Although much has been written about the history of sanitary reform in nineteenth-century Britain, very little has hitherto been known about Arthur Helps’s abortive but high-minded attempt to prevent a threatened cholera epidemic in the East End of London in the summer of 1854. Its goal was to raise by private subscription at least £100,000, to be expended on sanitary improvements as well as on other precautionary anti-cholera measures in two or more districts of metropolitan London, exclusive of the City or Corporation (where, under the medical officership of John Simon from 1848, substantial progress had already been made in the field of cholera prevention); to provide constructive examples; and, if possible, to stir the government to action. Helps’s efforts failed, partly because of his excessive idealism, partly through his lack of administrative experience, and partly (in consequence of his imperfect medical knowledge) as a result of his reliance on the advice of men of science, professional sanitarians included. Using new, unpublished, evidence from the correspondence between Helps and Stephen Spring-Rice, now in the National Library of Ireland, this article will trace the short and chequered history of the Health Fund for London. But first it is necessary to relate the scheme to the wider background of sanitary reform in industrial England.

The sanitary problems associated with the process of industrialization and urbanization in Britain are well-known: inadequate drainage, the absence of a proper water supply, poor-quality housing stock, unhygienic slaughter-houses – all were conducive to the outbreak and spread of disease, the control of which was handicapped by the lack of complete medical knowledge. The first phase of a public health

1 Thanks are due to the following for a critical reading of this manuscript during its several stages of preparation: Dr W.F. Bynum, Academic Head of the Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine, London; Dr Frank Taylor, formerly Deputy Librarian, Principal Keeper and Editor of the Bulletin, John Rylands University Library of Manchester; Dr Peter Helps, great-grandson of both Sir Arthur Helps and Tom Taylor; and Dr Charles Mayo. Acknowledgement is also made to the National Library of Ireland for permission to quote from manuscripts in its collections.
movement in Britain is usually located in the 1830s, but, as George Kitson-Clark has shown, the movement's roots stretch back to the work of eighteenth-century physicians, amongst them Richard Mead, John Pringle, James Lind and Gilbert Blane, who scientifically observed the 'correlations between disease and the conditions in which people lived'. By the turn of the century their achievements had inspired emulators in Manchester (Percival and Ferriar) and in Liverpool (Currie), both cities facing serious health problems associated with the former's rapidly-growing cotton industry and with the latter's development as a major seaport, problems which were subsequently exacerbated by the influx of Irish immigrants. The same cities were also at the forefront of sanitary progress in the 1830s; in Manchester a voluntary board of health was established in the wake of the cholera epidemic of 1831 which called upon the services of the future Sir James Kay-Shuttleworth, who in 1833 became joint secretary of the Manchester Statistical Society and made significant contributions to disease-prevention; in Liverpool William Duncan, later to become Britain's first medical officer of health (the second being John Simon), excelled as physician to the Liverpool Infirmary. Equally important as formative influences in the growth of a public health movement were the utilitarian thought of Jeremy Bentham and what Kitson-Clark calls 'the tradition of Unitarian idealism'.

British sanitary history from the 1840s until 1854–55 was dominated by two men: Edwin Chadwick (1800–90), author of the influential 1842 Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population which highlighted the deficiencies in existing local methods of tackling insanitary conditions, and John Simon (1816–1904). Although they were required to work co-operatively on many health-related matters, and although they both subscribed to the 'atmospheric' theory of disease (which attributed it to 'miasmas' or impurities in the air generated from organic decay and imperfect sanitation), their views on fundamental matters often failed to coincide. Chadwick, for instance, advocated a more centralized approach to sanitary management whereas Simon favoured increased control by local authorities. Similarly, Chadwick's perceived solution to health problems lay mainly with 'engineering' applications, a constant supply of water to households, the use of small tubular drainage sewers, and the agricultural utilization of sewage; Simon, by contrast, asserted the

3 ibid., 101–3.
primary role of medicine in combating the spread of disease. Chadwick's views were influential on the Report of the Royal Commission on the Health of Towns of 1844–45, admired by Helps, and, although not actively involved with the Health of Towns Association organized in 1844, Chadwick's approach is also evident in its own attitudes and publications. Simon's first known sanitary connection was his membership of its Central Committee.

In 1848 were passed three measures important to cholera-prevention as well as to the careers of Chadwick and Simon: a Public Health Act, to become operative in 1849 for a restricted term of five years, a City Sewers Act, and a Metropolitan Sewers Act. The first measure was administered by a General Board of Health under the ex officio presidency of Lord Morpeth, Commissioner of Woods and Forests, other members including Lord Ashley and Chadwick (the only paid commissioner). Perhaps because of its inadequately defined and/or restricted powers and because of its failure to apply effectively to any part of the metropolis, it was by no means completely successful; the Board, for instance, could only act if called upon to do so by a petition signed by one-tenth of the ratepayers in a certain district or if the death rate reached twenty-three per thousand. The Metropolitan Sewers Act broadened the powers and membership of the Consolidated Commission established in 1847 but significantly excluded the City, the Corporation having introduced, without Morpeth's knowledge, a separate bill giving additional powers to the City Commission of Sewers and authorizing the appointment of a medical officer, a post soon to be filled by Simon. A compromise forced by Morpeth was that the City Commission should send representatives to the Metropolitan Commission whenever affairs of mutual concern, such as drainage, were to be considered. Rather unexpectedly, Morpeth and Chadwick were in control of both the Board of Health and the Metropolitan Commission, running them, in S.E. Finer's description, in 'double harness'; Finer argues that, whereas 'it has usually been assumed that the failure of the General Board was due to weaknesses in the Public Health Act', actually the 'dualism of the two bodies, the efforts of the General Board to retain its control over the Commission and to expand it to include water and burials was the most important single factor in the fall of the Board'. The expectation of a new cholera epidemic in mid-1848 further complicated the situation, resulting in the passage of the Nuisances Removal Act which provided, in the event of the approach of cholera, for an Order in Council giving the Board of Health complete control over preventive measures and empowering it to appoint a medical officer as an additional member, but only for the duration of the plague. Thomas

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Southwood Smith (1788–1861), a doctor who was instrumental in the foundation of the Health of Towns Association and the Metropolitan Association for Improving Dwellings of the Industrial Classes, was appointed to this post and became a key player in the events of 1853–54.

Simon’s rise as an authority on London sanitation coincided with a decline in Chadwick’s reputation between 1849 and 1854. The latter was due to various factors including his personality, temperament and association with the unpopular forces of centralization in sanitary government. Although most of the members of the Metropolitan Commission were personally and ideologically congenial to Chadwick, a number, especially John Leslie, were not, and so much internal dissension ensued that in 1849 the government was forced to request the resignation of members with Board of Health connections, including Chadwick. The new chairman was, paradoxically, Chadwick’s old friend and admirer, Lord Ebrington. Thereafter, the rivalry between the Metropolitan Commission and the Board of Health intensified, partly because Chadwick was no longer a member of the former, matters being brought to a head by Chadwick’s futile attempt to improve London’s water supply and system of interments, despite the fact that, in Finer’s words, ‘the Board’s power to investigate them was as insubstantial as its duty was non-existent’. By the time Chadwick’s term of office at the Board expired, opposition to the Board’s continued existence had become formidable. Simon’s star, meanwhile, waxed strongly, and, allied with the more popular anti-centralizing forces and capitalizing on his undoubted gifts of persuasion and compromise, he successfully survived conflicts with the City Commissioners of Sewers and Poor Law doctors during the 1849 cholera outbreak. A driving force behind the Amended City Sewers Act of 1851 which, according to Royston Lambert, ‘converted the faulty and lagging measure of 1848 into one of the most advanced pieces of health legislation of the time’, Simon saw his efforts rewarded in a steadily declining death rate for the City. His annual reports to the City Commission of Sewers, publicized and praised in the columns of The Times, enhanced his reputation beyond the City and thus made him a welcome ally of the Health Fund for London.

Arthur Helps (1813–75) was one of those eminent Victorians who combined a literary career with public life. Educated at Eton and Trinity College, Cambridge, where he was elected to the Apostles, he published his first major work in 1835, the year of his graduation: Thoughts in the Cloister and the Crowd, a volume of essays and aphorisms. He entered public life as private secretary to Thomas

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8 ibid., 381.
9 Lambert, Sir John Simon, 173.
Spring-Rice, later Lord Monteagle, Chancellor of the Exchequer in Melbourne's government, until 1840 when he went to Ireland as private secretary to Lord Morpeth (later Lord Carlisle), Chief Secretary for Ireland. On the fall of Melbourne's administration, Helps returned to his writing, publishing *The Claims of Labour* in 1844, which expressed concern for the bad living conditions of the working classes, and in 1847 and 1848 the first series of essays in two volumes, *Friends in Council*, which continued publication as perhaps his best-known works during his lifetime; here he presented discourses on social, political and literary topics, each delivered by one of a coterie of imaginary associates, followed by a discussion. He also wrote histories of the Spanish conquest of America with a characteristically strong anti-slavery bias. In 1860, at Palmerston's request, he became Clerk of the Privy Council, an office that brought him into a close relationship with the royal family. After the death of the Prince Consort in 1861 Helps became increasingly important to the Queen whom he served in many unofficial ways; for example, he assisted her in the selection of the Prince's speeches and addresses (1862), an edition for which he wrote a preface, and later helped in the preparation of her *Leaves from the Journal of our Life in the Highlands* (1868). The pressure of Court duties, however, did not prevent him from carrying on as a prolific writer of biographies, novels and plays. In 1873 appeared his *Some Talk of Animals and their Masters*, inspired by Helps's responsibilities - as part of his Privy Council brief - for cattle diseases and the transportation of animals, and in 1875 he published *Social Pressure* which highlighted the need for social, as opposed to political, reform.

It was in *The Claims of Labour* that Helps's interest in sanitary reform was first made manifest. Subtitled 'An Essay on the Duties of the Employers to the Employed', it contained in the 1845 edition an additional 'Essay on the Means of Improving the Health and Increasing the Comfort of the Labouring Classes' which makes specific allusion to Chadwick's *Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population* and to the 1844–45 *Report of the Royal Commission on the Health of Towns*, dominated by Chadwick. In giving a summary of the latter document, Helps declares that since 'some delight in harrowing tales of fiction, here are scenes indicated, if not positively depicted, which may exercise the tenderest sympathies'. At one point, having already made complimentary references to Southwood Smith, he freely admits that 'If I were a despot I would have [in charge] a band of Chadwicks, Southwood Smiths', among others.

Helps's Health Fund for London was launched in late December 1853 with *Thoughts for Next Summer*, a hastily-written and privately-printed pamphlet, using his familiar and popular panel of conversa-

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10 Helps, *The Claims of Labour*, 100ff.
11 ibid., 218ff.
12 ibid., 136.
tionalists of ‘Friends in Council’, each representing a differing Help-sian point of view; Leonard Milverton, Helps’s principal alter-ego; Ellesmere, a jurist, cynical yet clear-headed; and Dunsford, a former university tutor, recorder of conversations. The setting is Worth-Ashton, a thinly-disguised Vernon Hill (Helps’s private estate at Bishops Waltham, Hampshire, which he had bought in 1843). Milverton’s friends, disturbed by his late ‘fractiousness’ involving the abandonment of his historical research, arrange a ‘consultation’ in the presence of Sir James C[lark], Queen’s physician and enthusiastic sanitary, at which it is discovered that he is not ill but cholera-obsessed. ‘I cannot contemplate without horror’, Milverton declares, ‘the approach of a scourge which is to carry prematurely off thousands of young and old . . . I cannot reconcile myself to our looking quietly at the approach of this cholera, and not making some great, some splendid effort, to meet the evil in fair field’. Acknowledging his own inability to suggest specific remedies, he is aware from the thoughts of others of ‘many ways of attacking it, many hindrances that may be thrown in the enemy’s way’; solutions such as ‘public and private benevolence’, the support of central and local government, or a ‘combination of these powers’. He further advocates the creation of ‘a great Department of Public Health’ with dictatorial authority. In conclusion, Dunsford offers Milverton’s belief that ‘by talking about the subject to keep it alive in the minds of men . . . something yet can be done about it’; indeed, ‘we might collect and devote a considerable amount of money to do now forthwith something in one or more of the worst districts in London to crush our dormant enemy’ – the cholera.

Helps sent copies of his Thoughts to a variety of people in the hope of receiving constructive criticism as well as moral and financial support and acceptance of membership of a ‘preliminary’ committee. One of those who received a copy was John Simon whose recent report to the Commission of Sewers, published in The Times of 1 December, had almost certainly been seen by Helps. The report was of crucial importance in arguing for the extension of sanitary reforms carried out within the City to the rest of the metropolis, especially for a ‘universal

13 Helps, Thoughts for Next Summer, 7–8.
14 ibid., 15.
15 Helps evidently felt that there were too many boards and commissions with delegated authority connected with public health as well as too much dependence on parliamentary action; ibid., 26, 33.
16 ibid., 55.
17 ibid., 56.
18 John Robinson Curtis, Present State of Hygiology (London: Whitaker and Company, 1855), xxix, wrote: ‘The author of the plan, as it were at a moment’s notice, had seemed to draw around himself half the moral and intellectual strength of the Metropolis’.
19 In Helps, Thoughts for Next Summer, 17, Milverton counters Ellesmere’s distrust of statistics with the claim that ‘if he had read the Registrar General’s Report and the report of the City Officer of Health he might find himself considerably enlightened’.
reform of our Metropolitan drainage' to carry the capital's sewage beyond its atmosphere, possibly to the countryside for agricultural enrichment. Simon evidently read Helps's *Thoughts* with enthusiasm for he wrote to D. Craven, Helps's clerk, on 29 December to thank Helps for it. He fancied having met Helps 'long ago at my friend Professor Hall's' and is 'delighted that sanitary improvement has the advocacy of so acute and elegant a writer'; 'doctors's writings . . . rarely get promoted to the drawing room, and I am sure that the paper will do great good by passing very much among these refined classes whom our dry technical literature does not reach'.

The Health Fund for London was not merely associated with Simon; it involved an entire circle of political and literary figures as well as professional sanitarians, men such as Charles Dickens (in the earlier stages), John Ruskin, Lord Stanley, Lord Granville, Lord Monteagle, F.D. Maurice, Joseph Toynbee, Lord Ebrington and Southwood Smith. Especially significant was the participation of Stephen Spring-Rice (1814–65), fellow-student at Trinity College, Cambridge, and Apostle, to whose father, Lord Monteagle, Helps had served as private secretary some years before. During this period of his life Spring-Rice was attending to the family estates in Ireland, and it is Helps's letters to him there, and the copies of other documents which frequently accompanied them, which constitute the single most important source for this article, revealing the precise chronology of the Health Fund scheme as well as glimpses of Helps's wit and charm though sometimes harsh judgements – not usually permanently held – on persons essential to the success of the project. The Spring-Rice papers also bring out the differing ideological positions of the chief participants in the scheme, differences occasioned at least in part by a lack of precision and definition in Helps's goals and methods, which largely explain why the scheme scarcely moved beyond the planning stage.

By early January 1854 Helps was able to report to Spring-Rice that 'Putting aside the usual things said to authors, I think it is clear that with the exception of a few lily-livered individuals, people are inclined to do something, which is not a small gain'. Indeed, 'the work is beginning. I have had a kind offer from Mr Simon, the City Officer of Health and, as you know, one of the greatest authorities on sanitary matters' whom he hoped to meet shortly along with Sir James Clark. William Prescott, the prominent banker, had shown an
interest in becoming a member of the committee; Lord Granville, Lord President of the Privy Council, was a hopeful prospect; and 'amongst the persons from whom I have had the most friendly replies is Mr Dickens, who can be very useful'. In his letter of 9 January Dickens had shown 'the greatest interest', declaring that 'sanitary improvements are the one thing needful to begin with, and until they are thoroughly, sufficiently, uncompromisingly made (and every bestial little prejudice and supposed interest crushed contrariwise under foot) even education itself will fall short of its uses'. 'Maurice, as you may imagine, is heartily with us'. Finally, Helps noted that he had 'persons of great working powers, but not of great notoriety in the world, whom I have had my eyes upon, and who are most ready to assist me'.

Not all the immediate reaction, however, was favourable. Lord Ebrington, Chadwick's friend and ally, who had assumed the presidency of the Metropolitan Commission of Sewers in 1849 after the enforced resignation of Chadwick and other members associated with the Board of Health, considered that Helps's proposed subsidy of London house improvements from some of the expected funds was unwise: 'Why relieve the rate-payers and homeowners of some district of London of the expense of purifying their property, which will let for all the more after it has been so improved?' Instead, he advocated building houses as a commercial 'speculation', perhaps by the Metropolitan Association for Building Houses for the Poor, at low sale or rental costs to the individual householder, as the most proper investment of the proposed Health Fund. Ebrington regretted his unwillingness to lend his name or spend his money on a project 'which upon earnest and serious consideration I have reluctantly become convinced would not in the long run and viewed in its whole bearings be beneficial'.

Lord Granville, another reluctant participant, also favoured private capital investment in improved housing. If it was easy to raise a million pounds for the Crystal Palace, he argued on 11 January, it should be simple enough to find sufficient funds for 'a more certain speculation: the turning courts and alleys into streets and squares, well aired, well watered, and well drained'. He also warned that the scheme's 'principal promoters should be stained as little as possible by royalty, nobility, literature, or philanthropy'; more helpful would be the involvement of 'four or five money-making men of great energy, honesty, and reputation for knowing what pays and what does not and

25 4 January 1854.
26 10 January 1854.
27 In his letter to Helps of 22 January 1854, Ebrington referred to it as 'our Commercial Association for building dwellings for the labouring classes, having branches at Ramsgate and Brighton'.
to carry out the plan on purely commercial principles, and I believe the thing is done'. Helps, in his reply of 13 January, did not feel that a 'speculation' which had been neglected for centuries could possibly be effected in but a few months and doubted whether there was any 'special attraction in building in the poor and run-down sections of Bethnal-Green and Lambeth' as there would have been in an area adjacent to a railway station. Granville's plans, Helps concluded, would be helpful for the future but irrelevant to the approaching emergency. But Helps did not give up seeking his backing, and Spring-Rice wrote a very emphatic letter to him on 15 January declaring that his support 'is far too important in a public point of view for me to give up without an effort'; they must act speedily, their main objective being to arouse the government by whatever means to immediate action because 'the enemy is marching on our sleeping camp, our videttes are driven in, and we must have something loud and immediate to waken the sleepers'.

A new ally by mid-January was Tom Taylor, playwright and soon to be editor of *Punch*, who in 1852 had become secretary to the Board of Health. As a friend of Simon, he wrote an encouraging letter to Helps on 17 January, although it is significant that he insisted upon his communication remaining 'confidential' because 'I hold myself at a polite distance from the Board of Health'; this reflects his often difficult relations with his superior Chadwick who evidently found quite unacceptable the playwright's use of official time to entertain actors and to prepare manuscripts for the theatres and journals. 28 Taylor's advice to Helps was that whatever was done by or for the Health Fund committee should not be done by persons 'officially connected with sanitary affairs' on account of the 'exaggerations, theories, quarrels and jealousies that have unfortunately grouped themselves around one of the best causes that ever was fought for'.

By mid-January also the nature of Simon's involvement with the Health Fund was becoming apparent, and the correspondence between Helps and Spring-Rice contains frequent allusions to meetings with, and advice received from, Simon. On 14 January it was reported that 'Simon will gratuitously take charge of the inspection — that is as a member of the Committee', doubtless a reference to an intended extension of the regular system of house inspection which Simon had already successfully pioneered in the City. Four days later, 29 Simon was emphasizing to Helps the need for separation between permanent and temporary measures of cholera prevention, a recurrent theme in the short history of the Health Fund movement. Surely, he insisted, the proposed £100,000 would be insufficient to give all London immunity; 'universal sanitary improvements' would

be necessary for that, requiring many years. Achievement of immediate goals, however, was both possible and necessary in Simon’s view; these should be undertaken with the co-operation of ‘constituted local authorities’ (boards of guardians and vestrymen) in ‘certain poor districts in London’, such as Southwark and Bermondsey, in order ‘to rectify their mal-arrangements of drainage and water supply, to pave their yards and cellars, to quicken their scavengers, to lime-wash their rooms’ and thus to minimize the risk of cholera. Simon was also optimistic about effecting housing improvements even in the ‘sewage-sodden south-side of the river’, Lambeth and Rotherhithe included, ‘if you would extemporize – perhaps by adaptation rather than building a few model dwellings’ appropriately adapted to those districts; ‘as the cholera would certainly be raging round them, you would be shewing, in strong contrast, the significance of preventive medicine’.

By this time, too, the lukewarmness of Charles Howard towards the project was becoming apparent. This was ‘rather a blow’ to Helps for Howard was another acquaintance from Cambridge days and brother of Lord Morpeth who was a prime mover of the Public Health and Metropolitan Sewers Commission Acts of 1848 and first President of the Board of Health, and to whom Helps had once served as private secretary in Ireland. On 6 January Helps still had hopes of persuading Howard to join the ‘preliminary’ committee: ‘Useful as you have been, you have hardly made that impression on the world which the force and uprightness of your character leads one to expect of you. You have now an opportunity of doing something very considerable in the world – more, a great deal, than you will probably imagine on first reading this letter’. By 19 January, though, it was being admitted that ‘He is with us heartily, and will do us immense service, but is quite averse to being on the Committee, alleging inexperience and ineptitude for business’. In a letter to Spring-Rice on the following day, Howard acknowledged that he did not have that ‘apprehension of an outbreak of cholera which many people anticipate in the summer’. Although he believed that ‘Helps has done valiantly’ and was prepared to do anything he could to assist in his future efforts, for the moment he dreaded responsibility and begged: ‘do not ask for a man of straw’.

In an effort to keep his fledgling project alive, Helps seems to have prepared two publications during the course of January (complete copies are unavailable, and it is possible that there was in fact only one pamphlet containing both contributions). The publisher John Parker, in whose offices the Health Fund committee had been meeting, wrote to Spring-Rice on 10 January that ‘Some Thoughts for Next Summer is to be published by our house in a few days, with a preface explaining the present state of the matter’. Quotations from this preface may be found in two separate sources.\(^30\) Shortly after-

\(^30\) ibid., 156–60; Curtis, Present State of Hygiology, xxxvii–xxxviii.
wards, on 20 January, Parker sent Spring-Rice a proof copy of an ‘introduction’ for his approval, evidently the introduction to a Prospectus to potential benefactors of the Health Fund of which several pages are extant in the National Library of Ireland. This Prospectus sets out objectives and objections, perhaps more gracefully presented in the correspondence, but uniquely records the structure of an Executive Committee assisted by a Council of Associates: ‘this Council will not consist wholly of persons noted for sanitary skill, but will be framed with a view to include notable men of all kinds who influence numbers of persons, and who have been shown a care for public good’.

Parker sent, on 6 February, a list of proposed associates, the names of those who were favourably inclined and probably acceptable being underlined. Parker recognized that it would harm the chances of the plan to include the names of those unwilling to accept, ‘so it is proposed to print only those who are pretty certain’, possibly adding the names of others in a subsequent edition. It is noteworthy that in this proof copy the names of Carlyle and Dickens are not underlined.

Dickens had been ardently courted and had been sent a copy of the Prospectus in proof for his approval. However, his response was now less enthusiastic than it had been earlier. In an apparently unpublished letter of 25 January he declared that ‘I am not very sanguine in reference to your project’. He thought that ‘unless you can shew the parishes in those parts of London [targeted by the Health Fund] to be arithmetically poor in respect of the available rates, you will want an Archimedes plan of leverage with the public’. He professed ‘little faith, generally speaking, in Boards of Guardians – particularly in districts about London – and I would far rather strengthen such hands as Southwood Smith’s’, by that time a regular member of the Board of Health. Dickens was especially concerned about the proposed improvement loans to small homeowners, citing a previous bad experience:

for they are a wickedly willful and prejudiced class whose market is disease and dirt. Only half a year has gone by since I was entrusted with the endeavour to improve, by drainage and ventilation, a very bad part of London which is certain to be devastated by the cholera, if it should happen with any virulence. A survey of that district was made at great expense, the cost of the improvements in every house was estimated, the house-owner was informed that he should receive the best guarantee in London for the expense [to him] not exceeding the estimate, as a loan upon the easiest terms. Yet these men threw such obstacles in the way of improvement that it was necessary to call them together to entreat them to consent to it as a favour. And when they came together, they so ridiculed and set their faces against the whole scheme, it was dropped in despair.

31 Helps, Prospectus, 30–1.
32 In Spring-Rice’s handwriting is the comment: ‘Still. I don’t think any names should be printed without specific consent’
Nevertheless, Dickens expressed the 'greatest respect for Mr Simon' and promised to subscribe to the Health Fund, giving additional support later. He emphasized the importance of the 'foreknowledge and union' of Southwood Smith to the project's success, Smith being 'a veteran of the cause . . . [with] Treasury scars to show', and thought that they should not 'pass over, or silently supersede, the Board of Health, which has been all thorns and no bed of roses'. Helps, disturbed by the letter's negative tone, replied 'instantly' (on 26 January) because Dickens was 'an important person and must not be allowed to go around talking against us, if it can be helped'. There is no further information regarding Dickens' association with the Health Fund.33

Ruskin, by contrast, was a more successful literary recruit, his participation resulting in life-long friendships with both Helps and Simon. No relevant correspondence is extant, but Ruskin's name was underlined in the proof copy of the list of proposed associates, and on 25 January there is a reference to the previous day's 'business-like meeting here to which Ruskin came and was wonderfully genial'. 'Would not the said Ruskin do for a Committee man?', it was asked, a member of which he did subsequently become.

By early February events were moving to the political stage. Not all leading politicians were easily convinced of the virtues of the Health Fund cause. Edward Stanley, fifteenth Earl of Derby and, like Helps, a graduate of Trinity College, Cambridge and an Apostle, was an obvious target; according to William Prescott, on 6 February, 'if you cannot persuade an active, intelligent, philanthropic man such as he is to take his share of duty and responsibility, the Committee will fall short'. The Helps-Stanley correspondence is especially voluminous and heated; as Helps noted on 5 February: 'I have had a monster letter from Lord Stanley and have fired a monster in return. They are not very pleasant letters. I cannot say smooth things: the Ellesmere part of me must break out sometime, or I die'. Stanley's attitude to the Health Fund first becomes evident in a letter of 3 February in which he expressed uncertainty about Helps's precise intentions. He made the assumption that the Fund would not simply strive to effect long-term sanitary reforms in certain districts of London for 'checking disease and consequently mortality' but also to set 'an example to the rest of London which you think would be generally followed'. He went on to speak of the difficulty of raising money for benevolent causes in the metropolis, citing the failure of an attempt to raise, with more widespread backing than that available to the Health Fund, a fund to establish a collegiate school in memory of the Duke of Wellington. A 'public work, undertaken at public expense' was the only solution in Stanley's view. Helps, in his reply of 4 February,34 explained that the

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34 Maurice, to whom Helps had sent copies of the correspondence, wrote on 11 February that
Fund was not ‘a plan of sanitary reform for London. It is an endeavour to prepare one or more of the worst districts of London to meet the attack of the cholera which we fear is coming next summer . . . The plan itself is of a direct, limited, temporary nature . . . contemplates immediate action upon a pressing emergency’. The state ‘cannot absorb all benevolence’, and the failure of the Wellington campaign was due to the fact that ‘a good deal had already been done in his honour’. Stanley (9 February) remained unconvinced and continued to require a clearer statement of objectives; otherwise, ‘You are rather in the position of that projector of the South Sea days who advertised for “a project of great national advantage”, but nobody to know what it is’.

Lord Granville was more receptive to overtures and on 8 February ‘joins us unconditionally, i.e. if we can get a Committee to act with him in whom the world would have confidence’. However, he was not one of the ‘provisional committee of gentlemen’ who asked for an interview with Palmerston, the Home Secretary, now that the original scheme had been almost completely abandoned. In the face of widespread criticism that they had been attempting to do something properly within the province of the government, the members of this ‘provisional committee’ – Helps, Goderich, Reginald Cockes and Prescott – wanted to know ‘before they proceed further, whether the government does intend to do anything which would render private effort needless in this matter . . . The simple question which they have to ask is whether the government is prepared to do anything more than it did in 1849’, the year of the last serious cholera outbreak.

The requested meeting of an ‘influential delegation’ with Palmerston occurred on 27 February and is most fully described in the Morning Chronicle. The delegation consisted of, among others, Arthur Helps and his brother, Williams, Charles Kingsley, Robert Stephen Rintoul, editor of the Spectator, Prescott, Ebrington, F.O. Ward (a friend of Simon’s and ‘a sanitary bore of the greatest magnitude’), Charles Howard, and Lord Harrowby, a close friend of Palmerston’s and spokesman for the occasion. 35 Harrowby enquired what further measures other than those which had previously been taken were being contemplated. A demand was voiced that the Board of Health ‘or other authorities’ be empowered to ‘deal immediately with those nuisances which have been found to be productive of disease’, a reference presumably to the temporary responsibility for plague-prevention

35 Although Anthony Ashley Cooper, Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury, was not mentioned in the newspapers as one of the delegates, Brenda Colloms, Charles Kingsley: The Lion of Eversley (London: Constable, 1975), 173, notes: ‘The delegation had high hopes of Palmerston’s sympathy, because he was father-in-law to Lord Shaftesbury, the delegation’s most influential member’.

in ‘Stanley’s letter there is much to encourage and much to make one sad, and yours which must, I should think, do him good by its faithfulness and manliness’ (original in the possession of Dr Peter Helps).
measures which could be granted to the Board, in the event of an outbreak, by an Order in Council under the terms of the Nuisances Removal Act. Helps bemoaned the absence of any single body dealing with a subject so important as public health, a recurrent theme during the discussions of this period. Simon ‘pointed out several defects in the existing Sewers Acts which prevented them from being effectively carried out’. Palmerston, in reply, asked to know ‘the particular course the deputation wished to impress upon the government the necessity of doing’, whereupon he was showered with suggestions, including requests for increased powers to be given to the Board of Health (whose President, Sir William Molesworth, and Chadwick were conspicuous by their absence), and to the Metropolitan Sewers Commission. Palmerston told the delegation to put their concerns and proposed remedies in writing, and a committee was appointed consisting of Ward, Simon and John Bullar, the philanthropist, to draft a memorandum to which others, including Helps, contributed. 36

Reflecting upon the outcome of the deputation some months later, in a letter to Lord Monteagle, Helps expressed himself as not being entirely pleased with the reception given by the Home Secretary, criticizing the ‘quiet, weary, supercilious air with which Lord Palmerston received one of the most important deputations that, I believe, was ever collected together on the public health’. 37 However, in the immediate aftermath of the interview, writing to Spring-Rice on 28 February and 3 March, he was more optimistic, contending that ‘most of those present seem to think that it was successful’ and that he was preparing suggestions for Palmerston in some hope of action being taken. Whilst admitting that ‘in such a complicated subject as the amendment of acts of Parliament such a feat borders on the impossible’, he believed that ‘the impossible often requires to be done, and must be accomplished in this case’. Despite Rintoul’s continuing preference for the ‘original proposition’ of extra-governmental action by the Health Fund, Helps himself ‘with all loyalty’ was ‘endeavouring to make a scheme to be worked out by government machinery already in being. If Lord Palmerston would adopt our plan, would press it on with great vigour, and the House of Commons would give one night of consideration to it, the thing might be done’. It was only ‘because I feared that nothing of this kind was possible in the time that I arranged a scheme on a charitable basis’.

Lord Harrowby presented the substance of the delegation’s memorandum to Palmerston to the House of Lords on 9 March. 38

36 The complete Memorandum on the Impending Pestilence of Cholera, Addressed to Viscount Palmerston, Her Majesty’s Secretary of State for the Home Department by the Deputation of 27 February 1854 is to be found in House of Lords Sessional Papers, Session 1854, xxxix, 3-6. It was here made clear that only the Metropolis (outside of the City) was concerned.

37 National Library of Ireland MS 14307.

38 According to The Times, 10 March 1854, ‘Lord Harrowby moved for the production of
moving for permanent, not just temporary, measures for the prevention or mitigation of the cholera, with emphasis on the need for the creation of a supervisory, central body with 'dictatorial powers'. In the light of this apparent progress, Helps could write on the same day that 'I have retired myself, as the French would say, into private life', concluding that 'people who know say that if nothing more is done at present, great good will come from the movement having been made. I do not exactly see that, but I cannot help hoping that as this report has been drawn with great care, it may be either partially or wholly adopted, and then may seem to check the ravages of cholera if it should come this year'. By 5 April he could declare that 'the government is going to adopt in their Bill some of the principal suggestions which were presented to Lord Palmerston, and which were moved for in the House of Lords by Lord Harrowby . . . We must think this is a step gained in sanitary legislation and an abundant reward, if any were wanted, for our labours'. But he feared that 'it will come too late to do much good this year; . . . as Simon said long ago when we were working at this report, "All this will be admirable for 1864!"'

Cholera did come to London that summer. Simon's well-planned programme of sanitary measures resulted in a much lower mortality rate in the City than during previous visitations of the disease, and he was able to leave for his annual holiday in October. The picture was not so bright in the rest of the metropolis where matters were complicated by upheavals in the organization of public health. The five-year term of the Board of Health, now involved in the administration of the Nuisances Removal Act, came to an end on 12 August despite Palmerston's efforts to obtain a one-year reprieve. It was replaced by a completely reconstituted Board under the chairmanship of Sir Benjamin Hall, the former Board's most vehement critic and, in Royston Lambert's view, 'the spokesman of the Metropolitan vestries, the champion of local self-government . . . totally inexperienced and seemingly anti-sanitary'. Helps's initial reservations (20 September) to Hall's appointment were still less flattering: 'you would think with me that it is fortunate that the place was not given to Lady Palmerston's poodle dog, if she has one'. Although Hall moved with relative despatch to stimulate the local authorities to action in the face of the virtual ineffectiveness of the Metropolitan Sewers Commission, and although enquiries were instituted and assistance rendered in districts such as Southwark, Bermondsey, Rotherhithe and Greenwich, it was too late to emulate Simon's achievements in the City. In

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40 *The Times*, 6 September 1854.
his report to the City Commission of Sewers of 25 December 1854 Simon compared an overall reduction in cholera mortality rates between 1849 and 1854 of a mere 25 per cent with one of 71 per cent which his efforts had brought about in the City.

Commending Simon's work on 27 December 1854, The Times asked 'if such measures have been found effectual within the limits of the City, why should they not be extended throughout the Metropolis?' Such had been the goal of the Health Fund for London, a goal which, but for the protracted debates which arose from the lack of clearly defined and agreed objectives and methods, might have been realized. Although one should not make undue claims for a scheme that failed, the Health Fund was not without some influence on the course of British social reform. Helps himself doubtless profited from the administrative experience gained from the Health Fund during his long and successful career as Clerk to the Privy Council. Because of their involvement with the enterprise, public attention was concentrated on the reforming interests of figures such as Ruskin and Kingsley which cemented their involvement in future campaigns. The debate about the scheme brought to the fore the work of Simon in the City and served as a springboard for his later career in public health, first (in 1855) as Chief Medical Officer to the Board of Health, then (1859) as head of the Medical Department of the Privy Council, and ultimately (1871) as Chief Medical Officer of the Local Government Board. The friendship of Simon and Helps, which stemmed from the Health Fund scheme and which was reinforced by their mutual interest in Christian socialism, was perhaps the most tangible outcome, and Simon's later preferments were probably the direct results of Helps's influence. The final word goes, appropriately enough, to Helps, in his letter of appreciation of 22 November 1855 to Simon and others:

Seriously speaking it gratifies me very much to find you professionals taking any notice of us amateurs, and of our feeble efforts. One thing I know, and that is that nowhere will the exertions of you men who have to advance in the van of Sanitary Reform be more heartily and more affectionately, if I may use the word, recognized than in the circle of those who formed the Health Fund Committee of 1854.  

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41 John Rylands University Library of Manchester, English MS 341/70.