

DRAINAGE OF TOWNS, ETC.

Several of the towns in my district have been during the year attending to their drainage.

In Dunedin the Drainage and Sewerage Board have been preparing and discussing their general plan of drainage, and have improved many parts of the town and suburbs in which drainage was deficient.

In Gore a general plan is being gradually carried out, which, when completed, will much improve that rising town.

In Otautau the drainage has been completed, and appeared to be working well when I visited it in January.

In Riverton the drainage plan has been carried out, but the septic tank for the hospital had not been erected at the date of my last visit in January.

Invercargill is contemplating a main-drainage scheme, which presents many difficulties owing to the flatness of the ground and a general want of fall to the outlet.

Numerous defects in particular drains were looked to by us, and ordered to be put right, generally being referred to the local authorities, who have seen to them.

Refuse-tips, principally in Dunedin, have been frequently examined, and have been found now generally well conducted.

A goodly number of complaints regarding privies, fowl-runs, stables, piggeries, and suchlike in the towns, and throughout the country, have been received and attended to during the year.

FACILITIES, WORKSHOPS, ETC.

Many of these were examined, frequently at the request of the Inspector of Factories, and defects in the matter of cleanliness, or of deficient privy accommodation, &c., were required to be put in order.

In Dunedin, and frequently when visiting places in my district, the sanitary arrangements in hotels were found to need improvement, and the suggestions I made were always attended to cheerfully.

Slaughter-yards when visited were mostly well kept, but in one or two cases where they were not in good condition, structurally or from neglect, the Agricultural Department, to whom I reported on what I had observed, have had matters put right.

INFECTIOUS DISEASES.

The epidemic of scarlet fever, or German measles, which had died away to a great degree towards the spring, again broke out as summer advanced, and, with the resumption of the schools in January, was widely spread throughout Dunedin, having apparently been diffused among children who had played together during the holidays in public places. With a view to limit it, if possible, we instituted a systematic inspection of the town and suburban schools, finding in several cases that children were returning to the schools while still peeling. A circular was then addressed to the head schoolmasters, to be read in their schools, warning children, and through them their parents, that they would render themselves liable to a penalty for exposing children in a public place while suffering from an infectious disease. In one school ten children had to be sent away from that cause, and several in others. The schoolmasters and Inspectors gladly welcomed our action, and did their best to carry out our instructions.

I also wrote to the Otago Education Board requesting them to issue a circular to their teachers, to prevent children resuming school attendance until they were certified by a medical man or by their guardians free from infection. But, I regret to say, the Board informed me that they would do no such thing. I therefore took the matter in my own hands, requesting teachers to exclude such children. At a subsequent meeting, in discussing a letter I wrote to the Board, regretting their want of action, a resolution was passed resolving to assist me in this matter as far as they could; but, so far as I can learn, they have made no motion to carry the resolution to practical issue. I am still, therefore, sending out my circulars (of which the following is a copy) in all school districts from which I have returns of cases of infectious diseases, and I find that the schoolmasters are backing me up loyally:—

Department of Public Health, Dunedin, , 1903.

As I have recently had notification that cases of scarlet fever are occurring in your school district, and have reason to fear that disinfection is not being properly attended to, will you be good enough to read out to your scholars, in school assembled, the intimation that they must not return to school, after absence from illness, without a certificate from parent or guardian that they, the house and its contents, have been efficiently disinfected, and that no sickness of an infectious nature exists in the household.

The Headmaster, School.

, District Health Officer.

The question came up several times as to whether schools should be shut up during the prevalence of the epidemic. It seemed to me that such a procedure in towns would mean that children would play together in public places, and so spread the disease more freely than before. In country districts, where the children might live at considerable distances apart, the case is different, and in some of these I consented, and encouraged the closing of schools for a time, with the result that the spread of the disease was stopped or lessened.

I have been endeavouring in every way possible to get local authorities to carry out the work of supervision and disinfection in infectious cases; but, except in a few instances, where they are doing good work, the most of them either neglect my requests or do the work in a very imperfect manner. This is in part due to the fact that they have no conception of their responsibilities, or have no inspectors to carry out the duty of visitation and disinfection. It might facilitate the carrying-out of these duties did the Department issue a general circular to all local authorities calling their special attention to sections 16, 28, and 30 of "The Public Health Act, 1900," and to sections 3 and 6 of the Public Health Amendment Act, as I find the local authorities, as a rule, ignorant of their responsibilities in these respects.