

A History of Epidemics in Britain (Volume II of II) : From the Extinction of Plague to the Present Time

Charles Creighton



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This volume is the continuation of 'A History of Epidemics in Britain from a.d. 664 to the Extinction of Plague', and is the completion of the history to the present time. The two volumes may be referred to conveniently as the first and second of a 'History of Epidemics in Britain.' In adhering to the plan of a systematic history instead of annals I have encountered more difficulties in the second volume than in the first. In the earlier period the predominant infection was Plague, which was not only of so uniform a type as to give no trouble, in the nosological sense, but was often so dramatic in its occasions and so enormous in its effects as to make a fitting historical theme. With its disappearance after 1666, the field is seen after a time to be occupied by a numerous brood of fevers, anginas and other infections, which are not always easy to identify according to modern definitions, and were recorded by writers of the time, for example Wintringham, in so dry or abstract a manner and with so little of human interest as to make but tedious reading in an almost obsolete phraseology. Descriptions of the fevers of those times, under the various names of synochus, synocha, nervous, putrid, miliary, remittent, comatose, and the like, have been introduced into the chapter on Continued Fevers so as to show their generic as well as their differential character; but a not less important purpose of the chapter has been to illustrate the condition of the working classes, the unwholesomeness of towns, London in particular, the state of the gaols and of the navy, the seasons of dearth, the times of war-prices or of depressed trade, and all other vicissitudes of well-being, of which the amount of Typhus and Relapsing Fever has always been a curiously correct index. It is in this chapter that the epidemiology comes into closest contact with social and economic history. In the special chapter for Ireland the association is so close, and so uniform over a long period, that the history may seem at times to lose its distinctively medical character.

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