

GENERAL REMARKS.

With the exception of Napier and Hastings, the milk is delivered in cans fitted with properly constructed taps, through which the milk is drawn instead of being baled out at the customers' doors, thus exposing this sensitive and important food-supply to preventible contamination. It is greatly to be regretted that the two largest and most important towns in my district should lag behind the smaller places in any form of sanitation.

From the experience that I gained during my recent visit to England, and the opportunities that were afforded me of observing the mental apathy that was displayed by even intelligent people towards all forms of sanitation, even in towns of considerable size—I do not speak of the larger cities; and, of course, there is only one London—I formed the opinion that New Zealand has much cause for self-gratulation; that the sanitary condition of many of our towns, the desire to improve their present sanitary conditions, and the intelligent interest taken by all classes of the inhabitants afford an object-lesson to many older communities.

More than a quarter of a century ago, when Napier was a much smaller town than it is at present, the inhabitants taxed themselves for an abundant supply of excellent water. A comprehensive and expensive drainage scheme followed shortly after. I think that all unprejudiced persons must agree with me that these facts reflect the highest credit on those who were responsible for them. I regret that our drainage scheme is not all that it should be; many defects, both of design and construction, can be pointed out; and money might have been saved in the latter. But it is easy to be wise after the event, and to the too-censorious we may retort with,—

A man must serve his time to every trade

Save censure—critics all are ready-made.

But, notwithstanding that adverse criticism is possible, it must be admitted that the scheme is on the whole good, and that the errors that unfortunately exist do not in any way detract from the enterprise and public spirit of the men who were responsible for the initiation of the scheme.

Hastings is much in the same boat; but its drainage scheme, as far as it goes, is more up to date and superior in design. The water-supply of Hastings is ample, and the quality is much the same as in Napier. Hastings has outgrown its present drainage, which will have to be added to in the near future. The Borough Council recognise this, and contemplate its extension.

We find the smaller towns, like Waipawa and Waipukurau, with a sewerage system which, though incomplete and in some respects defective, is better than none, and reflects credit on the inhabitants.

Dannevirke and Woodville have both taxed themselves for a water-supply, on which they are to be congratulated. The quantity is more than ample for their needs, and the quality is unsurpassable. In the former town a comprehensive and up-to-date drainage scheme seems to be in sight, and in the latter I hope is in the near future.

When I turn to the northern portion of my district, I regret that I have to be less optimistic. Gisborne, with its suburbs of Kaiti and Whataupoko, has a combined population of upwards of 4,500 people, and is innocent of public water-supply and drainage. In Gisborne the plans for both have been obtained, and the loan for the installation of the water-supply authorised, but at present it ends there. The place is not wanting in public-spirited men who have the true interests of the town at heart, but there are conflicting interests and difficulties that are met with at every turn and will take time to overcome. With the rapid growth of Gisborne, water and drainage have become an absolute necessity, and, with the rapidly increasing wealth that is coming in from the back country that has been and is being rapidly opened up, there should be no trouble in financing the scheme. Gisborne is to be congratulated on having adopted the method of collecting nightsoil in double-lidded tins.

The townships further north are too small and scattered for a common system of water-supply and sanitation to be expected of them. Most of the settlers have an individual supply of pure water available from the springs and streams in the neighbourhood of their premises, and some of the settlers have provided themselves with septic tanks.

I should like to see a public water-supply for Wairoa, and am informed on reliable authority that it can be obtained at a moderate cost; and some form of drainage may be undertaken later on. At present Wairoa is to be commended for having adopted a system of nightsoil-removal with the most approved method of collection.

During the past year there has been a large number of infectious diseases in the district, measles and scarlatina being specially prevalent. I am happy to say that the cases have been for the most part of a mild type, and few deaths have occurred as a result of them. The Health Officer in a scattered district like this is greatly handicapped in preventing the spread of such infectious diseases as measles and scarlatina, and I have found that the public are not sufficiently alive to the necessity of isolation. In the former disease its great infectivity, coupled with the fact that the most infectious period is during the catarrhal stage, prior to the development of the rash, when the nature of the disease is still doubtful, renders the prevention of its spread extremely difficult. Again, owing to the popular fallacy that measles is a mild complaint, medical aid is frequently dispensed with, and it is to be feared that many cases are, as a consequence, unnotified, and escape all supervision, and it follows almost as certainly as the night the day that when a case is introduced into a community all who are not protected by a former attack will become infected. With scarlatina much might be done to check the spread of infection, but at present the Department is faced with great difficulties. It is impossible for the Health Officer to be ubiquitous, and evidence is difficult to obtain. Persons in the peeling stage expose themselves in cabs, railway-carriages, and other public places, reckless of the danger to which they are exposing others. I am aware of many such cases, but up to the present I have not been able to obtain sufficient evidence to secure a conviction. This is much to be deplored, for—

We must not make a scarecrow of the law,
Setting it up to fear the birds of prey,
And let it keep one shape, till custom make it
Their perch and not their terror.