added another practical thought. They could not expect lodging in inns, and it would be hard to sleep in the open air every night.

“Tom,” John said, “you are a sailmaker. You can make us a small tent. I can set it up each night and take it down each morning. Then we need not care about the inns.” Richard did not like this plan at first. He said that, with his hatchet and mallet, he could build them a rough shelter each night. He believed a shelter of branches and boards would serve as well as a tent. John and Richard argued about this for some time, but at last John won. A tent would be quicker, cleaner, and safer.

The problem was carrying it. The weather was hot, and the men did not want to load themselves like packhorses. Then good fortune helped them. Thomas's master had a rope-walk as well as a sailmaking business, and he had a small old horse that he was not using. He was willing to help the three honest men and gave them the horse to carry their baggage. He also gave Thomas an old worn sail, in payment for three days of work. The sail was no longer useful for a ship, but it was more than good enough to make a tent.

John, with his soldier's experience, showed them how to cut and shape the sail. They prepared poles and staves to hold it up. Soon they had their equipment ready: three men, one tent, one small horse, one gun, and Richard's bag of tools. John said he would not go without a weapon. He was no longer only a biscuit-maker now, he said, but a trooper again. Richard carried tools because they might help him earn food or lodging by honest work.

On the morning they set out, Thomas looked at his small compass and said the wind was blowing from the north-west by west. So they chose to move in a north-westerly direction if they could. But leaving Wapping was not simple. The plague was very violent on the north side of the city, especially near Shoreditch and Cripplegate. They did not dare go close to those places. So they went east through Ratcliff Highway as far as Ratcliff Cross.

They kept Stepney Church on their left hand and did not go near the churchyard. They feared both the dead there and the wind that blew from the more infected parts of London. So they made a long turn through Poplar and Bromley and came at last to the great road near Bow. There were watchmen at Bow Bridge, and the three men did not wish to be stopped and questioned too closely. They crossed aside into a narrow way that led toward Old Ford. In this manner, quietly and carefully, they began their life outside London, though the danger of the road was only just beginning.

## Part 15: On the Road

At Old Ford, the three travellers were examined, but they were not treated

harshly. Because they seemed to be coming from the country rather than from the city, the people there were less afraid of them. They were allowed to go into a public house where the constable and his watchmen were. There they received drink and some food, which greatly refreshed them. This first kindness gave them courage, and it also gave them an idea for what they should say afterward.

They decided that, if they were questioned again, they would not say they had come from London. They would say they had come from Essex. This was not fully honest, but it seemed necessary to them. The constable at Old Ford helped them by giving them a certificate saying they had passed from Essex through that village and had not been in London. In the common meaning, this was false. But in a narrow sense it could be called true, because Wapping and Ratcliff were not part of the city itself.

This certificate helped them greatly at Homerton, a small place in the parish of Hackney. The next constable accepted it and helped them get a fuller certificate of health from a justice of the peace. With this paper, they passed through the long, divided town of Hackney, which then lay in several separate hamlets. At last they came to the great north road at the top of Stamford Hill. By this time they were tired, and the sun was going down.

A little before the back road from Hackney opened into the great road, they found a barn or something like a barn. They searched it as well as they could and saw that no one was inside. Then they set up their tent with its head against the barn, because the wind was strong that night. They were still new to this kind of lodging and did not know well how to manage the tent. Still, it was better than lying in the open field with no shelter at all.

They lay down to sleep, but Richard the joiner was not satisfied. He was a serious and careful man, and he did not like their resting so loosely on the first night. He tried to sleep, but could not. At last he took the gun and went out to stand guard. He walked back and forth before the barn, watching the road and listening to every sound.

He had not been there long when he heard people coming. At first the sound was low, but it grew louder. It seemed to him that a large company was walking

straight toward the barn. He did not wake his companions at once. But after a few minutes, John called from inside and asked what was wrong. Then John came out quickly too, while Thomas, who was lame and very tired, stayed in the tent.

The people came closer, just as Richard had feared. Then one of the travellers called out like a soldier on guard, "Who comes there?" The strangers did not answer at once. One of them spoke sadly to another and said, "Alas, we are disappointed. There are people here before us. The barn is already taken." They stopped in surprise, and the travellers soon understood that there were about thirteen of them, with some women among them.

The strangers began to talk together about what they should do. From their words, Richard and John learned that they were poor, distressed people like themselves, trying to escape from the plague. The women were especially afraid. "Do not go near them," they said. "How do you know they do not have the plague?" One of the men wished only to speak, but the women begged him not to risk it. They said that God had helped them escape so far, and they must not run into danger now.

When John heard this, he said quietly to Richard, "Let us encourage them if we can." So Richard called out to the strangers. He told them that the three men were also flying from the same dreadful enemy. He said they were only three poor men, and if the strangers were healthy, they would receive no harm from them. He added that they had not gone into the barn, but only set their little tent outside it. If the larger company needed the barn, the three men could move their tent elsewhere.

One of the strangers answered. His name was Ford. He asked whether the three men were truly sound and free from the sickness. Richard answered that they were, and that they had spoken first because they did not want the strangers to be afraid. But he also said that danger could come both ways. If the larger company wished to use the barn, they too must say whether they were healthy. Ford answered humbly that, until then, God had preserved them, though no one knew what might still happen.

Richard asked where they had come from. Ford said that most of them were

from Cripplegate parish, with two or three from Clerkenwell. The plague had come there in a terrible way, and they believed few would be left alive behind them. Richard then asked why they had not left sooner. Ford explained that they had already been away for some time. They had stayed near Islington in an empty house, using bedding and other things they had brought with them. But now the plague had come up into Islington too, and a house next to them had been infected and shut up.

“Where are you going now?” Richard asked. Ford answered that they did not know. They would go where their lot led them, and they trusted God to guide those who looked to Him. After this, there was no more long debate. The company came up to the barn and got inside with some difficulty, because it was almost full of hay. They settled themselves as well as they could. Before they slept, an old man, who seemed to be the father of one of the women, prayed with the whole group and asked God to guide and protect them.

Morning came early, because it was summer. Richard had kept guard in the first part of the night, and John had relieved him later. In the morning the two groups began to know one another better. The larger company said they had first meant to go north by Highgate, but they had been stopped at Holloway and not allowed to pass. So they had crossed the fields eastward, keeping away from towns, and had come to the great road near Stamford Hill.

They now thought of crossing the marshes and going toward Epping Forest, where they hoped to rest. They were not very poor, at least not in immediate want. They had enough to live simply for two or three months. They hoped that by then cold weather might check the infection, or that the sickness would have spent its force. This was much like the hope of John, Thomas, and Richard, though the three men were better prepared for travelling farther.

Yet the three travellers now saw one difficulty. Their horse, which carried the baggage, forced them to keep to roads. The other company could cross fields, paths, and open ground as they pleased. They did not need to pass through towns except when they had to buy food. John and his companions did not want to break fences or gates and damage the country. Still, they wished to join the larger

company, because there was safety and comfort in numbers.

After some talk, the three men gave up their first plan of going north-west. They agreed to follow the others into Essex. They took down their tent, loaded the horse, and all travelled together. When they came to the ferry by the river, they had trouble. The ferryman was afraid of them and would not come close. After they spoke with him from a distance, he agreed to bring the boat to another place, leave it there for them, and let them row themselves over.

They paid him before he would help them. He also brought food and drink and left it in the boat for them, but only after receiving the money first. Then came the problem of the horse. The boat was too small to carry him safely. At last they had to unload the baggage and make the horse swim across. It was slow and troublesome work, but they managed it, and so the whole company crossed the river.

From there they travelled toward the forest. When they came near Walthamstow, the people of the town refused to admit them. Constables and watchmen kept them at a distance and spoke with them from behind a barrier. The travellers gave the same account of themselves as before, but the townsmen did not believe them. They said other companies had already passed that way with the same story and had brought infection into places they entered. Some of those earlier travellers had later died in the fields near Brentwood, whether from plague, hunger, or distress no one could say.

Richard and one of the other men argued that this was no reason to block the road. They asked only to pass through the street and go on. If the townspeople feared them, they could shut themselves in their houses until the travellers were gone. But the constables would not listen. The travellers returned to their companions, discouraged and uncertain. Then John, the old soldier, said, "Leave the rest of this to me."

John ordered Richard to cut poles and shape them like muskets. The men wrapped cloth around the place where the gun lock would be, as soldiers sometimes did in wet weather. They rubbed mud and clay on the wood to make it look darker. Then they placed the people in small groups under trees and made

fires in different places. John set up the tent within sight of the barrier, put their one real gun in the hands of a guard, and tied the horse near the hedge. From a distance, the townspeople thought they saw several armed companies.

After watching them for some time, the people of Walthamstow became frightened. They had refused to let the travellers pass, but now they feared that these armed strangers might stay where they were or force their way through. Toward evening, the constable called out to the guard near the tent. John stepped out with the gun on his shoulder and spoke as if he were only one soldier under a higher captain. The constable asked what they meant to do. John answered, "What would you have us do? You stopped us on the road."

The constable said they had stopped them because of the plague. John answered that they had already said they were healthy. He also said they had as much right to seek safety as the townspeople had to protect themselves. The constable told them to go back. John answered that a stronger enemy than the constable kept them from going back. Then he said that, since they were stopped there, they would encamp there and live there, and the town must provide food for them.

This frightened the constable more than any open threat. John said they had no wish to use violence, but they could not starve. The constable spoke of raising the county against them. John answered that if the town meant mischief, the travellers would not give them time for it. At this, the constable changed his tone. He asked what they wanted. John said they had first asked only to pass, but if the town would not allow that, it should send food.

In the end, the constable agreed. He promised to open some gates and show them a way around the town. He also sent twenty loaves of bread and several large pieces of beef. John asked for enough food for twenty men and six or seven women for three days, though their true number and order were not what he pretended. The townspeople had no courage to come close enough to count them. It was evening, and fear made the small company look much larger than it was.

This was John's management, and it succeeded for the moment. But it also caused danger afterward. The county was alarmed by reports of armed companies

from London, said to have the plague and to be plundering the country. Two days later, horsemen and footmen were searching for such groups. When the travellers heard this, they saw the danger they were in. By John's advice, they divided again. John and his two companions went one way with the horse, while the others moved apart toward Epping, all keeping near enough to find one another later.

That night they all camped in the forest, not far from one another, but they did not set up the tent because it might reveal them. Richard used his axe and hatchet to cut branches and make rough huts. They used the food from Walthamstow and had enough for that night. The others now trusted John as their leader and began to call him captain. He told them they were far enough from London to be calmer, but they must still be careful: not to infect the country, not to let the country infect them, not to waste their money, and not to use violence unless they were forced.

#### Part 16: A Camp of the Living

The next day, the whole company moved toward Epping. They left the rough huts they had made in the forest and trusted that no one would trouble them. John and his two companions gave up their thought of going toward Waltham. By this time, all the people were willing to follow John's advice. They called him captain, not because he ruled them proudly, but because he had shown good sense in danger.

When they came near Epping, they chose a place in the open forest. It was not close to the highway, but it was not too far from it either. It stood on the north side, under a small group of low trees. There they set up their camp. Richard and the other men cut poles, fixed them in the ground in a circle, and tied the tops together. Then they covered the sides with branches, leaves, and bushes, so that the huts became close and fairly warm.

They made three large huts for the main company. They also made a small separate tent for the women. A little shelter was built for the horse, because the poor animal had become very important to them. Their camp was simple, but it had order. Each person had a place, and each tool was used carefully. In a time

like that, even a rough seat or a dry corner seemed like a great comfort.

A day or two later, it was market-day at Epping. Captain John and one of the other men went carefully to buy food. They bought bread, some mutton, and some beef. Two of the women went separately, as if they did not belong to the same company, and bought more food. John took the horse to bring the provisions back, and Richard used his tool bag as a sack. They did not steal, threaten, or press anyone, but paid honestly for all they bought.

When they returned, Richard went to work again. He made benches and stools from the wood he could find. He also made a rough table where they could put their food. These things were plain and badly shaped, but they changed the camp. The place no longer looked like a hiding place only. It began to look like a poor little household under the trees.

For two or three days, the people of Epping took little notice of them. Then many came out from the town to look. They stood at a distance and stared at the huts, the horse, the women, and the small fires. At first they were afraid to come near. John was glad of this, because he did not want the townspeople to bring danger to the camp. There were already rumours that the plague had appeared near Waltham and perhaps even near Epping.

When the people came too close, John called out to them. "Keep back," he said. "We are all well here. We do not want you to bring the plague among us, and we do not want you to say that we brought it among you." These words were wise. They made the townspeople understand that fear could work both ways. The camp feared the town as much as the town feared the camp.

After this, the parish officers came to speak with them. They did not come close, but stood at a safe distance and asked who they were. They also asked by what right they had set up their camp there. John answered plainly. He said they were poor people from London who had left before the plague reached them fully. They had no friends in the country, so they had first stopped near Islington. When the sickness came there too, they had moved farther away and chosen the open forest rather than trouble any town.

At first, the men from Epping spoke roughly. They said the travellers must

leave. They said the company might be infected, though they claimed to be well. They could not allow strangers from London to remain so near the town. John answered calmly and with great patience. He reminded them that London gave life to much of the country around it, because farmers sold their goods there and paid their rents from that trade.

“It would be hard,” John told them, “if the country should be cruel to the people of London now, when they flee from the worst enemy in the world.” He said that Epping men might later come to London markets, and Londoners might remember how they had treated poor people in distress. He also warned them that the plague might yet come to Epping. If that happened, Epping people might also need mercy from others. His words were simple, but they were reasonable.

The officers answered that another company from London had lately frightened the country. They had heard of armed men with tents, who had forced towns to give them food. They thought John’s company might be part of that same group. John said that what other people had done should not be charged against them. He offered to give their names and places of living. He said they wanted only a little clean air in the forest and would leave if the place became unsafe.

The officers then spoke of another fear. They said the parish already had poor people to care for. If these strangers became sick or helpless, the town might have to support them. John answered that they hoped not to be a charge to anyone. If the town helped them in their present need, they would be thankful and would repay it if God allowed them to return to London. If any of them died, the rest would bury the body and trouble the parish as little as possible. If they all died, he said sadly, then the last man could not bury himself, but he would leave enough behind to pay the cost.

John also said that they would not use violence. If no one helped them, they would spend what little they had and then, if necessary, perish quietly. This speech softened the townsmen. They did not formally give permission for the travellers to stay, but they went away and did not disturb them. So the poor company remained there for three or four more days. During that time, they began to deal with a small eating house at the edge of the town. The people there brought what

was needed and set it down at a distance, and the travellers always paid honestly.

The younger people of Epping often came to look at them. They stood far enough away to feel safe and sometimes talked across the space between. On the first Sunday, the travellers stayed quietly in their camp. They prayed together and sang psalms. The sound reached some of the people from the town. This did them much good in the eyes of the country people. They did not look like a wild crowd now, but like poor, serious people trying to live honestly.

Little by little, the opinion of the neighbourhood changed. People began to pity them and speak kindly of them. One very wet night, a gentleman who lived nearby sent them a small cart with bundles of straw. The straw was to lie on and also to cover the huts more closely against the rain. A minister from another parish also sent them wheat and white peas. The travellers received these gifts with great thanks, because they had been sleeping on damp leaves and hard wooden frames.

After this first kindness, others followed. Some people sent chairs, stools, tables, blankets, rugs, pots, dishes, and other useful things. These were not rich gifts, but in that place they were precious. Richard now built a larger shed or house with a real frame and a roof. The weather was growing damp and cold as September came on, and they needed better shelter. He made the sides and roof thick with branches and thatch, so that the wind and rain could not easily enter.

At one end of the building, they made a rough earthen wall and a chimney. Another man worked hard to make a passage for the smoke to go out. They also made an upper floor or loft where some could sleep warm and dry. The place was poor, but it was no longer a mere camp. They had fire, shelter, food, and a kind of order. For people who had left London in fear, this seemed almost like peace.

But their peace did not last. Near the beginning of September, they heard bad news. The plague was said to be strong at Waltham Abbey on one side and at Romford and Brentwood on the other. It was also said to be coming to Epping, Woodford, and other towns near the forest. Some blamed the small traders who went to and from London with food. Whether every report was true or not, the fear was enough. The travellers saw that the danger they had fled from was now coming after them.

This news troubled them greatly. They were afraid to go into the towns for what they needed. The townspeople were also afraid to come near them. For a time, they depended almost wholly on gifts from gentlemen in the country. One sent them a pig, another sent sheep, and another sent a calf. They had meat, and sometimes cheese and milk. Their greatest trouble was bread, because they had grain but no mill or proper oven.

At first, they ate some of the wheat parched, without grinding it. This was rough food, but hunger made it useful. Later they found a way to take their corn to a windmill near Woodford. When it was ground, Thomas the biscuit-maker made a dry hollow hearth and baked simple biscuit-cakes. They were not fine bread, but they kept the company alive. In this way, they became less dependent on the towns, which was a great blessing when the surrounding country became infected.

Soon they heard that many people had died in the villages near them. Some poor families from those villages left their houses and built huts in the forest, just as John's company had done. But many of those people had waited too long before leaving. They had already been among infected neighbours, or they went back into the towns after moving out. So the plague entered some of the new huts too. When John and his friends heard this, they knew they must move again or be in clear danger.

It grieved them to leave the place where they had received so much kindness. They had been treated with more humanity than they expected. Yet the purpose of their whole journey was to preserve life, and now life was again in danger. John went to their chief benefactor, the gentleman who had helped them most, and explained their distress. The gentleman advised them to leave before they were trapped by infection on every side. John then asked whether, as a justice of the peace, he would give them certificates of health.

The gentleman granted this at once. He gave them proper papers saying that they had lived apart for more than forty days, had been examined, and had shown no sign of sickness. These certificates were of great value. With them, they could travel more safely and would not be treated simply as dangerous people from

London. They left reluctantly and first moved toward the marshes near Waltham. But a man by the river frightened them with stories that the towns on that side were all infected, so they changed their plan.

They thought next of going toward Romford and Brentwood. But there, they heard, many poor people from London were already wandering in Hainault Forest and nearby places. Some were begging almost by force, some were suffering terribly, and some were said to be robbing the country. This meant that John's company would find little kindness there. People would look at them with anger and fear. So John went back once more to their good friend and asked for advice.

The gentleman advised them not to go far. Instead, he directed them to an old ruined cottage belonging to a farmer. The farmer allowed them to use it. Richard and the others went to work immediately. In a few days, they repaired the place enough to shelter the whole company. There was an old chimney and an old oven, both broken, but they made them useful again. They added sheds and lean-to shelters on every side until the old house could hold them all.

The country people now trusted them more, especially because their certificates showed they were sound. They helped them with boards, shutters, doors, and other things. There the company settled for the rest of their stay. The weather grew cold and wet in October and November, and they suffered from cold, pains, and common illnesses. But they never caught the plague. About December, when the danger in London had much decreased, they returned to the city.

I have told their story at length because it explains how many people came back to London so suddenly after the sickness weakened. Those who had money went farthest and found better shelter. Those with little money stayed nearer, in barns, huts, fields, woods, boats, sheds, and old houses. Some were kindly received, especially if they could show they had left London early and were not infected. Others suffered greatly and were driven from place to place until they had to return to the city, whatever the danger.

Many poor wanderers built little huts in fields and woods and lived like hermits. Some survived, but some did not. Country people sometimes later found the huts empty and were afraid to go near them for a long time. In one place, a man was

found dead in a hut, and near the gate of a field someone had cut rough words with a knife. The words said, in broken spelling, “Oh misery! We both shall die. Woe, woe.” Such marks show what this flight from London truly meant. It was not a journey into safety, but a hard struggle between fear, hunger, weather, sickness, and hope.

## Part 17: Despair and Strange Behaviour

After the story of John and his companions, I must add a little more about the people who fled from London. Many of them found shelter on ships and boats, especially along the river. Ships lay in long lines from the Pool down toward Gravesend, and perhaps farther. Families lived on some of them, hoping that the open water would keep them safer than the streets. I heard very little of the plague reaching these people, except where ships lay too near the most infected parts or where sailors went too often on shore.

Watermen above the bridge also found ways to live on the river. Some took their whole families into their boats. They covered the boats with sails and cloth, and they put straw inside for bedding. In the daytime, some came ashore and rested under little tents made from sails. At night, they went back into the boats. The people of the country often gave them food or sold food to them from a distance, but they were not willing to receive them into their houses.

This was the general rule everywhere. The country people often helped if they could do it without clear danger. But they did not want Londoners inside their towns and homes. We cannot blame them too much for this, because they had wives, children, servants, and neighbours of their own to protect. Yet to the poor people who fled, this refusal seemed very cruel. They were running from death, and when they reached a village, they often found only closed doors.

I knew of one unhappy citizen whose case was very hard. His wife and all his children had died. Only he, two servants, and an elderly female relation were left. He took an empty house in a village not far from London and sent a cart with his goods. But the people of the village would not let the goods enter. They feared

that the goods themselves might carry infection, because they had come from a house where so many had died.

The man argued with them, and the cart was brought to the door by some force. Then the constable stopped it again. The matter was carried before a justice of peace. The justice ordered that the goods should be taken away. If no one would take them away, he said they should be pulled from the door with hooks and burned in the street. The poor man was forced to remove them, crying bitterly at the hardship of his case. Whether he lived or died, I never knew.

Such events made many Londoners cry out against the country towns. They said the country people had no mercy. But the case was not simple. In truth, almost every town within ten or twenty miles of London was touched by the infection in some degree. I heard numbers from many places. Enfield, Hornsey, Tottenham, St Albans, Brentwood, Romford, Deptford, Greenwich, Kingston, Windsor, and other towns all lost people. Some lost only a small number, but others lost many hundreds.

Another thing made the country people stricter. They believed that infected Londoners had a wicked wish to infect others. This opinion became common, but I do not think it was true in the way people said. Some physicians argued about it. Some said the disease itself made people wild and hateful, as if it put rage into the blood. Others said human nature cannot bear to suffer alone and therefore wishes others to suffer too.

I take a different view. I do not believe that infected people generally wished to spread death. Many were not cruel; they were desperate. Some were half-mad with fever and did not know what they were doing. Others hid their sickness because they knew no one would help them if they told the truth. The country people, on their side, used this accusation to defend their own harshness. Each side spoke too strongly against the other.

It is true that frightening reports were carried into the country. People said Londoners would come out in armed groups, break into towns, rob houses, and bring the plague with them. Some such reports came from real events, but most were made larger by fear. London itself was not without order. The Lord Mayor,

aldermen, justices, constables, churchwardens, and many other officers worked with great care. Considering the fear and misery of the time, London was governed more steadily than many people later believed.

One matter deserves praise. The magistrates did not simply lock houses and forget the people inside. They often tried to ease the rule when they could. If a sick person was willing to be carried to a pest-house or another safe place, the family might sometimes receive relief. If the healthy people could prove they were well and promised to keep themselves apart elsewhere, they were sometimes allowed to move. The magistrates also tried to make sure that shut-up families had food, medicine, and messages carried for them.

Aldermen sometimes rode to infected houses and asked the people at their windows whether they were properly supplied. If they said the watchman was absent, drunk, asleep, rude, or careless, he could be removed. This may sometimes have been unfair to the watchman, because the family's complaint might not always be true. But the magistrates usually thought it safer to favour the family. If a watchman was wrongly removed, another post could be found for him. If a family was truly neglected, the result might be death.

Yet the system itself had serious faults. To lock the healthy in the same house with the sick was a terrible thing. I still doubt whether it truly stopped the infection in the end. The disease often spread before anyone knew it was present. A person might look well and yet carry death in his breath, clothes, or body. By the time a house was known to be infected, some of the family had often already fled, and others were already dead.

One house in Whitechapel showed the cruelty of the rule. A maid there had signs of sickness, but she recovered. The family was kept shut up for many days. Just when their time of confinement was almost finished, someone reported new illness in the house. The family had to begin their quarantine again. Fear, anger, bad air, and close rooms made several of them sick. Then, worst of all, some people who came to examine them seem to have brought the plague in with them, and much of the family died.

About this time, a small hardship fell on me personally. The alderman of

Portsoken Ward appointed me one of the examiners of houses in the area where I lived. We had a large parish and many examiners, though the people often called us visitors. I tried hard to be excused. I said that I did not approve of shutting houses in the way it was being done. I did not wish to become an instrument of a rule which I believed would not fully answer its purpose.

I could not escape the duty entirely. The best favour I could get was that I should serve only three weeks instead of two months, if I could later find another suitable householder to take my place. Even this was not easy, because few honest and capable men wished to take such a dangerous office. In those three weeks, I learned enough to see the weakness of the system. We could not know the true state of a family except by asking the family itself or its neighbours, and both might hide the truth.

Still, the shutting up of houses did one useful thing. It kept many people, already sick and light-headed with fever, from running through the streets. Before the rule was strictly carried out, some infected people did run about in a terrible condition. Some begged at doors, saying openly that they had the plague and asking for rags for their sores. Others wandered without knowing what they did. If such people had been free everywhere, London would have been even more dreadful.

One story was told of a poor infected man in or near Aldersgate Street. He was walking in the street, singing and speaking like a madman. People thought at first that he was drunk. But he himself said he had the plague, and it seems he spoke the truth. He met a young married gentlewoman and tried to kiss her. She ran from him, but the street was nearly empty, and no one was near enough to help.

When she saw that he would catch her, she pushed him strongly, and he fell backward. But as he fell, he caught hold of her and pulled her down too. He got up first, mastered her, and kissed her. Then he told her that he had the plague and asked why she should not have it too. The poor woman, who was also with child, was so frightened that she fell into a fit. She recovered a little, but died a few days later. Whether she had the plague or died of fear, I cannot say.

Another infected man came to the house of a family who knew him well. A

servant opened the door, and the man ran upstairs into the room where the whole family sat at supper. They rose in great surprise. He told them calmly that he had only come to take leave of them. When they asked where he was going, he answered, "I have the sickness, and I shall die tomorrow night." At once the women and little girls ran in terror, some upstairs and some downstairs, and locked themselves into rooms.

The master of the house was angry enough to throw the man out, but then fear stopped him. He did not dare touch him. The sick man looked around and said, with strange calmness, that if they were all so troubled by him, he would go home and die there. Then he walked downstairs, opened the door himself, and went out. The family burned strong smells in every room afterward and washed their clothes. No harm came to them, as far as I heard, but they were badly shaken for several days.

I also heard of a man who ran from his bed in the pain of his swellings. He had the plague badly, and his mind was disordered. He put on his shoes, but his nurse tried to stop him from taking his coat. He threw her down, ran into the street in his shirt, and went straight to the Thames. The watchman was too frightened to touch him. The man threw off his shirt, jumped into the river, and swam across.

The tide carried him down the river, but he reached the other side, ran about naked for a while, and then swam back again. At last he returned to his own house, knocked at the door, went upstairs, and got back into bed. Some said this violent action cured him, because it made his swellings break and cooled his fever. I cannot say that I believe the cure as fact. But the story shows what desperate things people did when pain and fever took away their reason.

Many such people cried to be allowed to "die at large," as they called it. They hated being tied in beds or locked in rooms. Their cries from shut houses were enough to break the heart of anyone who passed by. Yet if they had been allowed into the streets, they might have harmed others and spread terror everywhere. Some threw themselves from windows when they could not pass through the door. Some drowned themselves in the Thames or in the smaller river near Hackney, and many such deaths were never entered clearly in the bills.

It was also a mercy that London had no great fire that year. If a large fire had broken out, people would have had to gather in crowds to fight it, handle goods, enter houses, and touch one another. That could have spread the infection far more widely. There were a few small fires, but they were quickly put out. The next year the city would suffer terribly by fire, but during the plague year it was spared that second calamity.

People later asked why so many infected persons could still be seen in the streets if houses were searched and shut up. The answer is plain. In so large a city, it was impossible to discover every infected house at once. People became sick and died with terrible speed. Often, before officers knew that a house was infected, the worst had already happened there. Some were dead, some had fled, and some still looked well though the disease was already hidden in them.

For this reason, no human rule could fully stop the plague. The orders might lessen some dangers, and they might restrain the most violent cases. But they could not find every hidden sickness or keep every frightened family in place. As an examiner, I saw this clearly. We asked questions, listened to neighbours, and watched doors and windows, but we could never know all that happened inside houses. The plague moved faster than our knowledge, and fear moved faster still.

## Part 18: Hidden Infection

From my short service as an examiner, I learned one thing very clearly. The shutting up of houses could not work well unless people told the truth early. But that was the very thing they were least willing to do. A master of a house was ordered to report sickness within two hours after he knew of it. Yet many masters delayed until they had first sent away children, servants, friends, or anyone else who could escape.

This delay defeated the whole purpose of the rule. By the time the examiner heard of the sickness, the infection had often been in the house for several days. Some people had already gone out, and no one knew whether they were sound or sick. Some had carried the disease secretly in their bodies. They walked in the

streets, visited other houses, or left London, believing themselves still well. Then they suddenly fell down dead, and people said they had been struck in one moment.

Some physicians also believed this at first. They thought such people were seized suddenly, almost like men killed by lightning. But when their bodies were examined, the signs of the plague were found on them. This showed that the sickness had been in them earlier, though hidden. The poison had worked inside the body before it appeared outside. Then, when it reached the heart, death came very fast.

This hidden work of the disease made the examiner's office almost impossible. We could not enter every house and search every room. No honest citizen would have accepted such a duty, because it would have exposed him and his own family to certain danger. We had to ask questions at the door, or ask neighbours what they had heard. But the family might lie, and the neighbours might know nothing. So the truth often came too late.

In Petticoat Lane, two houses stood near each other and were both infected. Several people were sick, but the matter was kept secret. The heads of the two families arranged their story together. When the examiner came near, they appeared at the doors and answered for one another. Sometimes neighbours also said they were all well, perhaps because they had been deceived too.

At last the secret could not be hidden any longer. Death had done too much. The dead-carts were called in the night to both houses, and then everyone knew the truth. When the examiner ordered the constable to shut the houses, there were almost no people left inside. In one house two persons were dying; in the other only one was dying. A nurse in each house admitted that five had already been buried and that the houses had been infected for nine or ten days.

The rest of the two families had gone. Some may have been well, and some may have been sick. No one could tell. They had escaped before the officers could act. This was exactly the danger of the whole system. A shut house might look strict and useful from the street, but if the people had already fled, the door and the red cross came too late.

Another man in the same lane used an even stranger trick. His family was

infected, but he did not want his house officially shut. When he could no longer hide the sickness, he shut up the house himself. He painted the red cross on the door and wrote the usual words, "Lord, have mercy upon us." The examiner thought the constable had done it by order of the other examiner, because there were two examiners in that district.

By this trick, the man went in and out of the house as he pleased. Others thought the house was already under public control, but no watchman had been properly set there. The man continued this way until the trick was discovered. Then he took the healthy part of his household and escaped. Thus the house had been marked as infected, yet it had not truly been guarded at all.

Such things showed how little could be done if people would not help the rule honestly. The poor were more often shut up, because they could not hide sickness easily. Their rooms were small, their neighbours heard everything, and they had no second house to go to. Richer people and cleverer people often had time to move, hide, or arrange matters before the officers knew the truth. So the rule pressed hardest on those who were least able to bear it.

I was glad when I was released from this dangerous office. I found another householder who agreed to serve in my place, after I paid him a little money. In this way, I served only about three weeks instead of two months. Even three weeks was a long time, because it was August, and the disease was then beginning to rage violently in our end of London. Every errand, every question, and every door brought new danger.

During my service, I often spoke with my neighbours about the matter. Many of us agreed that the city should have separated the healthy from the sick in a different way. If a house was infected, the sick person should have stayed with only those who freely chose to nurse him. The healthy people should have been removed to a separate place and kept there for twenty or thirty days. If they remained well, they could then return or go where they needed.

This would not have felt so cruel as locking healthy people in with the sick. To confine a sick person who could not move was not the same thing as imprisoning a whole family. A sick person in his senses usually wished others to

be safe. Only when fever made him wild did he cry out against being kept in. But healthy people, shut in with infection, naturally felt that they were being forced to wait for death.

Of course, such a better plan would have needed special houses for the healthy to stay in during their short quarantine. London had not prepared such places. It had only small pest-houses, and those were not enough even for the sick. So the city used the rule it had, not the rule that might have been better. In a great danger, men often act with the tools already in their hands.

After a time, even the shutting up of houses became almost impossible. Funerals were too many for ordinary customs. Bells were no longer tolled for each dead person. People no longer wore black or followed their friends to the grave. Coffins could not always be made. Then the infection grew so violent that the authorities could not shut all the houses that needed shutting.

Whole streets seemed desolate. Houses were not merely shut; they were empty. Doors stood open because no one remained to close them. Windows shook in the wind because no living hand was there to fasten them. People began to feel that all rules had failed. They looked at one another with the thought that nothing remained but a general ruin of the city.

Yet this despair was not the same as religious despair. I do not mean that people all believed themselves lost before God. I mean that they despaired of living through the plague. In June and July, many who were infected lived for days and sometimes recovered. But in late August and early September, the disease often killed in two or three days. Some died the same day they were taken sick.

Around this time, I saw another painful sight from my own windows. A poor man came out of Harrow Alley, near Butcher Row in Whitechapel. He was almost naked and seemed out of his senses. He ran into the open street, dancing, singing, and making wild movements with his arms. Several women and children followed him, crying and begging him, for God's sake, to come back. No one dared touch him or stop him.

I was told that the poor man had two terrible swellings which would not break. The surgeons had put strong burning medicines on them, trying to bring them to

a head. The pain must have been almost beyond bearing. He seemed to be running not from his family only, but from his own body. I do not know what became of him, but I think he wandered in that terrible state until he fell down and died.

The whole city had a frightful appearance. The usual crowds were gone. The Royal Exchange was not officially closed, but almost no one went there. Trade had lost its old life. Men who once met there every day to talk of ships, money, goods, and business now stayed away or came only for urgent matters. Fear had become stronger than profit.

The public fires, which had been kept burning in some places to clean the air, were also stopped. Heavy rain had almost put them out for a few days. Then physicians began to argue about them. Some said the fires helped to cleanse the air. Others said they did no good and might even harm people's health. Some wanted wood fires, especially from trees with strong smells; others wanted coal fires because of the sulphur. Others wanted no fires at all.

In the end, the Lord Mayor ordered that no more public fires should be made. This was not because the magistrates were careless. They had worked hard and exposed themselves bravely. But the plague was now so fierce that every method seemed useless. Medicines, fires, shut houses, rules, warnings, and careful officers could not stop it. The people saw this and gave themselves up to fear, as if no human strength could stand against the disease.

## Part 19: The Worst Weeks

During the worst weeks, many people no longer tried to protect themselves with the same care as before. They felt that nothing could save them. This was not a despair about their souls, but a despair about their lives. They believed that if the plague touched them, they would surely die. In August and September, this feeling became very strong, because many who were taken sick died in two or three days, and some died on the same day.

Earlier in the summer, the disease often seemed slower. A person might be sick for many days, suffer greatly, and still recover if the swellings broke and the body

was relieved. But at the height of the plague, death often came with terrible speed. People said that thousands died in one night. Some even said that a great number died within two hours, between one and three in the morning. Whether those reports were exact or not, they show the fear of that time.

I knew cases near my own house that made such reports easy to believe. One family outside the bars, not far from me, seemed well on Monday. There were ten people in the household. That evening, one maid and one apprentice were taken ill, and both died the next morning. Then another apprentice and two children became sick. By Saturday at noon, the master, the mistress, four children, and four servants were all dead.

Only an old woman remained in the house. She had come in afterward to take care of the goods for a brother of the master, who lived nearby and had not been sick. Such a change in one house, from full life to silence in less than a week, was enough to shake any mind. In ordinary times, the death of one person fills a house with grief. In that year, whole households disappeared almost before neighbours had time to understand what had happened.

In another alley near the same side of the street, several houses were left without a living person inside. People said that in the alley near the sign of Moses and Aaron, some bodies lay too long before they were taken away. This was not, as some later wrote, because there were not enough living people to bury the dead. The reason was more particular. In some houses and alleys, there was no one left alive to tell the buriers that dead bodies were there.

In such a case, the officers could not come until they knew. The dead-carts did not search every room in every house. They came when they were called, or when a watchman, neighbour, nurse, or officer gave notice. If all these people were dead, gone, or afraid, the bodies might remain hidden for a time. But when they were found, they were carried away and buried. I am certain that this was the general practice.

This despair had a strange effect on the living. For three or four weeks, it made many people bold in a reckless way. They were no longer so careful to avoid one another. They went into company and spoke as if all caution were useless. One

man would say to another, "I do not ask how you are, and I will not tell you how I am. We shall all go, so it does not matter who is sick and who is well."

This same desperate feeling drove many people into the churches. They no longer asked who sat near them or whether the person beside them might be infected. They did not care what smells were in the building, or how ill another person looked. They seemed to count themselves already dead. Because of this, they crowded together with an earnestness I had never seen before. If people always believed that each church service might be their last, they would listen very differently.

This time also softened religious quarrels for a while. Many parish ministers had died or fled. Some churches were left without regular preachers. Then people asked ministers who had earlier been silenced or kept out of the Church to preach in those churches. Many who had refused to hear such men before now listened gladly. The danger of death made old arguments seem smaller.

The change worked both ways. Some Dissenters who had long stayed away from parish churches now came into them without difficulty. People who had been divided by names, forms, and old anger sat together under the same fear. I do not wish here to argue about those differences. I only record what I saw: when death came near, good men on different sides became more willing to receive one another. When the danger passed, many of the old divisions returned.

This is a sad thought. Death would reconcile us all if we kept it before our eyes. On the other side of the grave, there will be no such quarrels among those who are received by God. Yet in ordinary life, when danger is far away, people become proud again and hold tightly to their divisions. I mention this only as part of the history. The plague showed, for a short time, what fear and humility could do.

I could speak much longer about the strange behaviour of sick people in those weeks. Some were driven by pain into actions that seemed impossible in calmer times. One man, tied in his bed to keep him from running out, set the bed on fire with a candle that stood near him. He burned himself there before help could save him. Another, as I have said, ran naked through the street, dancing and singing in the middle of his agony.

These things are enough to show the misery of that season. I myself was sometimes near the end of my courage. At the beginning, I had believed I could stay in London with a steady mind. But during the worst weeks, I often repented of staying. It was too late then to follow my brother into the country. So I withdrew again into my house and kept close for ten or twelve days more.

Even from my own windows, sorrow forced itself upon me. Hardly a day or night passed without some dreadful event near Harrow Alley. It was a place full of poor people, many of them connected with the butchers or with work depending on the butchers. Sometimes crowds burst out of the alley, mostly women, crying and calling to one another. Their voices were mixed with screams, prayers, and confused words. We could not always understand what had happened, but we knew it was some new death or terror.

Almost every night, the dead-cart stood at the end of that alley. It could not easily go far inside, because the way was narrow and it could not turn round. So the bodies were brought out to it. The churchyard was not far away, and if the cart went away full, it soon returned. The cries of people bringing out their dead children, parents, husbands, wives, and friends were beyond description. Sometimes they cried "Murder," and sometimes "Fire," though it was clear that grief and sickness had disordered their minds.

The plague raged in this manner for six or seven weeks. It even broke, for a short time, the excellent order which the magistrates had kept. Usually no dead bodies were seen in the streets during the day, and burials were managed at night. But in the worst part of September, the number of deaths was so great that this could not always be maintained. Necessity forced the officers to bear with things that would not have been allowed at another time.

One remarkable thing happened during this dreadful period. The astrologers, fortune-tellers, dream-readers, and false prophets disappeared. Earlier, their doors had been crowded with frightened people. They had taken money by pretending to read the stars or tell the future. But now they were gone. I believe many of them died in the heat of the calamity. They had stayed too long to make money from fear and could not foretell their own end.

September was the most dreadful month London had ever seen. From the twenty-second of August to the twenty-sixth of September, the printed bills counted almost forty thousand deaths in only five weeks. One week showed 7,496 deaths, another 8,252, another 7,690, another 8,297, and the next 6,460. These numbers were terrible enough. Yet I believe the true number was higher. Many deaths were hidden, missed, or written under other names.

In those weeks, the courage of even the buriers began to fail. Some of them had already had the disease and recovered, yet they died while doing their work. Some dropped down at the side of the burial pit while carrying bodies. In Shoreditch, people told us of a dead-cart that was left without proper control because the driver died or fled. The horses went on, the cart overturned, and the bodies were thrown into the street in a miserable way.

Another cart was said to have fallen into the great pit in Finsbury Fields. The horses drew it too near the edge, and cart and horses went down into the pit. Some thought the driver had fallen in with them, because his whip was seen among the bodies. I cannot say whether that part was certain. But such stories show the confusion of those weeks. Even the men used to death were sometimes overcome by it.

In our parish of Aldgate, I heard that dead-carts were several times found standing full at the churchyard gate, with no driver, bellman, or bearer near them. Sometimes no one knew exactly whose bodies were in the cart. Bodies were let down by ropes from windows or balconies. Sometimes bearers brought them, and sometimes other people placed them there and went away. The men had no time to keep exact accounts.

Yet I must still give justice to the magistrates. Two things were never wholly neglected. First, food could still be found in the city, and its price was not raised beyond measure. Second, the dead were not left openly unburied when the officers knew of them. Some bodies might remain in houses where all the living had gone or died, but as soon as they were found, they were carried away. Considering the number of deaths, this was a great and necessary mercy.

Some later accounts said that the dead lay unburied in the streets. I cannot

agree with that as a general truth. I lived in a parish where the destruction was very great, and I had some part in the ordering of these matters. I am sure that no known bodies were left for lack of bearers or gravediggers. The work was terrible, and it was not always orderly, but it was done. Without that steady work, London would have fallen into a far more horrible state.

## Part 20: How Many Died?

I have said that known bodies were not left openly unburied, and I must now add something about food. In that dreadful time, one might expect bread to become very dear, or even impossible to get. Yet this did not happen in any great degree. At the beginning of the year, the small wheaten loaf weighed a little more than ten ounces. In the height of the plague, it was only a little lighter, and when November came, it was again much the same as before.

This was a remarkable mercy. In many cities, under such a sickness, hunger would have joined itself to disease. But in London, bread was still to be had. There was no general want of bakers, and ovens continued to work. Some families said that their maid-servants caught the plague when they carried dough to the bakehouses, as was then the custom. That may well have happened. Yet the city as a whole was not left without bread.

Another matter must be mentioned again. In all this terrible visitation, only two pest-houses were used in any public way, one beyond Old Street and one in Westminster. No general force was used to carry sick people there. In truth, there were many poor people who would gladly have gone if they had been sure of care, food, and a bed. Many had no nurse, no medicine, no proper room, and no money. For such people, a good pest-house would have been a kindness, not a prison.

I still think this was the one great thing missing in the public management of London. More pest-houses, well kept and honestly managed, might have saved many poor people. The sick could have been taken there when they wished to go, especially servants who had caught the disease while running errands for their masters. Some who went to the pest-houses did recover and return home. Good

physicians were appointed there, and the number buried from those places was not as terrible as many feared.

But I do not mean that all sick people should have been forced out of their houses. That would have been very dangerous and very cruel. To move a sick person through the streets might itself spread the infection. Also, if the rest of the family were left free after the sick person was carried away, some of them might already be infected and might carry the disease to others. So, in many cases, removing the sick by force would not have cured the danger.

It would also have made the people wild with anger and fear. The magistrates already found it hard enough to make families accept the shutting up of houses. If officers had tried to drag sick children, wives, husbands, or parents from their beds, many families would have fought them. They might have killed the men who came to take their loved ones away. The city was already near madness, and such violence would have made it worse.

This is why the magistrates acted with as much gentleness as they could. They did not leave the city, though many rich people had gone. The Lord Mayor, the sheriffs, the aldermen, and many members of the Common Council resolved to remain at their posts. They promised to keep order, give justice, distribute charity, and do their duty to the citizens. This promise had a strong effect on people's minds.

The Lord Mayor and the sheriffs held councils almost every day. They thought about civil peace, food, markets, poor families, burials, and public safety. They dealt gently with frightened people when they could. But they punished thieves, housebreakers, and those who robbed the sick or the dead. In such a time, mercy to the poor and firmness against criminals were both necessary.

Constables and churchwardens were also ordered to remain in the city, or to appoint fit men in their places. If one officer died or became sick, another was to be chosen quickly. This kept the machine of the city from stopping. It is easy to blame officers in a quiet time, but in those days their work was dangerous and heavy. Many did it with more courage than people later remembered.

The Lord Mayor and sheriffs were often seen in the streets and at places of

greatest danger. They did not wish crowds to press around them, because crowds were dangerous. Still, when urgent complaints came, they heard them patiently. A low gallery was built in the Lord Mayor's hall so he could stand a little apart from the crowd while hearing cases. This gave him some safety, but it did not remove the risk. He still stayed where duty required him.

One of their special cares was the market. If country people stopped bringing food, London would face hunger as well as plague. So the Lord Mayor and sheriffs often rode on horseback on market-days to see that the country sellers were protected and encouraged. They wanted the sellers to come and go freely. They also ordered that frightening sights should be kept out of the streets in the daytime, so that market people would not be terrified and refuse to return.

The bakers were also closely watched. The Master of the Bakers' Company and his assistants had to make sure that the Lord Mayor's orders were followed. Bakers were required to keep their ovens going. The weight and price of bread were controlled each week. By these means, bread remained plentiful and fairly cheap. I often wondered at this, especially when I saw how freely some country people came to market while I myself was afraid to walk abroad.

Another wise part of the public management was this: the streets were kept as clear as possible of dreadful sights during the day. If a person fell dead in the street, the body was covered or moved to the nearest churchyard until night. Bodies were buried, infected clothes were burned, and other terrible work was usually done in darkness. By morning, the pits were covered and the streets made decent again. Thus, during the day, a stranger might not see the full horror of what had happened in the night.

Still, the emptiness of the streets told its own story. The city was not equally empty at all times or in all places. Because the plague moved from one part of London to another, one side might begin to breathe again while another side was dying. In July, the west and north-west were heavily struck, while the city, Southwark, Stepney, Whitechapel, Aldgate, Wapping, and Ratcliff were still much less touched. People in those safer places went about almost as if the plague were only a distant trouble.

But in late August and September, the case changed. The plague lessened in the west and north-west, but it fell heavily on the city, the eastern suburbs, and Southwark. Then shops were shut, streets were silent, and even great places like Cornhill and Cheapside looked strange and thin. In the middle of the day, some people still had to go out for business or food. But in the morning and evening, there were very few to be seen. London seemed to breathe in short and fearful breaths.

The weekly bills showed this great change. In one week, the deaths were high in Cripplegate and St Sepulchre, while other parts were still lower. Later, the deaths rose terribly in Stepney, Aldgate, Whitechapel, the city parishes, and the parishes over the river. The burden of the disease had shifted. This was a sad change, but also a mercy in one sense. If all parts of London had reached the same height of sickness at the same time, very few people might have been left alive.

Even so, the true number of deaths was never known. The printed bills gave terrible numbers, but I believe they were too low. Some physicians believed that in the worst week twelve thousand people died. One even said that four thousand died in one night, though I cannot remember one single night known clearly for such a number. Whether that exact report was true or not, it agrees with the general truth. The bills of mortality could not fully count the dead.

There were many reasons for this. Some deaths were hidden by families. Some were written under other diseases. Some people died in fields, boats, alleys, empty houses, or rooms where no one was left to report them. In the worst weeks, officers were tired, frightened, sick, or dead. Carts moved at night, bodies were placed together, and exact names could not always be taken. So the printed numbers tell only part of the truth.

At this point, I must add an important lesson for those who may read this in future times. The plague was not spread only by people who were visibly sick. Those people were dangerous, of course, but others could avoid them. A person with swellings, spots, fever, or weakness was usually in bed or clearly unwell. The more dangerous people were those who already had the infection inside them but still looked healthy.

Such people walked in the streets, bought food, visited friends, worked in shops, and spoke with neighbours. They did not know they were infected. Their faces looked well, and their voices sounded ordinary. Yet their breath, sweat, clothes, and hands might carry death. They touched money, door handles, goods, dishes, and other people, and no one knew the danger.

This explains why many people fell down suddenly in the street. They had not been struck in one moment, though it looked so. The sickness had been working inside them for days. At last they became faint, began to sweat, sat down at a door, and died. Some just reached their own homes before death took them. Others came home, saw the fatal marks appear, and died within a few hours.

This was the great difficulty which no human rule could fully overcome. It was impossible to know every infected person from every sound person. It was also impossible for infected people always to know themselves. A man might say, "I have gone near no sick person," and still be carrying the disease in his own body. Another might say, "It is in the air, and there is no use being careful." But this was dangerous thinking. The hidden infection did not prove that care was useless. It proved only that the enemy was harder to see than men had first believed.

## Part 21: Breath, Contact, and Carelessness

I have spoken already of the hidden infection, and I must say more of it here. Many people thought they were safe because they had not touched a sick person. Others thought the plague came only through the air, like a wind moving over the city. But the truth seemed more difficult than either of these ideas. A person might receive the disease from another person who looked healthy. That was the deepest danger, because no one could clearly see it coming.

The physicians used a hard word for the matter that passed from the sick to the sound. They called it effluvia, meaning small hidden vapours or streams from the body. These might come from breath, sweat, sores, clothes, or other things connected with the sick person. Perhaps even the best physicians did not fully

understand it. Yet the effect was plain enough. A healthy person came too near, received the poison, and then carried the same danger to another.

Some people did not like this explanation. They wanted to say that the plague was only a direct stroke from Heaven, sent to this person and not to that person without any natural means. I could not agree with them. God rules all things, but He often uses means in the world. Fire burns by heat, water drowns by covering the breath, and sickness may pass by contact, breath, or hidden matter. To deny all means seemed to me not faith, but ignorance.

Others went to the opposite extreme. They spoke of tiny living things in the air, too small for the eye to see, which entered the body through breath or through the skin. I will not argue much about that. Learned men may speak of such matters better than I can. But common experience showed that the disease did not spread only because the air over London was bad. It spread most clearly where people came near one another, especially in houses, markets, rooms, beds, clothes, and crowded places.

This is why ordinary conversation became dangerous. A man might stand with his friend for only a few minutes at a door. He might receive no kiss, no hand, no cup, and no money from him. Yet the other man's breath might already be full of danger. The sick man might not know he was sick. He might go home that evening well enough, and the next morning find the marks of death on his body. Then the friend would remember their talk and tremble.

The same danger was in shops. A customer came in, asked the price of bread, meat, cloth, or medicine, and stood close to the seller. He breathed over the counter. He touched the goods and laid money down. Then he went away. Perhaps the seller never saw him again. But two or three days later, the seller might feel a pain in his head or a sickness in his stomach, and then all his house would be in danger.

Servants were especially exposed. Masters often stayed indoors and thought themselves careful, but they sent servants out for every little thing. The maid went for bread. The apprentice went for beer. The boy went for medicine. The old woman went to buy a little butter or cheese. Each errand carried the household into the street, and the street carried itself back into the household.

This was one of my own faults. I had not stored enough food and supplies before the danger came close. So my servants had to go out for small things, just as before. I saw the foolishness of this too late. When the plague was already around us, I tried to correct my error by laying in meal, beer, butter, and cheese. But a man who begins to prepare when danger is already at his door has lost half his advantage.

Rich people could do better. They could buy food for several weeks, close their doors, and keep every person of the family inside. Some did this, and many were preserved. They had room, money, servants, cellars, ovens, and stores. They could live apart from the world for a long time. But the poor could not do this. They bought their food by the day, sometimes by the meal, and if they did not go out, they did not eat.

This made the poor both sufferers and carriers of the disease. I do not say this to blame them. They were forced by need. A poor woman with children could not lock her door for a month with nothing in the house but one loaf. A labourer without work could not buy a store of meal. A servant turned out of his place could not choose a safe life indoors. So the very people most open to the plague were also the people least able to avoid spreading it.

As the weeks passed, many people grew less careful. At first, they were afraid of every stranger, every door, every breath, and every coin. Later, when death was everywhere, some became used to the danger. They spoke with neighbours again. They stood at doors again. They entered shops again. Some even knew that they had sickness in their houses and still went out, because they needed food or because fear had made them reckless.

This carelessness was one reason the numbers became so terrible. But even careful people were not always safe. A man might avoid sick houses, keep away from burial pits, burn strong smells in his rooms, and still receive the infection from someone who seemed sound. That was the sorrow of the matter. The disease hid itself under the face of health. It walked in the streets under clean clothes and a calm voice.

The weekly bills helped show how the sickness moved. In late July,

Cripplegate, St Sepulchre, Clerkenwell, Bishopsgate, and Shoreditch were heavily touched, while Stepney, Aldgate, Whitechapel, the city within the walls, and Southwark were still less harmed. Because of this, people in the safer parts kept their shops open and went about their business more freely. Country sellers also believed the city was still healthy enough to enter, especially when they came through the eastern or southern markets.

But this good appearance did not last. At the end of August and the beginning of September, the weight of the disease moved. The western and north-western parishes began to grow better, while the city, the eastern suburbs, and Southwark became terribly infected. Then the face of London changed again. Shops were shut. Streets that had looked alive became silent. In Cornhill and Cheapside, where business had once been very strong, few people were seen in the mornings and evenings.

The bills made this change plain. For the week from September 12 to September 19, the numbers in Stepney, Aldgate, Whitechapel, the city parishes, and Southwark were very high. Together with other infected parishes, they made a total of more than six thousand deaths in the selected places. The next week, the number fell to below five thousand in those same places. This was still dreadful, but it showed that the worst fury might be beginning to turn.

The change was strange to watch. One side of London seemed to rise a little while another side sank. In the west, where people had first suffered so greatly, men began to look abroad again. In the east and south, families were falling every day. This movement of the sickness was a mercy in one sense. If the plague had struck every part of the city with the same force at the same time, London might have been almost emptied of life.

Yet even the bills could not be fully trusted. Many deaths were returned under other names. Fever, spotted fever, surfeit, teeth, consumption, vomiting, swellings, and other causes rose greatly in the records. No one doubted that many of these were really plague deaths. Families wished to avoid the shame and danger of being known as infected. If they could persuade searchers or officers to write another cause, they often tried to do so.

This was another way in which fear defeated order. A false return might save a family from being shut up, at least for a time. But it also deceived the city. It made the danger seem smaller than it was. It allowed people to move more freely from houses where the plague was already present. A lie in one house could become death in another.

For this reason, I never believed that the printed numbers told the full story. They were useful, and they showed the general course of the disease. But they did not count every dead body truly, nor did they name every disease honestly. They were like a dark glass through which we could see the shape of the calamity, but not every feature. Still, even through that dark glass, the sight was terrible enough.

The lesson is plain. In a time of infection, the greatest danger may be what cannot yet be seen. A man must not trust only his eyes. He must not say, “This person looks well, so there is no danger,” or “This house has no red cross, so it is safe.” He must use care before the signs appear, not only after they are clear. The plague taught London that hidden sickness, careless need, and fear of shame can be as dangerous as open disease.

## Part 22: Trade, Ships, and Coal

I must now speak more clearly about trade during this dreadful time. Foreign trade was almost stopped. The nations of Europe were afraid of us. Ports in France, Holland, Spain, and Italy did not wish to receive ships from London. We were also at war with the Dutch, which made matters worse. It was a sad condition: we had enemies abroad, and at the same time a far more terrible enemy at home.

Our merchants could hardly send ships anywhere. Goods made in England, especially goods from London, were feared almost as much as infected people. This was not wholly unreasonable. Woollen goods, cloth, and similar things could hold infection if they were packed by sick persons. Foreign ports believed that a bale of cloth from London might be as dangerous to touch as a sick man. So even when English goods were received abroad, they were sometimes opened and aired in special places before anyone handled them.

Spain and Italy were especially strict. Ships from London were often not allowed to enter port or unload at all. Some ships that had been loading for Italy were denied entrance and went instead to Turkey, where they were allowed to unload more freely. This helped them in one way, but it caused other troubles. Some goods were not suited to the Turkish market, and some belonged to merchants in Italian ports. So the captains could not simply sell everything as they pleased.

Reports about London made things still worse. News grew larger as it travelled. People abroad were told that twenty thousand died in London every week, that bodies lay unburied in heaps, and that the living were too few to care for the sick. Such reports were false, but they were believed. Even when honest accounts were sent, many people abroad would not accept them. Fear had made the truth hard to hear.

These wild reports hurt English trade for a long time. Even after the plague was mostly over, some foreign merchants still feared London goods. The Dutch and Flemish merchants took advantage of this. They bought English goods from parts of the country that were not infected and carried them through Holland or Flanders. Then they sold them abroad almost as if the goods were their own. Sometimes they were found out and punished, but the damage to London trade was already great.

I do not say that these goods always carried infection abroad. I cannot prove that. But the danger was real enough that honest men should have been careful. If infected goods were opened in another country, they might carry death where the plague had not yet come. Trade is a useful and necessary thing, but it becomes wicked when men put many lives at risk only for profit.

The plague also spread through England by trade and travel. London had business with almost every great town in the kingdom. Merchants, carriers, servants, seamen, porters, and buyers moved between London and many other places. Through these movements, the sickness was carried, sooner or later, to many cities, manufacturing towns, and seaports. Ireland was also touched in some places, though not everywhere. About Scotland I had no sure knowledge.

While London trade was stopped, some other English ports gained for a time. Colchester, Yarmouth, Hull, Bristol, Exeter, and Plymouth carried goods to nearby countries, to Spain, to Ireland, to Africa, to the West Indies, and to other places. But this advantage did not last fully. As the sickness spread beyond London, many of those towns also became infected. Then trade everywhere became troubled. It was as if the whole kingdom felt the weight of London's sorrow.

Ships coming home from foreign parts had another problem. Some had left before anyone knew how terrible the plague would become. When they returned, they came up the river as usual. But in August and September, when the infection was very strong near the lower parts of the city and along the waterside, business almost stopped there. No one wished to meet the sailors, and the sailors did not wish to come ashore.

So many ships waited below the busiest part of the river. Some lay near the Medway, some at the Nore, and some below Gravesend. Ships whose goods would not spoil could wait more easily. By the end of October, a very large fleet of homeward ships was waiting to come up. Such a sight had not been seen for many years. The river held ships, goods, fear, and delay all at once.

Yet two trades by water continued with little interruption, and they were a great comfort to the city. One was the trade in corn. The other was the coal trade from Newcastle. Without these two, London would have suffered far more. Food and fuel were not small matters in that year. They were part of the city's life.

Corn came by small vessels from Hull and other places on the Humber, bringing grain from Yorkshire and Lincolnshire. More came from Lynn, Wells, Burnham, Yarmouth, and other places in Norfolk. Still more came from the Medway and from ports in Kent and Essex, such as Milton, Faversham, Margate, and Sandwich. Suffolk also sent corn, butter, and cheese. These ships came to Bear Quay and supplied the city when land carriage became weaker and country people grew afraid to come by road.

The Lord Mayor managed this trade carefully. He wanted the masters and sailors to be safe, so that they would continue bringing food. Their corn was unloaded quickly, and they had little need to leave their vessels. Money was

carried on board to them in a pail of vinegar, as was then commonly done for safety. In this way, sailors and city workers could avoid close contact. The plan was simple, but it helped keep bread in London.

The coal trade was also extremely important. Great quantities of coal were burned not only in the streets but also in private houses. This was done even in summer, when the weather was very hot. Many physicians advised it because they believed fire could help clean the air. Some disagreed and said heat would make the sickness worse. But others answered that the heat of a coal fire was different from the heavy heat of the weather. They believed it burned and cleared bad vapours rather than feeding them.

I confess that I agreed more with the second opinion. In my own house, good fires seemed to keep the rooms sweeter and healthier. I cannot prove that this alone preserved us, but I believe it helped. Many houses that kept constant fires were not infected at all. At such a time, people naturally took comfort from anything that seemed to protect them.

Keeping the coal trade open was not easy. We were at war with the Dutch, and Dutch privateers took some of our coal ships at first. This made other ships careful, and they began to come together in fleets. Later, the Dutch seem to have feared taking them because the plague might be on board. Their caution helped us, because the coal ships then had a freer passage.

The Lord Mayor also ordered care in the river. Coal ships were not all to come up into the Pool at the same time. Lighters and other small vessels went down toward Deptford, Greenwich, and even farther, to take coal from them. In some places, such as Greenwich and Blackwall, great heaps of coal were left on shore after the ships had gone. In this way, the seamen had little or no contact with the river workers and coal sellers.

Even with all this care, the disease reached some of the coal ships. Many seamen died. Worse still, the infection was carried to Ipswich, Yarmouth, Newcastle, Sunderland, and other places on the coast. This shows again how hard it was to keep trade and safety together. London needed coal to live, but the bringing of coal also carried danger back to the towns that supplied it.

Because so many fires were kept, coal was used in unusual quantities. At one time, when ships were stopped by weather or by enemies, the price rose very high. Later, when more ships came safely, the price fell again and stayed more reasonable. Public fires also used much coal, though they were kept burning only a few days. Fires were made at many important places, including the Custom House, Billingsgate, Queenhithe, the Royal Exchange, Guildhall, St Paul's, Bow Church, and near London Bridge.

Some people later blamed these public fires and said more people died because of them. I do not believe this. I never saw good proof of it. The fires may not have saved the city, but I cannot think they caused the plague to grow. They were one of many methods tried by frightened but serious men. When death is everywhere, people use every means they can find, and afterward others argue about whether those means were wise.

#### Part 23: Pain, Burial Grounds, and Decline

I must return for a moment to trade inside England. When the infection first broke out, business almost stopped. Only food and necessary things continued in any steady way. There were fewer people in the city, because many had fled and many were sick or dead. So London did not need as much food as before, though it still needed a great deal. By God's mercy, there was a plentiful year of corn and fruit, and this helped keep bread cheap.

Meat was also cheap, but for a sad reason. Grass and hay were not plentiful, so cattle could not be kept easily. Butter and cheese became dearer for the same cause. Fruit, however, was extremely plentiful. Apples, pears, plums, cherries, and grapes came in great quantity, and because there were fewer buyers, the price was low. Poor people ate too much of this fruit, and many became sick in the stomach. Such illness sometimes weakened them and made them more open to the plague.

The stopping of foreign trade hurt the making of goods all over England. Many goods were made to be sent abroad, but ships could not safely carry them to foreign ports. Even when merchants abroad wanted English goods, ships from

London were often refused. So the workers who made cloth, ribbons, lace, hats, gloves, and many other things lost their work. The same happened to people who made goods for London itself, because the city's business had stopped.

This threw a great number of workers into misery. Journeymen, servants, labourers, and whole families who lived by daily work suddenly had no wages. The city's charity was therefore very necessary. It is to the honour of London that so many poor people were fed and helped during that time. I do not say that no one suffered want, but I do believe that no known case of extreme need was willingly neglected by the magistrates.

In the country, some master workmen tried to keep their poor workers employed. They continued making goods even when they could not sell them at once. They hoped that, when the plague ended, trade would return quickly. Rich masters could do this, but poor masters could not. So the trouble of London spread through the whole kingdom. The sickness was in the city, but the loss of work was felt far away.

The next year, a very different disaster changed trade again. The great fire of London destroyed houses, shops, warehouses, furniture, clothes, and great stores of goods. This was terrible for the city, but it created work for the country. All kinds of workmen were needed to replace what had been lost. Foreign markets were also empty of English goods because the plague had stopped trade. So, after plague and fire, there came for some years a very great demand for English work.

I must now speak of the mercy that appeared near the end of September. The plague had then reached its greatest height. My friend Dr Heath came to see me a little before that time and told me he believed the violence of the disease would soon lessen. When I saw that the next weekly bill was the highest of the whole year, I questioned his judgement. But he answered more clearly than I expected.

He said that, by the number of people then infected, far more should have died if the disease had been as deadly as it had been two weeks earlier. Before, it killed many people in two or three days. Now, he said, many lived eight or ten days, and many more recovered. He believed that the poison of the disease had begun to lose its strength. The next bill proved him right, for the number of deaths fell by

almost two thousand.

The plague was still dreadful. One bill still showed more than six thousand deaths, and another more than five thousand. Yet the fall had begun. More people were recovering than before. If this had not happened, London might have been in a condition beyond all hope. Dr Heath believed that there were many tens of thousands infected at that time. If the sickness had continued killing as before, the number of deaths would have been much greater.

In October, the decrease became clearer. The bills fell again and again. Still, many people were sick, and many became sick every day. The difference was that fewer died. This filled people with joy, but also with dangerous carelessness. As soon as they heard that the plague was weaker, they began to act as if there were no plague at all.

This was one of the strangest changes I ever saw. At the beginning, people had fled from one another with great fear. They would not enter a neighbour's house or stand close to a friend. But now, when the disease was still present and still killing many people, they became bold too soon. They opened shops, walked in the streets, visited houses, and spoke freely with almost anyone. Some even went into rooms where sick people lay.

This was not reasonable. Dr Heath himself admitted that the disease was still catching. It was only less deadly than before. But the sores, swellings, fever, and danger of death were still terrible enough. Even if more people recovered, no wise man should have wished to catch such a disease. Many who had kept themselves safe through the worst weeks now lost their lives because they became careless at the end.

Physicians tried to stop this rash behaviour. They printed directions and spread them through the city and suburbs. They warned people not to mix freely, not to visit infected houses, and not to throw away their caution too early. They also warned that a new rise of sickness might come if people were careless. But the people were full of joy and would not listen. They thought the bitterness of death was past.

This careless joy also reached people in the country. Many who had fled from

London were tired of being away. They wanted their houses, shops, goods, and ordinary lives again. When they heard that the bills had fallen, they came back quickly. It was surprising to see them return while more than a thousand people were still dying in a week. They entered the city as if all danger had ended.

The result was bad. In the first week of November, the bill rose again by about four hundred. Physicians believed that several thousand people had fallen sick that week, many of them newly returned. One barber named John Cock is a clear example. He had left London with his whole family and locked his house. When he heard that deaths had fallen greatly, he came home and opened his shop again.

There were ten people in his family: himself, his wife, five children, two apprentices, and a maid-servant. He had not been home much more than a week when the plague broke out in the house. Within about five days, almost all were dead. He died, his wife died, his five children died, and both apprentices died. Only the maid-servant remained alive. This one household showed the danger of returning too soon.

Yet God's mercy was greater to the city as a whole than we had reason to expect. The strength of the disease was spent, and winter came on quickly. The air became clear and cold, with sharp frosts. Most of those who fell sick now recovered. There were still some returns of the distemper in December, and the bills rose a little at times, but the sickness soon fell again.

Before long, London began to look full of people once more. This was strange to see. So many had died that one might think the loss would be visible everywhere. Yet houses were soon occupied again. Empty houses were few, and if some were empty, tenants were ready to take them. A stranger coming into the city might not have guessed how many thousands had disappeared only a short time before.

I wish I could say that the manners of the people became as new as the face of the city. No doubt many persons and families truly remembered their deliverance and were thankful to God. It would be uncharitable to deny that. During the visitation itself, the people had shown much seriousness and devotion. But in the general life of the city, little lasting change could be seen. Many returned quickly

to the same habits they had before.

Some people said that London was worse after the plague. They said the people had been hardened by danger, as sailors sometimes become bold after a storm. I will not go so far. Still, it is true that the deep feelings of the plague time did not remain in public life as strongly as one might have hoped. Fear had brought people to prayers, but safety soon brought many back to ordinary carelessness.

While London was recovering, other parts of England were suffering. Norwich, Peterborough, Lincoln, Colchester, and other places were visited. The magistrates in London considered whether they should make rules about people coming from those infected towns. But this was almost impossible. They could not easily know who came from where. In the end, they could only warn people not to receive or closely mix with those known to come from infected places.

The warning did little good. Londoners now believed themselves almost beyond danger. Many thought the air had become healthy again and could not be infected twice, as a person who has had smallpox is not easily infected again. This brought back the false idea that infection was only in the air and not passed from sick people to sound people. So people mixed together freely, sick and well, with very little caution.

Some paid dearly for this boldness. Many fell sick after the great decrease, though more of them recovered than before. Physicians were busier than ever, because so many people were infected. The difference was not that the disease had stopped spreading, but that fewer of the infected died. This is an important point. A lower death number did not mean that no danger remained.

When people returned to the city, they began asking after friends and neighbours. Then they found many sad surprises. Some whole families had been swept away. No relation or heir remained to claim their goods. In such cases, what little they had left was often stolen or carried away by different people. It was said that abandoned property belonged to the king, and that some of it was granted for the use of the poor. Whether all this was done exactly as people said, I cannot fully tell.

The poor were still in great distress after the worst sickness was over. During

the height of the plague, money had flowed in from many places for relief. But when people thought the main danger was past, much of that charity stopped. Yet many poor people still had no work, no family, no tools, or no strength. Some had lost everyone who helped them. Their need did not end simply because the weekly bills fell.

Foreign trade also returned slowly. The health of London improved, but foreign ports did not trust us quickly. Spain, Portugal, Italy, Barbary, Hamburg, and the ports of the Baltic were still shy of English ships for many months. The Dutch trade was already stopped by war. So the city's recovery was not sudden in business, even when the streets filled again. Fear of London goods remained long after the disease had weakened.

The great number of dead forced many parishes to make new burial grounds. Some of these continued in use afterward. Others were later built on or used for ordinary purposes, which I cannot mention without regret. It seems wrong that places where so many bodies had been laid in a time of distress were not kept separate and respected. In some places, the dead were later dug up as if they were rubbish.

One such ground was beyond Goswell Street, near Mount Mill. Many were buried there from Aldersgate, Clerkenwell, and even from inside the city. Another was near Holloway Lane in Shoreditch parish. A third was at the upper end of Hand Alley in Bishopsgate Street, which was then a green field. Dead-carts from the city also brought many bodies there. Later, houses were built on that ground, and when the foundations were dug, bones and bodies were found.

This caused loud complaint. Some bodies were still so plain that people could distinguish women's skulls by the hair. Some feared that disturbing the remains might bring back infection. The bones and bodies were then carried to another part of the same ground and thrown into a deep pit. That place was left open as a passage and fenced apart. It was said that the remains of nearly two thousand bodies lay there.

Other burial grounds were made in Moorfields and in the large parish of Stepney. Stepney had several places for its dead, including grounds in Spitalfields,

Petticoat Lane, Shadwell, and Wapping. Those places were not all separate parishes then, but belonged to the great Stepney parish. The number of dead was so large that ordinary churchyards could not hold them. New ground had to be taken wherever it could be found.

The Quakers also had their own burial ground and their own dead-cart. I have already mentioned Solomon Eagle, who ran through the streets crying that the plague was a judgement on the city. His own wife died of the plague the very next day after one of his warnings, and she was carried among the first in the Quakers' dead-cart to their new burial ground. Such events struck people deeply at the time. They seemed to join private grief with public warning.

After the plague, some people spoke harshly about physicians and ministers who had left London. Physicians who returned found that many people did not want to employ them. Notes were sometimes put on their doors saying, "Here is a doctor to be let." Ministers also suffered reproach. On some church doors people wrote, "Here is a pulpit to be let," or even "to be sold." These words were bitter and uncharitable.

I cannot approve of such judgement. A plague is not an ordinary danger. It is not like facing an enemy in battle, where a man sees what is before him. It is like standing against death itself, when every breath may be danger. Some clergy fled, but many stayed and died while doing their duty. Some Dissenting ministers stayed too and served bravely, but not all of them stayed either. Charity should have been used on both sides.

I believe all who stayed in duty deserve honour: clergy, physicians, surgeons, apothecaries, magistrates, constables, parish officers, buriers, nurses, and many others. Some not only risked their lives but lost them. I once tried to make a list of such people, but it was impossible for a private man to know the full truth. I remembered that many clergymen, physicians, surgeons, aldermen, constables, and parish officers died before September. After that, the sickness became so violent that men no longer died by clear number and account, but, as it were, by heaps.

## Part 24: London Opens Again

After all these things, I must say once more that the shutting up of houses was a doubtful rule. It was meant for the public good, and the magistrates used the law that was already in their hands. Yet it brought many private sorrows. Healthy people were often shut in with the sick. Families were made angry, afraid, and weak by close rooms, bad air, and long waiting. In some cases, the people who came to examine them may have brought the very sickness from which they were trying to protect them.

I do not say that the rule did no good at all. If a sick person was wild with fever and likely to run into the street, some restraint was necessary. If all infected people could truly have been kept apart from the healthy, the rule would have been useful. But the chief danger was often hidden. People who looked well carried the disease without knowing it. By the time a house was marked with the red cross, the infection had sometimes already gone out through servants, children, visitors, or frightened relations.

When the plague declined, people had another question before them. How should houses and goods be made safe again? Many houses had stood empty for weeks or months. Some had lost every person in them. Others had bedding, clothes, curtains, and goods that had been used by the sick. People feared that infection might still remain in these things. This fear was not foolish, because many believed the disease could live for a time in cloth and bedding.

There were many opinions about what should be done. Some advised strong smoke, burning pitch, brimstone, gunpowder, or other sharp things in every room. Some washed floors, walls, and furniture with vinegar. Some carried goods into the open air and left them in the wind and sun. Others burned old bedding and clothes altogether, especially if they had belonged to the dead. In many homes, costly perfumes and strong smells were used in great quantity.

These methods were not all equally useful, but they had one good effect. They made people careful and serious about returning to their houses. They also filled many streets with cleaner and sweeter smells than before. I cannot say exactly

how much they helped. Yet it was reasonable to clean, air, and sweeten houses that had been closed so long. It would have been foolish to rush back into rooms where sickness and death had lately lain.

Even after the plague had clearly fallen, people were often alarmed again. Some said the sickness would return at a certain time. Solomon Eagle and others still cried out that London had not yet suffered enough. They warned of new strokes and new judgements. If they had said plainly that the next year the city would be destroyed by fire, we might afterward have wondered more at them. But most of their warnings were only that the plague would return, and in that they were not proved right.

Still, these cries kept some fear alive. If anyone died suddenly, people were alarmed. If spotted fever rose in the bills, they whispered that the plague was coming back. If the plague deaths rose a little, the old terror returned at once. Through the rest of the year, there were still some hundreds of plague deaths at times. The danger was not gone in a single day. London was healing, but it healed like a sick body, slowly and with many fears.

One small alarm came from the meat market near Newgate. Two people fell down dead while buying meat in the shambles. At once a rumour spread that all the meat there was infected. For two or three days, many people were afraid to buy. Later, it became clear that the meat itself had not caused the deaths. The two people had been infected already. But when fear has hold of the mind, a rumour can become stronger than proof.

By the mercy of God, the winter weather continued, and the health of the city improved. By the following February, most people believed the distemper had quite ceased. Then men were not so easily frightened again. Shops opened more steadily, families returned, and the sound of ordinary work came back into the streets. Yet the return was not the same for all people. The poor came back quickly because they needed work, but many rich families waited until spring before bringing their wives and children.

The Court returned soon after Christmas, but much of the nobility and gentry did not come so early. Men who had business came first. They had houses, offices,

shops, accounts, and goods to look after. Their families followed only when they believed the danger was truly over. This difference was natural. Those with money could wait. Those without work could not wait long, because hunger presses harder than caution.

I should also notice one remarkable thing. Although the plague was violent in London and in many other places, it did not enter the fleet. Earlier in the year, before the sickness had come strongly to the riverside, many seamen had been pressed into service for the war with the Dutch. They went unwillingly, and many complained that they were dragged away. Yet, in the event, this hard treatment saved some of their lives.

When those seamen returned, many found that their families had been destroyed by the plague. They had reason to mourn deeply. Yet they also had reason to be thankful that they themselves had been carried out of danger, though against their will. That year there was a hot war with the Dutch, and we lost many men and some ships. But the plague did not rage in the fleet. When the ships came back into the river, the worst force of the sickness had already begun to fall.

I would gladly end this sad account with many clear examples of thankfulness. The deliverance of London called for deep thanks from the whole nation. We had been brought very low. Human help seemed at an end. Physicians, officers, fires, medicines, rules, and all other means had failed to master the disease. Then, when the town expected only more death, the sickness weakened in a way that surprised us all.

I do not think this happened because a new medicine was found or because physicians suddenly learned a better cure. The strength of the disease was spent. Its poison seemed to lose power. Learned men may search for natural reasons, and perhaps some may be found. But at that time, even many who were not very religious felt that a hidden hand had turned the plague aside. The city had been near ruin, and then hope came back.

I know that some readers may not like such reflections. They may say that I am preaching instead of telling history. But I cannot tell the history honestly without saying that the deliverance filled many people with awe. Like the one

leper in the Gospel who returned to give thanks, I wish at least to be thankful for myself. If others forgot, I would not willingly forget. I lived through a time when a man could hardly expect to see the next morning.

For a short time, the impression on the people was very strong. Even loose and careless people spoke of God's mercy. Strangers met in the streets and talked to one another as if they were old friends. One day in Aldgate, I heard a man come out from the Minories, look up and down the street, and cry out at the change. "Lord," he said, "what a change is here! Last week I came this way, and hardly anyone was to be seen."

Another man answered, "It is all wonderful. It is like a dream." A third said, "Blessed be God. Let us give thanks to Him. This is His doing, for human help and human skill were finished." These men did not know one another. Yet such words were common in the streets then. People passed along giving thanks for their deliverance. Even those who did not keep that feeling long could not resist it at the time.

But the people threw off fear too quickly. Only a week before, they had been frightened to pass a man with a white cap on his head, or with a cloth around his neck, or limping because of sores in his body. Now the streets were full of such recovering people, and others passed them without much fear. To be fair, many of those poor recovering people were truly thankful. They had come back from the edge of death, and they knew it.

Yet, speaking of the general body of the people, I must say this with sorrow. They praised God, but soon forgot His works. The deep seriousness of the plague time did not last as it should have done. I will not go farther into a harsh account of the wickedness that returned among us. I saw enough of it myself, but I do not wish to close this book with bitterness.

I will end instead with the simple verse I wrote at the end of my notes in that same year. It is plain and rough, but it is sincere: "A dreadful plague in London was, in the year sixty-five. It swept a hundred thousand souls away; yet I am alive." With that thought, I close my account. I was preserved when many better people were taken. The memory of that mercy should never leave me.

H. F.