

#1  
Of Epidemic Diseases.

being  
a Proposal to collect the History  
of all <sup>the</sup> Epidemics of our Country  
in order, as they arise, ~~being~~ <sup>or</sup> an attempt towards  
filling up that capital desideratum so earnestly re-  
commended by Sydenham

By Benj<sup>r</sup>. Watthouse M. D. Professor  
of the Theory & Practice of Physic in the Univer-  
sity of Cambridge  
Plura enim in secula Natura latent, quae  
lynceos <sup>etiam</sup> oculos fugiunt: haec fate manent  
Posteris, eorumque futura promovebant, tentamina.  
Lieutard.

Great pains have been taken of late to discover  
by means of instruments, that condition, and those changes of  
the air, which produce a general state of health or di-  
sease



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18 JAN 1942

Am. Acad. of Arts & Sciences

1. Mh. 1783. W



disease, so valuable & so important are some of these discoveries, that they will sufficiently commemorate the age we live in. — Nevertheless we have still to lament that attempts to ascertain the causes of Epidemics are for the most part more specious than substantial. —

There are changes in the Air which no instrument can detect. The Air is a chaos of all things: in it float up & down the attenuated particles of all bodies whatever. The waters do not cover the beds of the ocean so entirely as this fluid does our earth. All creatures are nourished by it, and the manner of our existence constrains us to live in it be it good or bad. — All the aids therefore of art are vain & all that Nature can do for us fruitless, if we are deprived of it. —

By heat & other causes the little corpuscles arising from bodies rotting, or burnt, or the exhalations of animals or vegetables, & lastly from the earth herself are kept in perpetual motion. Need we then wonder that our bodies are variously affected by these different changes in the quality of the air, as well as the variations in the gravity of this fluid.







fluid destined to nourish us? — It is matter  
of admiration we are affected so little —

Epidemics, the Measles, for example, though  
they may appear to superficial observers to agree  
in their external form & common symptoms, yet in  
different years, are they of very different & dissimilar  
natures. — An accurate History therefore is the  
only chance we have of founding a rational doc-  
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The modern Hippocrates earnestly recom-  
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Sydenham led the way & gave us that ad-  
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(3) This is only meant in respect to some nations, not every of us,  
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for the space of 15 years: - thus proving himself  
a patriot of the first class - But his obser-  
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-culty in more respects than is generally ima-  
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As we now possess, Peace, Liberty,  
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-bridge for the express purpose of encouraging  
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exciting that spirit of free enquiry, without which it  
will never increase beyond the petty bounds  
of a trade. -

A Military spark first struck out in this City  
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The European world regard us still; some with a kind solicitude, and some with envy, to see in what order and degree those dispositions and arts which characterize polished humanity arise among us —

In such arts as depend merely on a great strength of genius in an individual, who, without the assistance of others, wholly by exerting the faculties within him, creates, as it were the art which dies with him. — I say in such kind of arts our West and Copeley have shewn the world what Americans can do if they exert themselves. — But where a Science like that of Physic, must grow up from a chain of discoveries & experiments, handed down from generation to generation, any individual however warmly he may be disposed to promote <sup>of his profession</sup> the utility, can do but little unless he has the united observations of others to assist him —

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Least any should think this plan for the History  
of the Epidemics of our Country of less consequence  
than it really is, let him call to mind the labours  
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How laudable exertions shall Englishmen go  
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To the consideration of the Faculty  
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that if their observations do not correspond with  
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they would communicate their remarks while the  
the



the remembrance of <sup>the</sup> facts are recent. — The Gout, the Pleurisy, the Dropsy, and the Stone are fixed diseases, but Epidemics are not like them reduced to certain rules & that chiefly owing to the neglect of making observations for a series of years in the same Country.

In some seasons the Measles are very malignant; at present as far as I have seen they are mild, regular & unmixed — yet I am not without my suspicions that pulmonary diseases and gradual wasting will attend not a few of the more infirm. — I appeal therefore, to every Practitioner, who has like me, anxiously turned over the observations & cases of others in hopes of finding something to guide him in the case which puzzles him. I say I appeal to ~~such~~ the benevolence of such to ~~commit~~ to writing the observations they cannot but make in this, and every other Epidemic, in order that as exact an ~~an~~ account of such hitherto inexplicable disorders may



may be transmitted to our successors —

(11). *Wicks Nov. Organ. Secret.* Besides love to our fellow-creatures, I hope the peculiar honour attending discovery will excite us to pursue this salutary work. (1) Founders of Empires — Legislators, & Deliverers of their Country were rewarded by antiquity with Heroic honours, but Divine honours were conferred upon Discoverers of useful things; since the benefits of Inventions may extend to all mankind & are perpetuated thro the course of time: while civil benefits extend only to particular Countries & sets of men, and seldom descends to more than a few ages. — The wisest of Men did not fix his glory in any of the privileges of royalty, or other excellence which he was possessed, but in this single business of discovery. "Is (says he) the glory of God to conceal a thing, but the glory of the King to find it out."

Times as well as Countries have their wastes & deserts, what period so proper as this



as this, for cultivation - the dawn of peace? - We  
want the will more than the ability for investigating  
the more abstruse paths of nature; and I am per-  
suaded it is in Philosophy as in Politics, that  
mens ambitions are generally proportioned to their  
capacities, for Providence ~~and~~ seldom sends  
a man into the world with an inclination to  
attempt great things who has not abilities equal  
to their performance.

---

Boston May 26<sup>th</sup> 1783.



Corrected according to the  
photostat copy of the article  
as printed in "Continental Journal."  
June 5, 1783. Borrowed from Dr. Vieto.

A.C. Holt  
9/12/42

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*beginning with The Measles,*

By Benj<sup>n</sup> Waterhouse M.D. ~~Professor~~  
~~of the Theory & Practice of Physic in the University~~  
~~of Cambridge~~

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Printed at the University Press  
1942



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16 SEP 1942

42 in 1.1M. 1783, W



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By Benj<sup>n</sup> Waterhouse M.D.

Great<sup>a</sup> pains have been taken of late to discover by means of instruments, that condition, and those changes of the air, which produce a general state of health or disease; so valuable & so important are some of these discoveries, that they will sufficiently commemorate the age we live in. <sup>a</sup> Nevertheless, we have still to lament that attempts to ascertain the causes of *Epidemics* are for the most part more specious than substantial. (cis)

There are changes in the Air which no instrument can detect. The Air is a chaos of all things; in it float up & down, the attenuated particles of all bodies whatever. The waters do not cover the beds of the ocean so entirely as this fluid does our earth. All creatures are nourished by it, and the manner of our existence constrains us to live in it be it good or bad. All the aids therefore of Art are vain, <sup>a</sup> and all that Nature (can) do for us fruitless, if we are deprived of it. ; / a and n /

By heat & other causes the little corpuscles arising from bodies rotting, or burnt, the exhalations of animals or vegetables, & lastly from the earth herself, are kept in perpetual motion. Need we then wonder that our bodies are variously affected by these different changes in the quality of the air, as well as the variations in the gravity of this fluid destined to nourish us? — [It is matter of admiration] we are affected so little! We ought rather to admire

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omit { \* The American Academy of Arts and Sciences advertises the Public that this paper was read at the 13th meeting of the Academy held in Cambridge on May 27th, 1783. Liberty for publication of this Communication was granted at that time and reconfirmed by Vote of the Academy at the 1275th meeting held in Boston on January 14th, 1942. }



ternal form <sup>and</sup> common symptoms, yet in different years, <sup>and</sup> are they of very different & dissimilar natures. <sup>in</sup> An accurate History, therefore is the only chance we have of founding a rational doctrine of the Epidemics of this COUNTRY.

The modern Hippocrates earnestly recommended an exact history of Epidemics as they arose, in order that we might ascertain, whether certain tribes of Epidemic Disorders, constantly follow each other in one determined series, or circle as it were; or whether they all returned indiscriminately, without any order, according to the secret disposition of the air <sup>and</sup> the inexplicable succession of seasons.

Sydenham led the way <sup>and</sup> gave us that admirable History of the Epidemics of his Country for the space of 15 years; thus proving himself a patriot of the first class; <sup>sixteen</sup> But his observations were made in an Island <sup>three thousand</sup> 3000 miles distance from this wide extended continent, dissimilar in more respects than is generally imagined to

Great Britain

As we now possess, Peace, Liberty, and Independence, we may allow ourselves to think a little of personal safety. Our Commonwealth has thought so, & has founded a Medical School at Cambridge, for the express purpose of encouraging, and diffusing the knowledge of the Healing Art, <sup>and</sup> exciting that spirit of free enquiry, without which it will never encrease beyond the pitiful bounds of a trade.

A Military spark first struck out in this City, burst into a flame, & spread throughout the Continent; thus illumin'd, this, till then benighted part of the world, drew the attention of all nations, who have regarded us while we have conquered Armies and founded such an Empire

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No TP → The European world regard us still; some with a kind solicitude, and some with envy, to see in what order and degree those dispositions and Arts which characterise polished humanity arise among us. —

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Least any should think this plan for the History of the Epidemics of our Country of less consequence than it really is, let him call to mind the labours of the incomparable Sydenham for a series of years; the intent of which he says himself "was to assist in beginning a work, "that would greatly tend to the advantage of mankind, "when at length it should be finished by posterity, and "the whole series of Epidemics be exhibited to view as "they shall succeed each other in future".

In laudable exertions shall Englishmen go beyond us? —

To the consideration of the Faculty, in this City & its vicinity, this intimation of forming a History of Epidemics as they rise, is with all due difference submitted, and of the present one the Measles by way of beginning, with a request that if their observations do not correspond with the descriptions hereafter to be given (in part

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<sup>disorders</sup> In some seasons the Measles are very malignant; at present as far as I have seen, they are mild, regular & <sup>and</sup> unmixed — yet I am not without my suspicions that pulmonary diseases and gradual wastings will attend not a few of the more infirm. <sup>P</sup> I appeal therefore, to every <sup>and</sup> Practitioner, who has like me, anxiously turned over the observations & cases of others, in hopes of finding something to guide him in the case which puzzles him. — I say, I appeal to the benevolence of such to commit to writing, the observations they cannot but make in this, <sup>e/</sup> and every other Epidemic, in order that as exact an ac- <sup>history</sup> ~~count~~ of such hitherto inexplicable disorders may be transmitted to our successors. <sup>IP</sup>

<sup>2/</sup> Besides, love to our fellow-creatures, I hope the peculiar honour attending discoveries will excite us to pursue this salutary work. — Founders <sup>(1)</sup> of ~~Empires~~, <sup>and</sup> ~~Legisla-~~ <sup>d/</sup> ~~tors~~, & ~~Deliverers~~ of their ~~Country~~ were rewarded by <sup>a/</sup> ~~Antiquity~~ with ~~Heroic honours~~, but ~~Divine honours~~, <sup>c/</sup> were <sup>d/</sup> conferred upon ~~Discoverers~~ of usefull things; since the <sup>2/</sup> ~~benefits~~ of ~~Inventions~~ may extend to all mankind, & are <sup>i/</sup> perpetuated thro the course of time: while *civil benefits* extend only to particular ~~Countries~~ & ~~seats~~ of men, and <sup>q/</sup> seldom descends to more than a few ages. <sup>ss/</sup> The wisest <sup>m/</sup> of ~~Men~~, did not fix his glory in any of the privileges of royalty, or other excellence, <sup>the</sup> <sup>n/</sup> ~~of which~~ he was possessed, <sup>whereof</sup> but in ~~this~~ single business of discovery. “Tis (says he) “the

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BOSTON MAY 26TH. 1783.



HMS  
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Printed at the Univerfity Prefs  
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BOSTON MAY 26TH. 1783.



HMS  
C 164



# 4

December 16, 1941

Mr. Harlow Shapley,  
Harvard College Observatory,  
Cambridge, Mass.

Dear Mr. President:

At a meeting of the Academy held on May 27th 1783, there was read a paper by Dr. Benjamin Waterhouse, "A Proposal to collect the History of all the Epidemics of our Country in order as they arise, or an attempt towards filling up that capital desideratum so earnestly recommended by Sydenham".

I believe this paper to be the first paper on a medical topic to be presented before any scientific assembly by any member of the Harvard Medical School Faculty. On this account the paper is of interest to medical historians. I can find no evidence that it has ever been published.

Recently the Medical School Library has acquired an interesting collection of Waterhouse material: diaries, letters from President Jefferson regarding vaccination and from other distinguished persons, notes of lectures and even the announcement, dated May 21, 1795, of his due and proper election to membership in the Academy. It is an unusual collection which some day may be of great value to anyone with sufficient temerity to undertake an appropriate biography of a figure adding much color to the background of the Harvard Medical School.

I write you on behalf of Dr. Waterhouse asking for permission now to publish this paper. My thought is to send it to one of the journals interested in medical history: or better



I feel justified in making this request because Dr.

I am your very humbl servt

R. F.

HMS  
C 16.4



AMERICAN ACADEMY OF ARTS AND SCIENCES  
28 NEWBURY STREET  
BOSTON

Jan. 18, 1942

Dr. Reginald Fitz,  
The Harvard Medical School,  
Boston.

Dear Dr. Fitz:

The Council will be happy to have  
you proceed with the publication of  
the paper by Dr. Waterhouse.

It was also voted that the paper  
be deposited in the library of the  
Harvard Medical School with the  
papers of Dr. Waterhouse, and that  
suitable acknowledgment of the courtesy  
of the Academy be made if the ms.  
is exhibited.

Sincerely yours,  
Abbot Payson Usher



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18 SEP 1942

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