

**SANITARY LEGISLATION, PAST
AND PRESENT: THE VALUE OF
SANITARY REFORM, AND THE
TRUE
PRINCIPLES FOR ITS ATTAINMENT**

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Sanitary legislation, past and present: The Value of Sanitary Reform, and the True Principles for its Attainment by John H. Griscom

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JOHN H. GRISCOM

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SANITARY LEGISLATION,
PAST AND FUTURE:
THE
Value of Sanitary Reform,
AND
THE TRUE PRINCIPLES FOR ITS ATTAINMENT.

PARTS OF TWO ESSAYS READ BEFORE THE NEW YORK
SANITARY ASSOCIATION, OCTOBER 3^d AND
NOVEMBER 14th, 1861,

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SANITARY LEGISLATION—PAST AND FUTURE.

Mr. President, and Members of the New York Sanitary Association :

THE period is again approaching when it behooves the friends of Sanitary Reform—a phrase synonymous with saving the lives of the people—to be about the noble work which they have set out to accomplish. Though seven times defeated in their efforts to stay the progress of disease and death, their hearts fail not, nor is their determination abated. Nor though seventy times seven should the enemies of this holy cause succeed, by bribery and corruption, in postponing the day for the inauguration of the most valuable of all the reforms known amongst men, will its votaries lay aside their armor, or cease to contend for the faith which animates them with the assurance of final success.

Though, like the disciples of Him who went about healing all manner of disease, and unlike them who have thus far betrayed the people to their destruction, they carry neither purse nor scrip, the friends of Sanitary Reform in this city will never cease to show the public their true interests in this matter, and demand of their legislators the abolition of the official nuisances which are the only obstacles to the removal of those physical nuisances, under whose foul influences so many thousands find untimely graves.

One of the most surprising phenomena in the political economy of this state and city, is the indifference of the

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people to their own death records. They either refuse to listen to, or, if they hear, they heed not, the facts concerning the dealings of death among themselves. There is no denial that the mortality of this city is much greater than that of many others of far inferior advantages for salubrity and longevity, and yet the trump of the archangel sounds in their ears in vain. Their well-cushioned officials drain them of their fat salaries, but do literally nothing in return to raise the standard of health, or check the march of pestilence. Their legislators listen year after year to the appeals in behalf of the thousands of dying infants, and when apparently moved to comply with the urgent cry for relief from the threatenings of disease and death, the demon of bribery drops a golden curtain between them and the pictures of desolate misery which have so moved them, and suddenly all assumes a rose color, and thenceforth, while their pockets are filled with sinful wealth, the cemeteries of the metropolis become populated in an increased ratio.

RECENT FAILURES OF LEGISLATION.

Lest any one should regard this as too strong language, let me present the facts upon which it is based:

In 1859, a Health Bill, which would have been the means of saving thousands of lives in this city, passed the State Senate, almost unanimously, and went down to the Assembly, where there was every indication that it would soon become a law. It passed readily through all the preliminary stages of legislation, until it reached its third reading, when, on his name being called, a member from this city, who had been its avowed friend, and its acknowl-

edged and accredited advocate before the House, and who had pledged himself, in the face of the Assembly, to the honorable fulfillment of the trust which the friends of the bill had reposed in him—that member rose in his place, and *declined to vote*, but said if his vote became *necessary to carry the bill*, he would, in that case, vote in the affirmative—an alternative which he himself could have rendered unnecessary. The withdrawal of his vote and influence, at this juncture, *killed the bill*, and as a consequence, destroyed the lives of we know not how many of his constituents, and all, as he himself afterward declared, because by the success of the very measure of which he himself was the putative father, three of his friends would be legislated out of office—offices which, of course, they were incompetent to fill.

Dismayed, but not disheartened, by this treachery, justice to the betrayed and down-trodden poor, and the claims of Sanitary Science, demanded a renewal of the efforts the next year. Accordingly the Legislature was approached with a bill, with details improved by experience and a better knowledge of the health laws of other cities, both foreign and domestic. It was presented favorably to the Assembly by the appropriate Standing Committee, with an elaborate report,* fully setting forth its merits, and the urgent necessity of the measure. It was, in fact, a measure of life or death to thousands of both city and State.

But, alas! its friends reckoned again without a sufficient knowledge of the character of many of our law-makers. It was the year of gridiron railroad scheming, and Sus-

* Report of the Committee on "Incorporation of Cities and Villages."—Assembly Document 129, March 2, 1869.

quehanna bonuses; and again the office-holders of this city, one of whom, from the City Inspector's Department itself, was a member of Assembly, so wrought upon the fears and pockets of the friends of those measures, that the Health Bill was again defeated, even two of the signers of the report voting against it.

The crying of the helpless, nevertheless, ceased not to fill our ears, and the demands of Science, so far from yielding to these base betrayals of her rights, grew louder and stronger. The subject was again presented to the Legislature of the present year, and from the character of many members of the Assembly, there was every prospect that in that branch it would meet with success, with a reasonable hope in the upper house. The vast importance of the measure was appreciated by a majority of the assemblymen, in all its fullness, and though opposed, both covertly with money, and openly by speeches, it passed that body by a vote of exactly two to one. But the seats of the senate chamber were occupied by the same individuals as in the year before, and though there were, among them, many above reproach or suspicion, to a too large number the last chance had come for a pecuniary addition to the unholy gains of legislation.

It is averred that about \$30,000 was raised in this city, among the office-holders, and expended to defeat the Health Bill of last winter. To the exactness of this statement, we cannot, of course, affirm, but this we do know: that on the Saturday previous to the Wednesday of adjournment, the vote for a third reading stood 19 to 12, while just on the eve of adjournment, when the bill was put upon its passage, the hopes of a suffering community were dashed to

the ground by a reversal of this vote, and some thousands of new-made graves stand as monuments of the wickedness of men whose names are known as partakers of those thirty pieces—the price of innocent blood.* Then it was that the enemies of the people's dearest interests triumphed; thus have their selfishness and wickedness stood against the demands of humanity, and opposed the progress of scientific reform.

The recent revelations of a famous libel suit but dimly shadow forth proceedings similar to those attendant upon the defeat of the Health Bill of last winter, the realities of which are well known.

The dying eagle saw on the arrow whose barb had pierced its vitals, feathers plucked from its own wing; so, through the salaries of its officials, the tax-payers of this city supplied the motive power of the machinery which did this death-dealing work among themselves.

Thus were we furnished with another proof that

"Man's inhumanity to man
Makes countless thousands mourn."

LOSS OF LIVES.

Let me now attempt, with as much brevity as is compatible with so serious a subject, to show something of what this city has suffered from these corruptions, and

* The *New York Daily Tribune* made the following editorial announcement, on Monday, April 15, 1861:

"We understand that \$10,000 in cold cash, went up from our city to Albany on Friday night, to defeat the Metropolitan Health Bill. This was an *extra* sum, and is understood to be on account of Street Sweeping. We should hate to have it either passed or killed with money."

what it might have gained, had our legislators and office-holders all been actuated by honest motives.

There are certain diseases which infest cities, almost exclusively—and to the greatest extent those which are most crowded, and filthy, and the least ventilated. They have impurity for their father and privation for their mother.

There is another class of diseases which, though not peculiar to cities, are vastly more prevalent and destructive in localities where the laws of hygiene are neglected—where the broom, the whitewash brush, and the Health Warden, are equally strangers, but which are shorn of half their influence where cleanliness and pure air are the rule.

There is yet a third class, which are always and absolutely preventable, anywhere and everywhere.

To the first class mentioned belong Cholera, Cholera Infantum, Typhus and Typhoid Fevers, and some others.

In the second class are comprised Scarlatina, Measles, Whooping-cough, Diarrhœa, Dysentery, Croup, Erysipelas, Puerperal and some other forms of fever, Infantile Convulsions, Hydrocephalus, Marasmus, and some others.

In the last, or wholly preventable class, are included Small Pox and Intermittent Fever.

During the last 22 years, there have died in this city, of the first class I have mentioned—

Of Cholera Infantum.....	19,346
Of Typhus and Typhoid Fevers.....	10,108
Total.....	29,454