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JOHN HOWARD'S TRUE PLACE *in* HISTORY. A SUPPLEMENT *to the* PAPER entitled "JOHN HOWARD *as* STATIST." By WILLIAM A. GUY, M.B., F.R.C.P., F.R.S., *Professor of Hygiène, King's College, London; Consulting Physician to King's College Hospital; and one of the Honorary Vice-Presidents of the Statistical Society.*

[Read before the Statistical Society, 16th November, 1875.]

I AGAIN ask permission of the Fellows of the Statistical Society to address them on the subject of John Howard. The first occasion of my so doing was the January meeting of 1873; and I made choice of that year, because it was the centenary of Howard's appointment as High Sheriff of the county of Bedford. My object, you may remember, was to show "that the John Howard, "whom most men know only as the first of philanthropists, was "also one of the foremost statist^s of his time." If this be so, it follows that there is no society with which his great name can be so fitly associated as with ours. This association has now been brought about: a Howard medal has been founded, and for the first time worthily awarded, and duly presented; and I, therefore, deem the occasion a suitable one for allotting to Howard what I believe to be his true place in history, not only as the founder of a new method of procedure in matters social, but as the inaugurator of a new epoch in the history of England and the world.

To some it may seem strange that now, after the lapse of a century from the date of Howard's most conspicuous public service, and of eighty-five years from his death, I should deem it possible to throw any fresh light on the nature of the services he rendered us, and his consequent true place in history. For Howard's contemporaries, among whom he lived and laboured, were not niggard of their praise. Indeed the most eminent men of the day, some in poetry, some in prose, may be said to have exhausted the language of panegyric. They spoke of him as the "consummate philanthropist;" "a patriot of the world;" "the most truly "glorious of mortal beings;" "the Godlike;" as one who had lived "an Apostle, and died a martyr;" and they classed him with Shakespeare and Newton, as being, in his line, as they in theirs, unrivalled and inimitable. They expressed a hope, too, that his life and actions might become "an epoch in the moral

"history of mankind;" and Edmund Burke, in the course of a noble panegyric, well worthy both of its author and of its object, recognised his "plan" as "original," and one "as full of genius" as "of humanity;" and Lord Thurlow again spoke of him as one "whose humanity, great as it was, was at least equalled by his "wisdom."

Nor have the many biographers and panegyrists, who have written about Howard since his death, fallen short of the high standard of praise set up in his own day, or failed to recognise in his original and characteristic labours a philanthropy of a novel kind. If the true nature of Howard's work has escaped the readers of his biographies, it is because the chronological order, which is of the very essence of a biography, leads to the mixing up of matters of trivial importance with others that serve to stamp the character of the man, and give individuality to his proceedings.

What then, you may ask, remains to be said on this topic? I answer, that which is impossible to contemporaries, possible only for those who have lived long enough to take note of the degree and extent to which the example given to the world has been imitated; the model copied. We who are now living know that Howard was the founder of a new epoch, because we are the witnesses from day to day of the adoption by the State of the very method of procedure which Howard used on the many occasions on which he found work to do. Let me briefly explain to you what this method was. But first let me remind you of what I may venture to call Howard's preparation and training for the characteristic work of his riper years.

Howard found his first opportunity of rendering a great public service in the year 1756, when he was 30 years old, and soon after his election as a Fellow of the Royal Society. He was captured on the high seas, and imprisoned in France, where he shared the sufferings of large numbers of his fellow countrymen; but having been liberated on *parole*, he remained in France till he had made himself master of all the painful facts and figures relating to their captivity. He then came to England, and submitted these facts to the "Commissioners of Sick and Wounded Seamen," who thanked him for his services, and, remonstrating with the French Government, brought about an exchange of prisoners, and, as I infer, a redress of the grievances that Howard had pointed out. In this instance Howard's self-imposed duty began with a most laborious investigation of the facts of the case, and ended when he had placed the matter in the hands of the commissioners, who proved to be both willing and able to obtain redress. Seventeen years elapsed before Howard found occasion to embark on a similar enterprise, but during that interval he was not idle. He was

reconstructing the village of Cardington, and endowing its inhabitants with health, comfort, and improved morals; at the same time that he was cultivating his habits of exact observation on every occasion—at Cardington, at Bath, on the crater of Mount Vesuvius—on which he could bring his favourite instrument, the thermometer, into play. So that he entered upon his duties as high sheriff of the county of Bedford at the ripe age of forty-seven, with the recollection of a great wrong redressed, the experience of a wise and beneficent reform steadily and continuously carried forward on his own estate, and his powers of observation in good training. It might be predicated of such a person that if he found work to do he would know how to set about it; and that he would not fail for lack of zeal, ability, or perseverance. Of courage in facing every form of danger, of adroitness and presence of mind in dealing with every kind of emergency, of calm judgment and sound sense in recommending all those improvements in the management and treatment of prisoners which we ourselves have adopted, Howard was yet to furnish proofs and illustrations.

That we may understand Howard thoroughly, we must follow him step by step—first in his early journeys as Sheriff of Bedford, and then in his several unofficial tours of inspection among the prisons and public institutions of England and the continent.

Among the duties which devolved upon Howard as high sheriff, there was one which others who held the same office had for one reason or another neglected, but which he hastened to perform; it was the duty of inspecting prisons. He began his work of inspection at Bedford, and found the three prisons (the county gaol, the town gaol, and the county bridewell) equally the scenes of the strangest and most cruel abuses. He found innocent men in large numbers detained in prison for long periods of time (perhaps to die there), through inability to pay certain fees allowed by the justices, which in fact constituted the gaoler's chief source of income. He learnt that all prisoners, the poorest debtor not excepted, were forced to pay a sort of entrance fee under the name of *garnish*—to pay with money, if they had it; if not, with the clothes off their backs—to furnish a supply of beer to the rest of the prisoners, which beer, often of his own brewing, the gaoler sold at the prison tap. Howard found also that our prisons were for the most part private property, originally faulty in construction, allowed to fall out of repair, often so insecure as, on the one hand, to invite attempts at escape, and, on the other, to tempt the gaoler to put in practice the most cruel methods of precaution and restraint. As these places of confinement too were not as a rule built for prisons, they proved in every way unsuitable for their purpose. They were often found to be constructed and tenanted in such a way as to promote to

the very utmost the destruction of health and life, and the corruption of morals. It is hard to imagine any act of omission or commission, tending the one way or the other, of which our English prisons were not the scenes. The destruction of health and life was insured by the exclusion of every agent by which the one is promoted, the other prolonged. Food and water, air and light, fuel and clothing, exercise and recreation, all tainted or excluded; and, as a natural result, gaol fever and confluent small-pox afflicting and destroying not the prisoners only, but the gaolers and their families, and conveyed in various ways to the outside population of villages and towns, to courts of justice, and to our armies and fleets.

Howard did not see and fully appreciate all these evils at once. What struck him first and most forcibly was the injustice wrought by illegal fees. The destruction of health and life, and the corruption of morals, and the manifold neglects by which they were brought about, forced themselves on his attention later in the day, especially during his visits to certain bridewells and houses of correction.

The illegal fees of which I am speaking were, as I have said, the main source of a gaoler's income; and Howard, with that quick and just perception of cause and effect, of wrong and remedy, for which he gave himself so little credit, saw at a glance that the cure of this evil lay in the substitution of a fixed salary to the gaoler for these fluctuating fees. Accordingly he made application to the justices of the peace, asking them to institute this needful reform; but they told him that they could not act for want of a precedent.

Howard then, first in post-chaise, afterwards on horseback, in the winter of 1773-74, started, note-book in hand, in search of a precedent. He inspects the county and borough gaols, the bridewells and houses of correction, of all the midland counties, visiting several of them twice over, and he also inspects the prisons in London. I infer from the dates attached to his descriptions in his work "*On the State of Prisons*," that he set out on this winter's journey about the middle of November, 1773, and made his visits at intervals during December of the same year and the January and February of the year following; but in none of the prisons he visited could he find the precedent of which he was in search. This I look upon as a most fortunate circumstance: for had Howard, during some early visit, found that which he sought, he would probably have gone back to Bedford, told the justices of his success, and persuaded them to substitute a fixed salary to the gaoler for these objectionable fees and fines, and with this local reform Howard might have rested satisfied; but travelling, as he was led to do, from place to place and inspecting prison after prison, he not only found the wrong done at Bedford prevailing everywhere else, but each fresh prison either revealing some new defect of structure or

administration, or adding force and piquancy to the lessons which those previously visited had taught him; so that drawn on and on, and farther and farther, in search of a precedent, he was becoming ever better and better acquainted with the manifold evils, physical and moral, that had made the prisons of England their home. Thus it came to pass that he who had set out in search of a simple means of rectifying a local abuse, found the note-book (which as he tells us he could not use till he had aired it at the inn fire, and so driven off the foul vapours of the prison)—he found his note-book filling fast with plain and truthful records of universal abuses.

These were the facts which Howard submitted to Parliament; these the facts that so worked upon the feelings and consciences of its members as to make further inquiry needless, and delay a thing not to be thought of. Accordingly, without loss of time, the legislature passed two Acts, the one for the relief of prisoners who should be acquitted, respecting their fees, the other for preserving the health of prisoners and preventing the gaol distemper. This done, the House of Commons acknowledged Howard's services by a public vote of thanks, and I cannot but think that, had he not been the unique character he was, he would have gone back to Cardington bearing with him the happy consciousness of having done a great work and achieved a great distinction. But Howard seems to have somehow discovered what our legislators themselves appear to have been unconscious of, that Acts of Parliament to be obeyed must first be known to all who have to put them in force, and that then some machinery must be provided by which those persons may be got to do, and persevere in doing, what the Acts in question require of them.

Howard, as I say, knew this, and accordingly, without loss of time and at his own expense, he first published and sent to every prison in England and Wales copies of the two Acts of Parliament; and then, also without loss of time, set out on new tours of inspection, during which he visited every prison in the United Kingdom, and made several journeys to the continent, extending his visits to those of France, Holland, Flanders, Germany, and Switzerland, in search of information that might be brought to bear on the improvement of our English prisons.

The precious results of these tours of inspection carried on during the years 1773, 1774, 1775, and 1776, Howard published, at a low price and at his own risk, in his "State of Prisons." How needful were the several practical steps he had thus taken, may be inferred from what I have already had occasion to state, that the Acts of Parliament he had been at such pains to publish and make known, had been strictly obeyed and literally carried into effect, in only 15 out of 130 of the prisons that he inspected.

How Howard persevered in his work of prison inspection, publishing the results in new editions of his work; how he extended and enlarged his plan, so as to embrace not gaols only and the hulks, but hospitals and lazarettos, workhouses and schools, camps and barracks, indeed, every public institution, at home and abroad, in which he thought it likely that the lazy Lord of Misrule would seek to establish his mixed empire of negligence and cruelty, I have no time to point out. What I wish to affirm of Howard is this: that in his own person, of his own free will, and at his own cost, he set the first example of that method of procedure in bringing about the reform of abuses which the people and Government of England now resort to on every suitable occasion. Let me explain myself. Some person, among those lookers on who proverbially see more of games than the players themselves, happens to become cognizant of some cruel injustice, the inheritance perhaps of remote times, the product, may be, of some brisk and thriving industry, and he exposes it. If there is real ground of complaint, the public is brought to sympathise with the sufferers, the press gives the needful publicity, and possibly some benevolent association lends its support. The subject is brought under the notice of Parliament, or laid before some executive department of the Government. A Parliamentary Committee or a Royal Commission is appointed, witnesses are examined, evidence taken. The results are embodied in a report. At length an Act of Parliament is passed, and Inspectors are appointed, with power in some cases to bring about the punishment of those who neglect its provisions or set them at defiance; in others to give, by means of periodical reports, that publicity which either checks malpractices, or, by pointing out legislative shortcomings or defects, paves the way for improved legislation. It is by such successive processes as these, that our great social evils and wrongs are first exposed, then prohibited, then watched, checked, and destroyed.

Now every word of this description applies in its full force to the method of *proceduré* of John Howard. Before his time men were not wholly ignorant of the wrongs and cruelties which had come to prevail in our prisons. As early as 1701, the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge sent a committee to visit Newgate, of which a Dr. Bray was the chairman. This committee extended its inquiries to the Marshalsea and other prisons, and found the state of one and all of them deplorable. We are indebted to Mr. Hepworth Dixon, one of Howard's biographers, for publishing Dr. Bray's "Essay towards the Reformation of Newgate, and the other "Prisons in and about London," in which the strange abuses found in them are exposed, and suitable remedies pointed out. This important and interesting document, after lying buried among the archives of the society for a century and a half, has been brought

to light. But it led to no reform or improvement, and the Parliamentary Committee of 1729, with General Oglethorpe for its chairman, exposed the inhuman practices of certain gaolers with no better result. The subject seems to have fallen asleep, as it were, till about 1773, when Mr. Popham brought a Bill into the House of Commons for abolishing gaoler's fees, and substituting for them fixed salaries payable out of the rates. This Bill, after making some progress in the House, was withdrawn.

Howard probably knew of this movement; so that when he entered on his official duties of inspection as high sheriff, his attention was naturally directed in the first instance to the evil wrought by this false system of payment. But the other abuses of our prison life were not long hid from his penetrating glance, and the short winter's journey which I have described to you made him perfect master of all the facts of the case. He became cognizant of all the physical and moral elements which went to make up the grand total of personal injustice and national peril. It is reasonable to suppose that these facts would be brought to the knowledge of Mr. Popham, Mr. Whitbread (Howard's relative), and other members of the House of Commons interested in the subject of prisons, and thus it would happen that the long and tedious process of instructing and interesting the public might be rendered unnecessary. And so it was: for the House of Commons was led to resolve itself into a Committee of the whole House, Howard was called to the bar and examined, the House was satisfied with his statements, only seeking further instruction from Fothergill the physician, and Pott the surgeon, as to the cause of the gaol fever and the proper methods of preventing it. Howard was again called to the bar of the House to receive the public vote of thanks he had so richly merited. The House then proceeded to pass the two Bills, the one for putting an end to the abuses arising out of fees and fines, the other for preventing the gaol distemper. Then followed, as I have said, the publication and circulation at Howard's own cost of the two Acts; then, with the least possible delay, the work of inspection, which he continued to carry on at short intervals for fourteen years, and, side by side with it, the repeated publication of results both in successive editions of the "State of Prisons," and in his second great work on "Lazarettos;" and so ended that sequence of laborious inspections and publications which, as I have just pointed out, constitute the true exemplar and prototype of all the movements in favour of social reform which have taken place since Howard's day.

Howard's true place in history, then, is as the discoverer or inventor of that modern method of dealing with social wrongs which is gradually building up for us a civilisation deserving of the name. To affirm this of Howard is not to detract one iota from what I said

about him on a former occasion, when vindicating his claim to be welcomed as a Statist in the truest and best sense of the term. Nor ought what I have said this evening to be taken as impairing in the least degree Howard's right to be called emphatically the philanthropist; for as a philanthropist, in the fullest sense of that term, he stands, and will probably continue to stand alone. We know that no one in times past can be compared to him in the practical sympathy he displayed towards every variety of human suffering; and it is hard even to imagine that any man in times to come shall prove his rival.

But here again I must insist once more on the essential difference that exists between the preventive philanthropy of Howard and the palliative policy of his predecessors in well-doing. Seventeen centuries and more before Howard's time the policy of prevention, if I may so express it, had been applied with the highest authority to the individual. The outward act had been traced to its inward source, and men were bidden to restrain the motor thought that led to acts of fraud or violence. But the injunction stopped short with the individual. It was the true glory of the modest, noble Howard that he extended to the mass what had hitherto been limited to the man, and too often, alas! with consequences the most disastrous. Far from accepting as a truth the words that most men are wont to cite with complacent assent—

“How small of all that human hearts endure,
That part which laws or kings can cause or cure,”

Howard, in every act of his life, set forth in his own silent way his belief in the opposite doctrine, and, acting on that better faith, taught us of how much wrong and suffering the State, by omission or commission, can become the direct cause, and how truly in the case of communities as in that of individuals, external results may be traced to causes that conceal themselves in some unsuspected source, which is to the body politic what the heart is to the hand.

Dr. Guy, in acknowledging the customary vote of thanks, took occasion to vindicate Howard's memory from the strange mistakes and misconceptions which prevail respecting his treatment of his only son. He also submitted to the Society some coloured views of Cardington by Mr. Piercy, with photographs, plans, and elevations of a double cottage built by Howard more than a century ago.