

1901.

NEW ZEALAND.

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

(REPORT OF THE), BY THE CHIEF HEALTH OFFICER.

Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by Command of His Excellency.

The Hon. the MINISTER OF PUBLIC HEALTH to His Excellency the GOVERNOR.

MY LORD,—

Public Health Office, Wellington, 6th November, 1901.

I have the honour to submit to your Excellency the report of the Public Health Department for the year 1900-1.

I have, &c.,

J. G. WARD,

His Excellency the Governor of New Zealand.

Minister of Public Health.

The CHIEF HEALTH OFFICER to the Hon. the MINISTER OF PUBLIC HEALTH.

SIR,—

Department of Public Health, Wellington, 21st May, 1901.

Although this department has only been established for a short time, and consequently the amount of work done this year is not as great as it will be in future years, I have thought it well to submit for your consideration an account of what has been accomplished, and to indicate briefly the scope of the work which lies before us. Not a little of our energy and time has been spent in laying down the lines upon which it seemed the work of the department could be most efficiently and economically carried out. In this I have received much help from Mr. Horneman, and Dr. Valintine, since his appointment as District Health Officer.

As you are aware, a vast amount of excellent work was done by the various Sanitary Commissioners appointed under warrant by His Excellency last year—viz., Dr. Mason and J. A. Gilruth, general Commissioners for the colony; Dr. P. E. Baldwin, Auckland District; Dr. De Lisle, Hawke's Bay District; Dr. W. K. Fyffe, Wellington District; Dr. C. Morice, Westland and Nelson District; Dr. Syme, Canterbury District; Dr. Roberts, Otago District, and Dr. Torrance, Southland District. In the brief general survey of the sanitary conditions of the colony which I have sketched, I have availed myself of the valuable information contained in the reports of these various gentlemen. The greater part of the colony—certainly all those parts important from a sanitary point of view—were carefully inspected and reported upon, and much good was the result. Some of the conditions discovered were such as ought not to be allowed to exist—meat kept within a few feet of a privy, milk stored beneath beds, fruit covered with rags which had been gathered off the street, houses unfit for habitation, water-supplies in constant danger of pollution by filth of the most dangerous nature. Such were some of the menaces to the health of the people that the investigations disclosed. The data thus obtained, combined with the occurrence of the bubonic plague in the neighbouring colonies, were the causative forerunners of the new Health Act and the constitution of this department.

The Public Health Act of 1900 puts the colony in the van as regards the conservation of the public health. For many years the medical profession and those interested in health matters at Home have been striving—so far in vain—for the appointment of a Minister of Health. By the Act passed last session this has been accomplished for New Zealand. For the first time in the history of Great Britain and her colonies has the physical welfare of the people been elevated to a first place in the consideration of the Government. Foreign affairs, mines, and agriculture have all had their importance marked by the creation of Ministers holding Cabinet rank to look after their interest; but it has been reserved for New Zealand to create the first Minister of Public Health.

While the elevation of the physical weal of the people to a first rank in the political order is a matter for sincere congratulation, it is to the machinery of the new Act that we must look for real help in the removing of insanitary conditions and the inaugurating of reforms in matters pertaining to the public health. Under the Act of 1876 many things which it was desirable to do could not be done, and what could be done could only be effected after much labour and delay. While the present Act is undoubtedly at once the most complete and comprehensive of any that has been placed upon the statute-books of any English-speaking country, still it is capable of improvement. It is only after an Act has been in force for some time that its defects are found out—like a newly built house, a door wants lifting here, or a window wants tightening there before its occupant can be quite comfortable, so with an Act of Parliament. The recent refusal of a passenger to submit