

THE PLAGUE IN CAMBRIDGE*

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THE Black Death was part of the second pandemic of plague which wrought inconceivable devastation throughout Europe during the Middle Ages. It invaded Europe from the East in the autumn of 1347, and entered England through Weymouth early in August 1348. By the end of 1349 it had spread all over the country and it remained until 1666. During this time when the plague was domesticated there were four major epidemics and many smaller ones.

At the time the plague reached England, Cambridge was already a flourishing university town with numerous hostels and two colleges. The town had grown first on the high ground to the north of the river and later spread to the south side, on to a number of gravel patches in an area enclosed by a bend of the river and a ditch called the King's Ditch, which joined the two ends of the bend. It was in this portion of the town, enclosed between the river and the ditch, that the University developed. The plague soon spread through the whole town, but the mortality appears to have been greatest on the Castle side of the river, which was almost completely depopulated; in the rest of the town probably half the population died. When the foundations for the New Divinity School in Trinity Street were being dug the ground was found to be full of the skeletons of bodies which had been thrown into a pit without any attempt at order.

About half the beneficed clergy in the country died, and many parish churches were left without curate or priest to minister to the sick and poor and administer the rites of the Church. This loss was a stimulus to the foundation of some Cambridge colleges.

One of the existing colleges was University Hall which had been founded in 1326 through the influence of Richard Badew, Chancellor of the University. Its fellows were installed in houses on the site of the present Clare College. The houses had been bequeathed to the University by a physician, Nigel de Thornton; but the fellows had no endowments and struggled against poverty until Elizabeth, Lady of Clare, became their patron in 1336. The preamble to the Statutes which she gave to Clare Hall in 1359 states that she founded the college to further the type of knowledge acquired in a university which can be profitably applied to the furtherance of Divine Worship and the good of the State which 'in consequence of a great number

* Paper read to the Cambridge History of Medicine Society, 3 May 1956.

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of men having been taken away by the fangs of pestilence, is now beginning lamentably to fail'.¹

A similar motive influenced William Bateman to found Trinity Hall and to assist Gonville Hall, whose founder died in 1350, leaving Bateman his executor.

William Bateman (*circa* 1298–1355)² was distinguished for his studies in civil law. In 1328 he was appointed Archdeacon of Norwich Cathedral, but soon left Norwich to pursue his studies at the Papal Court of Avignon, where he remained for many years as Auditor of the Holy Palace. While there he served as a 'liaison officer' between Edward II and the Pope, performing duties something between those of an ambassador and a consul.

When the Bishopric of Norwich became vacant in 1343 Pope Clement VI arranged that Bateman should be unanimously elected bishop by the chapter, and he forthwith consecrated Bateman in that office. Soon afterwards Bateman returned to Norwich, and during the Black Death he courageously discharged his diocesan duties. Because of the large number of deaths among his incumbents, Bateman obtained a dispensation from his friend, Pope Clement VI, permitting him to admit very young clerks with little general and almost no religious education to be rectors of parishes. He used this dispensation sparingly as a temporary measure. In order to provide educated men for the future he obtained the King's Licence to found the College of Trinity Hall (20 November 1350). For the same reason he assisted in giving Statutes to Gonville Hall. In these colleges he encouraged the study not only of theology but of civil law and medicine.

Bateman returned to Avignon in 1344 and 1345 and on several subsequent occasions on affairs of State. His last visit was in 1354 when he had returned with Henry, Duke of Lancaster, and others in an endeavour to negotiate peace with the French. On this occasion he died suddenly on the day of the Epiphany, 6 January 1355.

It is interesting to conjecture that Bateman must have known that great physician and surgeon, Guy de Chauliac, who wrote an early account of the plague. He was physician and commensal chaplain to Clement VI and his successors, Innocent VI and Urban V, and stayed at his post at Avignon during the plague epidemics of 1348 and 1360 while many fled. He and Bateman were about the same age, both were of outstanding ability, and their times at the Papal Court overlapped.

The Cambridge guilds of Corpus Christi and of the Blessed Virgin Mary were founded principally for religious purposes to raise funds for hiring priests to pray for the welfare and prosperity of the members while alive and for their souls after death. The desirability of union between these guilds appears to have been under discussion before the occurrence of the

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Black Death, but this tragedy hastened it. On uniting they founded Corpus Christi College, so that more young clerks could be trained to help to replace the clergy who had died of plague.

One hundred years later it was the intention of Henry VI to lay the foundation stone of King's College Chapel, but the prevalence of plague in Cambridge prevented him.

In a letter to the Abbot of Bury St. Edmunds, he says:

. . . we had disposed us to be there in our owne person. Nevertheless, for the aier and ye Pestilence that hath long regned in our said Universite, we come not there at this time, but send Thiddre our Cousin the Marquesse of Suffolk, . . .³

Many small pamphlets were written on the plague in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, because physicians found little help on the diagnosis and treatment of plague in the writings of the classical authors, and because instruction about it was required by the clergy and other educated persons for use in their parishes and on their estates. These pamphlets are known as the Plague Tracts. One of the earliest was by John of Burgundy, and there are several copies of his tract in the University and College Libraries.⁴ From the plague tracts we learn that at first plague was thought to be due to bad air arising from some source of corruption, later on the idea that it was contagious and that the contagion could remain on fomites crept in. These ideas shaped the measures taken in the Town and the University to prevent or check the spread of plague.

During the Middle Ages, Cambridge was in a very insanitary state and must have been extremely noisome. Many of the streets were unpaved and refuse of all sorts was thrown into them and allowed to accumulate. The drainage of the town was difficult; there were many ditches running into the river and the King's Ditch. They were mainly stagnant, refuse was thrown into them and they were seldom cleansed. Cattle, swine and horses were brought into the town at night, and turned out in the morning for the common herdsman to lead them to pastures outside the town. Heaps of dung and other refuse accumulated in the streets outside the stables and the cow-sheds.

When Henry III granted a charter to the town on 22 February 1267, one of the provisions was that:

the town should be cleansed from dirt and filth and kept clean, and that the water-course should be opened and kept open as of old time it was used, so that the filth might run off. That all obstacles which prevented the passage should be removed, and that the great ditch of the town should be cleansed, for doing whereof two of the more lawful burgesses in every street were to be sworn before the Mayor and bailiffs (the Chancellor and masters being asked to be present if they would).⁵

There were frequent complaints about this unpleasant state of the town and of the danger to health arising from it. In 1351, in a petition to the King in Parliament, the Chancellor and scholars of the University prayed 'that the townsmen should be compelled to clean the streets, then very noxious to all persons passing, as well as the inhabitants'.⁶

On 12 August 1388, in preparation for the meeting of Parliament in Cambridge, the King sent a writ to the Chancellor of the University requiring him to 'remove from the streets and lanes of the town all swine, and all dirt, dung, filth and trunks and branches of trees, and to cause the streets and lanes to be kept clear for the future'.⁷

The title of one of the Statutes passed when Parliament met was 'The punishment of them which cause corruptions near a city or great town to corrupt the air'.⁸ This Statute became known as the Statute of Cambridge. It is given in full in Cooper's *Annals*. It states clearly the miasmatic theory of infection; namely, that many diseases are caused through the emanations arising from corruption infecting the air.

In 1459 it was reported that many inhabitants of the town of Cambridge and the suburbs of the same continued to cast and throw dung, corrupt earth, foetid water, garbage and intestines of slain beasts, carcasses and other filth, in the ways, streets, ditches, rivers, waters and other places of the town and suburbs in violation of the Act of 1388. In consequence of this insalubrious state of affairs Henry VI empowered the Vice-Chancellor of the University to inquire into the nuisance as often as he thought fit and to fine or imprison the offenders who did not remove or abate such nuisances. The fines were to be received by him for his own use.⁹

In 1502 about 266 persons were brought to answer charges before the Law Hundred or Leet of the town. Among the charges were those:

For suffering hogs, etc., to be at large in the streets and ways of the town.

For making dunghills in the highways, and casting dung and other filth into the streets.

For having gutters running down from their houses to the King's highway, amongst the parties presented on this account were the master and Fellows of Powles In and the President of Michael house.

For making seges or privies overhanging the common river and the King's ditch. The master of Buckingham college, the master or Keeper of Clement Hostel, and the keeper of Trinity Hall were amongst the persons presented on this account.

For casting dung and other filth and noxious matter and dead animals into the common river and King's ditch.¹⁰

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In 1503 a covenant was executed between the University and the Town on matters of common interest. It is an interesting document and is given in full in Cooper's *Annals*.¹¹

The town officials undertook to keep the town clean, but there was evidently much slackness on their part, for in 1526 Wolsey decreed that in default of the Mayor in dealing with common nuisances the Chancellor of the University should have the punishment and correction of them that made such nuisances.¹²

The cleansing of the town was an uphill task. In 1575, in Elizabeth's reign, a composition was made between the University and the Town for cleansing and lighting the streets, preventing various nuisances, and diminishing the danger from pestilence and fire.¹³ It was a serious attempt to deal with the sanitation of the town, and it is a revealing document as to the state of the town at that time. The preamble emphasizes the importance of 'avoiding of corrupt savours' which may be the occasion of the pestilence. The savours can be imagined on reading:

that it shall not be lawful for any keeper of an inn or hostelery, or any that keepeth any cart-mare, bullocks, or horses, commonly in his stable above the number of four, to cast out or lay out into the streets or lanes, the muck or dung of his stable, upon the pain of 3s. 4d. for every default, but in that time only whilst the muck or dung is in carrying away, and that every butcher shall from henceforth cause to be carried or conveyed away, all the paunches, guts, filth, entrails, and blood of all the slaughtered beasts, into the usual place, or to such convenient place as shall be appointed by the Vicechancellor and Mayor.

Pigs were not to go at large within the streets, precincts of any college or hall or house of students, churchyards, lanes or common pasture without a driver, and ducks and geese were to be kept off the streets.

This agreement provided for cleaning the streets by appointing two or four or more common carters who twice a week, 'on Wednesday before noon and on Saturday before nightfall, convey all the muck, mire and filth lying and made in heaps in the streets to dunghills' which were provided outside the town. Two other parishioners were appointed to see 'that all the streets and grounds within their several parishes, shall be duly purged and cleansed and swept and that the muck and filth has been removed by the carters'. Defaulters were to be reported and fined twelve pence for each default; half the fine was to go to the parishioner overseer.

Before this enactment nuisances could only be redressed after a complaint had been lodged. Parishioner overseers were now made responsible for the cleansing of the town, and for precautions against fire, and were given authority to take note of and deal with insanitary conditions.

For more than two centuries the King's Ditch was a continual source of

trouble. The Charter of Henry III had made provision for the cleansing of the streets and the ditch, but both were neglected.

In 1330 the Chancellor and Masters of the University complained to Parliament that the Mayor and Bailiffs did not keep the streets free from filth and dirt, and especially that they did not scour the great ditch of the town.¹⁴ Nothing was done about this complaint, but in 1348, the year of the Black Death, the King issued a commission empowered to make certain inquiries about the King's Ditch, one of which was 'who should cleanse it'.¹⁵

In 1574 Doctor Perne, who was Vice-Chancellor of the University, Dean of Ely and Master of Peterhouse, wrote an interesting letter to Lord Burghley the Chancellor, about the plague and the King's Ditch. In it he conjectures that one cause of plague is:

the corruption of the King's ditch which goeth through Cambridge and especially in those places where there is most infection.

He goes on to say that he will have it cleansed as soon as there is any hard frost. At the conclusion of his letter, Dr. Perne says:

I send a mappe of Cambridge, the which I did first make principally for this cause, to shoue howe the water that cometh from Shelford to Trumpingtonford and from thence nowe doth passe to ye Mylles in Cambridge, . . . might be conveighed from the said Trumpingtonford to the King's ditch, . . . for the perpetual scouringe of the same, the which would be a singular benefite for the healthsomeness both of the Universitie and of the Towne, besides other comodities that might arise thereby. I do trust in Almightye God, and I do greatly desire to see this thinge brought to passe which hath been so longe tyme wished for of many.¹⁶

It was not until 1610 that this suggestion was adopted and carried out jointly by the Town and University. The purpose of the scheme was:

for the cleansing and keeping sweet one common drain or ditch commonly called King's ditch, and for the avoiding the annoyance, infection and contagion ordinarily arising through the uncleanness and annoyance thereof, to the great endangering of the health and welfare of the people of both the said bodies,¹⁷

and it was planned by Edward Wright, M.A., of Gonville and Caius College, who also planned the New River.¹⁸

It was effected by a system of sluices arranged so that the numerous watercourses and ditches connected with the King's Ditch could be periodically flushed. Some of the water was conveyed by pipes to a fountain in the Market Place, which became known as Hobson's Conduit. It now stands at the corner of Lensfield Road and Trumpington Road.

When plague was present in the town 'searchers' were sent to examine cases of suspected plague, living or dead. The searchers were usually ignorant and illiterate old women who had recovered from an attack of plague and

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had some degree of immunity. They carried a white wand, two feet long, as a badge of office and reported to the Parish Clerks. The infected houses were isolated, or the sick removed to pest-houses.

The office of Parish Clerk was established in 1532 by Thomas Cromwell. The Parish Clerks kept the Parish Registers and it was from these and the reports of the searchers that the first Bills of Mortality were compiled. The Bills were not very accurate because of the manner of their compilation, but they were useful, in that an increase of deaths from the plague indicated the imminence of an epidemic and served as a warning for all who could to flee into the country.

In the University Archives there is a collection of Bills of Mortality for Cambridge from about 1638. They are made up parish by parish and record the number of burials. They were published under the joint authority of the Vice-Chancellor and the Mayor, who took joint action when action was necessary. The figures of the number of plague patients at the pest-house was obtained by the Mayor and the High Constable on their weekly visit to the pest-houses to inquire of the inmates, their wants and condition. During their visit they stood at a distance on the wind-side of the huts.

C. P. Murrell¹⁹ has given a description of the plague in Cambridge from 1665 to 1666 based on these Bills of Mortality and other records in the University Archives. There was an outbreak of the plague from July to December 1665, during which Bills were issued fortnightly, and a more severe visitation the following year from June 1666 to January 1667 in which Bills were issued weekly. In these two outbreaks about 920 persons died, and about half as many were infected and recovered. The mortality was probably one in eight during the epidemic period. In the crowded quarters of the town, particularly in the Parish of St. Andrew the Great, the infection never completely died down.

During epidemics of plague the University always closed, and members of colleges for the most part dispersed, so the invariable statement below the heading of the Bills of Mortality was 'All the Colleges (God be Praised) are and have continued without any infection of the Plague'.

Some of the efforts made to cleanse the town and get rid of corruptions from which plague was thought to breed have already been described. During an epidemic many other measures were taken. In the composition between the Town and the University of 1575 there were regulations for dealing with the occurrence of plague within a house. They were very similar to those in force in London and other large towns. Regulation 9 is as follows:

Also, that no manner of person inhabiting within any house visited hereafter with plague or pestilence, after notice and signification given by the Vicechancellor and

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Mayor, by these words, in writing in great letters set upon the uppermost post of his street door, viz., 'Lord have mercy upon us' shall go abroad out of that house, upon pain for the first default 20s. and for the second default herein 40s. and for the third default perpetual banishment out of the town, to be employed towards the poor man's box of that parish towards the relief of such poor visited persons, and there shall be one or more appointed by the Vicechancellor and Mayor or their Deputies, which shall provide all things necessary for the sustenance and other necessaries, to be delivered to the home visited at their door or windows, and further such persons thus visited, shall not carry or suffer to be carried out of their houses, any straw, rushes, sedge or mats, but shall burn the same within the said house, neither shall hang or lay any clothes or bedding which hath been about any such deceased person or belonging to any of that house where such sickness shall be, upon any hedge, pale or wall, bridge or any rail of any bridge or other-where where any common passage or resort is, but in his own ground, so as it be not to the manifest nuisance of his neighbours at the judgement of the said officers, within half a mile of this town, upon pain of 20s. for every default, to be employed as before, and the imprisonment at the discretion of the Vicechancellor and Mayor.²⁰

The earliest plague huts of which there are records, were erected on Midsummer Common; subsequently pest-houses were erected on Coldham's Common. The latter were probably in use during the epidemics of 1665–66. Pest-houses were simple wooden sheds covered by thatch. The following items quoted by Cooper from the Corporation Treasurer's account show that the pest-houses were a constantly recurring charge on their funds, and that occasionally the Council had to be reminded of its duty to keep existing ones in repair; and to erect new ones when necessary.

- 1594. Item, for carryinge boothe tymbre to Mydsomer Greene for visited people. iiis. iiip.²¹
- 1645. Item, to Hamond Tanne for thatch and other work at ye pest houses. 14s. od.²²
- 1647. Item, for mending ye pest house Dore. 1s. 4d.
Item, for a new doore and lock at ye pest house. 9s. 5d.²³
- 1655. On the 29th September, the Corporation ordered that the market bell and an old barred chest in the parlour should be sold, and the money applied towards building the pest houses, and on the 8th January, 1665–66 they ordered £30 to be paid to Alderman Pickering towards building the pest houses.²⁴
- 1659. Item, to ye Towne Clerk for entering a long order of Sessions about ye charge of building ye pest houses and ye disposing thereof according to ye said order made at ye Gen. Sessions. April the 26th 1658 by order of ye Court. 4s. 6d.²⁵
- 1663. Item, paid to Mr. Bailiffe Addams and Thomas Hutton for work done at the Pest house and Gaole. £13 1s. 8p.²⁶

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Shortly before the plague ceased in this country the Town of Cambridge petitioned Parliament to take in forty acres of Coldham's Common as being most advantageous for water and other necessities, on which to erect pest-houses. The Bill did not pass and in 1703 the pest-houses previously erected on the common were taken down and the materials sold.

Those dying of the plague were buried in the vicinity of the pest-houses. The burials are recorded in Parish Registers; for example, Cooper says:

It appears from St. Clement's register that there were buried on the Green (i.e. Jesus Green), seven in October, two in November, and one in March 1603-1604.²⁷

In 1952, when excavations were being made on Midsummer Common for the erection of a marquee for the Cambridge Trades Fair, portions of a number of human skeletons came to light which were probably remains of plague victims. During the very severe epidemic of 1630 when 347 people died, there were as many as forty plague huts on the common.²⁸

In the intervals between epidemics constant vigilance had to be exercised to prevent the plague being brought to the town by persons or merchandise coming from districts where the plague was prevalent. In the University Archives there is a proclamation of 1570-71 by John Whitgift, Vice-Chancellor, and Henry Seerle, Mayor, forbidding persons from Yarmouth to enter Cambridge.

Plague had broken out in Yarmouth and the Vice-Chancellor and the Mayor had been informed that people fleeing from the town had already spread the plague to villages in the surrounding countryside, and that some refugees were coming towards Cambridge. The proclamation warned the inhabitants of Cambridge of the danger, and forbade them to accept persons coming from Yarmouth into their houses on a penalty of forty shillings. It ended with a statement that a plea of ignorance would not be accepted. Proclamations such as this would be cried by the Town-crier as well as being posted in public places throughout the town.

Sturbridge Fair had to be abandoned on a number of occasions, but its importance made it a matter of national concern, and instructions were issued by the King and the Privy Council. The following proclamation was issued on 4 August 1625:

His Majesty . . . doe find it necessarie to prevent All Occasions of publique Concourse of his People for the present, till it shall please Almighty God of his Goodness to cease the Violence of the Contagion, which is very far dispersed into many Parts of the Kingdome already; And therefore, remembring that there are at hand two Faïres of speciall Note unto which there is usually extraordinary Resort out of all Parts of the Kingdome, the one kept in Smithfield neere the City of London, called Bartholomewe Faïre, and the other near Cambridge, called Sturbridge Faïre, the holding

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whereof at the usual tymes would in all likelyhood be the Occasion of further Danger and Infection to other Parts of the Land, which yett by God's Mercy stand clear and free; hath, with the Advice of his Majesties Privy Councill, thought good by this open Declaration of his Pleasure and necessary Commaundment not only to admonish and require all his loving subjects to forebeare to resort for this time to either of the said two Faires or to any other Faires within Fifty Miles of the said City of London, but also to enjoyne the Lords of the said Faires, and others interested in them or any of them, that they all forbear to hold the said Faires, or any thing appertayning to them at all tymes accustomed, or any other tyme, till by God's Goodnesse and Mercy the Infection of the Plague shall cease, or be so much diminished that his Majesty shall give Order for the holding them.'²⁹

When the day of the fair arrived the Corporation sent certain of their members to the fair field to see that the proclamation had been obeyed. They also abandoned the Mayor's feast on Michaelmas Day lest persons

invited from several partes, may prove dangerous and infeccious to the inhabitants of this Towne, who are Hitherto (Thanks be to God) altogether cleere from any such infection.³⁰

At the same time the University passed a Grace suspending sermons at St. Mary's Church and exercises in the schools.

When there was news of plague spreading in the surrounding country, watch and ward was kept, householders taking it in turns to do duty, and barricades were erected where coaches, wagons and carts were stopped and inspected. They even feared that contagion could be spread in correspondence, as the following quotation shows:

This year (1625) the plague prevailed to a most alarming extent in London and other parts of the kingdom. Mr. Mead, in a letter to Sir Martin Stuteville, dated Christ's College, the 9th of July, observes: 'It grows very dangerous on both sides to continue an Intercourse of Letters: not knowing what hands they passe through before they come to those to whom they are sent. Our Hobson and the rest should have been forbidden this week, but that the message came too late. Howsoever, it is his last.'³¹

Hobson was the celebrated Cambridge carrier. Carriers and postboys were made to fume the letters they carried. The letters were then delivered by another person.

During the epidemic the town became like a beleaguered city and commerce practically ceased. This brought great hardship on the inhabitants and a state bordering on famine. The food supply of the town was brought in under supervision of the Justices of the Peace for the county. Even after an epidemic had died down it was some time before normal relations with the countryside were resumed.

Thus, in 1351, soon after the Black Death, the Chancellor and Scholars

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of the University, in a petition to the King, had 'prayed that the fishermen might be obliged to bring their goods round to the hostels of Scholars, as they used to before the plague'.³² This was echoed three hundred years later in 1631 by Vice-Chancellor Butts when he said, 'Thus were we all at once coopt up together in ye town, there to be fedd with a bit and a knock by the Justices of ye County, Pardon (my good Lord) this freenes of speech'.³³

During an epidemic there was no difficulty in preventing people entering the town; on the other hand, steps had to be taken to prevent people leaving; anyone wanting to leave had to have a certificate from the Mayor and the Vice-Chancellor. There is such a certificate in the University Archives, issued to James Tabor in 1630.

All public assemblies in the town were prohibited, the market was moved to sites on the outskirts of the town such as Butts Green, and parishioners were only permitted to attend church in their own parish. In 1625 and 1630 windows were removed from the churches to cool and freshen the air.

Another measure which was resorted to was the lighting of street fires, a measure first advocated by Hippocrates. The following order is from the University Archives. It is dated 30 August 1563:

It ys ordered and apoynted by Mr Doctor Newton, Vicechancelour of the Universitie of Cambridge and Mr Henrye Seerle Maior of the towne of Cambridge that the inhabitants of everye parishe within the towne and precynctes of Cambridge shall weeklye at the sight apoyntment and commaundement of the churche wardens of everye parishe about vii of the clocke at night upon the mondayes wensdayes and saterdayes cause divers fiers to be made within the precinctes of their sayed parishes. Also by the sayed authoritie it is ordered and apoynted that every householder of this towne and the precinctes of the same shall in the mornyng upon the tuesdayes thursdayes fridayes and sundayes cast and pour downe about there strete dores one tubb of water of vi gallons at the least and furder shall cause the strete before there houses and ground to be made cleane twyse in the weeke that is to wytt upon the wensdayes and saterdayes and the fylte therof to be caried imediatlye to such places as are assigned for the receyte of the sayed fylte upon payne of iiis. iiiip. for everye default [as well of the goodes of the churchwardens neglectyng to overse and commande the premisses as of the goodes of every inhabitant and parishioner offendyng in the same].

In 1630 there was a terrible epidemic of plague in Cambridge. In a letter to Archbishop Usher, dated 25 May 1630, Doctor Ward, Master of Sidney Sussex College, said:

. . . there hath hapned the most doleful dissolving of our University and the most suddain despersion of our Students that ever I knew, occasioned by the Infection brought hither by a soulder or two dismissed not long since from the King of Sweden's Army, in February last . . .³⁴

The distress among the poor was so great that the King sent a letter to the clergy, justices of the peace, mayors of towns, etc., throughout the country, appealing for help, and some thousands of pounds were collected in London alone. In the letter it says:

. . . the distressed inhabitants of our said Towne of Cambridge are left in great mysery and decay: for the universitie, fearing the rage thereof have broken up and left their colledges, and the number of poore people in the said towne beinge very great: and many of them aged and impotent and such as whilest the schollars continued there had much reliefe by means of them, now the colledges being left are like to famish and many others of our said poore subjects who heretofore lived by their commerce and trafique as well with the schollers as with the countrey, and maintained themselves and families in good sort and did help and releeve others, are nowe by this grievous visitacion brought into great want, and their trading with the Countrey being now (out of a kind of necessity) wholly forborne they also are forced to crave reliefe so as the whole number that percive releife and maintenance are about 2,800 persons (besides those that are visited with the plague) the charge whereof doth and will amount to 150^{li} a week, at the least, which charge the university and towne are noe wayes able to disburse, there being not above seaven score persons at the most of the said inhabitants that are able any longer to contribute towards their releife; their estates being much weakened by the daily taxacions already laid upon them for the meaintenance of the visited persons and other poore people.³⁵

The state of the town can be imagined from the description in a letter from Dr. Butts, the Vice-Chancellor, to Lord Coventry.

For the present state of the town the sickness is much scattered, but we follow your lordships counsell to keep the sound from the sick; to which purpose we have built nere 40 booths in a remote place upon our commons, whether we forthwith remove those that are infected, where we have placed a German physician who visitts them day and night and he ministers to them: besydes constables we have certain ambulatory officers who walk the streets night and day to keep our people from needless conversing, and to bring us notice of all disorders, through God's great mercy the number of those who die weekly is not great to the total number of the inhabitants. Thirty one hath been the highest number in a week and that but once. This late tempestuous rainy weather hath scattered it into some places and they die fast, so that I fear an increase this week. To give our neighbours in the country contentment, we hyred certain horsemen this harvest-time to range and scowre the fields of the towns adjoining, to keep our disorderly pore from annoying them. We keep great store of watch and ward in all fitt places continually. We printed and published certayne new orders for the better government of the people, which we see observed: we keep our court twice a week, and severely punish all delinquents. Your Lordship, I trust, will pardon the many words of men in misery. It is no little ease to pour out our painful passions and playnts into such a bosom. Myself, am alone a destitute and

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forsaken man not a Scholler with me in College not a Scholler seen by me without. God allsufficient (I trust) is with me, to whose most holy protection I humbly commend your Lordship with all belonging unto you.³⁶

Referring to this same epidemic, Fuller refers to a repercussion of the plague on the University which deserves mention.

He says:

As God's hand was just upon—man's was merciful unto—the town of Cambridge; and the signal bounty of London (amounting to some thousands of pounds) deserves never to be forgotten. But this corruption of the air proved the generation of many Doctors, graduated in a clandestine way, without them keeping any Acts, to the disgust of those who had fairly gotten their degrees with public pains and expense. Yea, Dr. Collins, being afterwards to admit an able man Doctor, did (according to the pleasantness of his fancy) distinguish *inter cathedram pestilentiae et cathedram eminentiae*, leaving it to his auditors easily to apprehend his meaning therein.³⁷

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